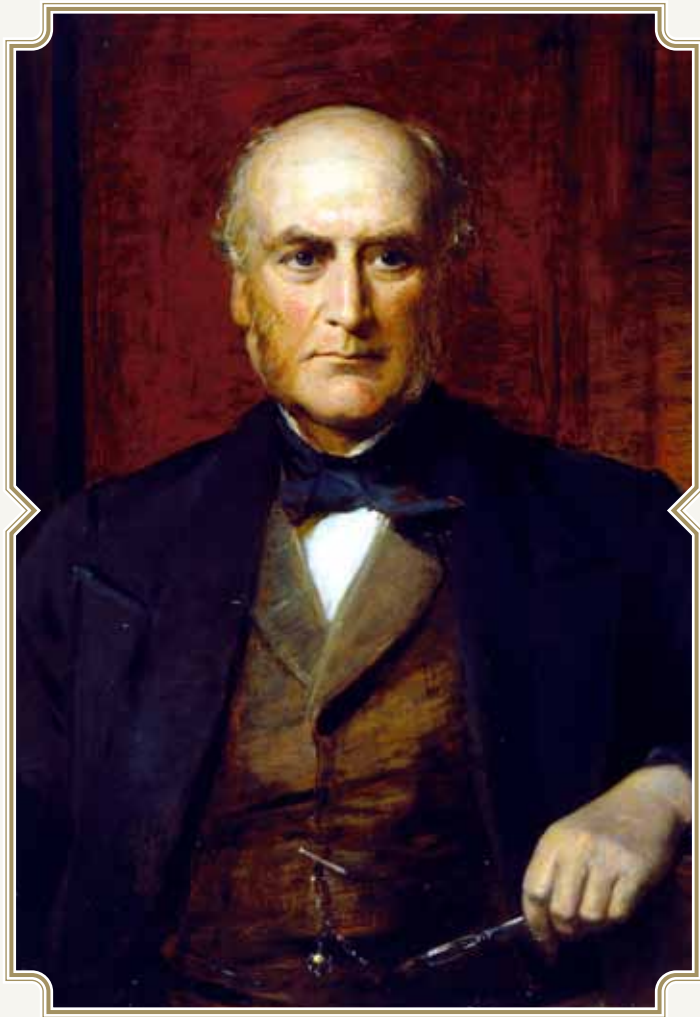




**ST PANCRAS
STORIES**



SIR GEORGE GILBERT SCOTT



The extraordinary design of St Pancras station and its adjoining hotel (then the Midland Grand) was the vision of one man: Sir George Gilbert Scott. A prolific designer of Victorian churches and workhouses, Scott was inspired by Augustus Pugin's Gothic Revival design of the new Palace of Westminster and by buildings he had seen in mainland Europe to devise his own exuberant, eclectic, colourful form of Gothic for the hotel.

Instead of stone, Scott built the Midland Grand from Midlands red brick, and oversaw its extravagant furnishing and fitting-out. It was his masterpiece; a monument to luxury, convenience and comfort in the architectural trappings of a cathedral. Although it closed in 1935, the building became one of Londoners' most-loved landmarks. It wasn't the only one Scott designed: his Albert Memorial in Hyde Park was completed in 1876. Scott was knighted in 1872, and is buried in Westminster Abbey.

The St Pancras Renaissance Hotel staff are so proud of Sir George Gilbert Scott that we named a magnificent one bedroom suite in his honour. This stunning suite is located on the first floor of the St Pancras Chamber and boasts a sitting room of real gold leaf wallpaper, a signature 'Sang' ceiling and dark wood Victorian furniture.



THE GRAND STAIRCASE



If you have a taste for elegant, spiralling staircases and grand entrances, you could not have chosen a better place to stay in the whole of London. The Grand Staircase, designed originally to allow ladies in wide bustles to pass each other with ease, is considered by many to be the most majestic in the country, and the building's masterpiece.

The snaking double staircase, with wrought iron balustrading that still houses its original gaslight fittings, is a wonder of high Victorian Gothic fantasy. It climbs three storeys to a spectacular vaulted ceiling richly decorated with paintings of stars and the Seven Virtues.

It was here, and in the cathedral-height windows, that architect George Gilbert Scott's experience as a prolific designer of churches and chapels came most to the fore. In creating London's most lavishly appointed playground for the rich and famous, the intensely religious Scott was still determined to impress upon guests the need for good behaviour.

The St Pancras Renaissance Hotel staff are so proud of The Grand Staircase that we named a magnificent bedroom suite in its honour. This three floor suite is located on the third floor of the St Pancras Chamber and sits beside the stunning panels of the virtues in the roof of the Grand Staircase.

QUEEN VICTORIA



This hotel was not the only major commission occupying architect George Gilbert Scott in the 1860s. He was also seeking to please none other than Her Majesty Queen Victoria.

When her beloved Prince Albert died in 1861, Victoria requested a grand public memorial that would sit in Hyde Park, close to where Albert's brainchild, the Great Exhibition had captivated London in 1851. Scott beat Philip Charles Hardwick (designer of Euston Station's Great Hall) to the commission, and worked on it alongside his intensive work on the hotel.

The memorial was formally opened by Victoria in July 1872 (although the statue of Albert wasn't installed until 1875). The famously hard-to-please monarch must have approved; in October she knighted Scott. It is not unreasonable to believe that, as a connoisseur of fine architecture, she would also have given the royal thumbs-up to the Midland Grand Hotel, which opened just a few months later, in May 1873.

VIRGINIA WOOLF



Virginia Woolf, the author of *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), *To The Lighthouse* (1927), and *Orlando* (1928), was born into artistic society. Her mother, Julia Stephen, was a renowned beauty and modelled for Pre-Raphaelite painters such as Edward Burne-Jones. Childhood holidays at Talland House in St Ives, Cornwall, which looked across Porthminster Bay to Godrevy Lighthouse, charged Virginia's imagination and later became a major influence on her fiction.

After selling the family home in Hyde Park Gate, Virginia and her sister Vanessa Stephen (later Bell) became central members of the Bloomsbury Group of writers, artists and intellectuals; the group would meet on Thursday evenings at the house the sisters had bought with their brother Adrian at 46 Gordon Square, not far from the hotel.

She enjoyed the happiest of marriages to writer Leonard Woolf and her central three novels established her as one of the most poetic and innovative of all English novelists. But the onset of war and the poor reception of her biography of her friend Roger Fry led to depression and suicide in 1941, when she filled her overcoat's pockets with stones and walked into the River Ouse near her home in Sussex.

The world renowned British Library which is located next to the St Pancras Renaissance Hotel houses the Virginia Woolf suicide letters.

EDWARD MORGAN FORSTER



Edward Morgan (or EM) Forster, the English novelist and short story writer, was born in Dorset Square, Marylebone, not far from the hotel, and was a member of the discussion group at Cambridge University that formed the nucleus of the Bloomsbury Group.

He is best known for his novels, *A Room With A View* (1908), *Howard's End* (1910) and *A Passage To India* (1924), which examined the class differences and contradictions of colonial-era British society. His wish for greater empathy and understanding between social circles was summed up by the two-word epigraph to *Howards End*: “Only connect”.

DESMOND AND MOLLY MACCARTHY



Desmond and Molly MacCarthy were, respectively, a literary critic and writer who married and became members of the Bloomsbury Group of writers, artists and intellectuals.

At Cambridge University, Desmond formed a circle with Lytton Strachey, Bertrand Russell and others, and later assisted art critic Roger Fry in organising his two controversial exhibitions of French Post-Impressionist art. MacCarthy went on to become literary editor of the *New Statesman* and the *Sunday Times*, and as editor of *Life and Letters* published work by Russell, Hilaire Belloc, Virginia Woolf and Aldous Huxley.

In 1906 he married Molly, the daughter of Francis Warre-Cornish and a respected literary figure in her own right. Despite progressive hearing loss, Molly was an active member of the Bloomsbury Group – based close to what was then the Midland Grand Hotel – forming the Memoir Group and the Novel Group and coming up with the name of ‘Bloomsberries’ for her fellow members. Her books include *A Pier and a Band* (1918) and *A Nineteenth-Century Childhood* (1924).

TAKING SHAPE



The Midland Grand Hotel took five years to construct and involved the skills of numerous builders, stonemasons, artists, craftsmen, and tradesmen.

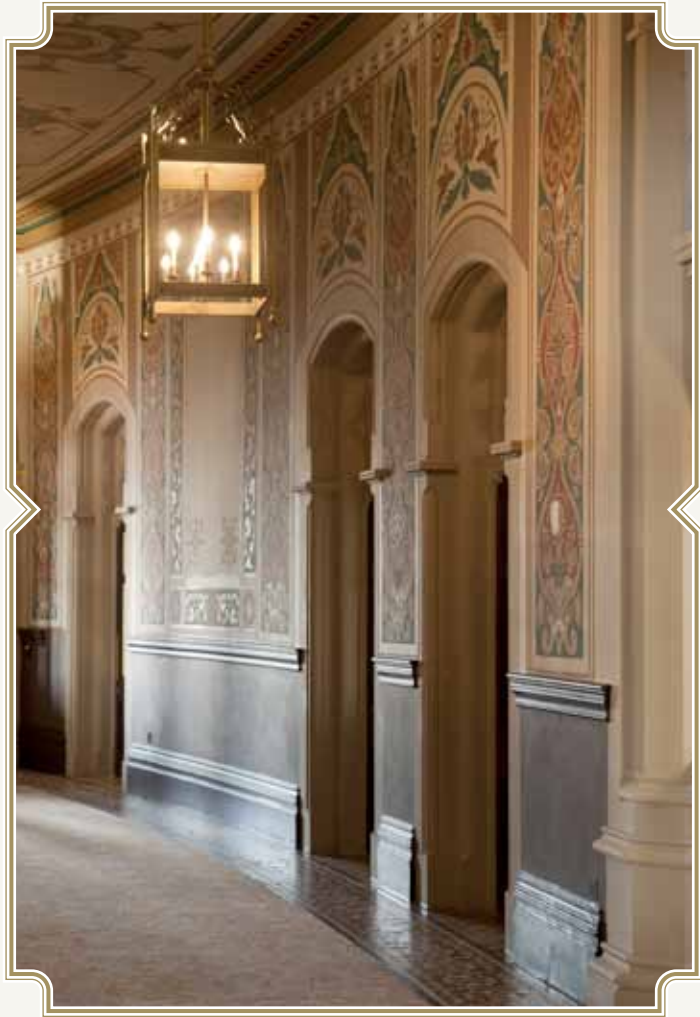
During this period nine stonemasons were employed to carve the legion of capitals, headstops and gargoyles that decorated the building inside and out. In the Dining and Coffee Room (now The Gilbert Scott Restaurant), pillars of polished limestone lined the walls, their gilded capitals carved with conkers, pea pods and bursting pomegranates. The Ladies' Smoking Room – the first public room in Europe in which women were permitted to smoke – boasted a breathtaking painted ceiling as well as granite pillars, carved stonework and a magnificent terrace overlooking the hustle and bustle of New Road. As he surveyed his creation, Scott himself remarked that the hotel was “almost too good for its purpose”.

TALK OF THE TOWN



Once open, the Midland Grand quickly became the talk of the town. In its heyday, guests paid between three-and-a-half shillings and several pounds to spend a night there; only The Langham on Portland Place was more expensive. The final bill for the hotel's construction had come in at a staggering £438,000 – around £500 million today – but now the Midland Railway was reaping the benefits of a new, lucrative revenue stream as well as the considerable prestige the hotel attracted.

That prestige accumulated as word spread further afield. As well as homegrown celebrities such as the music hall favourite Marie Lloyd and the boss of Boot's The Chemist, Jesse Boot, the hotel could count among its guests eminent visitors from abroad such as railroad and shipping entrepreneur Cornelius 'Commodore' Vanderbilt – one of the world's richest Americans – and George Pullman, creator of the luxurious Pullman sleeping car.



LUXURY AND INNOVATION



It wasn't just the splendour and luxury that distinguished the Midland Grand. Guests were equally taken with the technological innovations that added to their comfort. It was the first hotel in the world to offer an alternative to stairs: a pair of 'hydraulic ascending chambers' magically transported guests (in one chamber) and their luggage (in the second) between the four main floors.

A unique electric bell calling system allowed guests to summon service with the push of a button. There were toilets that flushed – unheard-of in hotels at the time, who relied on chamber pots. Furthermore, the revolving door which was installed in 1899 in the original entrance hall was the first in Britain and was supplied by its inventor, Theophilus Van Kannel.

A STORY OF DECLINE



For 30 years or more after its opening, the Midland Grand retained its glamour for visitors travelling to London. By the 1920s, though, it was losing its sparkle; the great and the good were staying elsewhere in town. It wasn't that the hotel's beauty had faded; its shortcomings were to do with more mundane and practical matters.

The unique features and construction of the original hotel now hindered efforts to modernise and stay in touch with competitors. The monumental construction of the thick concrete floor rendered it impossible to install new plumbing systems that could have serviced en-suite bathrooms which by that time had become de rigour. Other efforts to arrest the decline such as an in house orchestra were to no avail and in 1935 the hotel closed.

A STORY OF SURVIVAL



Against all the odds, the building remained standing despite determined attempts by the Luftwaffe and London's modernising planners to knock it down. During raids in World War II, the hotel was bombed three times within a month, but its sturdy construction saw it through almost unscathed. After the war, St Pancras Chambers (as it was now known) was used as offices by British Rail and its hospitality business, British Transport Hotels. Clearly, the staff found working amidst such faded grandeur uncomfortable: much of the magnificent original stencilling and paintwork was simply whitewashed without a care, and the carved stone pillars were boarded up.

Calls for it to be demolished gathered steam; but one prominent, much-loved voice was raised in protest. Sir John Betjeman called the plan to demolish St Pancras "a criminal folly". He adored the building's extravagance and wrote: "What [the Londoner] sees in his mind's eye is that cluster of towers and pinnacles seen from Pentonville Hill and outlined against a foggy sunset, and the great arc of Barlow's train shed gaping to devour incoming engines, and the sudden burst of exuberant Gothic of the hotel seen from gloomy Judd Street." Betjeman campaigned tirelessly and in 1967 succeeded in securing Grade 1 listing for the building, thereby ensuring its preservation.



THE PANELS OF THE EIGHT VIRTUES



Decorating the vaulted ceiling above the Grand Staircase is one of the hotel's most eye-catching and idiosyncratic features. The Panels of the Eight Virtues were painted by Edward William Godwin, one of the leading architect/artists of the Aesthetic Movement (precursor of the Arts and Crafts Movement).

However, it wasn't the hotel Godwin had in mind when he designed them. Godwin's major commission in the 1860s was to design a castle for the Earl of Limerick in Ireland. Money was no object and Godwin had a free hand, designing furniture, fittings and decorations for his neo-Gothic pile. Among these designs was a set of allegorical paintings of the eight virtues, to fill the panels of the dining hall's vaulted ceiling. When the ceiling was found to be too damp for the paintings, Godwin found a willing buyer in Gillows – the company that was furnishing the Midland Grand Hotel and decorating the hotel's western wing. Their man, Donaldson, successfully glue the cartoons to the panels above the Grand Staircase, and seamlessly added the vivid blue sky and stars.

The panels depict: Humility; Liberality; Industry; Chastity; Temperance; Truth; Charity; and Patience.



THE EIGHT VIRTUES



Humility portrays the qualities of modest behaviour, selflessness and respect for others.

The panel of Liberality illustrates the quality of generosity to others in material need.

The figure of Industry portrays the qualities of commitment, fortitude and integrity.

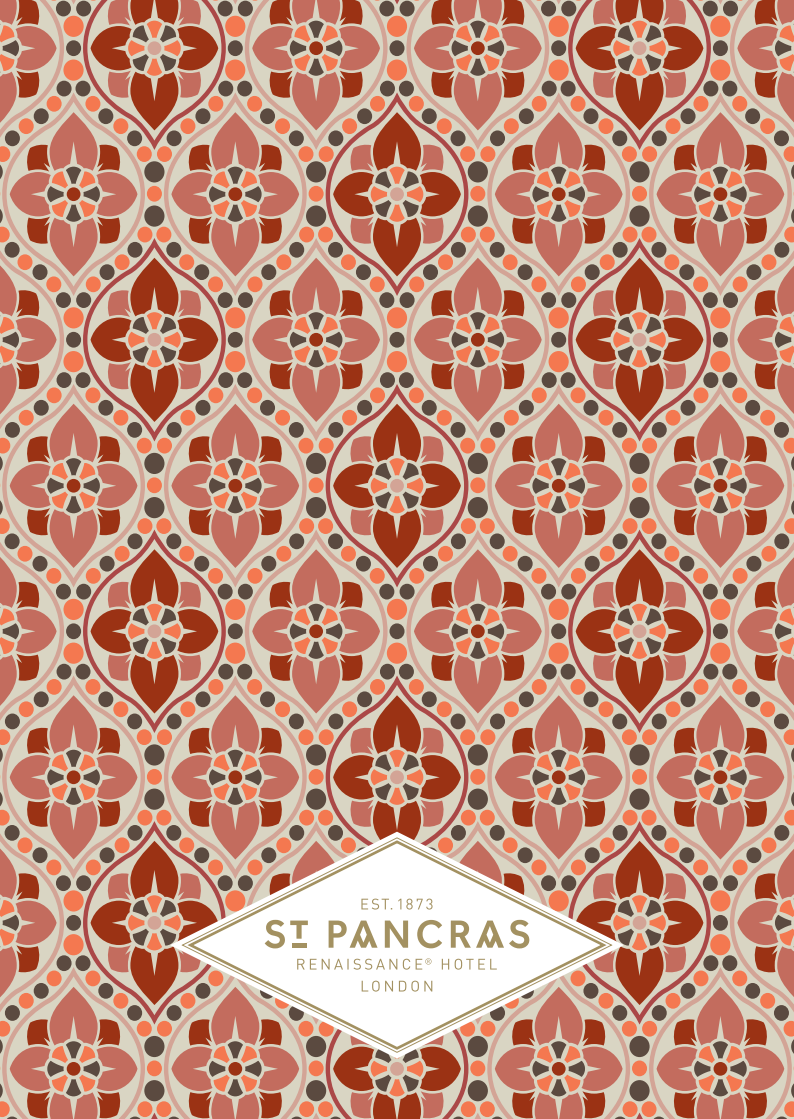
Chastity represents the embrace of moral wholesomeness and the ability to resist distraction by temptation, hostility or corruption.

The figure of Temperance illustrates the qualities of moderation, honour and justice.

Truth is an allegory for the qualities of both honesty and straightforwardness.

The panel of Charity illustrates love for others, and a spirit of benevolence and self-sacrifice.

The panel of Patience depicts the broader, traditional meaning of the word: the ability to create a sense of peaceful stability by resolving conflicts without violence and showing mercy to wrong-doers.



EST. 1873

SI PANCRAS

RENAISSANCE® HOTEL
LONDON