



## STAIRS

Coventry is home to some of the finest examples of stairs from the modern period. Three of the many remaining structures have been selected for this guide: the De Vere Hotel, 1972, Coventry Train Station 1962 and Dewis House 1965.

### De Vere Hotel

Completed in 1972, the De Vere Hotel (later re-named The Britannia Hotel) is known for its exterior concrete stairwell leading from the ground level to the first floor balcony. This imposing structure connects the hotel's conference and banqueting facilities to Cathedral Square, which is built in the Italian Piazza style. In order for the cast sections of concrete to achieve a sense of weightlessness, G.R Stone ARIBA & Associates were required to work closely with Taylor Woodrow Construction (Midlands) and the city's engineers. The addition of a small supporting column is hidden under the base of the half landing, which allows the elegant profile of the concrete structure to gracefully rise up to the first floor balcony. Today, the sharp lines of the concrete stairwell remain emphasised by the planted area beneath the balcony area.

Over the years, the stairs have been used for a number of public ceremonies and private weddings. Most notable of these was the hotel's Topping Out Ceremony held on the 11th April 1972. The ceremony started with a procession through the city, starting at the top of the De Vere stairwell and was led by the Deputy Mayor of Coventry, the Provost of Coventry Cathedral, the leader of the Conservative group, Coventry City Council and the hotel architects G.R Stone and J. Ward.



## CAR PARKS

*We must de-congest the centres of our cities*  
- Donald Gibson

### Market Car Park

From the earliest stages of planning for the redevelopment of the Coventry's central area in the late 1930s, the planning office had been looking at ways to de-congest the centre of Coventry by making safe pedestrian shopping areas that were free of cars. Gibson's plans appear to show parking zones as filling up the rear spaces and service yards between buildings. The key change from Gibson's plans is the provision for car parking. In addition to separate multi-storey car parks in Barracks Square and West Orchards, the later 1958 plans show car parking on the roof of the circular market hall connected via bridges to roof-top parking on adjacent buildings.

The archival image at the top of the above section shows roof top parking on the new circular Market building. A ramp led cars up to the roof from street level where drivers could park in one of the 300 parking spaces available over the busy market. A bridge connecting cars to other roof top parking was also constructed and an extra stairwell leading to the end of the Arcade was later added.

Today the market car park remains. It has been joined by a new multi-storey car park which connects to the circular roof via a bridge. The IKEA car park is intended for customers to the store but is also used as the main point of access to the market and Arcade roof top car parks.



### Coventry Train Station

Coventry Train Station is home to some of the finest stairs in the country. Large wooden handrails and hardened glass panels, supported by floating concrete stairs, run from the booking office to the platforms. The combination of wood, glass and concrete are set against vertical glazed white tiles. The width of the stairs is generous but not excessive and remains in character with the large glazed sections of the double height booking office and the veneered wooden panelling on the ceiling.

The current station was opened in 1962 and is a Grade II listed structure, designated in November 1995. The English Heritage listing states that the building is 'outstanding architecturally, particularly for its spatial qualities and detailing'.



The archival image above shows the booking office the day before the grand opening. The two men at the right of the image are discussing the snagging list, others consider the alterations to the floor. The photograph was taken from the landing that leads to the platform bridge (see adjacent image). The landing between the stairs provides a visual entry point to the two-story height booking office for passengers entering and leaving the station. Shortly after the stairs were completed, architect WR Headley and project architect Derrick Shorten used this extended landing to address invited guests who had gathered in the booking office on the day of the opening.



### Dewis House

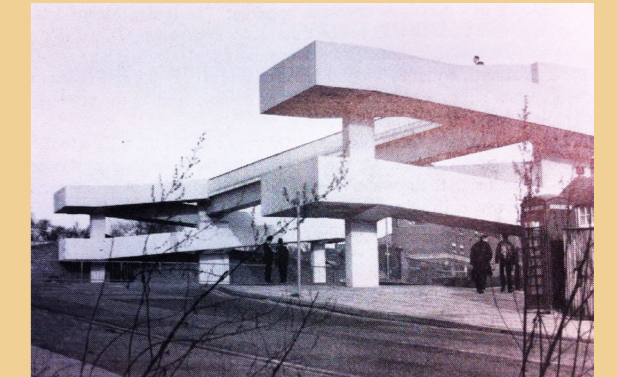
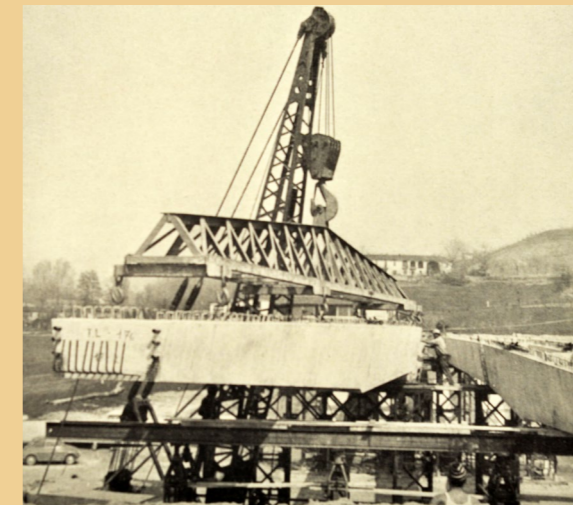
The exterior concrete stairs leading to the first floor of Dewis House can be found in the Bell Green area in the north of Coventry. The influence of Le Corbusier, in particular his design of the exterior stairs for L'Unité d'Habitation in Marseille (1952), is well documented. However, the Dewis House stairs remain in keeping with the design of the building, asserting harder angles, as opposed to the curved returns of Le Corbusier's stairs. The Dewis House stairs are shorter and heavier, successfully reflecting the modular proportions of the building.

Dewis House is owned and managed by Whitefriars Housing Group (who bought the entire Coventry City Council housing stock under a Large Scale Voluntary Transfer - LSVT - several years ago). The 17 storey building is 51 metres (167 ft) tall and is situated in Riley Square. It was completed in 1965 and contains 94 flats.

Bell Green is predominantly a residential area in the north of Coventry. It was once home to over 50 different types of shops, but there now remains only a handful.

### Pedestrian Bridges

The success of Coventry's Ring Road pedestrian bridges was in part a response to the extended article that appeared in the Italian Concrete and Engineering magazine *Cemento* in 1969. In the article, A. Gervas comments on the arrangement of ramps and stairs, detailing their construction with diagrams and pictures. The image below, taken from the illustrated article, shows large concrete sections being craned into position.



In the 1950s and 1960s, the City Architects and Town Planning Office developed a number of designs for pedestrian bridges. The concrete pedestrian bridge shown above is typical of the structures built over Coventry's busy Ring Road. This bridge was known for the long concrete sections of stairs, which were later adopted by council planners throughout the UK.

