

HURST STREET - HILL STREET (AREA 4)

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Hurst Street–Hill Street provides a pathway between ‘Southside’ and Victoria Square. This provides access south to the Chinese Quarter, LGBTQ+ district and the Birmingham Hippodrome, and north towards the Mailbox and Victoria Square.

I chose this path because living in Coventry, with my wife a huge ballet fan, this is our most popular pathway in Birmingham. Train to Brum, down the stairs to Hill Street, and south to Hurst Street to see the Royal Birmingham Ballet at the Hippodrome.

Photo (1) looks down to the bottom of Hurst Street at its junction with Sherlock Street where there is a large red brick building on the corner. It was built around the 1930s for the company Fisher and Ludlow who were making pressed steel panels for motor car bodies. The building is now managed by a group which reclaims derelict buildings and through refurbishment lets them out to small to medium sized businesses. Moving back up Hurst Street the white building on the corner of Skinner Lane is The Village Inn, part of the street’s thriving night life featuring clubs and bars with many featuring live entertainment including music, dancing and drag queens.

Hurst Street gets very busy during celebrations and festivals. For example photo (2) was taken in February during this year’s Chinese New Year celebrations. In May thousands of people will flock to the area for Birmingham Pride on Spring bank holiday weekend.

Photo (3) shows the view across the rainbow coloured Hippodrome Square down towards the National Trust’s ‘Back to Backs’ property on the corner of Hurst Street and Inge Street. Also known as Court 15, thousands of such houses were built between 1800 and 1830 and lived in by workers involved in trades such as button-making, tailoring, leatherwork, glasswork and woodwork. George Saunders, a tailor by trade originally from St. Kitts, built up a thriving tailor business here that included making costumes for the Hippodrome. He was the very last person to leave with the court’s closure in 2001. Fortunately it is now preserved as Birmingham’s only surviving back-to-back property.

Photo (4) looks up Hurst Street from the Hippodrome. Ahead is the pedestrianised area with access across to the Chinese Quarter via Ladywell Walk. A glazed section of the Ringway Centre, a sweeping monument built in the 1960s on Smallbrook Queensway, bridges the top of Hurst Street supported on a pair of dramatic splayed columns. The pastel green colour of the giant ‘Welcome to Birmingham’ shroud conceals the modernist facade of the Ringway Centre and dominates the look and feel of the top section of Hurst Street.

A memorial to remember those who have died from Aids and HIV, and those who are living with them, was installed in Hippodrome Square in 2022. The sculpture of two interlocking heart shaped ribbons was forged in Cradley Heath. I walked close by, drawn by the tribute to a Warrington teenager who her lost her life recently, and noticed that one ribbon is painted red while the other has been left to rust (5).

Once you have crossed the very busy Smallbrook Queensway into Hill Street you notice a continual stream of people walking towards you around the Hill Street/Station Street corner of the now derelict pub, The Crown. The station stairs cascade in spectacular fashion down to this corner (6, 7).

Scribbled between the orange and pink panels outside The Crown is 'OZZY WOZ HERE', a reminder that this pub was the venue of Black Sabbath's first gig. We bought our tickets for 'Black Sabbath-The Ballet' being performed by the Royal Birmingham Ballet at the Hippodrome in September just in time before they were sold out. Further along Hill Street at the back of New Street Station is a 50-metre mural of the stars of Peaky Blinders (8).

Hill Street reaches a busy intersection with Navigation Street (9). Travelling straight ahead takes Hill Street over Railway Bridge RBS2/3 and on up between high buildings towards the distant clock tower, until any further vehicle progress is blocked by stairs and the tramline at Victoria Square. The lure of some brutalist concrete got the better of me and I stood on tip toes with the camera held high above my head to get the final shot over a wall. A blue flash of a West Midlands Metro tram marks the end of Hill Street (10).

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5th March 2023