Talking Tees Valley Activity Pack

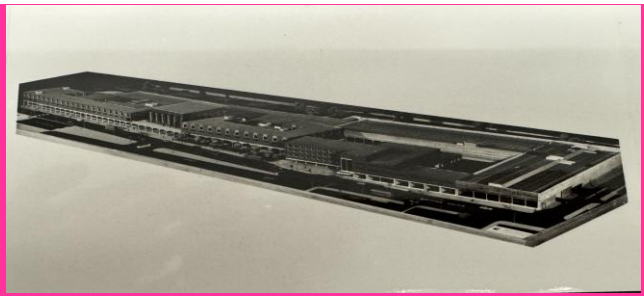
The Castlegate Centre & Swallow Hotel

Tees Valley Museums

Supported using public funding by ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

Kirkleatham Museum
Captain Cook Birthplace Museum
Dorman Museum
Hopetown Darlington
Preston Park
Museum of Hartlepool
Hartlepool Art Gallery

Tees Valley Museums



Welcome to another edition of the Talking Tees Valley Activity Pack

Each month we use objects and photos from our museums in the Tees Valley to take a closer look at the lives and stories from people in our area.

This month we're looking at the Castlegate Shopping Centre and neighbouring Swallow Hotel which stood on Stockton High Street for over 50 years!

The Castlegate Centre

Built in the early 1970's the Castlegate Centre (previously Castle Centre) was a shopping centre at the northern end of Stockton High Street. It housed a mix of national chains, independent retailers and cafes. The centre was demolished 2022-2023, following a time of decline due to changes in shopping habits, with more online shopping. The site of the centre would later become a new Stockton Waterfront Urban Park, which opened in 2026.

Why Castlegate?

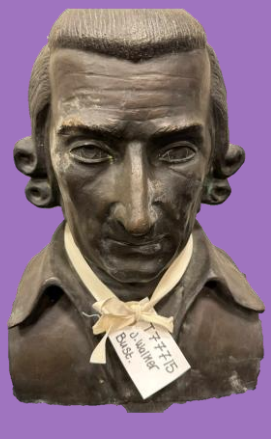
The shopping centre was originally named 'Castle' and later 'Castlegate' after Stockton Castle, which had stood on the site until its destruction which was during, or just after the civil war (1861- 1865).

Read our blog to find out more about Stockton Castle: https://teesvalleymuseums.org/blog/post/a-castle-in-stockton/

A case of mistaken identity

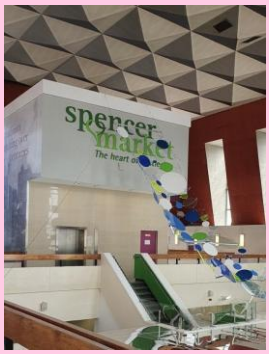
This bust, which once stood in the Castlegate Centre and on the High Street, was meant to be of the Stockton-born inventor, John Walker, who invented the friction match. However, it was found out much later that the bust was based on another John Walker, an actor with the same name. Because the inventor was not well known in his lifetime, finding an image of him is difficult to reference. The bust is now cared for by Preston Park Museum

J. Walker Bust



The Spencer Market

The Spencer Market inside the shopping centre used to span the entirety of the top floor, but in later years (as in the images on the right) it was replaced by more commercial units. The ceiling of the market was iconic, a geometric black and white design.



Shopping at Castlegate

The Castlegate Centre was part of a redevelopment plan for up to 50 shop units and 5 large stores that would be let to companies like **Boots, Hinton's, Tesco, Uptons** and even a **Woolworths**!

Shops like **Woolworths** were popular for their range of products you could buy, including records and tapes. These shops brought variety to the high street shopping experience.

Who do you like going shopping with?

What is your favourite shop?

What's the best thing you've bought while shopping?

Christmas Shopping

For Christmas the Castlegate Centre would be decorated in beautiful Christmas lights, with a tree standing outside.

Did you ever visit Santa at the Castlegate Centre?

The Swallow Hotel

The Swallow Hotel was built in the 1970s as part of the Castlegate shopping complex. It closed in 2009. It had around 128 bedrooms and was a popular hotel to stay at for visitors coming to the town for festivals such as Stockton International Riverside Festival.

The hotel is also remembered for its many famous guests, including performers who visited the Mall, (a well-known nightclub on Stockton High Street).

Plans shown in a booklet for the redevelopment show how close the hotel was to the Castlegate shopping centre.

The booklet is part of Preston Park's archive collection.

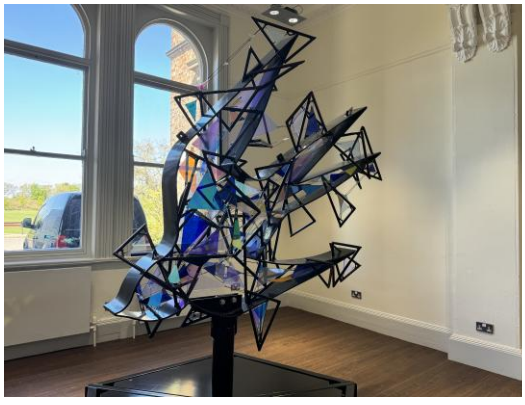
When did you last stay in a hotel?

Were you visiting someone or enjoying a holiday?

The closeness of the Swallow Hotel to the Castlegate Centre would have made it a perfect place to stay after a day shopping in Stockton, you could even relax in the hotels own leisure centre if you'd like a relaxing stay and perhaps enjoy a dance on the wooden sprung dance floor.

The hotel's restaurant, 'The Portcullis' was a nod to the history of the site that it stood near, the medieval castle. **Did you know, a portcullis was a heavy latticed gate found in medieval castle gateways?**

The hotels leisure centre was also known for its Egyptian theme, with decorative frescos around the pool area.



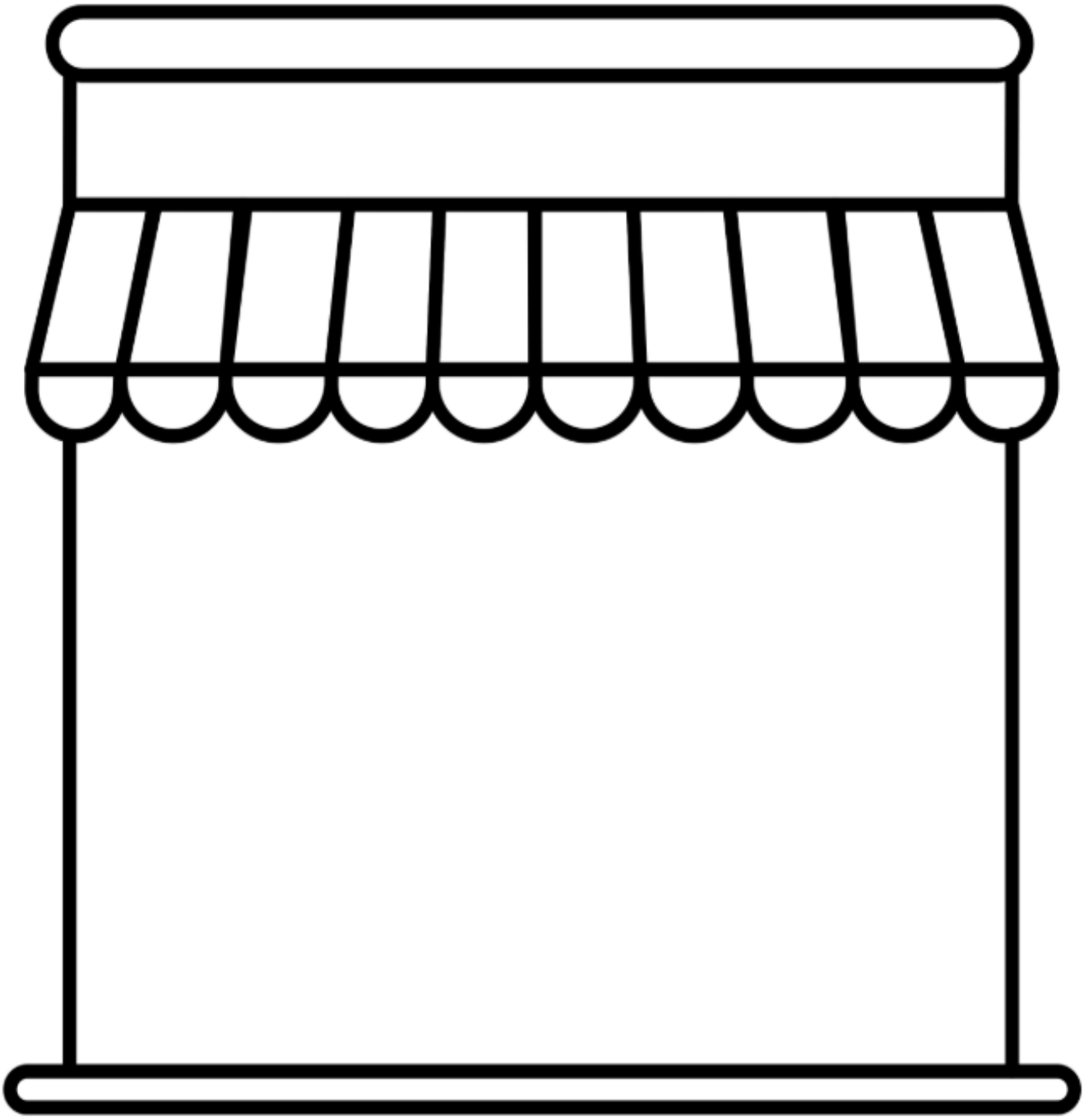
The Swallow
By Stuart Langley

Following the demolition of the Swallow Hotel, its iconic neon sign was salvaged and has been turned into a sculptural piece that honours Stockton's past while imagining its future.

The swallow served as a beacon on Stockton's skyline for over fifty years and so it was decided to save this piece of local history and to turn it into an artwork that could be displayed at the museum until December 2026.

Design your own shop Window

Either draw or cut and stick pictures to create your own shop window display! Your shop can sell whatever you choose, the display might even be seasonal.



All images used in this pack are courtesy of: Preston Park Museum

You can find all our Talking Tees Valley packs through the Tees Valley Museums website under 'Latest News' or here: https://teesvalleymuseums.org/news/

If you would like to share your stories or contact us about the packs please e-mail teesvalleymuseums@stockton.gov.uk