



Curzon Street Station, Birmingham

John Minnis

Discovery, Innovation and Science in the Historic Environment



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**Curzon Street Station
New Canal Street
Birmingham**

John Minnis, incorporating research by Emily Cole, Luke Jacob and
Kathryn Morrison

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SUMMARY

This report, which is produced at the request of National Planning & Conservation Department in response to the proposed siting of the HS2 Birmingham terminal, examines the surviving structures of the London & Birmingham Railway terminus at Curzon Street, Birmingham. It considers in particular the grade 1 listed 1838 building by Philip Hardwick, which he referred to as the Principal Building, the sole remaining intact building on the site, together with the boundary walls which incorporate the remains of the screen of the Grand Junction Railway terminus of 1838 and the bridges and viaducts that provided rail access to the complex. It looks at the significance of these structures and at the possibility of there being substantial archaeological remains of one of the first main line terminals in the world.

The report is based on a site visit made on 12 November 2014, examination of Hardwick's original drawings held at the National Railway Museum and of London & Birmingham Railway minute books and other related documents at the National Archives, together with accounts in contemporary local and national newspapers, guides and in secondary sources.

CONTRIBUTORS

John Minnis, Kathryn Morrison, Emily Cole and Luke Jacob. Photography by Steve Baker. Plans by Philip Sinton. Grace Penrose prepared the report for publication.

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1. THE LONDON & BIRMINGHAM RAILWAY

The railway line between London and Birmingham was engineered by Robert Stephenson for the London & Birmingham Railway Co. (L&BR) and built between 1834 and 1838. The London terminus was located at Euston Grove. The line required substantial engineering works throughout much of its length, passing through the Chilterns at Tring, and having Rugby and Coventry as the principal intermediate stops. The L&BR merged with the Grand Junction Railway (GJR) and the Liverpool & Manchester Railway (L&MR) in 1846 to form the London & North Western Railway (LNWR).

2. THE HISTORY OF CURZON STREET STATION

Birmingham Station, the northern terminus of the L&BR, was situated about a mile to the east of the town centre. The line did not continue into the heart of the city at that time for topographical reasons. The site, known as Nova Scotia Gardens – shown as an area of market gardens and fields on the edge of the town on maps of 1731 and 1778 – was purchased from Lord Howe.¹ It was bounded by Curzon Street (north), New Canal Street (west), Banbury Street (south-west), and the Digbeth Branch Canal (east and south). The Digbeth Branch Canal had been an important feature of the neighbourhood since its construction in 1799. The bridge built in 1838 to carry the railway over the canal is listed grade II.

From the outset, it was envisaged that the site would be shared by the L&BR and the GJR, whose line between Birmingham and Liverpool had opened in July 1837. The L&BR, as the primary developers, had a head start, and used the site at Nova Scotia Gardens to its best advantage, leaving an awkwardly-shaped triangular parcel of land for the GJR.

Euston opened to passengers on 20 July 1837 and Birmingham Station followed on 9 April 1838, when the L&BR line to Rugby came into operation. Omnibuses and coaches conveyed passengers the 36 miles from Rugby to Denbigh Hall, near Fenny Stratford, where the line resumed. At the time of opening on 9 April 1838, the Birmingham Station buildings were evidently largely complete. *The Times* was able to report on them as follows:

The general office in front of the station is of a magnificent character, and is intended for meetings of the directors and the offices of the secretary. The ground floor, when the building is completed, will be appropriated for the refreshments for passengers, under the direction of Mr Dee, of the Royal Hotel. On each side of the building there are noble carriage entrances to the station-yard, which is fitted with much taste, and a great regard to the comfort and convenience of travellers. The roof, which is particularly light and elegant, was constructed after a plan by Mr Bramah, the architect, and

is considerably wider than that at the station at Euston-grove. The booking-offices are to the left of the grand office, presenting to the street a long and elegant colonnade front, and in the station-yard are bounded by a noble flagged terrace on a level with the floor of the carriages . . . At the south end of the station-yard is a very spacious engine-house, in which there is accommodation for 16 engines with their tenders, or for 32 engines without their tenders. Above this is a tank capable of holding 203 tuns of water . . .²

Osborne's *London & Birmingham Railway Guide* of 1840 described the station as follows:

On the right is the splendid FAÇADE, adorned with four magnificent Ionic columns. The building, of which this is the front, contains the board room of the directors, the secretary's office, the offices of the financial and correspondence departments, a refreshment saloon, &c.³

These descriptions, together with Philip Hardwick's drawings (numbered 2001-7979), now at the National Railway Museum, York, confirm that the Principal Building on New Canal Street was built as the company's offices and boardroom, contrary to some accounts which have suggested that it was designed as a station master's office and booking hall⁴ or as a hotel.⁵ Although the 'noble carriage entrances' flanking the offices were mentioned in *The Times* account, J. C. Bourne's engraving, published in 1839, and Hardwick's drawings of the elevations show that they were asymmetrical. The site was not wide enough to accommodate the architect's original, symmetrical design: the left-hand or north entrance (for departing passengers) was built in accordance with the plan but that on the right or south (for arrivals) had to be squeezed between the offices and neighbouring houses owned by the Gooch family.⁶ The 1837 plans suggest that the right-hand arrival side had an arch matching that on the departure side but it was not a full porte-cochère, i.e. there was nothing behind the arch to protect passengers from the weather. The north entrance is not visible in an illustration of 1840 showing the station from the east,⁷ leading to speculation that the porte-cochère was never constructed, but the omission may be an error in a somewhat rudimentary sketch. Bourne drew from life and his drawings are renowned for their high level of accuracy, as comparison of his on-site sketches and wash drawings with the finished lithographs has shown.⁸ There is a reference to tenders being obtained for covering the carriage standing on the arrival line and altering the communication with New Canal Street by taking down the present arch and substituting a different one, including a small Porter's Lodge and a footpath for passengers.⁹ Gwyther & Branston successfully tendered for the work. Does this represent the demise of the arch on the south side of the Principal Building between it and the pre-existing houses?



Figure 1: The wash drawing for J. C. Bourne's celebrated engraving of the London & Birmingham Railway terminus. The station building and trainshed is visible on the left and the Principal Building on the right.



Figure 2: Curzon Street. From Osborne's Guide to the London & Birmingham Railway, 1840.

The report of April 1838 in *The Times* was parroted in the usual fashion by other newspapers, including the *Birmingham Gazette*, but a slightly different account appeared in the *Staffordshire Advertiser*.¹⁰ This mentioned the existence of 'stores for warehousing goods'. The exact location of these is uncertain, as is their relationship with the associated L&BR Goods Station (demolished) in what became later known as the Top Yard on the north side of Curzon Street which is thought to have been operational by this date.¹¹ The *Staffordshire Advertiser* explained that the 'beautiful range of booking offices' had waiting rooms at either end for passengers, corresponding to the first and second class carriages. The entrance building was described as 'in the course of erection'. The train-shed comprised: ' . . . magnificent shedding, supported by elegant pillars, erected by Mr Bramah, the extreme lightness and beauty of which excites general admiration'. Built after the train-shed at Euston, it was regarded as an improvement on that design, being wider and more spacious. Finally, the *Staffordshire Advertiser* account is of interest in claiming that the Birmingham Commissioners intended to sweep away the old buildings ('narrow and filthy streets') around the station to create 'a grand thoroughfare to the centre of the town'.¹² This was also discussed by Osborne in 1838¹³, but never materialised.

Although the train-shed was the work of the engineer John Joseph Bramah, the Principal Building and the station building adjoining the train-shed are known to have been designed by the L&BR company architect, Philip Hardwick (1792-1870). Again, the contract drawings signed by Hardwick and the contractors Thomas Grissell and Samuel Morton Peto survive at the National Railway Museum.¹⁴ Hardwick had also designed the principal buildings at Euston, including the Doric Arch. At Euston, Charles Fox is credited with the train-shed but he is recorded in 1839 as being Bramah's partner in Bramah, Fox & Co. of Smethwick. Cheffin recorded in 1840 that:

the roof being one of the finest in the world, some particulars of its various parts may be interesting. It covers a space 217 feet long and 113 feet wide. It is formed of wrought iron, in two spans of 56 feet 6 inches each; and the length is divided into 33 bays or spaces between each principal rafter, making 34 double or 68 single sets of principals, - a double one being considered to go across both spans, or the whole width of 113 feet, and the single one going across the 56 feet 6 inches only. These principal rafters are supported by three tiers of open ornamental arched girders of cast iron columns, one at each side of the roof; and at the row next to the booking offices, the roof is firmly attached to the wall of that building ¹⁵

Despite delay caused by the construction of the Kilsby tunnel, the London to Birmingham line was quickly completed for its full length, 112 miles, and the first uninterrupted service ran on 17 September 1838 in 4 hours and 48 minutes: 'a man may henceforth proceed from the metropolis to the capital of the midland counties, or from the latter to the former, and return the same day, after having devoted several hours to business'.¹⁶ The cheapest fare was £1.



Figure 3: The Principal Building, in use as goods offices with the 1841 hotel addition to its left. Photographed 1966. ©Historic England Archive bb64_02092.

The station buildings, already advanced in April 1838, were undoubtedly complete by 17 September 1838. The contractors were Messrs Grissell & Peto, and the work cost £26,000 (compared with £35,000 at Euston).¹⁷ According to *The Times*:

The lower portion of the magnificent station-house in Birmingham has recently been licensed as an hotel to Mr. Dee (mine host of the Royal), so that passengers, if they think proper, may be accommodated with every good thing without leaving the company's premises. The innkeepers of the town complain of this establishment, in company with the station-house, as a monopoly, but we presume that the immense influx of passengers into Birmingham, as evidenced this day, which will be occasioned by the entire opening of the rail-way, will speedily render these complaints uncalled for. Certain it is, that the complete junction of the two stations, and the distance of the principal hotels in the town render some adequate place of tavern accommodation absolutely necessary.¹⁸

Further to this, Osborne's *Grand Junction Railway Guide* of 1838 stated:

There is another thing, which, though not at present publicly projected, nor even hinted at, that we know of, is yet generally felt to be needed: a Railroad Tavern, where the principles which regulate the payments of the road will be applied to the payments of the inn A small approach to this system is already made, by a provision for breakfast for the passengers by the early train, at the station ¹⁹

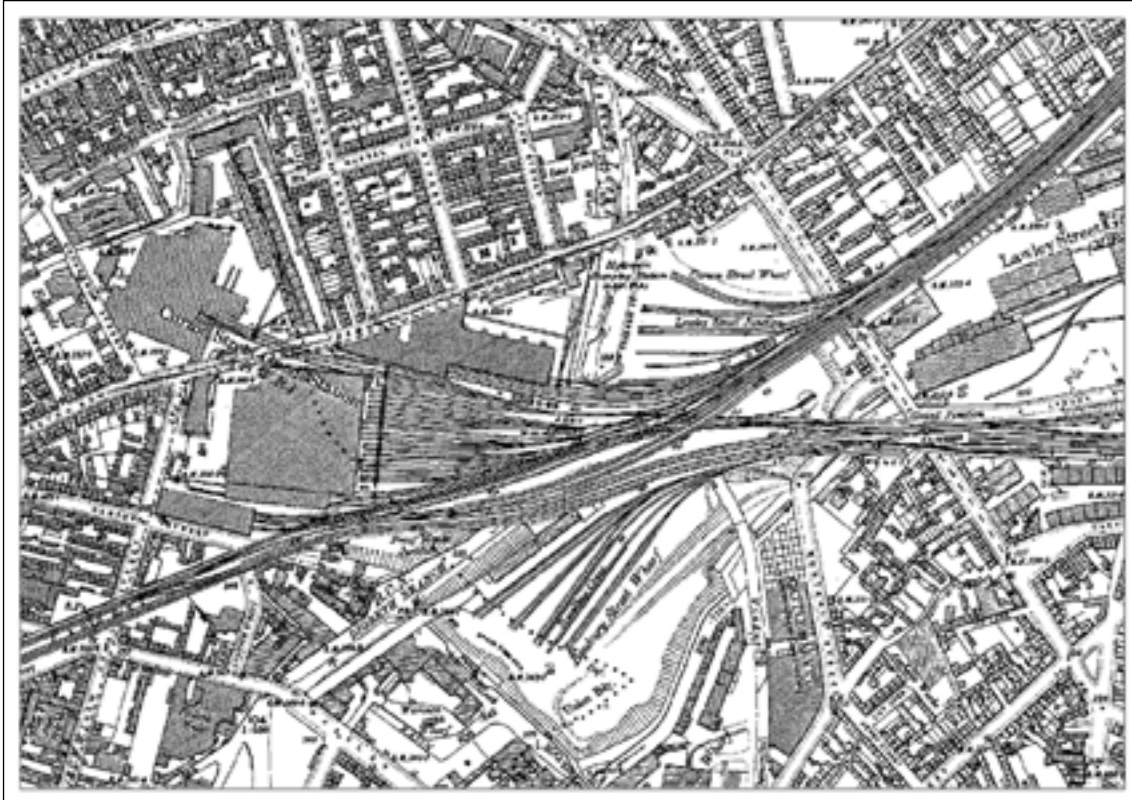


Figure 4: Curzon Street as a goods station. Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map, published 1890.

It is unlikely that the 'hotel' provided bedrooms at this time. If these had been available, the establishment would probably have been called a 'hotel and dormitory'. In May 1837 the L&BR Board of Directors had issued a prospectus inviting shareholders to invest in a company to be called London & Birmingham Hotels & Dormitories. In July 1838 it was resolved to let the site in front of Euston Station to the hotel company. Subsequently two opposing hotels designed by Phillip Hardwick were built, flanking the Doric Arch. The Victoria Hotel (demolished) on the west opened on 9 September 1839 and the Euston Hotel (demolished), on the east, in December 1839. The Euston, which was originally to have been called The Adelaide Hotel, was to 'be conducted in a manner similar to the first rate Hotels, so that any accommodation and attention is to be ensured to the persons who may frequent it'.²⁰ In other words, it was to be fully licensed. It was let unfurnished for 25 years from 25 December 1839 to Dethier and Vantini. The Victoria was furnished as a dormitory and not licensed: 'That the whole of the Establishment be considered more as a respectable Club House than as an ordinary Hotel and that every care be taken not to interfere with the custom of the Hotel opposite'.²¹ The manager or 'superintendent of the Dormitories' was Robert Bacon, steward of the Athenaeum Club in Pall Mall, whose appointment was agreed on 26 January 1839. The Victoria has been hailed by Oliver Carter as 'the first railway-owned hotel in Britain'²², suggesting that he regarded the 'hotel' in Birmingham as a different kind of establishment. In 1881 the two Euston hotels were connected by a link block, obscuring Hardwick's Arch.



Figure 5: The south elevation of the Principal Building, showing its context within the goods station. 1966. ©Historic England Archive bb64_02090.



Figure 6: The rear of the Principal Building, clearly showing the 1841 hotel addition with the wing for bathrooms and WCs on the right. 1966. ©Historic England Archive bb64_02100.

3. AN ALTERNATIVE SCHEME FOR CURZON STREET

Some undated plans held with other L&BR drawings at the National Railway Museum, York, suggest that the terminus of the L&BR was to be arranged somewhat differently from that eventually constructed. The plan envisaged that there would be separate arrival and departure stations (common on early railways, especially the Great Western Railway) with the arrival platform or 'stage' (nomenclature had not yet settled on platform: 'stage' or 'terrace' were both used) to the south of Curzon Street and the departure platforms to the north, with Curzon Street itself raised on a bridge separating the two parts of the station. The departure station was to have separate platforms for 1st and 2nd class passengers; a terminus building at the head of the platforms would similarly have been divided with separate waiting rooms and booking offices for the two classes (another feature of early main line railways). The design of the head end building bore no resemblance to what was eventually constructed by Philip Hardwick as the Principal Building of Curzon Street Station. The north edge of the site would have been taken up with a range of imposing three-storey warehouses and goods offices. The arrival station was to have been closer to Curzon Street than the station erected, with part of the site being taken up with a proposed new road, New Howe Street.

None of this was constructed, probably due to the intervention of the Birmingham Street Commissioners who were concerned about the Curzon Street level crossing. They ensured that a clause was inserted into the L&BR Act of 1837 that imposed conditions on the use of the crossing. The Commissioners had the power to force the L&BR to provide a pedestrian footbridge at any time in the future (a drawing was prepared). The remaining conditions included the crossing not being used for passenger trains, not used more than twelve times a day and that the road was not to be obstructed for more than five minutes.²³ Although the road bridge was proposed to deal with these conditions, in the event it was decided to locate the passenger station in its entirety to the south of Curzon Street.

4. THE GRAND JUNCTION RAILWAY TERMINUS

The GJR opened from Manchester and Liverpool to a temporary Birmingham terminus at Vauxhall, about a mile north of Curzon Street on 4 July 1837. In 1838 a new viaduct was completed, allowing the GJR access to Curzon Street. The GJR erected separate buildings and parallel platforms, designed by Liverpool architect Joseph Franklin (c. 1785-1855), to the north-east of the L&BR premises. Franklin based his design on the screen wall of Liverpool Lime Street, the terminus of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway. Lime Street was the work of John Foster Junior (c. 1787-1846), architect and surveyor to Liverpool Corporation, who was responsible for many of Liverpool's finest neo-classical buildings, including the Custom House and St James's Cemetery. Designed in 1835-6, it was the first classical screen to be erected at a railway station and the Corporation paid £2,000 towards its cost, a rare mark of civic recognition of the important contribution of a railway station to the amenities of a city. The result was a monumental structure composed of a succession of Roman triumphal arches, rich in its decoration and magnificent in appearance. The site was an important one and H. L. Elmes's St George's Hall was built opposite the station within a few years of its opening. Foster's screen sadly had a short life, being demolished in 1868-71 as a result of station rebuilding.²⁴

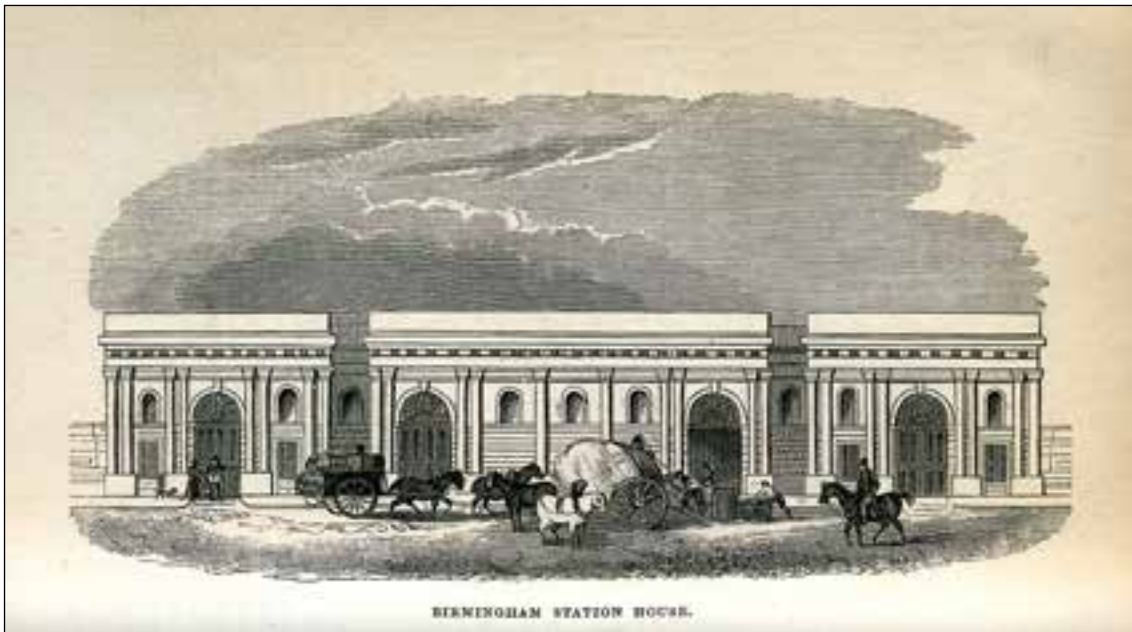


Figure 7: The Grand Junction terminus. From Osborne's Guide to the Grand Junction Railway 2nd edition, 1838.

Franklin's Birmingham screen was on a smaller scale than that at Liverpool but common to both was the deep plinth, the giant order and the large round-headed openings allowing vehicles to pass into the station. The Birmingham screen was divided into three parts, each linked by a recessed bay. By this means, the two outer sections of the façade could be read as Roman triumphal arches. As with

its Liverpool prototype and the L&BR terminus, this was truly monumental architecture designed to fill travellers with awe and to commemorate one of the greatest achievements of man. Franklin was by no means a negligible architect. Surveyor to Liverpool Corporation in 1837-1848, he was responsible for some fine classical buildings in the city including Great George Street Congregational Chapel (1840-1), described by Joseph Sharples in the Liverpool Pevsner City Guide as 'outstandingly good'.²⁵

The contractors for the GJR terminus were again Grissell & Peto of London. The GJR had an awkward triangular site with the buildings hidden from Curzon Street itself behind the screen wall.²⁶ In August 1838 it was reported that the GJR station would be completed within a few months and that the L&BR and the GJR companies were taking trains into one another's platforms, for the convenience of forward-travelling passengers.²⁷ The closure of Vauxhall and the move of the GJR trains to the company's own terminus at Curzon Street took place on 19 November 1838.²⁸ The work was probably completed by the end of 1838, since the station was illustrated and described in the second edition of Osborne's Guide to the Grand Junction Railway, of 1838.²⁹

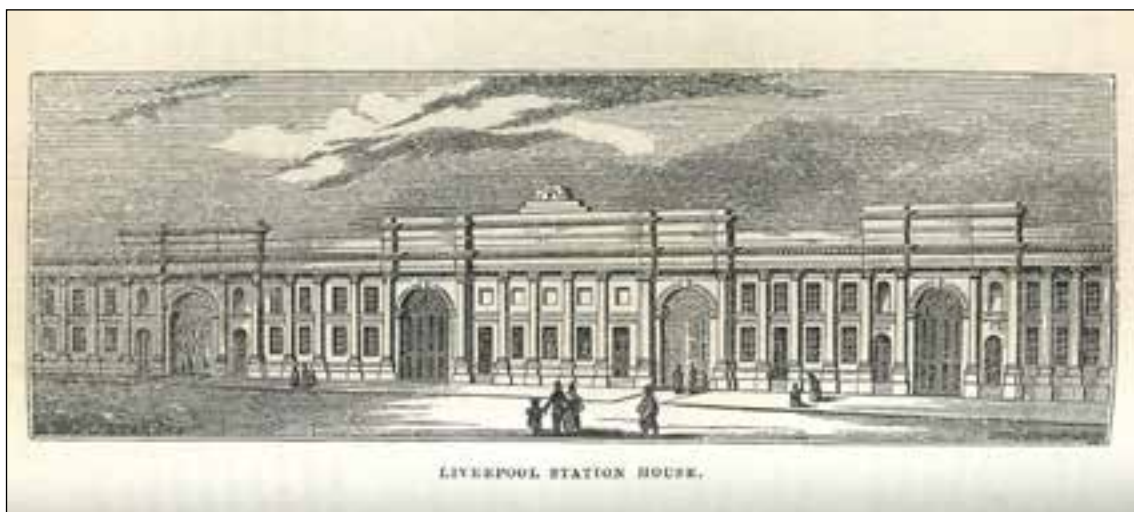


Figure 8: The Liverpool terminus of the Grand Junction Railway. From Osborne's Guide to the Grand Junction Railway 2nd edition, 1838.



Figure 9: The full extent of the screen wall of the Grand Junction Railway station looking east along Curzon Street with the accumulator tower visible on the far left. 1966. ©Historic England Archive bb64_02091.



Figure 10: The central part of the Grand Junction Railway station screen wall, showing the series of linked neo-Roman triumphal arches. ©Historic England Archive bb64_02094.

5. THE HOTEL

Philip Hardwick was asked by the joint boards of the L&BR and the GJR to write a report, considering the problem of inadequate hotel accommodation in Birmingham. He advised that the boardroom (presumably shorthand for the Principal Building) at Curzon Street could be converted for hotel use at a cost of about £1,000.³⁰ Certainly, the boardroom appears to have been little used: the meetings of the Board alternated between London and Birmingham, but the venue for the Birmingham meetings of 1839 and 1840 was Dee's Royal Hotel (Temple Row) rather than their own boardroom.

At the Board meeting of 20 July 1839 it was recorded that:

Mr Hardwick attended and reported that the building on the site of the Birmingham Passenger Station would afford sufficient accommodation for the Board independent of the uses to which it is at present applied, and that the building now appropriated to the use of the Board and Birmingham Committee might be let as a hotel at a rent of not less probably than £700 or £800 per annum.³¹

At the meeting of 23 August, a letter from Hardwick was read, giving details of an agreement for letting the building as a hotel to Frederic Dee at an annual rent of £700. However, at the same time as the Board was discussing leasing the building to Dee, there was disquiet at the way Dee was running the refreshment room for, at the same meeting, it was ordered:

that the secretary be instructed to inform Mr Dee that the attendance in the refreshment room has hitherto been inadequate and the charges in some cases too high, and that the general arrangements have not been such as to give satisfaction to the public . . . that the board expect that there will be such improvement in the future management of the Hotel as to obviate these and any other reasonable grounds of complaint . . .³²

If improvements did not take place, the company would enact a clause to determine the lease. Notwithstanding this, on 23 August 1839 Hardwick was authorised to proceed with the alterations to turn the building into a hotel, the cost of which was not to exceed £1,000.³³ A lease between the company and Dee was sealed on 22 November and Hardwick reported on 20 December that all the alterations were completed.³⁴ The hotel was then named the Victoria Hotel. The relationship with Dee was clearly not a happy one as, on 12 June 1840, the Board resolved that he be given notice and that his stock taken off his hands at a fair valuation.³⁵ On 28 August, it was agreed to advertise the tenancy of the hotel and, on 11 September,

the admission to the tenancy from 29 September of Robert Bacon, already the tenant of the Victoria Hotel at Euston, was agreed.³⁶ A change of name to the Queen's Hotel was agreed on 25 September.

Early in 1841, a decision was taken to enlarge the hotel by adding a north wing to the Principal Building. Robert Benson Dockray (1811-71), assistant engineer to Robert Stephenson in the construction of the L&BR, reported on the subject at the Board meeting on 11 February 1841, and it was agreed that the Works Committee be requested to order plans, estimates and specifications for the additions and to seek tenders for the work.³⁷ Four tenders were received and that of Gwyther & Branston for the sum of £5,408 was successful, undercutting Grissell & Peto, whose tender was for £8,363.³⁸ The tender was accepted on 11 June and it was proposed that the tenant, Bacon, pay the L&BR 10 per cent per annum on the total outlay, in addition to his rent, and for the same term as his lease.³⁹ This was resisted by Bacon and the lease was finally granted on 1 October 1842 to run from 29 September 1841 for 14 years with an annual rent of £1,170 for the first three years and £1,360 for the remaining 11 years of the term.⁴⁰

The new wing had four floors and a basement and, consequently, the elevations failed to match those of the Principal Building (drawings of the addition, signed by Dockray, and dated 21 July 1841, survive, NRM 2001-7979). The drawings indicate that the ground floor of the addition was occupied by a new refreshment room, 64ft by 36ft in size, with bedrooms on the first, second and third floors. The basement had a kitchen, larder, wash-house and wine and coal storage. The main staircase was located at the north end of the wing, in an area triangular in plan that also housed bathrooms and W.C.s. The final contract plan, signed by Dockray and Gwyther & Branston on 21 July 1841, included a small staircase (named 'Private Stairs' on the plan, and presumably intended for service use), located adjacent to the junction of the original part of the building and the addition between the central window (which was converted to an opening linking the two parts of the building) and the west window. The left-hand porte-cochère and entrance piers were demolished and a new entrance gate provided on Curzon Street. The rooms within the Principal Building appear to have remained unaltered in general layout following the construction of the extension, other than doorways punched through from the central corridors on the basement, ground, first and second floors to link the existing building to the addition. It is unclear how the rooms within the Principal Building were used, following conversion to a hotel, in the absence of plans indicating room functions. Drawings of an alternative unbuilt scheme also exist within the NRM holdings.⁴¹ Undated, they depict a two-storey addition with its windows in line with those of the Principal Building with its roof visible, instead of being hidden behind a parapet, visually a much more satisfactory solution than that actually constructed, although providing less accommodation.



Figure 11: The level crossing over Curzon Street with the tracks leading to the original L&BR goods depot, located behind the photographer, and showing the position of the GJR screen wall. 1966. ©Historic England Archive bb64_02093.

6. THE DECLINE OF CURZON STREET AND ITS TRANSFORMATION INTO A GOODS DEPOT

By 1846, Curzon Street Station was felt to be inadequate in dealing with passenger traffic. It was remote from the city centre and new lines were being planned to the north and west of the city.⁴² That year, an Act giving powers for a 'Grand Central Station' received Royal Assent and the process of planning what would become New Street Station began.



Figure 12: A general view of the goods station, looking west. The rear of the Principal Building is in the centre, partly obscured by the train shed of the 1838 London & Birmingham Railway station. ©Historic England Archive bb64_02096.

By 1852 the station at Curzon Street, which had officially been known as Birmingham Station until then, formally had Curzon Street added to its name in the railway timetable. Lawley Street Station (terminus of the Birmingham & Derby Junction Railway, forerunner of the Midland Railway) opened further to its east on 10 February 1842 but its trains were diverted to Curzon Street by 1 May 1851.⁴³

The construction of a city-centre station required new lines to cross those into Curzon Street. The bridge over the canal was widened and Lawley Street Viaduct was raised to enable trains coming in on the former GJR route to enter New Street without having to cross the lines into Curzon Street on the level. In June 1854 passenger services were diverted to the newly completed New Street ('Grand Central') Station, built in 1846-54 in a joint venture between the London & North Western Railway (LNWR, a merger of the L&BR and GJR in 1846) and the Midland Railway (MR). William Livock designed a new Queens Hotel (1853-54) for a site by New Street Station. Built at a cost of £9,957, this opened on 1 May 1854 (later extended on several occasions; closed 1965 and subsequently demolished). Curzon Street Station closed to LNWR passengers on 1 June and to MR passengers on 1 July 1854 when all services were diverted to New Street.

It was announced:

In consequence of the erection of the new Hotel at the Railway Station in New-street, the Queen's Hotel in Curzon Street will shortly be closed, and Mr. R. Bacon, who has for nearly fourteen years conducted that establishment in a very creditable manner, is about to remove to the Old Ship Hotel, Brighton. ⁴⁴

In 1860, with the closure of the engine shed at Curzon Street, the process of converting the premises into the LNWR's main Birmingham goods depot began. Although the L&BR station buildings (as opposed to the Principal Building) were demolished, the train-shed remained and was incorporated into the new goods station. The work was largely completed by 1865 and the layout remained largely unaltered until the closure of the depot in 1966. The goods depot with its attendant stabling and other facilities is described in great detail in Foster 1990 (1) and (2) and Foster 1997 ⁴⁵ and, as none of it survives, it will not be discussed further here. The Principal Building and its former hotel extension were used as offices both for the Curzon Street Goods Agent and the LNWR Central District Goods Manager and their respective staffs. As the Principal Building was designed as offices in the first place, few alterations needed to be made to it and the large former refreshment room on the ground floor of the hotel lent itself to a new role as the goods forwarding office, occupied by dozens of clerks. The nearby houses owned by the Gooch family were demolished in the 1870s and the land taken into the goods station. They had prevented Hardwick's original concept of the Principal Building, with gates to the passenger station behind symmetrically arranged on both sides, being fully realised. Some occasional passenger traffic remained at Curzon Street – an excursion platform on the south side of the site was used mainly on Bank Holidays for excursions to Sutton Coldfield and Sutton Park until 1893, when it was closed to enable the main line into New Street to be quadrupled.

When the goods station closed in 1966, the platforms, train shed, and the substantial remains of the GJR station were demolished within a few years, unrecorded save for a series of photographs taken for the National Monuments Record.⁴⁶ Despite the protests over the Euston Arch in 1961, the loss of the 1838 GJR screen wall in July 1971 went largely unremarked, so little was it known.⁴⁷ British Rail wished to demolish the Grade 1 listed Principal Building in 1970 and 1978 but was refused permission on both occasions. Ownership was eventually transferred to Birmingham City Council in 1979, with a grant of £5,000. The following three years saw conservation and repairs carried out to the Principal Building and the regrettable demolition of the north hotel wing on the grounds that it was a later addition that detracted from the purity of Hardwick's original design. In the process, interiors were largely stripped out and extensive repairs, particularly to the roof, undertaken. The restoration received Civic Trust and RICS awards in 1983-4. The Principal Building was then occupied by charitable groups until recent years and is currently empty. The site of the goods station had large steel-framed sheds erected on it and was used as a Parcelforce Depot until 2006. The depot was then demolished, and the site is now a car park.

7. ANALYSIS

The surviving elements of Curzon Street Station and its environs that are the subject of this report include the Principal Building (designed as company offices, listed Grade I), a railway bridge crossing the Digbeth Branch Canal (listed Grade II), boundary walls and the viaducts of the L&BR and GJR leading to Curzon Street.



Figure 13: The west elevation of the 1838 Principal Building, from a 1968 survey. ©Historic England Archive 4043_071.

7.1. The London & Birmingham Railway (L&BR) Principal Building

The building is currently owned by Birmingham City Council. It is Grade I listed (first designated 1952), and is on the Heritage at Risk Register (HAR). It lies alongside the proposed terminus ('Birmingham Fazeley Street' or 'Birmingham Curzon Street') of the HS2 line in Birmingham and is within the Birmingham Curzon HS2 Masterplan area, the Masterplan having been produced in February 2014 by Birmingham City Council to try and guide development of the area.



Figure 14: The east elevation of the 1838 Principal Building, from a 1968 survey. ©Historic England Archive 4043_069.

The Principal Building is in the Ionic style and constructed of ashlar sandstone. It comprises three storeys, is three bays wide and austere cubic in shape. It has a portico of four giant Ionic columns, rising to the dentilled entablature with attic. Behind the columns is a carved achievement of arms (those of London and Birmingham, as employed in the L&BR's coat of arms) and swags over the glazed iron tympanum above the great panelled doors and two ground-floor single windows. The first floor has two windows, one each side of the tympanum with blind balconies and cornices on brackets. The second floor has three windows in flat surrounds. All windows are sashes, mostly with glazing bars, and with horns to both upper and lower sashes. To the rear, two engaged Ionic columns stand between square piers.

Hardwick's design drawings of 1837, discussed above, indicate that the extant building has suffered few external alterations since it was constructed, other than the loss of the northern gate piers, removed on the building of the attached hotel in 1841, itself now demolished (see p.13), and the two porte-cochères.

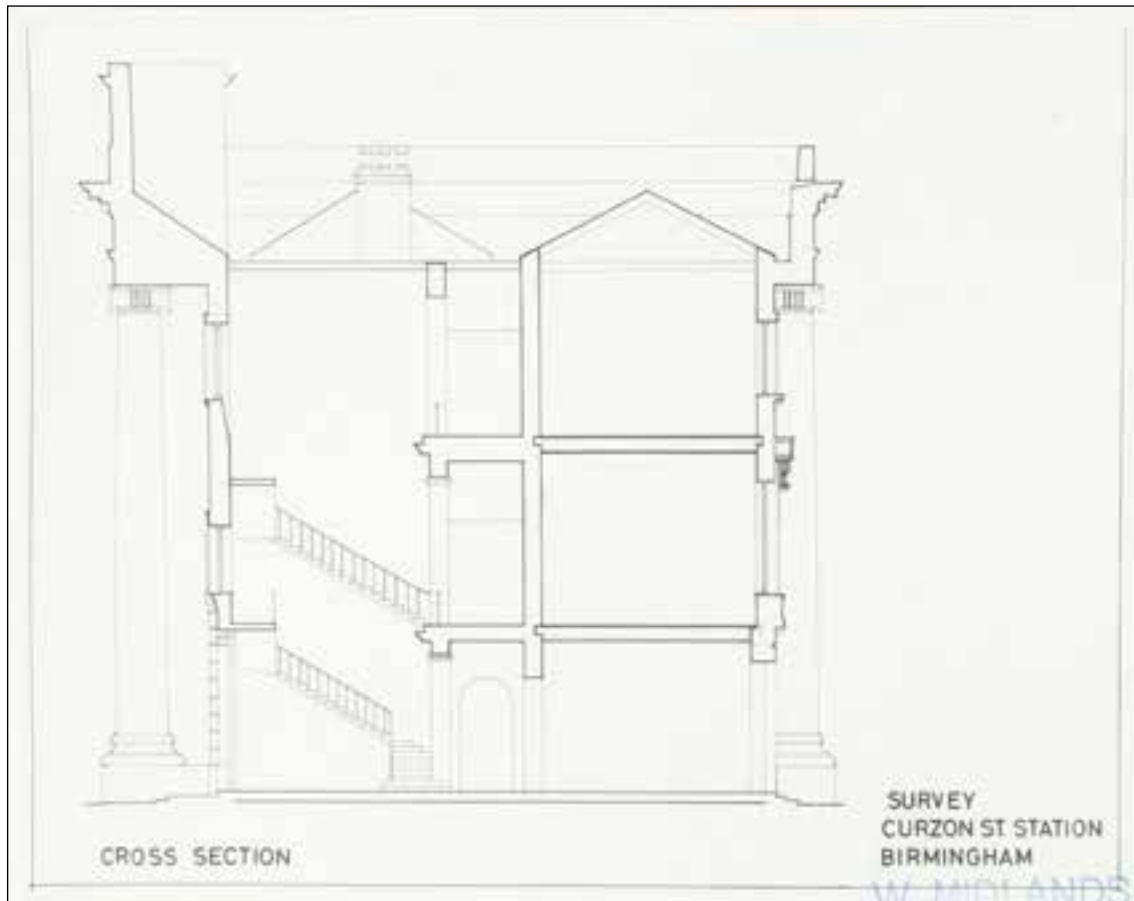
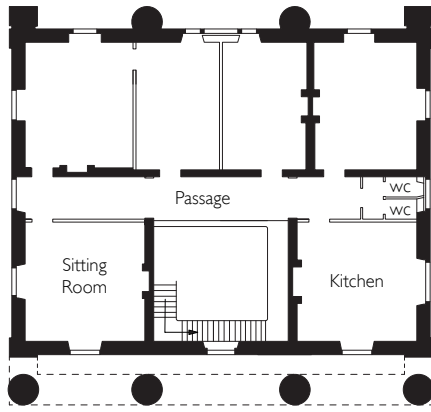
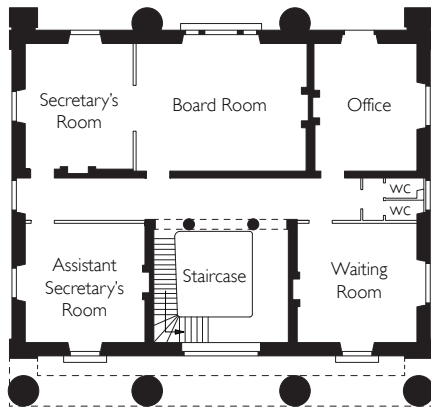


Figure 15: Cross-section of the 1838 Principal Building, from a 1968 survey.
 ©Historic England Archive 4043_061.

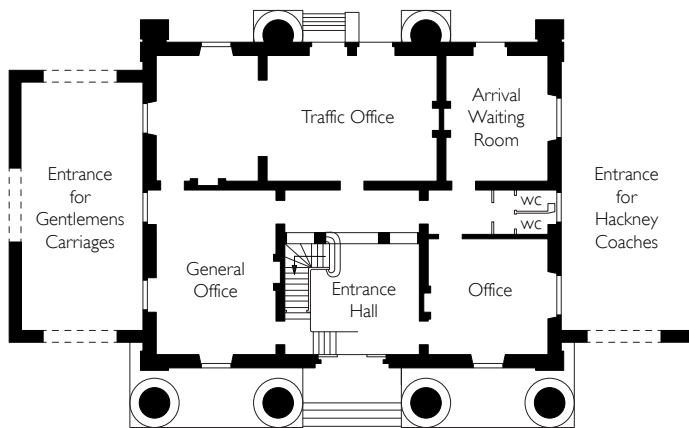
The plans confirm that the intended use of the building was primarily as company offices and board room for the L&BR. The internal layout has changed little since it was built, although much detail has been stripped out. A large full-height entrance hall filled the centre of the building with internal circulation being along a central corridor running much of the width of it, with the south end partitioned for W.C.s. On the ground floor at the front of the building was the General Office at the north-west end and another office at the south-west corner with a large room at the rear, formed of a broad central room and a smaller connecting room at the north-east corner as the Traffic Office and the south-east room as the Arrival Waiting Room. On the first floor, the large central room at the rear was occupied by the Boardroom with the Secretary's Room leading off it to the north and a further office without direct access to the Boardroom to the south. At the front of the building was the Assistant Secretary's Room and a Waiting Room, probably for persons waiting to see the Secretary rather than waiting for trains. On the second floor, the functions are less clear, the rooms at the rear having no use shown against them. One, a large room, well lit with a tripartite sash and two further windows, with stud partitions marked within it in 1837, currently has its roof timbers exposed and may have been intended for occupation by clerks. At the front, the north-west room is marked as



Upper Floor



First Floor



Ground Floor

Figure 16: The ground, first and second floors of the Principal Building, based on Philip Hardwick's drawings dated 1837, held at the National Railway Museum ©Philip Sinton/ Historic England.

a Sitting Room and the south-west as a Kitchen. While residential accommodation was to be found in other early railway offices, the Great Western Railway offices at Bristol having a flat for the Secretary, the lack of any attempt at segregating part of the floor, the provision of two W.C. s and a urinal, in the same position as those in the offices on the lower floors, and no room marked as a bedroom suggests that the space may not have been used in this way.



Figure 17: The east façade of the Principal Building. ©Historic England DP164912.

The 1837 plans show the intentions of the designer as to how the rooms would be used: they do not necessarily indicate how they were in fact used when the building was open for business. *The Times* of 11 April 1838, in its report on the opening of the railway, noted that ‘the ground floor, when the building is completed, will be appropriated for the refreshment of passengers, under the direction of Mr Dee, of the Royal Hotel’.⁴⁸ Osborne (1838) stated that the building contained the Boardroom, the Secretary’s offices, and the offices of the financial and correspondence departments, all of which appear in the 1837 plans, but also a refreshment saloon, ‘the entrance to which is on the arrival side’.⁴⁹ It is likely that the refreshment saloon occupied the large room originally intended as the Traffic Office, with its door facing the station.



Figure 18: The north façade of the Principal Building. ©Historic England DP164913.

The L&BR's half yearly meetings on 2 February 1839 and 7 February 1840 were held at Dee's Royal Hotel, Templer Row, Birmingham. This is significant in that it was reported that 'The lower part of the magnificent station house in Birmingham has recently been licensed as a hotel to Mr Dee (of the Royal Hotel): so that passengers, if they think proper, may be accommodated with every good thing without leaving the company's premises'.⁵⁰ This suggests, on the face of it, that conversion to a hotel was already underway within months of the station opening on 9 April. But it is evident from the company minutes that the word 'hotel' in this context refers to the provision of refreshments rather than overnight accommodation, the works to provide this not being authorised until August 1839 (see p. 12).

7.2. The Site Today

7.2.1. The 1838 Principal Building

The interior of the present building was examined comparing the findings of a site visit undertaken on 12 November 2014 with the Hardwick drawings of January 1837 and a survey of 1968, a copy of which is in the Historic England Archive. The rooms are considered in turn, working clockwise from the entrance hall on each floor. In general, the combination of war damage and neglect during the long period that the building was out of use have resulted in some loss of original fabric. All the skirtings appear to have been replaced, as have most ceilings. Only one of the internal doors is shown in the Hardwick drawings, that to the north corridor on the ground floor. This is a six-panel design with the smallest panels in the centre. Doors of this type survive in the south corridor of the ground floor and that to room 5 on the ground floor. The architraves to these doors again appear to be the same as those depicted in the Hardwick drawings. The remainder of the doors in the building are four-panel which may be original or may be later replacements. Opening-up works suggest that much of the floor structure and roof structure was also replaced, most likely in the early 1980s refurbishment, although some work to the roof would have been necessary following damage from an oil bomb and an incendiary in August 1940. The plan of the building has, however, been little altered.

Entrance Hall

The entrance hall rises through the full height of the building. Although the space impresses by its size, the architectural treatment is not elaborate, although the columns and entablature at first-floor level are striking. The originality of the open-well staircase is open to question in one respect. Its form is exactly as shown in the 1837 Hardwick drawings. However, the treads appear sharp-edged and may be compared with a photograph taken while the building was being used as a goods office in the 1960s,⁵¹ which shows considerable wear to the treads, suggesting that they have been refaced in material such as granolithic.

Ground floor. There is a glazed timber lobby behind entrance doors and a glazed reception office on the south wall, both being much later insertions, although a door lobby is shown in 1837. There is a blocked doorway, now forming a niche, leading to the Traffic Office/Refreshment Room in the east wall.

First floor. There are double doors with rounded fanlights above at each end of the landing, which partition it from the central corridor. They are not shown on the 1837 plans but may have been added at the time of construction.



Figure 19: The entrance hall of the 1838 Principal Building with the glazed lobby and the lunette prominent. ©Historic England DP164915.



Figure 20: The entrance hall, showing the columns at first floor level, together with the staircase. ©Historic England DP164917.

Second floor. A cornice, presumed original, is present. There is a curious iron shelf, the purpose of which remains obscure, running at the top of door frame height along the full width of the north and south walls. The hall is lit by a lantern, reconstructed since 1980.



*Figure 21:
Looking up
towards the
skylight in the
entrance hall.
©Historic
England
DP164919.*

Ground Floor

Room 1 (General Office 1837)

A stud wall, forming the east wall of the room, was added, subsequent to the 1837 plan, to create a central corridor. No historic features remain within the room and the ceiling has been lowered.

Rooms 2 and 3 (Traffic Office 1837)

These rooms are shown as interconnected on the 1837 plan. A partition between them is shown on the 1968 plan but has subsequently been removed. There is a stairway to the basement in the north corner of the room which is not marked on either the 1837 or 1968 plans. Room 3 has double doors with flanking sash windows looking towards the station in the east wall. This arrangement does not accord with that shown in the 1837 plans where there are two distinct openings, one approached by a flight of steps, and it is likely that these mark the entrance to what was, in practice, used as the refreshment room. There is a blocked round-headed doorway to the entrance hall in the west wall and a connecting door to room 4, added since 1968. Part of the ceiling had been removed as part of opening-up works to reveal that the floor structure is relatively recent (probably dating from the early 1980s restoration) but retains some early paired timber joists joined at intervals by rectangular iron plates.



Figure 22: Rooms 2 and 3 on the ground floor, marked as Traffic Office in 1837. ©Historic England DP164921.

Room 4 (General Waiting Room 1837)

No features of note remain.

Room 4A (Two W.C.s and a urinal 1837)

Toilet with modern fittings.



*Figure 23: The first floor landing showing the doors leading to the central corridor.
©Historic England DP164928.*

Room 5 (Office 1837)

This retains panelling, which appears original, to dado height either side of the chimney breast on the north wall. The fireplace itself has been blocked up and the chimneypiece removed.

First Floor

Room 1 (Assistant Secretary's Room 1837)

This retains a cornice which appears original.



Figure 24: The surviving cornice in first floor room 1, marked as the Assistant Secretary's room in 1837. ©Historic England DP164929.



Figure 25: Rooms 2 and 3 on the first floor, the Secretary's room and Board Room in 1837, now a single room. ©Historic England DP164931.

Room 2 (Secretary's Room 1837)

This was partitioned from Room 3 (the Boardroom) in 1837 by a stud wall with a broad 7ft 9in opening. The Secretary would need to be in constant communication with the Board and, as with the Great Western Railway board room at Bristol (see below), the two rooms are interconnected. The two rooms were separate in 1968 but the wall between them has now been completely removed. There is a simple fire surround in the west wall, which appears original.

Room 3 (Boardroom 1837)

A large room, 29ft 5in in length, which is the equivalent in size to the Traffic Office immediately below it, with a three-light window overlooking the site of the station. There is a door to room 4, not present in 1837 but there in 1968.



*Figure 26: The fireplace in room 2 on the first floor, the Secretary's room.
©Historic England DP164933.*

Room 4 (Office 1837)

The room is now fitted out as toilets.

Room 4A (Two W.C.s and a urinal)

This is now a disabled toilet.

Room 5 (Waiting Room 1837)

Not inspected; locked at time of visit.

Second Floor

Room 1 (Sitting Room 1837)

The room currently incorporates a hatch to the roof space. Inspection of this revealed that all visible work appeared to date from the 1980s refurbishment with steel beams and timbering of evidently recent date.

Room 2 (no purpose shown 1837)

In 1837, this large room was divided into three by stud walls. One of these walls bisected the tripartite window in the east wall. The stud walls were no longer in evidence in 1968 and the doorways giving access to them from the entrance hall have been blocked. The room is open to the roof with king post trusses exposed. These are identical in appearance to those depicted in the Hardwick drawings retaining original iron ties, the only subsequent modification being the addition of steel strengthening plates.

Room 3 (no purpose shown 1837)

This room also has exposed roof trusses.

Room 3a (Two W.C.s and a urinal 1837)

No sanitary fittings are present and the room has been used as a store.

Room 4 (Kitchen 1837)

This room has exposed roof trusses and a small late nineteenth-century iron fireplace in the north wall.



Figure 27: Room 2 on the second floor, with its exposed king post roof trusses. A large room with no function shown in the 1837 drawings, possibly occupied by clerks. ©Historic England DP164939.



Figure 28: Room 4, second floor, marked as kitchen in 1837, showing a small late 19th century fireplace. ©Historic England DP164942.



Figure 29: The basement, showing the tiered construction of the walls. ©Historic England DP164947.



Figure 30: The iron ceiling found in the basement towards the centre of the building on the western side. ©Historic England DP164946.

Basement

Access is via the stairs from the entrance hall or those in ground floor room 2, the latter being of relatively recent date. They lead into a large room on the east side of the building (sub-divided on the 1837 plan). Circulation is via a central corridor off which open a number of small rooms and, in turn from these, vaults beneath the colonnade. The ceiling to the central part on the western side of the building is of iron plates, possibly as a form of fireproofing for a strong room. The floor is paved with brick to the central and western part.

Discussion

The Principal Building raises a number of issues that remain unresolved. Firstly, there is the question of how the rooms were re-used following the conversion of the building into a hotel. The plans prepared for the 1841 extension show the room layout for the 1838 building as being unchanged but no indication of the use of the rooms. Any discussion of what the board room or the Secretary's office was used for under the building's new guise as a hotel must remain speculation in the absence of hard evidence.

Secondly, it is clear that the window and door openings in the north façade that adjoined the hotel addition have been subject to change over the years. This raises a number of questions. The 1837 Hardwick drawings show nine window openings in this façade of equal width (5ft). Today, there is a central door on the ground floor in place of one of these windows and there are blocked openings either side of it, that on the left hand side being considerably enlarged in width. When was this carried out? There is little firm evidence – the 1841 drawings clearly show the first-floor north façade windows blocked up but there is no plan for the ground floor or second floor. The 1968 drawings do not include the north elevation so it is not possible to see what the position was then. To compound the problem, the two outer windows on the ground floor of the south elevation are also of greater width (6ft 8in) than the central one or those on the first and second floors (5ft), and this is as drawn by Hardwick in 1837. The location of the 1841 hotel addition is marked by replacement stonework outlining its position on the north elevation of the 1838 building. Are all the windows on this façade replacements following the demolition of the hotel?

Thirdly, linked to this, there is the question of the originality of the remainder of the windows. All the windows have horns to both the upper and lower sashes. Horns are associated with the introduction of larger sizes of glass and were introduced to enable the sashes to better support the increased weight of the glass. However, at Curzon Street, the windows are traditional small pane sashes and while some of the windows are large, many others are not and yet all have horns. The use of horns was not widespread at the time of the construction of the building and it could be

argued that their inclusion points to a later replacement of the sashes. The roof of the Principal Building was hit by an oil bomb and an incendiary in August 1940 and the building remained out of use until after the end of the war.⁵² The Top Yard, just on the other side of Curzon Street from the Principal Building, received a direct hit, destroying a paper warehouse and this may well have caused blast damage. This may have required replacement of all the sashes in the building, which would explain the presence of the horns, but there is no firm evidence for this.

Fourthly, there is the curious ledge running along the north and south walls of the entrance hall at second-floor level which defies explanation. It could be some form of housing for fire buckets or for coat hooks but it is ill-positioned for either of those uses, with much it only accessible by step-ladder.



Figure 31: The shelf running at eye level on the flanking walls of the second floor of the entrance hall. ©Historic England DP164935.

7.3 The Surrounding Area

Structures that once surrounded the L&BR Principal Building of 1838, both those within the railway boundary and those outside it, have largely been demolished. Fragmentary survivals such as boundary walls and also the L&BR and GJR viaducts, together with the street and canal patterns, may be affected by future development of the area.

7.3.1 The Boundary Walls

New Canal Street

The boundary wall to the south of the 1838 L&BR building in New Canal Street has two openings flanked by ashlar gateposts on each side. These have unadorned caps and are probably of early date, although not dating back to 1838 when the building was flanked on each side by tall arched openings. The site of the second opening was then occupied by early nineteenth-century houses in New Canal Street. The posts currently have modern metal security gates inserted. Then to the south, the wall has been rebuilt since the goods depot closed in 1966, with an angled rather than a curved wall. The remainder of the wall is in English bond, with the headers formed of the distinctive blue engineering bricks favoured by the LNWR, and has, when compared to the 1966 survey photographs, been cut down in height. The wall formed part of the end wall of several buildings formerly on the site and this is evident in the presence of three stone window sills high up in the existing wall. The wall retains a curved corner as it turns into Banbury Street and this part is similar to that in New Canal Street. Numerous repairs and patching have been executed in blue brick over the years.



Figure 32: The early (but not original) gate posts to the south of the 1838 building. ©Historic England DP164948.



Figure 33. The boundary wall of the goods station, south of the 1838 building, with the sills of windows formerly part of buildings constructed abutting the wall.
©Historic England DP164951.



Figure 34: The balustrade behind which the 1841 hotel extension formerly stood.
©John Minnis.

Curzon Street

A length of wall with an intermittent balustrade adjoins the 1838 building to the north, constructed of matching sandstone and formerly fronting the now demolished hotel wing. This was likely to have been built at the time the hotel block was added in 1841, matching that shown in the NRM drawings. Some balusters have been replaced, probably during the 1980s restoration. Behind the site of the hotel, there is a low wall in blue engineering brick, panelled with cogging at the top of the panels – standard LNWR practice. The walling continues in red and blue brick, with a plinth but without the panelling or cogging. There is then a straight joint with a section in recent blue brick (post 1966) until a short section of red brick walling to the east of the site of the former level crossing to the goods yard on the north side of Curzon Street.



Figure 35: The base of the Grand Junction Railway screen wall. ©Historic England DP164954.

The next portion of boundary wall is formed of the lower part of the 1838 screen wall of the GJR terminus. The screen wall was constructed in red brick, stuccoed on the exterior face and with channelled rustication, on an ashlar plinth, two courses high and topped with an ashlar parapet. It was divided into three sections: a raised central part with a dentilled entablature and paired Doric pilasters, itself divided into three with a broad central part, flanked by two narrower parts. This raised central section was in turn flanked by two lower parts, with less ornate decorative treatment. Of this, the following survives:

a) the seven westernmost bays (of nine) of the west flanking wall. The stone plinth is present but the stucco facing has had the rustication filled in.

b) the six easternmost bays (of thirteen) of the raised central part. Again the plinth is evident and so are the paired pilasters.

c) the seven westernmost bays (of ten) of the east flanking wall. This is retained to a greater height than the other two portions of walling and also still has two of its bands of rustication. The westernmost bay (formerly an entrance) retains curved curb stones to the entry and granite gate pier protectors.



Figure 36: The remains of the screen wall, looking towards the 1838 Principal Building. A granite gate pier protector and curved curb stones to the entry remain. ©Historic England DP164955.

The demolished bays of the screen wall have been replaced in blue brick walling or are now entrances to the car park currently occupying the site. Following the former screen wall, there is a short length of red brick walling, still on an ashlar plinth, which may well be contemporary with the screen wall and then a later red brick wall with bands of blue brick headers, formerly forming the lower part of the wall of the LNWR hydraulic pumping station that supplied power for lifts and capstans within the goods station. There is a window blocked up in blue brick within this section. The date of the pumping station is unknown but it is likely to date from the 1870s-80s.



Figure 37: The most easterly stretch of the boundary wall of the Curzon Street site. The section of wall on an ashlar base may well be contemporary with the GJR screen while that beyond employs bands of the blue engineering bricks much favoured by the LNWR and incorporates a blocked window from the accumulator tower. ©Historic England DP164958.



Figure 38: The bridge carrying the lines into Curzon Street over the Digbeth Branch Canal, looking south. ©Historic England DP164960.

7.3.2 The Canal Bridge

The listed railway arch over the Birmingham Canal Navigations (Digbeth Branch Canal) was built in 1837-8 by the engineer Joseph Locke as a joint enterprise for the L&BR and GJR, providing access to Curzon Street. The north-east elevation remains unaltered, the south-west face incorporated into bridge widening when the line was carried through to New Street. The bridge is of brick, faced in ashlar with a broad elliptical arch. The architectural treatment of the bridge is relatively elaborate. The voussoirs are chamfered and stepped in groups of three. It has slightly battered abutments with channelled ashlar piers. A corbel bracketed cornice is broken forward over the piers with an ashlar parapet above. The original bridge extends approximately 49 yards in depth with slightly skewed brickwork to the vault with later work further to the south.

7.3.3 The Vauxhall Viaducts

The L&BR viaduct (Robert Stephenson, 1838) survives, hidden behind subsequent widenings on each side. The viaduct was the longest on the line, 711ft in length, with 10 main arches, each of 50ft span. The original arches with stone voussoirs are visible at the crossing of Lawley Middleway.



Figure 39: The converging London & Birmingham Railway and Grand Junction Railway viaducts with Curzon Street station visible in the background. From Drake's Road Book of the London & Birmingham and Grand Junction Railways, 1840.

The GJR viaduct (Joseph Locke, 1838) (listed grade II) is visible on its south side from Viaduct Road. It is of 28 arches, in brick with rusticated quoins, a moulded stone cornice and stone voussoirs. The north side has a second viaduct in blue engineering brick abutting it on the north side, dating from the 1893 widening of the lines into New Street. This was built at the same time as the original viaduct was raised by the construction of an additional set of arches above it to enable the GJR route to cross up and over the goods lines rather than cross them on the level. In doing this, the LNWR created what was in effect a two-storey viaduct and the example remains unique.



Figure 40: The Grand Junction Railway viaduct looking north where it crosses Lawley Middleway. The additional arches added above the cornice in 1893 to raise the GJR route sufficiently to avoid it crossing the goods lines on the level are clearly evident. ©Historic England DP164962.

8. ARCHAEOLOGY

When the goods depot was demolished following closure in 1966, buildings were subsequently erected on part of the site to serve Royal Mail parcels (subsequently Parcelforce). These in turn were demolished and their footprint is evident in the concrete bases that cover much of the site. The buildings were light steel structures and it is likely that their footings may not have caused widespread disturbance to the hidden archaeology below.

Curzon Street provides an opportunity to discover the hidden archaeology of the Birmingham terminus of the first main line railway from London and that of its companion from Manchester. As it closed to passengers so early, it retained many of its original components including the train shed until closure in 1966. There are only three railway termini of the pre-1840 period extant - the pioneering Liverpool Road station, Manchester (1830), of the Liverpool & Manchester Railway, that of the Leeds & Selby Railway at Selby (1834), and Brunel's Bristol Temple Meads (1840) - and excavation would enable much more to be known as to how a large city railway station of the 1830s was laid out. The circular Engine House of 1837-8 should also be mentioned. Successful excavations of engine sheds at York and Westbourne Park, Paddington have recently been carried out; the Curzon Street example pre-dates them by many years and would be one of the earliest such structures anywhere in the world to be investigated. The Engine House appears to have been in an area not subsequently concreted over and there is a good possibility that there may be substantial below-ground remains.



Figure 41: The GJR viaduct seen from Viaduct Road, looking east. ©Historic England DP164965.



Figure 42: The north side of the GJR viaduct, as widened in blue engineering brick in 1893. ©Historic England DP164969.

As some of these structures may not fall within the area required for the HS2 terminal, there is the possibility of incorporating the excavated remains within public open space, as a public realm feature, providing poignant contrast between two differing ages of rail travel, that of the Stephensons and the technology of today, approaching two hundred years apart by the time the new terminal is constructed.

With the retention of the L&BR Principal Building and the base of the screen wall of the GJR station, it has the potential to create that same blend of past and present that has proved so successful in the recent rebuilding of St Pancras and King's Cross.

9. CONTEXT

The Birmingham Principal Building has always remained in the shadow of Hardwick's much more celebrated Arch (or strictly propylaeum) at Euston. Its purpose has long been the subject of confusion. It is generally described as Curzon Street Station, a function it has never performed, even though it was part of the station complex. Designed as offices and a boardroom, it should perhaps be assessed as an office building, rather than as a railway station (which it never was) or hotel (which it subsequently became). But it is much more than that. The L&BR

was the first railway to connect London with a major provincial city and the offices were conceived as a frontispiece to the station, fulfilling the same function as the Euston Arch, marking what was held to be one of mankind's greatest achievements. Its significance is to be seen in the way in which plans of the layout of Curzon Street, along with those of Euston and some other English stations, were reproduced as exemplars abroad in such publications as the influential Austrian architectural and engineering journal *Allgemeine Bantzeitung*.⁵³ Britain was the world leader in the development of railways and what was being constructed was of international importance. Arthur Freeling in his guide to the railway said of the L&BR, 'This is a Roman Work, conceived in a Roman spirit, and accomplished with Roman perseverance and determination'.⁵⁴ Only a neo-Classical building on a grand scale was appropriate in such circumstances, and Hardwick's design should be considered for its symbolic function as much as for its practical qualities.

Although the Euston Arch was the greatest of all of them, many early British railway buildings and structures have a monumental quality. The Moorish Arch at Edge Hill (1829-30, fragments remain, undesignated) on the Liverpool & Manchester Railway (L&MR) is perhaps the closest comparable structure to it. The screen at Lime Street Station, Liverpool (1835-36) by John Foster (demolished), already mentioned, is also an important example. Certainly, the tunnel mouths of the earliest main line railways such as those at Primrose Hill (1837, listed grade II) and Kilsby (1838, listed grade II*) on the L&BR, Box (1841, listed II*) on the GWR and Audley End (1845, listed grade II) on the Eastern Counties Railway have a similar quality. Later, some station buildings such as Huddersfield (1847, listed grade I) and Monkwearmouth (1848, listed grade II*) had magnificent porticos that attested to the wealth and significance of the railways.

Triumphal arches were used elsewhere on early railways to give the appropriate degree of grandeur - as we have seen, in buildings such as Foster's Liverpool Lime Street and Franklin's GJR Curzon Street screens - but also in bridges such as Ignatius Bonomi's Skerne bridge on the Stockton & Darlington Railway (1825, Ancient Monument), the Chippenham New Road arch (1841, I. K. Brunel listed II*) or the Montpellier bridge, Brighton (1841 listed II). But in each case, as with Curzon Street, the structure served a practical function as well as a symbolic one.

However, the Principal Building can also appropriately be compared with a number of non-railway structures. The monumental classical screen front in such examples as Robert Adam's Admiralty screen (1760-61) and Soane's treatment of the south wall of the Bank of England (1823-27) was an obvious inspiration to the architects of the early railway stations. Structures such as Marble Arch (John Nash, 1825-26), with its triple archway derived from the Arch of Constantine, and Wellington Arch (Decimus Burton, 1826-29) are other prototypes, and the latter with its detached columns, single opening and prominent attic may have been an influence on the design of Curzon Street.

Curzon Street may be viewed as an early example of a purpose-built office building. Following the introduction of large purpose-built government offices such as Somerset House in the late eighteenth century, the commercial office building emerged as a building type in the City of London in the 1820s, largely for banks and insurance companies. The first building solely designed for use as commercial offices was believed by the leading designer of such structures, Edward l'Anson, to be in Clements Lane in the City in 1823.⁵⁵ L'Anson himself built his first offices in Moorgate Street in 1837.⁵⁶ Philip Hardwick is recorded as having designed the Globe Insurance office in Cornhill the same year.⁵⁷ Large blocks of commercial chambers did not emerge until the 1840s.

Only a limited comparison with other railway offices and boardrooms is possible. The L&MR had its boardroom on the first floor of its Crown Street terminus, opened in 1830 but, as it was closed in 1836 and demolished later in that decade, nothing is known about its layout and furnishings. The only other boardroom and offices that are directly comparable in terms of date to those at Curzon Street are those of the GWR at Temple Meads Station, Bristol, designed by I. K. Brunel in 1839 and completed by 1842. They were accommodated on the first floor of a three-storey building, the remainder of the building being given over to residential accommodation for the Superintendent and other staff. The offices, which still exist in largely unaltered form, were on a considerably grander scale than those at Curzon Street. The directors had their own entrance to the building, there was a broad staircase with elaborate newel posts and a ceiling light pendant, all in Gothic style, while the boardroom had an oriel window, an elaborate cornice, a Tudor Gothic fireplace with massive battlemented overmantel and a folding oak partition separating it from the Secretary's office.⁵⁸ While the Bristol offices lacked the impressive large open hall rising the full three storeys of Curzon Street, Brunel's lavish detailing contrasted with the austerity of what was provided by the L&BR. Interestingly, just as with Curzon Street, there was a proposal within a year or so of completion of the building to convert the boardroom and offices into a hotel. This was not put into effect and the boardroom remained in use until 1858.⁵⁹

CONCLUSION

The destruction of the Euston Arch in 1961-2 removed what was widely accepted as the greatest monument of the railway age. It placed a heightened focus on the Arch's Birmingham equivalent at Curzon Street, designed by the same architect at the same time in order to evoke the same feelings of awe and wonder. For too long, Curzon Street has remained isolated, set apart from the commercial life of Birmingham and standing in a wilderness of car parks and wasteland. The arrival of HS2 presents an opportunity to at last provide a setting worthy of Hardwick's magnificent building. The Curzon Street Station Principal Building is perhaps the finest surviving example in England of a building designed to celebrate the arrival of the railway as a supreme endeavour of progress and a harbinger of future prosperity. Its location, alongside the latest expression of that endeavour almost

200 years later, is a happy coincidence. Its significance should be fully recognised and it be enabled to play an active role in marking a new age of rail travel. The base of the screen wall of the GJR station, a fragment that reflects the work of two of Liverpool's most accomplished nineteenth-century architects, and draws upon the triumphal arches of ancient Rome to form a symbolic gateway to the future, is also part of this story and the possibility of incorporating it and other remains of the two stations that may be uncovered by archaeology should also be investigated.

NOTES

- 1 See for example, *Birmingham Journal*, 2 September 1837, 5.
- 2 *The Times*, 11 April 1838, 6.
- 3 Osborne n. d. [1840], 196-197.
- 4 See, for example, Hobhouse 1976, 40.
- 5 Foster 1990, 39.
- 6 Foster (1) 1990, 40.
- 7 Figure from Osborne's Guide n. d. [1840], opp. 197.
- 8 Van Laun 2014; Klingender 1972 133-42.
- 9 TNA RAIL 384/22, 13 January 1842.
- 10 *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 14 April 1838, 4.
- 11 According to Foster 1990, 43, publishing a redrawn plan believed to date from 1837/38.
- 12 *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 14 April 1838, 4.
- 13 Osborne 1838,100.
- 14 National Railway Museum 2001-7979.
- 15 Fully quoted by Foster (1) 1990, 45.
- 16 *The Times*, 17 September 1838, 7.
- 17 Foster 1990 (1), 40.
- 18 *The Times*, 18 September 1838, 3.
- 19 Osborne GJR 1838, 100-101.
- 20 TNA RAIL 384/98, 28 January 1839.
- 21 TNA RAIL 384/98, 25 January 1839.
- 22 Carter 1990, 8.
- 23 Foster 1990 (1), 53.
- 24 Thomas 1980, 119.
- 25 Sharples 2004, 207.
- 26 Foster 1990 (1), 44-45.

- 27 Webster 1972, 151
- 28 GJR notice quoted in Foster 1990 (1), 43
- 29 Osborne 1838, 99-100
- 30 Carter 1990, 15
- 31 TNA RAIL 384/3, 20 July 1839
- 32 TNA RAIL 384/3, 20 July 1839
- 33 TNA RAIL 384/3, 23 August 1839
- 34 TNA RAIL 384/4, 20 December 1839
- 35 TNA RAIL 384/4, 12 June 1840
- 36 TNA RAIL 384/4, 28 August and 11 September 1840
- 37 TNA RAIL 384/4, 11 February 1841
- 38 TNA RAIL 384/22, 11 June 1841
- 39 TNA RAIL 384/4, 11 June 1841
- 40 TNA RAIL 384/202, 1 October 1842
- 41 NRM 2002-7979
- 42 Foster 1990 (1), 69
- 43 Quick 2009, 86
- 44 *Birmingham Gazette*, 6 March 1854, 3
- 45 Foster 1990 (2), 71-112, Foster 1997, 79-126
- 46 Historic England Archive bb64_02090-bb64_02112
- 47 Webster 1972, 189
- 48 *The Times*, 11 April 1838
- 49 Osborne 1838, 198
- 50 *The Times*, 18 September 1838
- 51 Reproduced in Foster 1997, 109
- 52 Foster 1997, 113
- 53 <http://anno.onb.ac.at>, accessed 7 January 2015
- 54 Freeling 1837, 19

- 55 Hitchcock 1954, 375
- 56 Hitchcock 1954, 375
- 57 Colvin 2008, 479
- 58 Binding 2001, 33-52
- 59 Binding 2001, 52

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