

= The Crescent , Taunton =

The Crescent is a street in Taunton , a town in the English county of Somerset . Construction began in 1807 , during a period of extensive redevelopment in the town , driven by the Market House Society and the Member of Parliament Sir Benjamin Hammet . Lined on the eastern side by a Georgian terrace , the street follows a shallow crescent shape , broken in the middle by Crescent Way and a bit further south by St George 's Place . It links Upper High Street , at its southern end , with Park Street and Tower Street to the north . On the western side , Somerset County Council have their offices in the County Hall , erected in 1935 , and extended in the 1960s . The Georgian terrace , the Masonic Hall , and the County Hall are recorded in the National Heritage List for England as listed buildings .

= = History = =

During the 17th and 18th centuries Taunton suffered , first due to the Civil War (1642 ? 1651) , during which two thirds of the town was burnt down , and then the decline of the cloth industry upon which the town 's economy relied . In the late 18th century , the Taunton Market House Society formed with the aim of improving Taunton town centre , most notably the Market House . Benjamin Hammet , a prominent member of the society , was elected as a Member of Parliament for Taunton in 1782 , and tried to start clearing the slums in the town centre . In 1770 , the old Market House was knocked down and replaced , and less than ten years later , Hammet Street was built , to connect the Market square with the Church of St Mary Magdalene .

The Crescent formed part of Hammet 's plan for Taunton . It was built to the north of Upper High Street , in what was known at the time as Paul 's Field . It follows a shallow crescent shape , which Nikolaus Pevsner notes is " hardly noticeable " . Although Hammet died in 1800 , the foundation stone was placed in 1807 by William Kinglake , as part of a ceremony that was attended by " an immense number of persons . " The Monthly Magazine noted that the street was intended to add to the " ornament , respectability , and advantage " of Taunton , while the Taunton Courier reported that the houses were intended for " genteel families " .

When the street was built , each end featured a cottage with high iron gates which limited traffic to residents and their visitors . The footpaths were less restricted , but featured " three or four posts between which a corpulent person had difficulty in squeezing . " These gates and posts have since been removed . The Crescent comprised a terrace of houses along the street 's eastern side ; the other side was not built on and was eventually converted into parkland . In 1822 , a Catholic chapel , known as St George 's Chapel was built at the southern @-@ end of the terrace , the first Catholic church built in Taunton since the Reformation . The Catholic congregation moved out to a larger church in 1878 and the chapel was bought by the Freemasons , who converted it into a Masonic Lodge .

In 1935 , County Hall was built on the open side of The Crescent , providing Somerset County Council with more space than their previous offices at Shire Hall . Early plans for further buildings at the site did not come to fruition , but County Hall was extended in the 1960s to cover most of the open land in front of The Crescent .. Despite the work done by Hammet , the area between The Crescent and the High Street was still considered a slum until it was redeveloped around the Second World War . During this period , the General Post Office (GPO) built " Telephone House " , a telephone exchange and office building , replacing the houses in the middle of the terrace .

= = Architecture = =

On the eastern side of The Crescent , a Georgian terrace was erected in 1807 . Built of " pinkish @-@ brown " brick , each house is of three @-@ storeys plus a basement , and is two windows across . The houses are split by plain pilasters and topped with hipped slate roofs . While the first and second storey windows are rectangular , those on the ground floor are round @-@ headed , as are the doorways . The first floor windows have small , circular segmental balconies . A variety of

six- and eight @-@ panel doors are reached by climbing a small flight of steps , and the entire terrace is fronted with railings . This terrace forms two separate listed building designations from Historic England ; numbers 1 ? 11 and 15 ? 20 , both of which are Grade II * listed .

The terrace was later split , and is intersected by Crescent Way , which leads to the Crescent car park . On the southern side of Crescent Way , the northern end of the terrace formed by numbers 15 ? 20 , is Exchange House , the former GPO Telephone House . According to Pevsner , this building breaks the modesty of the street , with " its thick @-@ set Tuscan porch " . At the southern end of the same terrace is the Masonic Hall , another Grade II * listed building , which forms the end of the terrace , and features a series of prominent Ionic pilasters along the front and southern end .

A further terrace to the south of the Masonic Hall is split from the hall by St George 's Place . It is formed of numbers 21 to 23 The Crescent , and number 42 Upper High Street . The terrace forms two listed building designations , both Grade II . Numbers 21 and 22 The Crescent are two @-@ storey roughcast houses , each spanning three windows . The doorways are round @-@ headed , and are flanked by ground floor bay windows . Number 23 forms the back of 42 Upper High Street , and is a two @-@ storey red brick building .

On the western side , the first part of the County Hall was built in 1935 , and is known as " A Block " . It was designed by Vincent Harris , and is Neo @-@ Georgian . It is a three storey , built out of red and buff @-@ coloured bricks forming an English bond , with Portland stone dressings . The central section is curved , with wings at 45 degrees to the formed main entrance . The ground @-@ floor is fronted with ashlar , and has three round arches , the middle one of which forms a doorway . The doorway is topped by an engraved coat of arms in the tympanum . The central block spans nine windows , while each wing has a prominent window at the end , framed by an aedicule . The first and second floors of the wings feature eleven sash windows . An extension was made to the south of the building in the 1960s . The original " A Block " is designated as a Grade II listed building .