

ARCHITECTURE

February 2020: Railway Station Architecture

This meeting showed us how railway station architecture has evolved over time and how the responsibility for their design shifted from civil engineers to architects. (All photos Wikipedia, CC licence or public).

Early Examples

The railway era started with the Liverpool to Manchester Railway in 1830. Other early routes were from London to Birmingham and those of the Great Western Railway.

The first main line station was that of Crown Street, Liverpool (1830). It was the rail engineer George Stephenson who is credited with designing the station. His concept was that a station is a place to buy, refresh and wait. Like all early stations the platforms were at a low level,



Another early example is that of Euston station built in 1837. It had an impressive wrought iron roof with glass covering. The platforms were higher than those at Liverpool but still low by modern standards.

It was not long after that railway companies wanted to impress, so we see them start to build stations with impressive frontages. Birmingham Curzon Street was built in 1838. Although the station closed for passengers in 1893, the site is to be a terminus for HS2.



Major Expansion.



The mid-1840s saw a major expansion of rail routes. By 1848 there were some 4,200 miles of track and 1,821 stations. This peaked in the 1920s at over 19,500 miles of track and 7,700 stations, Today there are 9,800 miles of track and 2,500 stations. The 1840s saw more impressive stations being built such as that at Huddersfield (photo, Richard Harvey) and Newcastle in 1850. The old Euston station was

also noted for its impressive portico.

Such facades were a 'statement' portraying the railway company as solid and reliable.

Great Stations of London

In the 1880s, architects started taking over station design from civil engineers. This was the era of some well known London stations, many of which survive today. King's Cross Station the terminus of the Great Northern line was a design of Lewis Cubitt, brother of the legendary Thomas Cubitt who designed Belgravia. Built in 1851-2 it was the largest London station at the time, featuring a 112-foot (34 m) high clock tower that held treble, tenor and bass bells.



The original St Pancras station of the Midland Railway Company was designed by William Henry Barlow. It had a single span roof which measured 245 ft wall to wall, the largest in the world at the time. In 1865 the company held a competition to design a 150-room hotel at the front of the station. Gilbert Scott submitted a design for a 300-room hotel which despite its higher cost was so much liked that it went ahead

as the Midland Grand Hotel, the impressive edifice we see today (1928 photo).



Reflecting Local Architecture

As architects became involved, a characteristic of some stations is that they reflected local buildings. For example, the tower at Stamford station (1848) reflects those on nearby Burghley House. Battle station (1852) reflects the nearby Cistercian Abbey. (Photo 1962, Ben Brooksbank).

20th Century Stations

Some stations in the first half of the 20th century demonstrated a modernist style (e.g. Surbiton – left) or Art Deco style (e.g. Arnos Grove - right). Generally though, modern stations tend to be smaller and much more functional than their 19th century counterparts. For instance, there is now no stationmaster's home attached to the station and many are 'box like' structures without architectural niceties.

