Charing Cross Station and hotel as built, and before the erection of the Eleanor Cross, from an engraving of 1864

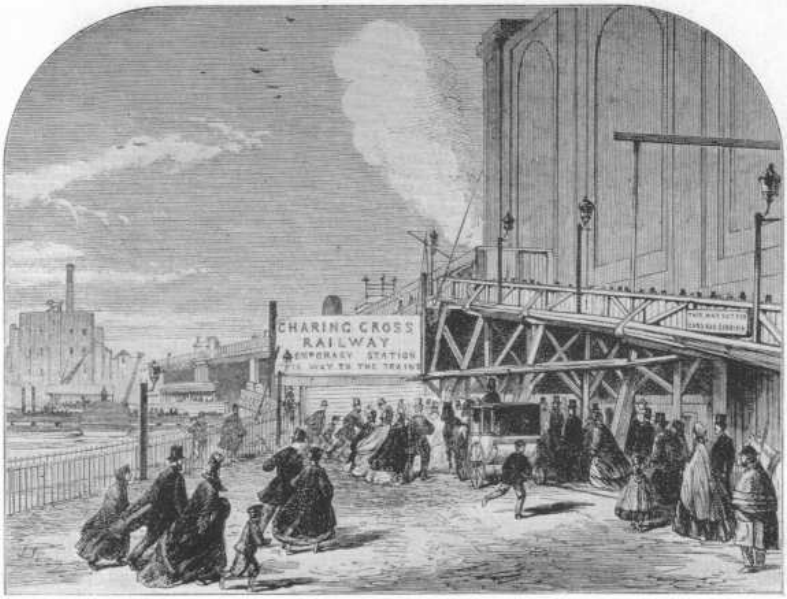
CHARING CROSS

CHARLES E. LEE

The Seal of the Charing Cross Railway Company

For half a century one of the principal gateways to the Continent, Charing Cross Station in the West End of London this month completes 100 years of service. It was the second station of the southern railways on the north of the river, and used the site of the old Hungerford Market. The approach replaced a Brunel suspension bridge.

UNTIL the 1860s no railway crossed the River Thames anywhere in the inner London area. Then five crossings on bridges were made in quick succession, three to give southern railways termini north of the river, and two to link the northern and southern railways. In addition, the elder Brunel's Thames Tunnel at Wapping was converted to railway use by the East London Railway and subsequently provided another north-south link.



Temporary entrance from Villiers Street to Charing Cross Station, on the opening in 1864

STATION, 1864-1964

The three bridges giving approaches to termini were the Victoria (now Grosvenor) Bridge opened in 1860 and providing access to Victoria Station, and the Hungerford and Cannon Street bridges which enabled the South Eastern Railway to reach Charing Cross and Cannon Street stations in 1864 and 1866 respectively. North-south links were afforded by the West London Extension Railway in 1863, crossing the Thames on a bridge at Battersea, and by the Blackfriars Bridge of the London, Chatham & Dover Railway, which took that company's trains to Ludgate Hill in 1864 and also enabled them to link with the Metropolitan Railway at Farringdon Street in 1866.

This spate of activity had its origin in the middle 1850s when various "company promoter" schemes were produced for a railway bridge across the Thames to give access from the south to the rapidly growing and developing West End of London. The London, Brighton & South Coast Railway gave its backing to a proposal of 1857 headed by William Lee, a director of the London & County Bank, and Victoria Station resulted. This also let that energetic and highly-competitive newcomer, the London, Chatham & Dover Railway, into the West End. Something of the background of the manoeuvres was outlined by the present writer in *The Railway Magazine* for October, 1956, March, 1958, and September, 1960.

Naturally, the South Eastern Railway was not happy about the impending blow to its competitive position. That company had come under the direction of a new board and new chief officers in 1855, with the Hon. James Byng as Chairman, C. W. Eborall as General Manager, and Samuel Smiles as Secretary. Speaking to his shareholders on February 24, 1859, Byng said that in 1857 he was asked by a Committee of the House of Commons to give a pledge to recommend them to promote or to concur in the prosecution of such a scheme as should effectively supply access to the West End of London and complete the system of railway communication in Kent and to the Continent. He said that he had informed the Committee that the company could not get to the West End; it could go to Waterloo, but that would be very inconvenient and expensive

Charing Cross Station with the original arch roof, as seen from the river in 1864, before the Embankment was built

in working. A London Bridge and Charing Cross railway would meet the conditions, and could give a direct connection with the London & South Western at Waterloo and with the Great Western and the London & North Western and all the railways in the north via the West London Extension. He therefore recommended to the shareholders that the company should vote £300,000 towards the new railway, which was agreed.

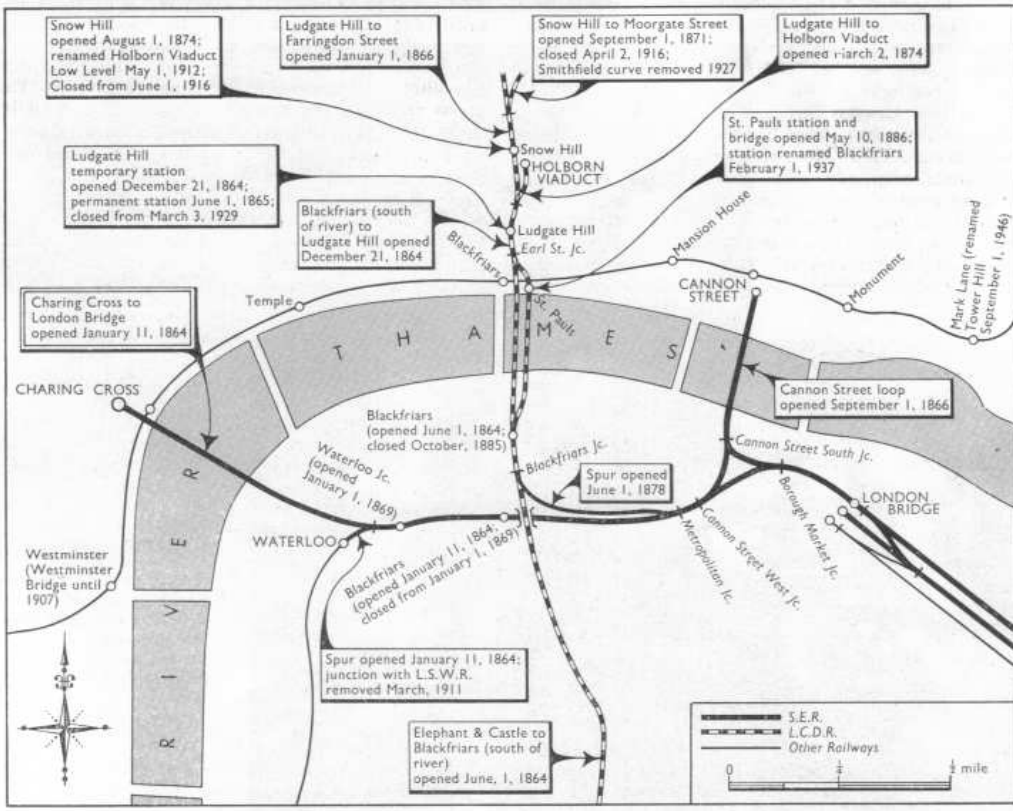
The Charing Cross Railway Company was promoted as an independent company, and received its Act of incorporation on August 8, 1859, despite strenuous opposition by the Brighton Railway and by the Trustees of St. Thomas's Hospital, which was then in High Street, Southwark. The line, as authorised, was 1 mile 68 chains long, from a junction with the South Eastern about 17 chains south-east of London Bridge terminus, to Charing Cross, via Waterloo. The South Eastern was empowered to participate in the management and to work the railway. Under an Act of May 17, 1861, the £300,000 contribution by the South Eastern was increased to £650,000. A 60-chain branch line to Cannon Street, involving another bridge over the Thames, was authorised on June 28, 1861, to which the South Eastern subscribed the further sum of £250,000, making £900,000 in all. At this time neither the Victoria Embankment nor the District Railway had been authorised, and the railway authorities envisaged a heavy urban passenger traffic between Charing Cross and Cannon Street. By an Act of July 13, 1863, the South Eastern was authorised to absorb the Charing Cross undertaking by agreement, which was duly done as from August 1, 1864, and the Charing Cross company was dissolved.

For its terminus at Charing Cross, the railway acquired the Hungerford Market, a two-storey building opened in 1835 for the sale of meat, fish, fruit, and vegetables. This had replaced an earlier market built in 1680 by Sir Edward Hungerford, whose name is perpetuated in the bridge. He was a colourful rake who was credited with the advanced age of 115 when he died in 1715. In its later years the market was not a success, although bazaar stalls for oddments and an exhibition hall were added. Gatti & Morico introduced the sale of ices and coffee in a small café with an orchestra. When this building was demolished in August, 1862, to make room for the railway station, Gatti & Morico received £7,750 compensation.

The approach bridge to Charing Cross Station replaced an earlier structure, authorised by Parliament in 1836 as the Hungerford & Lambeth Suspension Footbridge. An extension of time was granted in 1843, and in 1845 the name was altered officially to the Charing Cross Bridge, but the older name has remained in popular usage. This bridge, which was designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel, was opened on May 1, 1845. The centre span was 676 ft. long. In 1859 the Charing Cross Railway Act authorised to the railway company "the appropriation, alteration, and adaption to the objects of the undertaking of the Charing Cross Bridge, and either wholly or partially the discontinuance of its present user by the public as a passenger thorough-

fare and the providing of a substituted thoroughfare or thoroughfares instead thereof". The bridge company was dissolved in 1860 and its property transferred to the railway. It was thereupon decided to remove the suspension bridge, and erect a new structure, at the same time providing accommodation for pedestrian traffic across the river in lieu of that destroyed by the demolition of the bridge. The chains and other ironwork of the old bridge, amounting in all to 1,040 tons, were sold in the same year for £5,000, and were used in connection with the Clifton suspension bridge, near Bristol. The new railway bridge was begun on June 6, 1860. The cost was about £180,000, and the designer was Sir John Hawkshaw. It contained 5,000 tons of wrought iron and 2,000 tons of cast iron.

Construction of the railway was begun in February, 1860, and involved substantial works as the whole line was above ground level on viaduct or arch. It included 17 iron bridges, 14 across streets; two iron viaducts on columns, of which that over the Borough Market was 404 ft. long; and 190 brick arches, of which 18 were over streets. Considerable difficulty was experienced at the London Bridge end, by reason of the opposition of St. Thomas's Hospital. The line crossed a corner of the hospital grounds, without touching the buildings, and a provision was inserted in the Act that the railway company should, if called on, purchase the whole of the hospital buildings and grounds. Only one-sixth of an acre was actually needed. The governors required the whole site and buildings to be bought, and asked at first £750,000. Eventually, the arbitrator fixed the total sum to be paid at £296,000. Having paid that sum into the Bank of England, the railway company applied by its solicitor to the hospital authorities on the morning of January 21, 1862, to give up possession. On this being refused, the company's workmen forced open a small gate leading into the hospital grounds and took possession. The governors then filed a bill in Chancery, and obtained an injunction from Vice-Chancellor Wood. On appeal to the Lord Chancellor, a compromise was suggested by the Court, and ultimately agreed to by both parties, by which the company obtained possession of the portion of the hospital grounds required for the railway, and the governors of the hospital retained posses-



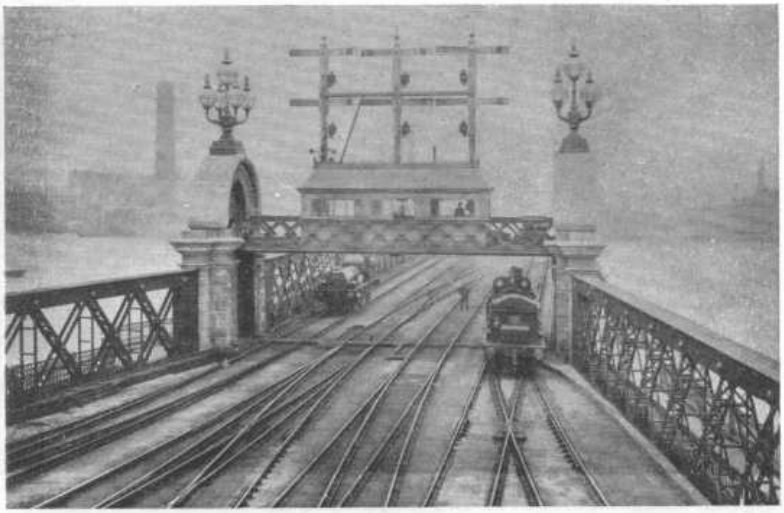
Chronological map of the Charing Cross Railway and associated lines, showing pre-grouping ownership

sion of the hospital itself until July, 1862, when the last of the patients was removed and the whole buildings given up to the company.

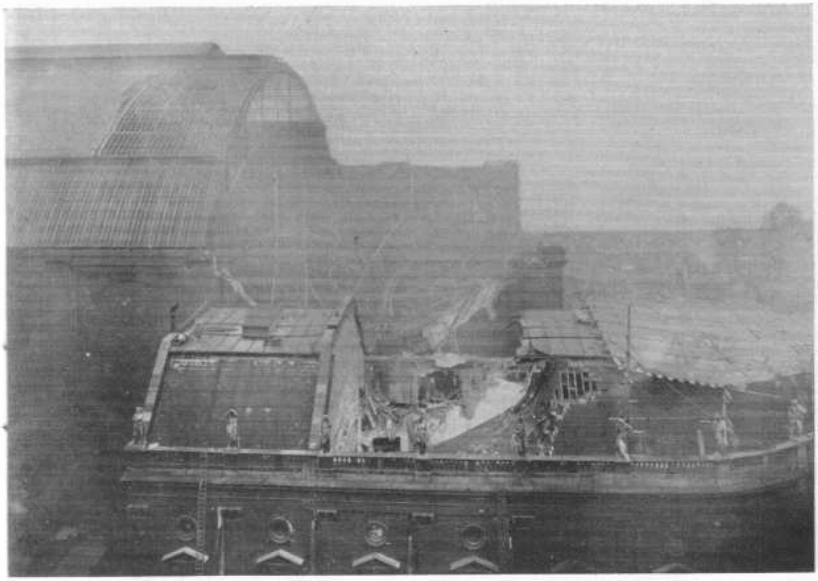
The railway was opened on Monday, January 11, 1864, without ceremony, and at first for local traffic only. Greenwich and Mid-Kent trains began to use the line from the opening day; North-Kent trains on April 1; and main-line trains on May 1, 1864. The initial train service was every quarter of an hour from 7.10 a.m. to 12.25 a.m. with 70 daily journeys each way on the Greenwich line and 17 on the Mid-Kent. There was one intermediate station between Charing Cross and London Bridge, called Blackfriars. It was exactly one mile from Charing Cross and was in the Blackfriars Road, of course south of the river. The probable reason for this position is that the rival London, Chatham & Dover Railway was rapidly approaching from the south, and in fact opened its own Blackfriars Station nearby on June 1, 1864. From the outset, the Charing Cross Railway had a single-line physical connection with the London & South Western Railway at Waterloo, but there was no Waterloo Junction Station until January 1, 1869, on which date Blackfriars Station (S.E.R.) was closed.

Charing Cross Station was planned from the outset to include a large hotel over the ground-level booking offices, and so on, and it is mainly the hotel which constitutes the familiar frontage from the Strand. This was set back about 120 ft. from the public roadway of the Strand, between Villiers Street and Craven Street. The forecourt was enclosed with iron railings between piers surmounted with lamps. There were two lodges at the carriage entrances, originally called "police lodges" but used during most of their existence as small shops. The actual station, consisting of circulating area and platforms, was under a semicircular roof of iron and glass with a span of nearly 200 ft., whereas those at Kings Cross were only 105 ft. The iron in the roof weighed over 1,200 tons. The platforms extended beyond the limits of the glass roof on to the bridge structure. The hotel was opened on May 15, 1865, and had 250 beds. It was built by Lucas Brothers, of Lambeth, under the superintendence of Edward M. Barry. One of the features was a "rising room, fitted with comfortable seats, in which visitors may be conveyed up or down if they feel indisposed to use the staircases". This was not one of the earliest passenger lifts in London, but they were still rare and the word "lift" was not in general currency. Such devices were termed "ascending rooms" in London hotel advertisements for another quarter of a century.

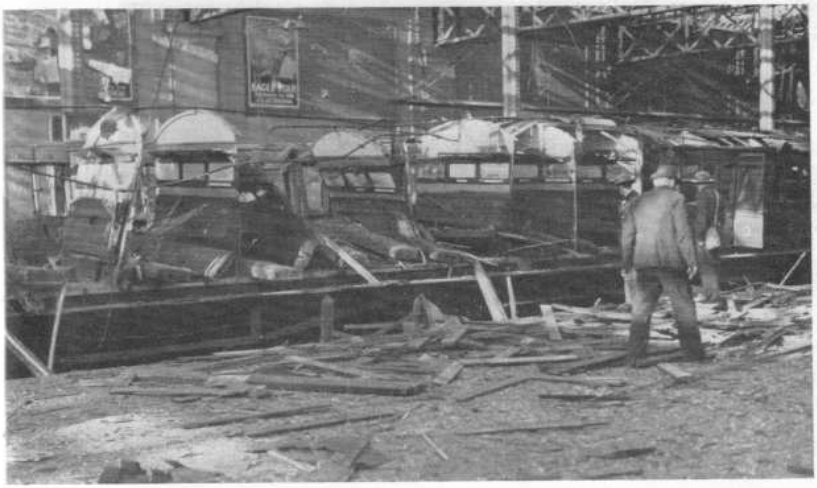
Outside the hotel, in the forecourt, the 70 ft.-high Eleanor Cross was erected in 1865 at a cost of about £1,800. It is not, of course, the original Eleanor Cross, nor is it exactly on the original site. When Queen Eleanor, the wife of Edward I, died at Harby, Lincolnshire, on November 28, 1290, the King brought the body to Westminster Abbey, where it was entombed on December 17. At the twelve points where the body rested he subsequently erected crosses, of which the last was in the village of Charing, a name possibly derived from a Saxon word indicating a turn; the River Thames here turns east. The cross here was erected in 1291, of Purbeck marble and Caen stone, but not completed until 1294; its cost was £650. The original location was probably at the top of Whitehall, where the statue of King Charles I now stands. This cross was condemned by the edict of Parliament in 1643 but not actually destroyed until 1647. It was the point from which many milestone distances from London were measured, and this may have influenced the railway company in erecting a replacement, as it wished Charing Cross Station to be regarded as a central point. The design of the new cross, of which Edward M. Barry was architect, was founded largely on the drawings of the original cross. The sculptor was Thomas Earp of Lambeth.



Charing Cross railway bridge looking south, in 1864, with signalbox and original Saxby & Farmer signalling. A new signalbox was opened in February, 1888, after the widening of the bridge on the up-stream side



Extent of damage caused by the collapse of Charing Cross Station roof on December 5, 1905. The Avenue (now Playhouse) Theatre is seen in the foreground, its roof having been brought down by the collapse of the nearby station wall



Damaged train in Charing Cross Station in October, 1940, after a daylight air raid, during which a bomb fell on the station

At the time Charing Cross Station was opened, the approach from the Strand was not available, and a temporary entrance from Villiers Street was provided through what was to be the tunnel approach for empty cabs to the arrival platform on the western side. As it was on rising gradient, pitched with rough stones for horse traffic, it was unpleasant for walking, but this was only a temporary expedient. It was realised that continental traffic would form an important feature of the new terminal and facilities for customs examination were provided. For half a century Charing Cross was outstanding as a gateway to the Continent, but this did not blind the railway to its original intention of handling also an intensive urban traffic, and in 1866 seven bogie tank engines were built at a cost of £16,800 especially to work the traffic between Charing Cross and Cannon Street. The latter station was opened on September 1, 1866, and thereafter practically all trains went into, and out of, that station.

While the railway was being built, the Metropolitan Board of Works (predecessor of the London County Council) secured powers in 1862 to build the Victoria Embankment, and this great mid-

Charing Cross Station and hotel in 1960 after rebuilding of the two upper storeys which received heavy war damage. The forecourt railings and lodges were removed during the widening of the Strand in 1959

The circulating area, Charing Cross Station, from a photograph taken in 1950

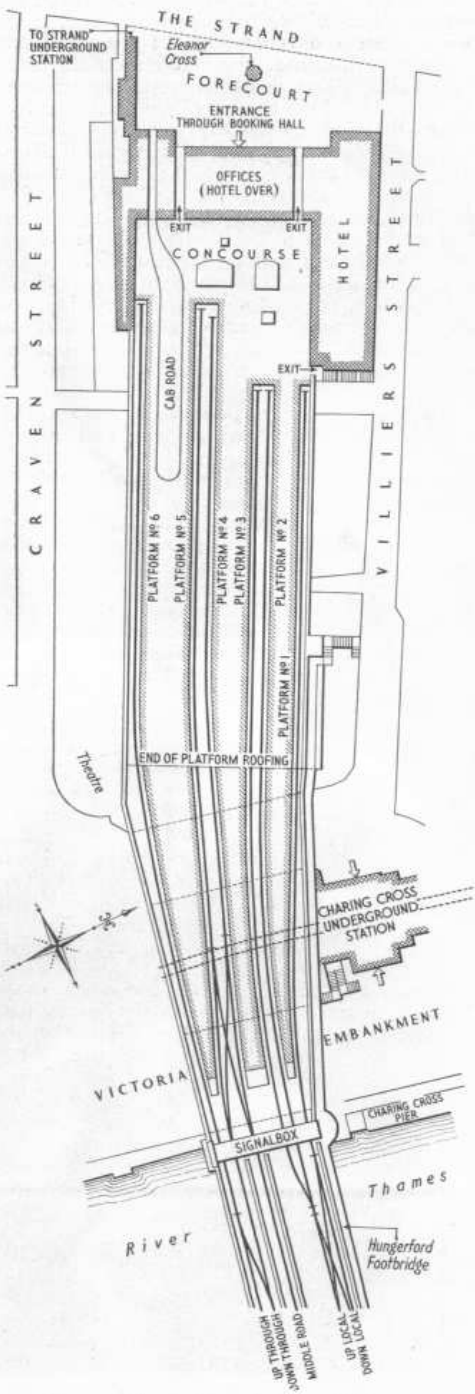
Victorian engineering achievement was undertaken to the designs of Sir Joseph Bazalgette. Two years later, the Metropolitan District Railway was incorporated with powers to build a line between South Kensington and Tower Hill, the southern part of the Inner Circle, which was to run under the Victoria Embankment between Westminster and Blackfriars. The embankment was begun in February, 1864, and the river footway between Westminster Bridge and the Temple was opened on July 30, 1868. The District Railway works delayed completion of the thoroughfare and the formal opening was on July 13, 1870. Meanwhile, the District line had been brought into use from Westminster Bridge to Blackfriars on May 30, 1870; it was extended to Mansion House on July 3, 1871, but the final section to Cannon Street and Tower Hill was delayed until October 6, 1884.

Under the provisions of the Metropolis Toll Bridges Act, 1877, the Metropolitan Board of Works secured the abolition of the ½d. toll across Charing Cross railway bridge, and £98,540 compensation was awarded to the railway company. By section 8 of this Act the maintenance of the footway remained with the railway, which was required to "keep the bridge in substantial repair, suitable and open to the public at all times for every description of foot traffic". The footway was 7 ft. 6 in. wide, and lighted at the cost of the railway. Access was at first provided to it only by wooden steps from Villiers Street on the north side of the river, and by a wooden slope from Belvedere Road on the south. An iron staircase was erected at a cost of £1,901 by the Metropolitan Board of Works in 1888, to give access to the bridge from Victoria Embankment.

In 1899 the erstwhile rivals—the S.E.R. and the L.C.D.R.—came under the management of a joint committee as the South Eastern & Chatham Railway, dividing net receipts in the proportions of 59 per cent and 41 per cent respectively. The capital structures, however, remained separate, and this had a curious effect later at Charing Cross. The Hampstead tube railway from the neighbourhood of Charing Cross had been authorised in 1893, but no construction work had been begun. Under an Act of 1898, the proposed terminus was altered to a point near Charing Cross Station. Work was eventually begun in 1903, and two years later agreement was reached with the South Eastern Railway for the tube station to be built under the forecourt, but without breaking the surface, as the South Eastern did not wish its important cab traffic to be disturbed. This position was altered by a memorable disaster which occurred on December 5, 1905. One of the tie-rods of the main principal nearest the wind screen in the roof of Charing Cross Station failed, and two complete bays and the large wind screen at the river end of the station collapsed. The station wall that carried the bays overturned and crashed bodily through the adjoining wall and roof of the Avenue Theatre (opened in March, 1882), which was under reconstruction. No passengers and none of the platform staff was hurt, but two men engaged on repairing, glazing, and painting that part of the roof were killed, as also was one of W. H. Smith & Son's bookstall attendants and three of the men working in the Avenue Theatre.

Colonel Sir John Pringle inquired into the accident on behalf of the Board of Trade, and reported that the tie-rod failed by reason of a flaw in the welding at the time the roof was made, but that the danger of failure could not have been anticipated. At the coroner's inquest a verdict of "accidental death" was returned. Arising out of the damage to outside property it was considered that Cyril Maude, lessee of the Avenue Theatre, had no legal claim on the company, but he was voted a grant of £20,000. The station was, of course, closed until the whole of the roof was taken down. It was reopened on March 19, 1906. The cost of repairs

Charing Cross Station approach in 1958, showing the form of roofing which replaced the original arch



Present layout of Charing Cross Station, with forecourt as reduced by Strand widening in 1959

was about £60,000 and there was, in addition, a loss of between £7,000 and £8,000 a week in traffic receipts. For six weeks during the closure, the Hampstead tube was allowed to open up the forecourt surface to facilitate its work. The curious effect of the S.E.C.R. working agreement was that the cost of the roof repairs fell on the joint exchequer, but the sum paid by the Hampstead tube for its easement under the forecourt was exclusive South Eastern property.

Continental traffic continued to be an important feature until the first world war, and on July 1, 1913, the S.E.C.R. established an accelerated Charing Cross to Paris service of 7 hr. After that war the continental traffic passed to Victoria; the Customs House was demolished; and the old cab road from Villiers Street was filled in. Meanwhile traffic on outer suburban lines continued to grow. Although schemes for extensive electrification were prepared by the South Eastern & Chatham Railway, the whole work was undertaken after grouping in 1923, when the company became a constituent of the Southern Railway. It was on the third-rail 660-volt d.c. system, which the Southern adopted as standard. At Charing Cross this involved complete rearrangement of the tracks and the installation of new signalling.

The track layout between Charing Cross and Cannon Street was designed to suit the practice of working Charing Cross trains into and out of Cannon Street, and this was no longer required. There were six running lines and a siding across the bridge at Charing Cross, of which three running lines and the siding crossed the old (eastern) part of the bridge, and the remainder the newer portion which had been erected at the time of a widening in 1887. These lines were mechanically signalled with Sykes lock-and-block, and the Charing Cross signalbox had 130 levers. Rearrangement of the lines was undertaken in 1925, and the main part of the work was done during the week-end, August 22-24. The alterations were completed in November. The Charing Cross platforms were renumbered from east to west, with Nos. 1 to 3 intended for suburban trains and Nos. 4 to 6 for main-line trains.

Electric traction was planned for December 1, 1925, but was deferred because of lack of adequate power supply. Electric services began on February 28, 1926, to Orpington, Bromley North, Addiscombe, and Hayes, and further services were introduced on June 6 with the conversion of the Dartford group of lines. Four-aspect colour-light signalling was brought into service from Charing Cross and Cannon Street to Borough Market junction on Sunday, June 27, 1926. The new overhead signalbox at Charing Cross contained a power frame with 107 levers. Steam traction for main-line trains continued for 35 more years, but multiple-unit diesel-electric trains were introduced between Charing Cross and Hastings, via Tunbridge Wells Central, on May 6, 1957. The completion of electrification to Folkestone and Dover on June 12, 1961, enabled regular steam trains to be eliminated from Charing Cross. East Kent trains normally use platform No. 6, the longest; it is 748 ft. in length.