

# Railroaded out

## Railway Lands: Catching St Pancras and Kings Cross

by Angela Inglis  
(Troubadour Publishing, £30)  
**CHRISTIAN WOLMAR**

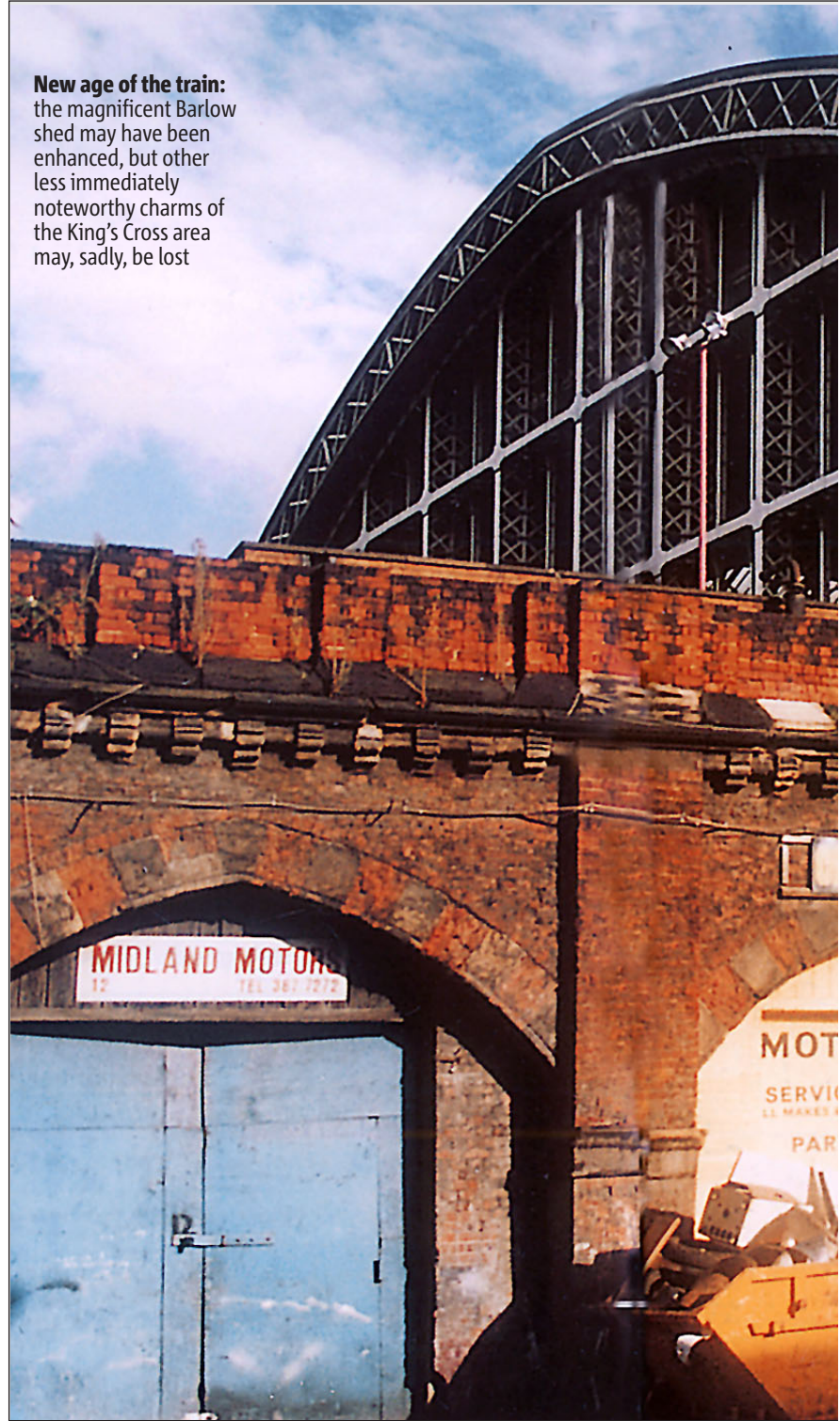
**W**HEN St Pancras was built in the 1860s, more than 6,000 people were made homeless and no thought given to their fate. Even the dead were not spared, as thousands of bodies were removed in a process that traumatised the young Thomas Hardy. These days, such callousness would be unthinkable but nevertheless the current redevelopment of the area, based around the transformation of St Pancras into the new Eurostar terminal, has claimed its share of casualties.

St Pancras and King's Cross have an extensive hinterland of old goods yards and sidings made redundant by the decline of rail freight. With St Pancras now about to reopen, this is to be replaced by what is known in the jargon as a "mixed development" of housing, offices, shops and leisure facilities.

King's Cross may have been a haunt of prostitutes and drug addicts but as the many detailed and evocative pictures in this book show, the area was not without merit. While the masterpieces that make up the station (Gilbert Scott's crazy Gothic hotel and the elegant single-span Barlow shed) have not only been retained but greatly enhanced, other features have been lost, such as the gas-holders, the warehouses, and several blocks of pleasing Victorian flats inhabited by an engaging ragbag of artists and eccentrics.

This is, essentially, a photographic memoir, and while the photographs linger in the mind, the text is less notable, providing insufficient information for those not already familiar with the area. There is a fascinating debate to be had here because though the area will be transformed, the question implicit in this book is whether anything at all of its character will survive. Every developer should be compelled to create a commemoration like this to ensure that as much as possible does.

**New age of the train:** the magnificent Barlow shed may have been enhanced, but other less immediately noteworthy charms of the King's Cross area may, sadly, be lost



# Far more than just another

## Clarissa Eden: A Memoir from Churchill to Eden

edited by Cate Haste  
(Weidenfeld, £20)  
**ANDREW ROBERTS**

THIS IS the last great British autobiography of the pre-war and wartime era, masquerading as merely the memoirs of the widow of the most beleaguered occupant of No 10 in modern times. There are important revelations in it — naming the six members of Churchill's cabinet who forced him out of office in 1955, for example, and proving that Anthony Eden was not hooked on barbiturates during the Suez Crisis — but they are somehow incidental. The importance of this book lies in its myriad insights into the personalities of many of the most important artistic, social, literary, political and cultural figures of the mid-20th century.

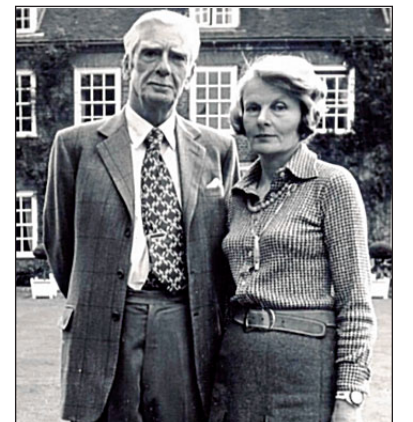
Clarissa Eden grew up in the age before the British social and cultural elite fragmented into self-contained villages, and, although she had next to no formal education, she clearly had an extraordinary

capacity for making friends with the most interesting people of her generation. Long before she married Eden, aged 34 — he was 55 — she had a rich intellectual and social hinterland.

She was taught philosophy by Isaiah Berlin and Freddie Ayer at Oxford, although she wasn't an undergraduate; she roomed with Pamela Harman at the Dorchester during the Blitz, knew Cyril Connolly in his Horizon days, lunched with an exhausted and occasionally pessimistic Uncle Winston at No 10 in 1940, was photographed by her close friend Cecil Beaton, had Donald Maclean as a dancing partner, fell out with Evelyn Waugh and Randolph Churchill, wrote journalism for Vogue, decoded messages in the Foreign Office basement during the war, met Glenn Miller and the Duke of Kent before their planes crashed, stayed with Greta Garbo, sat on Dali's (very uncomfortable) Mae West lips sofa, slept in a fur coat at a freezing wartime Chequers, studied art in Paris, gossiped with Nancy Mitford and generally lived the life of at least 10 characters from *A Dance to the Music of Time*.

"Lucian Freud remembers we first met in the Café Royal during the war," starts a typical paragraph, "when I was with Cyril Connolly and he was with his father-in-law Jacob Epstein, and the bombs were falling in the blackout."

Others who enter these pages as friends or acquaintances or sparring partners, include Orson Welles, Fitzroy Maclean, James Pope-Hennessy, Harold Nicolson



**Niece of one PM, wife of another:** Clarissa Eden with Anthony in 1974



**Lucky in his enemies:** global anti-Americanism has helped keep Fidel Castro in power

# Communism's great survivor

## My Life

by Fidel Castro with Ignacio Ramonet  
(Allen Lane, £25)  
**VICTOR SEBESTYEN**

HIS FIRST serious act of rebellion was at the age of 11 when, in a quarrel with his father, Fidel Castro threatened to burn down the family house. Mr Castro Senior clearly understood the nature of his son. He calculated that the boy probably meant business so he beat a retreat, teaching the child early lessons in how to defeat a superior force.

For 50 years, Fidel Castro has been the world's most famous revolutionary icon. His comrade in arms Che Guevara may have sold more T-shirts, but Che had the good fortune to die young. It was Castro who created a revolution, survived scores of assassination attempts and stayed in power from 1959 — until his operation for intestinal disease critically weakened him last year.

Despite the evidence that Cuba's tropical version of Communism failed as catastrophically as all the other kinds, and the testimony of thousands of Castro's victims to the brutality of his regime, the old monster remains fêted in the Third World. In his final years his reputation has risen in proportion to the global growth of anti-Americanism. Fidel's rants against "Yankee imperialism", which he has been making for more than four decades, are nowadays accorded more respect than ever in Europe.

Of course, he remains a hero to the Left, including to the co-author of this book, Ignacio Ramonet, a Marxist academic who teaches at a French university.

This is an unorthodox autobiography based on 100 hours of interviews with Castro over two years. Ramonet's interviewing style may be more Hello! magazine than Jeremy Paxman — "Commandante, you are a great public

speaker; tell us the secret of your eloquence," he says.

Yet Castro's life has been extraordinary and he can tell a good story. Born, as so many future Marxists were, into a comfortably off landowning family, he was educated by Jesuits. Castro rebelled in a vague sort of way but as a law student discovered Left-wing politics, went around with a pistol, and became a full-time agitator. A charismatic leader from his late teens, he mounted his first attempt at a revolution in 1953 with a raid on the Moncada barracks in Cuba's second-largest city, Santiago. It was a humiliating, tragi-comic failure, dramatically and amusingly told here.

Castro was arrested, jailed, narrowly escaped execution and was exiled to Mexico, where he raised a new group of revolutionaries. In 1956 he landed in Cuba for his second attempt to topple the American-backed — and Mafia financed — military dictator Fulgencia Batista. It started disastrously. More than half of his "army" were ambushed on landing. He was left with fewer than 15 men — including his brother Raul — and just two guns. Yet within two-and-a-half years, after a brilliant guerrilla campaign, at the age of 33 he took power in Havana. He continued as one of the longest-lived dictators in history.

He turned his country into a Soviet client state which survived the collapse of Communism practically everywhere else. Cuba remains as an anachronistic leftover from the days of the first Cold War into the second.

Castro has been lucky in his enemies. America's absurd 40-year-long trade blockade of Cuba kept him in power artificially long. For the past five years he has been handed a "hearts and minds" gift by whoever it was in Washington who thought of basing Camp X-Ray on the only bit of Cuba that the US controls.

Castro is less than lucky in his interlocutor. Personal insight is probably a handicap for a world leader. But even the most ruthless dictator — let alone one who shrewdly stayed in power for 47 years — might have chosen to edit out the claim that he "never sought a leadership position. The satisfaction of the struggle is the prize. I wasn't interested in being President. There was no vanity in me whatsoever."

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