

# Fellowship Square Trail

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# Fellowship is life

## Introduction

Fellowship Square takes its name from the Waltham Forest motto and inscription on the Assembly Hall "Fellowship is life, lack of fellowship is death" This is a William Morris quote from the book *A Dream of John Ball*, a novel about the Peasant's Revolt of 1381.

Fellowship Square is a cultural centre in the heart of Waltham Forest. Located on the Town Hall site on Forest Road, the square consists of the historic buildings that make up the town hall complex and an open site for the whole community to enjoy.

The Fellowship Square site was originally part of Chestnuts Dairy Farm and Forest Road was known as Clay Street until June 1886.

The sites of Fellowship Square, Chestnuts Field, Feel Food Centre, allotments, Waltham Forest College and Monoux Sixth Form College, were all part of the original Chestnuts Farm Estate. The area that now includes Fellowship Square was sold to Walthamstow District Council in 1919 for £21,000. The Monoux site was not included in the sale.

## The first Town Hall

By the early 1910s Walthamstow District Council began to realise that the old Walthamstow Town Hall on Orford Road, was becoming too small for its needs and started to look for a new site. A number of sites were considered, including land located between the William Morris Gallery and Forest Road, or at the corner of Church Hill and Cairo Road.



Above: The Clock Tower on Waltham Forest Town Hall.



The Fellowship Square site was originally part of Chestnuts Dairy Farm

Above: Chestnuts Dairy Farm, 1920.

# Arrested Development

## A competition to create a civic centre

A Civic Centre is a network of spaces or buildings that provide essential services to a city or town. It can include everything from government offices and public meeting spaces to free classes and memorials honouring members of the community. The Walthamstow Civic Centre is the home of Waltham Forest Town Hall. It is grade II listed, and is the centrepiece of a trio of buildings. To the west was a magistrates court, which will be replaced by a brand-new civic building in 2023, the Assembly Hall is to the east and has been used as a performance and events venue.

In 1929 Walthamstow District Council decided to hold a competition to design a new civic centre for Walthamstow as the original Town Hall on Orford Road was no longer big enough. The winning design, by Philip Dalton Hepworth, was intended to be symmetrical, with the Town Hall in the centre of the design, the Assembly Hall on the east being reflected by a courthouse on the west. There is a strong Nordic Classicism influence to the design, reminiscent of Scandinavian architecture of the same period with simplified characteristics of Art Deco details. This is shown by the clean stripped back classical design, symmetry, portico columns and elongated windows. The outbreak of the Second World War meant that the courthouse was not built until the 1970s and the style was very different to Hepworth's original design. The new civic building will complete Philip Hepworth's original masterplan intent for the town hall campus.

## Building work

Building commenced on 29 October, 1938. The foundation stone of granite, inscribed with the Walthamstow coat of arms was laid by Alderman Mrs Catherine McEntee JP Mayor of Walthamstow.

## Impact of the war

The outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 impacted on the progress of the construction work. Internal finishes had to be significantly simplified, which led to an increased use of colour effects by painting. Some of the fixtures and fittings had utilised alternative materials, for example plywood was used in the committee rooms instead of oak, Terazzo tiles were used in the foyer rather than marble and in the Council Chamber the Victorian furnishings, with the initials WDC for Walthamstow District Council (1894–1929) from the old Town Hall were reused instead of commissioning new furniture with initials WBC Walthamstow Borough Council (1929–1965). The external Portland stone was going to be replaced by brick, but in the end it was possible to use the original material. Even though building work wasn't complete, the Town Hall became the Civil Defence Head Quarters during the war and was used by the ARP (Air Raid Precautions) wardens. The Western end of the basement consists of a windowless bunker and retains its steel airtight doors. Within the walls there remain the explosive protection valves to protect against bomb blasts. The fortified basement later became a Cold War Shelter.

**Below:** The Town Hall basement which retains its steel airtight doors.



## Preserved for future generations

A time capsule was placed under the foundation stone of the Town Hall in 1938. The capsule was a lead-lined box filled with council records and memorabilia, which is only to be opened if the building is ever demolished.

Among the items in the time capsule are a map of the area, a book containing the original signature of William Morris, photographs of council members and a scroll signed by one school child from each school in the borough. Stanley Bird was 10 years old and attended the South West Essex Technical College on Forest Road, now Waltham Forest College. Stanley's school decided to choose the youngest boy and the youngest girl pupils to sign the scroll for the time capsule. However, Stanley explained that there were two boys of exactly the same age, himself and another boy. The headteacher, Dr Baron decided to toss a coin to choose who would go and Stanley won. It was a very exciting day for 10-year-old Stanley. He was taken to the event in the Principal's car – He had only been in a private car once before! He was also invited to ride in the borough Rolls Royce with the Mayor of Walthamstow, Alderman Mrs Catherine McEntee JP and at the end of the day the Mayor's chauffeur drove Stanley home.

## Back to the future

A competition for young people from Waltham Forest invited them to write or draw what they thought life would be like 100 years in the future. The winning entries came from Marcus and Aamenah and their work was placed in the time capsule to mark the opening of Fellowship Square.



**Above:** The new time capsule and students Marcus and Aamenah with their winning entries in 2021.

A model of the  
civic centre based on  
PD Hepworth's designs



# The Town Hall

## The Town Hall building

The Town Hall is a steel framed building. The upper floors are hollow block. The ground floor is made of 18" thick reinforced concrete and was used to protect personnel during Second World War air raids.

The building is clad in Portland Stone, a Jurassic-aged rock which started life as a seafloor sediment. Portland Stone is used to adorn many significant British buildings including Buckingham Palace, the British Museum and St Paul's Cathedral.

The clock tower is covered with copper. As well as containing the clock and hour bell, the tower also acts as a fresh air intake for the ventilation system.

The building is clad in Portland Stone, a Jurassic-aged rock which started life as a seafloor sediment

## Stone carvings

To the rear of the Town Hall building, surrounding the Council chamber are five larger-than-life figures carved by the Irish sculptor John Francis Kavanagh (1903–1984). They symbolise Fellowship, Motherhood, Education, Recreation and Work.

Motherhood and Education are represented by female figures with small children, whereas Work and Recreation are represented by male figures. Fellowship shows a representation of William Morris. The figures are partially draped and have idealised bodies carved in a manner which has been described as stylised classicism and are consistent with much European sculpture of the time.

Whilst these gender-role stereotypes might have reflected society at the time, they are not representative of modern Waltham Forest.



Above: The Town Hall building as viewed from the main gates.



Above: John Francis Kavanagh's sculptures (from left to right), Education, Fellowship, Motherhood, Recreation and Work.

# The Town Hall

Continued...



## Amity the Lion

Amity is based on the two lion head sculptures on either side of the Town Hall building. Sculptures of lion heads are among the most popular decorative adornments of buildings across England. The lion represents the qualities of bravery, valour, nobility, strength, fierceness and gravitas. In architectural sculpture the lion head can serve several purposes: as decorative sculpture on a grand building, to indicate a principal entrance or centre to a building, or to indicate Britishness, as in a civic building or bank or other building put up for an organisation wishing to have connotations of patriotic feeling. Our lion character has been given the name Amity, meaning 'friendship', to echo the name and ethos of Fellowship Square.



Above: A lion adornment found on the side of the Town Hall.

## Bas reliefs

Joseph Armitage (1880–1945) was the sculptor responsible for the 16 low bas-reliefs (pictured opposite), representing the building trades which adorn the pillars around the main entrance of the Town Hall. Among the trades represented are architect, bricklayer, stone carver, carpenter, heating engineer, painter and gardener.

## Can you see the sea?

If you look on the western exterior wall of the Town Hall building you might spot an Ordnance Survey benchmark (BM). This is a way of marking a height above sea level.



Surveyors in our history made these marks to record height above Ordnance Datum Newlyn (ODN – mean sea level determined at Newlyn in Cornwall). If the exact height of one BM was known, the exact height of the next could be found by measuring the difference in heights, through a process of spirit levelling. They can be found cut into houses, churches, bridges and many other structures. There are hundreds of thousands of them dotted across Great Britain, although Ordnance Survey no longer use them today.



# Eastenders Assemble!

## The Assembly Hall

The Assembly Hall is also a steel framed building and is built on the site of the old farm lake. Walthamstow Assembly Hall was designed to seat 1500 people and has been credited as being 'the best of its kind in South East England' with 'exceptionally high acoustics'.

It has been used as a recording venue for many classical pieces by the BBC and record companies. It was also used for broadcasting programmes. It has hosted a wide range of performances including The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Plácido Domingo, Yehudi Menuhin, the Rolling Stones, Sex Pistols, The Stranglers, Iron Maiden and Ed Sheeran.

The venue was popular from the 1950s–1970s as a regular dance hall venue. It was used for boxing and wrestling matches as well as for other entertainment and celebratory events.

Carved on the front of the Assembly Hall is a William Morris quote, Fellowship is Life, Lack of Fellowship is Death. This comes from the book *A Dream of John Ball*, a novel about the Peasant's Revolt of 1381.

Also carved on each side of the building are John Francis Kavanagh's interpretations of Comedy and Tragedy, the masks used in ancient Greek drama. At that time all the actors were men and they would often play several different parts, and wear a mask for each part they played.

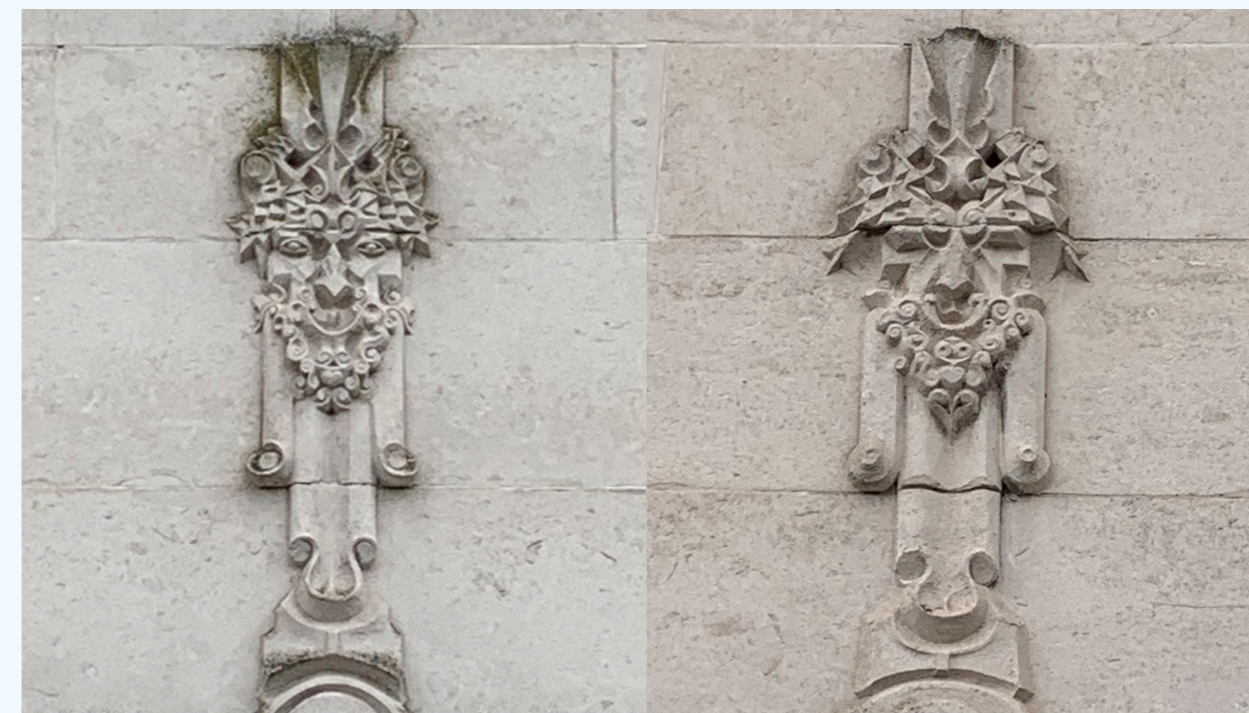
The masks were often brightly coloured with exaggerated features, for example, a large nose and mouth. This allowed the faces to be seen by all of the audience.

Comedy and Tragedy are now used as the symbol for theatre. The laughing mask symbolises comedy, while the crying mask represents tragedy. Said to represent the range of human emotion, for example, or the extremes of the human experience.

Carved on the front of the Assembly Hall is a William Morris quote, Fellowship is life, lack of fellowship is death.



Above: *A Dream of John Ball* which features the William Morris quote: Fellowship is Life, Lack of Fellowship is death.



Above: John Francis Kavanagh's Comedy and Tragedy adornments can be found on the Assembly Hall.

# The Main Square

## Flying the flag

There are two flag poles in Fellowship Square. The Union Flag flies continuously on the western mast, this is known as the 'superior' position. The Council Flag flies on the eastern mast, nearest to the Assembly Hall. In addition, there is a programme of celebration and recognition days when other flags may be flown on the secondary mast. For a celebration, memorial, anniversary or key date to be marked on the square, it must fulfil the following principles:

- It is a celebration, commemoration or recognition of a community within the borough or
- A nationally holiday or celebration
- It has senior sponsorship from a Councillor and Senior Officer, and is signed off by the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council

The façade and fountain lighting can also be changed to display relevant colours.

You can speak to the Fellowship Hosts for information about the flag that is currently in position.

## Fellowship Fountain

Philip Hepworth's original design for the Town Hall campus always included a water feature, a circular pond. During the Second World War the pool was used as an ARP reservoir, which was filled by an artesian well that used to supply water to the site. The pool contained approximately 121,000 gallons of water – around a fifth the size of an Olympic swimming pool.

A fountain was added in 1953 to commemorate the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. Red, white and blue underwater lighting originally lit the fountain.

The Fellowship Fountain is at the centre of Fellowship Square. It is a space for everyone to enjoy, it is safe and accessible for all residents and visitors. The new fountain retains the original vision as imagined by Philip Hepworth. There is a central plinth with a feature central jet. In addition, there are 144 individual jets, with multi-coloured lighting to illuminate the space which can be set to match Town Hall façade lighting. The jets can also be programmed to dance to music, bringing the whole space to life.



**Above:** The fountain which was added in 1953 to commemorate the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.



**Above:** Fellowship Square in 2022 with its new fountain with 144 illuminated jets.



# Sign of the Times

## Coats of arms

A coat of arms is the arrangement of symbols, colours, and shapes on a shield which represent characteristics or virtues of families or individuals. The first coat of arms was used during the Middle Ages as a way for knights to identify each other. When knights wore full armour and a helmet, it was hard to tell who they were, so they began to paint symbols on their shields. Eventually, they would put the symbols on their banners and on the coats worn over their armour, which is where we get the phrase, coat of arms.

The Waltham Forest coat of arms is a combination of Leyton, Walthamstow and Chingford councils. The three councils merged to form the London Borough of Waltham Forest in 1965 and a new coat of arms was created. Walthamstow's Town Hall became the administrative centre for the new borough, which is why both the coats of arms for Walthamstow and Waltham Forest can be spotted around the site.

## Create your own

Students may like to design their own version of the Waltham Forest coat of arms.

A lot of images and symbols in the Waltham Forest coat of arms are less relevant to residents of Waltham Forest now and whilst they reflect the history of the borough, they are perhaps not a modern reflection of its diversity, creativity or values.

What could we change to make it more relevant to today's residents?

These questions might help

- Who lives in Waltham Forest?
- What is Waltham Forest well known for?
- What is important to the people living in Waltham Forest?
- What images and symbols might represent the community of Waltham Forest?



**1** The three oak trees represent the merged councils of Leyton, Chingford and Walthamstow.

**2** The wavy line represents the River Lea.

**3** The crowned stag's head refers to the Royal Forest of Waltham which once covered the area.



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