

St Pancras Hotel

Booking Office Bar: Proposed Alterations

Design, Access and Heritage Statement

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The Booking Office bar as existing (photo by Michael Sinclair)

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 the Manhattan Loft Corporation, in association with the St Pancras Renaissance Hotel, wish to expand the use of the Booking Office Bar. 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. A second Listed Building Consent was obtained in 2019 for various amendments that were required in connection with operational matters and the Building Regulations. These consents are about to expire, and this application is therefore submitted for the identical scheme, in order to refresh the consent for the creation of extra bar space on the new mezzanine.

In the meantime, Listed Building Consent was granted by LB Camden on 19 April 2021 (Ref: 2021/0310/L) for the redesign of a new bar fitout by Hugo Toro. This work has now been completed and has been very well received and proven popular in revealing the panelling and ticket windows behind the bar. The new mezzanine will build on this success, and further enhance the public enjoyment of the bar and of the architecture.

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.



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 and this has now been superseded by a new refurbished bar with appropriate fitting and lights that enhance the historic fabric and reveal the true splendour of the linenfold screen behind. A stained timber plank floor was laid in the bar area, vinyl flooring behind the bar, and sensitive lighting was introduced to further highlight the panelling relief.

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 low significance.
- The modern bar fittings and lighting make a positive contribution to the appearance of the bar area.
- 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 west (photo by Michael Sinclair)



Booking office bar looking south (photo by Michael Sinclair)



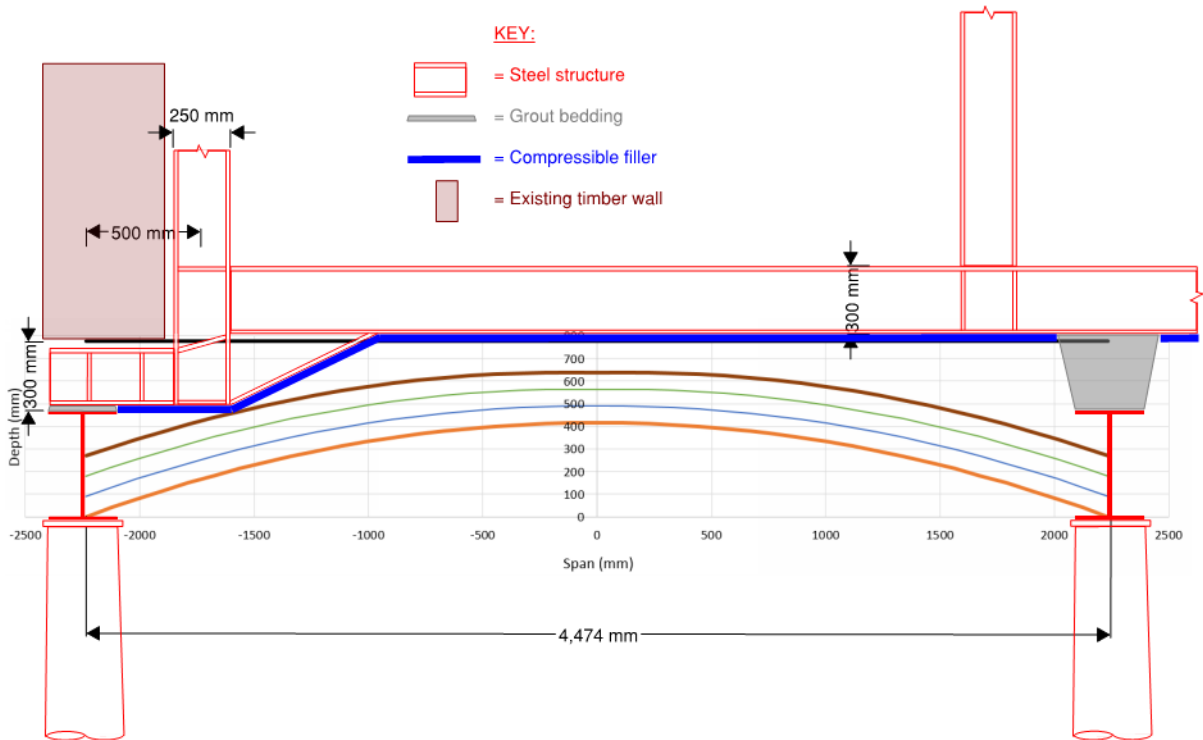
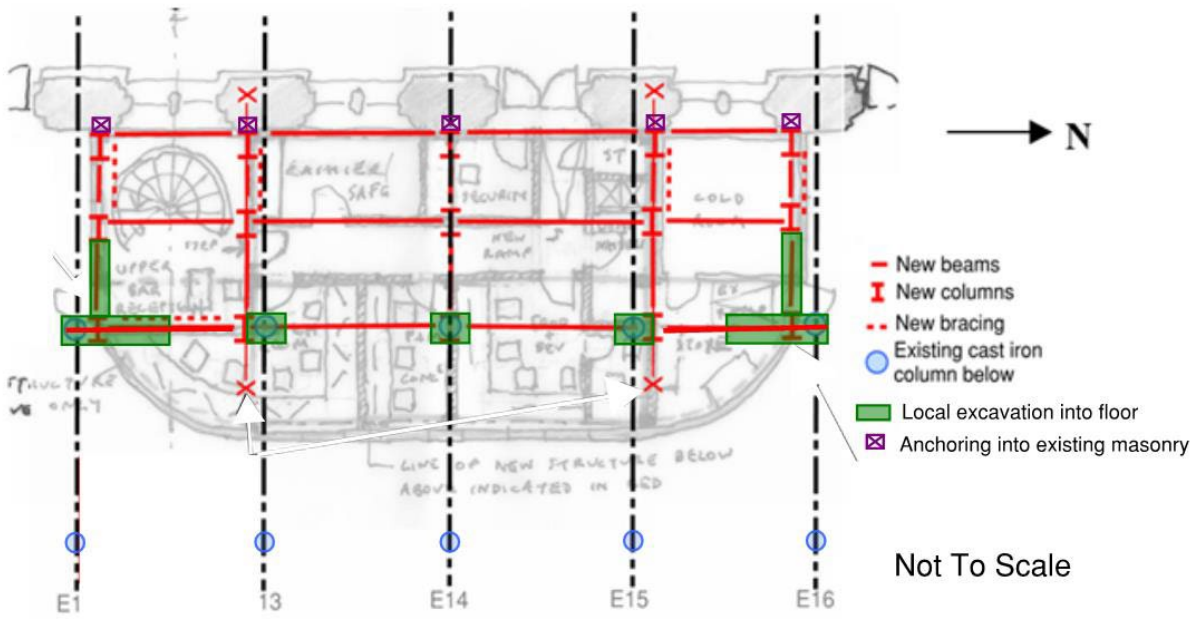
4 Design and access statement

Mezzanine. The proposal is to remove the existing roof of the ticket office and to rebuild it at a lower level so that the panelled partition of the booking office forms a parapet at a height of 900mm above the mezzanine level bar. Above this a round brass rail will provide guarding at a height of 1100mm above mezzanine level. The mezzanine will be approached via a new spiral staircase to the south, centred on one of the windows to the hotel concourse. The mezzanine bar will be located on the cross axis of the Booking Office, flanked by a temperature-controlled beverage displays and dumb waiters from below. The freestanding cabinets on the mezzanine will be detailed with more solid finishes below 900mm and more glazed or mirrored finishes above. The inside parapet of the linenfold panelled partition will be mainly lined with fixed banquette seating.

Ground floor. At ground level the inside of the ticket office will be totally stripped out and reconstructed. To support the new mezzanine a new steel structure will be required, with cranked steel beams and posts taking their bearing from five holes below floor level in the wall to the hotel concourse, and five pads cast in the floor above the cast iron columns in the station retail below. A raised floor will then be reconstructed to suit the new office layout and to clear the services accommodated in the void below. In order to avoid a raised step behind the bar counter, it will be possible to reuse the existing services trench below the floor of the ticket office to connect to the existing drain connections to the services trench in the hotel concourse.

Panelled walls. The existing door in the south face of the ticket office will be reopened to give access to the mezzanine bar entrance lobby, and the two modern mullions cut back to their historic line. The oak linenfold panelling will be repaired and refinished to remove some of the discoloured varnish, and the opportunity will be taken to replace the missing cresting to the north and south returns. The back bar will allow sight of the panelling and ticket windows.

Access. Access to the mezzanine bar will be restricted by virtue of the 800mm width of the doorway and the absence of a lift; the area is too small to be able to provide one. However, the area of the upper bar will be only 25% of the total bar area, and will provide no greater service than below. An Approved Inspector has been consulted on this matter and considers it reasonable in terms of the DDA to restrict access for disabled visitors to the ground floor only (as existing) , particularly in view of the restrictions of the grade 1 listed building. Ramped access will be provided within the ground floor offices inside the ticket office.



Structural section: Schematic of proposed structure to avoid loading the masonry arch flooring, steelwork built into wall below floor level

5 Heritage Impact Assessment of the proposed changes to the approved Listed Building Consent application

The new mezzanine

The new mezzanine will have a neutral or slightly positive impact on the significance of the Booking Office. It will not be visible from ground level except for the brass rail, the tall cabinets, and the people using the mezzanine. The existing unsightly guard rails will be removed. The new spiral staircase access will allow the public to enjoy the inside elevation of Scott's wall to the hotel concourse, currently hidden to public view within the back-of-house offices.

The ticket office panelling

The significance of the panelling will be enhanced by repairs to the panelling, and by the replacement of the missing cresting above the panelling on the north and south returns. The reopening of the former door in the panelling will avoid the need for alterations, except trimming back the modern added mullions to the original line.

Interior of the ticket office

The interior is of no historic significance and will all be replaced to a new design. There will be no visible impact on the wall of the hotel concourse at low level since new cranked steel beams will be set into the concourse wall below floor level. The ends of the cranked beams and some drainage will require some removal of the floor finishes locally, but this will only affect fill above the vaults below and the modern boarded floor finish that can be reset.

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 impact of the proposals is minimal in terms of historic fabric, and the new mezzanine will have a minimal impact from ground level and will increase the joy of the bar and the Scott architecture.