

Birmingham Trail Two: Birmingham Business Section

A Private Act of Parliament in 1746 sanctioned the development of the Colmore Estate which lay north of what is now Colmore Row. This was the home of the Colmore family who lived in New Hall in the grounds once belonging to the Priory, and connected to Colmore Row by an avenue of elms, on the line of Newhall St. The church of St. Paul's was endowed with land and money by the Colmores in 1779 and much of the rest of the area was developed with 3 storey terrace houses and workshops many of which were demolished in the 1880s when the leases ran out. Consequently, a great deal of new building took place at the end of the 19thC.

The Colmore Estate laid down strict rules concerning the materials allowed in the new buildings and they also insisted on a common roof line and frontage which had to be of a magnificent style.

Edmund St. and the upper parts of Church St. and Newhall St. became the area used mainly for offices by professional people who preferred the Arts & Crafts style but also minor public buildings and warehouses were built.

The lower ends of Church St, Newhall St. and Lionel St. were favoured with a number of Lethaby inspired brick factories with round arches and bold cornices. Lethaby's Eagle Insurance building (see Trail No.1) had an important influence, especially in its expression of the post and beam method of construction.

We start this walk where Edmund St. joins Chamberlain Square. On the left is

1. **The Council House Extension** Grade II* by Ashley & Newton 1912/13, built in stone in an Edwardian Renaissance style with banded rustication on the ground floor and giant pilasters on the upper floor. Within twenty years of being completed the Council House was already overcrowded and an extension was needed. The Gas Dept. occupied the ground floor, the upper floors being used for an enlargement of the Art Gallery which after gifts from John Feeney, the proprietor of the Birmingham Daily Post became known as the "Feeney Art Galleries". They were joined to the rest of the Council House by a dramatic single span bridge over Edmund St. completed in 1919. The former Gas Rates Office on Edmund St. was converted into a gallery for showing international collections in 1993. Entry to the main Art Gallery is also possible from this area. (This elevation over the entrance steps was bombed in the Second World War, and reconstructed by A.G. Sheppard Fidler in 1958.)
2. The University of Central England, Unit of Art & Design, **Birmingham School of Art**, Margaret St. Grade I, 1881-5, (extension in 1893) by Martin & Chamberlain and regarded as J.H. Chamberlain's masterpiece. The land for the School was given by W. Cregoe Colmore and the building paid for by Louisa Anne Ryland and Richard and George Tangye. Built in a Northern Italian Ruskinian Gothic style, this was the first Art School in municipal control.

The two-storey entrance front terminates in gabled wings of unequal height in order to meet the need for unbroken north light on both top floor studios. The three storey elevation to Edmund St. is heavily buttressed and terminates in three gables above an iron balcony of delicate design. The interior is well studied with contrasting large and small spaces and plenty of arches. Note the friezes of tile decoration, and the effective asymmetrical composition.



Naturalism can be seen in the carving on the porch and in the bright mosaics. The twelve foot diameter roundel on the left gable of the Margaret St. facade, with a terra cotta lily, in front of a lattice grid, modelled by Barfield of Leicester, was Chamberlain's last design, William Martin having to supervise the construction of the building after Chamberlain's early death. (Chamberlain was a devoted exponent of Ruskin's ideas and was chosen by Ruskin himself as a Trustee of his St. George's Guild.) Many Arts & Crafts designers and artists, such as Walter Crane, William Morris and Burne Jones had strong associations with the School. Between 1880 and 1900, Birmingham was the largest art school in Britain, generally thought to be the best equipped, and for examination and competition results the most successful. It is difficult to get inside the building without an

appointment but it is well worth looking through the door at the Venetian Gothic entrance hall. Back to Edmund St. The facades on the left are of

3. **The Medical Institute** 1875, by Osborne & Reading, was a classical brick stone building known as Empire House.
4. **The Board School Offices** 1875, by Martin & Chamberlain, perhaps a trial run for the School of Art.
5. **The Parish Offices** 1875, by W.H.Ward, was a grand, stone, French Renaissance styled building with a clock tower, cupola and lantern, now lost.
6. These three buildings, now gutted, make up the facade of the huge office space known as the **Louisa Ryland House**. Cross Newhall St and continue down Edmund St. On the left corner is
7. **Nos. 106-110 Edmund St. and 29 Newhall St.** Grade II, 1895 by F.B.Osborne is a dignified brick and terracotta block designed as medical consulting rooms now partly a wine bar. On the opposite corner is
8. **No. 19, Newhall St.** Grade I, 1896. The Bell Edison Co. The former Telephone Exchange by Frederick Martin of Martin & Martin. This is a triumph for the local terracotta school, strident, harsh in colour, with arched bays enclosing three storeys of windows, their piers rising into chimneys made into gables, and decorated by fabulous beasts above the arches. Pierced decoration adds to the general flamboyance. The beautifully decorated gate is by the Bromsgrove Guild.
9. **Nos. 103-107 Edmund St. The former Ear Nose & Throat Hospital**, Grade II, 1890/91, by Jethro Cossins & Peacock in a classical "Queen Anne" style. The rear of this building is to be demolished. On the left, opposite, are two derelict survivors.
10. **No. 134 Edmund St.** Grade II, by Newton & Cheatle for G.L.Eveson, coal and coke merchant. Arts & Crafts in brick and terracotta with interesting rain heads and
11. **No. 136, Edmund St. formerly Osborne Garrett** Grade II, 1880, in a Venetian Gothic style. Opposite, on the right is
12. **Nos. 117-119 Edmund St. The White Swan** may be by Yeoville Thomason. Following is a good row of offices on the right.
13. **Nos. 121-123 Edmund St.** Chambers for G.A.Willetts. Grade II, 1899 by Newton & Cheatle. In a Neo-Georgian style with a relieving arch across the whole facade set off by the little tripartite dormer.
14. **Nos.125-131, St. Edwards Chambers**, Grade II, 1899, by Newton & Cheatle built for themselves and with Norman Shaw style bays linked at the top. Note the iron ties and an elaborate central ventilation pipe.
15. **No. 133 Edmund St.** Gradell, for T.B.Scattergood, Chartered Accountants. 1895, by Mansell & Mansell.
16. **The Midland Eye Hospital** , 1883, by Payne & Talbot, less interesting and now ripe for development. Note the oriel window. Opposite is
17. **Nos. 158-160 Edmund St.** Keay & Co. Grade II, 1891, of brick and stone. Built for J.W. Allen of West Bromwich in the French Renaissance style for £5000. The pilastered curve of 158, leads round into Church St. and a fine line of Arts & Crafts fronts.



18. **Nos. 41-43 Church St. Saint Philip's Chambers** c1900, Grade II*, is by Newton & Cheatle in an Arts & Crafts style. It is of brick and stone, its bay windows originally with tile-hanging to their roofs and apron walks flanking the shallow oriel of stone; while the tense line of the parapet is in contrast to the graceful curves of the bay roofs. A replica of the original door surround has been installed in recent years with lead-covered bay windows flanking a stone bay while the tense line of the parapet is in contrast to the graceful curves of the bay roofs. The original door surround has been removed.



19. **Nos. 53-55 Church St. The Old Royal Public House** Grade II, late 19thC. purple brick and terracotta in a French Renaissance style.

20. **Nos. 57-59 Church St.** Wiggins Teape Grade II*, 1909, a powerful red brick design influenced by Lethaby. Turn up Cornwall St. and turn right to 12, New Market Street, on the left corner with Great Charles St.

21. **No. 12 New Market St. Former Birmingham Guild of Handicrafts** Grade II, 1898, by Arthur Stansfield Dixon. Dixon was the designer of the metalwork for the Guild as well as an architect and this building has been described as an "essay" of arched brickwork. The plan is L-shaped with a courtyard at the back linked to New Market St. by a semi-circular arched gateway under the building. The large windows of the ground floor metal workers' room on the corner have similar arches, giving the base of the building an arcaded effect. The studios are on the top floor facing New Market St. and have large windows with square heads directly beneath the eaves of the steeply pitched tile roof. The upper windows have elliptical arches characteristic of 16thC. Belgian work. The slope of Great Charles St. has been considered and the floor levels split to give a picturesque arrangement of windows although the roof line is level. This building has recently been re-furbished as offices, having been empty for many years. Turn back up New Market St. and turn right up Cornwall St. Make a detour to examine treasures in Newhall St.



22. **Nos. 43-51 Newhall St. Cornwall Buildings** Grade II, c1898, (now partly a wine bar) with an oriel tower, in brick and buff terracotta.

23. **No. 55 Newhall St. Avebury House** 1911, by Marcus O. Type with mannerist classical detail revealing a steel frame. A glance along the left hand side beyond Cornwall St. shows a fine row of the buildings of c1900s culminating in

24. **Nos. 60-56 Newhall St.** Grade II*, c1900, by Newton & Cheatle, is a five storey brick and terracotta building with Flemish gables, supported by reliefs of St. George and the Dragon, and delightful two-storey porches with a chequer-board decoration. Above the doors are elaborately decorated shields containing the numbers 56 and 60. Note the terracotta faces on the arches. Norman Shaw's influence can be seen here.



25. **Nos. 54-50 Newhall St.** Grade II, circa 1900. Continuing up Cornwall St.

26. **Nos. 85-87 Cornwall St.** Grade II*, 1899, a surgery for Dr. J. E. Parrott by W. Henman and T. Coope. The latter was a pupil of Alfred Waterhouse and chief assistant during the erection of the Natural History Museum, Kensington, he may have been in charge of William Henman's General Hospital, Steelhouse Lane, 1894-7, (see Trail 3), before joining him in partnership 1898. A composition in red brick and stone in a Belgian Renaissance style with two bay windows of equal height. The centre of the facade has a typically Belgian gable containing a pedimented window. The vertical lines of the columns are continued up the facade by short pilasters and brackets.

27. **Nos. 89-91 Cornwall St.** Grade II*, 1904, by C. E. Bateman. An asymmetrical Arts & Crafts building incorporating features from Lethaby's Eagle Insurance in Colmore Row.

28. **No. 93 Cornwall St.** Grade II*, 1902, by Newton & Cheatle for Sir James Sawyer as professional offices. This was deliberately designed in an earlier style to contrast with the earlier building next door.

29. **No. 95 Cornwall St.** Grade II*, 1901, by Newton & Cheatle, for Smith Priestly. These are elegant chambers in a Georgian style with a solid asymmetrically placed porch and attractively beaten metal railings. The cornice, which is returned into the parapet before the ends of the building, effectively shelters the upper windows and terminates the brick piers whilst the three dormers look out over a cut-away parapet. (Newton and Cheatle set a high standard of design around the turn of the century.)

30. **The Birmingham Midland Institute**, formerly the Birmingham Library, Grade II*, 1899, by Cossins Peacock & Bewley, of red brick and stone with gables. Note the iron railings along Cornwall St. Opposite is

31. **The Extension of the School of Art.** This wing, added in 1893, by W. Martin, with terra cotta putti modelled by Benjamin Creswick is thought by some perhaps to lack the conviction of the original building. Note the decorative tiles. Opposite we are now back to
 32. **The Council House Extension** this part housing the Education Dept.
- Turn left along Margaret St. and turn right, back to the Gas Hall.