

St Pancras Hotel

Booking Office Bar: Proposed Alterations

Design, Access and Heritage Statement

Richard Griffiths Architects

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The Booking Office bar as proposed

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 on tours, as well as the residents in the apartments. The project was taken forward by the Manhattan Loft Corporation under Harry Handelsman, with RHWL and Richard Griffiths Architects as joint architects.

Since opening in 2011, the hotel has proved highly popular and successful and the Booking Office Bar is now inadequate for its purpose. The capacity is insufficient at peak times, and the Manhattan Loft Corporation, in association with the St Pancras Renaissance Hotel, wish to renew the interior design to make better use of the space, and to reveal more of Scott's architecture of the Booking Office and of the linenfold panelled ticket office. It is intended to complete this work in 2021 in order to mark the 10th anniversary of the opening of the hotel in 2011.

Listed Building consent was granted by LB Camden and Historic England in February 2017 (Ref: 2016/6204/L) for a project that would have created a new mezzanine level bar, and a new layout for the Booking Office Bar. A second Listed Building Consent was obtained in 1919 for various amendments that were required in connection with operational matters and the Building Regulations.

Manhattan Lofts do not now wish to proceed with the installation of the mezzanine bar, and the present application is for a redesign of the bar fitout by Hugo Toro. This requires various modifications to the proposals already consented. These include the installation of banquette seating in the Booking Office. These sit on the floor without being fixed, and so should not require consent. However, an assessment has nevertheless been included in this HIA.

2 Historical background

Scott's Grand Midland 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 already 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.



Early view with hammer beam roof



Early view showing boarded floor and heightened booking office clerestory

The Booking Office of the Midland Railway was strategically placed so that travellers arriving from the ramp on Euston Road or the taxi rank could enter the Station via the Booking Office located between the taxi rank and Barlow's trainshed. The ticket office was detailed as a piece of joinery against the east (station) wall of the Booking Office, lined with oak linenfold panelling, and surmounted by a glazed clerestory giving light to the offices behind. Early photographs show the Booking Office with its magnificent hammer beam roof, timber plank floor, ticket office with ticket windows, and motley porters standing around. A close inspection of the early photos reveals alterations to the ticket windows and the extent of the clerestory.

A bomb fell on the Booking Office in the First World War, and the roof was rebuilt with Belfast trusses and a flat ceiling (the present arched braces were only added in the recent works).

In the 1970's the proposal to remove the ticket office to provide modern ticketing facilities provoked a storm of protest from the Victorian Society. As a consequence, the proposals were amended to relocate the ticket office on the west side to make it more visible to visitors entering from the station, with the linenfold panelling being retained. Close inspection reveals a number of minor changes, including the addition of further doors in the panelling and the loss of the cresting below the clerestory windows on the returns facing north and south. Contemporary photos show a tiled floor pattern.

The Zeppelin raid of 17 February 1918 cost 20 lives and destroyed the roof of the booking office, which was rebuilt with a plainer ceiling. The structure is seen after modernisation in the post-steam era. The atmosphere and much of the ambience of the original remains, with wooden panelling and Gothic style architecture – the Gothic church influence is unmistakable. The circulating area is now clear of free-standing destination boards and courtesy screens. In pre-Grouping days this was the Midland Railway's office, the GER's being round to the right. Colour-Rail.com/103596

and manpower haemorrhaged to the armed forces, this became more and more difficult. On the night of 17 February 1918 St. Pancras came under attack from a Zeppelin raid – five bombs were dropped on or near the station and hotel, with one falling on Midland Road.

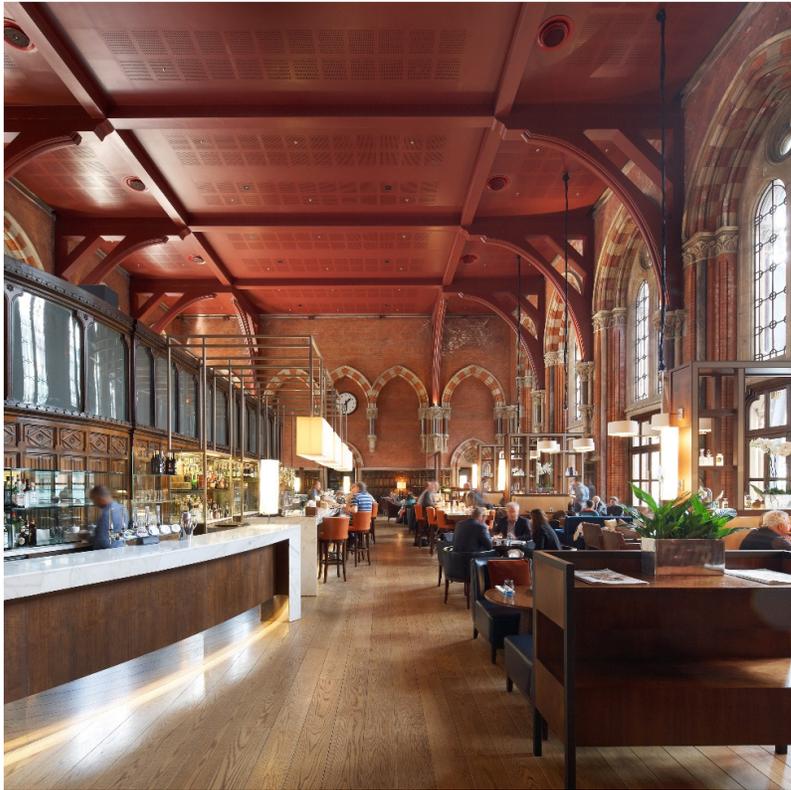


In the recent hotel conversion, the Booking Office became the bar of the hotel, and arched braces were installed at ceiling level to replicate an impression of the lower parts of Scott's roof destroyed by bombing. The panelling and ticket office windows were partially obscured by the bar fittings and by the light fittings above the bar. A timber plank floor was laid in the bar area, vinyl flooring behind the bar, and a raised timber floor in the offices fitted into the former ticket office.

In 2017 Listed Building consent was obtained for the creation of a mezzanine bar inside the panelled Booking office. This remains unexecuted.

3 Significance of the Booking Office

- Scott's St Pancras Hotel is grade 1 listed.
- It is perhaps the most famous neo-Gothic Revival secular building in the world.
- The Booking Office was Scott's most notable architectural interior when built, in view of the hammer beam roof.
- Following the post-War rebuilding the Booking Office is still a highly significant interior on account of its rich wall treatment.
- The ticket office has reached iconic status owing to the Victorian Society Campaign and is a notable example of Victorian linenfold panelling.
- The ticket office remains highly significant despite its relocation and minor depredations to some of the carved detail.
- The floor and ceiling finishes have little or no significance.
- The modern bar fittings and lighting have a negative significance by obscuring the panelling behind.
- The conversion of the hotel and Booking Office back to hotel use is one of the most significant conservation projects of the century.
- The Booking Office bar has proved highly successful and popular as the heart of the hotel, open to visitors entering from both the hotel and from the station.



Booking office bar looking north



Booking office bar looking south

4 Design and access statement

Fit-out

The design approach began by analysing the current fit-out and the historical background of the site showing, as a result, that the layout does not emphasize the beauty of the space, obscuring the panelling of the ticket office, and fragmenting the space with tall furniture and fittings.

As a first step, all the tall elements of the current project have been removed to create one unique space and to take advantage of an immersive view of the Scott's architecture.

The layout has been conceived to let people easily move through the station and the hotel. To reach this point, the left and right wing side of the Booking Office Bar follows a linear arrangement to simplify circulation. To emphasise the core of the space four sculptural trees have been placed, also accentuating the feeling of being in an exotic journey. The fit-out is arranged creating different areas: the central bar, the open kitchen, the central informal table, the banquettes with organic geometry and the private area. To highlight this variety, different furniture has been designed, all conceived as free standing and not fixed to the historical building (apart from the bar stools that are attached to the 2011 floorboards).

Taking inspiration from the site, and especially the Renaissance Hotel, the material palette used is designed to achieve a balance between modern and historical, youthful yet respectful of age. Following this concept, the floorboards will be stained to a slightly darker tone to contrast with the ceramic baseboards. The ceiling will be covered with a light fabric to lighten up the space. Fabrics, marble, and wood have strong patterns to emulate the rich and iconic Victorian character. The colours of wood and marble follow the warm tones of the existing site and blue ceramic tiles take inspiration from the blue ceiling of the hotel's vault.

The access remains unchanged, with a level floor throughout.

Lighting

The lighting scheme proposed has been carefully considered in order to embrace and celebrate the heritage of the space whilst having minimal impact of fixations, integration and detracting from the overall composition of the ticket office.

The historic volume and perimeter features will be lit and emphasised using floor standing 5 amp plug-in uplighters which will be electrically cabled through the more recently laid flooring which holds limited or no heritage value. These uplighters would be removable due to the plug-in nature should the space be required to be reinstated to the current situation.

The same under flooring electrical routes would be used to power the newly installed joinery lighting where all lighting will be integrated within the millwork and not fixed to historic elements.

The Ticket Office windows will be delicately backlit to emphasise the historic special features whilst providing a notion of depth behind as an echo of its historic use. The Ticket Office Service counter openings will also be subtly up lit using surface standing miniature uplights to highlight the form and historic finishes.

Additionally the existing ceiling points will be maintained and re-used for the decorative ceiling chandeliers these will be accompanied by floor standing uplighters placed (and hidden from view) above the Ticket office booth to uplight the ceiling contributing to the overall ambient lighting levels in the space.

Finally all windows will be treated with a warming filter to control the light spill coming from the adjacent Handsome Lobby and train platform. The light spill from daylight and existing lights will have a detrimental effect on the guest experience as it will affect the overall lighting scheme. Adding the filters to all windows in the booking office will prevent light spill and glare with minimal or no effect on the windows perception from outside.

5 Impact Assessment of the proposed changes to the consented Listed Building Consent applications

Floorboards

Impact: Staining the floorboards to a dark oak colour.

Justification: The original floor finish of the Booking office comprised of wooden boards running north-south. The existing wooden dates from 2011 and has boarding running east-west. The dark floorboards will blend with the dark linenfold panelling and make for a richer interior suited to its bar use.

Booking office ceiling

Impact: The ceiling will have fabric panels stretched over the compartments of the ceiling.

Justification: The ceiling to the Booking office is not original and was repaired and rebuilt after being badly damaged in the air raids in 1918 and 1941. The existing modern acoustic panel are finished with a dark red paint. The fabric panels will give a tented feel to the Booking Office bar, adding to the richer, more exotic flavour of the fit-out.

Glazing

Impact: A light orange-yellow film will be applied to the glazing facing the platform and facing the Hansom Lounge concourse in order to create a warmer colour and more intimate atmosphere within the bar.

Justification: The film, like UV film, can be removed in future and is therefore a reversible intervention. The colour will be virtually undetectable from the platform side except a night when the lighting in the Booking Office bar will appear warm and inviting.

Bar counter

Impact: The marble bar counter inserted in 2011 will be clad with a new bar countertop and light blue tiles to the face. New units for glasses and bottles will be placed between the ticket windows on the back bar counter.

Justification: The proposals will have no impact on the fabric of the existing linenfold panelling. The furniture positioned against the panelling is all free standing and will be more sympathetic than the present one, and intrusive lights that obscure the ticket office will be removed. The blue tiles will match the light blue of the roof trusses in the hotel concourse (former taxi rank) and in the Station.

Seating

Impact: The seating will be replaced with new freestanding chairs and tables, and new upholstered banquette seating. The banquette seating rests on the floor without fixing, and will not therefore appear to require consent.

Curtains

Impact: New curtains at the entrances and to the private dining area will be hung from metal rails via metal plates screwed to the existing timber floorboards and to the new banquette seating.

Justification: The curtains will have no impact on the historic fabric.

Electrical services and lighting

Impact: There will be new sockets , new chandeliers and light fittings as shown on the drawings.

Justification: The services strategy for the works will include a new lighting scheme. New wiring and sockets will be integrated in the furniture or will be run in the screed below the 2011 floorboards.

Any fixings to masonry will be made in the brick and stone mortar joints. The ceiling is modern and there are already chandelier positions.

6 Conclusion

The Booking Office started life as a Gothic Great hall, complete with Hammerbeam roof, filled only with the ticket office and the throngs of people using it. The roof was lost in the War and it became a more utilitarian space. It is now the chief bar of the magnificently restored hotel, placed at the point of arrival and departure of travellers to and from the Continent. The present fit-out is unsatisfactory in terms of the welcome and ambience that it can offer, and in relation to its unfortunate impact on the visibility and appearance of the ticket office. Scott wanted to demonstrate how Gothic Architecture was able to meet the needs of his present day, and in the same way Hugo Toro's scheme offers an aesthetic attuned to today's visitor, with a richer and more voluptuous interior, with the richer colours that Scott himself might have used; it might indeed be thought appropriate in view of the Middle Eastern origins of the Gothic pointed arch. The impact of the proposals is minimal in terms of historic fabric, and in terms of historic appearance the proposals add a rich third layer to the two layers – Scott and Post WWII – that already exist. The application should be allowed.