

THE RESTORATION OF THE WESTERN RAILWAY STATION IN BUDAPEST

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In 1833, the Pest city council came to an agreement with the Austrian State Railway Company about the construction of a new railway terminus worthy of the capital. The city allotted a site on the city boulevard, relatively close to the Danube. On this site, which had a really very important position in relation to the city's overall appearance, a dignified station was constructed between 1875 and 1877. Basically, the cross-section of the building resembled that of a basilica with a central nave and two side aisles, with the difference that the nave, which was here the reception hall for the trains, was three times as wide as the side aisles. These latter served to separate the facilities for arriving and departing passengers. In keeping with its function, the aisle on the right-hand side was much more magnificently decorated, and it was there that the restaurant and the parcels office were to be found, and there also were the ticket offices. The arrival side was less pompous, with the exception of the waiting room which was used for welcoming the imperial couple on visits and which had a rich stucco and fresco decoration.

Not only the ingenious solution of the division of the arriving and departing traffic flows was a novelty for the time, but also the train shed, the roof of which spanned 42 metres, constructed in the Polonceau system, and was 25 m high and 153 m long. This bold steel construction was not only a novelty in Hungary and the whole Habsburg Monarchy at the time, but with regard to its span, there were only four larger ones in the whole of the rest of the world. At the same time, the hall was of an especially light construction and magnificent appearance which was even further increased by the light which came flooding in through the roof glazing and the side walls, and which, in the opinion of the time, did not just illuminate the interior, but also gave it a superb form. The best example for praise from abroad is that the station gained unstinted acknowledgement at the Paris universal exhibition in 1878, and the machine exhibition hall was, indeed, built following the plans of the Budapest station.

Right down to the present day, Hungarian specialist literature on the subject has not been able to provide an answer to the question of the identity of the planner of this masterpiece of its time. The projects which were also exhibited at the time, and parts of which are known, were erected by Augustin de Serres, the chief construction engineer of the railway company, or to be more correct, his signature is to be found on them. The idea was so original and bold for its time, that it is difficult to link it with just one person for whom we do not have any other similarly splendid work. This is proved by nothing better than the fact that the construction was not undertaken by either an Austrian or a Hungarian firm, but several foreign companies were invited to tender, and in the end the firm of Eiffel et Co. was awarded the contract. The spiritual author of the iron construction of the train shed was T. Seyry, a French engineer, one of Eiffel's partners and head of the company. Thus the opinion has often been voiced in Hungarian specialist literature that the creator of this bold, and for its time almost unique planning concept, is to be sought in this group. There is a further fact which is also of considerable importance. Owing to the state's persistent financial difficulties, the Austrian State Railways were to a considerable part in the hands of French financial groups.

In point of fact, the company only manufactured and supplied the three-bayed iron construction. Hungarian firms were entrusted with the other works, and the site technical direction was in the hands of a Hungarian, László Gyenge. Nevertheless, the external appearance and the internal decoration reflected the tastes of French historicism.

The station, which was opened for traffic in 1877, was able - thanks to its up to date features - to satisfy the requirements for a main-line terminus for over a hundred years.

During the Second World War, the station did, it is true, suffer severe damage, but this was repaired as far as possible after the war. In 1952 it was then declared a monument, so to speak as one of the first Hungarian monuments, because, as a result of out-dated legislation, up to then, there were fewer than monuments under protection in Hungary. Despite this, the management of the Hungarian State Railways decided on demolition.

The application for demolition was justified with the perilous state of the covering of the train shed. Several factors were the cause of this evaluation of the state of the main hall.

When the station was built, it was, so to speak, at the periphery of the capital. But, after a hundred years, as a result of Budapest's enormous growth, it was already part of the inner city. This phenomenon, which is to be found in all European capitals, was much more difficult in Hungary due to the fact that the other two main stations in the capital, the Eastern Station and the Southern Station, were also wedged into the heart of Pest and Buda respectively. With this unfortunate situation in mind, the city planners of the past half century did, of course, consider the idea of moving out of the city centre. It is equally well known that a resiting would consume such vast sums, not just because of the construction of the station buildings on a different site, but also because of the reconstruction of the tracks, the signalling and other equipment, that the railways would hardly be capable of paying for them.

Although both facts mentioned above were well known, the Hungarian State Railways did not take sufficient care to restrict the noxious smoke and steam from the locomotives. "The building's going to be knocked down anyway".

When the Hungarian department of monuments forbade the demolition and put the owner under the obligation to repair such damage as had occurred in the meantime, a third factor cropped up which almost made it impossible to save Eiffel's work of art.

When the train shed was built, there were no standards laid down in Hungary for statics. Under those standards for statics which were introduced later and subsequently tightened up on several later occasions, the shed was perilous, even if its construction had not been corroded. Put briefly, in the opinion of the best statics experts, according to Hungarian standards, the train shed had been perilous even when it was built. The specialists from the department of monuments argued, of course in vain, that the train shed had already been standing for a century, and that, if repaired, it would still continue to stand. The statics experts were not, of course, able to guarantee the safety of a building which had such a volume of traffic, mainly on account of the indisputedly altered meteorological conditions. In Hungary, the department of monuments is subordinate to the Ministry for Building and Town Development, which, apart from the close contact with town planning bodies, has a number of other advantages. Under the legal provisions, the minister can suspend statics standards regulations. The secretary of state, himself a foremost expert on statics, took

this responsibility on himself for a year, and with the time thus gained it was possible for the Hungarian State Railways to arrange a competition for the planning of a new station building, but the rules of the competition also made provision for proposals for the modernisation of the existing building.

Out of the 43 entries submitted, the first prize was awarded to Dr. Tibor Sigray because his plan envisaged the retention of the historical structure and its reinforcement in an ingenious fashion. This produced the best possible result for the monument, both from the functional and the aesthetic aspect. In the opinion of the jury, the many proposals for a new building had not succeeded in finding a solution on a par with the original building. Under Sigray's plan, the corroded parts, which accounted for 50 % of the structure at some points, were replaced and the static regulations were satisfied by the application of scarcely noticeable reinforcements.

There was a further problem which still remained to be solved. On account of the great volume of building works in progress which were causing great strains on the country's industry anyway, Hungary's iron mills were booked up for years and would not have been very willing to undertake the works involved in the replacement and reconstruction as they would have entailed a very great deal of specialist work. However, time was short because the train shed was to be incorporated in the new metro station then under construction. The train shed would have to be ready in time for the opening of the new metro.

The Hungarian State Railways solved the problem by entrusting the work mainly to older specialists in the railway operating depot at a small village for which their predecessors a century earlier had had to go to Paris to the world-famed firm of Eiffel.

The reconstruction works were completed on time and cost less than the 100 million Forints (about 900.000 Marks) originally forecast. The restoration of the train shed is, of course, being followed by that of the adjoining station buildings. This work is still in progress. The completed royal waiting room is an example of the success already attained.

LES GRANDS MAGASINS: PARISIAN CIVIL ENGINEERING ARCHITECTURE IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Ruth-Maria Ullrich

Since the middle of the last century, the appearance of the Parisian townscape has been given a characteristic stamp by representative major buildings, the manifold space programme of which required a large building volume so that the area occupied by the construction often necessitated several blocks of houses. This form of block construction - in general a characteristic of public buildings, such as Garnier's Grand Opéra and Lefuel's new wing in the Louvre - also became a characteristic feature of private commercial organisations, the "Grands Magasins".

In 1907, Paul Göhre compared them to ocean liners, "in their interior every inch of space is exploited as carefully and thoroughly as possible, into which the whole complicated life of modern society is compressed. Both, the ocean liner and the department store, are triumphs of modern socially organised work".

The space concept of the "Grands Magasins" included a central hall and staircase for the circulation of the public, galleries for the sales of the various kinds of goods, "comfort rooms" for the customers, such as a buffet room, a billiard room, a library, an art gallery and a winter garden, then studios, administrative offices, dormitories and dining rooms for the staff, basements for the stores, heating, lighting and water supply, stables for the cavalry, depots for the delivery carts.

However, the facts of the history of the construction of the major Parisian department stores show that they were not constructed on a gigantic scale right from the beginning. Generally the company grew up from small beginnings in a small boutique with the continuous purchase of further shops and dwellings. Only after the whole block of houses had been acquired was it possible to begin with the construction of the final structure. Thus in 1867 nine houses along the Quai de la Mégisserie fell victim to "La Belle Jardinière", by 1881 the "Le Printemps" site covered eleven house numbers. The evolution of the "Grands Magasins" as major sales outlets for products of the most varied kind can be traced back to the period following the French Revolution. With the "Proclamation de la Liberté du Travail" of the 2nd March 1791, freedom of trade was proclaimed and the guild system with its concession system hindering competition was abolished. The development of major industry began, followed by growth of the towns and a strengthening of the wealthy bourgeoisie. It was not just the flood of industrial products which was decisive for the economic growth of the "Grands Magasins", but also the new stimulating methods of trading: reduction of the profit margin made possible by increasing turnover, fixed prices, the waiving of any compulsion to buy, allowing goods which had been already purchased to be returned, profit sharing by the sales staff.

The fascination generated by the new forms of trading, the secret of their success, "the uninterrupted and rapid turnover of capital on the principle that the main thing was to convert the latter into goods as often as possible within a year" - according to Zola - is still shown in his novel "Au Bonheur des Dames" from 1883 with the department store as "The ladies' paradise". Zola also described the negative social side of the phenomenon, such as the destruction of the small shop through the competition of the department store, the