

# The Arts and Crafts Movement in Leicester

**Start location:** Green Dragon Square (formerly New Market Sq.), Market Place, Leicester, LE1 5HQ

**Time taken:** 50 minutes (approximately)\*      **Distance:** 1.7 miles 2.7 km      **Circular route**  
Allow additional time for information stops.

## Description:

This walk takes in a number of buildings associated with the Arts and Crafts movement - a trend in the decorative and fine arts between 1880 and 1920. Some buildings are in the Arts and Crafts architectural style, others are connected with noteworthy individuals of the time.



- Main route
- Alternative route
- 1 Stage / waypoint
- A Point of interest

\*Time is calculated at a steady pace of 2mph, if walked without stopping. Allow extra time to look at points of interest and read the information.

This route was developed by staff and volunteers for Leicester City Council:  
[www.choosehowyoumove.co.uk/walks](http://www.choosehowyoumove.co.uk/walks)



**Walk starts:**

From Green Dragon Square (formerly New Market Sq.), Market Place, Leicester, LE1 5HQ

**Safety tips:**

Take care crossing roads, use pedestrian crossings where present.

Watch for cyclists throughout the city centre, including pedestrianised spaces, pavements and cycle lanes.

Remember to observe the guidance on social distancing.

**Introduction:**

This walk looks at some of the architecture and history of the arts and crafts movement within Leicester City Centre. The Arts and Crafts Movement was an international trend in the decorative and fine arts between about 1880 and 1920. It began in Britain and flourished in Europe and America. The movement stood for traditional craftsmanship using simple forms and often used medieval, romantic or folk styles of decoration. The Arts and Crafts Movement promoted the development of hands-on craftsmanship skills. It also supported economic and social reform and was essentially anti-industrial, wishing to move away from the mass-production which was becoming commonplace in the industrial age.

**Route directions:**

Note - detailed information about the places of interest we pass can be found at the end, after the directions.

1. From Green Dragon Square (formerly New Market Square) follow Market Place to Hotel Street. Turn right and follow the road ahead, soon turning sharply to the left.
2. Turn left into Grey Friars and pause to look at (A).

**(A) No.5 Grey Friars, Barradale Offices, 1880**

The architect Isaac Barradale designed these offices for himself in 1880. This building is Grade II listed as a very early example of the English Domestic Revival style of the arts and crafts movement for which Barradale was especially known. Barradale developed his 'Leicester style', characterised by tall gables, roughcast walls, small paned windows and heavy timbering such as the ornate carved brackets that can be seen on no.5 Grey Friars. These brackets support the large oriel window above which projects out from the first floor. This style of window allowed more light to shine on the working desks of his employees and incidentally provided a good view of the outside world. This building is considered to be Barradale's best work and was unique in the city at that time. Another figure associated with Arts and Crafts began here as an apprentice – the young Ernest Gimson. He went on to become a nationally-known architect and furniture maker/designer of the Arts and Crafts Movement.

Continue on Grey Friars to the junction. Turn right on Friar Lane then next right on New Street (caution, narrow pavement). Continue ahead to Peacock Lane, cross to the opposite pavement then turn left, passing the Cathedral Church of St Martins. Turn right into Applegate. Continue past the junction with Guildhall Lane and pause by Jubilee Square.

3. Not far from here on the other side of St Nicholas Circle is the Jewry Wall (B). You may wish to detour there, then return.

**(B) Jewry Wall** - connections with Arts & Crafts

The Jewry Wall was built during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century as part of the Roman bath house complex. So what does a section of Roman masonry have to do with the Arts and Crafts Movement? On Valentines Days in 1895, members of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings met to discuss the old Jewry Wall. The Society was an amenity society founded by leading figures of the Arts and Crafts Movement, including William Morris and Phillip Webb. The society's purpose was to oppose what they considered to be the destructive 'restoration' of ancient buildings, then occurring in Victorian England. The society protected and still protects many ancient buildings across England.

Retrace your steps slightly and turn into Guildhall Lane. At the junction with Loseby Lane/Carts Lane, continue ahead into Silver Street.

4. Pause at (C) the Silver Arcade for information. If the arcade is open, walk through and pause to look up.

**(C) Silver Arcade**, 1899, architect Amos Hall, Silver Street

The Silver Arcade was designed by Leicester-born architect Amos Hall, who took over Isaac Barradale's architectural practice in 1892. There are only two four-storey shopping arcades in the UK, of which this arcade is one. Above the main staircase Hall designed oriel windows, just as Barradale did for his offices at no.5 Grey Friars. The Silver Arcade is Grade II listed but had become very dilapidated following its closure around 2003. It reopened in 2013 following a £3million refurbishment to restore it to its original retail use.

Emerge from the arcade onto Cank Street and turn left, then left again into Cheapside. Turn right on East Gates then continue past the Clock Tower onto Humberstone Gate.

5. Cross Charles Street at the pedestrian traffic lights to your right (by New Look) and continue on Humberstone Gate, right hand side. Pause at (D) for information.

**(D) Secular Hall**, 1881, architect William Larnar Sugden

The Secular Hall in Leicester is the only surviving city building in Britain that is entirely devoted to Secularism. The Secular Hall has two connections with the Arts and Crafts Movement. The first is via the Gimson family. Josiah Gimson, father of Ernest Gimson (mentioned earlier), was an advocate of Secularism in Leicester and in 1873 suggested that Secularists should build their own meeting place. The result is this building, designed by architect Sugden and completed in 1881. Secondly, in 1884 the hall hosted William Morris when he delivered a famous lecture, "Art and Socialism". Here, 19-year old Ernest Gimson first met Morris, which subsequently influenced the direction of Ernest's career.

Continue ahead then turn right into Rutland Street to enter the Cultural Quarter. From the Curve theatre, take the continuation of Rutland Street and walk along the left hand pavement to reach Charles Street.

6. Cross over Charles Street at the pedestrian traffic lights and continue on Rutland Street. Cross Granby Street with care and walk ahead on Belvoir Street. Cross side roads with care. At Wellington Street turn left around the corner a short distance (avoid the pedestrian/cycle lane on the pavement) and turn back for a view of (E) and (F).

**(E) Department store, 1880, designed by Isaac Barradale.**

At the corner of Market Street and Belvoir Street stands an imposing building designed by Barradale. With its tall gables, roughcast walls, heavy timbering and small-paned windows, Barradale's building demonstrates his 'Leicester' style - as we first saw at his office, (A). Now joined together as one building, Barradale originally built two buildings here, the first in 1880 and the second in 1883. They were the department store of Joseph Johnson & Co. Ltd which was sold to Fenwick in 1962 and closed in 2017. The building is now being adapted for use as apartments, commercial and business space. Completion is anticipated in 2021.

**(F) Formerly Bernetts Hotel.**

The building on the opposite corner of Market Street was also designed by Barradale and was originally Bernetts hotel.

**7. Turn right into Town Hall Square and pause at (G) for information.**

**(G) Town Hall, 1876, Francis Hames**

Leicester Town Hall was designed by architect Francis Hames and completed in 1876. It was built in the Queen Anne Revival style of architecture. The arts and crafts style of architecture paralleled the Queen Anne Revival style during the 19th and early 20th century. The British Victorian version of the Queen Anne Revival style of architecture was more closely associated with the Arts and Crafts movement than the American version.

Cross Horsefair Street and take the walkway between buildings to Market Place South and return to the start. The walk finishes here in Green Dragon Square (formerly New Market Square).

We hope that you have enjoyed this short introduction to places associated with the Arts and Crafts movement in Leicester. If you would like to find out more New Walk Museum has an Arts and Crafts gallery where a collection of works are held, including some works by Ernest Gimson. The suburbs of Leicester also have an abundance of history and architecture related to the Arts and Crafts Movement. See the Ernest Gimson walking trail leaflet under 'resources'.

**Places of interest passed on route – additional information**

**(A) No.5 Grey Friars, Barradale Offices, 1880.**

The architect Isaac Barradale designed many private houses in Leicester, especially in Stoneygate where his 'Leicester Style' of arts and crafts architecture can be seen. It includes tall gables, roughcast walls, small paned windows and heavy timbering. The architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner, best known for his series of guides Buildings of England, regarded Barradale as arguably the finest architect of the Arts and Crafts movement in the country.

In 1881, a teenager began an apprenticeship here with Barradale. This young man was Ernest Gimson who went on to become a nationally-known architect and furniture maker of the Arts and Crafts Movement. Gimson's childhood home was located just off De Montfort Street on New Walk, now the site of the Belmont Hotel. There is a blue plaque to Gimson on the side of the building. Later, in 1898 Gimson designed Stoneywell Cottage in Charnwood Forest. The cottage was built and also furnished in the Arts and Crafts style and is now owned by the National Trust. Gimson was described by Pevsner as 'the greatest of the English artist-craftsmen', although

he was primarily a designer and employed craftsmen to execute most of his designs. Gimson combined innovative design work with a respect and understanding for the materials and processes of craftsmanship.

#### **(D) Secular Hall, 1881, William Larnar Sugden**

The Secular Hall in Leicester is the only surviving city building in Britain that is entirely devoted to Secularism - the belief that religion and religious views should exist separately from political and civil government. In 19th century when this hall was built, this was a controversial concept. Secularists often had difficulty finding meeting space. Clerical authorities were opposed to Secularists meeting in church halls; even some public houses refused them meeting space. So Secular halls began to be built in towns and cities of the midlands and north.

Earlier we mentioned Ernest Gimson, the influential Arts and Crafts designer. His father Josiah was a local industrialist and one of the principal advocates of Secularism in Leicester. In 1873, when the founder of the Secular Movement was prevented from giving a lecture in Leicester, Josiah suggested that Secularists should build their own meeting place in town and he contributed funds. Architect William Larnar Sugden from Derby was appointed and the Secular Hall opened in 1881. Following Josiah's death in 1883, the Gimson family remained connected with the Secular Movement in Leicester with Ernest's elder brother Sydney taking a key role.

In the 1880s advanced thinkers were invited to speak by the Leicester Secular Society, thus promoting new ideas. Young Ernest Gimson would have attended and heard the thoughts of a number of distinguished speakers. A prominent advocate of the Arts and Crafts Movement – the textile designer, writer and social activist William Morris – was invited to speak and he gave a famous lecture here entitled “Art and Socialism” in 1884.

The architectural style of the Secular Hall has been described as ‘a free treatment of the Flemish Renaissance’. The architect, Sugden, designed five terracotta busts of Socrates, Voltaire, Thomas Paine, Robert Owen and Jesus to decorate the front of the building – chosen as examples of ‘world-menders and social reformers’. This proved controversial at that time.

#### **(E) Department store, 1880, Isaac Barradale**

The building at the corner of Market Street and Belvoir Street is now one building but originally Barradale designed and built two. The first at number 36 Market Street (a little further around the corner) was designed as a department store for Joseph Johnson & Co Ltd in 1880; the second was built on the corner in 1883 as Gresham buildings for Richard Allen, whose business is uncertain. By around 1900 Gresham Buildings became part of Joseph Johnson's store and was joined to the first building by a short section in buff bricks (take a closer look to see the changes in architecture). With its tall gables, roughcast walls, heavy timbering and small-paned windows, Barradale's building has all the elements of his ‘Leicester’ style. As the department store expanded in the 1920s there were later additions to link to and incorporate a former hosiery factory at the Belvoir Street/Bowling Green Street junction. The original Barradale buildings now have Grade II listing (but not the later additions).

Joseph Johnson & Co. Ltd was an outfitters, drapers and furnishers. The department store also contained a funeral directors' department with a mortuary in the basement, as well as bedrooms on the top floor for the shop girls. It was run by the Johnson family until it was sold to Fenwick in 1962 and eventually closed in 2017. Most recently it was purchased by a developer and conversion is underway to a 121-bedroom ‘apart-hotel’ with lobby bar, restaurant and gym. There will also be ground floor and basement commercial units and workspace for businesses. Completion is anticipated in 2021.

#### **(G) Leicester Town Hall, 1876, Francis Hames**

Before 1876, the old Guildhall was used as Leicester's Town Hall. In 1877 Josiah Gimson (mentioned earlier) was elected as a Liberal councillor and would have been one of the first councillors to use the ‘new’ purpose-built

Town Hall of 1876, designed by Francis Hames. Fast-forward to the present day and the Town Hall here is said to be one of the most energy efficient town halls in the UK; the architect didn't do badly!

### **Acknowledgements**

With thanks to Tyler Barton for researching this route.

### **Resources:**

National Trust – Stoneywell

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/stoneywell/features/ernest-gimson-the-creator-of-stoneywell>

Ernest Gimson

<https://gimson.leicester.gov.uk/ernest-gimson/gimson-in-leicester/>

Ernest Gimson walking trail – city centre and suburbs:

<https://gimson.leicester.gov.uk/media/1182/ernest-gimson-walking-trail.pdf>

The Victorian Society

<https://www.victoriansociety.org.uk/leicester/former-fenwicks-store-given-grade-ii-listing>

The Secular Hall

<https://www.storyofleicester.info/faith-belief/secular-hall/>