

RICHARD GRIFFITHS ARCHITECTS

St Pancras Hotel

Gilbert Scott Portico: Artwork Installation

Design, Access and Heritage Statement

Richard Griffiths Architects

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1 Introduction

The opening of the St Pancras Renaissance Hotel and residential apartments in 2011 marked the culmination of an 80-year long search for a viable use for Sir George Gilbert Scott's Midland Grand Hotel. The project is perhaps the most notable conservation success story of the century and makes appropriate and beneficial use of all parts of the former hotel, as well as the former taxi rank and Booking Office. The project has won several conservation and design awards, including an RIBA Award, and has proved successful and popular for hotel users and visitors. The project was taken forward by the Manhattan Loft Corporation under Harry Handelsman, with RHWL and Richard Griffiths Architects as joint architects.

The Gilbert Scott Restaurant and Bar originally opened in 2011 and was led by celebrity chef Marcus Wareing. It closed before the beginning of the pandemic in 2019 and was more recently renovated under consent Ref. No: 2022/2514/L. This renovation is now complete and is proving to be a success with the bar's highly decorated intricate mouldings, masonry details, decorative columns and painted detailing that are now displayed in their full splendour. The lighting installed in the design has highlighted the original decoration including the stone carving, the plaster mouldings and large amounts of gold leaf.

The exterior Portico, a key area of the hotel's public Euston Road frontage, has been immensely improved from an unused and squalid shelter to a splendid place for enjoying the views of St Pancras and the surrounding area but is still suffering from a lack of footfall and appears to be invisible to the public.

This project aims to tackle this issue in a sensitive way by allowing the historic form of the building to remain dominant while animating the Portico entrance to attract more visitors to the publicly open spaces.



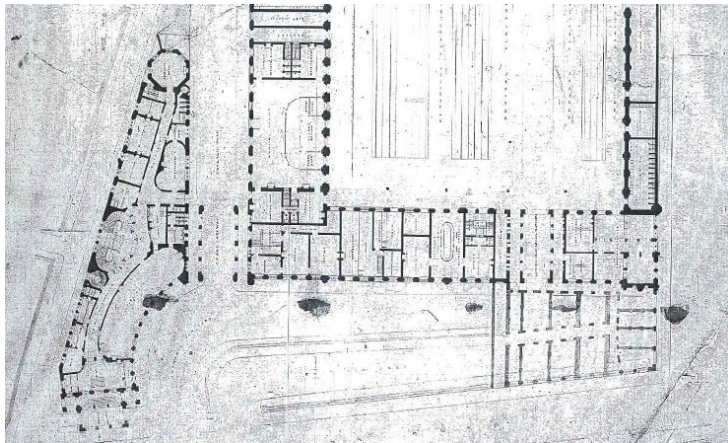
The Grand Midland Hotel c1900

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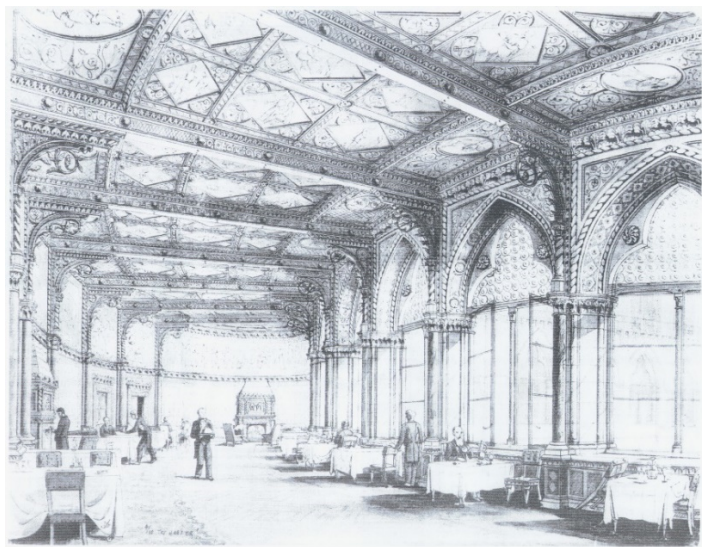
2 Historical background

George Gilbert Scott's **Midland Grand Hotel** was constructed to provide a fitting London Terminal to the Midland Railway. His successful competition design gave the Midland Railway the image that they wanted to advertise their ambition and achievement at a time when the other railway terminals had mainly been completed. It was noted, not least by Scott himself, as a noble attempt to prove that the Gothic style was suitable for a major civic building, following his failure to do so at the Foreign Office.

The **competition design of 1868** provided for a west wing with a portico for carriages, a tall entrance hall with a Venetian screen to the hotel reception, and a curved corridor leading to the famed staircase, giving access to the curved coffee room and to the rest of the hotel. The staircase gave access to the wing of hotel rooms either side of a long corridor facing onto Euston Road or onto the station platforms. The platform level rooms are a storey height above Euston Road, so as to allow trains to cross over the Grand Union Canal, rather than below it as at Kings Cross. The entrance hall is at street level, so there are changes of level to the ground floor corridor, to the staircase, and to the hotel concourse.



Scott's competition plan 1868



Competition design for coffee room

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The **west wing** of the hotel was completed in 1876, after the east wing had been operating for four years. However, during construction the Midland Directors rejected Scott's proposal of Clayton and Bell as decorators and appointed Gillow's instead. They adopted a hierarchy of materials from ash, mahogany and oak in the bedrooms to ebonised gold and crimson velvet in the public rooms, or alternatively walnut and huja with black and gold decoration.

The **portico** acted as a covered canopy for carriage drop-off, with a balcony above opening off the Ladies Smoking Room.



The portico carriage entrance from an early photograph

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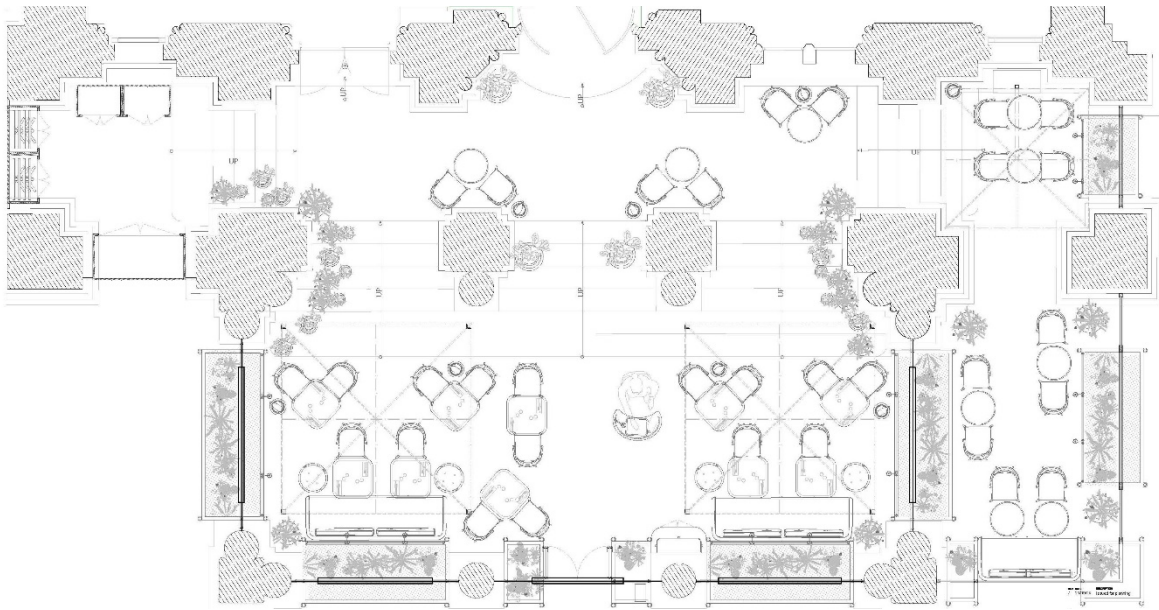
3 Significance of the Portico

- Scott's St Pancras Hotel is grade 1 listed.
- It is arguably the most notable neo-Gothic Revival secular building in the world.
- The portico marks the 1876 main entrance to the hotel in an ostentatious manner.
- The highly significant decorative schemes were restored during the 2011 and 2022 projects.
- The bar and restaurant use has proved popular but have some practical shortcomings.

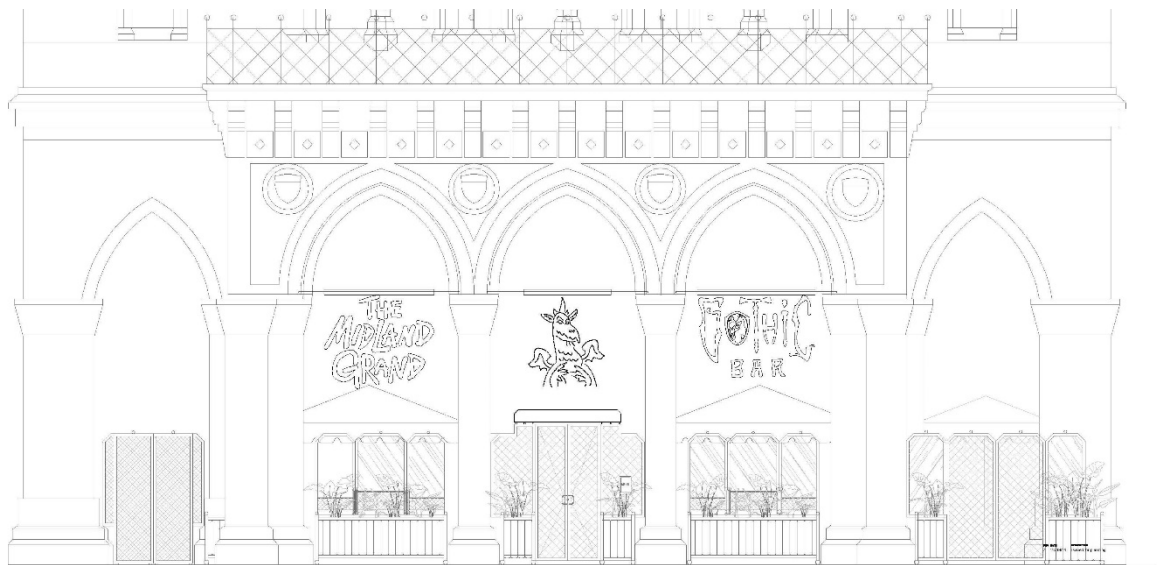


The screened-off portico today

4 Client brief and proposals



Proposed floor plan with indicative furniture layout



Proposed elevation of portico

The Portico

Manhattan Loft has returned the portico on Euston Road back to being an active entrance but believe this can be further enhanced.

The enclosure of the portico with screens and planters as an outside bar has given new life and presence to the former main entrance of the hotel on Euston Road. However, Euston Road is a two-lane major traffic artery, and detracts from the visibility and welcome of the Portico bar.

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As a result, Manhattan Loft have commissioned an art piece to be erected for the Frieze London. This has been envisioned to be in keeping and in the same style as the public art pieces already present within the station.

The artist and Neon fabricator Kerry Ryan has proposed installations which take their cues from the highly decorated and coloured St Pancras interiors and aims to bring further attention and interest to this challenging St Pancras Hotel Portico.

The intention is to draw attention to the portico bar by means an artwork of five hanging neon panels set inside the three front arches and two end arches of the portico, identifying the hotel by means of neon lights and a neon dragon that appears to spit fire.

This application seeks to gain permission to make this installation a permanent feature of the portico.

The upcoming Frieze London art festival offers a unique opportunity to launch the commissioned art.

The Frieze London

Frieze London was founded in 2003 by Amanda Sharp and Matthew Slotover. Eva Langret is the Director of Frieze London.

The fair is one of the world's most influential contemporary art fairs, focusing only on contemporary art and living artists, and takes place each October.

The fair's exhibiting galleries represent some of the most exciting artists working today, from the emerging to the iconic; and a team of world-leading independent curators advise on feature sections, making possible performance-based work and ambitious presentations by emerging galleries. The fair focuses on living artists and innovative practice.

Frieze London coincides with and is within walking distance of its sister fair, Frieze Masters, in The Regent's Park. Frieze Masters gives a unique view on the relationship between historical art and contemporary practice, showing work made before the year 2000 whereas Frieze London presents work created mainly post-2000.

For the past few years, we have had each year over 60,000 visitors to Frieze London and Frieze Masters combined. These visitors included those with an interest in the art world, such as curators, artists, collectors, gallerists and critics, as well as the general public. Some visit as first-time collectors of art whilst others view the fair more as an exhibition, enjoying the experience as a cultural day out.

Details of the proposal

The five pieces of art comprise of a Central Dragon, hung in the central arch on Euston Road with two neon signs, 'The Midland Grand' and 'Gothic Bar', hung within the arches immediately to the left and right. In addition, two neon signs are proposed for the side arches stating: 'Bar / Dining'.

The dragon will be two sided and constructed within a frame and a solid painted panel. All the other neon signs will be lettering mounted to a wire frame.

All signage would be static (not flashing) and hung from the existing arch ties at the base of each arch under the Portico balcony. Power (Low Voltage) will be fed from the existing panel board located outside under the Portico.

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These views are indicative only – see the application drawings for detail.



Artist's impression of the Portico artwork

5 Heritage Impact Assessment of the proposals

Portico

The current enclosure with freestanding planters and glass/mesh screens has helped bring the café to life and enhance the amenities in the area with a Parisian-street café. This application is made to allow the artwork to continue to identify the hotel and portico bar and to welcome visitors on Euston.

The new signs in the archways will have no impact on the fabric of the building, since they are hung from the existing tie bars, and lit by an extension of the existing wiring in an entirely reversible manner. They will however have a significant impact on the appearance of the portico.

The proposal should have a beneficial impact on the building by drawing attention to the Portico bar and former main entrance, inherently desirable to the public.

It is a bold artwork that is intended to be put in place for the Frieze Art Fair in October and will make a particularly strong impact at night when the dragon is spitting fire (a dragon forms part of the Midland Railway Coat of Arms.)

6 Conclusion

The proposals will better reveal and enhance the historic fabric and appearance, and will provide greatly enriched enjoyment to the public, both those using the bar and restaurant and those who are passers-by.