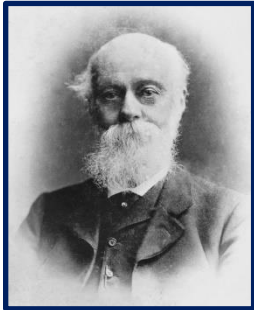




Hans Price



An elderly Hans Price © courtesy of Weston Library

Weston grew rapidly after the arrival of the railway in the 1840s. Its population doubled between 1851 and 1861. More houses were needed, as well as public buildings such as hospitals, schools and libraries.

Hans Fowler Price (born in Bristol in 1835) was the architect who contributed most to the look of Victorian Weston. After serving his apprenticeship with a firm of architects in Liverpool, Price started his own practice in Weston in 1860.

In 1862 he married Jane Baker, whose father was solicitor for the Smyth-Pigott estate. This link to the local squires, major landowners in Weston, was to prove important for Price's career.

Price designed several buildings in Clevedon, including Clevedon Pier and the Royal Pier Hotel. Most of his work, however, was in Weston. Price was appointed architect for the Smyth-Pigott estate, parts of which were developed for housing from the 1860s. He designed dozens of the large stone houses which were built at the western end of Worlebury Hill. Price also designed around 70 smaller houses for working people that were built south of the Boulevard.

Redesigning the Wadham Street Baptist Church (1862-63), now the Blakehay Theatre, was Price's first known public commission. The original church opened in 1850, but the popularity of the Baptist movement in Weston meant it soon became too small. Price's alterations doubled the size of the building. He went on to design other Baptist churches, including Bristol Road Baptist Church (1866) which is built from distinctive pink limestone.

The original hospital building on Alfred Street (1865-66) is another early example of Price's work. The building later became the dispensary for a larger hospital complex, providing medicines and medical supplies until the hospital's closure in the 1980s. Work began in 1871 on a large Price-designed extension to the West of England Sanatorium, at the south end of the seafront. An impressive chapel was included. Later known as the Royal Hospital, this also closed in the 1980s and is now used as housing.



The Weston Mercury building © Fraser Darke

Price's commercial designs include Magdala Buildings (1870) opposite the Odeon Cinema, and a terrace of shops (1897-99) at the northern end of High Street. The terrace's central section housed the entrance to the market hall, later converted into a theatre. This was destroyed by fire in 1964, and was replaced by the present Playhouse. The Weston Mercury offices (1885) on Waterloo Street are probably the most striking of Price's commercial buildings.

Price was a great admirer of Spanish Renaissance architecture, and this influence can be seen in much of his work. The Mercury offices' design was said to be inspired by the Cathedral of Saragossa. The Constitutional Club (1881), across the road from the Mercury, is another example of Spanish influence. Built as the St Kew Masonic Lodge, there is a statue of the saint above the door. The stone tower was topped by a wooden turret until 1981, when it was removed for safety reasons.

Price's firm were architects for the Somerset County Education Committee, and designed many schools. Weston's first Board School (1897), providing compulsory education for children aged 5-14, was built on Walliscote Road. Separate schools for boys and girls shared the same site. Now Walliscote Primary School, the building has been described as one of the finest Board Schools in England. Price also designed Weston's second Board School (1900) on Locking Road, and other schools at Kewstoke, Milton and Worle.

The School of Science & Art (1893), on Lower Church Road, was Weston's first proper higher education institution. Price's design included large arched studio windows on the building's northern side. The current ornate frontage, with its decorative tiles, was added in 1899.



The School of Science and Art building © Fraser Darke

Weston Town Hall was enlarged in 1897. Price added a new council chamber supported on columns over the main entrance. He also remodelled the clock tower, and joined it to the main building.

Price preferred using local materials in his projects. These included grey Mendip limestone for walls, yellow Bath Stone for decoration, and Welsh slate or terracotta tiles from Weston's Royal Pottery for roofs.



The old library building, 2007 © Geof Sheppard

Unusually for a Price design, the former Public Library (1900) on the Boulevard is mainly built of red brick. Costing £3,385, it was built with funds raised to mark Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee of 1897.

Weston Museum's home since 1975 was probably the last project Price completed. It was built in 1912 as workshops and stores for the Weston Gaslight Company. Price was Chairman of the Board of Directors, and his firm's name is on the plans.

Hans and Jane Price had eight children. He died at his home at 7 Trewartha Park in November 1912 and is buried in Milton Road Cemetery. Price practised in Weston for over 50 years, and never retired. 343 known sets of plans exist for work carried out by his firm. He was also a Town Commissioner and sat on various committees. Price was a keen member of the local chess club, and served in the Sixth Somerset Company of the Rifle Volunteers.

Many of Price's buildings are now listed. The Alfred Street Dispensary became Hans Price House after its conversion into housing. Wyvern Community School was renamed Hans Price Academy in 2011. A blue plaque dedicated to Price, on the front of the former School of Science & Art, was unveiled by Weston Town Council in 2018.

