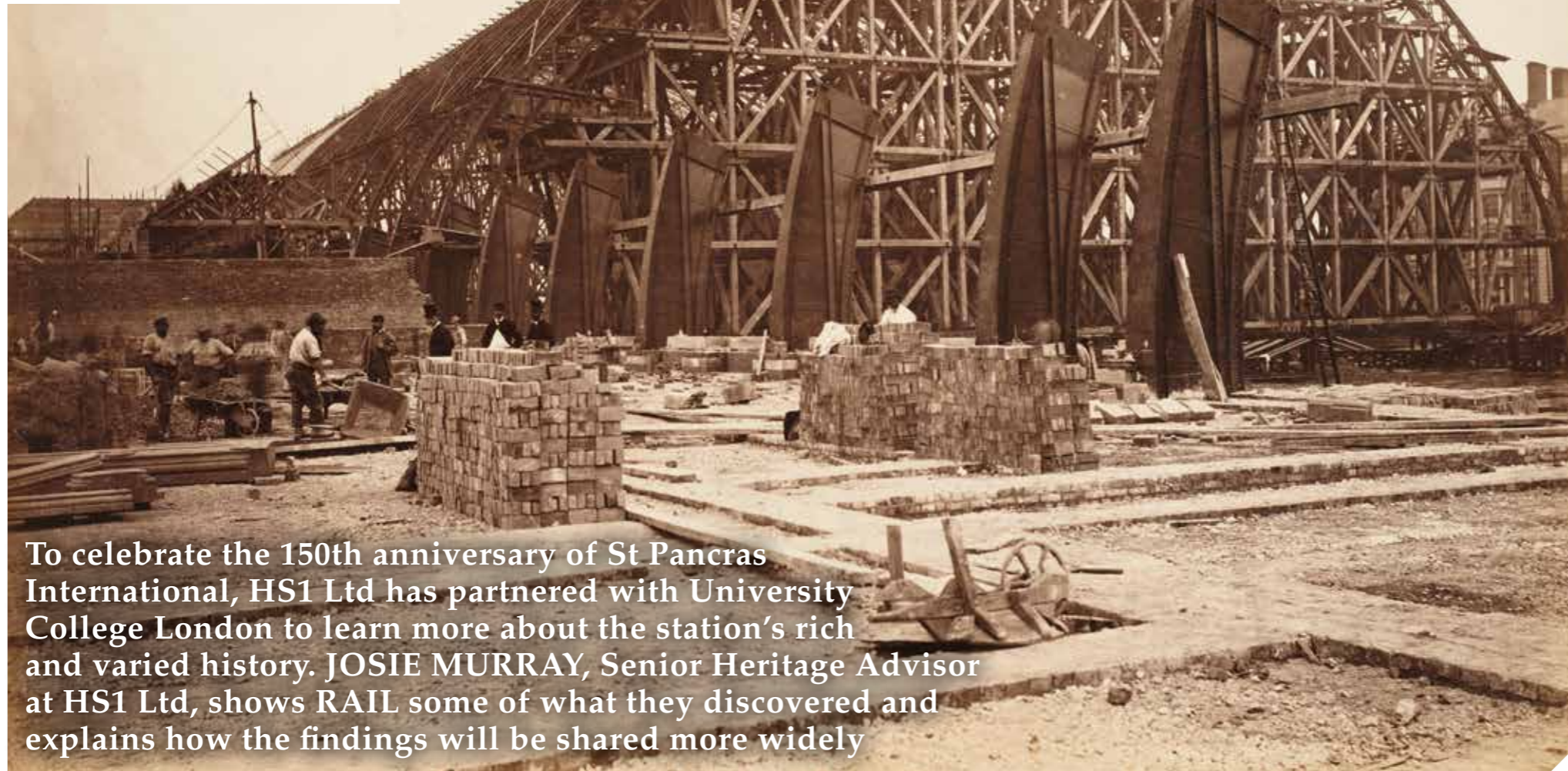


A most sacred station



To celebrate the 150th anniversary of St Pancras International, HS1 Ltd has partnered with University College London to learn more about the station's rich and varied history. JOSIE MURRAY, Senior Heritage Advisor at HS1 Ltd, shows RAIL some of what they discovered and explains how the findings will be shared more widely

When St Pancras International opened in October 1868, its arched trainshed designed by William Henry Barlow became famous for being the largest single-span roof in the world.

Built as a statement of intent by the Midland Railway Company (MRC) as it sought to outshine the neighboring stations of its competitors on Euston Road (at Euston and King's Cross), successive generations have marvelled at its architectural elegance and neo-gothic splendour ever since.

But the history of this wonder of Victorian engineering has also been an extraordinary tale of survival. Having endured the German air raids during two world wars, British Rail then proposed to demolish it as traffic declined in the 1960s.

Thankfully, these latter efforts were

successfully resisted by a well-publicized campaign led by the poet laureate John Betjeman and architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner, so that a bright new future could

Who was St Pancras?

According to the Roman Catholic church, St Pancras was born in Phrygia (in modern day Turkey) in around 290AD. The 14-year-old orphan was brought to Rome, where he converted to Christianity. He was beheaded for refusing to renounce his faith in 304AD by the Emperor Diocletian.

It is thought that Pope Vitalian sent his relics to England to spread Christianity, including to St Pancras Old Church in Camden, from which the railway station takes its name.

emerge for the station in 2007 when it was reborn as the UK's rail gateway to Europe, following an £800 million restoration.

For railway and architectural historians, much has already been documented about the physical construction and fabric of the cathedral station. The original drawings for the Barlow trainshed and the George Gilbert Scott-designed Midland Grand Hotel and station frontage are a matter of public record, as is the choice of building materials which were of the highest quality and designed to showcase the best products that the East Midlands towns and cities served by the MRC could offer.

But in order to dig deeper into the twists and turns of the St Pancras story and to uncover previously unreleased historical material, station owner and operator HS1 Ltd joined forces with students and academics from

University College London (UCL) in March 2017.

At UCL the project was led by Professor Margot Finn, chair of Modern British History, who coordinated a team of more than 30 student volunteer researchers. Meanwhile, advising from HS1 Ltd was its Senior Heritage Advisor Josie Murray.

She explains: "St Pancras International is

“ Without beer, we would have a very different St Pancras ”



Josie Murray, Senior Heritage Advisor, HS1 Ltd

Work continues to erect the trainshed at St Pancras which, at 689ft long, 100ft high and 243ft wide, was the largest single-span roof in the world at the time of its opening in October 1868, and dwarfed its nearest rivals at Cannon Street (190ft wide) and Charing Cross (166ft). NATIONAL RAILWAY MUSEUM/SCIENCE AND SOCIETY PICTURE LIBRARY.

150 years old and we wanted to celebrate that history by connecting and engaging with our customers to reveal and share its stories.

"The station was built and operated by an innovative company but has suffered many challenges in its history, not least being bombed in both world wars. It has been through periods of underinvestment and near-derelection only to be saved from demolition by people who were very passionate about it. Following its listing at Grade I in 1967 and its subsequent regeneration, it is now being celebrated again as a masterpiece.

"As guardians of the building we know quite a lot about the infrastructure, building and materials, but we don't know a lot about the human stories and the social history of the station. It's the people who built it, worked in it and cared for it that create those stories, which is a big part of why we wanted to do this project with UCL."

Using access to archives from the British Library, National Archives, London Transport Museum, National Railway Museum, London

Metropolitan, Midland Railway Study Centre and UCL itself, the finished project details 150 stories, facts and images reflecting the station's remarkable history.

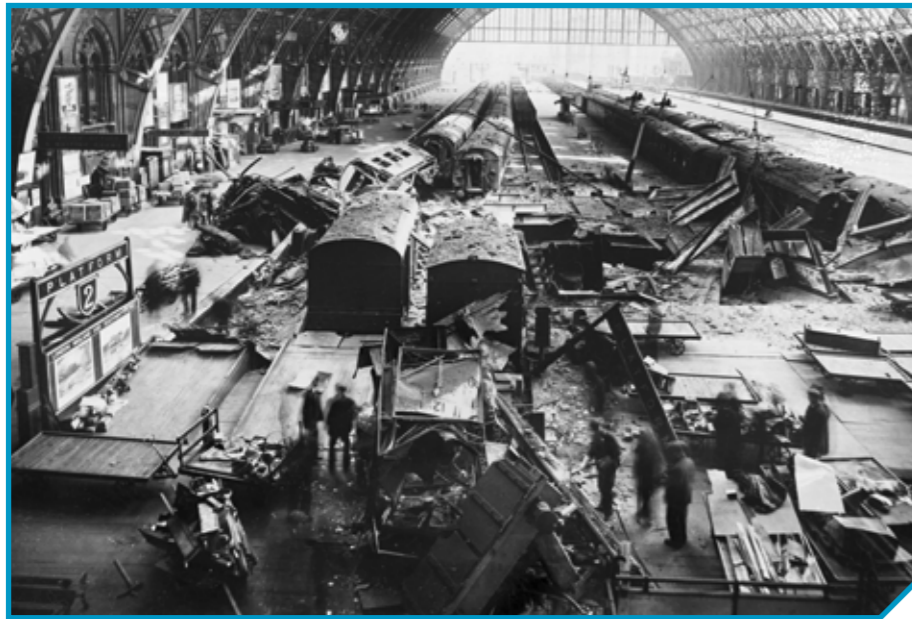
It focuses on five key themes; the history of the station's landscape and architecture, changing railway technology over the ages, personal stories behind St Pancras International, the social evolution of the St Pancras area and the ways in which posters and advertising have been used to capture the imagination of passengers.

Murray adds: "We agreed from the outset that these were the five areas which are most underrepresented in the records we have and that it would be a project of exploration, because we didn't know what would be available. But UCL did a fantastic job collating and organizing the information and it gave the students an opportunity to work on a live research project and develop extra-curricular skills. Very importantly, it is also about inspiring the next generation of people who are going to look after buildings like St Pancras."

Turning her attention to the project's findings, Murray says that a wealth of valuable material from the station's earliest days was available to the researchers. The first unexpected finding emerged from a series of photographs taken in the 50 years that followed its completion, which offers a



One of the lesser known facts about St Pancras International is that the MRC's former goods depot at Somers Town became known as RAF St Pancras for two weeks when the first ever landing in the centre of London by a fixed wing aircraft was made on May 3 1969. An RAF Harrier 'jump jet' made a vertical landing at the disused coal yard, in preparation for the Daily Mail Transatlantic Air Race between London and Manhattan a few days later. ALAMY.



→ new perspective on the type of journeys that were being made.

They show that more than a century before the first Eurostar service departed to the continent from the station in 2007, passengers were already using the station for international journeys and not just domestic travel, as had been widely assumed.

“We found a lot of material from the time of construction; there are lots of contemporary newspaper accounts and a series of photos taken by the Midland Railway Company’s officially commissioned photographer. It’s a fantastic record and it really shows off the scale and majesty of the space, which relied heavily on the endeavours of man to build.

“Then we have lots of individual photos of people leaving on journeys from St Pancras. A lot of people went to Australia or New Zealand via Tilbury, including the England cricket teams. There are also accounts of Americans coming into Liverpool and then down to St Pancras to stay at the hotel”

Murray says that the photographic resource is sadly not as rich during the First World War, when the station was damaged by a Zeppelin raid in 1918 and a number of people lost their lives.

William Henry Barlow

Born in 1812, William Henry Barlow joined the newly formed Midland Railway Company in 1842 and became consultant engineer in 1857 following the retirement of George Stephenson. A Fellow of the Royal Society from 1850 and an active member of the Institution of Civil Engineers, he was involved in many of the landmark projects of his day, including the 1851 Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace and the completion of the Clifton Suspension Bridge in 1864 following the death of its designer, Isambard Kingdom Brunel, in 1859.

Barlow was responsible for the

Like much of London, St Pancras suffered heavily during the Blitz, when five bombs fell on the station during a German air raid in May 1941. NATIONAL RAILWAY MUSEUM/ SCIENCE AND SOCIETY PICTURE LIBRARY.

Photos have survived from the Second World War, however, that vividly show the scale of damage inflicted by German air raids, but also provide evidence that railway operations largely carried on as normal while repairs were being made.

Murray says that the biggest challenge posed to the research team was the absence of contemporary information about the storage of beer, which was a fundamental factor in the design of the station. The decision to build the platforms above ground level was partly made to enable the railway to cross the Regent’s Canal to the north, but also to accommodate the storage of beer produced by brewers in Burton-on-Trent, particularly Bass and Thomas Salt.

“Without beer, we would have a very different St Pancras, but unfortunately the Bass archives aren’t in an accessible form and we’d love to know more,” she reveals.

The project also unearthed interesting evidence of a darker side of St Pancras

construction of the Midland Railway’s southern extension from Bedford to London, including the magnificent trainshed at St Pancras which he designed with Rowland Mason Ordish and William Henry Le Feuvre.

His standing in the profession led to his subsequent appointment as a commissioner of the Board of Trade inquiry into the collapse of the River Tay railway bridge near Dundee in 1879. Barlow led the design of the replacement bridge and checked designs for the Forth Bridge near Edinburgh before he died at the age of 91, on November 12 1902.

Sir George Gilbert Scott

Born in 1811, George Gilbert Scott was a Gothic revivalist architect chiefly associated with cathedrals, churches and workhouses. He is credited with the design or adaptation of more than 800 buildings.

Having already designed a number of iconic buildings, including the Albert Memorial and the Foreign & Commonwealth Office in London, he beat ten other architects to win the commission to build the station and hotel buildings at St Pancras in January 1866. At £315,000, Scott’s designs were the most expensive, but achieved the company’s objective to outdo all other London termini. Financial savings later dictated the removal of one of the floors from the frontage designs before the Midland Grand Hotel opened in May 1873. He was knighted by Queen Victoria in 1872 and died on March 27 1878.

International when it exposed some rather less edifying aspects of railway development in the mid-19th century.

This includes a campaign by MRC to acquire freeholds in the parish of St Pancras from 1859-1860, and several years before permission was granted to begin station construction.

At that time, parts St Pancras, notably Agar



“It’s about inspiring the next generation of people who are going to look after buildings like St Pancras”

Josie Murray, Senior Heritage Advisor, HS1 Ltd

Town were considered a malodorous slum which was due to poor quality housing, lack of infrastructure and overcrowding.

The location of the Fleet sewer, and gas holders built by the Imperial Gas & Coke Company, steered the MRC towards choosing these estates bordering on to Euston Road as the site of their station where 3,000 homes would need to be demolished.

Murray says that the MRC was a poor landlord to the residents of these houses before they were demolished, and that their occupants were evicted without compensation.

The MRC also dismantled St Luke’s Church on Euston Road and built a replacement in Kentish Town in 1868/69. The dismantled church was rebuilt in Wanstead. The approach lines to the station cut through the old St



Students from UCL’S History Department and staff from HS1 Ltd gather for the launch of the St Pancras International historical research project in March 2017. HS1 LTD.

Pancras graveyards and were built with scant regard for the human remains interred there.

“It suited MRC that Agar Town was considered a slum by writers of the day and that its demolition was justified as few lamented its clearance in 1866,” argues Murray.

“They also had to bring the line through a burial ground which had closed in 1854, but had been very intensively used as the cemetery of the parish church. More than 7,000 bodies were exhumed but it wasn’t handled with much sensitivity. There was a huge outcry before they were reinterred in a new St Pancras cemetery at Crouch End in

North London.”

The historical material discovered by the project will now be used to support St Pancras International’s 150th anniversary year with a series of exhibitions throughout 2018.

It will be displayed according to different themes in key locations around the station.

“2018 is about celebrating St Pancras International: the people, the place and the journey. We know that a lot of our regular users are interested in the station history but don’t necessarily have a lot of time to investigate further, so we’ll present it near to the platforms and in the main part of the station itself. We’ll also use our website and social media, and other forms of engagement such as regular station tours, and there might be some audio podcasts.

“One of our first themes will be Transformation, which is about trying to get people to stop for a moment and take a good look at the station because, when you consider the technological innovations embedded in the fabric of the station, they’re not just from the 19th century but the 20th and 21st too.

“We will follow that up with other themes, such as Women in the Railway and the unsung heroines who kept it open during both world wars. There will also be a Goods and Trade theme, because when it opened in 1868 the station wasn’t really about passengers but goods and freight. There were at least three beer trains a day from Burton, and we know that in 1862 MRC was bringing in 18% of London’s coal (800,000 tonnes per year).”

For fans of the station, Murray says that the anniversary year will not mark the end of the research project and that there is still a lot of material to investigate.

As the project continues to uncover more mysteries, it will provide a valuable snapshot in time of one of the UK’s most historically significant stations, and is not to be missed over the next 12 months. ■

Navvies work on the site of the station undercroft which will be used to store barrels of beer from breweries in Burton-on-Trent. The spacing of the 688 cast iron columns that support the train deck above was dictated by the size of a standard beer barrel. NATIONAL RAILWAY MUSEUM/ SCIENCE AND SOCIETY PICTURE LIBRARY.

