

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF ST PANCRAS
INTERNATIONAL STATION

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Abstract

The restoration and re-opening of St Pancras in London as an international station has met with universal acclaim. The modern restoration of this Victorian station, with its magnificent train shed and neo Gothic hotel, is the result of collaboration between modern architects and engineers that echoes the original work of their Victorian predecessors, Sir George Gilbert Scott and William Henry Barlow.

The station complex is composed of two main elements. The first, the Midland Grand, originally an expensive and prestigious hotel that was much admired in its heyday, fell into disrepair after its closure in the 1930s and narrowly survived demolition due to the campaigning work of Sir John Betjeman and others in 1967. Today it is undergoing a refit as a modern hotel with private apartments in its upper floors. The second, the train shed, has been emptied of many of its original platforms, which are now housed in a modern, unpretentious extension at the northern end of the station. This has enabled the architects to open up the basement storage area and turn the station concourse into an airy space, which now contains the longest champagne bar in Europe as well as public art, shops and restaurants. This paper is a critical appraisal of the newly restored station complex, examining its various elements for their appropriateness and aesthetic appeal, and debates whether it justifies Simon Bradley's description of it in his book "St Pancras Station" (Profile Books 2007) as "a wonder of the world".

Introduction

Passing South West along Euston Road en route to the British Library, the harassed Londoner might be aware of an interesting Victorian edifice to his right, towering above the traffic and covered in scaffolding and advertising billboards. Should he have the opportunity, among the commuters and lines of waiting bus passengers, to glance more fully at the said building he might notice pinnacles and ribbed stone vaults pointing up into London's polluted air. Would he, however, linger to admire its architecture as a tourist might gaze at the Taj Mahal, marvelling at its aesthetic and spiritual qualities? One day perhaps: when the builders have left and the fund managers have moved into their loft apartments tucked discreetly but majestically under the spires and cornices. Should he, on entering the station and looking up to a breathtaking span of ice blue steel broken up by a false clock face, marvel at the view, or lament the lack of aesthetic taste that allowed public art to wreck the otherwise beautiful Victorian concourse? In search of refreshment and retail therapy does he move confidently along the basement concourse admiring the range of cafes and shops, or does he find himself peering into the former beer cellars with trepidation, failing to recognise many familiar high street names?

In this essay I am going to examine critically the claim by Simon Bradley in his book "St Pancras Station" (Profile Books 2007) that the newly restored St Pancras International Station is "a wonder of the world".

Formerly an underused Midland Mainline terminus fronted by an abandoned Midland Hotel and narrowly saved from demolition by Sir John Betjamen in the 1960s, the

building has been metamorphosed over the last 12 years into the new Eurostar international terminal with regional connections to the Midlands and North. £5.8 billion of investment, £800 million on the station itself has changed it into, what is known in business jargon as a “destination”. Fitted with the longest champagne bar in Europe , the new international concourse bustles with passengers who are inclined to linger rather than rush on to their next destination. As well as the conversion work on the Midland hotel, the great train shed built by William Barlow and Rowland Ordish in 1868 is now separated from a modern extension housing regional trains by a tall glazed transept, which forms the new heart of the station complex. The floor of the old train shed has been sliced into and opened up, creating a light open concourse with views up to the arched roof. The undercroft space, originally used for storage, is now the main retail and departure area. The jumble of buildings to the west of the original train shed is now being rebuilt as a Marriot Renaissance Hotel with a “21st century Gothic” façade (Pearman,H. RIBA Jan 2008). Has the new restoration, however, in the words of its architect Alastair Lansley been “a good marriage....a magnificent completion. The best in the world...”?

Chapter 1 The Midland Hotel

Designed in 1868 by the architect Sir George Gilbert Scott and completed in 1877, the frontispiece of St Pancras Station, the imposing Midland Hotel, is built in Gothic style. Why was it thought appropriate by the great Midland Railway Company to commission an architect more used to restoring churches to build their “flagship” hotel? Why, in the exciting age of railway innovation was one of London’s most important transport terminuses fronted by a building designed in a style derived from Medieval Europe? Why do we still regard the hotel as “a fabulous building? One of the greatest buildings in Britain...”? (Harry Handlesman as quoted in Gibson G. RIBA Journal Jan 2008 Pg 34).

By the time Sir Gilbert Scott designed the Midland Hotel, Gothic style, an already accepted, traditional style of architecture associated mainly with churches and educational institutions like Oxford and Cambridge, was enjoying a massive revival. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries this popular medieval style had been largely superseded by the classical lines of Georgian architecture, but amid the turmoil of the post French revolution era the older European societies like Britain were reluctant to be seduced by the new and “dangerous” cultural fashions in art, literature and architecture. Instead, new state funded churches and palaces like George the Third’s Kew started looking back nostalgically to a more tranquil Medieval past in their design, and were seen to represent bastions of authority and peace in the face of poverty and unrest among the masses who, it was felt, might otherwise “break out” in a similar way to their French counterparts. The London church of St Pancras, built at this time, had definite Gothic qualities. In keeping with these sentiments, when the

Houses of Parliament burnt down in 1834, Charles Barry and A.W.N. Pugin were commissioned to rebuild them in “Gothic or Elizabethan style only”, and it is possible to see their architecture reflected to some extent in the design of the Midland Hotel with its Westminster style clock tower.

The design of the Midland hotel, however, owes itself mainly to the inspiration of its architect, Sir George Gilbert Scott. Scott, the son of a country vicar, first learnt to draw by studying the interiors of local churches. As a young man, he was apprenticed in various London-based architectural firms and in 1835, following the death of his father, he set up in business designing workhouses for the Poor Law Commission. This work led to church commissions and he soon embraced the new “Revival” style of Gothic design, a movement largely inspired by the architect A.W.N. Pugin. Pugin, a Catholic convert and obsessive medievalist, believed that “the architecture of the past was the architecture of the future” (Bradley). In his book “True Principles” he endowed the medieval Gothic ideal with a moral superiority fuelled by traditional religious beliefs. He was supported in these views by an enthusiastic group of young clergy and scholars calling themselves the Cambridge Camden Society who expressed the desire in their pamphlet “The Ecclesiologist” that all churches should be designed in an original Christian medieval form rather than the “pagan antiquity” of Greek and Roman style. After reading this pamphlet, appropriately enough while on a train, Scott became a faithful disciple of the group as many of his designs for churches during the 1840s testify.

However, Scott’s development of the Gothic ideal into a more individual style came in 1849 when, on a visit to Italy, he met the influential architectural critic John

Ruskin. Ruskin had just published his book “Seven Lamps of Architecture” extolling the virtues of the figurative ornamentation of Gothic building. He was particularly enthusiastic about the Italian Gothic way of blending different materials and colours. This provided much needed inspiration for Scott who developed these ideas in his book “Remarks on Secular and Domestic Architecture” written in 1857. In this book the blueprints for the design of St Pancras are clearly laid out and he looks more to Europe than Britain for examples. These include the public buildings of medieval Flanders and Ypres as well as the simple ornamentation of thirteenth century French church architecture. For materials and colours he is inspired by Northern Italian architecture with its alternating red brick and pale stone arches and coloured marble which he was to later reproduce in polished granite columns framing the windows of the hotel. In “Remarks” he also argues that the new gothic style should be “pre-eminently that of our own age”. Accordingly he was not afraid to innovate and adapt his design for the Midland Hotel and, taking his lead from his French counterpart the great architect Viollet-le-Duc, he also incorporated ironwork in the hotel balconies and the great staircase in the reception hall, and snaked and curved his Gothic pile around the entrance and form of the giant iron framed train shed pushing up behind.



The Midland Hotel presently undergoing restoration

When viewed from the south east, the vast façade provides a five storey panorama of red brick broken by hundreds of windows which vary according to their level, the largest and distinctly ecclesiastical of which are on the lowest floors. These are framed by pointed shapes of polished Ketton stone and outlined by distinctive Gothic arches made of pale Ancaster stone alternating with brick which echo the fashion for structural polychromy much favoured by architects at the time like William Butterfield. An Italian style balustrade more appropriate for the warmth of the Mediterranean borders the main roof area which is attractively tiled in blue. This strangely romantic theme is echoed in the sprigged finials of the polished granite columns that flank many of the windows. The overall effect, however, is overwhelmingly scholarly and religious; indeed if the unsuspecting traveller was unsure of his bearings he may well think that he has been misdirected to a College of

London University. The imposing nature of the building is increased by its elevation above an arched roadway which was necessary to raise the yawning gothic arch of the main entrance to the level of the railway behind. On the eastern end of the façade rises a spired and pinnacled clock tower reminiscent of the tower on the Houses of Parliament. A muddle of Tudor style chimneys and castellated oriole windows on the roof draws the eye from this towards the south west where the building sweeps in a pleasant curve around to the main hotel entrance, a triple gothic archway which rises to a tower surmounted by two Transylvanian style spires flanking an ornately decorated gable in a strangely symmetrical arrangement. The overwhelming effect is one of cluttered pomposity. It is over decorative and fussy with an inappropriate ecclesiastical style that is both hypocritical and irritatingly self assured. How would such a building, reminiscent of dark and best forgotten fairy tales, comfort the nervous Victorian traveller? Perhaps Scott hoped that the warm red brick and the familiar religious architecture would cancel out their dark forebodings.

Why, however, was such a building commissioned by the Midland Railway company? The company had raised enormous funds from the businessmen of the English midland manufacturing towns to build a railway that would carry the huge output of goods from Nottingham shoes to Burton on Trent beer to be sold in the Capital. To celebrate this engineering achievement and to advertise the growing prosperity as well as the attractiveness of the English Midlands, the company sought to make its arrival felt with a landmark that was not easily missed. Scott's design, only submitted after some persuasion by one of the directors, a personal friend, echoed the style of his original Foreign Office plans. Two years previously, he had altered these to a more classical style after they had been flatly rejected by Lord

Palmerston, who had wanted nothing to do with anything neo-medieval. The new plans took no account of the setting in which the building was to stand. Instead it was designed in Scott's words "on so vast a scale as to rule its neighbourhood instead of being governed by it", "making Euston appear the old fashioned muddle it was and King's Cross a very ordinary piece of austere engineer's building" (Simmons, J. 1968), which was exactly the effect the Midland railway company wished to achieve. The design had "an urgent tempo and physical energy" (Lewis, M.J. 2002 Pg 143) that could be seen as highly appropriate in the Age of Steam. Also Scott's building was decorative but also practical. Medieval features like stained glass only appeared in windows where there was no view, and the many plate glass windows were varied in size and enlarged to let in maximum light. The striking towers and gable ends broke up the monotonous urban horizon as well as providing space for a vast water tank. The great staircase in the entrance hall was emblazoned with heraldic symbolism but the strength of the "frankly industrial" (Lewis, M.J. 2002 Pg 143) ironwork enabled it to rise comfortably and majestically into the interior. The resulting station hotel was, therefore, imposing and awe inspiring while at the same time being modern, comfortable and welcoming.

By 1877, therefore, London boasted a Gothic style hotel serving a mainline station and it appeared to have been totally acceptable to all concerned. But why? How had the Gothic Revival taken such a hold on the Victorians, so much so that it appeared not only in public buildings but also in smart suburban villas throughout the land? This enthusiasm for Medievalism had, by the second half of the Nineteenth century also spread to literature and art which thanks to mass production were now enjoyed by more people than ever before. Popular works included Tennyson's poems like "Morte

d'Arthur" and "The Lady of Shallott" and the paintings and book illustrations of the Pre Raphaelite brotherhood with their fondness for Arthurian subjects. Even Queen Victoria, the most popular monarch since Elizabeth the first had, in 1842, organised a medieval costume ball. The rapid distribution of goods and ideas by railway also facilitated the spread of this nostalgic look at the past. Indeed George Gilbert Scott spent so many hours travelling to his many architectural assignments by rail that he once sent a cable to his office from some midlands station saying "Why am I here?"(Barlow 2002 Pg 19). The "Reality" of Gothic as described by Ruskin in his great work "The Stones of Venice" (1851-3) also held great resonance for those Victorians who saw their world rapidly changing in a whirl of capitalism, the old order being overturned by Revolution in neighbouring Europe and the even their fundamental religious beliefs being questioned by the new ideas of Charles Darwin. Gothic had by now become "national, patriotic, signalling prowess abroad and steadfastness at home" (Brooks,C. 1999). It is no wonder that they wished to gaze out to the changing places around them through curtains framing Gothic bay windows.

But was the Midland Hotel also an enormous paradox? The original philosophy of the founders of the Gothic revival movement was based on nostalgia for the past. Ruskin and his later followers like the designer William Morris argued that skilled craft of the past had been superseded by industrial uniformity and mediocrity. They also felt that the new designs were produced by an unhappy and exploited workforce who needed to work in better conditions in order to produce pleasing work. The toils of the same workforce had built the railways, and now here was a building celebrating the past to acknowledge this fact. Where was the acknowledgement of Victorian technological innovation with its increased and exciting pace of life in this medieval hangover from

the past? Where was the relevance of Catholicism in the secular language of commerce and travel?

The same arguments could well apply today. How appropriate is this monstrous edifice to us in the 21st century? Does it inspire confidence in the commuter embarking on a wearisome crawl on inadequate rolling stock to the English Midlands, or in the traveller dashing by the latest high speed train to the Continent? Perhaps not, but as Londoners gaze at the wounded beast with its supportive framework of scaffolding they must also feel a sense of pride that such workmanship both in design and execution is being restored and incorporated into an international terminus that rivals any around the world.

Chapter 2 The Train Shed

Unlike his Victorian predecessor, the modern traveller is probably unaware of the Gothic façade of the Midland Hotel. Unless visiting the British Library or its locale, most people arrive at St Pancras by high speed continental trains, the conjoined local Midland Mainline train service or by underground on the tube. What they see first of the Station is the glorious sky blue ironwork of the train shed roof, towering above them in a series of majestic Gothic arches locked in a single span of 240 feet. The whole is lit during the day by light filtering through the restored glazing between, giving the visitor a feeling that he may well have arrived in a giant conservatory rather than a grubby London station. The colour of the roof contrasts brilliantly with the supporting Victorian red brickwork with its interwoven cream stonework cleaned in 1990 when the Midland hotel was also cleaned of its century-old grime. The “Wow” factor is enhanced by the fact that there are no supporting pillars or struts to interrupt the view. Moving towards his next destination, the entranced visitor is carried down gliding escalators into a lower concourse flanked by an arcade of pillars behind which nestle discretely signed shops and cafes. From here it is still possible to gaze upwards to the roof which now seems even more lofty and palatial. This amazing piece of architecture, however, was not the work of a far-sighted Le Corbusier or Vallet-le-Duc. It was the inspiration of two practical Victorian engineers, William Henry Barlow assisted by Rowland Mason Ordish.

In 1863 Barlow was instructed by his company, the Midland Railway, to build a train shed on their newly acquired London site, conveniently located between the existing termini at Euston and King’s Cross. This would enable freight from Bedford and the

Midlands to be brought directly into the heart of London, a move made necessary if the Midland Railway was to compete successfully with its rivals. He had a number of complex technical problems to overcome. The first was the necessity to raise the platform level between 12 and 15 feet above Euston Road in order that the lines could clear the nearby Regent's Canal. This problem he turned to advantage, however, by using it as storage space supported, not by massive brick arches as in the case of Charing Cross, but by iron stanchions which consumed less space. These he placed at a distance of just over 14 feet apart, the traditional width used for beer barrel storage as the brewers of Burton on Trent would be the main users of the space.

His next task was to cover the area. Although the easiest solution would have been to build a double spanned roof of around 120 feet, the directors wanted maximum space and flexibility for the new lines and were also concerned not to disrupt the storage area by massive centrally located supporting roof pillars. Barlow was therefore instructed to design and build a single span roof of 240 feet, which would make it the widest in the world. Unfazed by this daunting task, Barlow achieved his brief by shaping the roof into a series of gothic arches, proved after testing to be the most wind resistant and load bearing shape, which were supported by granite and brick piers at each side. The 25 iron arches were set at 29 feet 4 inches apart, twice the width of the beer cellars beneath, supported by an interlacing framework of iron braces throughout its length of 689 feet. The whole structure was then tied with lines of joists that ran beneath the raised platforms and thus would be protected from too much expansion and contraction. In each of these ways the great train shed was designed in response to practical engineering problems, but the result was a magnificent piece of innovative

architecture, considered by many to be one of the wonders of the world when it opened in 1868.

However, few Victorian travellers would have lingered to admire Barlow's work, as its ridge and furrow glazing would have been permanently blackened and blotted out by the grime created by the coal fuelled steam trains. Today we can appreciate the true quality of its design in its clean and newly restored state. We also get a new view of it from the undercroft of the station, now the main arrivals and departure area, which has been opened up by slicing through the old floor of the train shed. This brilliant innovation by architect Alistair Langley and engineer Mike Glover was the result of collaboration similar to that of Barlow and Scott. Their original brief in 1996 when they inherited a "somewhat confused ex British Rail scheme" (Pearman.H. 2008) was to pack both diesel and Eurostar trains into the old shed. Instead, they decided to remove all the diesel lines and create a new station shed for them attached to the old one by a new glazed transept which is now the station's main entrance. This left fewer platforms in the old shed giving them the space to create lightwells which would open up the undercroft area. To do this, however, Barlow's original supporting grid of columns and beams would have to be cut into, creating serious structural weakness. Mike Glover's solution was to install four steel struts set in concrete bridges resting on top of the old beams. The thermal stress imposed on the original building by this giant slab of concrete was counteracted by "a huge horizontal waling beam 4.5m wide running the length of the western end of the shed." (Kucharek, J.C 2008). Glover was fortunate in that Barlow's original structure was so solid and perfectly calculated that he was able to adapt it with the minimum of reinforcements, "a testament to the great Victorian engineers"(Kucharek,J.C. 2008) The result is a

dramatic piece of 21st century British architecture that allows the inspiration of its 19th century designers to finally reveal itself.



View of Barlow's restored train shed with its exposed undercroft shopping area and new concrete reinforcements.

As the modern traveller scans the apex of the newly restored Barlow arch at the southern end of the station, however, his gaze meets the gilded face of the newly restored clock. The paleness of the new gold hands makes it impossible to read the time. Dropping his gaze in disappointment he notices a giant couple embracing 9 metres above the ground. On closer inspection at the southern end of the main Eurostar concourse he sees the bronze pair set on a “curious oval plinth” in a “gruesomely over-scaled” clinch (Pearman,H .2008). Far too large to be appreciated

from the floor level he is forced to gaze up into the unrewarding solidity of a bronze skirt and stare in disbelief at the huge legs and feet of the “loathsome couple” which are “quite possibly the worst piece of public art in Britain” (Pearman,H. 2008). The architect Alastair Lansley had requested a piece of public art in his original brief for the station concourse but had been unspecific in his instructions. London and Continental railways commissioned the artist Paul Day after seeing original drawings. Presumably they liked what they saw.

It raises the question “What is the purpose of Public Art?” It is generally accepted that it is to improve the aesthetic appeal of shared space by “developing creative ways of engaging people of all ages in re-visioning their environment.”(Charity, R. 2005). It is arguable whether this particular work, called “The Meeting Place” adds anything at all to the magnificence of the station’s Victorian ironwork and restored brickwork beside which it looks rather trite. Even the nearby commuters enjoying an overpriced glass of bubbly at the longest champagne bar in Europe would have to be very tipsy to appreciate its charm. However, on a recent visit to the station I encountered a young professional photographer at the foot of the giant lovers; “Wonderful, isn’t it!” she said as she gazed happily up into their metal embrace.

Fortunately for the more sensitive artistic commuter this particular piece of public art is in rather a backwater of the station as most travellers are either checking in at lower levels for Eurostar or the tube, or using the Midland mainline trains in the new train shed extension at the northern end of the station. This consists of a large, flat roofed structure supported by seven rows of columns 30 metres apart that look, in the words of the architect, a bit “like cocktail sticks”. Light enters through glazed north-facing

slots and the whole building is ventilated by huge lateral openings. No attempt has been made to compete with the magnificence of Barlow's original structure, and it is "a clear separation of old and new" (Bradley,S. 2008 Pg 166) which, seen from the main station concourse, simply adds to the overall feeling of light and space, rather like an "unpretentious conservatory"(Powers,A. 2008). It is attached to the original shed by a large glazed transept which forms the main entrance to the station and is now the real hub of the complex. This impressive piece of modern architecture presents a welcoming light-filled and convenient front to what has now become an efficient transport hub, a source of national pride emphasised by its rarity in this transport-challenged country.

One of the most obvious features of the whole station complex is that it is an extraordinary mix of architectural styles. Much debate has been generated among architects about how easily the neo Gothic design of Scott's hotel sat alongside the practical yet astounding ironwork of Barlow's train shed, the former the product of an architect's imagination, the latter a practical piece of engineering. It has been argued that the two co-existed separately and most unhappily. However, when Barlow's restored train shed is examined today we can see a lot of architecture inspired and designed by Scott. The original booking office has a neo-Gothic façade and contains a lofty Gothic inspired hall. The brick perimeter walls of the shed are adorned with polychromatic red and cream brickwork and gothic arches that echo the design of Scott's hotel. Similarly Barlow made important contributions to the design of the hotel as Scott had to work to a plan pre-determined by the design of the train shed. The main entrance and exits to the station had to be elevated to meet the height of the platforms and had to match the height of the arched exit for cabs already set in

Barlow's shed. We see these as a huge Gothic arch surmounted by a tall, turreted square tower on the western side of the hotel building through which carriages would enter the station, and a projecting arched exit at its eastern side. The hotel also had to be curved at its western end to provide access to the station from Euston Road. Given that Barlow had specified the curve of this façade and the height and position of the station entrances and exits, he probably also specified the approach ramps from Euston Road., as the design of the shed "made their incorporation by Scott inevitable" (Herbert,G. 1998). In these ways each building mirrored elements of the other in an integrated whole. The two buildings have also been criticised for their disparate characteristics: Barlow's shed represents the most modern technology of the Victorian age and a "somewhat stark anticipation of an unpalatable "non-artistic future," while Scott's hotel design was "nostalgically indicative of a former time and age.....whose architectural expression belies any constructive means other than the traditional building crafts" (Herbert,G. 1998). It could, however, be argued that although its rather ecclesiastical architecture was inspired by the past, the imposing hotel façade has a dynamism that was appropriate for the new steam age, while the hard structural features of the train shed were softened by the warmth of brick and stone and the comfortingly familiar shapes of gothic arches. In these ways the design of both shed and hotel interlock to form "a complex, richly diverse, but ultimately congruent whole" (Herbert,G. 1998).

This description could also be applied today to the modern complex of buildings that comprise the new international station. Now that the heart of the station has shifted northwards to the tall, glazed entrance transept, most passengers and visitors see the train sheds first, and are only dimly aware of Scott's hotel, now to be renamed 'St

Pancras Chambers' as rose coloured reflections through a grid of glass and ironwork at the southern end of the station. It is difficult for them to appreciate the nature of the original station façade, wrapped in its cocoon of green netting and scaffolding even if they do happen to venture out onto the busy and unattractive environs of Euston Road. Instead they see a colourful and imaginative blend of Victorian colour enhanced by the light and space of the new shed extension and transept, which is offset by the depth of the newly revealed undercroft area that sparkles with life and movement. Many of them will be grateful to the foresight of the poet Sir John Betjeman, who persuaded a cost-cutting government of 40 years ago to save the station from proposed demolition. He is justly commemorated in a series of circular stone plaques engraved with appropriate verse set into the floor of the station's southern concourse. A beautifully sculpted 8 ½ ft bronze of the poet by Martin Jennings, is nicely positioned in the same area. Clutching his hat, the figure gazes up into Barlow's iron and glass roof that has once more "burst again upon an astonished and delighted world" (Powers,A. 2008).

Chapter 3 The Retail and Leisure Areas

THE SHOPPING AREAS

Most modern rail travellers aim to save time. High speed and efficient connections are seen as positive and essential requisites of today's "fast lane" generation. Travelling by train in the UK is no longer seen as an exciting and stimulating experience to be savoured slowly like good wine. The view from the window is of secondary importance to the mobile 'phone or electronic game, and few can remember the romance of travel in John Betjeman's day

"when steam was on
the window panes,
And glory in my soul."

(Extract from his poem "Cornish Cliffs")

Part of the attraction of St Pancras International is that it is attempting to rekindle the romance of rail travel by combining nostalgic architecture with high speed efficiency, and to broaden the travel experience by also providing opportunities for quality shopping and eating in a calming and tastefully restrained atmosphere. It has become a "destination station" (Young 2008) thanks to the vision of London & Continental Railways and their project director Mike Luddy to "make St Pancras a place people wanted to come to whether they were getting on a train or not" (Young 2008).

Shops, bars and cafes are familiar features of modern stations and airports. They are the necessary backdrop to our commercially driven lives but they should not intrude into the magnificent interior of an architectural masterpiece like St Pancras. The fitters, Chapman Taylor, had to “tread very carefully”(Young 2008) when incorporating the 62 shops and 15 bars into this grade 1 listed building, carefully monitored by the guardians of old architecture, English Heritage. There are shops and cafes in the departure lounge, in the new train shed and also alongside the Eurostar platforms in the old shed, where they are tucked discreetly between Scott’s supporting brick arches. The main retail area, however, is in the undercroft, where Burton beer barrels were once stored behind a series of brick arches and where we can still see Barlow’s remaining iron pillars that held up the main platform concourse. Fitting out this area was Chapman Taylor’s main challenge and resulted in a number of innovative solutions that make this a highly successful project.

The original design by architect Alastair Lansley had tucked the shops into rather cramped spaces behind the arches of the beer cellars. Chapman Taylor’s chief architect Steve Johnson decided to extend them and after much negotiation, persuaded English Heritage to accept a new position 3 metres beyond the original. This placed the shop fronts between the undercroft’s brick arches and iron pillars, which now create a colonnade in which shoppers can stroll and browse, away from the throngs of passengers passing through to the departure lounge and underground station. The shops themselves have frameless glazing with unobtrusive fittings. These are cantilevered from the floor following the shape of the original brickwork, to protect it without touching it. Merchandising within the shops has to be kept at low levels and shop signage is restricted to simple cut-out stainless steel lettering, with sales stickers

completely banned. The result is unimpaired views of the attractive weathered brick arches and myriad reflections of Barlow's stunning roof span that soars high above Glover's inspired incisions.

The types of shop are also carefully controlled by L.C.R. The undercroft area or "Arcade" as it is known contains a number of exclusive retail outlets, which are taking advantage of the annually predicted forty million Eurostar travellers who are channelled through this area in order to check in. They include a selection of high quality food outlets such as the continental themed patisseries 'Crepeaffair', 'Paul' and 'Le Pain Quotidien' and the luxury English baker 'Peyton and Byrne', as well as a number of expensive jewellers, boutiques and gift shops. Traditional names like Hamleys, Foyles and Marks and Spencer give a rooted, English feel while the continental cafes create the exciting atmosphere of an exclusive European market that prepares us for the heady experience of continental travel. Lansley's vision for the undercroft was that it should be "more Burlington Arcade than Oxford Street" (Young, E. 2008). In this he has succeeded.

If Oxford Street is more to your taste, however, the recently opened 'Circle' retail area situated in the newly built transept between the two train sheds should fit the bill. At present it is a much quieter area than the Arcade, although this will change when its St Pancras Road entrance becomes the main London Underground entrance in 2010. To create a livelier environment, a permanent Farmers' Market is being set up in autumn 2008 which, it is hoped, will attract local office workers as well as commuters when the redevelopment of brownfield sites around neighbouring King's Cross is completed. It contains a range of shops which you might find in any British

city centre: Monsoon, W.H.Smiths, Boots and of course M&S, distinguished by the fact that it is the first station M&S to sell clothing. Fast food outlets here include the predictable burger outlet, but the overall tone is raised by the Japanese sushi bar situated nearby. This is an area for British shoppers and is boringly familiar. It is this familiarity, however, that makes it welcome to the modern Midland Line commuters, who are all too often in need of homely retail therapy and strong Starbuck's coffee when their trains are cancelled or delayed yet again.

For drama and style, however, move upstairs to the main Eurostar concourse. Here a glass of bubbly can be enjoyed at Europe's longest champagne bar, running alongside the main platforms and overlooking the Arcade. Drinkers can also enjoy a good range of European wines together with seasonal fare described as "proudly British" on the St Pancras website. With its soaring ceiling of sky-blue iron, it is questionable whether there is a more attractive station bar anywhere in the world. The view can also be shared by diners at 'The Betjeman Arms' a high-class brasserie tucked away behind the brickwork on the western side of the concourse. Equally patriotic, it specialises in fresh seasonal English produce and traditional British dishes which can be enjoyed from breakfast through to dinner and which can be eaten on the concourse terrace as well as inside. Devotees of Italian food can also take their fill at Carluccio's terrace which is situated on the concourse in the shadow of Paul Day's giant lovers. One wonders, however, whether the view will be as welcome when wintry north winds blow in from the open Midland Mainline extension. The continental cafes snugly situated in the warmth of the Arcade below will seem a much more attractive option, creating even more congestion and crowding in the area. Although its architects were prepared for this, the fear is that St Pancras will increasingly feel, as it

does already, like a “grand country house” where the occupants live “mostly in the basement kitchen” (Powers,A. 2008).



The Champagne Bar with the Arcade below.

The retail complex at St Pancras International is typical of a growing trend among retail designers to site their outlets in historic city centre venues. This is a departure from the huge out-of town developments of the last twenty years that have moved the main commercial activity out of the old central business districts, causing economic decay in many town centres. Today these vast chain stores with their familiar names and predictable products are finding it increasingly difficult to compete with e-commerce. How much easier it is to buy our products at the flick of a switch in the comfort of our own home than to search through acres of shop floor displays, only to find that the bargains we make are swallowed up by outrageous parking fees. Yet we crave to get our fix of ‘retail therapy’. It is a British obsession and for those of us who

have been brought up in urban environments, it is a way of life. We need new entertainment and excitement if we are to spend our leisure time at the shops. Retail designers are responding to this challenge by making our shopping experience ever more comfortable and stimulating. Merchandise displays in the most successful shops are increasingly artistic and accessible, allowing us to enjoy “an unmediated encounter with the tangible attractions of beautiful things,” (Riewoldt 2000) and we are soothed at every turn by the aromas of continental food and coffee. We are again enjoying the architectural heritage of our great city centres and trendy addresses are now to be found in redevelopments of the old industrial inner cities. Increased affluence has led to an explosion of foreign travel and hungry retailers are following the crowds to airports and stations.

One of the most successful examples of this is the huge station retail complex at Promenaden Hauptbahnhof in Leipzig. The station building was the largest in the world when it was opened in 1915, with a 300metre long façade jointly owned by two different German railway companies. In 1997 it underwent a two year modernisation, costing EUR 256 million, as part of the German reunification process. It is now a showcase for the German railways and contains 120 shops, plus 18 cafes and bistros accommodated on two floors set in an airwell beneath the giant booking hall. Like St Pancras, these underground arcades consist of small, discretely-signed specialist shops with clear glass fronts reached by escalators. A spectacular glass-fronted lift carries shoppers to the main concourse where they can dine in style in the painstakingly restored Prussian waiting room or enjoy a concert in the opulent surroundings of the identical Saxon waiting room. Like its smaller London cousin, its designers have taken great pains to restore the original architecture of the station, so

that travellers once again experience the high level of style and comfort enjoyed by their Edwardian forebears and hopefully linger in its magnificent surroundings long enough to part with their money.

THE HOTEL

Our ancestors spent even more time in the stations where there was a comfortable hotel like the Midland Grand, although it when it first opened in 1876 it was really only within the means of the well-to-do upper classes. Travel was still regarded as highly expensive and the hotel took advantage of this assumption with its many 'extra' charges including 2 shillings for a hipbath, one shilling for a maid and one shilling and sixpence for candles. Even the fire in the grate had a separate charge. There was a definite hierarchy of accommodation with the cheaper rooms on the top two floors, and if you needed it, there was a constant reminder of your room's status in the varying quality of its furniture and fittings. Sadly, the rapid changes in Britain's economy during the early part of the twentieth century made the hotel an anachronism and it closed in 1935. For the next fifty years it fossilised as offices for the amalgamated London, Midland and Scottish Railway Company with its upper floors functioning as a hostel for cleaning ladies. It narrowly survived demolition in 1966 and was Grade 1 listed the following year. Lack of investment meant that there was very little refurbishment, so that the crumbling ruins of much of its original decoration still remained when it became the focus for redevelopment in 1997, as part of the ex British Railway scheme to make St Pancras the new home of its Eurostar trains.

The transformation of this phoenix will be complete in 2010 when it will re-open as 'St Pancras Chambers'. It will then become a 245-room Marriot 'Renaissance' hotel and its top two storeys will be converted into 67 loft apartments with a penthouse suite in the tower. An additional 190 rooms will be accommodated in the western extension of the station opposite the British Library, linked to the old hotel by a 21st century 'Gothic' arched façade designed by the architects Richard Griffiths. There will be a small amount of selected restoration within the new hotel which will include the magnificent double staircase with its iron work and colourful heraldic decoration, still as impressive as it was when Victorian guests first gazed up into the stars and suns of the rib vaulted ceiling. Much of the new interior decoration, however, will be re-created from old photographs as the existing walls are too patched and damaged to restore successfully. Historic fittings like the old water closets and radiators will be recorded and photographed before being replaced. The furniture will be new but carefully chosen to compliment the traditional décor. Scott himself would have approved of this as always tried to preserve as much as possible of the original old churches and cathedrals he was restoring, but designed any new work to be "in harmony with what he considered the spirit of the building."(Bradley,S .2006)

This £10 million programme of restoration and refurbishment by London & Continental Railways in conjunction with the Manhattan Loft Corporation is a well carefully calculated investment designed to tap the wealth of the affluent who can afford to spend their leisure on city breaks in Europe's most expensive hotels. It is, however, dependent on two major factors. The first is the continued expansion and regeneration of the King's Cross area. At the moment it is a noisy congested and unattractive area with obvious signs of industrial and urban decay. Unlike his French

counterpart at the Gare du Nord, the traveller who ventures outside the station cannot “cross an uncrowded road, and sit down to breakfast, lunch or dinner at one of a dozen small brasseries and restaurants.” (Powers,A. 2008) There are almost no signs to direct him to nearby Bloomsbury or Covent Garden. A new business, residential and cultural district is planned, however, on the 27 hectare King’s Cross Central site to the north of St Pancras. A further £150 million redevelopment scheme consisting of homes, offices and shops at ‘Regent’s Quarter’ to the east of King’s Cross is already underway. A new western concourse extension for King’s Cross station is also planned. In a slightly bizarre plan, even the ugly gas holders on the outskirts of St Pancras are to be deconstructed, their frames being used to house apartments as well as recreation areas. These moves will improve the quality of the area making it an attractive environment in the heart of London for the rich tourist or businessman who might stay at the new hotel.

The second major factor in the equation might shake all these plans. The programme is dependent on a continual stream of investment, mainly from the private sector, which largely rests on the fortunes of property companies and the banks that back them. An economic downturn in the fortunes of Britain and Europe will have serious consequences for the success of the scheme. It would be an ironic twist of fate if the Scott’s great Gothic Goliath was to become an empty anachronism once again. However, a glance at Manhattan Loft Corporation’s website reveals that all but one of the £1.85million loft apartments has been sold, together with the £10million showpiece penthouse in the tower. Obviously some people are still optimistic about the fortunes of this great national heritage site and are prepared to ride out the twists

and turns of fate in order to secure themselves a slice of what Harry Handlesman, founder of MLC, calls “this fabulous building”. (Gibson, G. 2008).

Conclusion

The 2007 re-opening of St Pancras as an international station has been an overwhelming success in many ways. The stunning expanse of its Victorian train shed with its sky-blue ironwork and newly-restored ridge and furrow glazing creates a magnificent setting for continental arrivals. The inspired designs of its modern architect Alistair Lansley, together with the engineer Mike Glover, are the product of a partnership that echoes the combined success of Scott and Barlow. The £800million re-fit has changed the once rather neglected terminus into a ‘destination station’ which, it is hoped will attract people regardless of whether they want to catch a train or not. The 62 shops and 15 bars that include the longest champagne bar in Europe have given the station new celebrity and style which it hopes will boost the numbers of passengers passing through its doors each year to a predicted 40 million. The new changes have been designed to enhance and harmonise with the old to create a station that is a successful mix of restoration and modern improvements. Indeed Barlow and Scott would hardly recognise their old station with its train shed free of the grime and noise of its original steam locomotives, restored to a “luminosity” that reminds one of the Victorian writer Charles Kingsley’s “equation of cleanliness and godliness” (Powers,A. 2008)

The Midland Hotel, now renamed ‘St Pancras Chambers’ is undergoing a similar metamorphosis. Changed from neglected ugly duckling to shining vision in red and cream, its gleaming spires and Gothic arches once again present to the world a face of optimism and opulence. Designed to rule its neighbourhood and outshine its rivals, it is even more prominent now that the front of King’s Cross Station is a shabby ‘60s

replacement of its original. It is questionable, however, whether its ecclesiastically inspired architecture, nostalgically reflecting an earlier pre-industrial age is an appropriate setting for modern penthouses and a luxury hotel. Although certainly convenient for the rail traveller, its location in an almost endless building site overlooking the teeming traffic of Euston Road, makes it a noisy, daunting and unattractive place for the average tourist to stay. A swift completion of the regeneration of the King's Cross area might solve the problem, but is this likely in the current economic climate? However, recessions are transient and the Capital is gearing up for the 2012 Olympics. Like the Chinese authorities in the recent Beijing games, Britain would like to ensure that the highest level of necessary infrastructure and accommodation is completed in time to impress the rest of the world. In this St Pancras Chambers and its international station may have a most important role to play.

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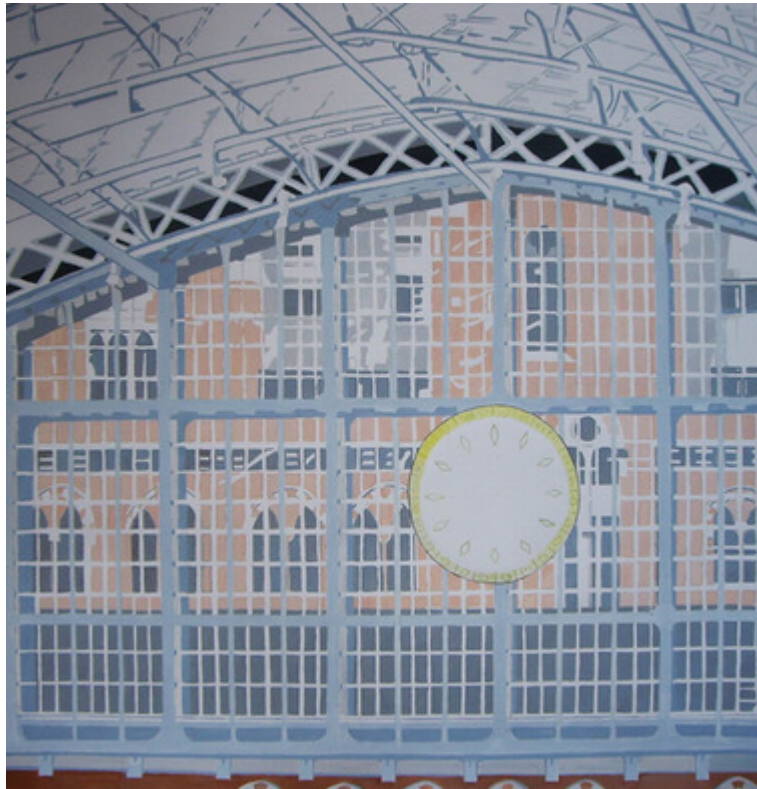
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Appendix

The following illustrations are my own paintings that form part of an installation for my degree show. They show different views of St Pancras International Station that illustrate some of the points I have made in this paper.



“What they see first of the Station is the glorious sky blue ironwork of the train shed roof, towering above them in a series of majestic Gothic arches locked in a single span of 240 feet. The whole is lit during the day by light filtering through the restored glazing between, giving the visitor a feeling that he may well have arrived in a giant conservatory rather than a grubby London station.”



“This amazing piece of architecture, however, was not the work of a far-sighted Le Corbusier



or Vallet-le-Duc. It was the inspiration of two practical Victorian engineers, William Henry Barlow assisted by Rowland Mason Ordish.”



“Why, in the exciting age of railway innovation was one of London’s most important transport terminuses fronted by a building designed in a style derived from Medieval Europe?”



“...the vast façade provides a five storey panorama of red brick broken by hundreds of windows which vary according to their level, the largest and distinctly ecclesiastical of which are on the lowest floors. “



“On the eastern end of the façade rises a spired and pinnacled clock tower reminiscent of the tower on the Houses of Parliament.”

