

# Thomas Coats Memorial Baptist Church, Paisley, Scotland

(Information courtesy of church website)



The Church has been part of the Paisley sky-line for over a 100 years. The spiritual home of a broad-based congregation in the Baptist tradition, the Church is primarily a place of worship, prayer, music and the preaching of the gospel. As such it offers a welcome to all who come through its great oak doors. The beauty of the building speaks its own silent message. There is the intricate beauty of the wood carvings and the spaciousness and symmetry of the sanctuary with its vaulted roof and cruciform shape. Marble, alabaster and mosaics abound. The building, in red sandstone, is Gothic in design, topped with a crown spire rising to more than 60 metres above ground-level.

The building today is used not only for worship, but a myriad of services and events ranging from concerts in the church or hall to the examinations and graduation of the University of the West of Scotland. The church is also home to the famous [Thomas Coats Memorial Choral Society](#), with their annual concert during Lent being one of the highlights of the year with the building often filled to capacity.

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## The Coats Family and Thomas Coats



Thomas Coats was a devout member of the Baptist Church and a successful industrialist whose working life almost mirrored the reign of Queen Victoria. Within the family firm, J & P Coats (his two elder brothers) he was a key figure in the expansion of the company not just in Paisley where it had been founded in 1828 but also in Europe and in North and South America. By 1910 around 10,000 people worked in the thread mills in Paisley which required 400 tons of coal per day to keep the machinery running.

In common with many other members of the family Thomas was a philanthropist. The breadth of his concern reflected the way in which the

Coats family used their resources and their position to improve the amenities available to the population of Paisley and its environs. As well as expanding their textile business - well into the 20th century - they were committed to the improvement of public education and health and what we might now refer to as the living environment of the citizenry of 19th century Paisley. Underpinning this was a Christian faith which kept the family at the heart of the religious life of the town.

The Coats legacy is still to be found throughout the town with the Thomas Coats Memorial Church, which dominates the Paisley skyline, being the most obvious example. The Memorial building was built after his death in 1883 on the commission of his wife and children. Gothic in design and built with warm red sandstone the base is cruciform under a superb vaulted roof and has a seating capacity of around 1000. Rising above the church is a magnificent crown tower and spire.

The wider Coats family contributed to the construction and renovation of three other churches including Paisley Abbey. The former main hospital for Paisley, the Royal Alexandra Infirmary, owed much of its provision to Peter Coats. Though much of the industrial presence has now gone from the town there are still echoes to be found of Paisley's textile past. Where else might you find an interwoven pattern of streets called Cotton, Silk, Lawn, Thread, Mill and Incle.



*Inside the Nave*

## Architecture



There can be few 19th century buildings more stimulating and exciting, or more worthy of sensitive restoration than Thomas Coats Memorial Church. The attention to detail throughout the building is astonishing and the quality of craftsmanship astounding.

Imagine the sense of anticipation felt by the congregation when the "cathedral" was first opened in 1894. A revival of Gothic architecture on the grandest scale, the building, designed by Hippolyte Blanc, can seat a thousand people. The floor of the vestibule is a magnificent mosaic. There are marble drinking fountains at each end and a ceiling of stone ribbed cross vaults with gilded scrolls bearing quotations from the scriptures. The wealth and beauty of the foyer is only rivalled by the chancel.

The open baptistry is formed from black-veined white marble and is large enough for total immersion. Alabaster panels, ornately sculptured, depict events in Jesus' life. The alabaster and marble pulpit, bronze lectern and carved oak communion table exhibit craftsmanship of the highest quality. Crowning the chancel is a vaulted ceiling decorated with angels. On either side of the chancel can be seen some of the 3040 pipes of the [Hill Organ](#) which is considered to be one of the finest in Europe.

The architect's scrupulous attention to detail extends even to the toilets, which with concealed plumbing, wall tiles, mosaic floors and floral ceramic-ware by Doulton are the epitome of Victorian grandeur.

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*Church photography by Matt Edwards*