London Road (Low Level)
Station Nottingham.
Restoration by:
Family First Trust
Projects Agency
is the organisation entrusted by British Rail, on the recommendation of the City Council, with the work of restoration under the guidance of William Saunders and Partners - the consulting architects to the British Rail Property Board for this purpose.

The Agency, sponsored by Family First Trust of Nottingham, operates under the Manpower Services Commission Community Programme, although it has existed under various earlier schemes for providing temporary work for unemployed adults. It currently has a total workforce of 260 people, plus a 30-strong supervisory and management team.

The organisation is engaged in the renovation, conversion, alteration and extension of many local buildings used or being adapted for community activities. Its headquarters, together with joinery workshops and training facilities is located in the City Council-owned Radford Mill, Garden Street, Nottingham.

Membership of the London Road Station project team varies according to the nature of tasks in hand, and the flow of men and women into and out of the stipulated 52-week maximum period of service for most employees. At any one time, there is likely to be a team of about 20 or so construction supervisors, craftsmen and general workers (most of whom are engaged on a three or four days per week basis).

All the people involved are adding to their work experience and many are developing new skills. In some cases this begins with the basic off-the-job training in bricklaying, plastering, joinery and welding, being provided at Radford Mill. Others are acquiring new skills by working alongside the Agency's own craftsmen, or specialist contractors undertaking stone repair and chemical cleaning of brick and stone work.

Whatever the workers' particular circumstances, the opportunities provided by this project will help to enhance their future employability - which is the primary objective of the Family First Trust Projects Agency.
HISTORY

The London Road (Low Level) Station, erected at a cost of £20,000 to the design of the local architect T C Hine, was opened on 3 October, 1857 - 20 years into the reign of Queen Victoria.

Whilst these buildings are the oldest surviving railway premises in the City, they were by no means the first to be built. Nottingham's railway history began with the opening by the Midland Counties Railway Company of the Derby line from a station erected on Queen's Road in 1839; nine years later this was replaced by a new building on Station Street, which itself made way for the present Midland Station on Carrington Street in 1904.

The Low Level terminus was originally called the Great Northern Station; indeed, the access to it is still known as Great Northern Close. It was built as the headquarters of the Ambergate, Nottingham, Boston and Eastern Junction Railway Company (created by the amalgamation of three local railways in 1845), and jointly financed by the Great Northern Railway which was to operate it.

The station buildings originally comprised an entrance portico, booking hall, waiting rooms, board room, offices and living quarters for a railway official, together with other facilities associated with a passenger and goods railway operation. The whole of the station concourse, known to the railway people as a "train shed", was covered by a wrought-iron framed glazed roof supported by thirty cast-iron columns; this structure is still in a remarkably good condition after 126 years.

The station flourished and additional capacity became necessary. In 1880 the number of platforms was increased from two to five. Other alterations included:

- the bricking-up of the original goods entrance at the southern end of the west wing
- the breaking into the northern end of the west wing to create a new goods entrance
- the addition of a perishable goods dock
- the filling-in of parts of the entrance portico to provide two additional rooms.

The setting up of the Nottingham Suburban Railway in
1886 brought further traffic to the Low Level Station. Total daily train movements reached a peak of about 135 by 1898, serving such destinations as London (via Market Harborough and Northampton, and via Grantham and Peterborough), Scotland (via the East Coast route), Derby, Buxton, Sheffield, Newark, Lincoln and the Lincolnshire Coast, and East Anglia.

Nottingham’s Victoria Station, of which only the clock tower remains as a feature of the Victoria Centre, began its 67 year life in 1900 as a joint venture by the GNR and the Great Central Railway. This enabled the Great Northern and other Railway companies to re-route many passenger trains so as to take advantage of the new direct line between Nottingham and London. This development, in combination with the existing competition from the Midland line and the effect of the opening of the London Road (High Level) Station in 1900 (closed in 1967), heralded the rapid decline in the use of T C Hine’s creation. Traffic plummetted until, by 1910, only six inward and six outward passenger trains made use of it.

Following the re-organisation of the railway system in 1923, the ownership and control of the Low Level Station passed into the hands of the London and North Eastern Railway Company (LNER). It finally ceased to handle passenger traffic in 1944, when the last few trains (to and from Market Harborough) were diverted to Victoria. Four years later, the station became the responsibility of the British Railways Board upon the nationalisation of the country’s railway system.

London Road (Low Level) continued to operate with some goods and parcels traffic until 1967, when it became a parcels concentration depot. More recently its functions have been largely confined to the handling of mail and periodicals, with a mere four inward and four outward train movements per day, together with accommodation for a few technical services.

Parts of the station have been in a state of disuse for at least 40 years and have had no maintenance work done on them during that period. Naturally, they have deteriorated into a severely dilapidated condition. Other parts of the premises, vacated much more recently, are in a rather better condition internally.

British Rail will finally vacate the site completely by the end of 1984 when alternative arrangements will have been made for the small amount of newspaper traffic still going through the terminal.

T C Hine’s 1857 station is interesting from an architectural as well as a railway historical, point of view. The buildings consist of an unusual blend of Italianate, French, Venetian, Jacobean and Gothic styles—dubbed as an “architectural cocktail”. In its day the “porte
cochere", or entrance portico, was a particularly impressive access for passengers arriving by horse-drawn carriage.

2 DILEMMA

The British Railways Board cannot afford the £250,000 estimated cost of restoration by contractors for a building for which they have no future use. On the other hand, whilst it remains in its present condition it is of little interest to any other potential user. Yet, since the station is on the Department of the Environment's statutory list of buildings having architectural and historical importance, it must be preserved not demolished.

The property was offered to the Nottingham City Council, but was declined as the Council had already taken over a number of historic buildings which it was obliged to preserve.

3 RESTORATION

As a solution to the dilemma, it was suggested by British Rail and subsequently agreed by the City Council and the Manpower Services Commission, that the restoration would be carried out under the MSC's Community Programme. This Programme provides temporary jobs for long-term unemployed men and women on projects of community benefit which would not otherwise be undertaken. By this arrangement, the labour costs will be borne by the Government whilst the materials and other costs will be met out of British Rail's renovation fund and by grants from the City and County Councils.

The restoration comprises the following work:

- removal of as many as possible of the extraneous fittings and additions to the original buildings and of accumulated rubbish
- injection damp proofing of the walls
- stripping and renewal/renovation of all roof slates and timbers
- renewal of all rainwater goods
- cleaning and making good of all external brickwork and stonework
- reconstruction of the clock tower
- renewal/repair, as necessary, of floors, ceilings, doors, window frames and other joinery
- removal and renewal of all defective internal plaster-work
clearance and landscaping of the station approach.

As is customary on community projects of this kind, the restoration will generate business for local building materials suppliers and for equipment hire concerns; certain aspects of the work are contracted out to specialist firms - eg for injection damp proofing and stone/brick cleaning.

Site work began on 14 November, 1983 with the knowledge that £20,000 was available from the City Council and a similar sum from British Rail. Shortly afterwards another £5,000 was offered by Notts County Council - again matched by a similar further contribution from British Rail. This initial funding of £50,000 enables considerable progress to be made, but the completion of the project will be dependent upon further monies being forthcoming during 1984/85.

This collaborative enterprise will enable the community of Nottingham City and County to inherit, in a presentable restored condition, a building of considerable historical importance.

4 FUTURE USE

No decision has yet been taken about the future of T C Hines's unique Building. However, the City Council has committed itself to examining thoroughly and sympathetically, on merit, any proposed use for the station buildings and associated land that would be compatible with the existing planning policies. Whatever its destiny, the Council will require future occupiers to enable the public to have access to the historic building.

What is known is that the restoration and subsequent use of the station is the key to the future development of a very large site, of which it forms but a small part. This land area is flanked by an industrial warehouse to the north and by motor car showrooms/workshops and the City Council's Eastcroft depot to the south. In a west/east direction, it extends from London Road to Sneinton Hermitage/Meadow Lane. Apart from the retention of some railway tracks, the whole of this area is scheduled for environmental improvement; this includes a large railway warehouse, also by T C Hine, built along with the station. It is also to be associated with other developments achieved and planned, affecting London Road, the Nottingham Canalside and the Sneinton district.

These factors lend considerable extra importance to the Low Level Station restoration project.
Thanks to John Cruxon for the Restoration Summary

Thanks to Lucy Smith of Virgin Active for the photographs