

## COVENTRY COUNCIL HOUSE



### Guide to records

**Coventry Archives** is located in the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Jordan Well, Coventry, CV1 5QP.

Admission to both the Reading Room and Research Room is free. Documents and books can be consulted without charge, but a charge is made for photocopying or the taking of digital images. Visitors are required to make an appointment to view original documents in the Research Room. Material in the Reading Room is available without the need of an appointment.

**Opening hours:** The Coventry Archives Reading and Research Rooms are open, 10.30 am – 3.30pm, Wednesdays – Fridays; the Reading Room is open on alternate Saturdays, 10.30 am – 3.30pm. Please refer to the Coventry collections online catalogue at <http://coventrycollections.org/> or further details, or telephone on 02476 237583.

### Introduction to the Council House

Coventry has been described by the author John Hewit as being a city 'famous for its...planned civic progress' [Hewit, 1969]. The Council House is a great example of this as not only does it demonstrate the great amount of attention payed to the built environment of the city, it also shows the importance that the cities municipal function holds.

The Council House's design is reminiscent of Tudor style architecture and so it would be easy to mistake this building as being of a medieval construction. However, construction on the Council House began in 1913 and was not completed until 1917. The building was not officially opened until 11<sup>th</sup> June 1920 by the Duke of York. The 7-year duration that it took for the Council House to open its doors is the result of disruption caused by WW1. The major war limited the efficiency of the process by compromising how many builders could work on the project as the war required many men to enlist. Similarly, some of the key developers working on the project had to apply for an exemption from military service. Delays such as these coupled up to make the grand opening of the council a very long and drawn out process.



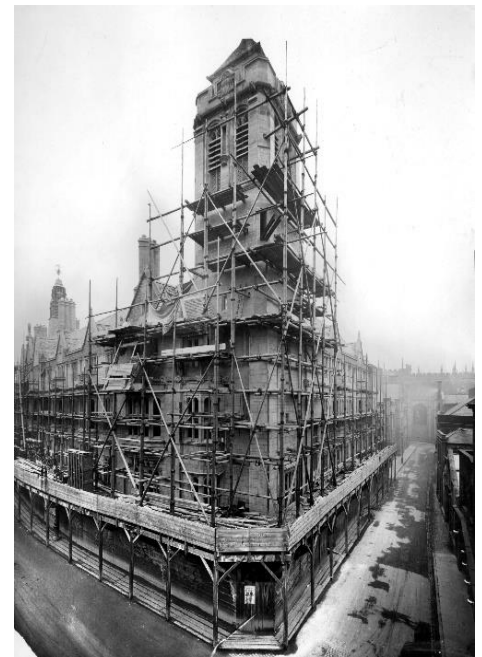
A picture of the then Duke of York (later became King George VI) at the grand opening of the Council House.

The Council House design is the product of plans devised by Edward Garrett and HW Simister. Garrett and Simister had entered an architectural competition that begun in 1910 that would see the winners design a new council house that would become the home of Coventry's municipal functions.

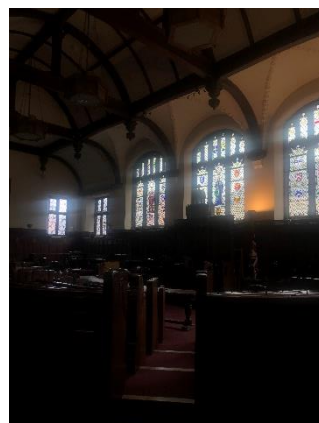
Located on Earl Street, the Council House's size meant it was also surrounded by Hay Lane, St Mary Street and Bayley Lane. Allowing it to have a rather prominent space in the Coventry City centre.

The Council House has an important part to play in Coventry's Heritage and not just because of the way it contributes to the built environment of the city. There are many features that make it an important part of the history; for example, the buildings council chamber is comprised of British Oak that was taken from the Arden Forest that once belonged to Coventry until it was knocked down as a result of urbanisation. Another interesting fact that works to add to the House's legacy is the history behind St Mary's Hall (a portion of the Council House). The infamous, Mary Queen of Scots whilst captured by Queen Elizabeth I, is said to have been imprisoned in this area of the Council House. These two examples are amongst the wealth of history held by the Council House.

Today, the Council House is considerably smaller than it was as it serves less functions; for example, it is no longer home to the police office as it was in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although it may have decreased in size, it still has a very important role to play within the city as it is the place to go to deal with issues concerning things such as housing to parking tickets.



This image shows the Council House whilst it was under construction.  
0001\_HistoricCoventry\_00313  
[1918]



These photos were taken in February 2020 and show the main council chamber. There has been little change made to the area, apart from the addition of a few features like electronic microphones.

For further information visit:

<https://www.britainexpress.com/counties/westmid/coventry/council-house.htm>

## **Archive material:**

Material relating to proposed 'Municipal building plans' and initial planning involved with the Council House:

CCA/TC/21/22/10/2 (Plan on Appropriated Land Earl Street, St Mary Street)

CCA/TC/21/22/10/3 (Information on Erection of buildings)

CCD/CE/3/83 (File entitled 'General Works Committee, report of the subcommittee re carvings in connection with municipal buildings')

CCD/CE/46/8/1/66 (Municipal office and shops, Earl Street: block plan of area needed [as details of intended buildings])

CD/CE/46/8/1/88 (Town Hall and Municipal Buildings: scheme 'A')

CCD/CE/46/8/1/89 (Town Hall and Municipal Buildings: scheme B)

Letters relating to the Council House:

PA159/11 (Letter from Edward Garratt to Alderman WH Grant)

PA159/1/21 (Letter from Alderman WH Grant to Garratt, Simister, Buckland & Farmer)

PA159/2/12 (Letter from W.H. Grant to the Council House sub-committee)

Archive material on plans to renovate the Council House:

CCA/3/1/996 (File relating to restoration work done at St Mary's Hall including Council House, ranging between 1914-1936)

Photographs:

CCA/4/12/12 (Image of the Council House, contained within a folder with the reference CCA/4/12)

CCG/CG/1/123/8 (Photograph of footbridge link between St Mary's Hall and the Council House)

Historic Coventry collection (previously Pictures of Coventry) holds around 50 images of interior and exterior shots of Council House including the many statues sculpted by Henry Wilson

Newspaper clippings:

CCA/TC/1/1/23 (Press cuttings- general "Book 29")

CCA/TC/1/1/32 (Press cuttings- general "Book 29", 1948-1950)

## **Local study material:**

### Books:

John Hewitt, Coventry: The tradition of change and continuity, (Coventry, Coventry Corporation, 1969)

### Maps:

The map cabinets are really useful for seeing the development of the Coventry area and space occupied by the Council House, under the following references:

M3 13 XXI.12

M3 14 XXI.13-XXI.14

M4 1 XXI.15

### Municipal Handbooks:

Reference number: JN352

The handbooks provide information on topics such as Coventry Councillors, representatives of public bodies, various committee's in Coventry, Justices of Peace and the different Coventry mayors.