

1876 - 1921

A clash of Industry and Ideals

Local drawing lessons began in 1876, in rooms rented from a nearby Elementary School

It provided evening classes staffed and managed by the Central Art School in Birmingham, which had links to art industries in the district.

Land was purchased for £2,500 in 1898 and the school built for a reduced tender of £6,502, saving £750. In comparison the swimming baths opposite cost £33,000 and took 13 years to complete.

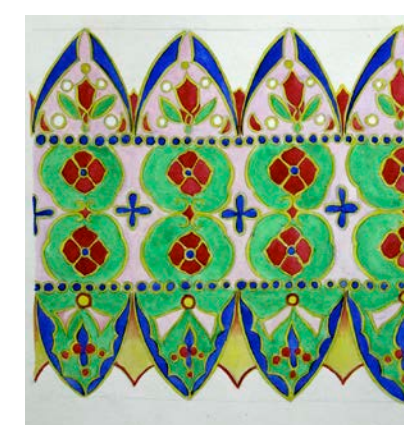
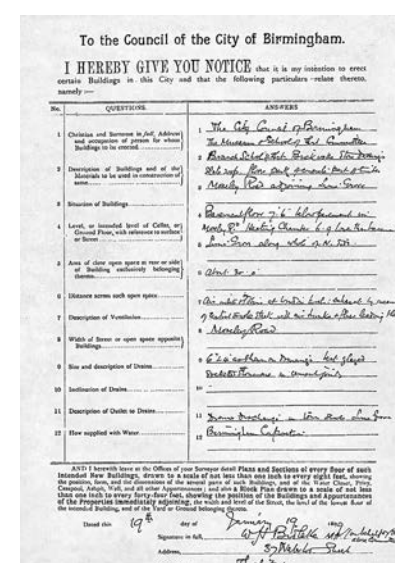
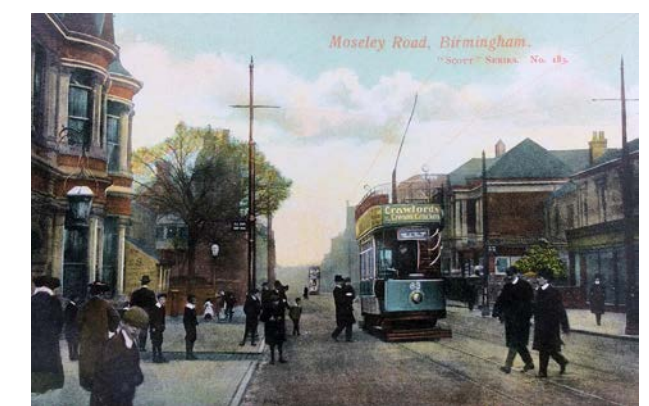
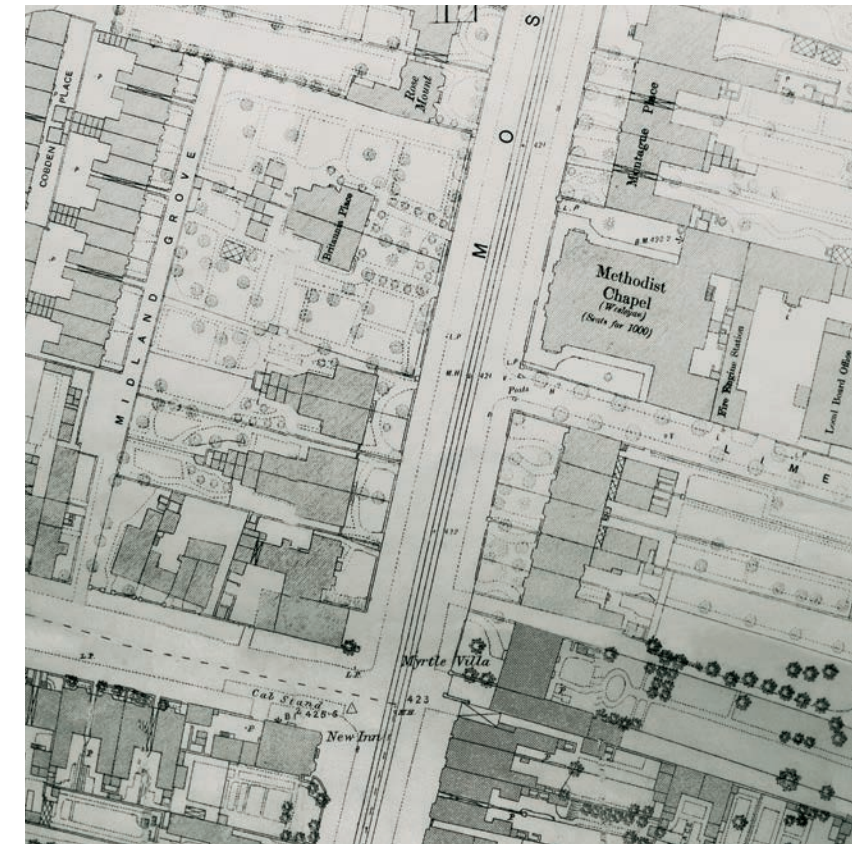
In 1899 it became the first purpose built Branch Art School in the country

The building design was inspired by Arts and Crafts principles. By 1901 it had nearly 400 boys aged 12-15, teaching them drawing, painting, design and modelling, wood carving, metalwork and enamelling. It was better equipped with significantly more space and became one of the most popular Branch Art Schools in the city. It used techniques pioneered by the Central Art School - such as 'shut-eye' and 'memory' drawing - where students are trained to draw an impression, avoiding accurate draughtsmanship, and instead draw the spirit of the object.

This often preceded every drawing lesson to build up a memory of 'visualisations' and train memory retention, skills that could later be called upon in design. Learning was by repetition, instruction and practice. It was a Victorian atmosphere where students were told what and how to draw.

The period saw increased demand for specific art and design trade classes that the school tried to accommodate. However, release from industry caused friction: the Art School offered day classes but businesses wanted evening only attendance. There was also differing opinions about the content of the classes. The Art School offered elementary drawing but local industries wanted specific craft skills taught.

War economies closed the school in 1916



Current Architecture.

