# Kensington (Olympia): London Underground’s secret wartime hub reclaims its public role



Kensington (Olympia) station in West London holds a fascinating place in the history of the London Underground, known for being conspicuously absent from Tube maps for nearly two decades. Despite its clear physical presence and service on both the London Overground and District line in Zone 2, it was kept off official cartography for years due to its unique historical and strategic significance.

The station originally opened in 1844 simply as "Kensington" but closed that same year due to low passenger numbers. It reopened in 1862 and was renamed Kensington Addison Road in 1868. During the Second World War, parts of the Metropolitan line it served were bombed, leading to its closure along the West London line. However, Kensington (Olympia) was far from forgotten. Its location was of particular interest because of its proximity to the headquarters of the Commander of the Allied Forces, led by General Dwight D. Eisenhower. Eisenhower reportedly used the station as his preferred embarkation point when travelling to Wales in preparation for the pivotal Normandy landings in 1944.

Following the war, the station reopened in 1946 under the name Kensington (Olympia) and took on a new role: it transported workers from the nearby Post Office Savings Bank. This use led to the station being subject to National Secrets Act restrictions, keeping it largely under wraps for the public until 1958. It was only then that the station was officially publicised, gaining a permanent platform and a District line shuttle service to Earl’s Court. The unique part-time scheduling of the station has persisted, distinguishing it as one of London’s few stations with sparse train services today.

In addition to its historical context, Kensington (Olympia) has evolved into a practical hub, serving as an interchange between the London Overground and National Rail, with connections that avoid Zone 1 congestion by operating fully within Zone 2. Its proximity to the Olympia Exhibition Centre also makes it a key access point for event-goers and local travellers, supplemented by nearby bus routes.

The District line itself has played a significant role in the station’s development over the years. From its early expansion days through wartime disruptions and post-war redevelopments, the line adapted to London's changing transport demands, with Kensington (Olympia) reflecting those shifts. The station’s journey from disuse to strategic military importance, classified secrecy, and finally a revived public service point underscores the layered history embedded in London's transport network.

Today, after a facelift and the addition of community spaces such as a garden, Kensington (Olympia) continues to serve Londoners alongside London Overground services. Yet its story remains a remarkable example of how transport infrastructure can intersect with national history, wartime secrecy, and urban development.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.mylondon.news/news/transport/secret-london-underground-station-left-32398477), [[3]](https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-london-assembly-does/questions-mayor/find-an-answer/kensington-olympia-0)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.mylondon.news/news/transport/secret-london-underground-station-left-32398477), [[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kensington_%28Olympia%29_station), [[6]](https://acearchive.org/kensington-olympia-station), [[7]](https://iiab.me/kiwix/content/wikipedia_en_all_maxi_2023-10/A/Kensington_%28Olympia%29_station)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.mylondon.news/news/transport/secret-london-underground-station-left-32398477), [[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_District_line), [[5]](https://uktransport.fandom.com/wiki/Kensington_%28Olympia%29_station)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.mylondon.news/news/transport/secret-london-underground-station-left-32398477), [[3]](https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-london-assembly-does/questions-mayor/find-an-answer/kensington-olympia-0), [[5]](https://uktransport.fandom.com/wiki/Kensington_%28Olympia%29_station)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.mylondon.news/news/transport/secret-london-underground-station-left-32398477), [[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_District_line), [[5]](https://uktransport.fandom.com/wiki/Kensington_%28Olympia%29_station), [[6]](https://acearchive.org/kensington-olympia-station)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.mylondon.news/news/transport/secret-london-underground-station-left-32398477> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kensington_%28Olympia%29_station> - Kensington (Olympia) station, located in West London, has a rich history dating back to its opening in 1844. Initially closed due to low patronage, it reopened in 1862 and underwent several name changes, including Kensington Addison Road in 1868. During World War II, the station was bombed, leading to its closure. It reopened in 1946, serving as a terminus for a shuttle service to Clapham Junction, primarily for workers at the nearby Post Office Savings Bank. The station's strategic location made it a preferred embarkation point for General Dwight D. Eisenhower during preparations for the Normandy landings in 1944. Over the years, the station has been served by various lines, including the District line and London Overground, and continues to operate today. [Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kensington\_%28Olympia%29\_station]
3. <https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-london-assembly-does/questions-mayor/find-an-answer/kensington-olympia-0> - This page from the Greater London Authority provides information about Kensington (Olympia) station, detailing its services and connections. It highlights the station's role as an interchange between the London Overground and National Rail services, as well as its limited District line service. The page also mentions the station's proximity to the Olympia Exhibition Centre and the availability of local bus services. [Source: https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-london-assembly-does/questions-mayor/find-an-answer/kensington-olympia-0]
4. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_District_line> - This Wikipedia article outlines the history of the District line, including its expansion and the addition of stations like Kensington (Olympia). It discusses the line's development, service changes, and the impact of historical events such as World War II on its operations. [Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\_of\_the\_District\_line]
5. <https://uktransport.fandom.com/wiki/Kensington_%28Olympia%29_station> - This Fandom page provides a detailed overview of Kensington (Olympia) station, including its history, services, and significance. It covers the station's opening, closures, and its role during significant historical events. [Source: https://uktransport.fandom.com/wiki/Kensington\_%28Olympia%29\_station]
6. <https://acearchive.org/kensington-olympia-station> - This archive page offers a comprehensive history of Kensington (Olympia) station, detailing its various phases, including its opening, closures, and the services it has provided over the years. It also discusses the station's role during World War II and its strategic importance. [Source: https://acearchive.org/kensington-olympia-station]
7. <https://iiab.me/kiwix/content/wikipedia_en_all_maxi_2023-10/A/Kensington_%28Olympia%29_station> - This archived version of the Wikipedia page on Kensington (Olympia) station provides detailed information about the station's history, services, and significance. It includes sections on the station's opening, closures, and its role during significant historical events. [Source: https://iiab.me/kiwix/content/wikipedia\_en\_all\_maxi\_2023-10/A/Kensington\_%28Olympia%29\_station]