

# Meet me at St Pancras

**Technologies old and new come together under one roof. It's the new age of the train. Jennie Hislop reports.**



**St Pancras Station, London, 1958**

London now has a railway station that is the equal of New York's Grand Central and the Paris Gare du Nord. St Pancras International is the UK home of Eurostar. It is a stunning Victorian station in the heart of London, with connections that spread out across the country, linking the UK with the rest of Europe.

The new station opened in 2007, and handles 50 million passengers a year. It provides access to the northern European cities of Paris, Brussels and Lille. From there you can travel to Spain, the French Alps, the south of France, and Germany. Eurostar flashes along the railway line, known as High Speed 1 (HS1), at 300 km per hour (186 mph), just as the TGV has done in France for many years. The whole area around St Pancras and King's Cross has had a major regeneration. It is now a thriving, inner-city district, home to multinational businesses, art galleries, bars and restaurants.



## The original station

When St Pancras Station was built in Victorian times, it took 6,000 men and 1,000 horses five years to complete, and cost £436,000. It opened in 1868, a masterpiece in iron and glass, designed by the great engineer W.H. Barlow. He created a cathedral on two floors. Below, there was an enormous basement, used as a storage area for beer coming south from breweries in the Midlands. Above this floor, he built a vast crystal palace, the tallest and widest of its day, and one of the great feats of Victorian engineering. The glass roof, all 240 feet (75 metres) wide, appeared to float unsupported. It crossed the five platforms in a single, undivided span.

## The new station

The 21st century St Pancras International was restored over a three-year period at a cost of £800 million. The basement area is now the check-in and departure lounge. Escalators lead to the platforms on the floor above. The glass roof has been carefully restored, and the iron arches painted the original sky blue. An 18-car Eurostar train is about a quarter of a mile long, so the roof was extended. There are now fifteen platforms.

The restoration of this building is a triumph of great tradition, high technology, and style. There is a 300ft (92m) champagne bar. A farmers' market is supplied with fresh produce brought in from Europe daily. There are boutiques, patisseries, delicatessens, chocolatiers, and a whole range of places to eat, from brasseries to organic home-made burger bars.



## The station hotel



**The station hotel**

The large Gothic building in front of St Pancras is not, in fact, the station but the Midland Grand Hotel. When it opened its doors in 1873, it was one of the most advanced hotels in the world. It was the first building in London to have a ‘rising room’, or lift, and the first to have revolving doors. It had a Ladies’ Smoking Room, which was quite shocking in its day. There were laundry lifts, coal lifts, and speaking tubes to send instructions to the staff. The Victorian decoration was rich and expensive, but the hotel was built with old-fashioned plumbing. There were 300 bedrooms but only nine bathrooms. People took a bath in a tub in their bedroom. The hotel closed in 1935. Its facilities were outdated, and it was too expensive to run.

It is now known as St Pancras Chambers. There is a 245-bedroom, five-star luxury hotel, with every comfort and modern amenity, and 68 private apartments and penthouses on the upper floors.

## The place to meet

When someone says ‘Meet me at St Pancras’, everyone knows what they mean. There is a 9-metre tall, 20-ton bronze statue called ‘The Meeting’, which depicts a couple caught in a deep embrace. It is **the** place to meet, under the great glass roof, where Eurostars glide to a halt, beneath the famous station clock. See you there!