

St Albans Museums: 'Talking Buildings' project, 2016	
Building:	The Forrester House mosaic, St Peter's Street
Researched by:	Diana Brimblecombe
<p>This research was undertaken by volunteers and is not an exhaustive history of the building but captures what intrigued them during the project.</p> <p>If you have any memories you'd like to share, or any queries about the research, please do let us know: museum@stalbans.gov.uk</p>	

The Civic area was developed from the early 1960, and included the Albans Arena (formerly the City Hall), the Magistrates' Court, Hertfordshire House, the Police Station, and in the 1980s the Civic Centre, and later into the 1990s the Crown Court.

One of the early buildings was Forrester House, designed (as was the Alban Arena) by Sir Frederick Gibberd and this was completed in 1960. Originally, it was Council offices, but nowadays it has a bookmaker (Ladbrokes) and a bakery (Greggs), in place of the earlier Electricity Showrooms, with several privately rented flats above.

Forrester House, named after Lord Verulam's family name, is a red brick building, with a plain front which is greatly enhanced by a mural designed by the celebrated sculptor William Mitchell. Mitchell, who was born in 1925, often worked in conjunction with Gibberd, notably the bronze doors and bell tower of Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral (1967) and the fountains of the Civic Water Gardens at Harlow New Town.

Mitchell worked for a number of clients, both in the UK and abroad, and for many years for Mohammed al Fayed, at Harrods, where he designed the extraordinary Egyptian Hall and Escalator.

Mitchell was celebrated for his innovative use of materials in his sculptures, as seen here in the St Albans mosaic. He used glass, recycled timber, plastic but most importantly here Faircrete, a concrete developed by John Laing which could be carved and modelled whilst still wet, retaining the shapes when dry.

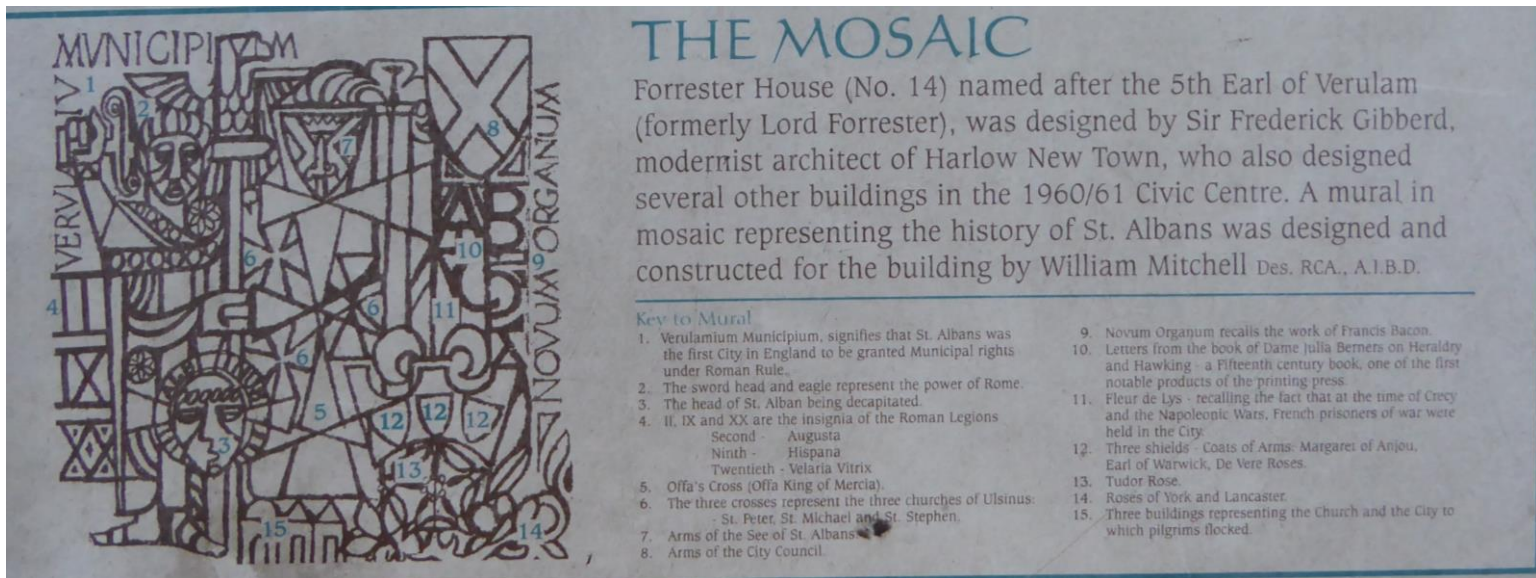
The mosaic tells the history of Verulamium and St Albans, from earliest times and includes:

- at the top, the Latin words Verulamium Municipium, recall that it was the first English city to be granted municipal rights under Roman rule.
- on the lower left side are the Roman numerals 11, 1X, XX which recall the Roman Legions based at Verulamium.
- on the right side, Novum Organum, Sir Francis Bacon's (of Gorhambury) greatest work.
- three crosses of the churches founded by Abbot Ulsinus, St Peter's , St Michael's, St Stephen's.
- the diagonal cross of Offa King of Mercia, now the symbol of St Albans.
- the three shields Of Margaret of Anjou, Earl of Warwick, de Vere.
- the Roses of Lancaster (red), of York (white) and Tudor from the battles of St Albans.
- the English Pope, Adrian IV (Nicholas Breakspear).
- typeface from the Book of St Albans and also to recognise the many printing companies.

as well as other symbols recalling the people and events in our local history.

Many walk past this interesting mural without looking up, and have never noticed it.

Information panel opposite the mosaic, by the bus stop:



Research sources:

'St Albans A History & Celebration' by Tom Doig, published by Frith Book Company Ltd. Page 103.

William Mitchell's biography – online sources including Wikipedia.