

A MODERNIST ICON UNDER THREAT

“There is nothing quite like it in the county... this is an excellent civic building, well-made and individual”

Owen Hatherley. *Modern Buildings in Britain: A Gazetteer* (2022)



Shrewsbury Civic Society is concerned that there may be an attempt to demolish the Shirehall. A scheme to radically upgrade and alter the building was proposed in December 2018. However, in September 2020, the council indicated that it would rather sell the building and move to the town centre. In October 2020, following an application for a certificate of immunity from listing requested by Shropshire Council, Historic England decided not to list the Shirehall as it narrowly missed meeting its criteria for listing post-1945 buildings. In May 2021 the Twentieth Century Society placed the site on its Top 10 Buildings at Risk List.



The Shirehall was officially opened by Queen Elizabeth II on 17 March 1967, an important moment in the county's history

The Modernist principle that the function of a building should be expressed by its form is reflected in the design of the Shirehall by County Architect Ralph Crowe. The Council Chamber connected by a bridge to a much taller administrative block, landscaped courtyards and an ornamental pool. The design was partly influenced by the new, widely admired, Plymouth Civic Centre. The Shirehall's main block has simple continuous bands of glazing with slightly sloping concrete panels above and below. The building's horizontal lines contrast deliberately with the stark verticality of the Column to create a memorable combined architectural landmark.

Crowe's design is also highly symbolic. The unusual ovoid-shaped Council Chamber, the focus of local democracy, is placed in front of, and superior to, the executive building housing the unelected bureaucracy. Le Corbusier, one of the greatest architects of the 20th century, can be seen as influence here; the sculptural pilotis or columns beneath the Council Chamber echo forms used at his Unite d'Habitation, Marseille. The forecourt below the Council Chamber is a remarkable space.

Like other civic buildings of that era, artwork was commissioned to adorn the Shirehall. Most notable is a cast iron mural depicting Shropshire industries in the entrance hall by Rosalind Alexander

The Shirehall represents more than any other building Shropshire's progressive contribution to the built environment in the 1960s. It reflects the boldness of the age, the freedom of expression and the desire to be imaginative.

If you are interested to hear more please contact us at info@shrewsburycivicsociety.co.uk