

Malvern Civic Society 2018

Streamline Worcestershire. An illustrated talk on the Art Deco and Interwar Modernist Architectural Legacy in Worcestershire by Philip Butler.

Philip began his well-attended talk by explaining his passion for the Art Deco era, sharing his enthusiasm for the varied aspects of design which abound from the period. He explained how difficult it can be to specify exactly what Art Deco is, as it emerged from a variety of influences stemming from the European art scene. Ancient Egypt, mechanised production, minimalism Twentieth century innovation and functionalism were some of the strands he mentioned.

Following on from this the audience heard that Britain was rather late to the table. However, by the 1930s the past was being shrugged off and a new world of exciting possibilities was being explored. Architects challenged the old concepts, using new materials. Iconic buildings such as Battersea Power Station, the Midland Hotel in Morecambe, the Hoover building and Peter Jones Department Store were constructed at this time and can still be seen today.

Philip then continued to outline how his curiosity over local buildings had been aroused by the local War Memorial Bus Shelter in Barnards Green. Although this was built after the Second World War, it is recognisably built in 1930s' Art Deco style. His interest led to a research project on the Art Deco architecture of Worcestershire.

His virtual expedition of Worcestershire buildings began with Cinemas. These were the new modern picture houses at the cutting edge of technology in the early 1930s and embraced the new modernist design. Sadly although the buildings are still there in many cases, few of them are now cinemas. The Regal in Evesham and Tenbury Wells are exceptions to this and still show films. The Northwick Park, Worcester now Grade II listed, is a furniture shop. The photographs of the interiors of these buildings were stunning and much appreciated by the audience.

Philip went on to show us the famous Lido at Droitwich and the adjacent Winter Gardens. This was a Depression era project aimed at boosting the town's prosperity. It worked, and daily band concerts were sometimes broadcast live by the new BBC transmission station built in 1934. The new Lido with brine baths was built in 1935 and has recently been restored. Another famous leisure building was Dudley Zoo, built between 1935 and 1937.

Many industrial buildings were also commissioned and are still in use notably Henan and Froude in Worcester, now Isaac Maddox House. Philip introduced some examples of residential houses that still exist although some of them have been altered to include more modern materials.

Malvern itself has a few buildings from this era. Woolworths, now Iceland, was built in 1936 and incorporates some Art Deco features and is in stark contrast to the former bank's neoclassical building from 1931. Somers Park Methodist Church is another building to view.

The talk was interesting and brilliantly illustrated. Philip's knowledge and enthusiasm kept the audience riveted as he took them on an unusual tour of Worcestershire. The pictures were evocative of a previous era, and were much enjoyed by the audience, who responded with several questions and discussion. Particular interest was shown in how practical the design feature of flat roofs was in Britain!

Philip Butler has published a book **Streamline Worcestershire** which was available at the talk, and I believe sold out. I would thoroughly recommend the book as it is a mine of information and beautifully illustrated.