

Rebuilding King's Cross

All Change!

Change and Delight



The transformation of King's Cross Station is a significant piece of infrastructure renewal and placemaking for London, and like its near neighbour, St Pancras International station, it aims high. The words and images here are a modest salute to this decade-long endeavour, set for completion to coincide with London's 2012 Olympics.

John McAslan



1 Cubitt's marvel becomes even more marvellous

King's Cross Station, Euston Road

King's Cross Station, London, has become the heart and pulse of Britain's biggest nexus of mixed-use urban regeneration. After decades of profound urban blight, the commercial and social transformation around the station has been astonishing. The gradual regeneration of the Regent Quarter, along York Way, east of the station, started the process. Now, the £2 billion King's Cross Central scheme is creating 8 million sqft of mixed-use space in new and modernised Victorian industrial buildings to the north.

King's Cross Station demonstrates Network Rail's commitment to improving rail infrastructure, and our daily lives, through strategic investment. The Grade I listed 1852 station, designed by Lewis Cubitt and operated by Network Rail, is nearing the end of its decade-long £500 million modernisation by John McAslan + Partners (JMP). The building is pivotal, anchoring the junctions of Euston Road, Pancras

Road, York Way, Gray's Inn Road and Pentonville Road. The Station serves in excess of 60 million passengers a year; millions more drive or walk past it.

By 2012, the Station's meticulously restored façade, and the forthcoming public square in front of it, will carry Cubitt's architecture into the 21st century, creating the gateway to a unique rail travel experience – and an architecturally commanding landmark at the main approaches to King's Cross Central and the Regent Quarter.

The modernised station's most compelling feature is the 185 metre wide glass and steel canopy over the new western concourse, which radiuses outwards like a graceful wave over an architecturally unique mixed-use threshold to the new

booking hall and gateline. It recalls the extraordinary parabolic structures designed by the Italian master, Pier Luigi Nervi, and the form of Eero Saarinen's TWA Terminal in New York.

The concourse's steel and glass structure begins its dramatic ascent next to the Station's refurbished western range façade, flowing upwards and outwards in a fountain-like filigree of crossing parabolic trajectories. The concourse is the most strikingly innovative moment in British transport architecture for a quarter of a century, matching the impact of Stansted Airport and the Waterloo Eurostar terminal.

The retail and catering segment that sweeps around the outer edge of the concourse at mezzanine level

is equally dramatic. The five million small, circular white tiles applied to prefabricated, geometrically varying surfaces made at the Dalbeattie works of Swift Horsman Ltd, will add a brilliant sense of finely crafted detail to the bulkheads and edges of the mezzanine level.

JMP's project leaders, Hiro Aso and Simon Goode have worked closely with Arup to ensure that the structure met the ground at 17 points, without posing any structural threat to the London Underground concourse beneath it – a series of big subsurface spaces connected to St Pancras International, and serving six Underground lines. The JMP team has worked equally closely with English Heritage and 24 stakeholder groups.

And so, King's Cross Station becomes the most visible mark of social and commercial change in

an area that, only a decade ago, was edgy and synonymous with human deprivation and poverty. What a difference now: the polychromatic Nido student tower in Pentonville Road ... the Gagosian Gallery in Britannia Street ... the London Wildlife Trust's Camley Street Natural Park ... children playing in Coram's Fields ... sought after small terraced houses in nearby Keystone Crescent ... classical music at King's Place, where *The Guardian* newspaper is edited ... youngsters learning how to make more of their lives at the New Horizon Youth Centre ... and, now, tens of thousands of students, professionals, and householders will throng into King's Cross Central and the Regent Quarter.

And at the centre of it all, the glistening canopy of King's Cross Station's western concourse, and the hurly-burly of people coming and going.



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King's Cross gives young architect a flying start

"A few years ago, I could not have dreamed of working on a project of the scale and complexity of King's Cross Station. As a young, qualified architect, the challenges have been extreme, at times, but hugely rewarding. There's a terrific feeling of pride in being involved." *Jasmine Wadia, John McAslan + Partners*

"It's the most innovative moment in British transport architecture in twenty years." *Jay Merrick, The Independent*

2 A green heart that doesn't skip a beat

King's Cross Skip Garden, York Way



Is there anything more crudely functional than a skip? And yet, the King's Cross Skip Garden is pure delight, a focal-point of cheerfully anarchic growth in a regeneration area whose new and modernised buildings are solidifying into strict patterns of order set out by the area's redevelopment masterplans.

In the Skip Garden, battered and brightly painted skips are a reminder that there are other kinds of organic urban growth. And other kinds of masterplanners.

Paul Richens is a tall, rangy chap whose clothing, demeanour and bearing signify the opposite of precise strategic plans. He's a loose-fit fellow and he runs this loose-fit Eden for the Global Generation organisation along with its production gardener Bobb

Burton. Global Generation involves young people in projects that support the theme "I, We and the Planet".

More than two thousand children have visited the Skip Garden in the last year, which is an essay in what making-do can create. A pear tree growing in a wicker tub; a sculpture called *The New Human* composed of discarded pallets, steel rebars and crude lashings of duct tape, piping and plywood. Lord Derby apples, Arran Pilot potatoes, Moonlight climbing runner beans, and red-flowered broad bean plants contributed by Jamie Oliver's gardener.

Thus, at the heart of what is London's busiest concentration of road junctions and major regeneration projects, nature has its own self-help agenda.

A lone honey bee veers past Paul Richens ankles. "And I know where that bee's from," he says. "It's come from the Camley Street Natural Park." The park, one of the first created by the Wildlife Trust in London, lies just beyond the northern edge of King's Cross Central. The bees work to yet another kind of masterplan.

3 Hanging out, and hanging in

New Horizon Youth Centre, Chalton Street

Two minutes walk west of the British Library, in a building that is part of the vast 1920s Levita House mansion block on the Ossulston Estate in Somers Town, the New Horizon Youth Centre is helping vulnerable or homeless young people to gain new skills to develop their maturity, and improve their lives and employability.

For nearly half a century – and for more than two decades at Levita House – New Horizon has been turning bad life experiences into new expectations.

New Horizon, and the youngsters coming and going from it, seem as natural a part of the local scene as, say, the stylish Somers Town Coffee House 60 metres up the road. It is a great example of acceptance and aspiration – and of the value of different kinds of lives existing together.



one of them could have guessed what those strange rubber objects in the jars were: walking stick ferrules.

5 A new powerhouse of the arts

Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, King's Cross Central

The King's Cross Central regeneration scheme is designed to generate new commercial space, and many new homes. And at its heart, the transformation of the Grade II listed Granary Complex introduces

education and culture into the redevelopment mix, to bring more than 4,000 students and university staff into the area every day.

The Granary, designed by Lewis Cubitt in the 1850s, was part of a



6 Mr Giordani's charming little Italy

KC Continental Stores, Caledonian Road

A minute's walk from King's Cross, in Caledonian Road, the careworn shopfront of KC Continental Stores is a postcard from another time ... the Brooke Bond and PG Tips window stickers, the sun and wave patterned rubber doormat, the Birra Moretti three-pack carrying the image of a suave 1950s lounge-lizard in a green suit and fedora, cans of tomatoes set out in small pyramids. And, issuing from the open door, a richly pungent and complex aroma of ham, salami, and cheese.

The scene conveys with equal force a sense of the year 1965, when Leo Giordani started the shop. Mr Giordani is a fastidious Italian shopkeeper doing his best to accommodate the march of change in this stretch of Caledonian Road, particularly in the last decade. The shop is a Tardis of sorts, and an atmosphere of quiet order settles

on you the moment you cross the threshold.

"We used to have a tailor, and a Jewish tobacconist shop which was here for 90 years," he says. "Also, we had shoe repairs, two greengrocers, two butchers, and a sweet shop. There was a coffee shop – *Italian* coffee – and a barber. Also a bakery." He glances across the street at the smart new Tesco on the corner. "At the Tesco, they have clothes," he muses.

Mr Giordani's future is uncertain. His shop is leased, as was Peter and Tony's Continental Hairdressers next door. That's closed for redevelopment, and Mr Giordani's shop may also face closure and conversion. And yet commercially, Mr Giordani isn't struggling. "Business isn't bad," he admits, "but we get more English customers than Italians now."

goods interchange at the height of the Victorian industrial boom. Now it's an interchange of booming creativity – the new campus for Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, and thus part of the University of the Arts London. The Granary and its extension by Stanton Williams Architects will be Central Saint Martins' focal point for education in art, design, communications and performance.

The presence of Central Saint Martins, whose alumni include Stella McCartney, Antony Gormley and Anne-Marie Duff, brings a certain cachet to the area. As does the remodelling of segments of the Granary, a considerate exercise in the adaptive reuse of historic architecture which has, for decades, been regarded as commercially and culturally useless.

His shop is on the corner of Keystone Crescent, a terrace of small Georgian houses now fetching up to £750,000 that herald the demographic changes which have swept, slowly but surely, up Caledonian Road over the 46 years that Mr Giordani has presided over the KC Continental Stores.

The smell of his hanging row of Parma hams, pasta, and cheeses clings to you as you leave the shop and it takes twenty or thirty seconds for this rich scent of earlier times to be stripped away by the diesel and petrol fumes of traffic pulsing across the three-way junction at Pentonville Road, 200 metres away.



4 An Aladdin's cave of miscellany

Pentonville Rubber, Pentonville Road

Pentonville Rubber is a treasure trove of what most people would think of as odd bits and pieces. Jars chock-a-block with strange rubber objects resembling outsized thimbles. Fold-up mattresses with striped ticking. Miscellaneous rubber floor tiles. A "memory foam" mattress.

The goods hover in piles, or hang

from the walls. There are lurching stacks of yellow, blue and pink foam rubber, shrink-wrapped rolls of plastic, rubber strips and gaskets hanging like thick strips of black liquorice.

Many of London's now famous architects and designers have been here early in their careers. And not



“There is nothing mythical about King’s Cross itself. On the contrary, it is a superlative example of Victorian matter-of-fact.”

Stephen Bayley, Design Critic

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Schuco

Mundy

Stonewest

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NG Bailey

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Chapman Taylor

Stanton Williams

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LB Camden / LB Islington

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Victorian Society

King’s Cross Conservation Area

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Commission for Architecture and

the Built Environment

Greater London Authority

Transport for London

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Thameslink

British Transport Police

Local residents and businesses

Train Operating Companies

Argent