

# THE BIRMINGHAM PUGIN TRAIL

## **Augustus Welby Pugin: Who was he? Why was he important?**

Augustus Welby Pugin (1/3/1812 – 14/9/1852), son of the French émigré A.C. Pugin, architectural draughtsman and topographical watercolourist, is arguably the greatest British architect, designer and writer of the nineteenth century. Some of his finest work includes the interiors of the House of Lords, the Catholic church of St Giles, Cheadle, and his own house, The Grange, Ramsgate. He brought the Gothic Revival in this country and beyond to a new level of intensity and significance. He taught that architecture, society, morality and faith are all interconnected, and that the finest buildings can only be raised when the society from which these buildings emerge is equally fine. In his forceful and witty writings, in his countless and wonderfully inspired designs in different media, and in the conviction and power of his buildings he demonstrates his genius and his ongoing quest for truth in architecture, design, and life as he felt it should be lived. His work was continued by his sons Edward (1834-1875), Peter Paul (1851-1904) and Cuthbert (1840-1928).

## **Introduction: The Pugins in Birmingham**

The Birmingham Pugin Trail has been launched to celebrate the bicentenary of Pugin's birth on 1 March 2012, and to highlight the significance of his contributions in Birmingham. Pugin's buildings still in use today form the core of the Trail, some incorporating designs by other members of the Pugin dynasty. Also included are sites with archives and other links to Pugin.

Augustus Welby Pugin designed or contributed to six main sites in Birmingham, with St Chad's Cathedral being the main hub of the Trail, and open daily. The building of the (demolished) King Edward's School in New Street was a very significant project, as it began the working relationship between Charles Barry the architect, and Pugin the designer. Together they went on to rebuild the Houses of Parliament in London, an iconic British building, recognised the world over. Many of its interior fittings, designed by Pugin, were made in the Hardman workshops in Birmingham.

Pugin travelled extensively, embracing the latest technology and using trains as railways developed, including the London to Birmingham line. He was a committed family man and, in his short lifetime, had three wives and eight children. After his death, in 1852, his widow and younger children lived in Birmingham for over four years. His eldest daughter, Anne, married Pugin's assistant, John Hardman Powell, who became chief designer for the Hardman business. Pugin's eldest son, Edward, designed or extended several buildings in the Birmingham area, most of which have not survived. His other two sons also contributed to the design of local buildings, as did his grandson, Sebastian Pugin Powell (1866-1949).

In his lifetime Pugin was a celebrated figure, and Queen Victoria awarded his widow a civil list pension. But fashions come and go and the popularity of Gothic design waned in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and many such buildings were destroyed as Britain 'modernised'. In recent years, however, Pugin's popularity has grown, particularly as a result of the 1994 Pugin exhibition in London, the foundation of the Pugin Society in 1995, and the Landmark Trust's high profile restoration of his house, The Grange, in Ramsgate, which opened to the public in 2006. The time has now come for Pugin's legacy in Birmingham to be shown to the world.

## **The Birmingham Pugin Trail Route**

### **1) St Chad's Cathedral (1837-41) and Bishop's House (1840-41)**

The Cathedral and Bishop's House (originally opposite), and their interiors, were designed by Pugin. The cathedral is an internationally significant building, being the first Catholic cathedral to be built in the UK since the Reformation. The cathedral was built by George Myers ('Pugin's Builder') and the original internal decorations and fittings were made by craftsmen who re-introduced medieval techniques of production: William Warrington, the chancel windows, 1841; John Hardman junior, the

plate and, after 1845, several splendid windows; Herbert Minton, the floor tiles. Pugin's magnificent rood screen was removed in a re-ordering, in 1967. The vestments were made by Lucy Powell and colleagues, to Pugin's designs, many surviving to this day. Pugin, a collector of antiquities, also provided the Cathedral with some fine original medieval furnishings, acquired on his continental journeys, including the 15th century German Canons' stalls and the pulpit. Beneath the Cathedral is a spacious Romanesque-style crypt containing several chantry chapels.

The Bishop's House was demolished in 1960 (to make way for the ring road), and some of the contents sold. Quite recently, one of the gothic ceiling lights was auctioned at Bonhams, with an asking price of £10,000-15,000. This had once been owned by the singer Cher in her Malibu home, during her 'Gothic' phase.

## **2) Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (BMAG)**

John Hardman junior, who lived in Handsworth, developed his metalwork and stained glass business to produce items to the medieval designs of his close friend, Pugin. This became a worldwide trade, surviving into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with a substantial archive, part of which is held by the museum and includes metalwork and stained glass drawings, brass rubbings, and cartoons for windows (cartoons are the full size drawings). Various items designed by Pugin are also held by the museum, including Hardman (metalwork), Minton (tiles) and a table by J.G. Crace, and some are usually on permanent display in the galleries. One of the largest items, currently on display in the industrial gallery, is the Rood Screen from St John's Church, Alton, Staffs. Pugin designed his 'model village' in Alton, based upon the medieval ideals for a caring, Christian community, at a time when there was much poverty and unrest. The design of the church, for use by the poorer parishioners, was equal in quality to the design of Alton Towers, the seat of the Earl of Shrewsbury, Pugin's rich and supportive patron. The Hardman stained glass cartoon archive has been held by the Museum since 1972, when the company moved out of its Newhall Hill premises after a major fire.

## **3) Birmingham Central Library Archives and Heritage**

The library houses the world-famous and extensive Hardman written archive, which currently occupies 100 metres of shelf space. It includes working day books, ledgers, staff accounts, family documents, collections of photographs, letters from Pugin and significant documentation of items for the Houses of Parliament, as well as records of orders from America, Australia, and other European countries. Scholars from around the world come to Birmingham to gain access to this rich historical record. The archive catalogue was digitised and went on line in 2010. It also has various other Pugin holdings, including a copy of his book *Floriated Ornament* 1849, and *Contrasts* 1836. (NB The library will be moving into new premises in 2013, see website, below, for the latest news)

## **THE JEWELLERY QUARTER – an area of Birmingham well known to Pugin**

Over the years there were several sites occupied by the Hardman workshops, and various members of the Pugin family would have visited them. Some of the buildings still exist, but most have gone, even some of the roads no longer exist, but the vast amount of work carried out on these sites, over the decades, forms part of the Pugin heritage in Birmingham, and provided steady local employment. Of particular interest, and briefly mentioned elsewhere, are the embroidery workshops, set up in 1842, and based in premises in Great Charles Street and Easy Row (which no longer exists). Some of this work can still be seen, such as the vestments in St Chad's Cathedral, embroidered by the local team of ladies led by Lucy Powell, John Hardman's sister. To give recognition to this vanished world a Virtual Pugin Trail is being prepared (and will be available to download as a pdf file).

## **Site of the Hardman workshop, Newhall Hill**

This became the main workshop, and was in continuous use until 1970, when a serious fire almost gutted the building. A significant part of the Hardman collection of books, photographs and ornaments, built up by the family and staff for over 100 years, was destroyed by this disaster. The workshop was able to carry on working in a small section of the building, until it found new premises (Lightwoods House, Bearwood 1972-2009).

John Hardman Powell, Hardman's nephew and Pugin's only pupil (who married Pugin's eldest daughter, Anne, in 1850), became the chief designer at the Hardman workshop after the death of Pugin in 1852. He continued the Gothic tradition started by Pugin, handing down his skills so that future generations could continue this style of work. This company, the only such survivor from that era, has continued into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and, although the metalwork side of the business had stopped, has been producing beautiful stained glass to orders from clients around the world.

#### **4) The Pen Museum**

The museum tells the story of the history of writing, and houses a very fine collection of pen nibs and other writing materials, many originating from the workshops found in and around the Jewellery Quarter, the pen nib centre of the world in Victorian times. Not only were nibs designed for writing, some were designed decoratively for displays, such as those exhibited at the Great Exhibition of 1851 in Hyde Park, London, where Pugin, Hardman and colleagues exhibited in their 'Medieval Court'. The Pugins, a dynasty of designers, would have used a variety of pens and other writing implements, examples of which are on display in the museum.

#### **5) Key Hill Cemetery**

This Nonconformist cemetery was opened in 1836 and holds the remains of several notable Birmingham citizens, some probably known by Pugin and his family. Three local companies built the Crystal Palace for the Great Exhibition of 1851, the first industrial exhibition of its kind, with displays from all over the world. The metal frame of the Crystal Palace was made locally by Fox, Henderson & Co, all the glass by the Chance glass company of Smethwick, and the Oslers made the magnificent fountain for the central display area. Members of each of these 3 families have been laid to rest here. Pugin said the Crystal Palace was 'a beastly place to display Gothic' – its design far removed from his beloved medieval style, but he recognised the merit of such an exhibition for future business. The Gothic Revival was given a huge boost by this exhibition and orders flooded in. Sadly, Pugin did not benefit, as his health was in decline and he died in 1852 at his home, in Ramsgate.

#### **6) Museum of the Jewellery Quarter**

Here the techniques and materials of the jewellery trade are displayed. Pugin's metalwork and jewellery designs were executed by craftsmen in the nearby Hardman workshops. A paradox of Pugin's approach was his pragmatism and adaptability. For the many clients with limited budgets Pugin used medieval designs, but utilised modern technology to produce affordable items particularly for the new churches being built to serve poor communities in rapidly expanding cities across the country (and beyond). It could be argued that Pugin anticipated the era of flat-pack retailing, as his metalwork could be constructed using 'off the shelf' component parts, with orders being assembled to match the budget of each client. Precious metals and modern alloys, precious and semi-precious stones were used by Pugin, to offer customers from all walks of life the opportunity to purchase his designs.

#### **7) St Mary's Convent and the Hardman Home: 101, Hunter's Road, Handsworth**

St Mary's Catholic Convent was designed by Pugin for the recently founded order of nuns, the Sisters of Mercy. The convent was opened only two months after St Chad's Cathedral, in August 1841, with financial and practical support from John Hardman Senior and John Talbot, 16<sup>th</sup> Earl of Shrewsbury. St Mary's met with the approval of the Venerable Catherine McAuley, foundress of the Sisters of Mercy, who described it as 'beautiful – fully furnished for 20 Sisters'.

A Pugin church (1846) in the convent grounds also served the Catholics of the parish during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but was destroyed by bombing in 1942. A school and House of Mercy on this site, designed by Edward after his father's death, were also demolished.

The Hardman family home was extended by Pugin in 1842, and became the presbytery (priest's home) to the nearby St Francis' church in 1894. On 8 November 2002 this house was given an English Heritage blue plaque: 'JOHN HARDMAN 1811-1867 Master metalworker and stained glass maker of the Gothic Revival lived here' (not open to the public).

St Mary's Convent is now open as a retreat/spirituality and heritage centre. Guided tours are available, with access to the original cloisters, chapel, and heritage room of this beautiful building, and an opportunity to learn about the history of the convent.

### **8) St Joseph's Church (1850), Presbytery and Cemetery, Thimble Mill Lane, Nechells**

St Joseph's church was originally built as a mortuary chapel by Pugin, for the new Catholic cemetery, and both were opened in 1850. Some of Pugin's original features can still be seen. As the local Catholic population grew a school was needed, and Edward designed the school buildings on the same site. Eventually, in 1867, the chapel became a parish church, and was extended in 1872 by Edward, who also built the adjoining presbytery (priest's house). The school buildings were demolished for road widening but the church continues to serve the parish.

### **9) Erdington Abbey (1850)**

The Catholic church of St Thomas and St Edmund of Canterbury was designed by Charles Hansom and opened in 1850. It was once said 'Anything that Pugin can do, Mr Hansom can do better' and Hansom was also cheaper, but it was Pugin who designed the wonderful church plate, considered to be a nationally significant collection. Pugin also designed most of the stained glass windows, made by Hardman, the work being continued by John Hardman Powell after Pugin's death.

### **10) St Mary's College, Oscott (1837-41)**

St Mary's College, Oscott, originally with a school, is the seminary of the Catholic Archdiocese of Birmingham, opened in 1794, for the training of Catholic priests. In 1838 the College moved to its new home, destined to become a national focus for the revival of Catholic life in Victorian England. Joseph Potter of Lichfield designed the building, but through the influence of John Talbot, 16th Earl of Shrewsbury, Pugin was brought in to complete the project. Pugin designed the gate lodges (1840) and also most of the furnishings (1838-41). Pugin's work here led directly to the commission for St Chad's Cathedral.

Pugin was given a free hand in the decoration of the chapel (1837-38). The marvellous east window is an early example of the revival of the medieval technique of stained glass production by William Warrington, to Pugin's design. The ceiling is decorated in characteristic colours of blue, red and gold, with Christian symbols and emblems associated with priestly ordination. Like St Chad's, the chapel contains several medieval objects collected by Pugin, including the carvings and enamels on the High Altar. However, the wonderful late 15c Netherlandish lectern is now in the Metropolitan Museum New York. Work at St Mary's was also carried out by Pugin's sons Edward, Cuthbert and Peter Paul, and also his grandson Sebastian.

Pugin was made Professor of Ecclesiastical Art and Architecture at Oscott. His lectures influenced his important book, *The Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture*, published in 1841. He also established the College museum to inspire both students and visitors. Pugin's second son Cuthbert and grandson Sebastian were educated at Oscott, and later joined the family firm of architects.

St Mary's College, Oscott is a residential working college. It is only accessible to visitors on designated days, when guided tours of the public areas are offered.

## **EDGBASTON SITES**

### **11) King Edward's School, Edgbaston Park Road**

This historic school, now housed on the Edgbaston site, had occupied buildings in New Street since it opened in 1552. The previous school building (1838-1935) in New Street, was a fine example of secular Gothic design, by the architect Charles Barry. He employed the 23-year-old Pugin, in 1835, to design the school interiors, fittings and furniture as Pugin, by then, already had the reputation of being a Gothic designer. The New Street building was on a site near to the current Odeon cinema, and its demolition, in 1936, is now regarded as an act of corporate vandalism.

In 1935, after almost 100 years in the Barry building, the school was moved into temporary accommodation on the current Edgbaston site. The upper corridor of the old school had been

dismantled stone by stone, labelled, and moved to Edgbaston. These stones, together with some stained glass designed by Pugin, were used for the interior of the current chapel, re-constructed in 1952, built as a memorial to the old boys who had lost their lives in two world wars. This school contains the earliest examples of Pugin's work in Birmingham. Surviving items designed by Pugin include several pieces of furniture, and the spectacular 'Sapientia' – the Master's chair and desk, which is still in use in the school today. From the extensive archives stereoscopic slides were recently discovered, which show some of his interiors of the New Street school. On occasions some of the Pugin collection may be on display at other city sites, to offer better access to the public. The collection has been photographed and can now be accessed at <http://kes.org.uk/gallery/Other/Pugin>

### 12) The Barber Institute of Fine Arts, Edgbaston Park Road

For Pugin enthusiasts, there are two items in the collection with strong Pugin family connections. The more significant is an Early Netherlandish triptych of the *Deposition*, probably painted in Brussels about 1470 by a follower of Rogier van der Weyden, and once in the Drawing Room of Pugin's house, The Grange, in Ramsgate. The other is a Flemish early 16th-century wooden sculpture, *The Meeting of Joachim and Anna*, which was formerly in the collection of John Hardman junior's son, John Bernard (1843-1903).

Pugin greatly admired the work of the great German painter and printmaker Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528), and he sketched Dürer's house and tomb when visiting Nuremberg. He also had a good collection of Dürer woodcuts and engravings, and may have been familiar with some of those in the Barber collection. In addition, the Barber houses a small but fine group of medieval enamels, metalwork and ivories that would have been of interest to Pugin. These include a 13th-century French crozier head and a German arm reliquary of comparable date, similar to those drawn by Pugin for his book *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture* (1841), plate V.

### 13) Winterbourne House & Garden, Edgbaston Park Road

Pugin designed several domestic buildings, and is considered a revolutionary architect due to his rejection of the established Georgian style of classical design, in which priority was given to the symmetry of the external façade. Pugin allowed his house designs to develop functionally, following the needs of his clients. In a wider context, his innovatory views about house design, his anticipation of the Arts and Crafts movement, and his trenchant ability as a writer and theorist have had immense and ongoing influence. In Birmingham there are a significant number of Victorian houses, many with a Gothic design, reflecting his influence on Birmingham architects. Winterbourne is a good example of an early 20<sup>th</sup>-century suburban Arts and Crafts villa and garden. Built in 1903 for the Nettlefold family, it is now owned by Birmingham University. It became a horticultural study centre, with a nationally significant rose collection. Recently refurbished, the house is now a conference centre, with the gardens and cafe open to the public. Designs by Pugin or his colleagues, from the University's Special Collections, are on display, and occasionally rotated.

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## DETAILS OF TRAIL SITES

(current opening times available on web sites)

### City centre:

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| <p>1a) St Chad's Cathedral (<b>open daily</b>)<br/>St Chad's Queensway<br/>Birmingham B4 6EU<br/>Tel: 0121-236-2251 / 0121-230-6201<br/><a href="http://www.stchadscathedral.org.uk">www.stchadscathedral.org.uk</a></p>         | <p>1b) St Chad's Archive (<b>by appointment only</b>)<br/>Cathedral House<br/>Birmingham B4 6EU<br/><a href="http://www.birminghamarchdiocesanarchives.org.uk">www.birminghamarchdiocesanarchives.org.uk</a></p>   |
| <p>2) Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (<b>open daily</b>)<br/>Chamberlain Square<br/>Birmingham B3 3DH<br/>Tel: 0121-303-2834<br/><a href="http://www.bmag.org.uk/birmingham-museum">www.bmag.org.uk/birmingham-museum</a></p> | <p>3) Birmingham Archives &amp; Heritage (<b>by appointment</b>)<br/>Central Library, Chamberlain Square<br/>Birmingham B3 3HQ<br/>Tel: 0121-303-4549<br/><a href="http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/archivesandheritage">www.birmingham.gov.uk/archivesandheritage</a></p> |

### Jewellery Quarter sites:

- 4) The Pen Museum (**open daily**)  
Unit 3, The Argent Centre  
60, Frederick Street  
Hockley, Birmingham B1 3HS  
Tel: 0121-236-9834  
www.penroom.co.uk
- 5) Key Hill Cemetery (**open daily**)  
Entrances: Icknield Street and Key Hill Drive  
Hockley, Birmingham B18  
www.fkwc.org
- 6) Museum of the Jewellery Quarter (**open Tues to Sunday**)  
75-80, Vyse Street  
Hockley, Birmingham B18 6HA  
Tel: 0121-554-3598  
www.bmag.org.uk/museum-of-the-jewellery-quarter

### Other sites in Birmingham:

- 7) St Mary's Convent (**by appointment**)  
98, Hunter's Road  
Handsworth, Birmingham B19 1EB  
Tel: 0121-554-3271  
www.mercyhandsworth.org.uk
- 8) St Joseph's Church (**open for services**)  
Thimble Mill Lane  
Nechells, Birmingham B7 5QS  
Tel: 0121-327-0235  
www.stjosephs-nechells.co.uk #  
*# This site has been set up by old pupils of St Joseph's school, with information on the church and local history.*
- 9) Erdington Abbey (**open for services**)  
32, Sutton Road  
Birmingham, West Midlands B23 6QL  
Tel: 0121-373-0143  
www.erdingtonabbey.co.uk
- 10) St. Mary's College, Oscott (**by appointment**)  
Chester Road  
Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands B73 5AA  
Tel: 0121-321-5000  
www.oscott.net

### Edgbaston sites:

- 11) King Edward's School (**not open to public**)  
Edgbaston Park Road  
Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 2UA  
Tel: 0121-472-1672  
www.kes.org.uk
- 12) The Barber Institute of Fine Arts (**open daily**)  
University of Birmingham  
Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 2TS  
Tel: 0121-414-7333  
www.barber.org.uk
- 13) Winterbourne House and Garden (**open daily**)  
University of Birmingham  
58, Edgbaston Park Road  
Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 2RT  
Tel: 0121-414-3003  
www.winterbourne.org.uk

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### Some links to national and international web sites with Pugin's work:

The Pugin Society: [www.pugin-society.org](http://www.pugin-society.org) St Augustine's Church, Ramsgate: [pugin.com/pugchur.htm](http://pugin.com/pugchur.htm)  
Houses of Parliament: [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk) Ramsgate Tourist office: [www.visitthanet.co.uk](http://www.visitthanet.co.uk)  
The Landmark Trust: [www.landmarktrust.org.uk](http://www.landmarktrust.org.uk)\* Pugin Foundation of Australia: [www.puginfoundation.org](http://www.puginfoundation.org)

\* 3 Pugin buildings are now owned by the Landmark Trust and 2 are available for short holidays:  
The Grange, Ramsgate and Oxenford Gatehouse, Peper Harow, Surrey

### Further reading

Rosemary Hill (2007) *God's Architect, Pugin and the Building of Romantic Britain*. Penguin  
Brian Doolan (2004) *The Pugins and the Hardmans*. Archdiocese of Birmingham Historical Commission  
Michael Fisher (2008) *Hardman of Birmingham, Goldsmith and Glasspainter*. Landmark Publishing  
(Most local Pugin sites will have guide books or leaflets available).

### Credits

The Pugin 2012 Steering Committee led by BMAG Curators; site managers and curators; The Pugin Society.

### Disclaimer

The information above was correct at the time of going to press.

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