

Issue 35.3 – January 2026

PREMIER CONSTRUCTION



6 Seattle Aquarium Ocean Pavilion

THE GRADEL QUADRANGLES AT NEW COLLEGE





SHOEMAKERS MUSEUM

A fascinating brand-new visitor destination celebrating 200 years of Clarks shoemaking, the **Shoemakers Museum** offers an exploration of the cultural stories behind the world famous brand and is located in Street where the company was first formed.



The ambitious project was initiated in 2022 by the Alfred Gillett Trust - the charitable organisation set up to safeguard and preserve the collection and archives associated with the Clark family and C & J Clark Ltd.

The project was conceived the aim of creating a destination attraction whose opening would coincide with the bicentenary of Clarks and tell the story of the company's Quaker founding brothers Cyrus and James Clark, as well as highlighting the ongoing relationship between the company, the village and its people.

Shoemakers Museum also recounts the rich industrial history of shoemaking itself, displaying for the first time many of the amazing archive artefacts held by the company which illustrate the manufacturing and global retail/marketing story behind the Clarks brand, which helped shape how Britain - and the world - walks. Additional facilities at the museum include an open-air events space, a schools' education room, a research and study library, and a café.

Designed by Purcell Architects, the Shoemakers Museum is rooted in place through locally quarried stone and

enriched with references to Clarks' design language - blending history, craftsmanship and innovation - to set a new benchmark for sustainable cultural buildings in the UK.

Purcell's striking double-height contemporary extension houses the permanent exhibition and seamlessly connects to The Grange; a Grade II listed 16th-century manor house long associated with shoemaking. The wider site also includes a 17th-century barn and a beautiful garden with a walled orchard, creating a rich and layered setting that ties the museum to its heritage, while offering a vibrant new cultural destination. »

“Nissen Richards Studio responded to the brief to create a colourful, highly graphic and vibrant exhibition environment through the imaginative communication of stories and immersive experiences which speak engagingly to many different audiences.



The permanent exhibition and graphic design, wayfinding and shop design for the new museum were created by Nissen Richards Studio, who also wrote the exhibition text, working in close collaboration with the museum's curatorial team. Nissen Richards Studio responded to the brief to create a colourful, highly graphic and vibrant exhibition environment through the imaginative communication of stories and immersive experiences which speak engagingly to many different audiences.

Visitors can explore the evolution of Clarks from a homegrown Quaker business into a global fashion brand, whose iconic shoes have been and are worn by just about everyone -

including legions of children setting off for the new school year. The museum is a celebration of shoemaking and street style, retail rituals and advertising design - all rooted in one extraordinary Somerset village.

Visitors arrive at Shoemakers Museum into a dramatic double-height space, with their journey starting in the Arrival area before moving through three main exhibition spaces: Welcome to Street / Making Gallery / Buying and Selling. The Arrival area instantly offers visitors two immediate 'wow' moments. The first is a wall display featuring neon shoe outlines and the second a bespoke welcome desk clad in vegan leather and featuring

embroidered shoe outlines.

Welcome to Street, the first part of the exhibition, focuses on the village itself, the Clark brothers and the importance of the people of Street to the history of Clarks. A full-wall depiction of Street and its rural context, which takes the form of a 3D-abstracted wall, also spans both the ground and first floors of the exhibition space and shows the village's schools, factories, Quaker meeting houses, workers' housing and distribution centres, along with showcases and interpretation.

The ancient and iconic Glastonbury Tor sits at the top of the installation. The scene is set at night, time, with a number

of buildings lit up to appear inhabited. An interactive element demonstrates how excess energy from the factories was once used to power the town's streetlights.

The second major section is called the Making Gallery and explains the production processes of shoemaking. The design inspiration here was to create an abstracted factory feel within the section's large and open space, punctuated by a soundscape made up of real factory sounds. Within that is a secondary idea of a conveyor belt, with the sequential arrangement of objects alluding to this. This is an AV-intensive space centred around two 'island' displays, with interactive displays all around the

perimeter, telling the story of hundreds of years of evolving shoemaking processes.

Visitors then move upstairs to the third section of the display, 'Selling and Buying', where the focus is about celebrating the product. The design feel changes with that transition to reflect a more highly polished, public-facing environment. The space plan was fragmented in this section to create a series of scaled and intimate spaces.

The heart of this gallery is Clarks shoes through time, starting with marketing and advertising illustrated by point-of-sale pieces from the historical archive in a large wall-hung display.

A middle section celebrates the design

of the shoes themselves, with a two-wall display inspired by shoeboxes and examples of shoes displayed against an almost-black background. Two partial shop re-creations from the 1950s and 80s follow.

The 50s shop environment features seats in the shapes of drums and graphic wallpaper, whilst the 80s shop is highly graphic and features large-scale geometric shapes. A back-to-school area with a large wall hang sits between the two shops and features a number of child-friendly interactives.

A feedback area is located directly before the end of the shoe story, where visitors can design the colouring for a shoe or provide a memory of working for Clarks. ■