



The Adams Building

1854–21st Century
The Lace Market, Nottingham

New College Nottingham 





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The Adams Building on Stoney Street is by far the largest building in Nottingham's Lace Market, and a well-known landmark. Historically, it is probably the largest and finest Victorian lace warehouse to survive in Nottingham and is listed as a building of architectural or historical interest (Grade II*).

The building is named after its original owner Thomas Adams of the firm Adams and Page (whose monogram survives in fretted iron on the front doors). Adams was a Victorian industrialist with strong Quaker views and a deep social conscience. He selected local Nottingham architect Thomas Chambers Hine – who was drawn equally to history and technical innovation. Between them they created a building which, for a variety of social and architectural reasons, is quite unique.



The building is the product of several phases of construction from 1854 to about 1874. The earliest phase is the building facing Stoney Street with its elaborate symmetrical frontage behind a railed courtyard. It was designed as a lace warehouse and salesroom, in which lace products brought in from outlying factories were finished and sold.



The main display area seems to have been a spectacular two-storey lightwell in the centre of the building (now closed up), lit by decorative gas lamps and approached by a grand staircase. Secondary areas were used for mending and dispatch, the power source being a steam engine to the rear, with hydraulic engines for the hoists and packing machines.

Fretted ironwork on the front doors



The chapel

As a philanthropist and a committed Christian, Adams was determined to provide humane conditions and good facilities for his workers. A large area of the basement was designed as a chapel (with a company chaplain and vestry) where 500 or more workers and managers could share a service at the start of each day. The east window of the chapel faces the pavement on Stoney Street and some of the stained glass has been preserved.

Indoor toilets and tea rooms were provided for employees, and there are records of a sick fund, a savings bank and a book club. Heating was provided by a mixture of coal and patent warm air flues brought through ducts from a heat exchanger in the boiler. These amenities were central to the design, and the Adams factory was regarded as a model example of its kind by the factory inspectors of the day.



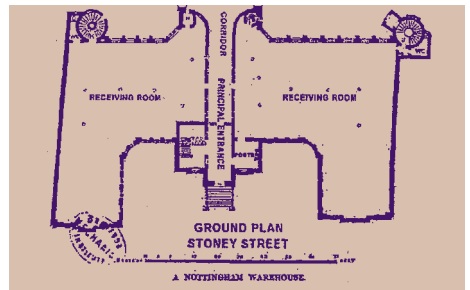
Sorting and checking lace



The chapel today

The architect, Hine, adopted a distinctive Anglo-Italian style for the elevations, which in places seem to be copied from the 15th century Palazzo Riccardi in Florence. His chosen materials were plain brick, moulded brick and local stone (unnoticeably exchanged for render in some high level places for the sake of economy), with some ceramic decoration.

Hine gave high priority to the elevations, and the internal floors were adjusted or allowed to cut across windows in some places rather than spoil the external effect. The size and grandeur of the building must have caused astonishment at the time, not least because of the contrast with other industrial buildings, which were of a more plain and functional design. Local papers described it as the 'finest ... in the Midlands!'



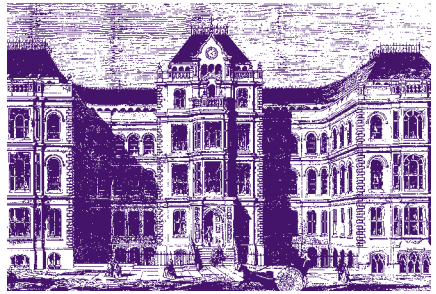
1854 plan of the earliest phase

In order to provide maximum lighting for the most delicate lace repairs, Hine provided lace lofts at roof level whose walls were almost entirely glazed. The lace lofts, above all else, are characteristic of Nottingham's lace industry, and can be seen, along with modern interpretations, throughout the Lace Market. Although usually glazed with square timber windows, the lace lofts above Stoney Street were boldly innovative at the time and demonstrate Hine's interest in experimenting with structural materials.

The later phases of the building extended along St. Mary's Gate to the rear and, finally, along Warser Gate. In the process, they incorporated the building which forms the end of King's Place. Although externally of little apparent interest, this building appears to be a rare survivor of a tenement lace or hosiery factory in the city centre. Dating to the early 1800s, it was used at various times in its early life as a Roman Catholic chapel.

The later blocks were more plain and functional and it is possible that some were originally built speculatively, perhaps for rent as tenement lace factories.

Extra steam engines were provided to serve these new blocks, and in order to prevent the spread of fire, massive cast iron doors were fitted at the main cross walls. An ingenious heating and ventilation system was installed, using fresh air from wall ventilators drawn over hot steam pipes. Hine continued to experiment structurally; the timber floor beams of the original building giving way progressively to cast iron beams, rivetted wrought iron girders, rolled iron beams and, possibly, early mild steel beams as each of these became available. The building, therefore, illustrates technical and structural evolution over a particularly interesting period.



Early lithograph



Lace edging, St. Mary's Gate



The rear of the Adams Building today



Spiral staircase

The completed Adams Building had 113,000 square feet (10,500 square metres) of floor space across six floors, eight main, and three minor staircases. It was the first of several very similar warehouses designed by Hine in the Lace Market, which give the area its very distinctive character.

Over the years, various alterations were made, in particular the addition of new goods lifts, the replacement of the original (and highly ornate) boiler chimney, the removal and insertion of staircases, and internal conversions. On St. Mary's Gate, the decorative turret and clock tower above the main entrance stair were replaced by a lift motor room, crudely built in brick.

During the Second World War, concrete bomb shelters were built in the Stoney Street courtyard, obscuring the basement walls, and the commandeering of the ground floor by the Royal Air Force for parachute storage caused further damage to the floor and the chapel below.



The courtyard

For many years, the Adams Building was in a serious state of decline, due to the rising repair costs, outdated standards of workspace, and under-occupation. Many floors were structurally weak and had sagged or failed under the weight of heavy machinery. In 1996, the building was acquired by the Lace Market Heritage Trust, and has since been restored and converted to new use as a college of further and higher education for **New College Nottingham (ncn)**. Many of the courses (textiles and fashion) are continuing the traditional use of the building for garment design and manufacture, and the restoration triggered a revitalisation of the Lace Market as a whole. The project was assisted by grant aid from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the European Regional Development Fund, and was a pilot scheme using the Government's Private Finance Initiative.



The courtyard today



In 2002, **ncn** won a Queen's Anniversary prize for higher and further education. The official citation reads: "In a far-sighted and imaginative initiative, the College has played a major role in the regeneration of Nottingham's city centre through the renovation and re-use of a derelict heritage building. The Adams Building now provides exemplary education, training and business support in state-of-the-art facilities, meeting the needs of individuals and the growing service sector."

ADAMS restaurant & brasserie

The Adams Restaurant and Brasserie is renowned for its high standards of customer service and international cuisine. It is popular for business lunches, wedding receptions and other special events.

The **ncn** Adams Hair and Day Spa offers a full range of health and beauty treatments.



The preparation of the conservation plan for the project (including the historical research from which these notes were prepared) was carried out by Woodhall Planning and Conservation (conservation consultants) of Leeds, in conjunction with the Heritage Lottery Fund and English Heritage.

The Adams Building
Stoney Street
The Lace Market
Nottingham NG1 1NG

0115 9 100 100
enquiries@ncn.ac.uk
www.ncn.ac.uk



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