

# DEPARTING STORES

*Emporia at risk*

Harriet Lloyd

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BRITAIN'S HERITAGE

# Departing Stores

*Emporia at risk*

Harriet Lloyd

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## Introduction

Buildings are the backdrop to the ordinary business of living. They provide an insight to the activities, needs and values of a society – and when these undergo a seismic shift, entire groups of buildings can be left suddenly without purpose. The same loss of relevance previously faced by stately homes, warehouses and many churches now threatens a new building type for the first time: the department store.

The decline of these high street titans has been part of a slow, subtle, and somewhat inevitable process that began perhaps as far back as the 1970s and 80s. As enormous shopping centres sprang up across the country, retail hubs were drawn away from traditional centres, such as arcades and market places, to more suburban locations. Reduced accessibility caused by hikes in parking charges, poor town planning decisions and – rather ironically – pedestrianisation schemes served to further drive custom away from the high street. But both shopping centres and high streets are struggling to compete with the meteoric ascent of online shopping, which between 2006 and 2020 rose to claim nearly 20% of all sales in the UK. In the wake of lockdowns and a global pandemic, that figure has soared to 30%. Meanwhile, research by the British Retail Consortium in partnership with the Local Data Company has found that overall retail vacancy stood at a five-year high of 14.1% in the first quarter of 2021.

The Covid-19 crisis has merely expedited a process that was well underway, and most industry analysts are unconvinced that high streets will recover unless they adapt. Increases in both personal mobility and disposable income have given urban shoppers more choice than ever, and high streets are not guaranteed a pool of custom in the same way they were just a few decades ago. This has only been compounded by the emergence of online shopping, and in this respect retailers find themselves in a Catch-22. As we become increasingly accustomed to – and in turn, reliant on – the product range, competitive pricing and

convenience of online shopping, the more retailers are pressured to move online to retain customers. Yet by contrast, Primark – a company which has resolutely refused to move its offering online – enjoyed queues of thousands outside its stores after the third lockdown was lifted, the likes of which had once been a common sight at department stores too. Shifting to ‘e-tail’ represents a fine line between staying in the running for custom, and becoming lost in an even bigger sea of competition.

Alongside managing shifts in consumer behaviour, large stores have had to face a number of more practical concerns. Sizeable department stores are lumbered with equally sizeable rents – Kendals in Manchester, reputed to be the oldest department store in the country, was paying £4.36 million per annum back in 2016.

Stores have also been crippled by business rates tied into the value of the properties they occupy (roughly half the building’s open market rental value). Once more, online-only retailers reap the rewards, paying rates on warehouses but not shop floors. In turn, bricks and mortar stores are forced to raise prices, placing them at an even greater disadvantage.

Should a building become vacant, landlords are given a three-month business rates holiday. If new tenants cannot be found within this time, the landlord then becomes responsible for the fee. However, the relief can be extended for properties that are judged to be in too poor a condition for repair, or are scheduled for demolition or redevelopment. This has grave implications for the future security of department store buildings, for which landlords are unlikely to find new single-occupancy tenants and may be incentivised to leave buildings in a state of decay.

The sum total of these factors spells disaster for department stores. Accelerated by lockdowns and social distancing measures, the past year has seen empires topple like dominoes.

The difficulties of 2020 brought about the collapse of both Debenhams and Beales, while John Lewis has cut store numbers from 51 to 34 since the onset of the pandemic. House of Fraser, which has closed dozens of stores after going into administration in 2018, remains in a precarious state even after a rescue deal from Sports Direct owner Mike Ashley. Figures from Summer 2021 listed some 237 vacant department stores. When emergency measures such as the business rates relief and commercial rent moratorium – now extended until Spring 2022 – eventually end, it's expected that a great many more businesses will be forced to shutter.

As this report hopes to convey, department stores make up some of the finest and most socially significant buildings on British high streets. Designed to impress and inspire, they are undoubtedly of great architectural merit, and stand as a monument to the historic prosperity of the town. They are deeply connected with personal histories; they are sites where people have gathered, worked, even celebrated their weddings. But the demise of Debenhams alone has left a hole of 13.6 million sq ft in towns across the country. In a new era when large-scale retail is no longer sustainable, these fine structures are at risk of dilapidation or even demolition. And as these hubs of daily life are erased from the map, local communities feel increasingly disenfranchised. Protecting and reviving these buildings is not only a matter of preserving precious and distinctive architecture; it is an opportunity to restore a sense of place.

Presented in this report are a number of cases taken from across Britain, most of which were identified during research carried out in 2020. The landscape is changing at an alarming rate. Revisiting these same cases just a few months later, many have now stopped trading, several face disruptive conversions and some even wholesale demolition. Others are still struggling to attract buyers and remain as empty shells; a potent and painful emblem of once thriving towns and cities left to decay. Here, we hope to highlight some of the UK's most precious stock of department store buildings, to

celebrate those developments that have brought new life to their walls, and to sound the klaxon for those whose futures stand perilously at risk.

### Unique challenges

Whether national chain or family-run independent, modern British department stores share remarkably similar origin stories. The vast majority started out in the mid to late 19th century as draperies, selling fabrics for dress-making and upholstery. Several were founded on a shoestring budget by drapers' apprentices striking out on their own. Those that found success were able to gradually buy up neighbouring properties, and this piecemeal expansion was typical of the early department store.

Companies then faced a difficult choice. Opting to erect a new building conferred prestige and ensured a prominent presence on the street; but also meant operating out of temporary or reduced premises while construction took place. One common solution, exemplified by Griffin & Spalding in Leicester, was to unify the storefront with a new facade and retain the original buildings behind.

Stores in larger cities and commercial centres were frequently given the impetus to rebuild by external factors. Many of the buildings we see today were borne from the upheaval of road-widening works during the 1920s and 30s, or the devastation of the Blitz. Some early stores were burnt to the ground in arson attacks by local traders, concerned that their custom was being drawn away.

Those surviving in their Victorian incarnations bear testament to their unfolding success in their irregular interior fabric. In many stores decades of extensions, amalgamations and ad hoc fixes have resulted in labyrinthine interiors of varying levels and ceiling heights, disused staircases and forgotten stockrooms. These idiosyncratic layouts may have once been charming (if occasionally bothersome) for staff and customers, but now they present a serious hurdle to sympathetic redevelopment.



Opposite: Photographs from 1934 and 1939 show the changes as a result of road-widening works on Brighton's Western Road. Reproduced from the James Gray Archive with thanks to The Regency Society.



Purpose-built stores, while inherently more considered and uniform in layout, come with their own challenges. The sprawling footprint of these stores – with some sites covering a number of acres – now presents a major threat to those that are unlisted. Natural light – an enemy to the retailer – is a necessity for homes, hotels and offices, and cannot reach anything in the centre of the deep floor plates. This can make demolition the most attractive option for developers working with unprotected buildings. One way that this is being circumvented for listed structures is to carry out partial demolition – usually of extensions added in the 1970s or later – to introduce a central courtyard or gardens. This has the added benefit of improving the public realm in many instances, but often requires construction of additional storeys to counteract the lost floorspace and keep the project financially viable. These extensions can be unsightly, incongruent and risk knocking street proportions out of kilter; but if denied they can consign the building to more years of disuse.

### A Second Life

Andy Warhol prophesied that “in the future, all department stores will become museums”. In some places, his prediction has already come true: in 2018, Liverpool art festival Independents Biennial was staged in the city’s old G. H. Lee building, and in 2021, the former Lewis’s store. Over in Seoul, South Korea, three department stores have already launched in-house galleries (starting, of course, with a Warhol retrospective). There is a clear parallel between galleries and stores, both presenting objects to be pored over and admired, and this shared functionality is echoed in the built structure. London’s Design Museum, both now and in its previous incarnation as the Commonwealth Institute, bears a strong resemblance to the typical department store interior, with exhibition spaces spinning off from a grand central atrium. Reinvention as museums or galleries, then, could well be one solution to the rapidly

growing estate of empty stores. In early 2021, Labour councillors in Westminster proposed reviving Debenhams’ Oxford Street flagship as an “Art House”, with exhibition space, affordable studios, and a shop selling artists’ hand-crafted wares. If these buildings are to remain accessible and amenable to local communities, they require bold, imaginative ideas such as these.

More commonly, though, the most financially rewarding route is taken. Many of these colossal stores are already undergoing conversion to ‘mixed-use’ – generally a combination of office space, flats or student accommodation, and individual retail units on the ground floor. Of course, any use is better than dereliction, but too many student flats can create transient populations that leave the area devoid of continuity, while demand for office space has not been fully tested after the widespread shift towards remote working during the pandemic. Chief executive of Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber Of Commerce Russell Borthwick has warned that future steps must support the “finely balanced eco-systems” of city centres, or risk creating “urban deserts.”

The government are enthusiastically backing the conversion of retail premises to housing as a way to give high streets “a new lease of life”. Under new rules introduced in March 2021, developers may benefit from permitted development rights (PDRs) when invoking change of use from commercial to residential classes. These PDRs give developers the green light from the government, bypassing local planning authorities. The reforms have attracted criticism from many, including Historic England and the Royal Town Planning Institute, who raised concerns about the increase in “dead frontage”. They also condemned the “one size fits all” approach that revokes power from local planners, who are better equipped to make locally appropriate decisions. Permission in principle will make identifying areas of employment more difficult, restrict the agency of communities, and reduce councils’ abilities to actively manage regeneration. While listed

Opposite: Decorative relief on the facade of the former Co-operative House, Nottingham. The building was converted to a casino and restaurant in 2007.

buildings are exempt from the PDR reforms, our report identifies many architecturally valuable buildings that are unprotected by national or local listing, or even conservation areas. Those that are listed will still feel the impact of new builds that fail to relate to the character or proportions of the street.

### Taking action

A firm, positive step has been taken with the government's £1bn Future High Streets Fund, of which £92 million has been allocated specifically towards reviving historic high streets. Historic England will be working in partnership with local authorities, Business Improvement Districts and community groups to deliver the programme in 69 'High Streets Heritage Action Zones', including Great Yarmouth, Chester, Coventry and Leicester.

On a practical level, the scheme will fund grants for restoration and conversion of historic buildings to new uses. But it also aims to engage local communities with a four-year-long Cultural Programme funded by an additional £3m from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Arts Council England. This aspect of the scheme is intended to help locals recover a sense of identity and belonging, by learning and celebrating what is special about their town or city through festivals, markets, artistic installations, history trails and skills workshops.

### A call to arms

The success of high streets lies in their ability to adapt and be reshaped as part of an organic process, at the hands of their users: the local community. Large-scale, formulaic regeneration projects can reverse their intended effects by alienating locals and failing to complement established patterns of use and activity.

In turn, loss of local identity is a powerful factor that can influence the social and economic wellbeing of a town. By preserving the fabric of distinctive historic buildings, particularly those as prominent as former

department stores, residents can recover a sense of connection and continuity.

Studies as far back as the 1990s have identified the vital role of architecture and unique local heritage in fostering a thriving environment. As the New Economics Foundation noted in their 2005 analysis of the British high street:

Many town centres that have undergone substantial regeneration even lost the distinctive facades of their high streets, as local building materials have been swapped in favour of identical glass, steel and concrete storefronts that provide the ideal degree of sterility to house a string of big, clone town retailers.

Safeguarding these buildings is not just about preserving the past; it is also about securing the future of our high streets. To thrive once more, they need to offer something unique. That comes from both the kinds of businesses operating there – independent enterprises supporting local crafts and products – and the fabric of the street itself. By caring for and celebrating the historic buildings in town centres, we can restore a sense of place. Their use does not have to remain commercial; refurbished stores can provide excellent facilities for community-led programmes, cultural initiatives and social enterprise.

The lockdowns necessitated by this pandemic have reiterated for many the importance of spaces away from the home and the workplace – what urban sociologist Ray Oldenburg called the 'third place'. Historically, retail – and in particular, department stores – were one such place, playing a pivotal role for many sections of society. Women, confined largely to their homes in the 19th century, found freedom there, as did teenagers in shopping malls many years later. For many people today, the high street can provide the majority, or even entirety, of their daily social contact. Now that these spaces are in decline, the question arises of what will replace them. The government are hopeful that moving residents back into town centres will "cement our high streets... in their

rightful place at the heart of communities". But we need to think creatively about what they'll do when they get there.

The loss of these buildings concerns not just their inherent architectural and historic value, but the shape of daily life. What kinds of places

or experiences will draw people out of their homes? With imaginative reuse, there's no reason why these beautiful buildings shouldn't continue to offer 'a third place' for many years to come.

# Origins of the Department Store



Le Bon Marché in Paris, Charles Fichot, 1872

In 1796 Harding, Howell and Co's Grand Fashionable Magazine opened on Pall Mall, described by an enthusiastic observer as "perfectly unique in its kind". The store was 150ft long, housed in the former residence of a Dutch Duke, and separated into four departments by glazed partitions. Yet it closed in 1820, and it wasn't until the model was ratified in France that department stores truly took root in the UK.

Au Bon Marché was established in Paris in 1852, an evolution of the *magasins de nouveautés* – shops that showcased newly developed products. It was the store's progressive owner, Aristide Boucicaut, who developed many of the retail practices we have

come to know as standard today.

In the early 19th century, products were not assigned fixed prices; instead sales were negotiated through bartering, allowing shopkeepers to charge higher prices for more affluent-looking patrons. Chez Boucicaut, entry to the grand emporium was free and the prices were the same for all, giving customers the impression of good value and honesty. He is also credited as the first to operate a returns policy.

Importantly, the fixed pricing system allowed the emergence of a new kind of shopping: browsing at leisure. Later stores consistently emphasised the lack of pressure to purchase in their newspaper advertisements.

Victorian customers had hitherto been discouraged from examining products themselves; in most shops they were kept out of reach, and even sight, in storage behind the counter. Yet in Boucicaut's department store, and those that followed, goods were laid out for inspection. Consumerist desire was nurtured by the tactile thrills of being able to handle the goods for oneself.

Visual merchandising was an equally powerful tool. Stores capitalised on the new technology for manufacturing plate glass, installing vast windows on the ground floor to showcase extravagant product displays – a tradition that persists with Christmas windows in modern department stores.

Boucicaut was abandoned by his business partner over his experimental ideas, but the gamble paid off, and other stores soon followed – Le Bazar de l'Hôtel de Ville in 1856, Printemps in 1865 and La Samaritaine in 1869. Word of their popularity spread across the channel; some keen entrepreneurs, including David Lewis of the Lewis's empire, even visited for inspiration. Soon the Parisian department store model was being imported to the UK, alongside their luxurious products.

At the time these businesses were established, proprietors would avoid fashioning overly fancy premises for fear of losing customers who might assume the cost would be passed on in the pricing of the goods. Moreover, shopping was a predominantly practical activity. As one 1864 drapers' handbook advises, "Many [customers], from the midst of domestic engagements 'run out' to make purchases, and will much rather go into some quiet, unexposed place, than be exhibited and reflected in every possible aspect by a variety of mirrors." Yet as stores expanded into new departments, opulence offered a kind of quality assurance for a business that might otherwise be perceived as a jack-of-all-trades.

It soon became clear that large stores would present their own unique challenges for architects and engineers – how to keep the atmosphere warm and welcoming in winter, yet

cool and airy in summer; how to store fragile goods such as fabric, which could just as easily dry out and harden as become spotted with damp; and how to light a large, deep building. Without contemporary advancements in construction and technology, it's possible the department store would have reached a critical size, found itself limited by structural constraints, and floundered.

The solution came with the advent of iron construction, whereby enormous buildings could be erected in record time using cast iron frameworks and mass-produced parts. Louis-Auguste Boileau, his son Louis-Charles, and Gustave Eiffel – all celebrated architects in iron – each worked on the Bon Marché store at various points. The reduced reliance on masonry meant that eye-catching facades could be constructed in different materials, such as terracotta and faience, or given over to fabulous ornament as with the later Edwardian Baroque and Neoclassical stores. And crucially, these frameworks could be used with glass to create vast domes and skylights, thus solving the pressing challenge of sourcing light in an age before electricity.

It also endowed stores with a cathedral-like monumentalism. In his novel *The Ladies' Paradise*, Émile Zola parodied Bon Marché and Boucicaut with the character Mouret, whose "creation was producing a new religion; churches, which were being gradually deserted by those of wavering faith, were being replaced by his bazaar". Certainly, many were concerned that the rise in department stores signalled a worrying shift towards decadence and moral decline.

But the stores Zola described as "cathedrals to commerce" recalled other impressive structures, too. The Crystal Palace, an engineering marvel of glass and cast iron erected for the Great Exhibition of 1851, would have been in many visitors minds' of that first generation. This architectural symmetry may have afforded department stores a certain cultural credibility. Just as the Great Exhibition had showcased wonders and inventions from around the globe,

so were shoppers of all classes afforded a microcosmic representation of the world through an incredible array of products. Newspaper advertisements show that British department stores prided themselves on importing the latest fashions and luxury goods from across the globe, from Italian gloves to German jewellery, French muslin to Moroccan leather. On occasion, stores even acted as museums more explicitly; Selfridges displayed Louis Blériot's monoplane in 1909, and hosted the first public demonstration of a television set in 1925.

Unlike museums, however, department stores were concerned not with exhibiting an objective reality, but instead constructing a fantasy realm in which customers were invited to picture themselves. Now, in stark contrast to the earlier advice offered to drapers, customers did wish to see themselves 'exhibited and reflected'. The store could achieve this quite literally when, over in Paris in the 1850s and 60s, Alexis Lavigne began developing the wax mannequin, with uncannily realistic glass eyes and hair. Later, stores employed live models to circulate around the showrooms and dining rooms to showcase new fashions.

This was accompanied by new ways of displaying products. Traditionally, goods were arranged en masse, piled high to impress customers with sheer quantity. The department store, operating on a model of quick turnover made possible by new methods of mass production, repurposed the 'massed' display as an indispensable tool for shifting old stock, emphasising bargains. High-end products, meanwhile, were arranged in 'open displays' – showroom settings that gave context, and therefore aspirational value, to the goods. They allowed shoppers to picture themselves within an alternative reality of ownership. The philosopher Foucault wrote of heterotopias: "other places" that juxtapose multiple spaces within one single place, leading to a transformative experience. The department store offered such an experience, where visitors could imagine idealised versions of themselves

and their homes. This was particularly true for women who, at the turn of the century, found a new place to construct identities for themselves: consumption promised liberation.

Industrialisation had allowed goods to be manufactured faster than ever before. What was needed now was the clientele. Middle- and upper-class women, who spent most of their time in the home, were an untapped resource. At the same time, cities were becoming increasingly accessible, with the proliferation of the London Underground, horse-drawn omnibuses and cabs. However, women were rarely seen alone in public (a sure sign of loose morals). The department store, then, finally offered a respectable space in which women could operate unchaperoned. The suitability of women to shopping was so accepted that, even as far back as 1864, it was considered "advantageous, if the wife, as well as the husband, were acquainted with the business".

And so it was that department stores were largely designed for, and in turn shaped by, a female audience. They offered, for the first time, public bathrooms for women, enabling them to stay out of the house for most of the day. A high proportion of the staff was female too, offering emancipation of a different form to lower-class women.

Glamorous architecture and sumptuous interiors played a part in attracting this largely female audience across the city, and once customers had entered the store, it was imperative to keep them there. After all, this female audience had much of the day at their disposal. It was from this that the concept of shopping for pleasure, as an event, started to emerge.

The motivation to maximise dwell time directly shaped the physical layout of the typical department store. Boucicaut was once again a pioneer here. He positioned the most popular items such as lace and fabric at opposite poles of the store, forcing shoppers to walk past a plethora of other alluring items en route. Grand staircases and, later, escalators, were positioned in central, light-filled atria, offering customers a



G. H. Lee, Liverpool

tantalising glimpse of other floors as they ascended.

Stores also sought to retain customers by offering amenities beyond retail, such as smoking rooms, reading rooms, and nurseries for any reluctant companions that had been dragged along. Selfridges even offered a Silence Room with plush chairs, low lighting and double glazing to allow customers a moment to recover from the excessive stimulation of the consumer paradise outside. Over time, departments expanded to include services, such as beauty parlours, or the lending library at Boots. However when Whiteleys applied for a licence to sell alcohol in their refreshment room in 1872, it was refused, revealing contemporary concerns about department stores as places that threatened morals and the established order of society.

As time progressed, these facilities were replaced by more spectacular diversions designed to draw in customers from all walks of life. Grand attractions such as theatres, ballrooms and even rooftop golf courses were added, while extravagant events were held to

drive footfall. These included celebrity visits, animal shows, live musicians, and of course, the Christmas grotto. Urban legend claims that Lewis's in Manchester once flooded the basement to create a miniature Venice, complete with gondola rides.

Large stores are coming full circle to this today, as younger generations seek to accrue experiences rather than material goods. Shopping centres, and those department stores that survive, are turning to experiential offerings such as cinemas, bowling alleys and, once again, rooftop golf in an attempt to attract visitors and gain an edge over their online competitors.

We must accept that the retail landscape has changed – perhaps irreversibly. The consensus amongst retailers, developers and landlords is that single-tenant occupancy is no longer viable. In order to preserve these iconic buildings, alternative uses must now be considered: ones which offer unique experiences. Otherwise, we risk filling our town centres with offices, flats, and nowhere to go.

# Case Studies





## Esslemont & Macintosh, Aberdeen

*Category C Listed - Conservation Area - At Risk*

Peter Esslemont and William Macintosh started out as rivals. However, with typical Victorian business acumen, the two went into partnership and established their joint venture on Broad Street in 1873. By the mid 1920s, Esslemont & Macintosh had relocated to bustling Union Street, where it traded for almost another century before closing its doors in 2007.

The company acquired what is now the eastern wing first, initially built for the Daily Free Press by Ellis & Wilson in 1892. The paper merged with the Aberdeen Journal in 1924 and E&M seized the opportunity to move. Two years later the neighbouring drapery, Sangster & Henderson, went out of business, and the company expanded once more.

This building had been designed by R. G. Wilson in 1897, who continued to operate solo after Ellis retired. Like its neighbour, it is fronted in grey granite ashlar, but draws on various elements of Northern European architecture for a more ornate overall appearance, including

mullioned and transomed oriel windows, and a fine pair of Dutch gables. The two buildings were connected in 1989 by constructing a third storey bridge over the intervening alleyway.

Some refurbishment was carried out in the western block in 2011-2, since which time a restaurant has been operating on the ground and first floors. The upper floors were approved for hotel use in 2008, but the conversion failed to materialise and the plans were dropped in 2015.

The eastern wing is more blocky than its cousin, but still boasts some attractive features including pedimented windows, pilasters and a frieze with triglyph and patera patterning. It too was converted to restaurant use on the ground floor in 2018, but the disused upper levels have resulted in a despondent-looking facade with boarded windows. The building seems to have been left largely vacant since the store closed, and has appeared on the Buildings at Risk Register for Scotland for several years.

Above: the 1892 building. Iain Cameron, Flickr  
Opposite: the 1897 building. © Iain Henderson, Flickr



Plucas58, Wikimedia Commons

## Beales, Bolton

*Partly Grade II Listed - Conservation Area - Subdivided for retail*

When Beales entered administration in January 2020, it left more than twenty stores across the UK at risk. The writing had been on the wall for some time, however, and one of its most architecturally striking stores, the Bolton branch, closed its doors in 2016.

Until 1994 the site belonged to Whitakers, a drapery business started by John Whitaker who moved to the city as a 12-year-old apprentice. He later went into partnership with a Mr. Cain, and together they bought the business of a Mr. Stockdale on Deansgate in 1874.

The mock Tudor building, which still bears the Whitakers name, was opened in 1907. The frontage was designed by George Crowther and constructed using timber beams salvaged from demolished buildings on Bradshawgate.

The unlisted neighbouring section, Aspinalls Buildings, was built in 1912 for Edmund Aspinall, pork butcher and later mayor

of Bolton. It was designed by Bolton's oldest architectural firm, Bradshaw Gass & Hope. Faced in pale faience provided by Carter's of Poole, it housed individual shops on the ground floor and a popular dance hall above. The three prominent turrets and domed rooves underwent £500,000 repair work in 2012.

When the site's landlord went into administration, the buildings reportedly reached £800,000 at auction. The ground floor of the mock Tudor building has been taken over by Slater menswear, and that of the faience building is partially occupied by a dessert café.

The two buildings stand opposite the Central Street regeneration site, part of a £1.2bn overhaul of the town centre. Developers Placefirst demolished the buildings opposite in late 2021, and work on a build-to-rent housing development is expected to complete in 2023. With luck, this may revive footfall in the area.





© James Bridle Photography

## Bobby's, Bournemouth

*Unlisted - Restored*

A promising project is almost complete in Bournemouth, where the former Debenhams store has been successfully brought back to life.

The building was once Bobby & Co, later Bobby's, which was originally founded in Margate. The purpose-built Bournemouth store opened in 1915 overlooking the Central Gardens, now The Square. It was originally a symmetrical design, with two terracotta sections flanking a lighter centrepiece with four engaged composite columns, but it was later extended in the same style. The second storey windows are each fronted by monogrammed iron balconies.

The store shut down as part of the nationwide Debenhams closures in May 2021, but developers Verve Properties have been imaginative in their ideas for keeping the building in active use. Besides retail, the store now houses an art gallery, beauty parlour and

local makers' market. Later this year a food hall and rooftop terrace bar will open. Several spaces have a social function, hosting knitting meet-ups and children's entertainers. The varied mix of community-focussed uses seems most faithful to the original department store – a place where people from all walks of life can gather and enjoy themselves.

Verve have also displayed a keen sympathy for the building's history: they have reinstated the Bobby's name on the facade, removed the modern canopy and restored the copper domes. They also intend to repair original features such as the flagpoles, in a "rebirth and celebration of...[the] original architectural style". The building's rejuvenation has already drawn visitors in their droves, proving that the appetite remains for considered offerings in attractive, unique spaces.



© Steve Poole, Flickr

## Brights, Bournemouth

*Grade II Listed - Conservation Area - At Risk*

Frederick Bright founded his haberdashery in 1871 in Bournemouth's Arcade, gradually expanding into neighbouring shops over the following decades and eventually extending onto Gervis Place and Old Christchurch Road.

The latter elevation was largely rebuilt c.1920 to designs attributed to Bournemouth architects Reynolds and Tomlins. The typically art deco Egyptian facade is clad in ceramic marble tiles from Carter's of Poole, who supplied vivid and hand-painted tiles to many pubs and commercial properties along the south coast. The five bay central section is bookended by towers with panels of blue and ochre sunburst motifs, and stepped octagonal domed roofs. It is a bold and expressive building amidst its Victorian neighbours.

However, the structure is in a state of considerable neglect, with leaks and crumbling

walls inside and plant growth and rusting casement windows detracting from the outside.

Following other significant closures in Bournemouth, House of Fraser closed its doors for good in March 2022. Now in the hands of new owners, plans for the building's future have not yet been disclosed.



Martin Bond, Alamy



© Paul Smith, Flickr

## Staffords, Brighton

*Locally Listed - At Risk*

Brighton's Western Road has long been a shopping nexus, and the first few decades of the 20th century saw drapery stores there rapidly expand into neighbouring shops. As in many British towns, local planning in Brighton was kick-started in the aftermath of the First World War. Road-widening schemes were introduced to provide employment and make town centres more accessible to motor cars. It also gave many of these burgeoning department stores the opportunity to consolidate their premises – a rare chance, given that so much of Brighton's streets were laid out along efficient, yet cramped, 19th century plans. A number of stylish art deco edifices sprung up over the next few years, fuelling Western Road's reputation as 'Oxford-Street-by-the-Sea'. However, despite the road's significance as a historic retail centre, it has not been designated as a conservation area.

The Staffords building was one of the

first to be completed. It was built between 1926-30 in a glamorous classical style, with bronze torchères, circular dormer windows with swags, and monogrammed cartouches on the pilasters. Some cartouches remain blank; this part of the store was occupied by a stationer's, Carter's.

Staffords was a varied business dealing in toys, games, stationery, fancy goods and items imported from Asia. The store traded there until the late 40s; during the war it had been requisitioned as an air raid shelter and document storage facility. Several shops have been and gone in the interim. Currently the ground floor has been divided into three separate units, and the upper floors appear to remain in use. However some of the torchères are damaged or missing, and the facade could use some TLC to reinstate this building to its rightful place as one of the finest on the street.



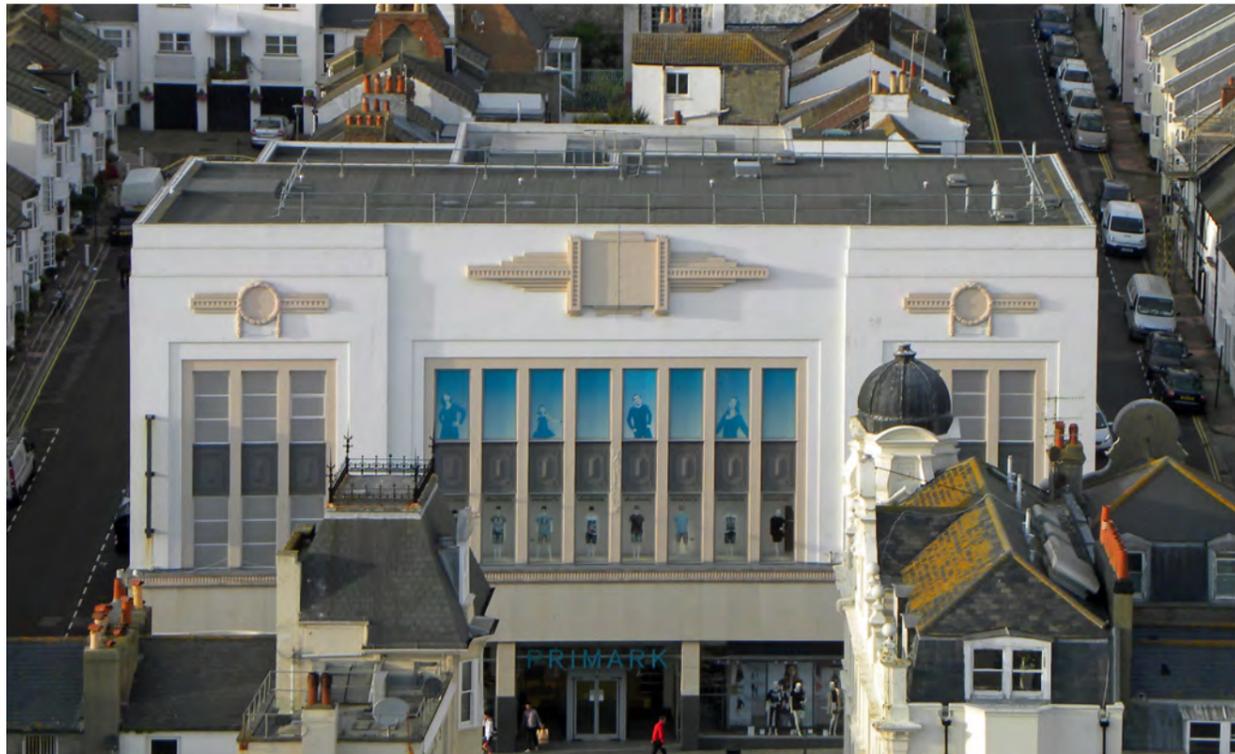
Opposite: © Kevin Lane, Flickr

## British Home Stores, Brighton

*Locally Listed - Restored*

Next door is the former BHS store, another striking product of the construction boom. The designs are attributed tentatively to Garrett & Son, who also planned the Imperial Arcade buildings further down the road, and an M&S store (since rebuilt). Faced with painted Portland stone ashlar, the building's blocky style is subdued with elegant classical motifs in relief, one of which originally incorporated BHS and the construction date, 1931. As was an

increasingly common practice, the building was designed with an optimistic future in mind. The building originally comprised three units, with the other two leased to a hosier and a gown shop until BHS expanded across the whole building in the early 60s. The store was then taken over by C&A Modes in 1970. Later incarnations included Littlewoods (2001-2006) and Primark, who have restored the building to its former glory. The building was locally listed in 2015.



© Jacqi Bartlett, Flickr



## Wade's, Brighton

*Unlisted - Restored*

This neoclassical gem was built in 1932 for W. J. Wade, a draper who had traded on the site since 1891. The 7-bay central section, flanked by rustication, is divided vertically by shallow pilasters and horizontally by metal panels with paterae. In 1936, further extensions were made to all four floors, and a new shop front installed. The store remained open until 1979, when it briefly became Owen Owen, and then Primark in 1981. When Primark moved to the former BHS store, New Look took over the premises – but after entering into a CVA in September 2020, the

store was permanently closed during the third national lockdown.

Unusually, the future of this store has been kept – for now – in the realm of retail. It's one of several new bricks-and-mortar stores for Flannels, the high-end sportswear brand owned by Sports Direct entrepreneur Mike Ashley. The building is listed neither locally nor nationally, and it appears the store's refurbishment has involved only minor alterations to the entrance and street-level windows, which have long since changed from the originals.



## Palmeira Stores, Brighton (overleaf)

*Grade II Listed - Conservation Area - Restored*

At the Hove end of Western Road stands an elegant Grade II listed building with pretty perforated parapets, carved pilasters and Ionic loggias. It was originally built as the Palmeira Hotel in 1863, at the same time as the neighbouring Palmeira Square, with its grand Italianate residences, was being developed. However by 1866 the premises were still unoccupied, and it wasn't until 1873 that the Brighton & Hove Co-operative Supply Association bought and refurbished the building to designs by Thomas Lainson. An 1891 catalogue for Palmeira Stores spans an impressive range of departments, from groceries and tobacco to toys and musical instruments, as well as services such as house repairs and horseshoe fitting. In 1893, a furniture storage warehouse was constructed round the corner on Holland Road, also to designs by Lainson. Decorated lavishly with terracotta and designed in the French Second Empire style, it encloses a

gated courtyard which was fitted with stables. This fantastic building, also listed at Grade II, has since been converted into high-end apartments.

Palmeira Stores flourished for a number of decades. On Valentine's Day, 1932, a fire broke out in the telephone room and spread to the furniture department. It took two hours for the fire brigade to battle the flames. Later that day, the general manager sent 100 motor cars out to collect staff, who were to sort through the damaged stock. The telephone system was replaced by a ten-line telephone board the same day, and by Monday morning the store was open for business as usual.

The Stores ceased trading in 1962, and reopened later that year as a branch of Maple's, who stayed for another 30 years. Since 2005 it has been operating as a Tesco Express, with flats above.

## Co-operative Departmental Store, Brighton

*Locally Listed - Partially Demolished*

Brighton's Co-operative Building is a stripped Classical monument with large Modernist windows and Doric columns, built in 1931. The designs were by a London-based firm headed by Frank Bethell and Charles Swannell, the former of whom also designed the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society's Central Stores in Woolwich. It was then the largest purpose-built department store in Brighton, and was extended in 1962 to create a dedicated supermarket in the face of rising competition.

The Brighton Co-op didn't merge with the Co-operative Wholesale Society until 1994, and the following year the accounting department relocated from these premises to Glasgow. The council rejected an application to demolish the building in 2011, and created a local listing in 2012. Nevertheless in 2013 the entire building except for the facade was demolished to make way for student housing. It appears the facade was given a clean last year.



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7am - 11pm

TESCO  
Express  
Open every day  
7am - 11pm



Loadshare  
& shares



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## Lewis's, Bristol

*Unlisted - Partly Refurbished*

In 1957, Lewis's ninth branch opened on Bristol's Horsefair, in a brand new purpose-built store designed by Sir Percy Thomas & Son. Clad in Portland stone, the building references Streamline Moderne style with its unusual curving facade, shaped like the prow of a ship. The crowning glory atop eight storeys was the roof garden and restaurant.

The building was taken over by John Lewis (no relation) in 1980, followed by Bentalls in 1998, who spent £20m on a refurbishment only to leave two years later. After a brief stint as House of Fraser, the building became a Primark in 2008, at that time the largest store outside London.



Geof Sheppard, Wikimedia Commons

## Debenhams, Bristol

*Unlisted - At Risk*

Neighbouring the former Lewis's building is a Debenhams store, which reopened for one final clearance sale in April 2021. The steel-framed building was originally constructed for Jones & Co, and comprised one of the first completed parts of the sprawling post-war development of the Broadmead shopping area.

Jones was a long-established local business, that had traded in Wine Street since 1840. A century later the premises were destroyed in the Blitz – but the company was resilient, and set up temporary trading premises in as many as eight separate locations across the city. In the meantime, the company insisted on choosing the location for their replacement store, and £1.75 million was spent on its construction. It opened in May 1957 to much

fanfare, promoting itself as “Bristol's ‘own’” department store, keenly aware that Lewis's would be opening next door a few months later.

Debenhams took over the site in 1972, and the store was refurbished in the mid 80s. New escalators were installed behind full-height plate glass windows, which it seems gave many shoppers an uncomfortable feeling of vertigo.

The store ceased trading in May 2021, and the buying process is apparently underway – although it has not yet been confirmed what the new owners intend to do with the building. Bristol's mayor, Marvin Rees, has met with the buyers to discuss future uses, which he believes should be mixed to ensure the area's survival. But as an unlisted building, the buyer could well opt to redevelop the entire site.



## Debenhams, Canterbury

*Partly Grade II Listed - Conservation Area - At Risk*

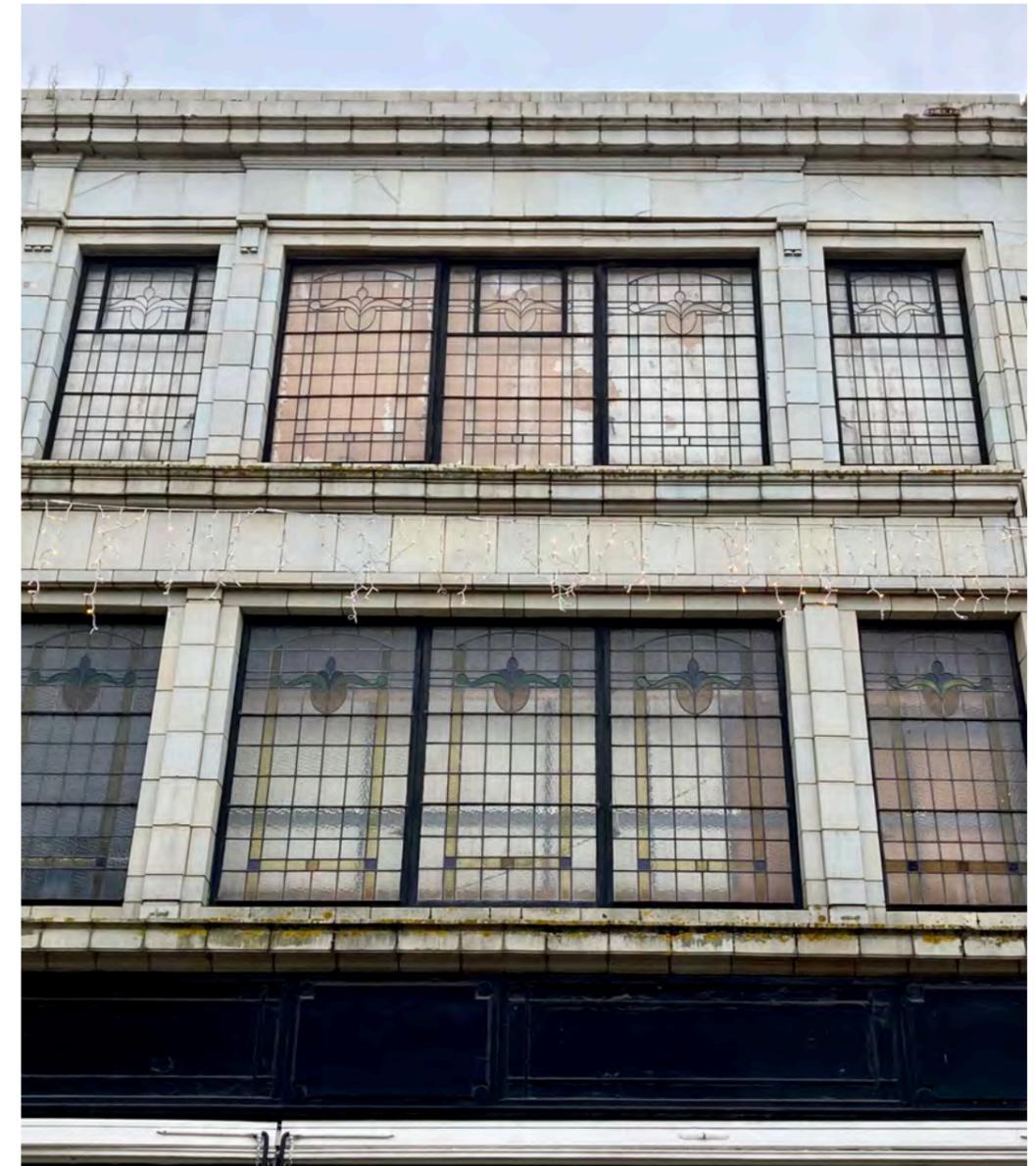
Debenhams closed its doors in Canterbury in January 2020, but until 1973 it was home to local department store Lefevres. Constrained by the city's medieval street pattern, the company, though thriving, was never able to establish a fully united premises. Instead, the store sprawled across multiple units on Guildhall Street, Sun Yard and Mercery Lane, each with a fascinating history. The longest stretch, on Guildhall Street, saw Lefevres' drapery business incorporate the Philosophical & Literary Institution (1825), the Guildhall Tavern and the Theatre Royal. In 1926, the company commissioned Canterbury architects Jenning & Gray to replace the theatre with a steel-framed

Modernist building. Unlisted, it's a rare example of architecture from this period in the city, boasting a ceramic-tiled frontage with stained-glass art nouveau windows. In the 1990s, Debenhams carried out significant remodelling of the interiors, during which some late medieval painted timber frames were discovered. The former Philosophical Institution is also still standing, featuring distinctive tapered windows. The architect, Frederick Hacker, apparently modelled the building on a temple in Athens; sadly the Ionic columns were removed many years ago.

Redevelopment plans for the Guildhall Quarter, designed by Clague Architects for

Chaucer Property Investment Ltd, were greenlit at the start of 2020. The 1920s building was set to reopen as a branch of new department store chain 15:17, which had taken over a number of former department stores in towns across the UK, including Ayr, Worthing and Kirkcaldy. Plans to attract footfall with concessions by local traders and interactive experiences such as axe-throwing sounded promising, but the business

has reportedly run into financial difficulty, closing several stores and making a takeover here unlikely. Furthermore, the upper floors were to be converted for residential use, but issues over the excess strain this would place on the waste water system has stalled all work on the building. For now, this key Canterbury site remains vacant and at serious risk.





## Howells, Cardiff

*Grade II\* Listed - Conservation Area - Undergoing Redevelopment*

James Howell opened his drapery store in 1865, moving to the present location on St. Mary Street two years later. By 1892 the business stretched all the way down to Trinity Street. Construction of new buildings took place in the mid 1870s and late 1880s, which now make up the northern block fronting onto St. Mary Street. The designs were drawn up by W D Blessley in the Renaissance style, with several detailed features including sculpted lion and human heads, shell hoods over the second storey windows and ground floor pilasters with panels of carved foliage.

The dominating aspect, however, is the Neoclassical corner block, an elegantly proportioned structure designed by Sir Percy Thomas and constructed 1928-30. The giant fluted Ionic columns, rising through three storeys, evoke the grandeur of Selfridges; the cornice above echoes the older Howells buildings with carved lion heads. The curved corners of the block are embellished with relief panels depicting classical figures.

Interestingly, an extension in the late 60s subsumed the neighbouring Bethany Baptist Chapel, elements of which were incorporated

into the store interior, including cast iron Corinthian columns, a domed roof and parts of the exterior walls.

The entire 275,000 sq ft building was bought up in 1972 by House of Fraser, who carried out a major refurbishment in 2009.

In the years to follow, the building was to change ownership multiple times. In 2019, then-landlords Naissance Capital Real Estate advertised the lease with the potential for a hotel and apartment redevelopment scheme. The property was later due to be put on sale, but this was delayed until 2021 due to the pandemic. It has now been purchased by Thackeray Group.

Thackeray intends to embark on a £100m mixed-use development plan, converting the building to residential, office and hospitality uses. This will include demolishing a later (c.1975) linking structure to create an inner courtyard with an entrance on Wharton Street, bringing the chapel back into view.

Thackeray has a proven record of reinvigorating heritage buildings, including Cardiff's Market Chambers and Fairfax House, and will be aiming for a carbon net-zero project.



© Jack Deighton, Flickr

## House of Fraser, Chichester

Grade II Listed - Conservation Area - At Risk

Opposite Chichester Cathedral stands a fine red brick building, designed in 1904 by Sir Reginald Bloomfield. It was built as the Oliver Whitby School, originally founded in 1702 and which remained on the site until 1950. Hints of its prior use survive in the gold-lettered school motto, *Vis et Sapientia*, carved into the first storey, and the cartouche bearing the arms of Oliver Whitby above the doorway.

The department store J. D. Morant had been operating in Southsea since 1910, but was destroyed during the Blitz in January 1941. The business moved to Chichester and into St. George's House, later expanding into the rest of

the school after it closed in 1950.

Morants was acquired by Army & Navy Stores in 1955, itself taken over by House of Fraser in 1973. The store was one of several branches to close in early 2019 after the company went into administration.

The site was sold at the end of the year to Interceptor Opportunities Ltd., who have promised to retain an active frontage but are pursuing a mixed-use model. Currently they are thought to be in talks with the council about the possible scope of redevelopment. The building, meanwhile, has been sitting vacant for almost four years.

## Shirers & Lances, Cheltenham

Unlisted - Conservation Area - Restored

Heralded in the press as “one of the most important business building developments in [Cheltenham’s] history”, this smart Art Deco store was completed in 1935. It occupies a prominent position on ‘Boots corner’, opposite Albert Nelson Bromley’s classical Boots building of 1924-7 and the former E. L. Ward department store (now Primark).

The building was commissioned for Shirer & Haddon, a partnership established in 1865 between John Haddon and two former Cavendish House employees, Alexander Shirer & John Macdougall. By the 1930s the company was still flourishing and keen to expand. The former premises were demolished and an island block constructed in its place, half of which was to be let to other shops and businesses. The scheme, designed by North, Robin and Wilsdon of London, cost £100,000 (approximately £5 million today), and Shirer’s part of the new building was able to open within 7 months.

The building owes its smooth and refined appearance to artificial freestone, concrete units designed to look like natural stone (here imitating Painswick limestone, quarried locally near Stroud). The edifice features attractive vertical windows with ziggurat architraves and fluted panel details. The interiors originally afforded 70 sq ft of showroom space on each floor, accessible both by an elegant staircase and a modern lift, with fixtures supplied by furniture artist the Marquis d’Oisy. The building also featured an arcade running through the centre of the block, as well as a rooftop garden.

The following year a furniture business, John Lance, moved in to form Shirers & Lances. The store traded until 1979, and has since been divided into multiple retail units with offices above. Council improvement plans will see a ‘pocket park’ open in front of the building in April 2022.



Tony Hisgett, Wikimedia Commons



© Marten Kuilman, Flickr

## TJ Hughes, Eastbourne

*Unlisted - Conservation Area - At Risk*

This handsome building by P D Stonham was originally completed in 1926 as new premises for Dale & Kerley, one of the finer stores operating in the town at the turn of the century. The business changed hands multiple times; it was taken over by Barker's in the 1950s, then House of Fraser and Army & Navy before the final takeover by TJ Hughes. The store was partially destroyed during the Blitz, but was repaired in the same style in 1953. With elegant rusticated pilasters, moulded cartouches and bullseye dormer windows, it makes an important contribution to the streetscape.

The building has been vacant since the store closed in May 2019, and was subject to a Modern Slavery investigation earlier this year when workers hired to clear the building of its fixtures were found to be living there in squalid conditions. Plans have now been submitted by investors Capreon, who intend to create a 'landmark' building on this important corner plot that they believe will "enhance the conservation area". Unfortunately, in their eyes

this means demolishing the existing landmark building, and replacing it with a bland apartment block – plans denounced by the Eastbourne Society as “nothing short of vandalism.”

Facade retention was rejected as too costly, while the patchwork of interior levels and ceiling heights makes renovation a challenge. Most parts of the building are in poor condition. However, there are strong arguments for preserving this building in its entirety, which occupies a prominent position close to the seafront and is congruous with the historic fabric of surrounding buildings. The third floor was once home to a striking dining room with stained glass skylights and an impressive dome, which are still intact. It could easily operate as a smart restaurant again. As the Eastbourne Chronicle reported in 1926, “In elevation [the] premises will represent to Eastbourne what Woolworth's premises represent to New York.” The irrevocable loss of this detailed and distinctive building would be a real tragedy.



Kevin Wheal, Alamy

## Debenhams, Guildford

*Non-designated Heritage Asset - Conservation Area - At Risk*

When construction began on this building in 1963, it was for the well-established department store chain Plummer Roddis. By the time the store opened in 1968, Debenhams had bought up the company, eventually rebranding in 1974.

The designs were by George Baines & Syborn, an architectural practice that developed from the firm behind the Chapman building in Taunton, as well as its 1959 extension after it was taken over by Debenhams. The two riverside buildings share similar features: sweeping, curved elevations; a balance of brickwork, concrete and glazing; vertical fins and sky blue panels. It is a quintessential example of midcentury department store architecture. Unfortunately, like its Taunton counterpart, it is also severely threatened.

The store's location in the Millmead and Portsmouth Road Conservation Area, directly bordering the Town Centre CA, has traditionally limited Debenhams from modifying the building too extensively. However, following its closure in 2021, new owners Native Land have

lodged an application to demolish the site and build two predominantly residential blocks alongside a landscaped riverside section, which is to be renamed St Mary's Wharf. Unlike the current building, which elegantly responds to the sinuous curves of both the riverside and road-facing sections of the plot, the proposed designs show eight- and nine-storey rectangular blocks, whose height and massing are at odds with the surrounding townscape.

SAVE has raised formal objections to the proposals, as have The Twentieth Century Society and Historic England. This is partly on heritage grounds, considering not only the loss of a valuable asset, but also the potential harm to views of, and from, several highly graded surrounding buildings. But SAVE also objects on sustainability terms: granting approval for demolition would directly undermine Guildford Borough Council's professed intentions to become carbon neutral in its operations by 2030. As many other cases here demonstrate, reuse is both viable and environmentally conscious.

## Debenhams, Harrogate

*Unlisted - Conservation Area - At Risk*

Harrogate's charming Debenhams store occupies a relatively prominent position within the town conservation area, standing at the junction of Parliament Street and Oxford Street. It is the product of stylistically harmonised multi-phased development beginning in 1909 and continuing throughout the 1920s; it was later extended in the 1960s in the typical style of the era.

Designed for draper William Buckley, the original portion of the building features a canted corner; ashlar stone detailing to contrast with the red brick elevations; decorative sections of stained glass; and narrow gables that greatly add to the character of the street's skyline. At time of construction, it was one of five brick buildings in central Harrogate – the others being

landmark structures such as the Grand Opera House and The Majestic Hotel.

The store changed hands multiple times, notably to Busby's in 1953, then to Debenhams in 1958. From 1960-1962, the older building between the 1919 section and what is now Westminster Arcade was replaced to designs by Victor Syborn (who became a partner at the George Baines practice around this time).

The site's owners have now submitted plans for full demolition, claiming the interior layout makes reuse unfeasible. SAVE shares Historic England's concerns that this would be an unjustifiable loss for the conservation area, and again contradicts ambitions to limit carbon emissions. In view of this opposition, a decision has not yet been scheduled at time of writing.



Alistair Todd, Picfair



© Budby, Flickr

## Morgan & Squire, Leicester

*Unlisted - Conservation Area - Restored*

Leicester's branch of the popular Rackham's chain began life as a drapery named Morgan & Squire. Henry Morgan had started his business on the outskirts of Leicester in the early 19th century, hiring William Squire as a young apprentice. Evidently the two worked well together, and in 1846 they went into partnership and enjoyed considerable success at a new site on Hotel Street.

Morgan & Squire remained a family business throughout its expansions over the following decades, and in 1908 a new store was unveiled, attributed to Everard & Pick whose offices were next door at number 6. This corner building still gleams with Portland stone ashlar,

and seems to epitomise a period of stylistic change: the confident gables facing onto both Hotel Street and Millstone Lane echo those of the grade II listed Gothic building at 8-10 Millstone Lane, while the elevations' clean lines and the elegant curves on the first-storey windows seem to hint at the Art Nouveau movement still to come.

The store passed through many different hands in the latter half of the 20th century, including Swears & Wells, J J Allen, and House of Fraser, which rebranded this branch as Rackhams in the 70s. It closed in 1990 and has since been subdivided into retail, hospitality and office units, with student accommodation above.



## Fenwick, Leicester

*Grade II Listed - Conservation Area - Restored*

Isaac Barradale was one of Leicester's most prominent architects, designing numerous domestic and commercial buildings around the city. Two of his finest can be found on the corner of Market Street, formerly occupied by Fenwick and soon to be unveiled after a £17 million refurbishment.

Barradale designed the Market Street building for Joseph Johnson, a draper, in 1880. He also designed the neighbouring Gresham Buildings on the corner plot, completed in 1883. Johnson's enjoyed great success and was able to expand into these buildings in 1900, before

buying up large parts of Belvoir Street and replacing the existing smaller shops with a Moderne extension designed by Fosbrooke and Bedingfield in 1926.

Further extension work was carried out when Fenwick took over in 1962, and the company was a fixture of the street until 2017. Developers Aimrok Holdings were given planning consent in 2019, and since then a painstaking conversion has been underway. The buildings, retitled The Gresham, opened as a 128-room aparthotel alongside retail and co-working office space in Autumn 2021.

Opposite: As Fenwick (Alamy)

Overleaf: As The Gresham, 2021 © The Gresham/Will Johnson



PEDESTRIAN ZONE  
Except for loading  
Sun - Fri  
5 am - 10 am  
Saturday  
5 am - 9 am  
All any time

CAUTION  
AUTOMATIC  
BOLLARDS  
IN  
OPERATION  
DO NOT  
TAILGATE

McDonald's  
HOT CHOCOLATE  
BLEND

Merry Christmas

MAZI ZRR



© AHR

## Lewis's, Liverpool

Grade II Listed - Undergoing Redevelopment

Friends of the People was the store motto of David Lewis, an entrepreneur and philanthropist born in London in 1823. He settled in Liverpool, working as a tailor's apprentice until he had saved enough capital to strike out on his own. He began with a modest shop, 24 foot in length, selling boys' and menswear. Within ten years he had branched into womenswear, and after expanding into neighbouring plots he added footwear and tobacco departments in 1870. Further branches in Manchester (1880), Sheffield (1884) and Birmingham (1885) would open within his lifetime.

In the early hours of Christmas Eve 1886, a year after Lewis passed away, a terrible fire ravaged the Liverpool premises. The firm traded out of reduced temporary premises before the first portion of the new building could open seven months later. This building was in turn gradually redeveloped between 1910 and 1923. A rooftop garden was added, populated with parrots and monkeys; 24,000 tonnes of earth were dug out to create a basement; and a private railway side was added to allow direct transfer of goods to the store. The designs were by Gerald de Courcy Fraser, who had been articled to the store's original architect Walter William

Thomas. He went on to build several stores for Lewis's, including the Leicester building which was sadly demolished in the 1990s, save for the Modernist tower.

The Liverpool store was delivered a second major blow during the Blitz, when the building was largely reduced to a smouldering shell. The Watson Building, now converted to offices, was the only earlier C20th portion left standing. Fraser was again charged with overseeing the new building, which was designed in 1947 and constructed 1948-56.

This present building is monumental in scale, designed in a stripped Classical style with Portland stone around a steel frame. The flat corner elevation is the iconic face of the building, featuring a tall Egyptian-style porticoed entrance crowned by Jacob Epstein's 18' bronze nude of a man riding the prow of a ship. Commissioned to symbolise Liverpool's resilience after the war, the Liverpool Resurgent

(known affectionately as 'Dickie Lewis') rapidly became a local landmark and was immortalised in Peter McGovern's song *In My Liverpool Home*.

The Lewis's name remained here even after the business was bought by another department store chain, Owen Owen, in 1992. However the company went into administration in 2007, and the building was bought up by Merepark who had intentions to redevelop the site. The store ceased trading in 2010, but Merepark's plans fell by the wayside and the property changed hands again in 2017. Current owners Augur are redeveloping the site as The Circus, which was originally designed as a mix of retail and office space to join the hotel and gym that has already opened on the site. However, planning permission was recently granted for wider flexibility of use, and architects 3DReid are currently working on plans to reduce the retail space in favour of 200 residential units and an additional hotel.



© Rob Higgins. Flickr

## G. H. Lee and Bon Marché, Liverpool

*Unlisted - At Risk*

In 1878, Lewis opened a second department store in Liverpool, the Bon Marché. He had recently travelled to Paris to see the eponymous store, and this store was certainly aimed at a slightly wealthier clientele than Lewis's, providing goods imported from France, Germany and Italy. Lewis is widely credited as creating the first Christmas grotto, and certainly in 1879 Bon Marché was laying on a dazzling display of gifts and toys, from mechanical peacocks to talking dolls from Paris.

The current building facing onto Basnett Street was designed by Lewis's favoured architect, G. de C. Fraser, and built 1912-18. Steel framed, and clad in Portland stone, it features an intriguing mix of French Renaissance trophies (one of which features a WWI tank), a Greek key stringcourse and Egyptian-styled scarab motifs. It was extended upwards c.1923, and an additional block curving round onto Parker Street was added in 1928 to designs by Hillier, Parker, May & Rowden.

Neighbouring the Bon Marché building was once George Henry Lee's store. The business started out as a straw bonnet warehouse on Basnett Street and ultimately spanned the length of the block down to Houghton Street. The corner building here was reconstructed in 1908 to designs by Henry Hartley, featuring marble pilasters and engaged columns, which

was extended along Basnett Street in 1910. Lee's was bought up by Selfridges in 1919, and another block on Houghton Street was built to emulate the London store, with giant fluted Ionic columns and a dentilled cornice. It was intended to reconstruct the other buildings to similar designs, although this never took place.

Selfridge sold his provincial stores to the John Lewis Partnership in 1940. In the 1950s, Bon Marché found sales declining, and the store was briefly taken over by the Liverpool Co-operative Society. In 1961, it too was acquired by John Lewis and the two neighbouring stores were merged under the G. H. Lee name. The store was rebranded as John Lewis in 2002, but only a year later the company agreed to relocate as part of the Liverpool ONE scheme. The G. H. Lee and Bon Marché buildings closed in 2008, and were split into individual retail units with varying success, and some parts remain empty.

Plans were submitted for hotel conversions by different operators in 2014 and 2017, but no work commenced. Developers Niboco put forward a new application in early 2019 for a hotel, nightclub and casino, which was approved – however, the building was put on the market by freeholder Legal & General a few months later. It's unclear whether the dispute has been resolved, and the building's future hangs in the balance.





Phil Nash, Wikimedia Commons

## Compton House, Liverpool

*Grade II Listed - Restored*

Compton House may be the oldest purpose-built department store building in the country. It was constructed for William and James Redcliffe Jeffery, two American brothers who set up a multifaceted business in 1832 offering outfitting, cabinet-making and fabrics for sale. Their original premises were burnt down in an arson attack by a disgruntled former employee, but the resplendent five-storey building standing today went up in a matter of years, opening in 1867.

Sadly a few years later William Jeffery was diagnosed with apoplexy, and the store's high running costs led to its eventual closure. The building reopened as the Compton Hotel in 1873, offering luxurious accommodation to

American guests arriving in Liverpool on the transatlantic steamers.

At some point, the corner towers lost their steeply pitched roofs – however the rest of the glorious Neo-Renaissance facade, constructed in Stourston stone, remains, with plenty of sculpted flourishes including cartouches, pediments and arms representing Liverpool, Manchester, Britain and the United States.

As the golden age of cruise travel waned the hotel began to struggle, and in 1928 the premises were returned to retail use by Marks & Spencer. The store is still trading there today, and in 2009 a large-scale renovation took place to revive disused parts of the building.



© Brigster, Flickr

## Littlewoods, Liverpool

*Unlisted - Still Trading*

A stone's throw away on Church Street is the former Littlewoods store, built 1951-55 to replace the original premises that had been bombed during the war. 'Spinney House' (an in-joke by founder David Moores, meaning copse or 'little wood') operated as the headquarters and shopfront for Littlewoods Mail Order Stores for almost half a century. The building is a colossal structure fronted with Portland stone, occupying 84,000 sq foot over eight storeys. The design was by Robert Threadgold working under Alfred Ernest Shennan.

Richard Pollard notes in a recent edition of Pevsner the nostalgic impact of using Art-Deco-classical elements in the 1950s. However, it melds beautifully with the emerging local language of department store buildings; like Lewis's and Blackler's, both designed by G. de C.

Fraser, they were the giants of the high street, resurrected with sleek post-war defiance.

The Littlewoods building is particularly notable as one of the last major structures to feature decorative sculpture. The building is littered with nautical motifs sculpted primarily by George Herbert Tyson Smith, remembered best for his fine work on war memorials. Among the details here are Corinthian pillars topped with seahorses, roundels featuring a double-tailed merman, and a moulded stringcourse of shells and dolphins.

Littlewoods left the building in the early 2000s after a buy-out from Primark, who began trading there in 2007. The trailing queues outside the store after lockdown lifted suggest they'll be there for a while yet.

## Owen Owen, Liverpool

*Unlisted - Undergoing Redevelopment*

The impressively monikered Owen Owen was eight years old when he went to live with his uncle in Bath and start work in his drapery store. In 1868, at the age of 20, he opened his own store on Liverpool's London Road, a few doors down from another uncle's shop. Within just a few years he was employing 120 members of staff and had expanded into both his uncle's premises, and the neighbouring Audley House, which later became TJ Hughes.

By the 1920s, Liverpool's commercial centre had moved away from London Road. The Owen family bought up a new building on Clayton Square near other department stores including Lewis's, Bon Marché and G. H. Lee. Neighbouring the new Gunton & Gunton extension for G. H. Lee, it provided Clayton Square with another elegant Neoclassical Portland stone frontage, with giant three-storey pilasters and a dentilled cornice wrapping around chamfered corners. The designs were by

W. Aubrey Thomas (architect of the Royal Liver Building) with input from Stewart McLauchlan. The store opened in 1925 sporting all mod-cons, including automatic sprinklers, six customer lifts, and, on the top floor, a refrigerated storeroom where customers could keep their fur coats safe over the summer months. The company continued to flourish for many years, going on to rescue several Lewis's stores from administration in the early 1990s. But in 1995 the Liverpool branch closed for good, and was until recently partially occupied by a Tesco Metro.

Sports Direct owner and head of Fraser Group Mike Ashley has, happily, recently announced plans to revive the whole building. It will launch in 2022 as a flagship store for his luxury brand Flannels, where seven storeys of retail will be complemented by a fitness studio, beauty department and rooftop restaurant.

Opposite: pictured during restoration, April 2021.  
Credit: Frombowen, Wikimedia Commons





## Blackler's, Liverpool

*Unlisted - At Risk*

The art deco block spanning most of Great Charlotte Street in Liverpool was once the fine Blackler's store, remembered by generations of Liverpudlians as the home of an 18ft Santa statue who presided over the Christmas grotto each year, and Blackie the rocking horse.

The original store was badly damaged

during the Blitz, and operated out of temporary premises until this striking minimalist structure was completed in 1953. The designs were by G. de C. Fraser Son & Geary, the first of whom had designed buildings for Lewis's. The stripped style was typical of a growing architectural voice in the city inspired by North American commercial buildings that was also being practised by Frank Atkinson (Adelphi Hotel) and students of Charles Reilly, then head of the Liverpool School of Architecture. The original

store's second-storey colonnade was replaced with minimalist pilasters and long vertical windows, with an extensive canopy over the ground-floor. In 1983 the last shareholder from the Blackler family passed away, and the store closed for good in 1988.

Currently, the ground floor of the building is divided amongst multiple pubs, one of which bears the name 'The Richard John Blackler', and another 'The Rocking Horse', in which Blackie now resides. The relatively long

and narrow footprint of the building makes it more amenable to conversion than most, but the upper floors appear to be vacant, bearing a sign for Egerton Developments, which was dissolved in 2016.

Image: Rodhullandemu, Wikimedia Commons



John Bradley, Wikimedia Commons

## TJ Hughes, Liverpool

*Unlisted - At Risk*

There has been an Audley House standing on this site since at least the 1880s, but the present building, constructed c.1910, is generally attributed to Walter William Thomas (architect of the Philharmonic Dining Rooms and early Lewis's store). Then-owners Owen Owen were thriving and commissioned a suitably grand building, with turreted corners, elaborately carved balconies and an ornamented tower with both bullseye and pedimented sash windows.

Thomas J. Hughes was a former Owen Owen apprentice who set up shop on London Road in 1912. In 1925, the directors of Owen Owen were preparing to move to their new premises on Clayton Square, but were struggling to find a buyer for Audley House. The company's architect, W. A. Thomas (son of W. W. Thomas) encouraged the chairman to consult with other drapers on London Road, and on visiting Hughes' store the chairman was so impressed with his management that a deal was struck:

Hughes could move into Audley House in exchange for part ownership.

The larger building allowed TJ Hughes to expand into a greater number of departments, and it soon became known as the place for a bargain. In 1935 the company took over the original Owen Owen site across the road (which had also traded as a Woolworths for a short time), and replaced the original building with a modest two-storey block. This building is now undergoing demolition to allow construction of a new apartment block.

For now, TJ Hughes continues to trade in Audley House, but the company is reportedly looking for a more central site. In late 2021, a planning application was submitted to convert the building for residential use, with promises to retain much of the external fabric. The area is in much need of investment and regeneration, and this beautiful landmark building has the potential to be right at the heart of it.



© James Lambeth, Flickr

## Woolworths, Liverpool

*Unlisted - Redeveloped*

This entrance to the Liverpool ONE retail and leisure complex is built on the site of the first Woolworths store to open in the UK. The opening day in November 1909 attracted more than 60,000 customers, despite prudish reservations from local papers scrutinising the sales of hunting knives (decidedly “un-British”) and comparing Woolworth to P. T. Barnum. The public clearly felt otherwise, and by 1920 the company had opened 90 stores across the UK and were desperate to expand their Liverpool flagship. In 1921, the opportunity finally arose when Harrods pulled out of a deal to demolish and redevelop the site of St. Peter's Church, just opposite the store. Woolworths immediately set its architect, William Priddle, to work. He seized

the opportunity to create a “finely appointed building” with room for expansion, mothballing the first floor and basement for the future. Either side of the Woolworths shop floor were two tenants, Burton the tailor and C&A Modes, adding prestige to their affordably priced neighbour. The distinctive facade features a mix of art deco and Neoclassical elements: geometric metal casement windows and a ziggurat roofline are softened by ornamental modillions, carved bullseye window frames and Doric columns.

The store closed in 1983, but it has remained in retail use. In the 2000s the ground floor was subdivided into individual retail units and the entrance was formed into an arcade leading into the shopping complex.

## Whiteleys, London

Grade II Listed - Conservation Area - Undergoing Redevelopment

The history of London's first department store mingles stratospheric success with extreme tragedy. Founder William Whiteley opened his drapery on Westbourne Grove in 1863, and by 1867 had expanded across a row of shops housing 17 departments. Within a decade of opening, he employed over 600 staff on-site, while a further 1000 worked on the company's farm-land and in its factories. Whiteley's rapid expansion across a wide range of products and services angered local tradesmen and shop-keepers, and it's thought that the series of fires affecting the store in the 1880s were caused by arsonists. The largest took hold in 1887, completely destroying the store – described as

“an immense symposium of the arts and industries of the nation and of the world.” Tragedy struck once more in 1907, when Whiteley was murdered by a man claiming to be his illegitimate son.

The premises had been rebuilt after the fire, but another new store was erected on Queens Road (now Queensway) to designs by John James Joass and John Belcher, which opened in 1911. No expense was spared for this colossal structure, which included a theatre and a rooftop golf course. Two layers of giant colonnades line the main facade across twelve bays, with bay windows and bronze balconies perched between columns. The rooftop features



Oxfordian Kissuth, Wikimedia Commons

cupolas at either end, and a larger central dome behind an elaborately carved crest. Further extensions were made in 1925-27, at which point the store was bought by Harry Gordon Selfridge.

Throughout the 20th century, parts of the store were gradually siphoned off for office use, before the building was converted into a shopping centre in 1989. The allure had started to fade, however, and the construction of Westfield in nearby Shepherd's Bush drew the

centre's last remaining customers away. The building is now the subject of a £1.25bn overhaul by Foster + Partners for owners Meyer Bergman. The facade and domes will be retained and restored, but there are big changes afoot within. The retail space will be reduced by 65%, replaced by luxury and affordable housing, cafés and restaurants, a cinema, members' club, spa and hotel. The development is due to complete in 2023.



© Sam Lane Photography, Flickr

## M&S Marble Arch, London

*Unlisted - Set to be demolished*

Amid multiple large store closures on Oxford Street in 2021, this building was unexpectedly placed under threat when M&S announced intentions to demolish the store and rebuild with a mix of retail and leasable office space, restricting the shop space to just two and a half floors of a nine-storey building.

The building, known as Orchard House, has been home to M&S since 1930. It was constructed that year for the teashop business Lyons & Co under the directorship of Harry Salmon, a key figure in the redevelopment of the Portman Estate at this time. M&S, keen to establish a presence in the West End, jumped at the chance to rent the lower floors. Quickly finding success there, they were able to expand next door in 1932 and acquired the whole building in 1967.

The architects behind the scheme were Trehearne & Norman, who had recently designed Africa House on Kingsway. The exteriors of Orchard House harmonise with the older elevations on the street, nodding to its neighbour Selfridges with tall Ionic pilasters, metal casement windows and a heavy cornice. The facade was originally decorated with sculptures by A. T. Bradford depicting characters from Alice in Wonderland, of which only the White Knight remains as a keystone below the corner clock.

A listing bid has been refused, and, despite protestation by SAVE and The Twentieth Century Society, the plans have been approved by Westminster City Council. M&S have entitled their future-proofing programme “Never the Same Again” – an apt description.

## Arding & Hobbs, London (overleaf)

*Grade II Listed - Undergoing Redevelopment*

Standing at the foot of Lavender Hill in Clapham Junction is a baroque confection of a building: the former Arding & Hobbs department store, most recently trading as Debenhams.

The company was established on Wandsworth High Street in 1867, opening their third – and what was to be their flagship – store in the present location in 1884. However these premises were destroyed in a large fire just before Christmas in 1909 (urban legend has it that a large display of turkeys outside a shop opposite were roasted in the blaze).

The store was rebuilt the following year to designs by James S. Gibson, best known for the Gothic revival Middlesex Guildhall on Parliament Square. The Arding & Hobbs store – designed to amalgamate all three branches – couldn’t be more different. A steel-framed structure clad in red brick, it features florid stone dressings including monogrammed cartouches and swags. The most striking detail is the elaborate corner clock tower, topped by four aedicules and a dome. Extensions were added in

1928, including a restaurant, whose stained glass lightwell survives; banqueting rooms – and a masonic temple.

The store passed through several hands in the following decades: United Drapery Stores, Allders and, finally, Debenhams. The building was bought in 2018 by W. Real Estate Ltd. and, after the collapse of Debenhams last year, plans were submitted for conversion to office space on the upper floors, and subdivided retail units on the ground and basement levels. The proposals also involve the construction of two additional storeys in a modern style, the design for which has been inspired by the arches of the first floor windows. While the extension has been met with some consternation, the developers appear to have some admirable ambitions: they plan to remove the mid-century canopy and replace it with more traditional awnings, reinstate structural columns at street level, and restore historic windows on the Ilminster Gardens frontage. Planning permission was granted in April 2021 and work is now underway.



DEBENHAMS



DEBENHAMS

DEBENHAMS

ARDING & HOBBS

ARDING & HOBBS

DEBENHAMS

DEBENHAMS

FLASH

70% OFF

70% OFF





## Pauldens, Manchester

*Grade II Listed - Conservation Area - Undergoing Redevelopment*

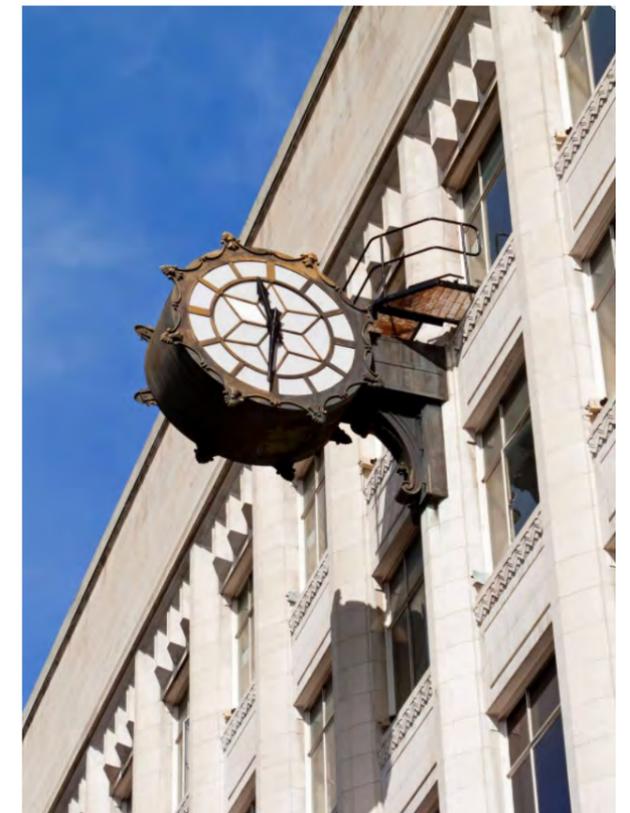
Pauldens' premises appeared in many guises after its establishment in the 1860s. The store started out on Stretford Road in Hulme, where it was rebuilt twice before suffering damage in the Blitz. Another large-scale refurbishment of 1957 was never to be appreciated by Pauldens customers; a few days before the grand reopening a fire broke out causing the building to collapse dramatically into the road. The business was forced to move into temporary premises – a drill hall across the street. In 1959, however, the store found a new permanent home in the Rylands Building by Piccadilly Gardens.

This striking monument, built in steel and clad in Portland Stone, was designed by Harry S. Fairhurst in 1932. The original occupiers, Rylands & Sons, were the biggest textile manufacturers in the UK at the time; founder John Rylands was Manchester's first multi-millionaire. They used the building as a wholesale warehouse to showcase textiles to prospective buyers. This unique type of building had been popping up across Manchester since the beginning of the 19th century, as the city was a hub for textile manufacture. In many ways, these large, impressive buildings acted as precursors to the department store.

The building was already partially in retail use, with parts leased to Marks & Spencer and Burton before Pauldens took over. In 1973, the store name was rebranded as Debenhams, who had bought up the business in 1928.

Since the company went into administration in December 2020, the building's owners AM Alpha have submitted proposals for

a £68.5m refurbishment which they hope will “restore and rejuvenate” the site. According to consultation documents, conversions to a cinema, gallery and apartments were all considered. Ultimately it was found that an office conversion was the only financially viable option to fund the restoration and conservation work required. However, the ground floor will be returned to its original layout by creating an arcade of individual retailers. The plans were approved in January 2021 in spite of concerns over the four-storey rooftop extension.



NorthScape, Alamy



© Budby, Flickr

## Lewis's, Manchester

*Unlisted - Partially Restored*

As one of the few retailers apparently still able to withstand the pressures of the high street, Primark occupies a considerable number of former department stores. The Manchester branch is housed in the old Lewis's building, which opened in 1880 as the first outpost of the Liverpool store.

In 1908 the company was able to buy up two adjoining buildings and commission a brand-new store. Designed by J W Beaumont & Son, the new building was constructed in steel and concrete with a Portland stone facing, and completed in 1915. Facilities included a hairdressing salon, soda fountain, telegraph office and a grand restaurant. A wired glass dome was installed, shedding light all the way

down to the ground floor.

Extensions begun in 1926 brought the total selling space to 295,000 sq ft, more than doubling the site's previous size. During the works a time capsule was built into the wall by the main entrance.

The store finally ceased trading in 2001, at which point Primark moved in. A partial refurbishment across three storeys was carried out in 2013, and the facade is in good condition. The upper floors underwent asbestos removal treatment around the same time, and the company considered redevelopment plans to convert them to leasable office space. This was considered financially unviable, though, and the floors appear to remain vacant.

## Kendals, Manchester (overleaf)

*Grade II Listed - Conservation Area - Undergoing Redevelopment*

A stone's throw away stands Kendals, another art deco icon of Manchester's city centre. The store is arguably Britain's longest running department store: the roots of the business can be traced back to 1796, when John Watts founded a ladies' outfitters on Deansgate. Forty years later, three senior employees, Kendal, Milne and Faulkner, bought out the business and expanded to an additional site across the road. Business boomed, and by the turn of the century the store was employing over 900 members of staff, and housed departments ranging from clothing to cabinet-making. In 1919 the store was bought up by Harrods, but after protests from staff and shoppers the Kendals name was retained. This continued long after House of Fraser took over in 1959, and is still how most locals refer to it even after it was officially rebranded in 2005.

The present building was completed in 1940, expedited somewhat by a fire in the old part of the building. The designs were drawn up by Harrods' in-house architect, Louis David Blanc, with input from J. S. Beaumont (who had worked with his father on the Lewis's building). The building's sleek facade is of Portland stone, punctuated by glass blocks forming bold vertical

strips. Upon completion, it was immediately requisitioned by the Civil Service and only opened to customers after the war.

In summer 2021 owners Investec received planning approval to convert the building into Grade A office space, with around 50,000 sq ft of retail to be retained on the ground floor in a similar scheme to the Pauldens redevelopment. The architects for the scheme, Sheppard Robson, recently completed a sensitive restoration of the Redfern and Dantzic buildings at NOMA, but have acknowledged that repurposing the Kendals building will necessitate the loss of some historic fabric. The characteristic glass blocks lining the elevations are to be mostly replaced by new glazing to allow more light; a two-storey rooftop extension is required to finance the project; and the creation of a central atrium will mean losing two of ten original art deco column heads.

Building had been expected to get underway in early 2022, however issues such as labour shortages have now pushed this back by a year. In the meantime, House of Fraser are continuing to trade on a six month rolling lease.



HOUSE OF FRASER

HOUSE OF FRASER

KING ST WEST

WOULDN'T I SEE A WAY FORWARD  
SLEEPING TO CALM  
SHEILA ANDERSON  
THE WIFE  
WOULDN'T I SEE A WAY FORWARD  
RETURN TO CALM



## The Manchester Co-operative Estate

Grade II Listed (except Federation House) - Partly within Conservation Area - Undergoing Redevelopment

Today's Co-op group descended from a movement begun by the Rochdale Pioneers in 1844. By 1900 the movement had spawned 1,439 regional co-operatives, operating under the banner of The Co-operative Wholesale Society, founded in Manchester in 1863.

By 1867, the society was thriving, with "too much in the bank". In urgent need of more warehouse space, the company bought up the land between Balloon Street and Garden Street, near Manchester Victoria station. Construction of an enormous CWS building was completed in

1869. The building went on to house the Architects Department, formed in 1896 and headed by Francis Eldred Lodge Harris between 1897-1918. By 1913, the department was working on 60 plans for purpose-built Co-op buildings across England.

This building has since been replaced, but as the society flourished, its Manchester footprint grew. Warehouses, offices, even staff surgeries popped up on the surrounding streets, all designed in-house.

The Co-operative Group are now

backing a huge regeneration scheme, rebranding the area as NOMA (North Manchester). It includes their recently built HQ at One Angel Square (2013), alongside several other historic Co-op buildings which are to be renovated for various new uses.

Already completed are Redfern Building (1935-6) and Dantzig House (1937-42), designed by CWS' in-house architect W. A. Johnson (alongside J. W. Cropper in the case of Redfern). Originally used primarily as warehouses, they now provide attractive office space across two

wonderfully restored Dutch Modernist blocks.

Also complete is the Neo-Baroque Hanover Building, built between 1903-5 and extended in 1907-9 by F. E. L. Harris. It was recently refurbished to provide office space for WeWork and Amazon, as well as exhibition space, a small theatre and a podcast studio for architects and designers. Approval was also granted last year for plans to redevelop The Old Bank, another Johnson building from 1927-30, as office, retail and leisure space.



Redfern Building, pictured in 2016 - James West, Wikimedia Commons



Hanover Building © David Dixon, Geograph.org.uk



© Edward Kendal, Flickr

## Mansfield & Sutton Co-operative Society

*Unlisted - Conservation Area - To Be Restored*

Mansfield has few buildings of Art Deco character, and its finest example was until recently under serious threat.

The former Mansfield & Sutton Co-operative Society building was in use as a Beales store until administrators were appointed in early 2020. For a long time, the Co-op was Mansfield's only established department store. Besides shopping it also catered for funeral arrangements, coal deliveries and plumbing services.

The Queen Street building was originally an extension to older Co-op premises round the corner on Stockwell Gate, which have since been replaced by the Four Seasons shopping centre. The first part of the building was completed in 1938, and an extension added

in 1963 to create a symmetrical elevation either side of the iconic central clock tower. Many of the original features survive, including casement windows and decorative metal panels.

After standing empty for two years, hope for the building's future has at last emerged after Mansfield District Council purchased the site in early 2022, with intentions to use the premises as its new headquarters. A town regeneration 'masterplan' announced in late 2021 proposes to introduce a mix of uses, including residential, student accommodation and office space – alongside retail – across this and fifteen other buildings in the town centre. The council have also received government funding to formulate a design code for the project, fostering a unified local vernacular across the redevelopments.

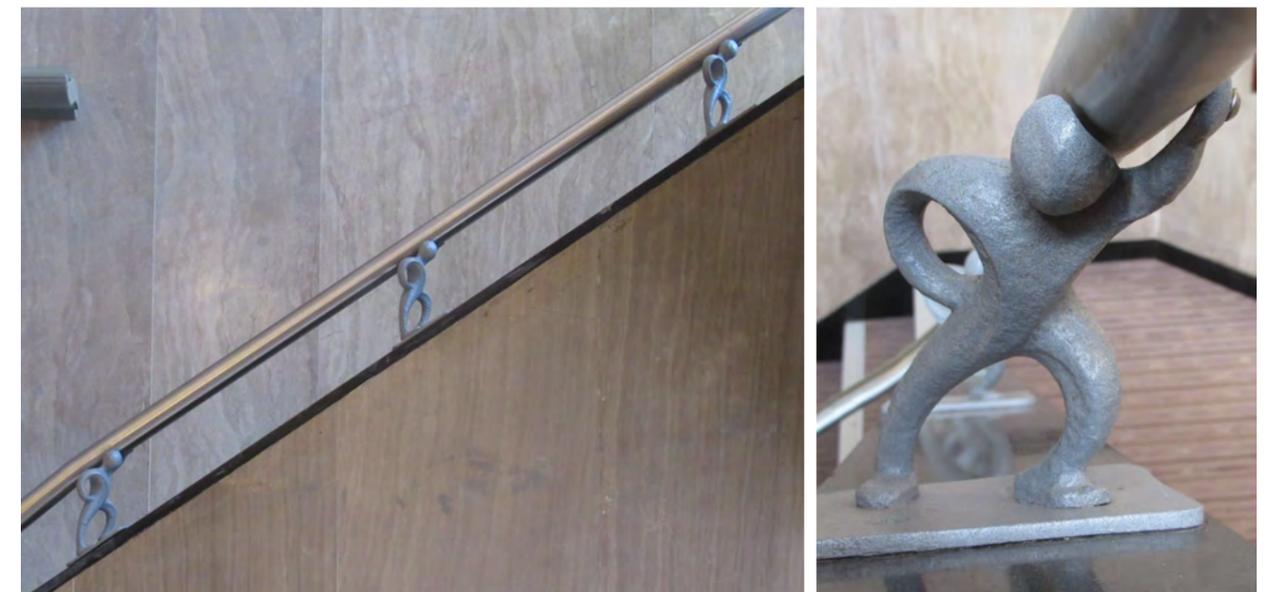
## Co-operative Stores, Newcastle

*Grade II Listed - Conservation Area - Restored*

Motivation to save Mansfield's languishing Co-op building is surely found in Newcastle, where an Art Deco treasure has been painstakingly restored to its former glory. The building, which operated as a Co-op from its grand opening in 1932 until 2011, was recently the subject of a five-year, £17m refurbishment by Interserve Construction Ltd.

The building is exceptionally striking, designed by the CWS in-house architect L. G. Ekins. The broad 15-bay frontage is flanked by two towers bearing elegant vertical windows topped by bronze barometers and clocks, respectively. Inside, a number of stunning original features remain, including the famous 'running men' on the staircases – small figurines bearing the handrail on their backs. They have now been carefully restored by the great-great-grandson of the man who originally installed them.

Despite remaining in continuous use for more than 70 years, the building was in desperate need of attention, with problems including wet rot and water ingress. The roof had been stripped of copper and the tower clocks taken by thieves. The finished result, however, shows how effective considerate refurbishment can be. The developers strove to contract the same companies that had worked on the original construction to make authentic repairs employing traditional techniques. Custom-made clock-faces were commissioned to replace those that had been stolen. Some features were even uncovered for the first time in years, such as the cast iron columns that were once part of the building's arcade. Preserving these historic features has not come at the cost of contemporary building standards, however, and the building is now home to an insulated, fully modernised Premier Inn hotel.





Premier Inn

SPACE GOLF

ZAP

MULLIGANS

ADVENTURE GOLF

Premier Inn

BAR & BLOCK

## Griffin & Spalding, Nottingham

*Unlisted - Conservation Area - At Risk*

Overlooking Nottingham's Old Market Square, the former Griffin & Spalding store is an iconic feature of the city's historic centre. Appearing in many different incarnations over the years, the company had traded on the site since 1846 when it was founded by two brothers, Edward and Robert Dickinson. They later went into partnership with a colleague, Edward Fazakerley, and it wasn't until 1878 that W. Griffin and J. T. Spalding, both of whom had previously worked in department stores in London, purchased the majority of the business. Under their guidance, the store thrived. They extended the store around 10 years later, and again in 1911, replacing two older buildings to the east. During excavations for the extension, a rather grisly discovery was made of four skeletons – and an additional skull. They were considered to be at least a century old at the time and most likely plague victims.

The dignified Portland stone facade fronting the building today was constructed in 1924 to match the 1911 extension and thus unite the various storefronts that had gradually been acquired. The classical design, spanning an impressive 13 bays, was put together by local firm Bromley & Watkins (the former of whom was a regular architect for Boots). Here Art Deco symmetry is embellished with sculpted urns, an elaborate cartouche supported by carved cherubs, and a gallery of coupled columns lining the restaurant terrace on the fifth floor. Griffin himself believed it to be a masterpiece of commercial architecture.

Business was good for a number of years. The company operated competitive policies, and customers were offered a reward of 10s if they found an item sold cheaper elsewhere. The store was bought up by Debenhams in 1944, but wasn't renamed until the nationwide rebranding in 1973. It finally closed its doors in May 2021, but no future plans are forthcoming for this magnificent edifice.



## Jessop & Son, Nottingham

*Grade II Listed - Conservation Area - Restored*

Watson Fothergill – born Fothergill Watson – was one of Nottingham’s most eminent architects, designing over 100 unique buildings in the city. Practising between 1864 and 1912, his works spanned the ecclesiastical, residential and commercial, a fine example of which stands on King Street.

It was built in 1895 for one Zebedee Jessop, in Fothergill’s English vernacular style. The exterior features several details characteristic of the architect: large dormers, black painted timbers and wide chimneys. The tower boasts some attractive herringbone brickwork that, presumably, few would have been able to see.

Jessop was a Lincolnshire-born businessman and a personal friend of James Marshall of the flourishing department store Marshall & Snelgrove. No doubt this connection proved useful when Jessop became partner of,

and ultimately took over, a mourning warehouse on Long Row in the 1860s. In 1897 Jessop moved the store to Watson’s purpose-built premises on King Street, where it continued to thrive and expand until the 1920s.

After the death of Jessop’s son, William, profits dwindled at the hands of several different managers and in 1933 John Lewis bought up the store, making it the first store the company managed outside of London. Another first came in 1972, when the branch became the first John Lewis-owned store to move into a shopping centre.

Extensive refurbishment of the King Street premises, now known as Fothergill House, was completed in 2018. The building has been converted to office use on the upper floors with restaurant units on the ground floor, although the tower and some of the upper storeys’ rooms were still out of use as recently as 2019.





## Woolworths, Nottingham

*Grade II Listed - Conservation Area - Undergoing Redevelopment*

Nottingham's first Woolworths store opened on Lister Gate in 1914. Following the business' rapid expansion across the country, the store was extended and refronted in 1936-7. Woolworths' in-house architect B. C. Donaldson designed this striking, symmetrical facade clad in faience tiles. Steel casement windows with decorative panels are separated by giant pilasters bookended by Art Deco motifs. Either side of the centre are more prominent vertical elements that rise above the parapet with distinctive curving sides. It is the only purpose-built Woolworths store to be listed at Grade II.

The building was occupied by an M&S Home store until its closure in Summer 2020. However, the council have just granted the building's owners, Hunter UK Retail Limited Partnership, permission to convert the property to student accommodation, with two retail units on the ground floor. The plans indicate partial demolition of the interiors (which have been assessed to hold no historic value), and a new extension at the back of the building, two storeys of which will be visible behind the facade. The frontage itself however will be preserved, bar the replacement of three small windows.



## Co-operative House, Nottingham

Unlisted - Conservation Area - Restored

Startlingly grand, Nottingham's former Co-operative store is a handsome terracotta-fronted structure, built between 1915 and 1916 to designs by William V. Betts. Renaissance Revival in style, the exteriors incorporate fantastic carved elements, including pilasters, swags, columns, and a domed turret, part of further additions made in the late 1920s. Particularly noteworthy are the detailed relief sculptures between the windows above the main entrance, depicting a sailor, seamstress and railwayman. The top floor was home to a silver service restaurant, the Elizabethan Ballroom, which doubled as an events space by night and saw The Beatles play alongside Gerry and the Pacemakers in 1963.

The Co-op ceased trading here in 2001,

and in 2009 the building was restored by Henry Boot Developments and converted to a mix of office, residential and commercial uses, including a casino and restaurants.



Alan Murray-Rust, Wikimedia Commons



Alamy

## Boots, Nottingham

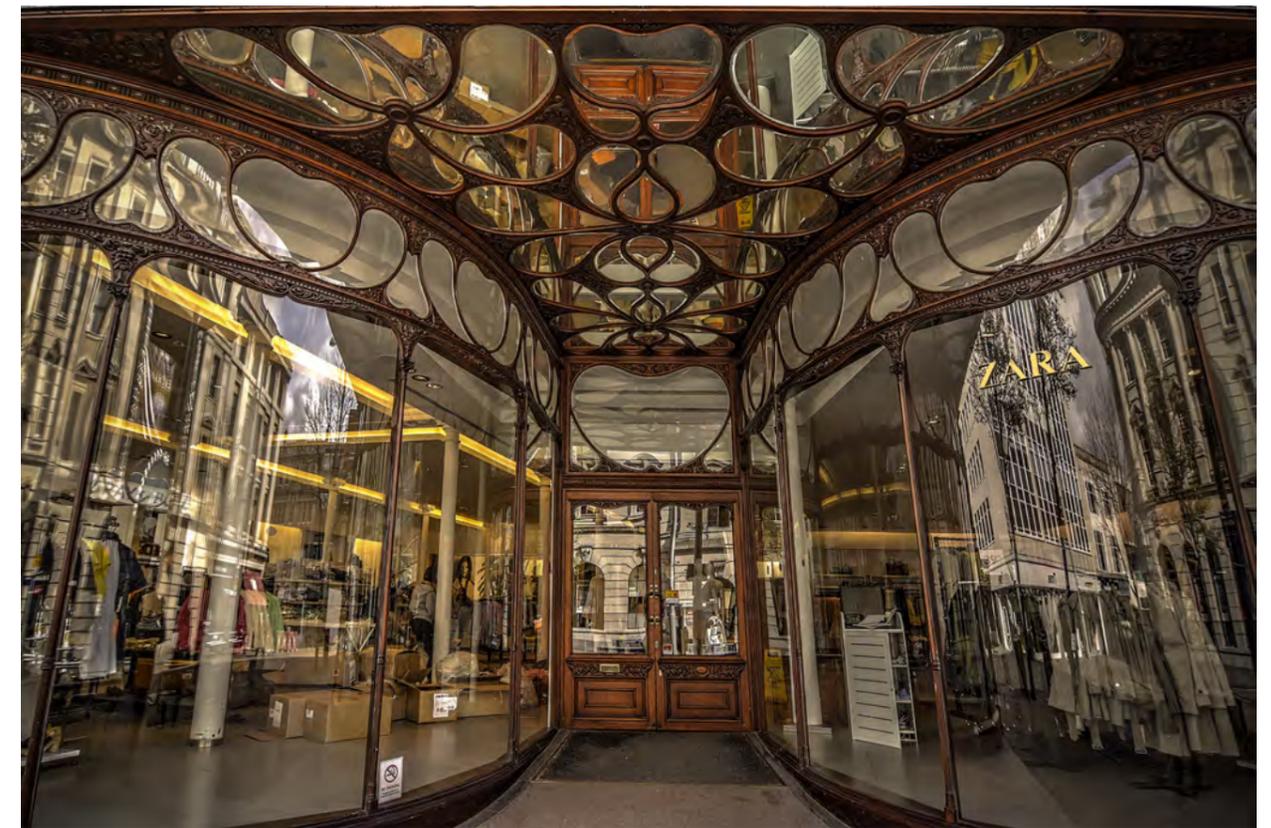
Grade II\* Listed - Conservation Area - Restored

Undoubtedly one of Alfred Nelson Bromley's finest buildings for Boots, and the second of his designs to feature here. This beautiful terracotta faience building replaced an earlier structure which Jesse Boot himself had helped to design, parts of which were retained including a central lightwell and internal pillars. When neighbouring buildings were demolished for road-widening works, the opportunity was taken to create a more impressive 'central depot', constructed 1902-5 in an ornate Renaissance Revival style.

While Boots offers a relatively streamlined set of services today in pharmacy, optometry and photography, the chain operated as a department store for a considerable part of the 20th century. This was the result of both Boot's own ambition, and the influence of his wife Florence, who took an active role in the

business. Together, they expanded the stores to include other departments such as stationery, silverware and gifts. This flagship store included a café, picture gallery, smoking room and 'Boots Booklovers Library', and in the 1960s it still boasted departments for pets, toys, gardening, records, jewellery, leather goods and winemaking.

Boots left the premises in 1972, and the interiors have been altered at various stages, most recently by CPMG Architects for Zara in 2002. The art nouveau windows – the only surviving examples on a former Boots store – lend the store a striking and distinctive appearance. This is in addition to dozens of eye-catching details, from the corner clock, flanked by relief figures, to the stained glass mullioned windows and elaborate window architraves with engaged Corinthian columns.



© Richard Krawiec, Flickr



HIGH STREET

ZARA

JD



© Martin Evans, Flickr

## Boyes, Scarborough

*Unlisted - Still Trading*

On a street lined with listed 18th and 19th century dwellings stands an impressive Edwardian Baroque structure. It is home to the original Boyes; a department store offering cut-price goods which now runs more than 60 stores across the country. It has remained a family business for nearly 150 years, and is remarkable for being one of the few buildings on this list that is has traded continuously under the same name.

Boyes was founded in 1881 by William Boyes, selling remnants from merchants. As business thrived he bought up other clearance lines and expanded “The Rem” warehouse into a department store. As with its contemporaries, the store was no stranger to pulling unusual publicity stunts. For a short while, monkeys

Jacko and Dinah were as familiar to local shoppers as the sales assistants.

The present building opened in 1916 after the previous premises burnt down. The designs were by John Caleb Petch, who also designed Boyes’ family home in 1897 (adding a garage in 1914 – Boyes was reportedly the first car owner in the town). The Boyes store was to be Petch’s final work. Within a modest three storeys, it conveys the glamour of a store in a larger town centre, and selling more expensive items. The upper two storeys are decorated with pilasters and an attractive array of bullseye and round-top windows. There are also a number of balconies with wreathed ‘B’ emblems. The crowning glory, of course, is the octagonal clock tower, from which there must be a lovely view of the sea.



Ruth Sharville, Wikimedia Commons

## Debenhams, Staines

*Unlisted - At Risk*

This site was originally the trading premises for local department store Morford & Goodman. The business was taken over during WWII by Kennards of Croydon, who, after gradually buying up neighbouring properties, were eventually able to remodel the site as a purpose-built store. The current building was constructed between 1956 and 1962 to designs by George Coles, a regular architect for Odeon, and many of whose buildings are now listed.

The designs capitalise on the store’s prominent position with a focal corner entranceway, whose slender pillars of stonework and glazing reference the Art Deco style. A fine Neo-Georgian stretch of brickwork and stone detailing curving along Thames Street gives the building a strong horizontal aspect.

Even before the store formally closed in 2020, Spelthorne Borough Council had identified the site as a preferred development

opportunity, earmarking it for a potential 250 housing units.

New owners Future High Street Living Ltd. have now lodged an application for total demolition of the site in favour of two new 14-storey tower blocks – standing ten storeys higher than the current building, and vastly overshadowing the surrounding streetscape. A stone’s throw away, on the Bridge Street car park site, developers Arora are set to begin work on a 14-storey hotel complex. There is rising concern that the council is seeking to meet the bulk of housing targets with large-scale developments, which will drastically change the look and feel of the town. SAVE considers the existing building a non-designated heritage asset and has strongly objected to the plans alongside the Twentieth Century Society. The planning committee are due to make a decision on the application this coming Spring.



Greg Balfour Evans, Alamy

## Debenhams, Taunton

*Unlisted - At Risk*

This understated Moderne building has been a fixture of the high street since 1939, when it opened as department store W. & A. Chapman. The company had been going since 1864, when two brothers from London opened an “unpretentious little shop” on Taunton’s North Street.

The smoothly curving three storey building references the Streamline Moderne style, pared back to suit the local vernacular with red brick in Flemish bond. There are broad metal casement windows with subtly decorative lintels on the first storey, and a double-height architrave over the original entrance. The designs were drawn up by George Baines & Son, who also oversaw the building’s extension in 1959 after the company was taken over by Debenhams.

With the writing on the wall for the Debenhams empire, ‘contingency’ plans were

drawn up in 2020 by developers Ropemaker Properties. They propose to demolish the existing site and replace it with a mixed-use building housing 92 flats and smaller shop units at street level. Refurbishment of the existing site was apparently considered at an early stage, but was judged to be economically unviable.

The plans have been contested by both locals and heritage groups including Historic England and Twentieth Century Society. The designs for the six-storey building have been criticised over its scale and failure to relate to the surrounding streetscape and nearby heritage assets, including Taunton Castle – a scheduled monument. Three public consultations have taken place, and the application has now been lodged with Somerset West and Taunton Council. With no formal listing and just shy of the neighbouring conservation areas, this elegant building is under critical threat.



Diamond Geezer, Flickr

## Beatties, Wolverhampton

*Locally listed - Conservation Area - Undergoing Redevelopment*

The flagship store and head offices of the beloved Beatties chain closed its doors in 2019. It was here that James Beattie began his empire with a draper’s shop in 1877. Expansion along Victoria Street and Darlington Street followed, although Beattie was outbid – much to his chagrin – for the corner linking plot by the tailor Burton. The buildings were finally united as Beatties in the 90s.

The Victoria Street elevation is art deco in style, featuring vast round-headed windows and an Egyptian-styled frieze. The designs are generally attributed to local firm Lavender, Twentyman and Percy; however the former two did not form their official partnership until 1932, and the latter joined even later. More likely E. C. Lavender and his father H. E. Lavender worked together on the plans.

The corner building, meanwhile, was constructed in the Burton house style by the

company’s architect, Harry Wilson. The sweeping curved facade is broken up by giant pilasters, each capped with Burton’s characteristic elephant head motifs. The entire complex was locally listed in 2000 and is identified as a landmark building within the City Centre conservation area, but has no national listing.

The Beatties chain was taken over by House of Fraser in 2005, but in 2020 Frasers Group head Mike Ashley announced the store would be moving in to the Mander Centre, replacing the Debenhams unit. The Beatties building was bought earlier that year for a bargain £3m by London firm SSYS Beatties – a far cry from the £69m it sold for in 2005. The council has now approved SYSS’ application to convert the building to over 300 flats and ground-floor shops, retaining the historic facades but adding an additional storey.

# Riding To The Rescue

Marcus Binney

SAVE has produced a long series of graphically illustrated reports on endangered building types. We began with *Off the Rails: Saving Railway Architecture*, followed by *Satanic Mills and Deserted Bastions* on military and naval structures, then churches and chapels, hospitals and asylums, theatres, cinemas, public baths, Northern pubs and farm buildings.

Department Stores are the latest building type in the firing line. What is astonishing is the speed with which these handsome and dominating buildings, the pride of cities and prosperous towns, have been closing. The sudden collapse is due to changing shopping habits and online deliveries, accelerated by Covid-19.

There can hardly be a sizeable town in Britain which has not suffered the closure of one department store and sometimes several. The race is on to identify and assess these buildings. This Hattie Lloyd has done remarkably well in a rapid survey of a selection of towns and cities highlighting the presence and quality of these buildings.

They stand proudly in high streets and often conspicuously on corner sites. They are grandly proportioned and designed in a host of lively architectural styles.

A parallel race is on among developers and store owners to win permission for conversion of the stores to new uses, notably residential. More alarming is the number of cases where owners are seeking to raze their department stores to the ground with the aim of securing lucrative planning permissions for larger new developments.

SAVE is always on the lookout for exemplars and pioneer schemes showing the way for imaginative reuse, for putting empty space to beneficial use, and creating a revenue stream to look after them. As we have said many times, old buildings do not need to be permanent pensioners on the state. Once

repaired and adapted they can prove good investments.

It is a pleasure therefore to be able to report a pioneering venture by one of SAVE's long-term supporters, Ashley Nicholson, a trailblazer in adapting buildings and places to new uses.

In the middle of Covid, in August 2021, he launched a model scheme for the revival of a large department store, nothing less than a Debenhams in Bournemouth. Bobby's, named after the first store on the site, is proving a runaway success. The ground floor continues to sell beauty products – the one item which buyers want to try out for themselves and not just buy over the internet.

Giant, the art gallery on the second floor, is claimed as the UK's largest artist-run gallery space and in the first three months attracted visitor numbers that rival, even exceed, London. The first exhibition included a Banksy. In 2022 there will be other leading artists. The gallery has now secured Arts Council support for two years. The Council has also committed six-figure sums to support the gallery.

Nicholson explains, "We are utilising art and culture to bring people to town and increase cultural tourism. Bournemouth has a lot of stag and hen parties and holidaymakers coming for the beaches. We are trying to bring in culture to broaden the market.

"Our aspiration has proved broadly right. Before we began, the town-centre offering was not enough to persuade people to make the journey. We have had people who say they haven't been to town for two or even five years. Now Bobby's is providing a reason to come to town. Last summer the gallery had 1000 visitors a day."

Almost all the building is now under offer. The first floor will open later this year as a food hall. There is already an ice cream parlour, and a Champagne and sushi bar. The South





© James Bridle Photography

Coast Makers Market is selling local gins and fudges. The top floor and roof terrace will be enlisted for fine dining and a cocktail bar. In the basement, with connections to the gardens, will be more retail. An outbuilding will house a craft ale bar and smokery. The old bakery is untouched and let to a working bakery. Coverage on the store's opening included the Observer, The Telegraph – even the New York Times.

Ashley Nicholson continues, “Community elements are important. We have created a comfortable seating area at the back of the ground floor. We have a group of 8–10 ladies who come as the ‘knit and natter’ group meeting for coffee and cake once a fortnight.”

The Enchanted Nanny comes on Tuesdays and at weekends – she is a children's story teller who holds her audience in thrall. Another lady gives classes on biscuit decoration. The third floor is under offer as offices.

Responding to a question about finance, Nicholson explains, “We bought the store with my shareholder. We paid circa £8 million and will be spending that again on the works. In terms of economics we have changed the

department store formula. Traditionally it was the ground floor which made all the money. The rest was used for a range of goods and servicing which lost money. We have retained beauty on the ground floor, which provides a good return. The restaurant is a good earner as the top has good views looking out over the gardens to the sea. The offices we have created on the fourth floor are under offer. It's not the obvious use but some businesses like the buzz of bars, cafés and shoppers.”

Can Nicholson's formula be rolled out to other towns? Nicholson replies, “Each town needs to be different. Up north and in less prosperous areas there will be a stronger element of education and community.”

### Climate Emergency

A new source of hope is the investment being made by Government to revive the High Street. Department stores have long had a place in the British psyche thanks to television series such as *Are You Being Served?* and *Mr Selfridge*.

Now there is a further argument for retaining and reusing these large and usually robustly built structures – the simple argument that the greenest building is the one that is already built. Demolition and rebuilding of large, sturdy structures designed for large floor loads is hugely wasteful of energy.

A new report commissioned by SAVE calls on Marks and Spencer (M&S) to re-think its demolition plan for the landmark Oxford Street store and warns Westminster City Council it won't meet its stated climate change commitments unless it immediately changes course. Analysing the environmental impact of the planned demolition of the store in central London, the report heavily criticises the carbon emissions of the scheme and calls for a comprehensive retrofit of the existing buildings instead.

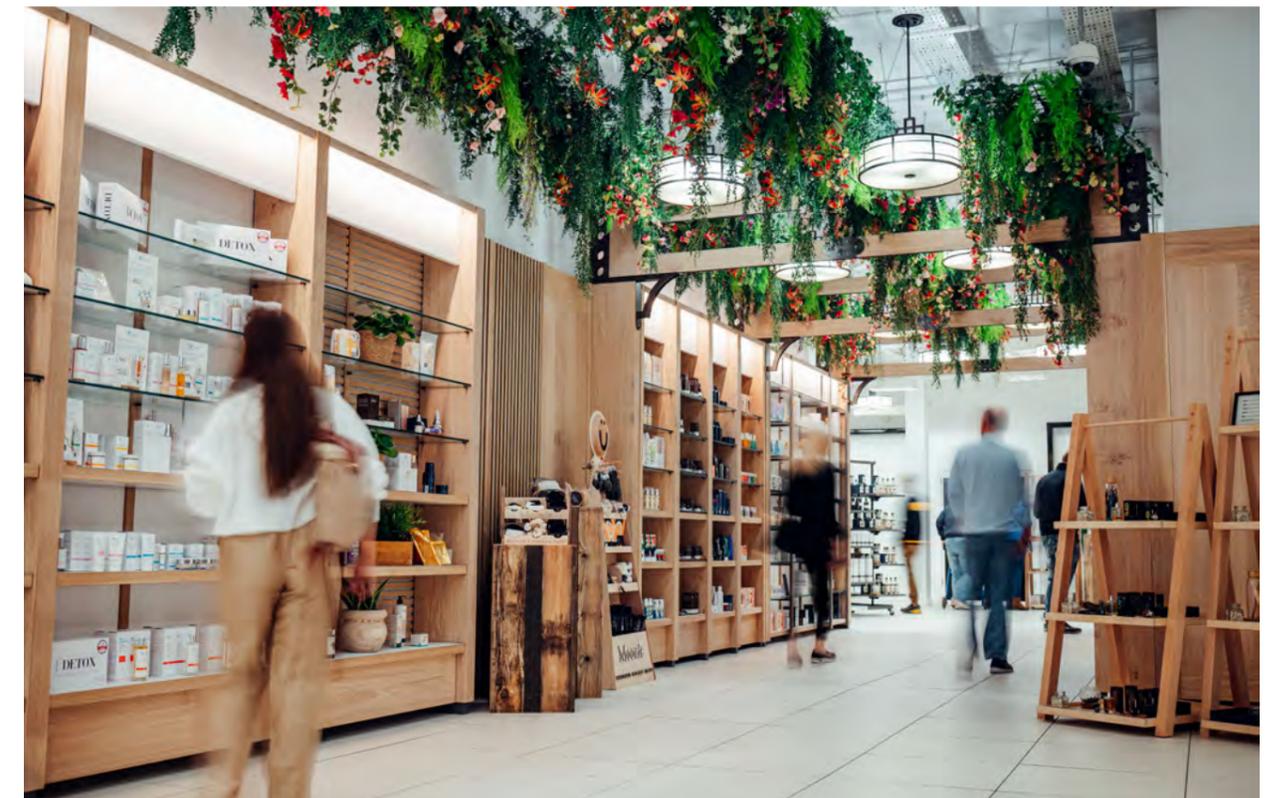
Written by sustainability and carbon expert Simon Sturgis, the report finds that the proposals do not comply with the UK Government's net zero legislation to reduce

carbon emissions or the Greater London Authority's stated policy to prioritise retrofit. The plans also run counter to Westminster City Council's declaration of a climate emergency.

The report states: “Westminster City Council should require that the site owner for 458 Oxford Street examine proposals for a comprehensive retrofit of the existing buildings. They should develop a scheme suitable for ensuring a new, long-term phase of life for the retrofitted, rationalized and extended existing buildings. What is required is that the same level of ingenuity and design skill that has been applied to the new build proposal is also be applied to a comprehensive retrofit scheme.”

It adds: “If Westminster City Council allows proposals for existing buildings to be demolished and replaced without properly prioritising comprehensive retrofit solutions, then it will not meet its stated climate change commitments.”

*Marcus Binney CBE is Executive President of SAVE Britain's Heritage.*



© James Bridle Photography

### Nominate a store

SAVE's friends at the C20 Society are running a campaign to protect 20th-century department stores of special architectural and historic interest. They are compiling a list of stores at risk in the UK. If you know of a 20th-century store that is under threat of closure or change, do get in touch to nominate it for inclusion. For more details see this link: <https://c20society.org.uk/department-stores> or contact [caseworker@c20society.org.uk](mailto:caseworker@c20society.org.uk)

[SAVE Britain's Heritage](#) is a strong, independent voice in conservation that fights for threatened historic buildings and sustainable reuses. We stand apart from other organisations by bringing together architects, engineers, planners and investors to offer viable alternative proposals. Where necessary, and with expert advice, we take legal action to prevent major and needless losses.

Find details of all our current campaigns and how to support us on our website, [www.savebritainsheritage.org](http://www.savebritainsheritage.org)



This urgent report from SAVE Britain's Heritage highlights the wide-reaching threat to an entire class of historic building: the department store. The pandemic has accelerated a move away from high street shopping that was already well underway, causing the collapse of high-profile chains and leaving a great many buildings vacant.

Here we highlight some of Britain's finest examples – including some facing a very uncertain future. We also present heartening tales of stores that have been sensitively adapted to new uses, showing that with enough imagination there is almost always a viable future for these important and cherished landmarks.

