

Exploring the past of King's Cross - the marshalling yards of the Industrial Revolution

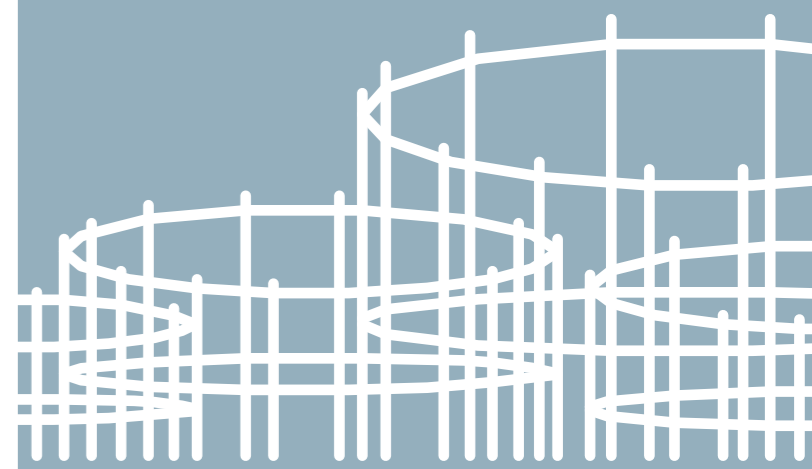
pastimes

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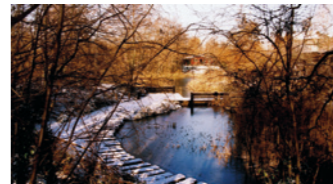
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Wood at Camley Street Natural Park. By Angela Irwin, courtesy of Troubadour Publishing Ltd



Scam, King's Cross © C. Talbot



Camley Street Natural Park © Sue Davidson

A number of projects were instigated to improve the area such as Camley Street Natural Park.

20TH CENTURY

After the havoc of wartime and the Nationalisation of 1948, the transport of freight by rail suffered an accelerated decline. In the southern part of the Goods Yard, most of the rail lines were lifted in the 1980s. Although six gasholders continued in service until 2000, the area rapidly declined from the busy industrial and distribution district it once was. By the end of the 20th Century, it was under-used industrial site with many buildings falling into dereliction. This had a detrimental impact on local communities whose residents lost opportunities for work and associated trade from the business of the goods yards.

A number of projects were instigated to improve the area such as Camley Street Natural Park, a community wildlife reserve established in the 1980s just to the west of the Regent's Canal on the site of the Plimsoil Coal drops. The area also became known for its night life and became a hub for artist and creative organisations. Nonetheless, problems of crime and poor quality environment continued to undermine the area - problems that many residents fought valiantly to address.



St Pancras International Station © John Sturrock

21ST CENTURY

The arrival of the 21st century has seen some significant changes that have kick-started the next chapter in the history of King's Cross.

In July 2001, construction work started on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link and the restoration and extension of St Pancras Station. Since then, the area around King's Cross has seen an investment of over £2.5 billion on transport infrastructure. To the south of the canal, several buildings were demolished and the triplet of gasholders dismantled and the components carefully stored on site.

The new St Pancras International terminus opened in 2007. The Midland Hotel and Great Northern Hotel have also been restored and in March 2012, the £450m refurbishment of King's Cross Station was completed. These changes have acted as a catalyst for further development and a vibrant new city quarter is now taking shape.

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Fish and Coal Offices, The Regent's Canal



The Great Northern Hotel. Usage rights courtesy of Camden Local Studies and Archives Centre

The first temporary passenger station was opened in 1850 to the north of the canal and was used until King's Cross station was opened in 1852.



The Western Transit Shed. Usage rights courtesy of National Railway Museum/SSPL



The Granary, King's Cross. Usage rights courtesy of National Railway Museum/SSPL

Between 1849 and 1852 the Great Northern Railway (GNR) developed their London terminus. The GNR purchased land for the station to the south of the canal and land to the north for its goods station and steam locomotive depot. The first temporary passenger station opened in 1850 to the north of the canal and was used until King's Cross station opened in 1852. The Great Northern Hotel opened in 1854, largely for patrons of the railway.

The temporary station became part of the wholesale potato market. Grain, another valuable commodity, was transported from East Anglia and stored in the specially constructed Goods Yard complex (1850-2) before being transported on across London. Coal was stored in the Eastern Coal Drops (1851) and Western Coal Drops (1860s). Various inlets allowed transfer direct from trains to barges on the canal.

The developments were not limited to industrial expansion. By the end of 1850s the construction of residential buildings was well advanced with lower quality housing along the Caledonian Road and more expensive



King's Cross Station. Usage rights courtesy of National Railway Museum/SSPL



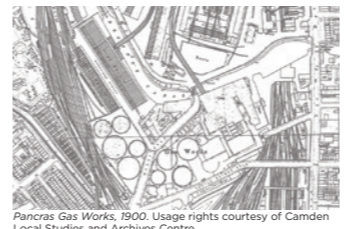
St Pancras Station Façade. Usage rights courtesy of Camden Local Studies and Archives Centre

pollution - but were popular due to their speed and efficiency. Major increases in rail traffic, and consequent congestion, necessitated the widening of the railway lines into King's Cross Station and the extension of the station on its west side. Several of the gasholders were also expanded in the 1880s and by 1900, Pancras Gasworks covered 11 acres.

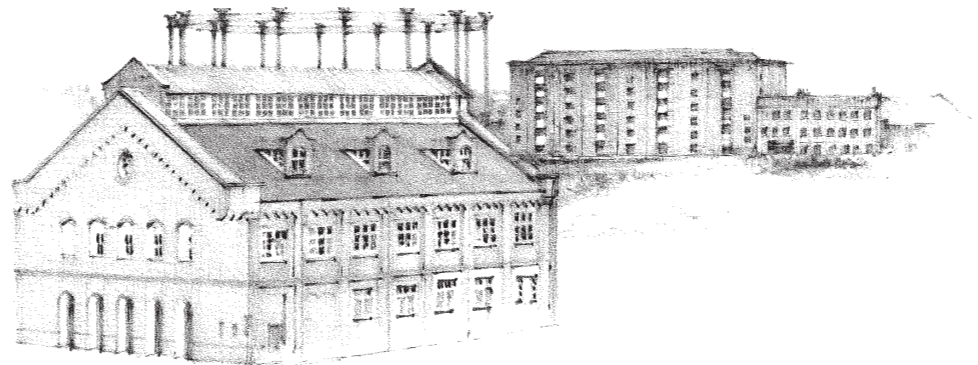
More housing was knocked down for this expansion, and by the mid-19th century it became difficult for railway workers to find decent affordable housing close to their place of work. As a consequence, the Improved Industrial Dwellings Society built the Stanley Buildings (1864-5) to accommodate 104 families to the west of King's Cross station. The Great Northern Railway built two tenement-style blocks of flats known as the Culross Buildings along the new Battle Bridge Road behind King's Cross Station in 1891.



Gasholder No.8 © John Sturrock



Pancras Gas Works, 1900 Usage rights courtesy of Camden Local Studies and Archives Centre



'Turnhalle', Gasholders and The Granary

properties in Barnsbury. To the west of King's Cross, the terraces and squares of Somers Town, first developed in 1784, continued to expand albeit now occupied by railway and industrial workers rather than the gentle middle classes. An area between Somers Town and the Goods Yard known as Agar Town was leased to workmen to build their own homes and it quickly became associated with poor quality dwellings. The German Gymnasium was built in 1864-5 as a club and sports facility for the German Gymnastics Society.

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Agar Town and areas of Somers Town were redeveloped in the 1860s to create space for the tracks, terminus and goods yards of the Midland Railway. This included St Pancras Station, built between 1866 and 1868, and the Midland Grand Hotel completed in 1876 for the Midland's patrons. The Metropolitan Railway, the world's first underground railway running along the route of the Euston Road, was also completed at this time using a cut and cover method to build the tunnels. The first tube trains were steam engines which caused considerable



St Pancras Lock and the Regent's Canal

19TH CENTURY

The Regent's Canal was completed in 1820, linking King's Cross to major industrial cities in the north of England. Another sign of the area's growing industrial importance was the arrival of the Imperial Gas Light and Coke Company which opened Pancras Gasworks to the south of the canal in 1824. During this same period, a number of other "polluting" businesses such as paint manufacture and refuse sorting were established, particularly in Battle Bridge, although much of the land to the north of the canal remained open fields.



St Pancras Waterpoint © John Sturrock

The arrival of industry fundamentally altered the nature of King's Cross. In a move to raise the rather tarnished image of the area, a statue of King George IV was erected at the Battle Bridge crossroads in 1830. The statue attracted ridicule and it was demolished in 1842, but the new name for the area - 'King's Cross' - stuck.

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The location of King's Cross on the outskirts of ancient London and at the meeting point of road, river, canal and rail transport has shaped the history of this fascinating part of London.

This history can be seen all around us - in the old buildings, the layout of streets, and in the stories of the communities based here. This leaflet offers just a brief introduction to this history and heritage. We hope it acts as an invitation to discover more.



St Pancras Hotel and Station from Pentonville Road. Usage rights courtesy of Museum of London



Baginbun Wells. Usage rights courtesy of Camden Local Studies and Archives Centre

ORIGINS

The area now known as King's Cross lay approximately 2km north-west of the roman settlement of Londonium. Roman remains suggest it may have been the site of a crossing of the Fleet River, and is the suggested location of the legendary battle between Queen Boudicca and Roman invaders. A settlement at St Pancras is thought to have Saxon origins, associated with the forerunner of St Pancras Old Church. King's Cross remained a rural area with scattered settlements up to the 18th century.

The area was popular with Londoners escaping the city to health spas and country inns...

Rocque's 1745 map shows the whole of the King's Cross site as open fields adjacent to York Way (formerly Longwich Lane and then Maiden Lane). This road, and Pancras Road (formerly King's Road), were traditional routes out of London to the north. Dotted throughout the fields were small settlements, such as Battle Bridge. The area was popular with Londoners escaping the city to health spas and country inns. It was also the route to and from Kentish Town, Highgate and Hampstead - retirement and commuter villages even in the 18th century. Euston Road (known as 'The New Road' until 1857) was completed in 1756. This kick-started development on the southern part of the King's Cross site. Buildings were generally low quality two-storey terraced housing but also included the Small Pox Hospital, built in 1793-4, and the Fever Hospital completed in 1802. Both were demolished after they were purchased in 1846 by the Great Northern Railway (GNR) to make way for its terminus, King's Cross Station.



The King's Cross. Usage rights courtesy of Guildhall Library, City of London



East Hags at Somers Town. Usage rights courtesy of Camden Local Studies and Archives Centre