The Art Schools of the West Midlands

John Beck and Matthew Cornford

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Exhibition guide

A school of art had a much higher object than the teaching of drawing merely as an accomplishment. The school depended upon two things—the goodwill of the town, and the steady attendance of all the pupils who joined it, with a desire for their own improvement, and with a view of advancing their after interest in life.

— Chair's speech, Annual Meeting of the Kidderminster School of Art as reported in The Birmingham Daily Post, January 9, 1863.

HEREFORDSHIRE

Hereford School of Art
Castle Green, Hereford

Founded in 1851, the School of Art was based on Castle Green before moving to Folly Lane in the late 1960s. By the 1990s, when it was known as Herefordshire College of Art and Design, the college was the only further education corporation in the West Midlands to specialise exclusively in art, craft, design and the performing arts. Hereford College of Arts remains on Folly Lane. The Castle Green site, now called The Pavilion, is to be restored as part of the regeneration of the River Wye area.

STAFFORDSHIRE

Burton-on-Trent School of Art
Waterloo Street, Burton-on-Trent

Established in 1874 and with premises in Horninglow Street by 1876, the School of Art occupied the second floor of the Burton Institute in Union Street from 1879. In 1934 the art school moved to part of a former girls' high school in Waterloo Street and closed in 1984 when its courses were taken over by Burton Technical College. The Waterloo Street site became Burton Enterprise Centre in 1986. Staffordshire County Council put the building on the market in 2017, and it has been converted into residential units.

Hereford School of Art

Leek School of Art and Crafts
Nicholson Institute, Stockwell Street, Leek

A school of art was set up in 1868 by the Leek Mechanics' Institute. Poor attendance led these classes to close, but new classes were introduced in 1874 and taught by the head of Hanley School of Art. When the Nicholson Institute opened in 1884, it included three large rooms for the art school. The school of art and science and the technical school were merged in 1892 as Leek School of Art, Science and Technology. By 1955 the school had been divided into a college of further education and a school of art and crafts. The two were combined in 1981 to form Leek College of Further Education and School of Art.

Lichfield School of Art
Cherry Orchard, Lichfield

Art classes were held at St. Michael's school and the subscription library in Market Street from 1874. A half-timbered building was completed in 1882 on the corner of Dam Street and Pool Walk with the School of Art on the ground floor. It became Lichfield Art, Commercial, and Technical School in 1940 and Lichfield Evening Institute and School of Art in 1946. The building was abandoned in 1950 because of subsidence and demolished in 1954. The art school moved to new premises in Cherry Orchard in 1952. It became Lichfield College in 1985 and in 1987 moved into the western end of the former Friary school.

Newcastle-under-Lyme School of Art
Sidmouth Avenue, Newcastle-under-Lyme

A School of Art was established in 1853 and was housed in the Literary and Scientific Institution. In 1867 the school moved to King Street where it stayed until 1890 when accommodation was provided in the new Municipal Buildings in Ironmarket, built as a Golden Jubilee memorial. Along with the School of Art, the Municipal Hall contained a council chamber, dance hall and library. The art school moved to Sidmouth Avenue after the Second World War and was integrated as part of Newcastle College of Further Education and School of Art on Liverpool Road in 1967.

Stafford School of Art
The Oval, Lichfield Road, Stafford

The first art classes in Stafford were held in an upstairs room at the Borough Hall in 1873. The School of Art joined the County Technical School in 1896 in the Earl Street building which later became the County Education Offices. Short of space, in 1963 the Stafford College of Art and Crafts, as it was then known, eventually moved into the Girls' High School building at The Oval. After another name change, in 1971 Stafford School of Art and Design merged with Stafford College of Further Education, the art school becoming a department of the college.

Burslem School of Art
Queen Street, Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent

A School of Design opened in 1853 in the old assembly room of the Legs of Man Inn. An art school was included as part of the Wedgwood Memorial Institute, which opened in 1869. Burslem School of Art acquired its own premises across the street from the Wedgewood Institute in February 1906. Burslem housed the Fine Art department of Stoke-on-Trent Regional College of Art, becoming part of North Staffordshire Polytechnic in 1971. The Burslem building remained empty for some time before being refurbished in 1999 to re-open as an arts centre. The Burslem School of Art Trust continues to create new opportunities for the local community through the promotion of the arts.

Fenton School of Art
Christchurch Street, Fenton, Stoke-on-Trent

Science and art classes had been led by ceramic artist George W. Rhead in the National Schools since 1881 but space was limited, the light poor, and student numbers increasing. When the Athenaeum became vacant on the completion of the new Town Hall, the building was extended and adapted to accommodate a new Science, Art and Technical School, which opened in January 1891. The art school occupied the first floor. Fenton was made a branch of Longton School of Art in 1910, transferring day classes to the latter but keeping the evening classes.

The building was later occupied by the Manchester and Liverpool District Bank and then the National Westminster Bank, before being demolished in 1977.

Hanley School of Art
Haslehurst Street, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent

The first Hanley art school was set up as part of the Potteries Schools of Design which were founded in 1847. Classes were held at the British School building in Pall Mall. The Hanley branch became an independent school in 1860. The building in Pall Mall was enlarged in 1880 by the addition of a new storey which provided space for another two hundred students. Hanley school gradually lost ground to its rival at Burslem and was closed in 1947.

Longton School of Art
Sutherland Institute, Lightwood Road, Stoke-on-Trent

Early attempts during the 1850s to establish an art school in Longton were unsuccessful but by the mid-1870s the town was offering classes in science and art. In 1899 the School of Art moved into the Sutherland Technical Institute along with the library. Longton was amalgamated into Stoke-on-Trent Regional College of Art in 1952. One of the three Potteries art schools to remain open as part of the new college, along with Stoke and Burslem, Longton housed the Departments of Ceramics and Fashion and Textiles. The school became part of North Staffordshire Polytechnic in 1971. The building still houses the public library.

Burslem School of Art

Stoke School of Art
London Road, Stoke-on-Trent

Stoke School of Art began in the town hall on Glebe Street as a School of Design in 1847, moving to the Minton Memorial Institute on London Road in 1859. Stoke and Hanley art schools operated together until Hanley became a separate school in 1860. In a reorganisation planned in the 1930s but delayed by the Second World War, Stoke and the other local schools of art were amalgamated into Stoke-on-Trent Regional College of Art in 1952. In 1964 the prominent Graphic Design and Printing departments relocated to the Technical College site. In 1971 the Regional College of Art merged with two other colleges to form North Staffordshire Polytechnic, which is now Staffordshire University.

Tunstall School of Art
Victoria Institute, The Boulevard, Tunstall, Stoke-on-Trent

The Victoria Institute was part of the Jubilee Buildings complex, including public baths, erected in 1889–90. Schools of art and science were opened in the Institute in 1890, the public library was moved there in 1891, and a museum was added in 1897. The School of Art was closed in 1926 due to low student numbers. The public baths closed in 2011 and Tunstall Public Library moved out in July 2022.

Coalbrookedale School of Art
Coalbrookdale

The Coalbrookdale Company established the Scientific and Literary Institution in 1853 and initially held its meetings in local schools. The School of Art was founded soon after, in 1856, as part of the national network of art schools run from South Kensington in response to the Great Exhibition of 1851. The Coalbrookdale Company donated land and financed construction of a building to house the Institution, its library and the School of Art. The building opened in 1859. In 1899 the Institution merged with the Coalbrookdale Social Club and was purchased in 1928 by Shropshire County Council, who relocated the technical and art colleges to the Walker Technical College in Wellington and made the Institution a venue for adult education.

Oswestry School of Art

Oswestry School of Art
Arthur Street, Oswestry

An art school had been in operation since the 1850s but it had no dedicated building until the new Guildhall, built on the site of the old Town Hall, opened in 1893. The Guildhall included, on the ground floor, offices for the borough surveyor, public and private offices with plan room, accountant and town clerk's offices with strong rooms, council chamber, county court offices and police station with cells. The public courts and a large reference library were situated on the first floor. The top floor housed the public library, a reading room and the science and art school. The library moved into the art school in 1961.

Shrewsbury School of Art
London Road, Shrewsbury

Shrewsbury School of Art was founded in 1855 on College Hill. A house was bought by the town's Technical Instruction Committee in 1899 to provide a centre for technical and commercial classes and a school of art. More space was needed by 1919 and a disused brush factory in Abbey Foregate was rented for two years before the school moved to a new building near English Bridge. The Technical College expanded on this site in 1938, with the School of Art as a department. A new Shrewsbury Technical College, later renamed Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology, opened on the London Road site in 1960, leaving the School of Art in the old Abbey School building, which has been occupied since 1985 by the English Bridge Workshop arts organisation.

Leamington School of Art
Beauchamp Hill, Leamington Spa

Founded in 1866, the School of Art was run by the Philosophical Society until it was taken over by the Free Library Committee in 1877. For some time classes were offered from the Town Hall, but lack of public interest caused the school to close temporarily in 1886. The art school was running again by 1889, with nearly two hundred students on the registers in 1891. The Municipal Schools and Public Library building, completed in 1902, provided space for the School of Art on the first floor. Leamington School of Art moved to Beauchamp Hill in 1940 and was renamed Mid-Warwickshire School of Art in 1955. The School merged with the Technical School to become Mid-Warwickshire College, then, in 1996, Warwickshire College.

Nuneaton School of Art
Hinckley Road, Nuneaton

The Nuneaton Technical Education Committee ran science and art classes during the 1890s. From 1923-1939 and from 1946-1961 the School of Art was based at the Nuneaton Museum and Art Gallery at Riversley Park. In 1952 the School of Art amalgamated with the Technical College and in 1958 six college sites were consolidated on the Hinckley Road campus. The college was renamed North Warwickshire College of Technology and Art, then merged with Hinckley College in 1996 to become North Warwickshire and Hinckley College. Another merger in 2017, this time with South Leicestershire College, formed North Warwickshire and South Leicestershire College.

Rugby Art School
Church Street, Rugby

The art school was opposite the Squirrel Inn on Church Street and was originally Caldecott School, built in 1830. It was renamed Trinity School, then St Andrew's School before becoming part of the Rugby College of Technology and Arts in 1929. The building was demolished in 1952-53 to make way for the market. Rugby College of Technology and Arts became part of Lanchester Polytechnic in 1970.

Stratford-on-Avon School of Art
Henley Street, Stratford-upon-Avon

The School of Art was established in 1877, with weekly classes held in a room in Stratford Town Hall. In 1881 the School of Art moved to a new studio in Sheep Street. Later, the school found a new base in a restored and extended late Fifteenth Century townhouse on Henley Street and was called the School of Art and Technical School, then the Technical School and School of Art and Crafts. In 1958 it was renamed South Warwickshire College of Further Education and moved to the Willows North in 1968. In 2018 the College merged with Solihull College & University Centre. The Henley Street building is now the public library and registration centre.

Bilston School of Art

Moseley School of Art

Bilston School of Art
Mount Pleasant, Bilston

Opened as Bilston Technical School in 1897 to commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, the school was divided in 1948 into a School of Art and a Technical School. In 1949 the school became Bilston College of Further Education and then, in 1970, an annex to the newly built College of Further Education at Westfield Road. Later it was incorporated in the much larger Bilston Technical College but has remained empty and in a poor state of repair for many years. The building was advertised for sale in September 2022 with planning permission granted for conversion into apartments.

Birmingham School of Art
Margaret Street, Birmingham

The Birmingham Government School of Design opened in rented rooms on New Street in 1843. In 1877 the town council took over the school and a new purpose built building on Margaret Street was completed for what became, after 1885, Birmingham Municipal School of Art. Among the many branch schools run from the Central School on Margaret Street were the Moseley Road School of Arts and Crafts, Bournville School of Arts and Crafts, the School of Printing, the School of Jewellery and Silversmithing on Vittoria Street, and Handsworth School of Dress Design. The School of Art became Birmingham Polytechnic's Faculty of Art and Design in

1971 and went on to become Birmingham Institute of Art and Design in 1988 with the absorption of Bournville College of Art. The Polytechnic became the University of Central England in 1992 and Birmingham City University in 2007.

Bournville School of Art and Crafts
Ruskin Hall, Linden Road, Bournville

Built in 1903, the Ruskin Memorial Institute was the first public building in Bournville, designed as a social centre for the village. In 1911 the Institute became the School of Art and Crafts. It was extended in 1928 and 1956 and again ten years later. The school was refurbished in 2002. Bournville Centre for the Visual Arts moved to Birmingham City University's Parkside Building in 2013. Ruskin Hall is currently the temporary home of Birmingham City University's School of Acting.

Brierley Hill School of Art
Moor Street, Brierley Hill

Art classes were held on Bent Street from 1883 with support from Stourbridge School of Art. In 1888, competing classes offered by Brierley Hill Science and Art School at the Brockmoor Board School led Stourbridge to close its Brierley Hill branch. Art and technical education continued at the Albion House School through the 1890s until the completion of the Technical Institute and Library in 1904. The library moved out in the mid-twentieth century but the building remained home to Dudley College's

International Glass Centre until 2009. Plans to convert the building into apartments were approved in 2022.

Coventry School of Art
Cox Street, Coventry

The Coventry School of Design was opened in a former ribbon warehouse on St. John's Bridges in 1843. A new School of Art opened on Ford Street in 1863. In 1954 a new building for what was then called the College of Art was opened at Cope Street with an annexe at Hill Crest, Radford Road, and at the former Provident Dispensary in Priory Street. In 1964 work began on another new building on Cox Street near the new Lanchester College of Technology, with which the College of Art, along with Rugby College of Engineering, merged in 1970 to form Lanchester Polytechnic (now Coventry University). Named after the artist Graham Sutherland, the building is being refurbished as part of the University's redeveloped arts and humanities facilities.

Dudley School of Art
St James Road, Dudley

The School of Art occupied a portion of the National School building on King Street before moving into a purpose built suite of rooms in 1860. The new Dudley School of Art and Free Library opened in 1884. In 1966 the art school was moved to a former junior school at Holly Hall. At the same time, a boundary extension of Dudley borough into Brierley Hill led to plans to amalgamate the art schools at Dudley and Brierley Hill. Despite

objections from its governors, Brierley Hill Art School became the responsibility of Dudley Technical College, to which Dudley Art School was attached.

Moseley School of Art
Moseley Road, Balsall Heath, Birmingham

Built in 1899, Moseley School of Art was the first purpose-built branch school of art in Birmingham. A Junior Art Department for boys was opened in 1900, followed by a Girls' Department in 1921. In 1945 the school became known as Moseley Road Secondary School of Art. The introduction of comprehensive education in the 1970s led, despite a campaign calling for its preservation, to the closure of Moseley Road. The building, in disrepair, was bought in 1984 by the Moseley Muslim Community Association (MMCA), which has led a successful programme of renovation.

Ryland Memorial School of Art and Crafts
Lodge Street, West Bromwich

In 1886 the West Bromwich Institute on Lodge Road was opened. Art classes were organised into a school of art, which, following the Technical Instruction Act of 1891, became the responsibility of the town council, the school becoming the Municipal School of Art. The art school was transferred from the Institute in 1902 to the new Ryland Memorial School of Art, built on an adjoining site. In 1969 the Ryland Memorial School merged with three other colleges to form the West Bromwich College of Commerce and

Technology. The building found use as a school and then as the West Bromwich campus of Sandwell College. It is now home to the British Muslim School.

Stourbridge School of Art
Hagley Road, Stourbridge

Stourbridge School of Art grew out of drawing classes at the Mechanics' Institution during the 1840s and was founded in 1851. Until its relocation to the Free Library and Technical Institute in 1905, the school was situated in a theatre building on Theatre Road. In 1958 the School of Art merged with Stourbridge Technical School to form Foley College of Further Education, subsequently renamed Stourbridge College of Technology and Art, then Stourbridge College, which became part of Birmingham Polytechnic. The site closed in 2019.

Sutton Coldfield School of Art
Mitre Court, Lichfield Road, Sutton Coldfield

In 1891 Sutton town council set up adult classes in practical subjects at various venues. A site for technical and art schools was selected next to the grammar school and the Sutton Coldfield Municipal Technical School and Art School was opened in 1904. By the 1940s a renamed Sutton Coldfield Technical and Commercial Institute and School of Art had acquired another site at Moat House. Continued expansion through the 1950s and 1960s led to further building and name changes, the institution becoming simply Sutton

Coldfield College in 1993. Converted into twelve apartments, the original building is marketed as the 'Old Art School.'

Walsall School of Art
Goodall Street, Walsall

Walsall School of Design and Ornamental Art was founded in 1854 and an evening class was taught from 1861 in the Goodall Street Baptist chapel. In 1872, a number of classes combined to form the Walsall Science and Art Institute. Disagreements led to a separate School of Art forming in the Athenaeum Buildings on Bridge Street, though it rejoined the institute in 1879. An Institute building was completed on Bradford Place in 1888. The art school moved to the former library building on Goodall Street in 1908 and, after a number of name changes, became Walsall College of Art in 1974. In 1981 the College moved to the former Chuckery Secondary School and the Goodhall Street site was sold. The College of Art merged with the College of Technology in 1992 to form Walsall College of Arts and Technology (WALCAT), with campuses on St. Paul's Street and Scarborough Road. As Walsall College, the college continues to offer a wide range of courses in art, design and photography at its Wisemore Campus.

Wolverhampton School of Art
Lichfield Street, Wolverhampton

The first small art school in Wolverhampton operated on Castle Street from 1851 until money was raised by subscription for a new school in Darlington Street. The Government

School of Practical Art opened in 1854, to be replaced thirty years later by a new Wolverhampton Municipal School of Art and Crafts, along with Wolverhampton Art Gallery, on Lichfield Street. The Gallery opened in 1884, and the art school was opened in June 1885. The institution became the Wolverhampton College of Art in May 1950 and moved into a new building on Ring Road St Peter's in 1969, the year the College merged with Wolverhampton College of Technology to form Wolverhampton Polytechnic.

Wordsley School of Art
High Street, Wordsley

The Wordsley School of Art and Technical Institute opened in 1899 following a campaign by local glass manufacturers who wanted their workers trained to meet international competition. An extension to the original building was completed in 1907. When the art school closed in 1938, the building served for forty years as the base for the Wordsley Community Association. After remaining empty for many years, the building was demolished in 2001, the foundation stones preserved by the Kinswinford glass museum.

Bilston School of Art (detail)

Bromsgrove School of Art
New Road, Bromsgrove

The Government School of Art first met at the Literary and Mechanics' Institute on the High Street in 1860. New buildings for the Institute and the School of Science and Art were eventually built on New Road in 1894 and 1895 respectively. The buildings were passed to the County Council in the 1930s. The Institute was used as the public library until 1976, while the School of Art continued to provide space for training in art and crafts as an annexe of the County Technical College. The buildings fell into disuse during the 1980s and were sold to developers in 1988. The block of flats that replaced them incorporates in its design some exterior stone carvings from the original buildings. The Bromsgrove Institute Trust continues to support the education and development of the people of the town.

Malvern School of Art
Albert Road North, Malvern

When the School of Art was established in 1886, the Chair of the Malvern Educational Council explained that unlike nearby art schools in Worcester, Kidderminster, Dudley and Stourbridge, Malvern would not directly serve industrial production. Instead, the Malvern School of Art would provide 'mental improvement and social pleasure' for the people of the town. A new Malvern Technical College and School of Art opened in 1928. It was known as Malvern College of Further Education in the 1960s, then Malvern Hills College. A merger with Evesham College

in 2000 created the Malvern campus for Evesham and Malvern Hills College, renamed South Worcestershire College in 2009. In 2016 the college merged with Warwickshire College Group but was closed down in 2020. A new school, Malvern Hills Arts and Community College, is due to open in 2023.

Kidderminster School of Art
Market Street, Kidderminster

After a first failed attempt in the 1850s, the Earl of Dudley successfully started a school of art in 1862. Initially, the school was run from the top floor of the town's commercial buildings before a dedicated building was completed in 1879, with a School of Science added in 1887. A museum and free library completed the project in 1894. New buildings were opened on Hoo Road during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s to accommodate growing student numbers and a pioneering carpet technology course at what was then called Kidderminster College of Further Education. The decline of the carpet industry during the 1980s led to shrinking demand and Kidderminster College moved back to a new building on Market Street in 2003.
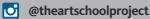
Redditch School of Art
Church Road, Redditch

An art school began in 1872, with premises on Church Road for the School of Art, the Literary and Scientific Institute and its library completed in 1886. Extensions provided extra studio space in 1954. By 1961 the art school had become a department of Redditch College of Further Education, but it remained above the library until 1972 when it moved to a school building on Peakman Street. Redditch College and North Worcestershire College merged in 1988 to form North East Worcestershire College (NEW College). When the Church Road building was sold in 2006, a covenant placed upon the building by an unknown benefactor allowed a portion of the revenue to be paid to the newly formed Redditch School of Art Trust in order to support the arts in the town.

Worcester School of Art
Victoria Institute, Foregate Street, Worcester

The Government School of Design was established in 1851. The 'nucleus' of what would become the Victoria Institute, explained the chair of the Institute Committee in 1894, 'might fairly to be said to be the Worcester School of Art' since the idea of a grand central building able to to bring together the public libraries, news room, museum, art, science and technical schools, and a public art gallery was first broached at an art school meeting in 1860. The Institute opened in 1888 and served as headquarters of the School of Art until 1962 it moved to Deansway. In 1991, the art school became part of Worcester College of Technology. In 2014 Worcester College and NEW College merged to form Heart of Worcestershire College. The Victoria Institute is now an apartment building.

University of Brighton

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In Conversation

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