

THE WATSON FOTHERGILL TRAIL

Watson Fothergill was a renowned architect who designed over 100 unique buildings in the Nottingham area. His influences were mainly from the Gothic Revival and Old English vernacular and his easily recognisable style includes the use of contrasting horizontal bands of red and blue brick, dark timber eaves and balconies, and elaborate turrets and stone carvings.

'Watson Fothergill' was born *Fothergill Watson*, on 12th July 1841 in Mansfield. He later changed his name to Watson Fothergill (in 1892) to continue his mother's family name. His father was a well-to-do lace manufacturer and merchant. When Fothergill was nine years old, he was sent away to boarding school in London but when his father died in 1853, his mother moved from Mansfield to Nottingham and Fothergill returned with her to go to a less expensive Nottingham school.

Fothergill left school at the age of 15 in 1856 and became a trainee with Frederick Jackson, Civil Engineer, Architect and Surveyor, Nottingham. Jackson was also a friend of Fothergill Watson's late father and executor for Watson senior's will. It is thought that Fothergill may have worked on the plans of Nottingham that were published by Jackson in 1861.

After four years, Fothergill went to work for I. C. Gilbert who was a Nottingham architect. Fothergill then spent two years in London studying and working part time in the architect Arthur Blomfield's office. In 1864 he returned to Nottingham to set up his own practice in Clinton Street. The first surviving Fothergill plans are from April 1871 for a Quaker School. He possibly got the contract for this building because of the connections he made from his mother who came from a devout Quaker family.

His first major work came about when he won a competition for the design of the Albert Hall, Nottingham. The hall was opened on September 20th, 1876, but burned down in 1906. In 1876 he also designed the new premises for the Nottingham Daily Express, the "Express Chambers" on Parliament Street.

By 1877-78 his career had really taken off and he did his first work for the Nottingham & Notts. Bank and the Trustees of Brunt's Charity. These two were to become regular clients over his career. Over the next twenty years, Fothergill designed private houses, shops, offices, warehouses, public houses, banks and at least two "coffee taverns" - the tee-total version of public houses!

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This walk covers a selection of Watson Fothergill's buildings in the central part of Nottingham within easy walking distance of each other. The numbered paragraphs below correspond with the numbers shown on the map.



1. QUEENS CHAMBERS

The shop and office complex with frontages on Long Row and King Street overlooks the Old Market Square.



Built at the time of Queen Victoria's Jubilee, there is a small rather unflattering stone carving of the queen's face adorning the building.

2. JESSOPS, King Street, 1895

The original Jessops department store was built after the clearance of the notorious area of slums between Parliament Street and Long Row known as the *The Rookeries*. Jessop and Son had taken over an established small haberdashery and millenary store on Long Row adjoining the Black Boy Hotel in 1866. With their new building they were set to rival Griffin and Spalding's store (now Debenhams) on Long Row. Fothergill produced a strong, sturdy structure framed in iron and concrete; midst a powerful feeling of brickwork there is a rich mixture of architectural features.



3. EXPRESS OFFICES & EXPRESS CHAMBERS

These were built as the newspaper offices, printing works, shops and offices for Messrs. Jevons and Renals, proprietors of the "Nottingham Express" newspaper. Fothergill built them in 1875-76, the corner entrance tower being inspired by the work of the architect Burges. In keeping with the paper's Liberal leanings, the entrance is graced by carvings of the heads of three leading Liberal politicians of the day - Richard Cobden, William Gladstone and John Bright. Rather careless restoration of their noses, using a rather red mix, gives the illusion of over-indulgence, especially after a light shower of rain. The upper storey was added by Fothergill in 1898-99 to provide the paper with more office space. Graham Greene worked in this building in his youth as a cub reporter.





4. FURLEY & CO. SHOP

A fine shop with warehouse over for Messrs Furley & Co, "high class provision merchants" at the corner of Parliament Street and Clinton Street.



It is notable for its set of four terracotta panels: Five Men Plying Sampans; A Far Eastern Market; Cutting Sugar Cane; Boiling Sugar Cane. On the Clinton Street frontage are some fine art nouveau glazed tiles.



5. NOTTINGHAM & NOTTS BANK

Possibly inspired by Manchester and Northampton Town Halls and built between 1877-1882, the bank's head offices on Thurland Street were designed to give its customers a feeling of security and permanence. The building is dominated by a central tower that was functional as well as decorative as it housed the ventilation system. At the Northern end at the base of a brick chimney is a "mortgage monkey" – to a Victorian the burden of having a mortgage was akin to having a monkey on one's back.

There are many other wonderful carvings of animals, beasts and foliage. High up are three panels in Portland stone, depicting the principal industries of the region - mining, textiles & agriculture. The names of the towns where the bank had other branches are carved in stone along its frontage. The bank by way of various amalgamations became the major local branch of Natwest and now houses a clothing shop.



It's worth a trip inside to view the wonderful dome and another mortgage monkey.



6. FOTHERGILL OFFICES

In 1893 the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire railway was built through Nottingham; the route from the south to Victoria Station (where the Victoria Centre stands now) involved demolishing most of Clinton Street including Fothergill's original office. Fothergill used the compensation to build his new offices on George Street.

This wonderfully elaborate building was in a way a three-dimensional catalogue of Fothergill's art. His offices were a picturesque mixture of Old English, Germanic Medieval and Scottish Baronial. His five architectural heroes are acknowledged on the front of his own office. These architects clearly influenced his style. They were: Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin (1812-1852), George Edmund Street (1824-1881), George Gilbert Scott (1811-1878), William Burges (1827-1881) and Richard Norman Shaw (1831-1912).



In addition there are four terracotta panels depicting the construction of Classical, Medieval and Elizabethan buildings, on the latter is a possible representation of Wollaton Hall. The front of the building is however dominated by a canopy figure of a Medieval architect with a bundle of plans in his hands and at his feet a model of a Gothic cathedral. Knowing of his love of the Gothic can we assume this is how Fothergill imagined himself?



The entire façade is a joyous, colourful mixture of gothic, old English and Bavarian. From the timber framed gable and fretted barge boards down to the large arched windows of the shop front the whole is a very personal statement. Neatly autographed in stone over the entrance in the inevitable gothic lettering: "Watson Fothergill Architect".



7. LACE WAREHOUSE 1

On a corner site running from Stoney Street into Barker Gate and back into Ristes Place, Fothergill erected two five storey warehouses for lace merchants Cuckson Hazeldine and Manderfield. Above a very modest doorway the building increases in interest culminating in a broad recessed turret set between twin bartizans (pepper pots).



8. LACE WAREHOUSE 2

Milbie House for Doubleday on Pilcher Gate is plain and symmetrical with its centrally placed doorway having a Romanesque arch with contrasting voussoirs (arch stones).



9. MORTIMER HOUSE

Fothergill developed a reputation for exploiting corner sites. On a double corner on Castle Road, stretching between Hounds Gate and Castle Gate, facing the castle he built Mortimer House. Originally a terrace of six houses and shops with a complex roof line it has had a varied life and currently houses the Castle pub and The Watson Fothergill restaurant.



20. E. S. COWAN OFFICE

The narrow front of E S Cowan's dilapidated offices on High Pavement is not readily recognisable as a Watson Fothergill design.



FURTHER READING

That concludes the tour. For more information about Watson Fothergill and his works click on the following link: [Wikipedia Watson Fothergill](#)