

## Elizabeth Line Tour - Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> May 2026

On one of the hottest days of the year we set off in an airconditioned coach from Aston Clinton to Langley Station and the Elizabeth line.

After an exciting game of 'dodge' the parked cars with a massive coach, we alighted at Langley Station.

We were met by two of the Elizabeth line Ambassadors, Rhona and Liz. Introductions were made, health and safety rules were passed on and an outline of the day ahead was given.

We were all feeling the rising heat of the day and with much relief we boarded the Elizabeth line for the first leg of our adventure.

A journey to Paddington in airconditioned, spacious and clean carriages was very welcome.

At Paddington Station we were met by the rest of our allocated Ambassadors: Joseph, Martin and a young man on a work experience placement from the Sycamore Trust.

The Elizabeth line and the Sycamore Trust have teamed up to give young adults on the autism spectrum behind-the-scenes, hands-on experience at stations to prepare them for the working world.

We continued the tour with a walk around both the adjacent Paddington stations. The Elizabeth line Paddington station is completely step-free from street to platform, and onto the trains – making it accessible to all.

Admire it, or not, the 120-metre canopy artwork of the Eastbourne Terrace provides a cool shaded area for the pedestrian access to the mainline concourse and Underground stations.

Cloud formations are digitally printed onto the glass panels of the canopy and it is a striking piece of integrated public art by artist Spencer Finch.

It is part of the Elizabeth line's wider approach and mission to integrating art into the infrastructure.

Of course, we also took this opportunity to pop to the adjacent GWR mainline station to pay a visit to the loved Paddington Bear statue. A photo opportunity not to be missed!

Stepping outside the canopy area and onto Eastbourne Terrace there is a large bronze sculpture by Gillie and Marc – “The Wild Table of Love”. An artwork showing endangered animals gathered around a dinner table. There are two empty seats at the table inviting public interaction – another photo opportunity!

Whilst outside Paddington Station an unusual clock was pointed out. The clock sits 7.8 metres above the pavement at the entrance to an office building. This is the work of the Dutch artist Maarten Baas’s. It features a silhouette figure within the clockface which can be seen painting and removing the hands of the clock, denoting time minute by minute.

We were then taken through a cleverly disguised door from the station concourse to enter the behind-the-scenes world of the Elizabeth line. We descended into the depths and visited the surprisingly small station control room.

Within the control room banks of monitors with split screens were alive with the CCTV images from all public spaces.

The screens are constantly monitored by staff and any issues are immediately addressed via direct communication with the public facing staff and security teams.

One important note of interest is this control centre does not have any direct communication with the train drivers.

Where the train is on the route will dictate who the train drivers interact with. Different control entities for different parts of the route: Rail for London Infrastructure (RFLI) and Network Rail.

After an interesting and informative round of question and answers we left the control room and made our way back to station level.

From here we were then invited to board a train which had terminated its journey at the Paddington station.

We entered the empty carriages and the train slowly headed to the sidings. The train was shunted into the sidings and here it switched tracks.

This was a fascinating procedure as the driver who is now situated at the wrong end of the train would have to traverse the nine passenger carriages to the new front of the train. This process is done in an efficient and timely manner ensuring no time is wasted.

The train is placed in an auto pilot setting. This allows the train to move off whilst the driver is still making his way through the carriages.

It is a surprisingly long walk from the back of the train to the now active drivers cab at the front.

Looking from the last carriage toward the front carriage was very similar to the infinity mirror illusion.

We changed trains at Paddington and took the next Elizabeth line service to the extraordinary Woolwich Station.

The Woolwich Station was originally not included in the original Crossrail plans. It was added after lobbying by the local council and developers involved in the regeneration of the former Royal Arsenal site. It was opened on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2022 as part of the launch of the line's central section.

This station is mostly underground, with large spacious ticket halls and platform screen doors typical of the new Elizabeth Line stations.

Its architecture was designed to fit into the historic Royal Arsenal area while supporting major redevelopment around it. The exterior cladding was designed to reflect the history of the site.

The main entrance is framed by a huge bronze-clad portal around 30 metres wide echoing the heavy industrial and military architecture surrounding Dial Arch Square. Each bronze panel is patterned to reference the spiral rifling grooves inside artillery barrels developed at Woolwich Arsenal during the 19<sup>th</sup> century – known as “Woolwich System.’ Whilst the darker external cladding panels are perforated with imagery of Britannia and the Lion. This is a reference to the famous memorial plaque known as the “Dead Man’s Penny”, which was cast at Woolwich and presented to families of British soldiers killed during the First world War. Over a million of these bronze plaques were produced at the Royal Arsenal.

The station has received a Civic Trust Award for its design.

The next important item on the itinerary was the lunch venue.

Heading off to Canary Wharf Station and the Crossrail Place Roof Garden. A most unusual public space – a hidden oasis and perfect for lunch.

It is a free rooftop garden built directly above the Elizabeth Line station at Canary Wharf and a wonderful venue for lunch – shaded under a timber lattice canopy filled with a transparent fluoropolymer plastic (PTFE), a lightweight alternative to glass which is self-cleaning, weather resistant including temperature extremes, pollution, and UV light. This creates a sheltered microclimate that allows for exotic planting.

The planting is organised around the Prime Meridian. Plants from the Eastern Hemisphere are placed on one side, whilst species from the Western Hemisphere are on the other. The garden includes bamboo, tree ferns, palms and other species that reflect the global trading routes that once connected the West India Docks to the rest of the world.

This was the last stop of the tour.

It was time to return to Langley Station via Canary Wharf Station - Platform B.

Canary Wharf is an architecturally distinctive station on the Elizabeth Line because it was constructed using a giant concrete box built directly within the North Dock at West India Quay. The station sits inside an artificial island beneath Crossrail Place.

The design idea was guiding passengers from darkness to daylight.

As you move from Platform B up toward the exits materials gradually become lighter as you ascend.

Platform areas use darker granite and grey tones, large openings allow views between levels and daylight is deliberately drawn deep into the station.

From Platform B the bright yellow glass surrounding the escalators and lifts acts as a visual wayfinding device, your eye is naturally drawn toward the exits.

We were accompanied by the Ambassadors back to our start point at Langley Station.

It was a chance to experience the Elizabeth Line at a peak footfall period.

The spacious carriages absorbed the larger number of passengers well but at a distinct cost to numbers of seats and a distinct lack of luggage designated spaces and overhead racks, resulting in passengers having to hold on to luggage, holdalls and backpacks.

Overall, these drawbacks are actually trade-offs resulting from the train being designed to function both as an urban metro through central London and as a commuter railway farther out.

We arrived at Langley Station having enjoyed a full day of learning, experiencing and travelling on the Elizabeth line.

With our complimentary Elizabeth line tote bags and pens safely stowed away, we thanked our lovely bunch of Ambassadors, who still had a return journey to complete before they headed to their homes.

We happily found our coach parked in the shade outside the station car park. The coach driver having wisely decided not to try to play car park “dodgems” again.

Soon we were heading back happy, tired and our heads full of new Elizabeth line facts and stories.

A speedy and uneventful return to Aston Clinton having had a grand day out!

Report by Wendy Clifton, Science & Technology Group Member.

A very special thank you to Rhona, Liz, Joseph and Martin – our ambassadors for the day.

They were informative, engaging and extremely well organised.

We particularly appreciated the enthusiasm and knowledge of the staff, who brought the story of the Elizabeth line, its engineering, architecture and public art to life in a fascinating and accessible way.

The explanations were clear, sometimes humorous, questions were welcomed, and the whole experience gave us a much deeper appreciation of this remarkable addition to London's transport system.

Our sincere thanks to all the Elizabeth line staff for the excellent tour provided to our U3A group. Please pass on our thanks to everyone involved for making the visit so enjoyable and memorable.