

History

There has been a building on this site since 1899. The building was originally the Cooperative Wholesale Society (CWS) warehouse for the North East.

It was designed by Newcastle architects Oliver & Lesson. It was described as “a striking symbol of commercial success” because of its size and imposing architecture.



It was a big company and stock was delivered from here to 115 CWS branches across the region, as far as Scarborough and Teesside. There were departments distributing groceries, clothes, shoes, furniture and stationery. In the building there was also a large banqueting hall, offices and a bank.

The CWS was one of the largest and reputable employers on Tyneside. Even during the First World War the men who enlisted in the armed services were still paid by the CWS and their jobs were kept open for them when they returned.

In the 1960s the number of shops declined in the area and the building became underused and it was decided to close it down in 1972. Tyne and Wear Metropolitan Borough Council then took over the building and in 1978 Tyne and Wear Archives was opened. In the 1980s the collections from the Municipal Museum of Science and Industry in Exhibition Park were moved over. In 1993 the museum was relaunched as Discovery Museum. This was followed by a major £13 million redevelopment in 1994 that saw Turbinia being transported through the streets of Newcastle from her previous home in Exhibition Park to the Discovery Museum.



Goods

CWS sold products from soap to pickled onions, however Pelaw Polish was one of CWS's most popular products. It became a household name and millions of tins were sold every year. The polish was produced at the CWS manufacturing site in Pelaw. Between 1891 and 1901 the Co-operative Wholesale Society's Boot and Shoe Department sold 250,000 pairs of shoes including 96,000 pairs of pit boots!

Loading bay - Now the ground floor area around Turbinia

The warehouse was built around a large yard known as the loading bay. Pulleys were used to bring goods down to yard from the various floors of the warehouse. The loading bay was covered with a glass roof, allowing work to continue in all weathers.

One day a week, buyers from the local Co-op shops would visit the Warehouse to select the goods they needed. Finished goods were distributed to the Co-op shops by horse drawn wagons called rollies.



Bacon room - Now the Ground Floor People's gallery



There was a Bacon Room on the ground floor of Blandford House. Co-op butchers boned, washed and rolled the ham. Oak burning stoves were used to smoke the meat. 'Bill Pickard, Co-op employee in 1963 describes the room *'The bacon room was cold. There, hung on hooks, were all the half-pigs and sides of bacon.'*

There was also a butter cellar in Blandford House. Butter arrived on the Quayside in kegs and was distributed to the local Co-op shops from Blandford House.

General office - Now the Story of the Tyne gallery

Over one hundred clerks worked in the General Office at Blandford House. The Clerks processed orders and sent out invoices as goods were sent off.

Money was stored in a large safe at the front of the office. The safe still exists today and is used as a museum store! There was also a committee room and telephone exchange on the first floor of the building.



The Directors Suite - Now the Archives

In the 1920s and 1930s a Directors Suite, comprising of committee rooms and a dining area, was created on the ground floor of the building in the Art Deco style of the period.

The suite was decorated with plaster mouldings, walnut panelling and chrome light fittings. These extravagant alternations suggest that the CWS was prospering in this period. CWS Directors even had chauffer driven cars!



The Great Hall - Now used for private functions and museum events



Blandford Street Dining Hall, Newcastle-on-Tyne, KITCHENER'S RECRUITS.

The Great Hall was used as a dining area for CWS employees. Dinners and teas were provided daily and dishes were handed to the waitresses over the bar and cooked in the kitchen beyond. Tables were set with white napkins, glasses and cutlery.

The hall also provided a venue for the Manager's quarterly meetings. When a meeting was in progress the huge curtain in the centre of the room was closed, separating the dining space. The CWS had an Operatic and Dramatic Society and there were often plays and concerts in the Great Hall.

Wet room - Now a storage area on the 5th floor

A variety of pickles (onion and beetroot) were produced in the Wet Room on the upper floor of Blandford House.

Women were employed to peel onions and prepare vegetables. The pickling process involved adding vegetables to glass bottles filled with vinegar. Each bottle was then sealed with hot wax.

