

# Stevenage Town Centre Tour



Town Centre, 1965

# Pioneering Stevenage

As the UK's first new town, Stevenage was an opportunity to pave the way toward a brighter future after the world wars. Planners, architects, artists, and engineers designed a vision of a more modern and equal society. They created a pedestrian town centre that was the earliest of its kind and scale in Europe and perhaps the world. They designed revolutionary architecture and art that reflected the new town's progressive social reforms. They also provided people with the most pioneering walking and cycling infrastructure of its time. For decades, Stevenage attracted thousands of annual visitors eager to admire, study, and copy its design.

## How It Started


As many countries continued to industrialise in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, new types of buildings were required – like factories, warehouses, department stores, and office blocks. Progressive architects designed functional buildings to meet these needs. These designs often utilised new technology and materials created during the Industrial Revolution.

In the 1920s and 1930s, modern architecture evolved from the First World War's devastation and the growing socialist movement. Modern architecture was also referred to as the international style due to its wide influence, and it included the Bauhaus school in Germany and functionalist architecture in Scandinavia and Central Europe (among others). These architects believed buildings should be functional and help create a more modern and classless society.

Modern designs were simple and geometric, and new materials and technology were used for mass production – like steel, reinforced concrete, glass, and prefabrication. Designs rejected ornament to more honestly express a building's modern construction and function. This symbolised machine-age efficiency and quality buildings for everyone.

Britain was slow to adopt modern architecture, but bombing from the Second World War and new reforms to address hardship created a need for many new public buildings and houses. It was during the futuristic Festival of Britain in 1951 that the country formally adopted modern architecture.

The Festival was a nationwide exhibition of British ingenuity meant to create a sense of civic pride and renewal following the world wars, and architecture played a significant role.

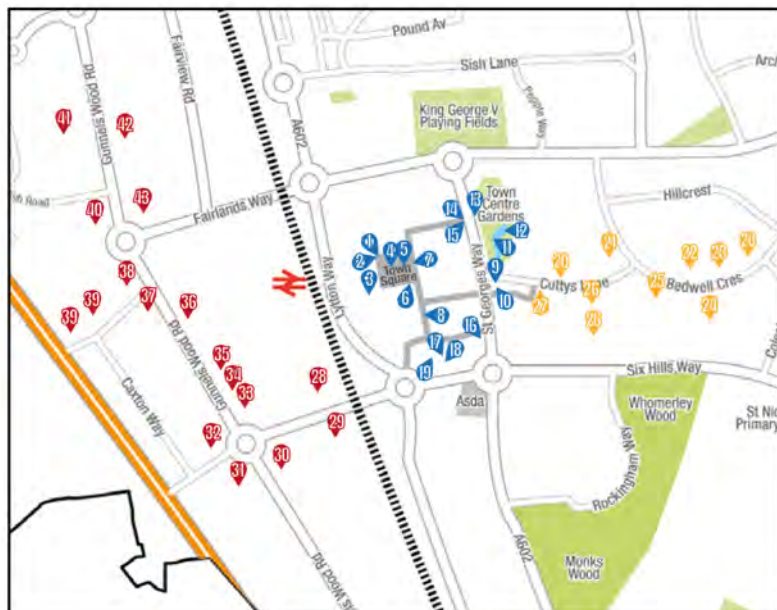


Art was also used to reinvigorate towns and public morale after the wars. For example, in the rebuilding of Rotterdam, in Swedish cities, and at the Festival of Britain, art was integrated into planning to contribute to public realm design as well as symbolise social progress.

Industrialisation also caused the rise of the motor vehicle, and public safety became a major concern. There were experiments with pedestrian planning and grade-separated cycling infrastructure (in which roads and cycle paths go above and below each other) to address these challenges, but these ideas were still small in scale and controversial in the mid-1950s.

It was in Stevenage that these ideas in architecture, planning, engineering, and art were revolutionised. Today, we can still see so much of this incredible heritage. Stevenage's pedestrian town centre is recognised for having more architectural value than any other in Britain from the 1950s and 60s. Let's go for a journey to see it for ourselves.





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# 1 21-23 Town Square



21-23 Town Square, 1963



This building was designed by Stevenage Development Corporation's (SDC) team, led by Chief Architect and Planner Leonard Vincent, and completed in 1958. It's a great example of a mid-century modern building that was very cutting-edge at the time, similar to Festival of Britain buildings like the Royal Festival Hall and Transport Pavilion. These buildings were influenced by earlier Bauhaus designs, which often featured white boxes carried by columns and with sleek windows. This building's glazed façade, made of steel frames filled in with glass and composite panels, is a great example of curtain walling – meaning the wall is not part of the primary structure. This was made possible by a strong reinforced concrete frame, which allowed more freedom with the exterior and interior design. The result was more glass on the exterior and more space on the interior. This was state-of-the-art for its time, and Stevenage is known for early use of this technology throughout the town centre.

## 2 Peter Lyon's Sculpture



Peter Lyon's  
unnamed  
sculpture, 1963

Stevenage new town was an opportunity to integrate art into planning on a scale bigger than before in the UK. Public art was part of SDC's plans from the beginning, and it was used to echo their modern and progressive vision. This unnamed aluminium sculpture was created by Peter Lyon and installed on 21-23 Town Square in 1964. Its modern abstract form is meant to cast interesting shadows on the building's concrete surface. This sculpture was part of SDC's plan to use walls for public art or lettering. Other examples around the Town Square include the Co-operative mural (which we'll get to) and the former Fine Fare sign on the opposite side of the square (which is now gone).

# Daneshill House



Daneshill House, 1963



This is another example of a curtain wall design. It was designed by Vincent and his team and completed in 1961. This type of glass-box high-rise became a common modern design in the post-war years, especially in America where many skyscrapers were built. This was made possible by steel frame and curtain wall technology. Daneshill House served as SDC's headquarters until Stevenage Borough Council took over occupation in 1980. In the mid-1980s, it was reclad and a reception block and rear extension were added.



## 4 Joy Ride

Joy Ride, 1970



This was the new town's first public statue when it was installed in 1958. It depicts a mother carrying a child on her back, which symbolises the old town carrying the new town. It has become a Stevenage icon. The artist, Franta Belsky, commented at the unveiling of this bronze statue that it 'had to be humanistic and cheerful.' 'You have to humanise the environment,' he said. 'A housing estate does not only need newspaper kiosks and bus-stop shelters but something that gives it spirit.' Belsky was also successful in making art accessible to everyone rather than just the elite.

# Clock Tower and Raised Pool



Clock tower and pool, 1960



The iconic clock tower and pool was completed in 1958. SDC's design was experimental and unique for its time. There is artwork on the tower's four sides as well as geometric tiles installed on the undersides of the tower's levels. The artwork includes a slate panel on the south side, which was unveiled by the Queen in 1959 to commemorate her visit. On the other sides, there's a ceramic depiction of a Stevenage map and its residents' occupations, a later bronze portrait of Lewis Silkin (Town and Country Planning Minister during Stevenage's designation as the first new town), and an even later panel commemorating SDC. The modern movement was also determined to fuse arts, crafts, and mass production to provide people with access to quality everyday designs. This is represented by the coloured panels on the clock tower and surrounding buildings, which is a reference to the inter-war Dutch movement called De Stijl. De Stijl designs also inspired the pool's tiling, which was installed in the 1990s.

## 6 Co-operative House and Gyula Bajò's Mural

Co-operative House and Gyula Bajò's artwork, 1961



This building was the Co-operative House, designed by the Co-operative Wholesale Society. It opened in June 1958 and was the town centre's first shop. The Co-op commissioned the Hungarian artist Gyula Bajó to produce a tiled mural for the building, which was installed by the time the shop opened. This stylised mural represents Stevenage as part of the co-operative movement by depicting people at work surrounded by buildings related to the new town.



Queensway, around 1960



Stevenage's town centre is considered very special for its unified design. SDC's architects and consultants (led by Leonard Vincent and Raymond Goring) created or oversaw the town centre's whole design from the original 1949 concept through the 1970s, and Queensway embodies the first three phases of the town centre's development. Vincent's team used grid designs for most commercial building exteriors, which are meant to provide a backdrop for socialising and shop advertisements. This geometric composition is enhanced by the rectilinear street canopies and layout. It's a very harmonious design inspired by the Lijnbaan in Rotterdam and the town of Vallingby in Sweden, but the buildings also make a bold statement about Stevenage's progressive identity. Here we see early UK examples of curtain wall technology first seen in 1952 at New York City's Lever House.



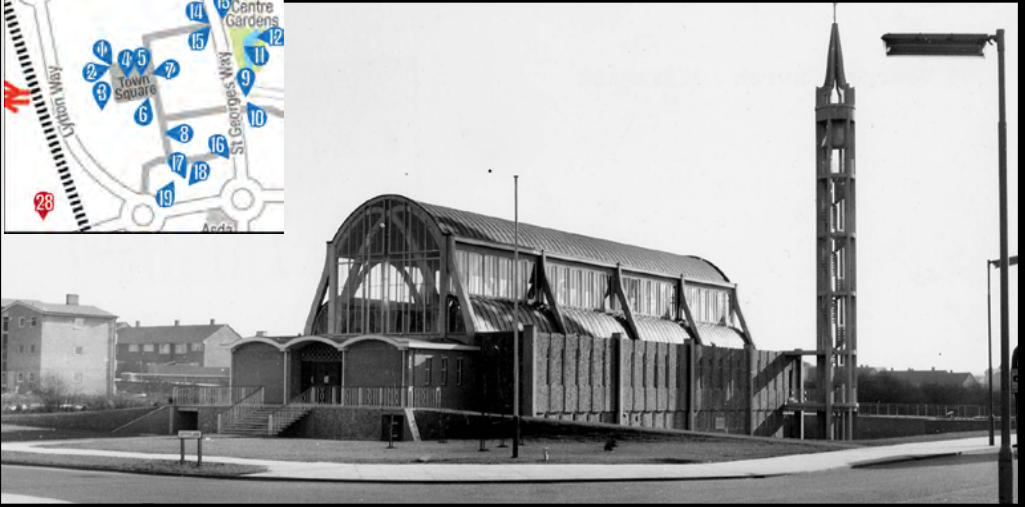
## 8 Queensway South

Queensway South, 1959



Buildings on the town centre's residential streets are more functional in style. They are also gentler and more human in scale and character, like here on Queensway South. More brick was used in their construction, but modern materials and techniques were used too. For example, prefabricated construction was used, and materials like concrete and steel made the glazing and protruding balconies possible. These designs share similarities with functionalist architecture like Arne Jacobsen's housing in Denmark or Churchill Gardens in London, which won a Festival of Britain award.

## 9 Church of St George



The Church of St Andrew and St George (originally Church of St George) is a Grade II listed church, which was built from 1956-60 and became Stevenage's parish church. It was designed by Seely and Paget, who also designed the Art Deco extension to Eltham Palace. Seely and Paget were partners both professionally and personally, making them important figures in UK LGBTQIA+ history. The church forms an important focal point at the end of Market Place. It's a modern reinterpretation of a Gothic church. The plan is traditional, but modern materials and construction were used, like reinforced and pre-stressed concrete frames and concrete flint panels. The concrete arches even resemble flying buttresses on the exterior and pointed arches in the interior. The use of traditional materials like flint was common for late-1950s design, but the expressive concrete structure was pioneering.

## 10 An Urban Elephant



An Urban Elephant,  
undated  
Photo credit:  
Pauline Maryan

The church also houses Stevenage Museum. They ran an arts competition in 1992, which resulted in Andrew Burton's fibreglass sculpture outside the Museum's entrance. Within this sculpture, the elephant represents beasts of burden, the hooks symbolise local industry, and the tower reflects the Town Square's clock tower. By using imagery inspired by Indian culture, it seems Burton illustrated Stevenage's major contribution to industry.

(If you want to extend your journey and see a new town neighbourhood, follow the Optional Route: Bedwell, stops 20-27)

# 11 Town Centre Gardens



Town Centre Gardens, 1960



The Town Centre Gardens are a fine example of the many green spaces provided through Stevenage new town planning. There wasn't a formal plan for the Gardens by 1955, but SDC used a natural spring to create a pond. Then, plans were finalised by the landscape architect George Patterson from 1959-60, and the gardens were completed in 1961. The sensory gardens for people with visual impairment were also added in 1967. These gardens combine natural features with landscape design.



## 12 Women and Doves

Women and Doves, undated  
Photo credit: Pauline Maryan



The pond features Women and Doves by David Norris, which was installed in 1981. It won the year's national Otto Beit medal for sculpture. This bronze sculpture and fountain echoes the park's social and natural ethos and celebrates the new town's soaring spirit.

## 13 Bowes Lyon House



### Construction of Bowes Lyon House, 1964



The invention of the transistor radio in 1954 helped create a booming youth culture, and Bowes Lyon was built to accommodate Stevenage's large youth population. It was a very progressive ambition ahead of national initiatives to do the same. This experimental youth centre was designed by Leonard Vincent and opened in 1965. Concrete columns hold up a concrete raft (the terrace) with a textured concrete block on top. The concrete block features an abstract mural by P.J. Ellis representing the seven ages of man.

Musicians like The Who, Eric Clapton, and David Bowie performed here in the 1960s. A skatepark was added on the east side in 1978, which is believed to be one of the earliest in the country. High-profile skaters, like Tony Hawk, competed here.

## 14 Cycleways

Cycleways, Six Hills Way and St George's Way, 1957



SDC also saw Stevenage new town as an opportunity to experiment with cycling infrastructure. Chief Engineer Eric Claxton and his team designed the first pedestrian and cycling infrastructure of its kind and scale in Europe and perhaps the world. Construction started in 1955 in conjunction with the road system, and it was mostly complete by the mid-1970s. It was a leading global example and the subject of many lectures, books, and study tours. This network was also made possible by reinforced concrete. Concrete was even experimented with using different aggregates and textures. For even better examples of the pioneering cycle network, take the optional tour around the industrial area below.

## 15 Scenes from Everyday Life



William Mitchell visiting Scenes from Everyday Life, 2013. Photo credit: Hugh Madgin



The cycleways were also a perfect canvas for progressive art. William Mitchell is a symbol of post-war public art, and he was commissioned by SDC in 1973 to produce artwork in this underpass. Mitchell produced *Scenes from Everyday Life*, which is a concrete relief that depicts contemporary society – such as fashion, moon landings, automobiles, women's rights protests, sporting events, and more. Mitchell worked extensively in concrete, this work was created using Mitchell's innovative and unusual casting techniques. Mitchell's studio also produced *Abstract* in 1973 for the adjacent underpass near the Church of St Andrew and St George. Mitchell often sculpted concrete into stylised abstract shapes and patterns, which you can see in this modern relief.



# 16 Southgate House

Southgate House, 1964

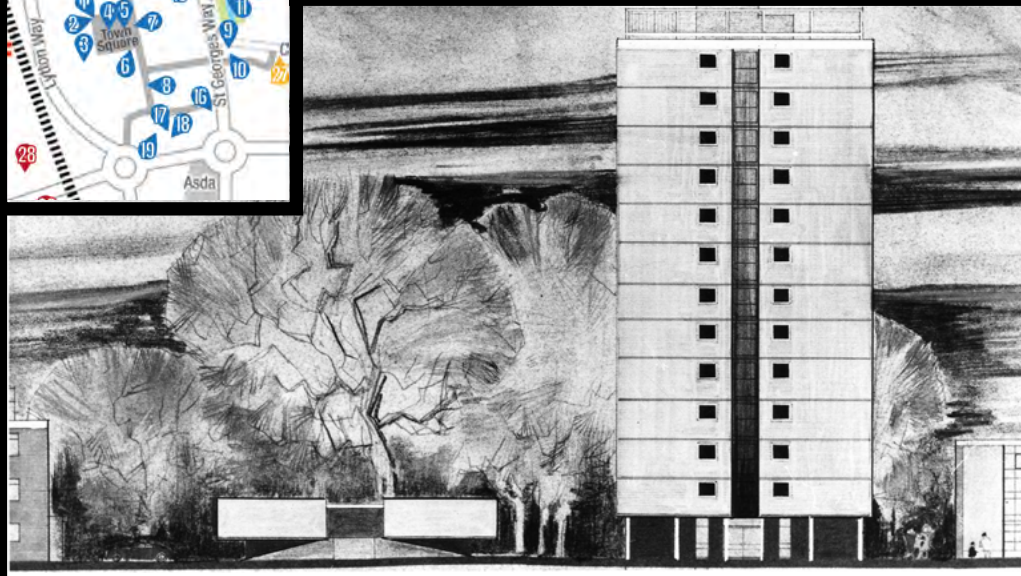


Southgate House was designed by Leonard Vincent (who was in private practice with Ray Gorbing by that time) and completed in 1964. This design was still cutting-edge for its day. It featured a reinforced concrete structure clad with courses of concrete panels and curtain wall glass. Vincent and Gorbing's offices were here from 1964-88; the borough council's offices were here from 1964-80; and a pub/night club occupied the bottom two floors from 1966-2001. It was recently renovated and is now called Vista Tower.

## 17 The Towers



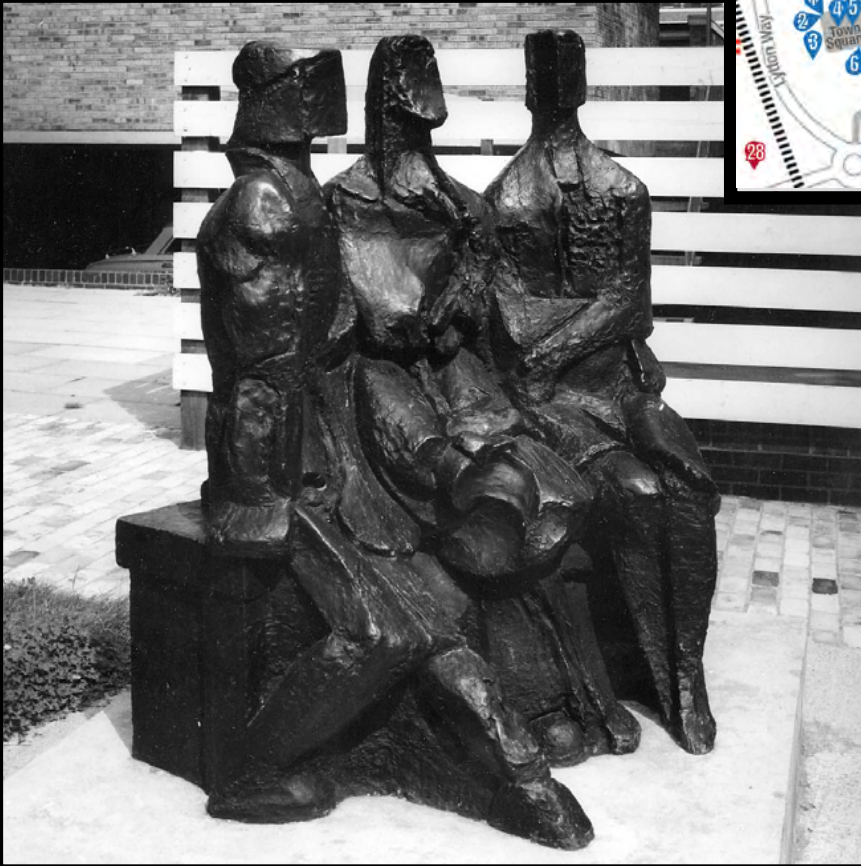
The Towers design, 1960



The Towers is a 13-storey Swedish style point block (meaning a high-rise building with a staircase/lift in the centre). It was designed by Vincent's teams and built from 1960-3. It is one of three point blocks from the first phase of construction – the others are High Plash (to the east of the Town Centre Gardens) and High Croft (to the south). These contribute to views throughout the town. 50 flats in The Towers were allocated to English Electric staff, and many were single, young people. These flats were very modern for their time. They offered heated floors and better-insulated walls and windows. These point blocks were part of a progressive approach to housing. Most new town houses were suitable for families, so these flats added variety. This encouraged diverse groups of people and a more integrated and classless society.

## 18 Seated Figures

Seated Figures, 1963



Seated Figures was created by David Noble in 1963 and installed in The Towers' back garden. Noble was from Digswell Art Centre in Welwyn, and SDC had a policy to prefer local artists for their arts commissions. Noble's sculpture expresses modernist subject-matter, like the abstracted human figure and maybe a nod to Cubism, using the trend-setting material of its time: reinforced concrete.

## 19 Outpatients' Clinic



Outpatients' Clinic, 1961



This building was designed by Peter Dunham for the North-West Metropolitan Regional Hospital Board and completed in 1961. The upper-storey of the north-west corner was used as a gymnasium for physiotherapy. This block was decorated with diamond-shaped concrete panels and appears to float on concrete columns. These are hallmarks of mid-century modernism and make this block especially significant.

(If you want to extend your journey and see the new town's employment area, follow the Optional Route: Industrial Area, stops 28-43)



# Optional Route: Bedwell

Chauncy House (no longer), 1959



Stevenage neighbourhood planning was extraordinarily forward thinking. It foreshadowed today's ideas like the 15-minute city, and the architecture was also experimental. The first Master Plan (1949) laid out six neighbourhoods created around existing settlements, which would surround a town centre. Each neighbourhood was designed to provide necessary amenities for quality life, including shops, pubs, churches, clinics, schools, and community centres. Stoney Hall was the first area developed, and it was located near the old town. Chauncy House was designed by Yorke, Rosenberg, and Mardall and completed in 1952. It was a ground-breaking example of modernism in the UK.

## 20 Houses on Cutty's Ln



Semi-detached housing on Cutty's Ln, around 1953



Work started on the second neighbourhood, Bedwell, from 1952. This neighbourhood was modern, similar to London's Lansbury Estate showcased at the Festival of Britain. Like South Queensway, these residential areas were designed to be functional and soft in character so that they met people's needs and felt comfortable. SDC understood that people were moving to Stevenage for more green space. Houses were surrounded by front and rear gardens, and planners intentionally separated homes from motor traffic. Homes offered modern designs, like open-plan interiors (partly because of new central heat technology), mixed with some traditional features, like brickwork and pitched roofs. These designs were led by Chief Architect and Planner Clifford Holiday until 1952 and Donald Reay from 1952-4.

## 21 Congregational Church

Congregational Church, 1954



The Congregational Church was designed by Edward D. Mills & Partners and constructed by 1954. The large central interior room and simple exterior decoration are fitting for a Protestant church, whose traditions are based on faith and community rather than worldly riches and clergy. It was designed with expanses of glass so that light dramatically floods the interior, which is important in a church for practical and symbolic reasons.

## 22 Telephone Exchange

View of the Telephone Exchange building in the background, undated

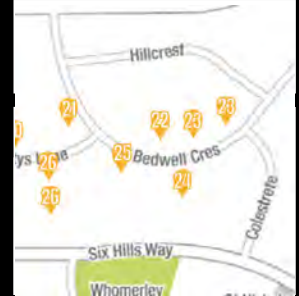


The two-storey building fronting the road was the first Telephone Exchange, which was completed in 1964. The high-rise behind was added around 1974. This massive, sculptural building made of concrete shows the direction that brutalism went. It's appropriate that this style was chosen for a utilitarian building because brutalism was a bold statement about a strong working-class society.



## 23 Bedwell Neighbourhood Centre

Bedwell Community Centre, undated (this building still exists, but an extension replaced the forecourt and pavilion)

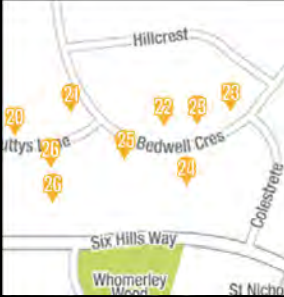


Bedwell Shopping Centre and The Game Keeper pub, 1960



The neighbourhood centre connected the community with shops, housing above these shops, The Game Keeper pub at the corner, a community centre just beyond, and more. Neighbourhood centres like this were designed to meet practical and social day-to-day needs, with more amenities in the nearby town centre. This helped create cohesive communities by keeping people local. The buildings were made from modern materials and technology in order to construct efficiently and improve public wellbeing through stylish, well-lit, spacious, and heated spaces.

## 24 Radburn Houses



Radburn houses in Bedwell, 1960 (Houses shown in the image are different than those on the tour)



These houses show how planners and architects were concerned with public safety and social cohesion. This type of planning, in which houses face gardens and pedestrian paths rather than roads, is called the Radburn Plan. Also note the considerate use of trees and hedges to further separate people from motor traffic.

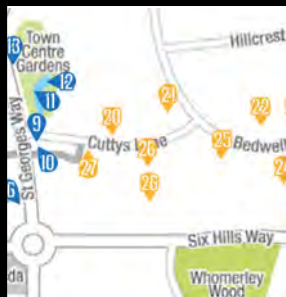
## 25 Bedwell Crescent Houses

Housing on Bedwell Crescent, 1953



Architects wanted to add character to neighbourhoods and avoid monotony, so they provided various house designs that used different materials and styles. Notice how this design combined modern and traditional features. The flat-roofed concrete porch design was especially modern and fashionable.

# Broom Barns Infants and Junior Mixed Schools



Broom Barns Junior Mixed School, 1954 (now gone)

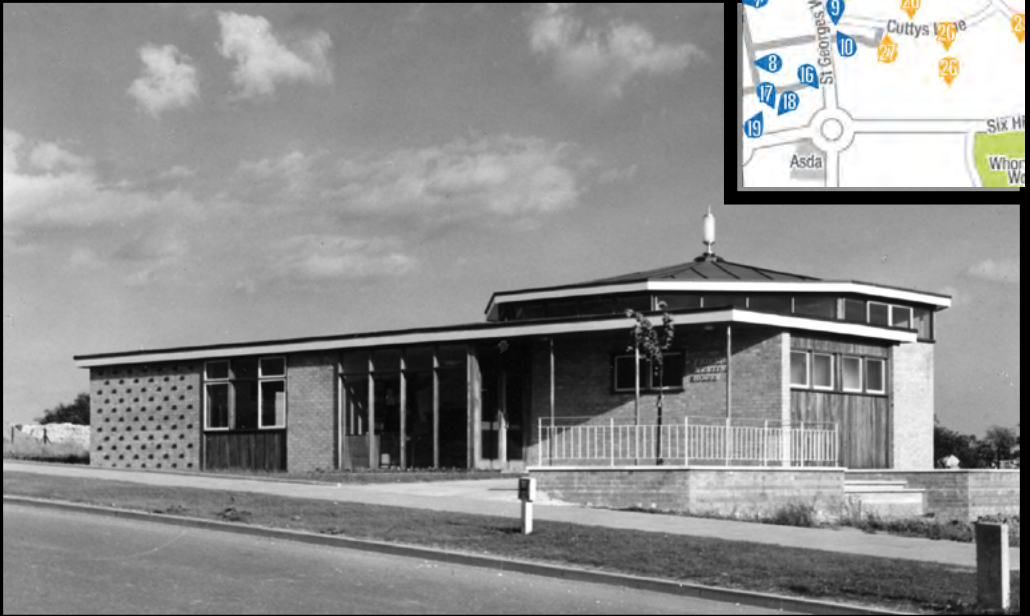


Broom Barns Infants School hall, 1959

These schools were designed by Hertfordshire County Council and opened by 1954. These designs show how steel, concrete, and glass were used to create big open spaces filled with natural light. The two schools merged in the 1980s, and the Fred Millard estate replaced the junior school. Hertfordshire County Council was the UK's pioneer of the post-war schools building programme. One of their earliest schools, Barclay School in the old town, was co-designed with Yorke, Rosenberg, and Mardall and won a Festival award. Their cutting-edge prefabricated systems were adopted across the UK.

## 27 Friends' Meeting House

Friends' Meeting House, 1959

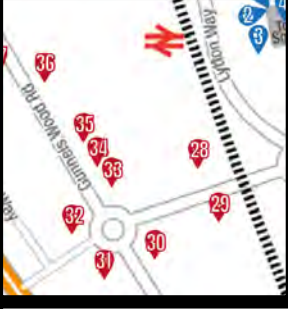


Friends' Meeting House was completed by 1959. It's a graceful yet functional design, and the use of brick and timber show Scandinavian influences. The varied geometric windows, octagonal roof, and honeycomb brickwork were imaginative creations.

(You can now rejoin the main town centre tour at the Town Centre Gardens, stop 11)



# Optional Route: Industrial Area



View along Six Hills Way toward the industrial area, 1961



Stevenage new town also provided its residents with employment, including an industrial area located west of the train line and separated from residential areas. The trailblazing and futuristic new town grabbed the attention of big-name employers and architects. Many of these industries were integral to national recovery and were important players in jet, space, and computer age innovation. These ages had a huge influence on public imagination and design, especially with the looming Cold War. Remember, the Festival of Britain's designs were inspired by science and technology, so it made sense that buildings in Stevenage's industrial area were designed in this style.

Let's go on a short tour around the industrial area, with headliner stops at the Costco and FIRA sites.

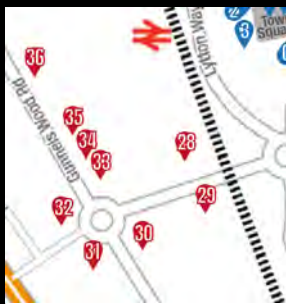
## 28 Platignum Pen Co.

Mentmore's Platignum factory,  
completed by 1960 (now gone)



Mentmore's Platignum Pen Co. factory was located west of the train line on Six Hills Way. Platignum were innovators in pen design. They even created spy and secret agent pens during WWII. This factory also symbolised post-war innovations in the petrochemical industry, which resulted in disposable products, like pens and other stationery.

## 29 Leroi Menswear and E.C. Hodge



Leroi Menswear pictured in the foreground and E.C. Hodge in the distance (both now gone), around 1961



Stevenage's creative DNA drew companies like Leroi Menswear (where Vincent & Gorbing's offices are now) and E.C. Hodge furniture designers. Leroi Menswear featured a huge window front, which was made possible by new structural materials, like steel and reinforced concrete.



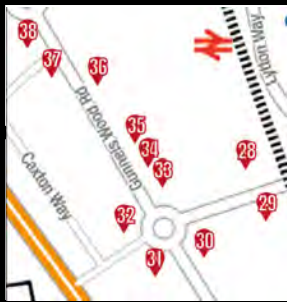
## 30 The Wine Society

Wine Society building, undated



The Wine Society has existed here since 1965. This is the world's oldest wine club and has always been a co-operative, which is very much in the Stevenage spirit! The original building on Gunnels Wood still stands, but some of the mid-century modern detailing was remodelled.

## 31 English Electric Aviation Ltd.



English Electric Aviation Ltd (now gone), 1956



English Electric Aviation Ltd's site went through various hands before becoming MBDA. These companies (English Electric, British Aircraft Corporation, and British Aerospace) were leaders in the jet and space industries – especially aircraft and missile manufacturing.

The original buildings were constructed by 1955. They were functional buildings with long strips of modern windows.

## 32 British Visqueen Ltd.

British Visqueen Ltd under construction, showing the two-storey concrete barrel vaulted factory on the left (now gone), 1953



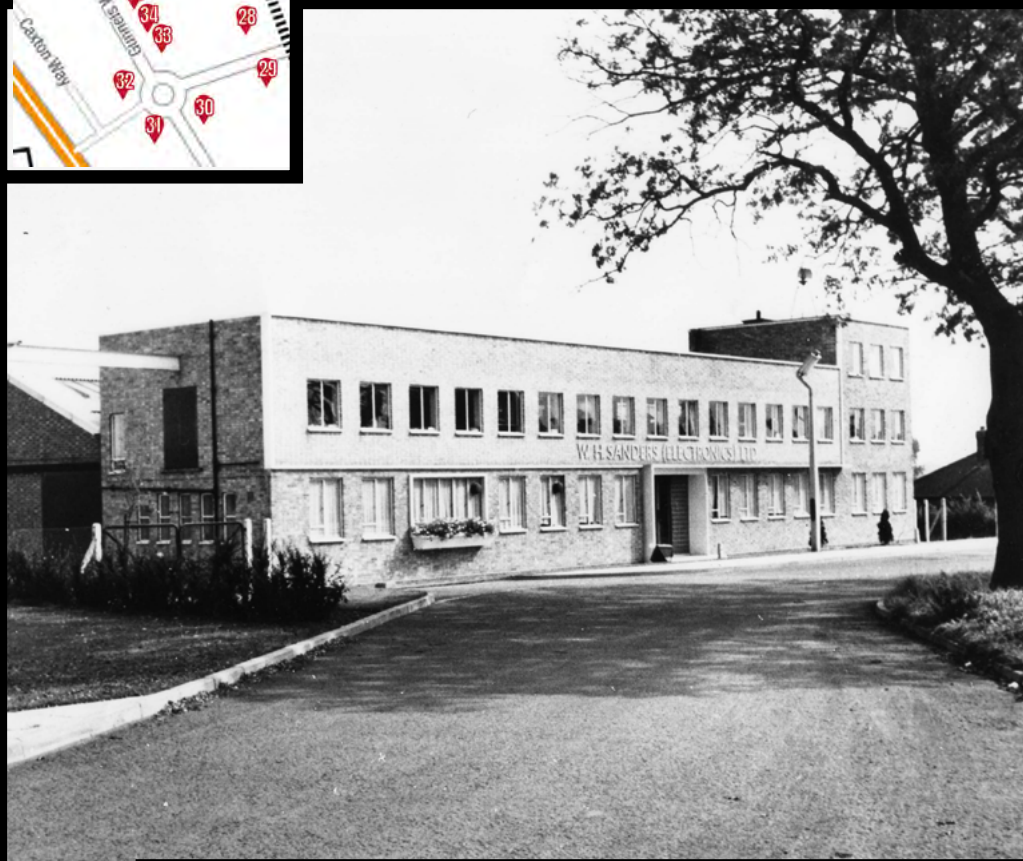
British Visqueen Ltd, which produces plastic sheets, had a site here. It was designed by the Corporation's Chief Architect Donald Reay and constructed by 1954 (it's possible the Corporation designed a majority of the industrial area's buildings).

These Bauhaus-inspired buildings were very trendy. They featured concrete frames, painted white, and filled in with big expanses of stylish windows. One block featured a state-of-the-art concrete barrel-vaulted roof.

## 33 W.H. Sanders



W.H. Sanders Electronics (now gone), 1954

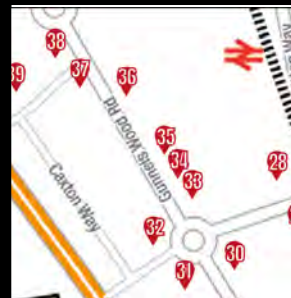


This building was built by 1954 and was a great example of a functionalist design, which featured brick construction, simple windows, and a flat roof.

W.H. Sanders produced electronics (mainly aircraft radar) and were licensed to sell Airtron products.

## 34 Shunic

Shunic factory (now gone), 1953



The Shunic factory was constructed around 1953. This building possessed a concrete structure with lots of glazing and a concrete barrel-vaulted factory to the rear.



## 35 De Havilland Aircraft Co. Ltd.



De Havilland factory (now gone), 1956



The de Havilland Aircraft Co. Ltd. Factory was built by 1955. De Havilland is another historic company. It's known for its many aircraft innovations, including the Comet, which was the first commercial jet airliner. This building featured a geometric plan with full-height windows, similar to car showrooms of its time.

## 36 Hawker Siddeley Dynamics

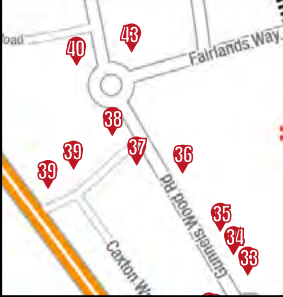
Hawker Siddeley (then British Aerospace) site shown in the background, 1986



Hawker Siddeley's factory was also built in the first half of the 1950s. In the north-east corner (along Argyle Way) is an interesting building. It features sculptural forms made of concrete, like its v-shaped legs and zig-zag windows/panels.

Hawker Siddeley absorbed de Havilland in 1960 and later became part of British Aerospace, then Astrium, and finally Airbus Defence and Military. These companies have a long history of aircraft, missile, and space innovation, which ranges from WWII's Hurricane fighter plane to today's ExoMars rover.

## 37 Kodak



Kodak factory (now gone), showing the administrative building, 1961



This was the site of the large Kodak factory, which made photography related products. The factory buildings were more functional in design, whereas the administrative building featured sleek glass curtain walls similar to Daneshill House in the town centre.

## 38 British Tabulating Machine Co.

British Tabulating Machine  
Co. (now gone), 1954

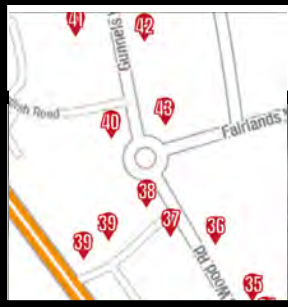


This former factory was designed by Leonard Vincent and built by 1955. One of the blocks had a snazzy glass curtain wall, which lit the stairwell.

This company built data-processing equipment, like early computers and Alan Turing's WWII code-breaking machines.



# Flexile Metal Co. and Post Office Engineering Depot



Flexile Metal Co. factory (now gone), 1954



Post Office Engineering Depot  
(now gone), around 1959



We won't take you down Bessemer Drive, but to the west were the Flexile Metal Co. (manufacturers of metal tubes), which was built by 1954, and the Post Office Engineering Depot, which was under construction in 1955. These were functional and creative designs comprised of modern materials and various geometric shapes.

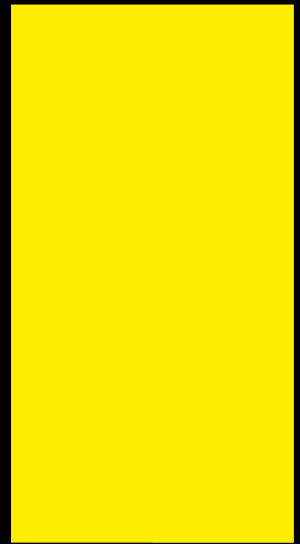
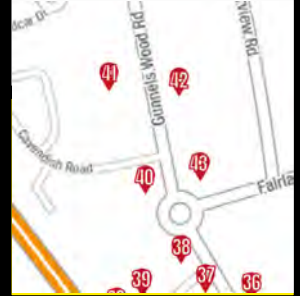


# International Computers & Tabulators

International Computers & Tabulators, 1965



Photo credit:  
RIBA



The British Tabulating Machine Co. became International Computers & Tabulators (ICT) and then International Computers Ltd. ICT built additional offices and labs to the north around 1965, which were designed by Oliver Carey. These buildings were very chic. Carey used new materials to create glass skyways, extruded staircases, buildings supported on columns, and a spiral staircase that appears to defy gravity. Fujitsu was granted permission to re clad the building in 2005, but you can still see some of the general design as well as the fashionable spiral staircase in the lobby.

# 41 John Lewis Warehouse



John Lewis warehouse, 1963

Photo credit: RIBA



Internationally renowned engineer and architect Felix Candela designed his only UK work here. This Grade II listed creative masterpiece was co-designed with Yorke, Rosenberg, and Mardall and completed in 1963. It shows Candela's trademark hyperbolic paraboloid roof. This type of design became a major feature of space age architecture (particularly in America) because its aerodynamic appearance resembles a futuristic spaceship. The concrete roof is supported on concrete columns, making the structure look like upside-down umbrellas. The concrete was originally left exposed to show the board-marked pattern left from timber boards used in the construction process. These were features in many future brutalist buildings.

John Lewis installed their first computer here in 1963. It's fitting that the warehouse's design was so trailblazing when such modernisation took place here.

## 42 Taylor Instrument Companies

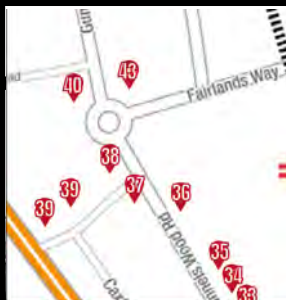
Taylor Instrument Companies  
factory (now gone), 1962



Taylor Instrument Companies had a factory here. It was completed around 1962 and featured a sleek design with long strips of windows.

This company has a long history dating back to 1851 in New York. It's now part of ABB Instrumentation Inc.

# Furniture Industry Research Association



FIRA, 1965



The government invested in manufacturing to help reconstruct the country and revive the market following WWII. The Furniture Development Council (FDC) was set up in 1949, which created the Furniture Industry Research Association. Their aim was to develop efficient, quality furniture standards by using new technology and a lack of ornament. They needed to build a facility to test their modern designs, and they chose modern Stevenage.

The building was designed by the celebrated practice HKPA and completed in 1964. FDC was directed by Jack Pritchard of Isokon, which worked with legendary designers to develop modern housing and furniture during the inter-war period. So, it's not surprising that their design for this research building was ultra-modern. It even foreshadows the High-Tech style through its movable interior parts and exposed structure and services.

# Back to the Town Centre

Arts & Leisure Centre, around 1980



Now head back to the town centre via the beautiful cycle network as it follows Fairlands Way and then the railway line. Then take the walkway over Fairlands Way and through the Stevenage Arts & Leisure Centre.



## Market Place, 1963



Special thanks and recognition to Historic England for their recent publication *The New Town Centre, Stevenage, Hertfordshire: Architecture and Significance* and to Curl la Tourelle Head Architecture for their research within Stevenage's DETAILS: New Towns project.