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Zara (originally Boots the Chemist), 2-10 Pelham Street and 2 High Street, Nottingham: Research and Investigation

Kathryn A. Morrison

Discovery, Innovation and Science in the Historic Environment



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Summary

The impressive store occupying the corner of Pelham Street and High Street in Nottingham, currently occupied by the fashion retailer Zara, was built by Boots the Chemist in 1902-05. As the company's Central Depot – or flagship store in modern parlance – it superseded a smaller building erected at 2-10 Pelham Street in 1892. This predecessor was allegedly designed by Jesse Boot himself, though the architects were named on plans as Heazell & Son.

The rebuilding of Boots' Central Depot in 1902-05 was necessitated by the demolition of adjoining High Street buildings for street widening. The architect was Albert Nelson Bromley of Nottingham, who had undertaken commissions for Boots since the mid-1890s. The building has a fine art nouveau style shopfront, perhaps inspired by Harrods, and a glazed terracotta superstructure with a clock and cupola on the north-west corner. Part of the internal galleried light well of the 1892 store was retained, and several of its cast-iron columns and capitals can be still seen inside Zara. Otherwise, few internal features of the 1892 and 1902-05 stores have survived.

After 1920 the premises were enlarged to the south following the demolition of an adjoining shop. The façade of the extension was executed in a style matching the 1902-05 building, but the goods entrance and sanitary facilities were reconfigured.

Boots vacated the site in 1972. It has subsequently passed through several hands and undergone internal alterations.

Boots' Pelham Street store is significant, not just as a particularly fine example of retail architecture in Nottingham, but as a key step in the development of one of the most successful national multiples in the United Kingdom. Pelham Street, perhaps more than any other Boots store, shows how the company introduced its working-class customers to a retail environment hitherto associated with the middle-class shopping experience. The listing status of the building was upgraded from Grade II to Grade II* in September 2018.

Contributors

The building was visited by Kathryn A. Morrison (Historic Places Investigation East) with Luke Wormald (Listing Team) as part of Historic England's Nottingham Heritage Action Zone initiative. The report was written and researched by Kathryn A. Morrison. It was desktop published by Rachel Forbes.

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Archive location

Historic England Archive, The Engine House, Fire Fly Avenue, Swindon, SN2 2EH.

Date of investigation

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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Jesse Boot (1850–1931) took control of his parents' business, as herbalists or medical botanists on Goosegate in Nottingham, in the 1870s.¹ By selling patent medicines for cash and expanding the range of his stock he made a great success of the enterprise. In 1881–83 he rebuilt the shop at 16 Goosegate (fig 1) with an eye-catching two-storey cast-iron shopfront (architect R. C. Sutton; listed Grade II).² The business became Boot & Co. Ltd. at this time.

After his mother's death in 1885, Boot holidayed in the Channel Islands and met Florence Annie Rowe, who became his wife. Florence's father was a bookseller and stationer, and her knowledge of these fields of retailing encouraged Boot to diversify. She exercised a strong influence on the future development of the business, fostering an 'artistic' approach as well as introducing new lines of merchandise and Boots' Booklovers' Libraries.

Boot had opened his first successful branch shop in 1884, but it was in 1888 – when The Boots Pure Drug Co. was formed to finance expansion – that the chain began to expand in earnest. There were about 60 branch shops in 1896 and 250 by 1900.



Fig 1. Jesse Boot's shop at 16 Goosegate, Nottingham, photographed in 1999. Erected in 1881–83, this pre-dated the creation of a house style for the company's shops. (© Historic England Archive AA99/08297)

THE PELHAM STREET ‘CENTRAL DEPOT’ OF 1892

Boots erected a new Central Depot at 2-10 Pelham Street, Nottingham, in 1892, superseding the Goosegate premises as the chain’s premier store. Old structures on the site were extensively rebuilt between March and October 1892.

Nos 2-10 Pelham Street was supposedly ‘specially built from the designs of the managing director’.³ In other words, it was designed by Jesse Boot himself. Drawings reveal that the job architects were Heazell & Son (a local practice comprising William Arthur Heazell and his son Edward Henry Heazell) and the builder was H. Woodsend.⁴ Boots did not yet have an in-house architect, but since 1883 the company had undertaken its own shopfitting in workshops on Island Street, Nottingham, in a department headed by W. Fawcett.⁵ There was also, from 1884, a separate building department which managed contracts for new branches.

A photograph published in a book issued for Boots’ shareholders in 1896 offers a glimpse of the upper elevation of the Pelham Street shop, showing that it had conventional sash windows (fig 2).⁶ The window surrounds and end pilasters may have been executed in glazed terracotta. The double-fronted shopfront had a central entrance lobby flanked by deeply curved display windows. The high transom lights, typical of chemists’ shops, were emblazoned with the word ‘Boots’ – the signature logo known as ‘The Boots Scroll’, which was repeated on the lobby floor. Over the door, the transom light (or overlight) contained an oval connected to the frame by short glazing bars to top, bottom and sides. This pattern was repeated on the soffit, which was fitted with mirror glass. The shopfront installed in Boots’ rebuilt Pelham Street store in 1905 was closely based on this design, albeit translated into a fashionable art nouveau style (see below and figs 17-18).



Fig 2. Exterior of Boots, Pelham Street, 1896 (The Boots Archive, WBA/BT/11/15/1/2))

The architects' drawings for 2-10 Pelham Street, dated March 1892, show rows of cast-iron columns which supported galleries under a rectangular glass-roofed light well, with the main stairs to the rear.⁷ The storeroom was arranged around the gallery at second-floor level. A photograph of the interior (fig 3), included in the book issued for shareholders in 1896, shows the light well with its cast-iron columns and foliate capitals, and the bottom of the elegant timber staircase.⁸ The inside of the shop entrance, with its distinctive overlight, is also visible.



Fig 3. Interior of Boots, Pelham Street, 1896. (The Boots Archive, WBA/BT/11/15/1/4)

On the ground floor were the dispensary and departments for stationery, perfumery, toiletries, druggists' sundries and books. Pictures, fancy goods and other lines developed by Boot's wife, Florence, were arranged around the gallery on the first floor. The *Nottingham Daily Express* sent a reporter to visit the newly-opened shop in October 1892:

For the stationery, book-selling, and fancy departments, the choice of colours is a happy one, a bright light blue . . . blended with an equally successful selection of lighter and darker shades . . . The whole is a striking contrast with the usual time-honoured black and gold fittings of stationers' shops. The chemists' section is wholly fitted up with mahogany inlaid carved butternut, giving an ivory-like appearance . . . Immediately you enter, and wherever you go, you are under a flood of natural light streaming through the roof.⁹

Advertisements boldly claimed that this was 'the most handsome and unique shop of the kind in England',¹⁰ and it was probably true that no other chemists were

departmentalising in quite the same way at this time, with trading spread over more than one floor.

The only visible evidence of the 1892 shop inside the present-day building is a row of four columns, complete with foliate capitals, on the ground and first floors. The design of the capitals (fig 4) is slightly different on each floor. In 1902-05 the columns were retained *in situ* as part of an enlarged light well. This was subsequently floored over.

A house style for Boots' façades was established just a few years after the completion of Pelham Street, around 1895, by the Nottingham architect Albert Nelson Bromley (1850-1934).¹¹ This involved extensive use of terracotta in an eclectic Renaissance Revival or neo-Jacobean style. Surviving stores of this type from the mid-to-late 1890s include Liverpool (1896, fig 5), Burton-on-Trent (1897), Bedford (1898) and Grantham (1899, fig 6). Architecturally, these buildings can be regarded as precursors of the much larger and grander Pelham Street store of 1902-05.

Bromley's neo-Jacobean terracotta fronts continued to be produced for Boots until around 1915, but from around 1903 they co-existed with an alternative house style handled by the in-house architect M. V. Treleaven (1850-1934), involving elaborate half-timbered fronts in a medieval style.¹²



Fig 4. A cast-iron capital surviving from the first-floor gallery of Boots' 1892 shop. The ground-floor capitals (shown in figs 3 and 19) are of slightly different design. (© Historic England, K. Morrison)



Fig 5. Former Boots, London Road, Liverpool, built in 1896 and photographed in 2017. (© K. Morrison)



Fig 6. Former Boots, High Street, Grantham, built in 1899 and photographed in 2017.
(© K. Morrison)

THE PELHAM STREET AND HIGH STREET STORE OF 1902-05

Buildings fronting Nottingham's narrow High Street, adjoining Boots' Pelham Street shop, were earmarked for demolition in 1902 as part of Nottingham Corporation's street-widening scheme. The Corporation had purchased these buildings some time before, in advance of a Bill passed by Parliament in 1900. Boots' shop was still relatively new, but the fate of its neighbours made rebuilding unavoidable. In reports of the 1904 Annual General Meeting this was described as 'enforced' and the disruption to trade was noted.¹³

Surviving architect's drawings were signed by A. N. Bromley and dated 4 March 1903 (figs 7-9).¹⁴ They reveal that the building was designed for Webster's Trustees rather than Boots. It was probably held by the retailer on a long-term leasehold basis.

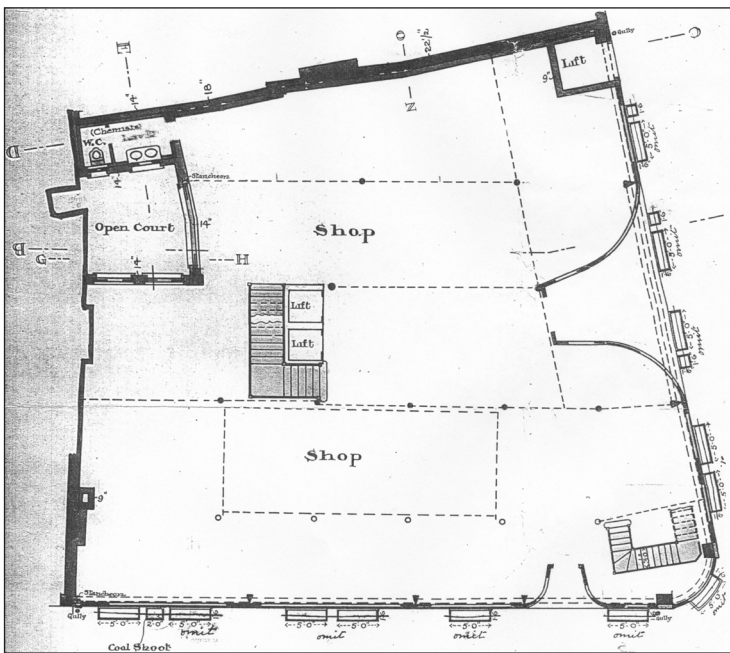


Fig 7. Ground-floor plan, signed by A. N. Bromley. (Inspire Nottinghamshire Archives CA/PL/2/2394, High Street, 4 March 1903).

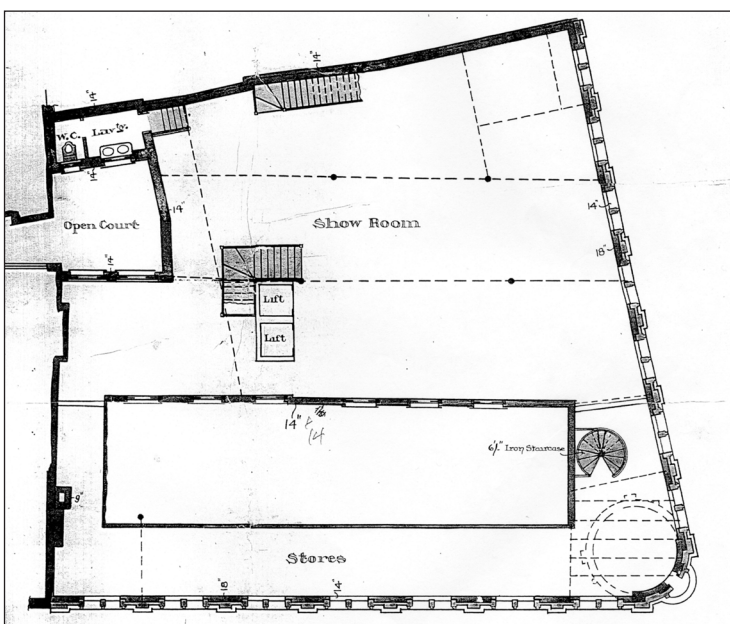


Fig 8. Second-floor plan, signed by A. N. Bromley. (Inspire Nottinghamshire Archives CA/PL/2/2394, High Street, 4 March 1903).

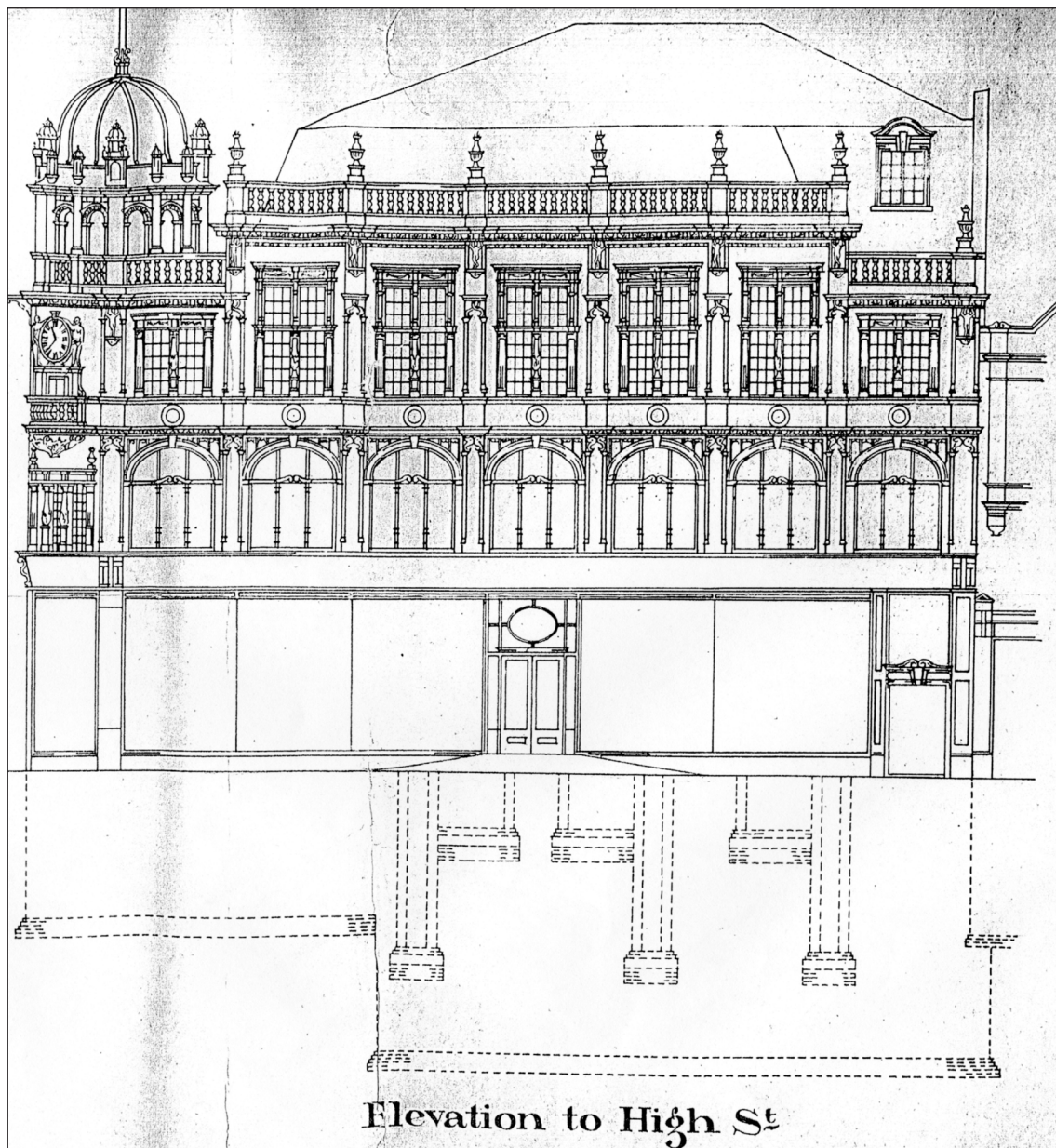


Fig 9. Elevation to High Street, signed by A. N. Bromley. (Inspire Nottinghamshire Archives CA/PL/2/2394, High Street, 4 March 1903).

The new enlarged store – still referred to by Boots as ‘Pelham Street’, though now fronting High Street – was clearly designed as early as 1902, which is the date of a perspective of the proposed building signed by Bromley (fig 10).¹⁵ A similar view was reproduced in Boots’ ‘scribbling diaries’ of 1905, depicting branches as they existed in July 1904 (fig 11).¹⁶ These two views differ from the completed building (fig 12) in several respects, showing that the design underwent revisions. In particular, the gabled dormers shown over the seventh bay of each elevation were omitted and extra height was added to the central bays facing the High Street. Furthermore, these views do not show the art nouveau shopfront, but indicate designs more akin to that of 1892 (see fig 2). By the time the store opened in December 1905 a new perspective had been prepared, including the art nouveau shopfront and the adjusted upper-floor design (fig 13).¹⁷



Fig 10. Architect's view of the proposed new Boots store on Pelham Street and High Street, dated 1902 and signed by A. N. Bromley. (The Boots Archive, WBA/BT/27/39/2/5/88)

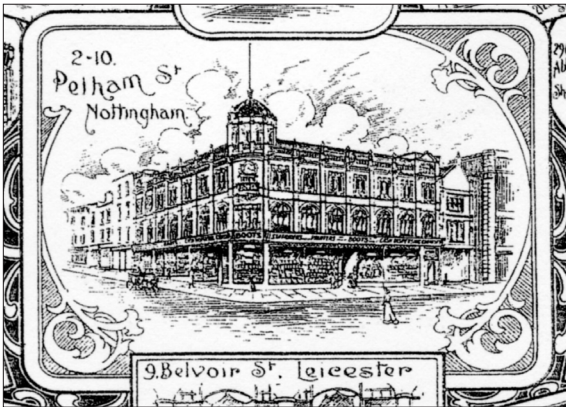


Fig 11 (left). View of the new Pelham Street store published in Boots' 'Scribbling Diary' of 1905 (The Boots Archive, WBA/BT/16/8/43/6)

Fig 12 (below). General view of the Pelham Street store. (© Historic England, Pat Payne)





Fig 13. A view of Boots' new building published in Nottingham Daily Express, 9 December 1905, 1. (Newspaper image. © The British Library Board. All rights reserved. With thanks to The British Newspaper Archive, www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/).

The views of 1902, 1904 and 1905, plus the architectural drawings submitted for building approval in 1903, reveal that the new building originally had just seven bays to the High Street: a gabled building adjoined it to the south.¹⁸ This was 4 High Street – also rebuilt in 1902 as part of the street-widening scheme – which was occupied by Henry Farmer & Co, music and instrument dealers, until 1920 (see below). On the south side of Farmer's was High Street Place, and beyond that stood the grocery shop of one of Jesse Boot's associates, S. F. Armitage.¹⁹

The architectural treatment of the 1902-05 building can be compared with that of other Boots' stores of this period. The terracotta (fig 14) may have been Doulton's Carraraware, which was specified for Boots' branch in Southend in 1915.²⁰ Some of the motifs had appeared on Boots' façades of the 1890s: for example, cross-light windows with terracotta mullions and transoms at Liverpool (1896) and Grantham (1899), and paired dolphins at Bedford (1898; compare figs 15 and 16). But the Pelham Street store of 1902-05 represents the maturity of this style and is the fully-fledged version that was thenceforth rolled out across the chain.



Fig 14. Decorative glazed terracotta around Boots' clock face on the corner of Pelham Street and High Street. (© Historic England, K. Morrison)



Fig 15 (left). Dolphin motif on Pelham Street elevation (compare with fig 13). (© Historic England, K. Morrison)



Fig 16 (right). Dolphin motif on Boots, Bedford, 1898 (compare with fig 12). (© K. Morrison)

This appears to have been the first example of Boots' art nouveau shopfront (figs 17-18), which was replicated at various branches in subsequent years though no other examples have survived.²¹ The curved glass and mirrored soffit invite comparison with Boots' earlier shopfront of 1892 (see above, fig 2), which was clearly the starting point for the design. However, the introduction of curvilinear glazing bars brought the old approach up to date. The art nouveau glazing pattern resembled that used in the transom lights of the ground-floor shopfront and first-floor show windows of Harrods' terracotta frontage on Brompton Road in West London.²² This was erected between 1900 and 1905 and may have exerted a direct influence on Boots. The principal shopfitter involved at Harrods was Frederick Sage & Co. of Gray's Inn Road, London. According to a centenary history of Sage & Co.: 'For five full years, the House of Sage devoted almost the whole of its resources to Harrods and thereby consolidated its reputation as the first name among shopfitters.'²³ Nevertheless, Sage did find time to work elsewhere during this period, introducing aspects of Harrods style to several provincial towns. In 1903, for example, Sage designed a shopfront – very like Boots – for Baird, a boot and shoe retailer at 11 Regent Street, Great Yarmouth.²⁴ It is possible that Sage was also responsible for designing Boots' shopfront in Nottingham in 1904-05.²⁵ Subsequent iterations could have been produced by Boots' own shopfitting department.

A full-page advertisement published when the store opened in December 1905 included a tour of the establishment.²⁶ From this and the 1903 plans it is possible to reconstruct the original layout of the interior.



Fig 17. Detail of main entrance, High Street. (© Historic England; K. Morrison)



Fig 18. Detail of main entrance, with mirrored soffit, High Street. (© Historic England, K. Morrison)

Medicines, toiletries, stationery and books (as in 1892) were sold in the shop on the ground floor, where there was also a printing department. The plans show a rectangular galleried light well respecting Pelham Street, rising through three floors. This was partially retained from the old shop (see fig 3), but enlarged, with the result that the columns and capitals differed from north to south. The columns used in 1902-05 were thicker than those of 1898, with moulded rather than foliate capitals (fig 19). They incorporate cast marks which probably aided assembly (for example, numbered with a 'D' prefix on the first floor and a 'C' prefix on the ground floor), though many of these marks have been erased.



Fig 19. Interior of ground floor of Zara: the columns and capitals which once carried the 1892 gallery (see fig 2) are on the left; those on the right were added in 1902-05. (© Historic England, K. Morrison)

Two electric lifts by the main stairs to the rear of the light well were furnished with seats and conveyed customers up to a picture gallery, or art gallery, on the first floor.²⁷ Here one could also order photographic enlargements. An additional customer stair occupied the corner of Pelham Street and High Street and led to an iron spiral stair connected to the upper galleries. All of these lifts and stairs have been removed.

On the second floor were the silver and leather departments and the Boots' Booklovers' Library. Storerooms occupied the Pelham Street side of the second floor, and the third floor (or attic; it was ceiled at collar level) over the High Street wing. The Pelham Café in the basement served cakes made on the premises. Also in the basement was a gentlemen's smoking room, of which no trace remains. The coal chute survives in the sub-basement heating chamber in the north-east corner of the building. The remainder of the sub-basement was used as stores, as it is today. A single water closet and lavatory for staff projected into a small yard or court to the rear on the ground, first and second floors, an arrangement remodelled in the 1920s. In the basement, however, the arrangement was slightly different, with the provision of separate ladies' and gentlemen's water closets or urinals, no doubt for customers patronising the café.

Internally, very little remains of the 1902-05 building other than the structural columns, including those which formed the light well. Gaps in the modern suspended ceilings offer tantalising glimpses of cornices, suggesting that some plaster ceilings are intact. Similarly, few of the surviving leaded windows (fig 20) can be viewed from the interior. They have been enclosed to maintain a neat appearance from the street. It is not known who produced decorative glass for Boots' branches,

but an account of the Gloucester store of 1914 mentioned that its glass was made by 'Mr Bonner of London'.²⁸

This building was influential within the Boots chain, as the largest store to date in Bromley's established neo-Jacobean style. The earlier Leeds store may have set a precedent in terms of scale, but it formed part of Matcham's County Arcade rather than being designed by and for Boots, and so sits outside the architectural development of the chain and the evolution of its distinctive house style. The Pelham Street store of 1902-05 was more-or-less replicated in a number of towns, notably in Sheffield and Birmingham in 1906-07, but it remained influential as late as 1915, for example at Southend.

Throughout this pre-war period, several important Boots stores were built in Treleven's alternative house style, with half-timbered façades in medieval fashion. After the Great War Bromley remained associated with the company but switched to a completely different neo-classical idiom. This was undoubtedly affected by his experience of designing monumental banks, but also reflected Boots' wish to cultivate a different image following Jesse Boot's retirement in 1920.



Fig 20. Detail of Pelham Street elevation, with decorative terracotta and glazing. (© Historic England, K. Morrison)

THE PELHAM STREET STORE AFTER 1905

Farmer's music shop at 4 High Street, next-door to Boots, had relocated to 57 Long Row by November 1920.²⁹ In 1921 Boots Systems Department established 'temporary showrooms' in Farmer's old premises.³⁰ Boots must subsequently have rebuilt 4 High Street in the style of the 1902-05 store, perhaps under Bromley's guidance.

The demolition of Farmer's old shop allowed Boots to extend their store by one and a half bays to the south. This was carried out with considerable skill. The building break is not evident in the façade but the glazed terracotta in the added bays has two different finishes: a matt finish matching the 1902-05 building, and tiles with a higher sheen which may have been made-to-match in the 1920s (fig 21). At the same time, the seventh bay of the 1902-05 store was remodelled: heightened in line with the bays to its north (left) and given a new customer entrance with a curved display window.



Fig 21. The south-west corner of Boots' building, which was added in the 1920s. (© Historic England, K. Morrison)

On High Street Place, just the two bays closest to the High Street – those most visible to passing pedestrians – were faced with terracotta. The remainder of this elevation was finished in red brick. Two of the windows contain leaded glass – one with Boots' Gothic-style 'B' monogram – which may have been reset. The Gothic-style 'B' monogram also features at the top of the rounded south-west corner of the building (fig 22).



Fig 22. Detail of terracotta decoration with 'B' monogram on south-west corner of Boots' building. (© Historic England, K. Morrison)

The main impact of the 1920s extension was to remove Boots' goods entrance from the High Street frontage. The old goods lift was removed, and a new one constructed within the open court to the rear. This was built in pale Fletton-type bricks. On each floor the old water closets were removed to create a lobby directly in front of the lift, with that on the ground floor corresponding to a new goods entrance. New water closets were erected to the south of the old ones on the upper floors. These are still in use, as is the 1920s back stair, which has wrought-iron stick balusters, including some which are waved (fig 23).

It is likely that Boots' shopfront was adjusted and the open gallery floored in the mid-20th century. Boots closed its Pelham Street store on 11 May 1972 and opened a new outlet in the Victoria Centre.³¹ The building was 'restored' in 1974 (and so some of the shopfront may be replica). At one point the southernmost bay, representing the 1920s extension, was partitioned off as a separate retail unit, but that alteration has been reversed.



Fig 23. The back stair of the 1920s extension. (© Historic England, K. Morrison)

CONCLUSION

Boots' store on the corner of Pelham Street and High Street in Nottingham represents a key stage in the development of this important national retail chain. Built close to the shop on Goosegate where the Boots story began, it reflects the ambition of the founder, Jesse Boot, who had been adding new departments to his shops for some time and building branch stores on an increasingly large scale. The surviving elements of the galleried light well of the previous store on the site are tangible evidence that Boots was emulating large, middle-class (or even upper-class) stores as early as 1892, whilst still targeting a more lowly clientele.

The choice of materials (especially glazed terracotta) and the style of the art nouveau shopfront suggest that Boots, and the architect A. N. Bromley, sought inspiration from the new Harrods store in Knightsbridge, London. The shopfront, in particular, appears to have been a last minute adjustment to the design, possibly involving Harrods' shopfitters, Sage & Co. Harrods had expanded from a grocery store into a large emporium – what would later be called a department store – and Jesse Boot may have drawn parallels with his own business. The key difference, of course, is that Boot was a multiple retailer for the working classes, while Harrods provided a single store for the well-to-do. Nevertheless, the architectural parallels with Harrods are suggestive of Boot's attitude.

It is well documented that Boot was personally interested in architecture, and his company seems to have spent more on the presentation of its stores than any other contemporary multiple retailer. The Pelham Street store is clad in high quality glazed terracotta, the windows contained decorative leaded glass, and the corner is marked by a clock beneath a cupola. This elaborate and expensive approach was repeated at subsequent locations, such as Sheffield and Birmingham. With these buildings – and their internal luxuries, such as electric lifts and cafés with lavatories and smoking rooms – it might be argued that Boots was opening up the delights of the middle-class shopping experience to the working classes.

ENDNOTES

1. For general background see Stanley Chapman, *Jesse Boot of Boots the Chemists. A Study in Business History*, London, 1974; Kathryn A. Morrison, *English Shops & Shopping*, YUP, New Haven and London, 2003, 209-215.
2. Morrison 2003, 209; Chapman 1974, 42; Inspire Nottinghamshire Archives, CA/PL/2/434 (Goosegate, 12 October 1881), 470 (Goosegate, 21 December 1881); 542 (Goosegate, 1 March 1882) and 944 (rear offices, Goosegate; 22 November 1882).
3. *Nottingham Evening Post*, 19 August 1892, 4
4. Inspire Nottinghamshire Archives, CA/PL/2/406 (Pelham Street, 16 March 1892).
5. Chapman 1974, 66 and 74; Morrison 2003, 209-215.
6. The Boots Archive WBA/BT/11/15/1/2.
7. Inspire Nottinghamshire Archives, CA/PL/2/406 (Pelham Street, 16 March 1892).
8. The Boots Archive WBA/BT/11/15/1/4.
9. Quoted in Chapman 1974, 80.
10. *Nottingham Evening Post*, 11 October 1892, 1.
11. A. N. Bromley's first work for Boots may have been located on the manufacturing site on Island Street, Nottingham, in 1895. For more on Bromley see: Ken Brand 'Albert Nelson Bromley', *Nottingham Civic Society Newsletter*, no. 77, September 1988, 2-9 and no. 78, January 1989, 14-18; <https://buildingourpast.com/2017/04/08/boots-architects-1-albert-nelson-bromley> (accessed 1 November 2018).
12. Morrison 2003, 214-215; <https://buildingourpast.com/2017/04/08/boots-architects-2-michael-vyne-treleaven> (accessed 1 November 2018).
13. *Nottingham Evening Post*, 19 November 1904, 6.
14. Inspire Nottinghamshire Archives, CA/PL/2/2394 (High Street, 4 March 1903).
15. The Boots Archive WBA/BT/27/39/2/5/88; Stanley Chapman, 'Eighty Years On', *Boots News*, 17 May 1972, 3.
16. The Boots Archive WBA/BT/16/8/43/6.

17. *Nottingham Daily Express*, 9 December 1905, 1.
18. Inspire Nottinghamshire Archives, CA/PL/2/2394 (High Street, 4 March 1903).
19. Wright's *Directory* 1915, 87.
20. *Architectural Review*, 1915, np, advertisement.
21. Other examples included Boots' branches in Lytham St Annes, Buxton, Southampton, Manchester, Walsall and Moorfields, London (Morrison 2003, 214, n.82). Shopfronts in Cambridge, Scarborough and elsewhere were similar in character.
22. Morrison 2003, 165.
23. Deryck Abel, *The House of Sage 1860-1960: A Century of Achievement*, London, 1960, 19.
24. *Yarmouth Independent*, 13 June 1903, 5.
25. Sage also designed Woolworth's first English shopfronts in 1909 (Kathryn A. Morrison, *Woolworth's 100 Years on the High Street*, Historic England, Swindon, 2015, 7).
26. *Nottingham Daily Express*, 9 December 1905, 1.
27. An 'American elevator' (operated by hydraulic power) had been installed in Boots' Goosegate store in 1888 (*Nottingham Journal*, 21 December 1888, 2). According to Chapman, working-class customers refused to use it (Chapman 1974, 72).
28. *Gloucestershire Chronicle*, 9 May 1914, 9.
29. *Nottingham Evening Post*, 2 November 1920, 4.
30. *Nottingham Journal*, 3 May 1921, 6.
31. Chapman 1972, 3.



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