

urban secrets

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Stafford has a strong sense of identity that is reflected in its buildings. Although many of the historic buildings have been lost, there are still fine examples to be seen. The Ancient High House, St Chad's Church, Chetwynd House and the Shire Hall all tell the story of the heritage of the place.

These buildings are recognised and valued today, but was this always so? Every building was new and modern once and perhaps didn't initially fit in with accepted notions of beauty and good design.

'Urban Secrets' is a publication to raise awareness of the more recent nineteenth and twentieth century buildings that may become Stafford's architectural gems of the future.

A town's buildings are a reflection of its social and cultural heritage. As society evolves, so its buildings have to meet those new demands and each generation makes its own mark to reflect those changes.

By looking at or 'reading' those buildings, you can begin to understand the unique character of a place.



Stafford had a rich heritage of which Staffordians are proud. Its success is based on many things: from the establishment of a Royal Mint in the tenth century and being created a Royal Borough by King John in 1206, to grasping the opportunities presented by the industrial revolution.

The transition of Stafford from a quiet but prosperous market town into an industrial centre accelerated in the nineteenth century. Shoemaking and engineering were the dominant trades and new kinds of buildings evolved to accommodate production. Also, new materials and technology enabled architects to develop new building styles. In addition, this period witnessed changes in the way people spent their leisure time - our cinemas, theatres, the Brine Baths and Victoria Pleasure Grounds all appeared in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Urban Secrets has highlighted a selection of buildings that might not at first be recognised as buildings worth keeping or valuing, but in 100 years they may be the very ones we treasure and celebrate as perfect examples of their type.



This building was designed by Henry Ward, the Borough Architect. It opened as the Borough Hall on 20 June 1877. Borough Council offices, the library and the Wragge museum occupied the ground floor. On the first floor, a large hall with stage was used for meetings, dances, concerts and plays. The Council moved to new buildings at Riverside in 1984, and the Borough Hall was refurbished in order to accommodate what we now know as the Stafford Gatehouse Theatre.

The standard materials of brick, stone and slate are used, this time in French Gothic Revival style, characterised by Gothic arches, tracery and gables. There is a wealth of detail to this beautiful building, characterised by a rhythmical arrangement of large and small arches, a frieze of shields, roundel windows and polished marble columns to the main entrance.

1870s

Stafford Gatehouse Theatre (former Borough Hall), Eastgate St





Built circa 1880 as one of the town's numerous shoe factories, this building was commissioned by William Mason but changed hands several times over the years. Although a very functional building with a range of north-lit sheds for craftsmen to the rear, the street frontage was constructed in a classical style with a distinctive, lead-domed tower, presenting an impressive public façade.

The 19th Century north-lit sheds were commonly used in factories, where good light was required for detailed work, but bright light and shadows could be avoided. The façade was originally of red brick, but has been rendered with a stuccoed effect, hiding some of the original architectural detail. However, the domed tower remains a focal point within the Eastgate Street scene, although the building itself is currently unoccupied.

1880s

No. 41a, Eastgate Street





Now forming part of Stafford's Register Office, this building at one time the home of the Chief Constable. It dates from 1893 and was built in the 'Free Tudor' style. Rejecting the mass production that was beginning to be introduced by industry at the time, proponents of this style drew on simple design inherent in aspects of more ancient buildings - for example Elizabethan or Tudor architecture. Notice the four-centred arch and recessed porch to the central door, as well as the leaded windows and tall chimney stacks. Other details enhancing the bespoke design of this building include a cartouche, scrolls, iron gates, recessed bow windows, wrought iron gutter brackets and rainwater heads complete with date.



1890s

Stafford Register Office, 79a Eastgate Street

The Oddfellows Hall was built in 1892 to the designs of George Wormal of Stafford. The choice of brick and stone compliments the surrounding architecture. As with the old library on The Green, Edwardian Baroque influences are evident in the 'Wrenaissance' approach used here. The large first floor hall was originally used for balls and social gatherings, and later as a billiard hall and social club. External details include stilted arches with grotesque stops to the arch mouldings, as well as quoins (the corner stones that anchor the edge of the building wall) and the

sandstone ram's head between the arches. The choice of a ram's head as a decorative form may relate to an earlier use of the site by a butcher. Animal heads such as this are frequently used as decorative embellishments on meat markets, although the ram's head is not connected with the heraldry of the Order of Oddfellows.

1890s

Oddfellows Hall, Greengate Street





This building was designed in 1913 by Campbell and Fairhurst for Goodalls Pictures Ltd. It was built by W C Pemberton of Wolverhampton and opened in 1914, billed as "the most luxurious and up-to-date cinema in town". Built of brick, it has a stuccoed façade and applied timber-framing. Architectural detail includes polished granite cladding to sill-height with channelled rustication above and relief stucco decoration including cable moulds and panels. Of particular interest is the fascia with abstract stained glass incorporating The Picture House name. Now a Wetherspoons pub, the interior retains original decoration and features including stucco details, a barrel vaulted ceiling and original ticket office.

1910s

The Picture House (Wetherspoons), Bridge Street





Built in 1913, The Green housed the main library and Wragge Museum. In common with other County Council buildings, brick and stone are combined in 'Wrenaissance' style which was heavily influenced by Edwardian Baroque architecture. Notice the classical detail in the domed portico, supporting columns, distinctive balustrade and the deep parapet.

The extension dates back to the 1960s. Despite its functionalist form, the use of natural materials such as brick and slate softens its bold elevations and ensures a level of conformity with the surrounding area.

The oldest of the three buildings on The Green, the Baptist Chapel opened in 1896. The unusual spire was designed by Birmingham architect Ewen Harper. Once again, the use of red brick and stone has been used in order to achieve consistency of style.

1910s

The Green: The old library, extension and Baptist Chapel





Burtons was one of the first chain stores, specialising in formal clothes for men. With branches spreading across the country, initially existing shops were converted; by the mid-1920s they were purpose-built in a distinctive Burtons house-style, designed by the Leeds architect Harry Wilson. There was a strong preference for corner sites, and adjoining properties would be acquired gradually for redevelopment into larger stores.

The characteristics of Burtons buildings can be seen here, in what is now The Orange Shop. Narrow vertical bays containing steel-framed windows are divided by pilasters, and moulded cast metal panels are used to mask floor levels. Both Art Deco and classical motifs can be seen. An Egyptian style is also discernible in the narrow pilasters with scrolled capitals.

1930s

The Orange Shop (formerly Burtons), Gaolgate Street





The Stafford Odeon was opened in 1936 by the Earl and Countess of Shrewsbury. This building shares the common architectural features of the Odeon brand from this period. The commissioned architect, Harry Weedon, was responsible for creating the strong, curved form, plain elevations, tall, vertical windows and projecting fins - typical of the Art Deco architecture that made Odeon a household name. Whilst undeniably distinctive, this building is nonetheless tied to the traditional Stafford streetscape through the more conventional use of brick and stone.



1930s

The Apollo Cinema (formerly The Odeon), Newport Road

Universal Grinding Wheel Co. Ltd opened a factory with the latest equipment at Doxey in 1913, with the offices opening on 21 January 1938.

The modernist approach to Universal (now owned by Saint Gobain) is clear; the emphasis is on simple, functional blocks and horizontal ranges of windows. The horizontal emphasis is significant as it was only made possible by changes in construction techniques; structural steel means that walls no longer needed to be load-bearing. Hence, walls were now merely

'curtain walls', and windows could be opened out to allow in maximum daylight, particularly useful in offices and factories. Additional detail lending identity to this essentially functional building includes the vertical brick columns, crowned with alloy metal unicorns. The unicorn is a recurring motif across the Universal site, appearing on many of the buildings.



1930s

Universal, Doxey Road

The college was founded in 1937, but not completed until 1946 and became an American Army Hospital during the Second World War (1939-45). The building is a mix of traditional brick and stone, in a conservative, late classical style. In addition to this, however, the influences of the 1930s can clearly be seen; following the British discovery of Tutankhamen's tomb in 1922, the inclusion of monumental forms and geometric patterning was de rigeur. Notice the monolithic squared slab feature above the college's Tenterbanks entrance as well as the geometric motifs within the building's stonework.



1940s

Stafford College, Tenterbanks





These were the first council flats in the Borough built in 1952. They combine Modernist forms and references with dark brick and false stone dressings to create buildings distinctively of their age.


The simple geometric detail of the flats is reduced to the horizontal emphasis of window openings, curved balconies and low connecting walls, with the contrasting emphasis of projecting vertical bays with tall double-storey windows. Elliptical openings provide distinctive interest to the connecting walls.

The three-storey, rectangular and flat-roofed form is broken down by projecting rectangular bays with double-storey windows, curved balconies accentuated by white string courses and storey-height connecting walls. The three blocks of flats form a staggered linear frontage set well back from Corporation Street.

1950s

Corporation Street flats





Built in 1962 as part of the modernisation programme which saw the electrification of the West Coast Main Line, this reinforced concrete building demonstrates the Modernist approach to architecture that was prevalent at this time. In a rejection of traditional and historical styles, form was simplified and unnecessary detail eliminated. The beauty of the building was perceived to be in its very functionality, emphasised by repetitive, angular geometries and starkly contrasting concrete and wood. This style is known as 'Brutalist'.

1960s

Stafford Railway Station, Station Road





Designed 1976 by County Architect D Taylor. Although very functionalist, and with quite blind elevations (for privacy), relief is given by polychromatic brick treatment and reeded pilasters. The use of brick is quite unusual for buildings designed at this time.



1970s

Magistrates Court, South Walls

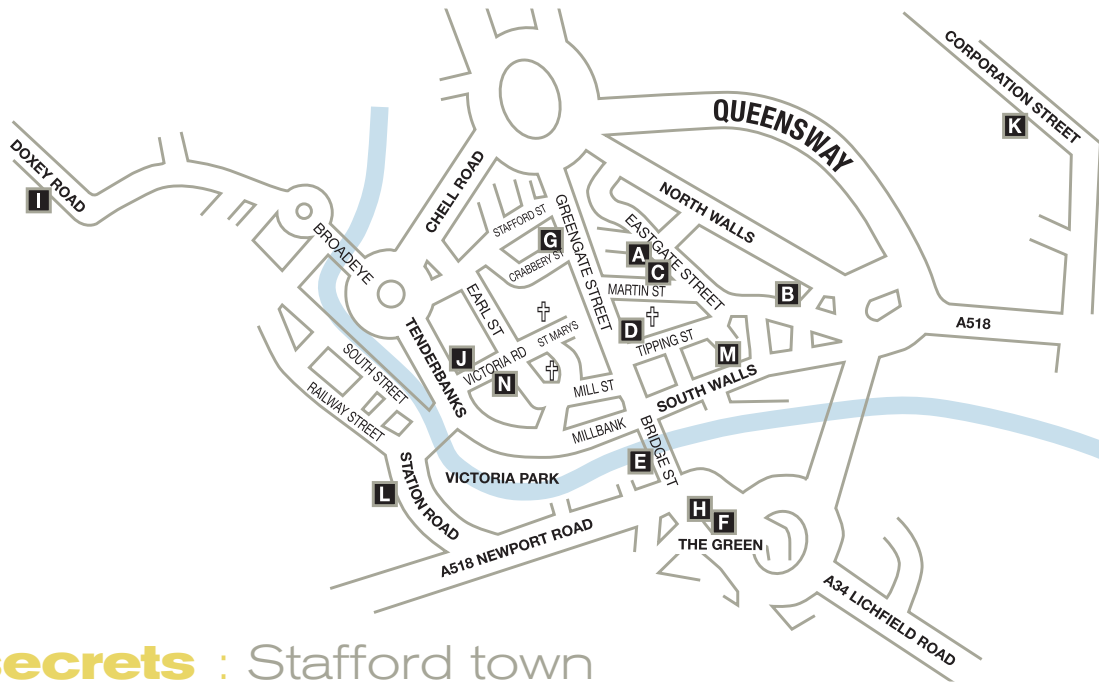
This building accommodates Stafford's Crown and County Courts. Built 1990, by Associated Architects of Birmingham. Note the use of red brick and cream stone. By choosing these building materials the architects have arrived at a contemporary solution to integrating with and complimenting the neighbouring buildings, both of which have a similar colour scheme.



1990s

Stafford Crown Court, Victoria Square





urban secrets : Stafford town

urban secrets : Architectural terms

ARCH	The spanning of an opening by means other than a lintel.	COLUMN	A free-standing upright member of a circular section normally intended as a support. In classical architecture it consists of a shaft, capital and base. The twisted column commonly appears in baroque architecture.
BAROQUE	A highly decorative and extravagant style of architecture that was generated in Rome in the seventeenth century.	CONCRETE	An ancient Roman invention that was laid on courses, concrete was a determining factor in the development of Roman architecture. It was then forgotten and revived in the eighteenth century. Modern concrete, reinforced, can be mixed and poured and has radically influenced the form of modern architecture.
BRUTALISM	A short-lived architectural movement of the 1960s that set itself in opposition to the picturesque Scandinavian-influenced mainstream of the period, and instead advocated the brutally frank expression of the nature of modern materials, characterised by unadorned concrete and the blunt detailing of joints and openings.	CORNICE	The top, projecting section of an entablature. Also any projecting ornamental moulding along the top of a wall, arch etc.
CANTILEVER	A projecting beam, canopy etc., supported by a downward force behind a fulcrum. It is usually anchored at one end by the weight of the structure above. Being without external bracing, it appears to be self-supporting.	CUPOLA	A small dome tower on a roof.
CAPITAL	The upper member of a column.	ELEVATION	An external face of a building.
CARTOUCHE	An ornamental panel, like a scroll or sheet of paper with curling edges.	FAÇADE	The architecturally emphasised front or face of a building.
CLASSICAL	Reference to ancient Greek and Roman styles with an emphasis on simplicity, harmony and restraint. Classical buildings tend to be symmetrical externally and on plan.	FANLIGHT	A fanlight is a semicircular or semi-elliptical window over a doorway or another window.

FENESTRATION	The arrangement of windows in a building.
KEYSTONE	The central stone of an arch.
LANCET	A narrow window with a sharp pointed head.
MULLION	A vertical post dividing an opening, usually a window into lights.
ORDERS	In classical architecture an order consists of a column with a base, shaft, capital and entablature decorated and proportioned according to one of six accepted models. These include: Doric, Ionic and Corinthian.
PARAPET	The parapet is a low wall projecting from the edge of a platform, terrace or roof.
PEDIMENT	A low pitched gable over a portico, door or window. When the cornice is discontinuous or broken, usually at the apex but sometimes the base, it is called a broken pediment.
PILLAR	A free-standing upright member, distinct from a column in that it need neither be cylindrical nor conform to one of the orders.
POLYCHROME	Many coloured. Decorative use of coloured stone or brick, typical of Victorian architecture.
PORTICO	A roofed space, open or partly enclosed, forming an entrance, usually the centrepiece of the façade.

QUOINS	Dressed stone on the corners of a building.
RUSTICATION	Massive blocks of masonry with roughened surfaces and sunk joints, often simulated in plaster.
SCULPTURE	Forming representations of objects in the round or in relief in various ways including: chiselling stone, carving wood, modelling clay, casting metal.
STRING COURSE	A continuous horizontal band in or projecting from an exterior wall.
STUCCO	A mixture of cement, sand, lime and water spread over metal screening or chicken wire or wooden lath on wooden walls to form the exterior covering of an exterior wall.
SWAG	An ornamental motif resembling a piece of cloth draped over two supports.
TERRACOTTA	Baked or fired but unglazed clay, usually reddish brown in colour.
TRACERY	An ornamental arrangement of intersecting ribwork, usually in the upper part of a Gothic window, forming a pierced pattern.
VERNACULAR	Style native to a country, of the domestic kind.

urban secrets : Acknowledgments

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