



NEWSLETTER

Winter 2025
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Victorian & Edwardian Architecture - Worcester



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Photos: Worcester Art Gallery & Museum (courtesy of Worcestershire Museums) & Victorian Terrace, Arboretum Road (this & other photos provided by Tim Bridges).

Spotlight: Worcester's Victorian & Edwardian Architecture

by Tim Bridges, The Victorian Society

Whilst famous as a medieval cathedral city, the Victorian architecture of Worcester also deserves attention. My association with the city began in the late 1960s, a time of redevelopment, and I recall much demolition including buildings in Silver Street and St Peter the Great Church.

My first encounter with Worcester's Victorian buildings was at King's School, notably St Alban's with its chapel of 1873 probably by the diocesan



St. Mary Magdalene

surveyor W.J. Hopkins, and the striking School House of 1886-7 by Ewan Christian, restorer of churches across Britain. I learned that much exterior stonework of the Cathedral is from A.E. Perkins' 1850s restoration. Prints and photographs show how it has changed since the 18th century.

The Guesten Hall ruin reminds us of lost medieval fabric, whilst Edgar Tower; landmark gateway to precincts and school - was also refaced in 1869 by Perkins.



Clock Tower, Engineering Works, Shrub Hill

Whilst attending services I saw furnishings by Sir George Gilbert Scott, and so was introduced to his controversial restoration of many cathedrals and churches.

After university I worked at Worcester City Museum and Art Gallery. This fine building of 1895 in Foregate Street mixes classical with renaissance styles. The architects J.W. Simpson and E.J. Milner Allen were renowned museum designers and I found their Kelvingrove Museum in Glasgow strangely familiar. Simpson also designed Kay's on The Tything in 1907, with Maxwell Ayrton - contrast the revivalist Museum with Art Nouveau at Kay & Co.

My first homes in Worcester were Victorian terraced houses. Much Victorian housing remains; large villas in Battenhall and smaller terraces in the Arboretum Conservation Area. These are varied as individual builders used different motifs, such as the Arboretum Road

terrace with its floral embellishments.

I lived close to the Malthouse from Spreckley's Barbourne Brewery of 1887-8. Such survivals indicate significant Victorian industry. The Royal Worcester Porcelain Works, Severn Street - on my route to school, was in production until 2009.

Now just some factory buildings remain, converted to other uses. Also evocative of Worcester's manufacturing past, the 1864 Engine Works, Shrub Hill Road, housed the 1882 Worcestershire Exhibition. Its clock tower marks the Tolladine Road junction.



Kay & Co., The Tything

Spotlight: Worcester's Victorian & Edwardian Architecture *cont.*

During the 1990s I lived at the converted church of St Mary Magdalene, Sansome Walk. With its prominent steeple, this church of 1876 by Frederick Preedy closed in its centenary year. The young Preedy lived in Fladbury, and designed several Worcestershire churches, including St Stephen's, Barbourne. His work exhibits excellent craftsmanship; surviving carvings in St Mary's are by H.H. Martyn. Preedy also designed and made stained glass, later moving his successful practice to London.

Since 2006 I have worked for the Victorian Society covering Victorian and Edwardian buildings in Birmingham. Although Worcester lies outside my area, I am aware of cases here, notably our objection to proposals for redevelopment at Lowesmoor.

Amongst projected losses would be the former New Concert Hall of 1869. This building associated with performances by Vesta Tilley was previously

under threat when I recorded it for the Museum. The building stands as a reminder of the city's diverse Victorian heritage. Much else has vanished including public houses. I waited for the school bus beside the doorway of the Angel Hotel, Sidbury. This striking entrance is all that remains of Wood and Kendrick's building of 1899, lost to 1960s road widening.

A happier Wood and Kendrick survival is the tiled façade of Eagle Vaults, Friar Street, whilst



Angel Hotel doorway, Sidbury

the giant terracotta Hopmarket Hotel, Foregate of 1898 by the prolific Worcester practice of Henry Rowe & Son is a prominent landmark.

Worcester is fortunate to have works by one of the greatest late Victorian architects, Sir Aston Webb, notably St George's Church, Barbourne of 1893-5. Less well-known is his former Congregational Sunday School in Angel Place, of 1888 in yellow brick, with corner entrance turret and spirelet.



Former concert hall, Lowesmoor

The Arts and Crafts movement encouraged the use of traditional materials in reaction to 19th century mass manufacture.

It inspired buildings like Laslett's Almshouses, Union Street of 1911-12 by Lewis Sheppard, of which I am a trustee. Replacing the City Gaol, these part timber and brick houses with a chapel surround a garden to form a city centre oasis.

The coming of the railways changed Worcester. The unusual

rail bridge of 1860 crossing the canal at Westbury Street found fame depicted on a postage stamp in 1994. It is a great testament to the city's Victorian heritage. *Article by Tim Bridges, Conservation Adviser, The Victorian Society.*

Tim Bridges is the guest speaker for The Mayor's Charity event at the Guildhall on the 4th March.

References: Nikolaus Pevsner & Alan Brooks; The Buildings of England, Worcestershire (2007)



Sunday School, Angel Place

Planning Watch

Introduction

It's been a busy spell fellow Planning Watchers! Three big items have hit the desk since the last newsletter, and they've got our attention. These are as follows:

Draft Shopfront Design Guide SPD

First, a victory for the persistent! The Draft Shopfront Design Guide SPD is finally out for consultation. Our Planning Panel is throwing its full support behind this, as we've campaigned for clear guidance on this crucial issue for ages.

Attractive shopfronts are the face of our city, drawing in shoppers and visitors, and this guide aims to protect and enhance our historic character.

While the draft covers a lot of essential ground — a big well done to Worcester City Council — we have still spotted a few gaps.

We'll be responding during the consultation and urging Worcester City Council to adopt the final version this Spring, ideally alongside the SWPDR (South Worcestershire Development Plan Review), to give it maximum clout.



An area missing from the draft SPD – the uniformity of shopfront design to the railway arches. Source: @PershorePatty.

Call-in Powers

Hold onto your hats—the government is getting serious about hitting that 1.5 million new homes target. Housing Secretary Steve Reed has unveiled fresh measures that give Whitehall a closer look at local decisions.

Local Planning Authorities must now notify the Secretary of State when they plan to reject large housing schemes (over 150 homes). This is a clear warning shot: the Minister can now "Call-in" these applications and take over the decision, especially if the local committee votes against the recommendation of their own planning officers.



Steve Reed, MP & Secretary of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government, Gov.uk

This is a heavy-handed move designed to set a powerful tone, one that may embolden developers looking to push less than ideal schemes?

The Budget

Finally, the purse strings have loosened a tiny bit. The Chancellor has announced £48 million in "additional" funding to boost capacity in the planning system, including hiring 350 new council planners across England.

That's roughly one new planner per Local Planning Authority – haven't we heard this before? They're also setting up a 'Planning Careers Hub' to "retain and retrain mid-career professionals.

This is a welcome investment to tackle staff shortages, but let's hope it's enough to make a real difference to the workload!

Article by Chris Evans, MRTPI, Worcester Civic Society

Worcester Civic Society's Planning Panel, led by Chris Evans (Chair), examines and comments on key strategic documents affecting Worcester's and its historic assets. It also examines individual major developments and minor developments affecting listed buildings and conservation areas in the city through its engagement with the Conservation Advisory Panel (CAP).

Heritage at Risk: Powick Old Bridge – a Scheduled Monument

Since our last update in the Autumn Newsletter Powick Old Bridge has been listed in Historic England's recent (October 2025) Heritage at Risk Register. On the 18th November, the Civic Society and the Battle of Worcester Society had a follow-up meeting with Worcestershire County Council to discuss the future safeguarding of Powick Old Bridge.

The County Council confirmed that at its Cabinet meeting on 23 October it approved an additional £5m for restoration, scheduled to begin in March 2027 and finish in 2028. The Civic Society expressed concern about the long delays, which the Council attributed partly to the



Debris, arches over Powick Mill Pond, 15 November 2025

need for new consents, including Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC). The Council already been granted full phased SMC consent.

The Civic Society also raised ongoing concerns about water pipes within the bridge, which may have weakened the bridge's structural integrity as well as the risk of the water pipe fracturing in the future.

Proactive debris management remains critical to protecting the bridge. Yet Worcestershire County Council has not considered measures such as tree catchers or flood debris screens, despite



New flood debris damage to arch parapet, 18 November 2025

debris buildup causing the partial collapse of the bridge on 31/01/2023 and a floating tree damaging the parapet of another arch only last month. Ignoring such solutions risks further structural damage and localised flooding. As such, it would seem to be remiss of the County Council not to consider such future proofing measures.

These measures are not costly compared to restoration costs. For example, in 2022, tree catchers were installed on the River Ely upstream of Ely Bridge (near Cardiff Bay) to intercept debris before it reaches the bridge's central pier. Previously, debris buildup during heavy rainfall reduced river flow, increased flood risk, and threatened the bridge's structure.

River Ely tree catchers, showing the staggered alignment of the seven poles. Courtesy of Arup



The catchers cost just a quarter of the £957,000 required for traditional flood defences, while still allowing fish passage and preserving the river's community amenity value. Since installation, no blockages have occurred, significantly reducing flood risk and damage.

Worcester Civic Society is working with Worcester MP Tom Collins, who has established the Protect Powick Old Bridge Group. In the New Year, the group will meet with representatives from the Environment Agency, Worcestershire County Council, the Battle of Worcester Society, Powick Flood Forum and others to discuss ideas for future debris management.

Profile: Sir George Dowty, founder of the Dowty Group of Companies

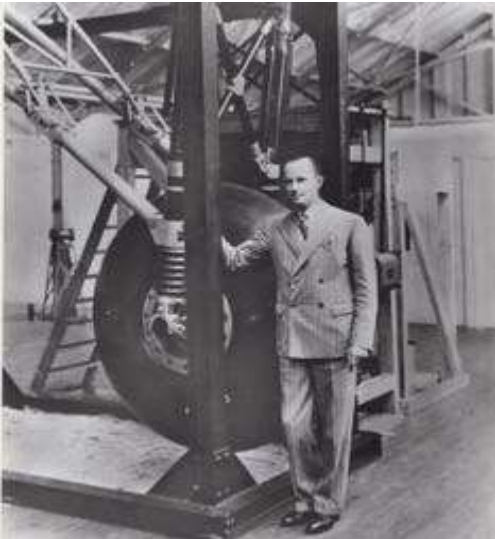
by Martin Robins

Introduction

Sir George Dowty (1901 – 1975) born in Pershore, was one of eight children. He rose from modest beginnings to become one of the world's most influential engineers. His company, Dowty Aviation manufactured parts for military aircraft during World War II, and later Concorde.

The company he founded in 1931 would go on to earn global recognition of its own, and in 1956 he was honoured with a knighthood for his achievements.

After schooling in Pershore, Dowty attended Worcester Royal Grammar



Sir George by main landing gear from the Lancaster Bomber

School before beginning an apprenticeship with the Worcester engineering firm Heenan & Froude.

Gloster Aircraft Company & Aircraft Components

Following time spent travelling and working as a journeyman, he joined the Gloster Aircraft Company in 1924 as a draughtsman—an experience that set the stage for his life's defining work.

In 1931 George launched Aircraft Components, a venture that quickly became indispensable to Britain's expanding military aviation industry. During the Second World War, almost every military aircraft carried a Dowty-designed component. By 1939 the company also had factories in the USA and Canada.

In 1940 Aircraft Components changed its name to Dowty Equipment.

Acquisition of Meco, Worcester

After the end of the War, the company diversified into mining technology, pioneering hydraulic roof supports and acquiring Worcester-based conveyor manufacturer Meco in 1969.

By the time of Sir George's death in 1975, the Dowty Group of companies employed around 15,000 people.

The Group was broken up in 1992, but its innovative spirit and key technologies live on within several major international companies including GE (Dowty Propellers) and Safran Landing Systems.

A True Worcestershire Man

Beyond engineering, Sir George was a passionate supporter of Worcestershire County Cricket Club, serving as its President during a period in the 1960s when the club won back-to-back County Championships. In 2022, the Sir George



Dowty Meco Works, Worcester

Dowty Memorial Committee was formed to celebrate his legacy. It has since published numerous works, hosted events—including an organ recital in Pershore Abbey—and in 2024 oversaw the unveiling of a statue in his honour, with another due to follow later this year.

Proud of his roots, Sir George always described himself as a true Worcestershire man—and the county, in turn, has every reason to be proud of him.

His last secretary produced a detailed summary of Dowty's diaries, from 1919 to 1975. Copies available by contacting martinrobins@btinternet.com



Sir George with apprentices

Stamped in History – Local letter boxes

December always brings a flurry of Christmas cards, and with them, a renewed awareness of our letter boxes. Suddenly, those everyday fixtures become part of the season's ritual—and if you look closely, you'll notice just how varied and fascinating they really are.

The Letter Box Study Group has identified around 800 different types of post boxes – including 400 different varieties of pillar box.



Smith & Hawkes letterbox, Malvern

Take Malvern, for example. It boasts three rare survivors of early letter boxes: elegant fluted columns crafted by Smith & Hawkes back in 1857. These are true gems of postal history.

Interestingly, before 1879, letter boxes weren't the familiar red we know today - they were painted green.

Some of these letter boxes even had vertical slots, though these proved impractical, letting rain seep in.

One of Malvern's historic boxes still stands proudly on Worcester Road, outside the hospital, freshly restored and looking splendid after a little TLC (see photo in bottom left-hand corner).

The letter box by Worcester Cathedral offers another striking sight - a Penfold-style letter box. But here's the twist - it's not original!

In 1988, Royal Mail commissioned around 100 replicas from Machan, a Scottish foundry, to be placed in heritage locations across the country.

The Worcester example is one of these replicas, a nod to Victorian design rather than a true antique.



Penfold-style letterbox by Worcester Cathedral

However, there is a genuine late Victorian letter box in the city, standing quietly in Lowesmoor, by Vesta Tilley House (mentioned in page 3), made by the Derby foundry of Handyside & Co.

It must have seen Vesta Tilley herself arriving to perform! Perhaps she posted a letter there...



Letterbox by Vesta Tilley House

So, while December may be the month we notice our letter boxes most, it is also a chance to appreciate the artistry, history, and quirks hidden in plain sight on our streets.

Article by Jan Scrine, The Milestone Society

Programme of Events – Spring 2026

Date & Time	Event (please see our website for more detail and updates – www.worcestercivicsociety.org.uk)	Location
Wednesday 4 th March 6pm to 8pm	Mayor's Charity Lecture: Victorian & Edwardian Architecture in Worcester & the West Midlands. Keynote speaker : Tim Bridges, Conservation Adviser, The Victorian Society. Tim will be talking about Victorian & Edwardian buildings in Worcester within the context the Victorian Society's work in Birmingham and the metropolitan area. All welcome. Price: Free admission but a charity donation welcomed. Soft drinks and wine will be available.	The Guildhall, High Street, Worcester WR1 2Y
Tuesday 17 th March 11am to 1pm	Private guided tour of Tudor House Museum followed by tea/coffee/cake in the tea rooms. This is a beautiful 16 th century timber framed building and now a museum. Visitors will see a series of fascinating displays as well as the remarkable architecture of the building including the original wattle and daub walls. Price to be confirmed.	38 Friar Street, Worcester WR1 2NA
Thursday 16 th April 2pm to 3pm arrive by 1:45pm to allow for payment.	Private guided tour of Worcester Cathedral's Grounds & Gardens. This tour includes the Bishop's Palace gardens which are normally closed to the public. The tour also includes seeing the medieval ruins of the old Guesten via the cloister's central garden. The tour will cover some of the planting and plant mythology as well as finding out more about the Cathedral's history including the former monastery on site. Price: £5 for members (subsidised by Worcester Civic Society) and £8 for non-members	Worcester Cathedral, College Yard Worcester WR1 2LA
Tuesday 21 st April 6pm to 9pm	Worcester's Blue Plaques - a talk by John Wickson and Peter Goggs, followed by one woman show by Dr Georgina Lock on: 'Hannah Snell, Female Soldier, 1750'. Hannah Snell born in Worcester, enlisted in the British Army in the 18 th century and her story is one of determination and courage. She is immortalised on a Blue Plaque in Worcester. Blue plaques are permanent signs (blue & round), placed on buildings to commemorate a strong link between a famous person of event. Price to be confirmed.	Venue to be confirmed.
Friday 5 th June 1:30pm	Private tour of Madresfield Court House & Gardens: guided tour of this historic house in Malvern. It has been home to the Lygon family for over 900 years. The house was first mentioned in a charter of Henry I, dating from the 1120s. Price: £10 (members)	Madresfield Court, Malvern
June. Date to be confirmed.	Worcester Cathedral talk: A day in the life of the Cathedral's Clerk of Works and the Archaeologist. Event to be confirmed.	The Bishop's Old Palace, Worcester

Last year we held a variety of talks and visits. This included a talk by James Stourton, renowned arts historian and author on civic societies and saving heritage; a talk at the Bishop's Palace; a tour of Worcester Cathedral's library (photo to the right). Our tour to Madresfield Court was sold out and due to popular demand, we are organising another visit next year!



This year, the Executive Team & partners each paid for a Christmas Dinner event at Worcester Golf & Country Club. Please let us know if you would be interested in a paid for Christmas Dinner event next year.



Ticket Source – helping to enable effective management of our events programme. As part of our ongoing efforts to enhance our event speakers, locations and attendance, we are now using a new free booking system, Ticket Source. This system is used by many other charities including Malvern Civic Society, This booking system is free to the Civic Society as well as to users. Please note we are only using this system to ascertain the numbers of attendees to an event to help us plan-ahead. You will never be asked for a payment via Ticket Source. <https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/worcester-civic-society>

Executive Team – Update

At our AGM on the 6th November, new members of the Executive team were voted in including: Dr Heather Barrett as our new Chair and Nicola Freeman as Vice President. Short bios on Heather and Nicola are included below. Other changes include: Phil Douce has changed from Chair to President and Liz Demaison is now Vice Chair. The new Chair of the Planning Panel is Chris Evans, MRTPI. David Birtwhistle will continue to support the Society as a Consultant.

All of the Executive Team would like to wish our members a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. We look forward to seeing you at events next year.



One of many Christmas trees at Worcester Cathedral



Dr Heather Barrett, Chair: Originally from Gloucester, I’ve lived in Worcester since the 1990s and now call Barbourne home. With a PhD in urban redevelopment and conservation planning from the University of Birmingham, I lecture in geography at the University of Worcester, focusing on geography, planning and sustainability. A Civic Society member for over 20 years, I’ve chaired its policy and planning panels and served on the executive committee. As the Society’s new chair, I’m committed to protecting Worcester’s heritage, supporting quality development, and fostering pride in our city.

Nicola Gibbons, Vice President: Born and raised in Worcester, I attended St Mary’s Convent School in Battenhall. I later studied Architecture at Liverpool University, and qualified as an Architect 10 years ago, whilst living in London. I moved back to Worcester in 2020. These days, between working at KKE Architects in Diglis, I’m kept very busy by my little girls. I’m also an active member of Worcester Rowing Club and can be found coxing and rowing on the Severn whenever I get some precious free time.



Contacts:

- Chair:** Dr Heather Barrett
- Hon. Treasurer:** Stephen Inman
- Hon. Secretary:** John Wickson
- President:** Phil Douce
- Vice-President:** Nicola Gibbons
- Vice-Chair & Newsletter Editor:** Liz Demaison
- Membership Secretary:** Dee Bruce
- Events Officer:** Lorraine Preece
- Chair of Planning Panel:** Chris Evans, MRTPI
- Conservation Consultant:** Carl Jukes
- General Consultant:** David Birtwhistle
- Archivist:** Chris Wilkinson
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Please contact the Newsletter Editor for comments, articles or ideas at worcestercivicsociety@gmail.com

2026 content deadlines:

Spring – 1 st March	Summer – 1 st June
Autumn – 1 st September	Winter – 1 st December

Worcester Civic Society is a registered charity (No. 505346) and is independent of political parties. Our members meet jointly with the City’s Conservation Advisory Panel (CAP) and regularly meet with the City’s Planning and Regeneration Officers. The Society is a member of the national body Civic Voice.