# Historic Kwik Fit building in King’s Lynn faces urgent call for preservation



Concerns have emerged over the future of one of King's Lynn's most intriguing modern architectural landmarks, a Kwik Fit centre prominently located at 33-39 St James Street. Recently listed as one of the Victorian Society's Top 10 Endangered Buildings for 2025, this structure has been flagged for its deteriorating condition as parts of it fall into disrepair. As a notable example of early 20th-century innovation, the property’s significance resonates beyond its current use; it was one of the first buildings in England constructed using reinforced concrete.

Designed by the celebrated Norfolk architect A.F. Scott and erected shortly before the outbreak of the First World War, this building is distinguished by its exposed concrete frame and striking supporting pillars, which contribute to its modern yet robust exterior. The innovative use of reinforced concrete, now common, was pioneering at the time, marking a significant shift in building techniques, and thus, its preservation is critical.

Speaking to the importance of the building, Griff Rhys Jones, the broadcaster and president of the Victorian Society, expressed admiration for the structure's potential. He remarked, “Kings Lynn is a wondrous town, and this is a truly exciting building...what a pity that people have cause to worry about it.” He stressed that with minimal effort from current owners, the building could serve as a striking example of sustainable architectural practices for the modern era.

Historically, this site served as the headquarters for the Building Material Company for over sixty years, before transitioning through various uses, including that of a car showroom. Despite previous tenant activity, part of the property has remained vacant for two decades, with visible signs of neglect including boarded-up windows and accessible upper floors becoming increasingly impractical after the removal of essential staircases.

The Victorian Society has underscored the building's architectural rarity, declaring, “The building’s current owners, an investment company, must act now to safeguard this rare piece of architectural heritage.” Their call for preservation comes at a time when recognised architectural sites in King’s Lynn are becoming scarce. The loss of similar buildings accentuates the need for vigilance in protecting this particular landmark.

In 2019, the building was legally acknowledged as a Grade II listed structure by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, which also noted that "similar buildings did not appear more frequently until the 1920s and very few examples remain today." This designation highlighted the historical and architectural value of the site, which alongside its neighbour, the Former Lloyd's Bank at Tuesday Market Place, underscores King's Lynn’s rich architectural heritage.

The recent Heritage Action Zone project was instrumental in the listing and preservation efforts of key structures in King's Lynn, aimed at unearthing and safeguarding the town's historical narratives. This initiative not only spotlighted the significance of 33-39 St James Street but also solidified the community’s commitment to conservation amid threats of urban decay.

James Hughes, the director of the Victorian Society, added gravitas to this discourse by asserting that the building deserves urgent attention, not merely for preservation's sake, but to honour its place in the broader narrative of European architectural history. The ability to retain such pioneering examples of early modernism serves not only to enrich the town's cultural landscape but also to galvanise a collective responsibility towards heritage conservation in an era increasingly defined by change.

In summary, the Kwik Fit centre on St James Street stands as a critical reminder of King’s Lynn’s architectural past, urging contemporary society to reflect on the importance of preserving such treasures for future generations. Without prompt action, the loss of this unique structure would signify not only a historical setback but also a failure to recognise the innovative spirit that defined an era of architectural change.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
2. Paragraphs 2, 3, 5
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6. Paragraph 2
7. Paragraphs 6, 7
8. Paragraph 6

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/25176115.kings-lynn-listed-building-added-endangered-list/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/in-your-area/east-of-england/two-buildings-in-kings-lynn-listed/> - Historic England announced the listing of two buildings in King's Lynn: 33-39 St James Street, a Grade II listed building constructed in 1908 by the Bardell Brothers, notable for being one of England's earliest reinforced concrete-framed structures, and the former Lloyd's Bank at 1 Tuesday Market Place, also listed at Grade II. These listings aim to recognize and protect the town's architectural heritage. ([historicengland.org.uk](https://historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/in-your-area/east-of-england/two-buildings-in-kings-lynn-listed/?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.lynnnews.co.uk/news/unique-heritage-zone-project-comes-to-an-end-9260243/> - The Heritage Action Zone project in King's Lynn, a five-year initiative by Historic England and West Norfolk Council, has successfully completed its mission to uncover and preserve the town's history. The project included listing 33-39 St James Street, one of England's earliest reinforced concrete buildings, and the former Lloyd's Bank at Tuesday Market Place, both now recognized for their architectural significance. ([lynnnews.co.uk](https://www.lynnnews.co.uk/news/unique-heritage-zone-project-comes-to-an-end-9260243/?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.alamy.com/this-grade-ii-listed-building-in-st-james-street-kings-lynn-is-one-of-earliest-english-reinforced-concrete-framed-buildings-see-details-in-desc-image389339782.html> - An image of the Grade II listed building at 33-39 St James Street in King's Lynn, highlighting its status as one of the earliest English reinforced concrete-framed buildings. Built in 1908 by the Bardell Brothers, the building is notable for its exposed concrete frame, a design choice that was uncommon at the time. ([alamy.com](https://www.alamy.com/this-grade-ii-listed-building-in-st-james-street-kings-lynn-is-one-of-earliest-english-reinforced-concrete-framed-buildings-see-details-in-desc-image389339782.html?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/101459413-33-to-39-st-james-street-including-premises-occupied-by-kwik-fit-kings-lynn-and-west-norfolk-st-margarets-with-st-nicholas-ward> - A detailed description of 33-39 St James Street, including the premises occupied by Kwik Fit. The building, constructed in 1908, is recognized for its architectural features, including exposed concrete framing and ovolo-moulded columns. The interior has been adapted over time, with original features such as the lift shaft and staircase remnants still visible. ([britishlistedbuildings.co.uk](https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/101459413-33-to-39-st-james-street-including-premises-occupied-by-kwik-fit-kings-lynn-and-west-norfolk-st-margarets-with-st-nicholas-ward?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.kingslynncivicsociety.co.uk/local_list/extons-road-north-st-james-hospital/> - An overview of Extons Road (North) St James Hospital, a large south-facing building of red brick with white brick detailing under a slate roof. Designed by Medland and Maberley and built in 1856, it replaced the original St James Workhouse. The building is noted for its architectural interest and historical associations, including a visit by R. Vaughan Williams in 1905 to record traditional songs from former fishermen and seamen. ([kingslynncivicsociety.co.uk](https://www.kingslynncivicsociety.co.uk/local_list/extons-road-north-st-james-hospital/?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.lynnnews.co.uk/news/from-an-old-gun-battery-to-a-theatre-destroyed-by-fire-town-9406292/> - An article highlighting the history of King's Lynn, including the Theatre Royal on St James Street. The current building replaced a previous structure that burnt down in May 1936. The Theatre Royal is now home to Gala Bingo, reflecting the town's evolving use of historic buildings. ([lynnnews.co.uk](https://www.lynnnews.co.uk/news/from-an-old-gun-battery-to-a-theatre-destroyed-by-fire-town-9406292/?utm_source=openai))