

## The hole in the wall.

I was in a valiant but doomed charge of the light brigade as I headed the wrong way down the up escalator at Victoria station. A mismatched competition with my mates. We were all currently flying, seven sheets to the wind. They down the proper way; for me, it was one step down, two back. We were on a pub crawl of the circle line.

Previous expeditions to the smoke had included a twenty-four-hour sesh, starting at the bar that served the veg and flower sellers at Covent Garden and ending at Heathrow. We'd knocked off all the bars from Trafalgar Square and on down the Strand and raised a glass in a pub on all the properties on a monopoly board.

Now they are pretty much all-day sessions and not escalator - pint – escalator – escalator pint. I hit the bottom in a wobble as the stairs move away behind me. A busker plays Baker Street, the station where we'd began this intrepid – sorry stupid – endeavour.

I'd fallen behind the team and had to race along the platform to be pulled onto the tube. Narrowly close to being squished. Next stop the Hole in the Wall.

'Next station, Sloane square. Doors will open on the left-hand side. Mind the gap.'

Unbelievably, the doors opened right on the Westbound platform where the tiny boozier sat. Nestled in a niche, bottles of spirits sit squat on shelves. A brightly lit mirror enhanced the bar and like a TARDIS expanded its dimensions.

'Four pints of Fullers, and four Cinzano and lemonades please.'

The barmaid whose black dyed hair, matched the dark wood of the bar looked as if she had been serving for time immemorial; swiftly poured the pints. Her dainty hands sliced lemon and mixed the girls drinks. 'That'll be ten pounds for cash.'

I dug in my wallet and handed over a crisp tenner, fresh from the cashpoint. An expensive night.

'Tickets please.'

Blimey, the inspector is even checking our capital cards.

The barmaid smiled. 'Checking everyone's got a Jiminee Cricket. People often try and sneak down, but you need a valid travel ticket or pay for a tuppenny platform ticket.'

Satisfied, the inspector jumped onto a recently vacated stool and the barmaid poured him a pint in a jug, not the straights we were drinking from and passed it over with a theatrical wink.

Something brushed my legs and if my pint had been any fuller, I'd have slopped some. A cat jumped up onto the bar and let the inspector tickle it under the chin. 'Hello Kit.' He looked at us all. 'She's the best mouser on the underground.'

We smiled, necked our drinks and jumped onto the incoming tube, heading for South Ken.

I sat down on the uncomfortable seats. Mixing Youngs and Fullers had done me in; still several stops to go...

I must have nodded of. Damn. Where was I?

I tell you where. Lost on the flippin underground.