



The Manchester Group of the Victorian Society
NEWSLETTER
Spring 2025

COVER

MEMORIAL TO EDWARD PLATT HIGGINS, ST PAUL'S CHURCH, KERSAL MOOR

©Sian Crosby December 2024

Detail of one of two Opus sectile mosaic panels designed and manufactured by Walter J Pearce in 1925. See page 4

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Manchester Group of the Victorian Society

Newsletter Spring 2025

A message from the Chair

Welcome to our Spring Newsletter.

We hope you enjoy the articles on local architects, artists and buildings, and accounts of past events between December 2024 and March 2025- a mixture of talks and visits of local and wider interest. Thankyou to everyone who has written the articles for this Newsletter, and given talks and led visits over the past few months. We are fortunate that so many people are committed to sharing their interest in Victorian art, architecture, artists and writers with members of our Group. Another programme of future walks and talks is included which I trust will provide something of interest to all our members. We have introduced two lunchtime events which I hope will appeal to those working in Manchester thereby attracting a wider audience. Please let us know what you think.

Do stay in touch: we have a new email address manchester@victoriansociety.org.uk; or you can follow us on Facebook (The Victorian Society – Manchester) and Instagram (@manvicsoc).

Kate Martyn (Chair)



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Walter J. Pearce and Opus Sectile Mosaics

Walter J. Pearce of Manchester and Wilmslow is best known as a stained-glass artist, but he also worked in a medium he developed and is said to have patented in 1897, which he called 'Vitreumure.' This was a variation of Opus Sectile, a combination of traditional mosaic and of stained glass without the leading which had been invented by Powell and Sons forty years before. The glass was cemented to the wall with pieces laid out as in a stained-glass window in various shapes and sizes, often with the background using the traditional tesserae. His patent refers mainly to a method of applying gold leaf to the back of the glass pieces. This type of work is best seen in St Ignatius RC Church, Stamford Hill in London, where he installed a full scheme of panels. Locally he made two panels in 'Vitreumure' for St Paul's Church, Kersal Moor, Salford, and a further two for St James, Haslingden. He also completed panels for the War Memorial on the walls of the baptistery at St Peter's in Hale, at the Congregational Church at Morley Green, Wilmslow, and the Congregational Church, Hollins Grove, Darwen.

Pearce had many other talents. He published a standard text entitled *Painting and Decorating* in 1898 and designed several typefaces. He was an accomplished painter as well as an avid photographer. He was a prominent member of the Northern Art Workers Guild, serving as Master in 1903. He often worked collaboratively with other significant artists in his stained-glass designs, such as Lewis Day (1845–1910) and Arthur Lewis Duthie (d.1940), and this could affect the aesthetic. When working with Day, Pearce used slab glass, popular with Arts and Crafts workers in stained glass. Work by Pearce which uses slab glass can be found in St Chrysostom's, Victoria Park, Manchester, and dates from 1906.

The late nineteenth century had seen a flourishing of mosaics in British architecture. Both traditional and innovative methods of mosaic-making were used in a wide variety of contexts from the 1850s onwards. Widespread experimentation with new materials was made possible by the availability of cheap energy.

One such was a novel type of opaque glass for mosaic making which was developed by glassmakers James Powell & Sons in the mid-1860s. This new material, which would come to be known as Opus Sectile, quickly gained in popularity and was used in a variety of architectural projects throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The new material combined techniques used in the production of glass quarries with elements of traditional mosaics and stained glass. Its development began when George Rees, an employee at the glassworks, invented a method for producing slabs of compacted opaque glass from waste fragments of flint-glass contaminated with clay. This contamination often occurred during the risky process of removing a clay pot of molten glass from the furnace.

The danger of this operation were described by George Dodd in *The Penny Magazine of the Society for The Diffusion of Useful Knowledge* in 1841: "It frequently happens that the old pot breaks, and the pieces, becoming partially vitrified, adhere to the bottom of the furnace: in such case the men stand in front of the fiercely heated openings, and dig up and remove the broken fragments of pot by means of crow bars and other instruments." The new material made from these recovered fragments was initially christened "Rees mosaic." Rees's method involved grinding the waste to a powder and baking it in a mould to form a slab, in a process similar to that used to make glass quarries; the bulk of the resulting material was coarse and grey due to the inclusion of clay, with a finer, coloured coating being added to the top surface. The slabs were about a quarter of an inch thick with a rough eggshell-textured finish, and could be cut into shapes, painted with enamels if a more elaborate design was required, and then fired again to fix the paint permanently, before being assembled like a jigsaw and cemented into place. The eggshell finish was opus sectile's unique feature, resulting from its production from incompletely vitrified material. This gave it something of the appearance of a fresco rather than a reflective window or glittering mosaic. Opus sectile lent itself particularly well to the naturalistic depiction of textures such as fabric and skin, and the matt tiles formed an effective contrast when combined with gold tesserae.

Although he patented "Vitreumure" in 1897, known examples by Walter J Pearce are few and of late date. Three were produced as war memorials in the early 1920s, while those of St Paul's Church were not installed until 1925.



1925 St Paul's Church, Kersal Moor, Salford

Two panels placed on each side of the east window in memory of Edward Platt Higgins depicting scenes from the life of St Paul. Higgins, who died in 1924 was born in the parish, but left at an early age and spent his adult life in Belfast and London. The panels were donated by his sister, wife of Dr Andrew Boutflower of Salford Royal Hospital who lived in the parish for many years.

Reference Church Records
Images ©Sian Crosby. December 2024

Lark Hill House, Astley, Leigh

Information Richard Fletcher, Stephanie Boydell

Following the publication of “The Mystery House” in the Christmas edition of this Newsletter, Stephanie Boydell has drawn attention to an almost identical house situated in Manchester Road, Astley, near Leigh.

The present Lark Hill House was built about 1910 in a district known locally as Lark Hill. Built on a greenfield site in the Arts and Crafts style, the house has a “butterfly” plan. Two wings are set at right angles with the entrance set on the diagonal at their junction. Externally it features white painted pebbledash render on brick walls, battered buttresses, and wide overhanging eaves. The house was surrounded by extensive grounds containing a large glasshouse and fruit trees.

It is assumed that the house was built by the Astley and Tyldesley Collieries for the accommodation of their colliery managers. Tom McGrath’s history of the building records that it was first occupied by John Walshaw (1847-1917) and his family. He was followed by Daniel Chadwick Smith (1892-1941) who occupied Lark Hill between 1931 and 1939 and William Henry Richards manager of Astley Green Colliery and who moved to Lark Hill with his family. 1941 – 1947. In 1947 the Coal Industry was nationalised and ownership passed to that body which seemingly leased the property. By 1966 the house was being used as offices by the National Coal Board but later reverted to residential use. In 1997 plans to turn the property into a children’s nursery were approved and this use continues under the name of Astley Nature Kindergarten (2024)

The design appears almost identical to that of “The Homestead” in Victoria Park, Manchester (qv) and is, therefore, attributed to Arthur Henry Walsingham. However, the re-use of a design is most unusual, and further investigation is needed to determine the circumstances. One possibility that springs to mind is that details were published in one of several books of plans and elevations published around this time as “pattern books”.



Photo 319 Manchester Road, Astley © Google maps Streetview

Reference: ifthosewallscouldtalk.wordpress.com/2019/05/30/hidden-histories-lark-hill-astley/

Lloyd George, Lord Leverhulme and the Bolton Architect, Jonathan Simpson

Michael Shippobottom

This text follows on from the interesting article by Neil Darlington in the Newsletter for Christmas 2023 on Lloyd George and Sir George Riddell. Readers will also need no introduction to W.H. Lever (1851 – 1925) the First Viscount Leverhulme, joint founder of Lever Bros. soap business, Port Sunlight, and a proud Boltonian, as he has been the subject of numerous books, guides and walks.



A significant occasion for Lever was the visit to his Wirral home, Thornton Manor, of Lloyd George (LG) accompanied for at least a part of the time by LG's wife and youngest daughter, during the First World War, from the evening of Tuesday 4th September until Saturday 8th September 1917. Officially this was in order to attend the Royal National Eisteddfod held in Birkenhead that year, one of the rare occasions it has been held outside Wales, and at which Lever acted as 'President'. But it also no doubt afforded LG the opportunity to visit the model village, to inspect the factory's contribution to the war effort (in its manufacture of glycerine and shell cases) and to maintain morale.

Other guests for the visit or parts of the stay included Sir George Riddell, the newspaper proprietor; Henry Jones, a Welsh philosopher and academic; and (Sir) Richard Terry, Organist at Westminster Cathedral; Also in attendance were the Bolton architect Jonathan Simpson and his daughter Susan, and both are prominent in one of the official photographs taken of the visit in the garden Forum at Thornton Manor. Another image shows an extended group visiting the Port Sunlight Hospital and this also includes Frances Stevenson, LG's secretary (and mistress). LG became ill and remained in Cheshire longer than expected before travelling directly on to Criccieth, where LG's wife lived (as well as LG when not in London and the home counties) and from where he wrote to Frances pleading with her to come (with her sister) and stay...at the Marine Hotel.

Riddell was a close friend, confidant and advisor of LG but Lever is likely to have already known him. He and Riddell had earlier helped save an eighteenth-century panelled room for re-erection at the V and A in 1912 – The Hatton Garden Room, now in store. And Riddell was later to use some remarks made by LG on Lever as a criticism of the way LG was moving away from the Liberal centre ground towards the Tories when he quoted LG's opinion on the just wage: "...He says one Leverhulme or Ellerman is worth more to the world than 10,000 sea captains or 20,000 engine drivers and should be remunerated accordingly..."

Lever was an avowed Liberal: Gladstone had come to open the hall Lever had built and named after him in Port Sunlight in 1891 and Asquith was to visit the village in 1912. He stood as a Liberal himself in 1892, 1894, 1895, 1900 and finally 1906 when he was elected for the Wirral in what became a great reforming parliament. Throughout this period Lever helped to establish and/or build new Liberal Club houses in Birkenhead and Wirral, including Birkenhead, North End, 1898; Tranmere, 1899; New Ferry, 1903; Neston, 1901- 1902; Egremont, 1902; and later still Ormskirk, where he stood as a candidate in the 1910 election. Whilst an MP he introduced a bill for old age pensions and in 1908 advocated the building of a first floor over the riverside terrace of the Houses of Parliament, even offering to pay for a scheme to be drawn up, but the idea did not receive support.

And so to Jonathan Simpson (1850 -1937), invited to the LG visit because he was Lever's closest friend and, like Lever, had lost his wife some years earlier. It was a close friendship dating back to their dame school days together in Bolton and referred to by Lever's son, later the second Viscount Leverhulme, as "...the greatest friendship in my father's life...He always came over to our Christmas celebrations at Thornton Manor..." and he referred to his "...sense of fun, his love of all beautiful things in the world around him, and in art and literature his philosophy of life, his intensely human outlook, and his generous nature..." Holidays were sometimes spent together, as well as motoring trips into Derbyshire, Staffordshire or Dorset in particular. They shared many interests, including the theatre and collecting: Simpson dealt with Frank Partridge in London and F. W. Philips in Hitchin for whom he built an extension with rooms in different styles to act as showrooms (now converted to residential use).

Photographs of the interior of his own house show rooms of different styles, a taste shared with Lever, as well as something of the variety of his collection: original works by Randolph Caldecott; Annie French, the Glasgow artist; a pastel by Gainsborough Dupont, Gainsborough's nephew; and a pastel by Ford Maddox Brown of Emma, one of his daughters (later donated to Bolton Art Gallery). There was also period furniture including an eighteenth-century walnut display cabinet now with the National Trust at Mompesson House and a satinwood table now at Montacute.

Simpson had been articled to a local surveyor, James Lomax, (whose daughter he was to marry), then had established his own practice in Bolton around 1874. Many of his office drawings survive, now looked after by the Bolton archive service. The drawings show something of the range of the office with much simple domestic work; public houses for the local brewery Magee Marshall and Co; Shops for the Bolton Cooperative Society, as well as some industrial and ecclesiastical work, most notably the Blackburn Road Congregational church for Lever (and his brother and brother-in-law), though otherwise work for him was to remain fairly minimal.

Some work was undertaken in conjunction with other architects, generally regarded as having expertise in their field: Edward Ould on the restoration of Hall i'th' Wood; Robert W. Edis of London on the building of the Pack Horse Hotel, Bolton and proposals for an hotel in Great Lever; W. H. Powell of London for the Haulgh Schools; and T. H. Mawson in the garden buildings at Rivington (though not the look-out Tower which a recent publication has erroneously credited to Simpson). For a time he worked with his son, James Lomax Simpson, later to become the Lever Bros architect, and he employed Charles Holden, later to achieve fame for his work for the London Underground.

Much of the work is of a bread-and-butter quality, albeit now difficult to judge on site because of alterations such as removal of chimney stacks and replacement of original joinery. But at his best and with sufficient funding he could be very good indeed. His work is much influenced by the Queen Anne style, Arts and Crafts and the free styles of the period and this is most apparent in the design of his own house, Grey Gables and the row of substantial houses adjoining by him on Chorley New Road, Bolton, nos. 172 – 184, (170 having been demolished).

Characteristics include the tight, symmetrical grouping of chimneys with windows, e.g. at the Stocks Hotel, Walkden and former King's Arms, Bolton (now much altered); a love of simple geometry with plain surfaces, relieved only by unmoulded mullions and transoms e.g. the Rivington Barns or sparsely modelled bas relief decorative detailing e.g.

that at the Primrose Hill cottages in Port Sunlight. In contrast there is the lush, decorative craftsmanship, particularly in his pubs such as the painted glass panels commemorating Nelson and his victories in the former Victory Hotel, Bolton, with its mosaic floor (all now lost); the use of decorative 'pies' in the gable of the Starkie pub, Tonge Moor, Bolton (demolished); or the crisply carved detailing of foliage on his chapel at Astley Bridge Cemetery, Bolton.

Some work was illustrated in the contemporary architectural press, including one of his pubs, and some in foreign publications including the Voyseyish Thornton Hough school and Port Sunlight cottages. Pevsner referred to the restoration of Rivington Great Barn for Lever (*The Buildings of England: North Lancashire*, 1st edition, 1969), as "...impressively restored excellent fenestration of the stone end walls. It is a pattern of how to do such a job..." ...and Dr Brunskill included it in his buildings equivalent of *Desert Island Discs*.

Simpson had already wound down his practice by the time of the Lloyd George gathering which is a pity given that the house built for Lloyd George soon afterwards, at Churt in Surrey, was to be designed by Philip Tilden, and is according to Pevsner '... A gauche, almost styleless house...Mansard roof and big graceless loggia all over the garden front...' At the end of the war what remained of Simpson's practice was taken on by Richard Hermon Crook who had been an assistant. Charles Hutton, a junior assistant to Crook and who later joined Holden in London, becoming a Master of the Art Workers' Guild, recalled Simpson visiting Crook's Bolton office "an elderly man...dressed in tweeds. I remember a warm and kindly glance for the insignificant office boy who let him in..."

A cine film made of the Cheshire visit and clips, mostly set in the Forum at the Manor, can be seen on line (see YouTube: BBC documentaries: Lloyd George: The Peoples Champion, presented by Huw Edwards: at 2.46; 26.32; 51.55 and 57.50 minutes) but although LG and Lever are prominent, Simpson is missing, though his daughter is seen in one clip. Apart from the film and the report in *Progress*, published references to the Thornton Manor/Port Sunlight visit are minimal but LG said at the time that the factory was a "...triumph of organisation and kind-heartedness..." Frances in her autobiography recalled that they "... were full of admiration for this attractive village..." though feeling that "...it was virtually a town of tied houses..." She was to marry LG finally in 1943 after his wife had died, in a small ceremony unattended by any of his children.

References: The main sources for this text are meetings and correspondence with James Lomax-Simpson and Charles Hutton some fifty years ago and subsequent meetings with Lomax-Simpson's daughters, Rosemary and Josephine, also Bolton Museum and Archives, Roy Hattersley, David Lloyd George, 2010; Viscount Leverhulme by his son, 1927; Frances Lloyd George, The Years That Are Past, 1967, and Progress, the Lever Bros. house journal.

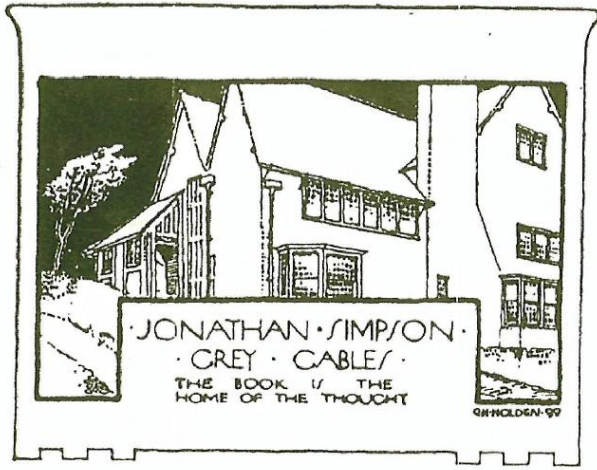
Illustrations

1 Group photograph at Thornton Manor, Wirral, September 1917, with W.H.Lever, Lord Leverhulme, standing in the centre, with Lloyd George and his wife seated in front; the Hon William Hulme Lever standing far right; Sir George Riddell standing second from right; Jonathan Simpson standing far left and his daughter Susan standing third from left. The photograph was taken in the pergola known as The Forum, designed by James Lomax Simpson, Jonathan's son [Progress]

2 Grey Gables, Bolton: Jonathan Simpson's own house with his bookplate drawn by Charles Holden. There has been speculation that Holden may have had a hand in the design of Simpson's house but, according to Charles Hutton, Holden denied this.

3 Grey Gables, Entrance Hall [Lomax-Simpson family photograph]

4 Grey Gables, The Study: The Ford Maddox Brown pastel of Emma, his wife can be seen on the right-hand wall, originally acquired from Charles Rowley, picture framer, friend of Brown and a noted Mancunian social reformer. [Lomax-Simpson family photograph]



2



3 >



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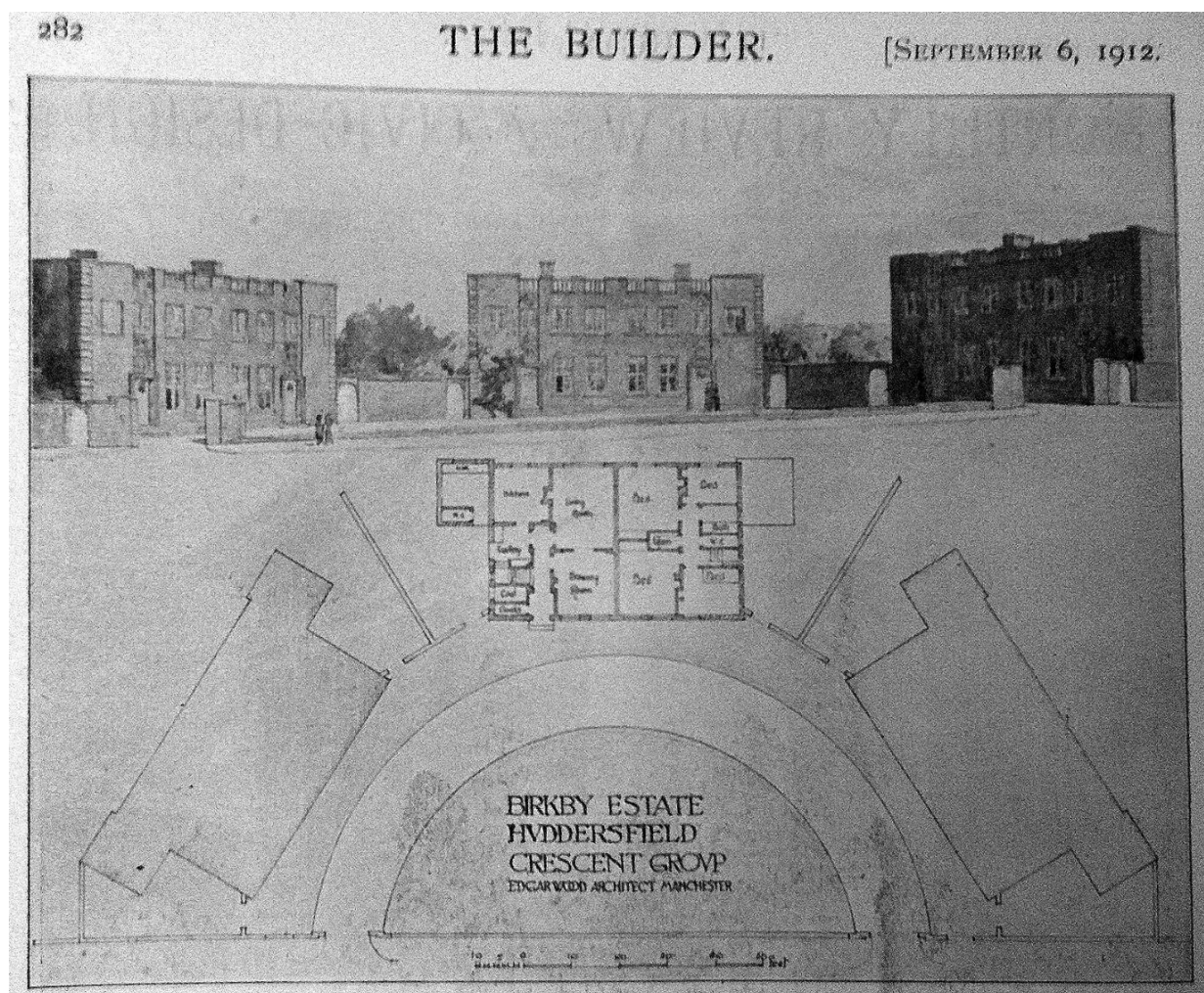
Edgar Wood and James Henry Sellers in Huddersfield: New Findings, Continuing Puzzles. PART 1

by David Griffiths, Edgar Wood Heritage Group (Yorkshire)

This is the first of two articles exploring little-known Huddersfield work by Wood and Sellers and their local legacy. A second part of this article will consider the continuing influence of this network in the work of Wood's pupil Bamford and in the post-War activities of Albert Lunn, Oswald White and J H Sellers.

PART 1: THEIR WORK BEFORE 1914

In its Summer 2022 edition, this newsletter published a drawing of 'Edgar Wood's competition design for Crescent Group, Birkby Estate, Huddersfield, 1912', reprinted from *The Builder* of 6 September 1912, reporting that nothing more was known of this unbuilt project. That remains the case, but new research at least sheds some light. The Housing & Town Planning Committee of Huddersfield Corporation had agreed, in June 1912, to prepare town planning schemes under the 1909 Housing & Town Planning Act for nine outlying areas of the Borough, and to hold a prize competition for four of them, including one described as 'Halifax Old-road, Birkby Hall-road, and Rose Hill', on the town's favoured north-westerly slopes. (1) Wood's scheme (*below*) was presumably an entry to this competition, but he was unsuccessful when the prizes were awarded six months later. His innovative flat-roofed blocks – reminiscent of his vast unbuilt 1909 Withington Garden City scheme – were unbuilt, and the intended site remains to be identified.



However, the area in question was already familiar to Wood and his informal partner, J H Sellers. Birkby Lodge, an early Victorian house, had been bought in 1896 by accountant George Pepler Norton, who had commissioned Wood to add a coach house and stables, a drawing room with two bedrooms above and an added recess to the billiard room. (2) His partner in accountancy firm Armitage & Norton was W H Armitage, Wood's client for the grade I listed Banney Royd, which was approved at almost the same time (BP819, 2 April 1900) half a mile away in Edgerton.

Nearer still was Rose Hill, a late Georgian house where Wood & Sellers were commissioned by mill-owner Joe Lumb to design interiors in 1909, celebrated by those responsible for the house's listing (grade II) thus:

The joinery (executed by Taylor and Hobson of Huddersfield), together with the furniture, the marble chimneypieces and plaster ceilings, combine to make these interiors among the most adventurous in Europe for their date. They compare well with the Kartner Bar in Vienna (Loos: 1907), or the Palais Stoclet in Brussels (Hoffmann: 1905).(3)

Between the Lodge and Rose Hill, at the corner of Birkby Hall and Birkby Lodge Roads, in 1903 Wood had also designed the cleverly disguised pair of semis, Azo and Crendon (BP1511, 6 January 1903) on land owned by Norton. A plot behind these, on the East side of Birkby Lodge Rd, was then the subject of applications by Norton for new streets, drawn up first by a local surveyor in 1906 and then by Sellers in 1913, though neither was implemented. (4) Further proposals were made by Norton in the latter year for new streets on the West side of the road, by now working with one Albert Lunn as his development partner. Once again Sellers was involved in drawing up this plan, alongside local architect Oswald White (1883-1960). (5) (More will be said below about Lunn and White.) These schemes were badged, like Wood's Crescent proposal, as the 'Birkby' or 'Birkby Lodge' estate. Thus, although the site of Wood's 1912 Crescent scheme remains unknown, we can surely conclude that it was intended to form part of a wider development, conceived between 1906 and 1913 by his well-established client George Pepler Norton, for which Wood may have drawn up a master plan (see below).

Avenues Estate, Fartown

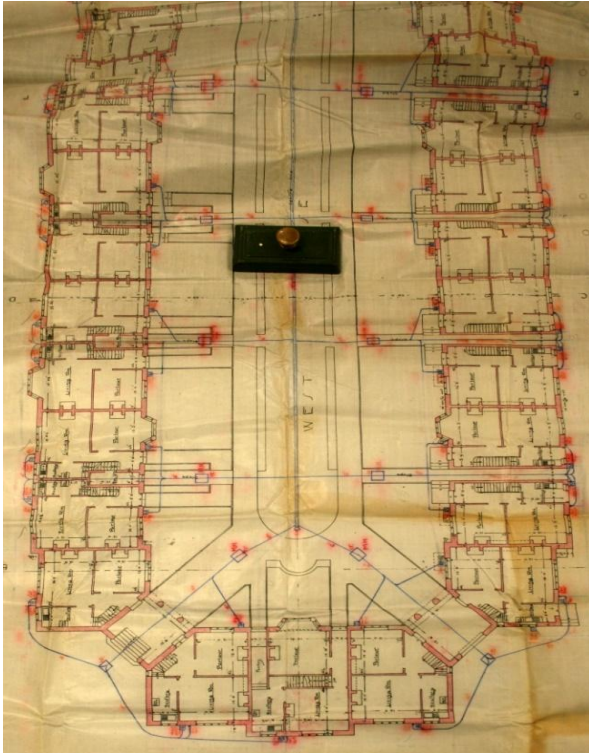


Meanwhile a much larger town planning proposal was afoot a mile or so to the northeast at Fartown. This was another of the scheme areas identified by the Corporation for competitive schemes, and in response a meeting chaired by the Mayor, George Thomson, on 2 March 1911, and addressed by Henry Vivian MP of the tenants' co-partnership movement, had established a committee to develop a 'garden city scheme'. Thomson was the owner of nearby Woodhouse Mills, where he had converted his business to a profit-sharing co-partnership, and was involved in the wider co-operative movement. (6) As well as serving as Mayor of Huddersfield, he was from 1910 the Master of Ruskin's Guild of St George, earning him the epithet 'The Ruskinian Industrialist' from his biographer.(7) The meeting established a committee to develop a prospectus and invited a number of local architects to become involved, among them Dennis

Bamford (1883-1961), who had been Edgar Wood's pupil from 1901-04 (and who will be discussed in the second of these articles). By October 'a considerable number of meetings had been held, exhaustive inquiries made', and it was proposed to register Huddersfield Tenants Ltd as a co-partnership society. (8) Little more is heard of this body, but a scheme for the area soon took shape, albeit with conventional tenures. On 4 November 1911 'tenders' – apparently competition entries – were invited for a block of four model dwellings, to be submitted to Oswald White. Three weeks later, the first advert appeared for 'The new garden suburb in the making, The Avenues Estate, Fartown'. (9) And on 3 February 1912 three competition winners were identified – Messrs J H Hall & Sons, Messrs Lunn & Kaye, and Oswald White himself. These three firms, together with Reginald Yates – who signed the advert – and the builder J E Flynn would go on to build the great majority of the suburb's houses, of which over 70 were approved before the War and another 100 or so in the inter-war years.

The driving force in the project was Albert Lunn (1872-1957), mentioned above as Norton's development partner at Birkby. He and Flynn had bought the land at auction on 23 May 1911 (10) and from 1911 to 1925 most Building Plans for the estate had Lunn, either singly or with Flynn, as the client. He was partner in a highly regarded painting and decorating business, Lunn & Cardno, whose aim was 'to place beautiful decoration within the reach of all', and an encomium printed in one of their brochures said they had 'proved conclusively that there is nothing incompatible between well-directed and successful commercial enterprise and a thorough devotion to the true principals [sic] of art'. (11) If this seems redolent of Morris & Co, it should be added that the local newspaper, celebrating Lunn's 80th birthday, recorded that he was 'still able to follow the Ruskinian gospel of work for the work's sake', and that 'Ruskin has been a guiding spirit'.(12) The same article went on to record that 'His constructive bent found practical

sacs, and this layout forms part of a wider plan of 9 April 1913 (*above*), found not in the official applications but in the papers of the builder Flynn.(14) Despite Wood's reputed involvement, all the plans mentioned bear Yates' name.



The second certainty is that four houses by Wood, not previously identified, were erected. The October meeting approved an ambitious design (BP10146, *left*) by Wood & Sellers for a block of 23 houses, arranged as a continuous terrace around three sides of the West Close cul-de-sac, with angled arched entrances at the corners, in one case leading out to the estate's proposed park. Each was to have a parlour, living room, scullery, three bedrooms and bathroom, with cellars entered as a lower storey on the West side and as conventional cellars on the East (reflecting the topography). Richard Fletcher of the Edgar Wood Society has commented that 'These houses are a great discovery – if only the full development had been built, it would have equalled the Fairfield Estate in terms of scope and design.' (15) In the event, however, only four, nos. 49-55, were built directly from the Wood & Sellers design (49/51 *seen below*). A subsequent application by Lunn & Kaye (BP10664, approved 8 January 1914) shows these four already erected and proposes to add three more; eventually the West side alone was completed. Lunn & Kaye did not significantly change the design and it is unclear why their names replaced Wood & Sellers, but their doing so leaves the first four houses as Wood's only executed work. (16)

There is, however, a wider question of influence. Several of the 20 or so Building Plans approved by August 1914, executed in local stone, display strongly 'Woodish' features such as canted bays breaking the roof line and in some cases flat roofs. The submitted designs for these are by Lunn & Kaye or, in one case, Oswald White, all of whom also deployed the tall-gabled, rendered style of Parker & Unwin and much inter-war suburbia to come.



Fletcher has suggested that Edgar Wood drew up the 1913 'Yates' plan and that 'various architects were then commissioned to actually build the houses..... My reason for thinking this is that the diversity of block shapes on the plan suggests that the houses had already been designed'. Although plausible, evidence of such a master planning role remains elusive. Interesting in this connection, however, is that Sellers also drew up (with Yates) the layout of the intended park mentioned above and designed a pavilion for it – a strongly geometric flat-roofed building with a tower and proto-art deco decoration (BP10113, *below*). This was recommended for approval by the Engineer but rejected by the elected members on 4 July 1912. The park did not proceed, and the area is now occupied by allotments.

Conclusion What emerges from all this, I suggest, is the existence in Huddersfield from about 1900 of a quite close-knit 'Ruskinian' network – interested in Arts & Crafts and in advanced industrial ideas too. This included businessman clients such as George Thomson, W H Armitage, George Pepler Norton and Joe Lumb; estate developers Albert Lunn, G P Norton again and Herbert Kaye; architects Dennis Bamford, Oswald White, Reginald Yates and John Lunn; and interior designers and craftsmen like Lunn & Cardno and Taylor & Hobson. These were all Huddersfield people. But some of their inspiration certainly came from Manchester, in the shape of Edgar Wood and James Henry Sellers.



The plan on p. 13, and Building Plans on p. 14, are reproduced courtesy of West Yorkshire Archive Service, Kirklees.

NOTES

- (1) Committee minutes, 19 June 1912.
- (2) Huddersfield County Borough Building Plans (hereafter BP) nos. 492 (approved 29 March 1899), 890 (1 May 1900) and 945 (2 October 1900), at West Yorkshire Archive Service, Kirklees (WYAS-K), KMT18/EN/5/8. For further information on this and Wood's other known local buildings, see *Edgar Wood in Huddersfield* (Edgar Wood Heritage Group (Yorkshire), 2015), available at <https://edgarwoodinyorkshire.weebly.com/his-buildings.html>
- (3) Listing entry number 1134389, 29 September 1978.
- (4) BPs 2982 (7 October 1906) and 10565 (2 October 1913).
- (5) BP10380 (10 March 1913). This scheme too was unimplemented, eventually being re-approved in modified form on 7 July 1927 and built as George Avenue and Una Place, an area of largely undistinguished inter-war suburban semis. Una was George's grand-daughter, born on 2 October 1913. That distinguished Manchester architect and designer J H Sellers was responsible for the drainage plan!
- (6) G P Norton was also a supporter of profit-sharing, successfully moving a motion to that effect in 1889 at the town's debating society. (J W Dicks, *UDS: The Old Society*, Huddersfield Examiner Press, 1964).
- (7) Stuart Eagles, *The Ruskinian Industrialist: George Thomson of Huddersfield* (Guild of St George, York, 2021). Thomson also commissioned another Manchester 'domestic revival' architect, George Faulkner Armitage, to remake interiors at his Georgian home, Woodhouse Hall, and at the Guild's premises in Sheffield.
- (8) For the meeting details in this paragraph, I am indebted to the notes of Huddersfield journalist and historian Stanley Chadwick, 'Avenues estate', WYAS-K, WYK1979/3/3, Box 3, derived from reports in the *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*.
- (9) *Huddersfield & Holmfirth Examiner*, 25 November 1911. I am grateful to Christopher Marsden for first drawing my attention to Avenues and for his research on it, which I have continued.
- (10) West Riding Registry of Deeds, WYAS Wakefield, 33/337/131.
- (11) Lunn & Cardno papers, WYAS-K, KC257/2/3/3, n.d. [circa 1900].
- (12) *Huddersfield Weekly Examiner*, 22 November 1952.
- (13) The Engineer's commentaries are from WYAS-K, KMT18/EN/5/8, Book 3.
- (14) J E Flynn papers, WYAS-K, KC671/1 (1913).
- (15) Personal communication. I am grateful to Richard, as again to Chris Marsden, for helpful information, comments and challenges throughout the development of this article. Fairfield was the Wood & Sellers estate at Droylsden, east Manchester.
- (16) To note a curiosity here, the builder John Lunn of Milnsbridge appear to be no relation to Albert Lunn, although the former's partner, surveyor Herbert Kaye, also partnered the latter in another of his developments, the Oakfield estate at Birkby, along with G P Norton.



Werneth Grange, Grange Avenue (off Manchester Road), Oldham,

Christmas Event: 7 December 2024, led by Steve Roman

Some 35 people attended the visit to Werneth Grange (above) with several afterwards enjoying lunch at the Egyptian Room, in the newly refurbished Oldham Town Hall (below). Built in 1871 for cotton magnate Joseph Lees, Werneth Grange became the Convent of the Sisters of Mercy in 1907. Although on the main road, it was hidden away behind thick hedges and trees, but has this year been restored and converted into a conference venue, owned and operated by St Mark Universal Care, with links to the Coptic Church. After an exploration of the restored building several joined Steve for a meal at the Egyptian Hall in Oldham Town Hall, a fine example of restoration and re-use.

Thanks to St Mark Universal Care for allowing access to Werneth Hall and Steve Roman for organising the event.

Photos © Steve Roman 2024



PAST EVENTS

The Saving of Stretford Public Hall

Saturday 25 January 2025 at Stretford Public Hall Chester Road Stretford.

Kate McGeevor - CEO of the Community Co-Operative that now owns and runs the hall.



In 1879 this hall, originally containing lecture rooms and the town's first free lending library, was gifted to the people of Stretford by John and Enriquetta Rylands, then living at Longford Hall. As the Group's Biographical Dictionary states, nepotism may have determined the choice of architect, William Arthur Lofthouse, as his father was the Rylands estate steward. From 1910 it was used as Stretford's Town Hall until 1933 when the current one was built on Talbot Road. From 1949 the hall became the Civic Theatre but fell into decline in the 1980's. Over a decade ago, despite being listed Grade II, the building was under threat. A campaign resulted in it being listed as an Asset of Community Value, meaning that users had first refusal to purchase the building if they could raise the funds. As a result of an initial Community Share Offer (increased by other funding) a total of £750K was raised. Initially, spaces for Groups and private events were hired out but in 2021 the first-floor ball room was restored, greatly increasing the income potential. Licences were obtained for Weddings, Concerts and Live Music. In the following twelve months there were 30,000 users. More and more restored spaces are being brought into use, artists' studios and co-working facilities.

The present position of Stretford Public Hall illustrates a point which will be familiar to members of the Manchester Group. The proven best way of saving a building at risk and securing its future is to have a professionally informed leadership group leading a team of volunteers (in this case over 100) all committed to that particular building.

In addition to safeguarding the fabric of the hall and improving the building's energy efficiency, there are two major projects for the future of the hall on the drawing board. One is to bring into use the building's large, high-ceilinged and dry basement. Sound proofed studios and performance spaces would be a possibility, obviously increasing hire income. The other project under consideration, even more ambitious, is to build a two-storey extension on to the King Street elevation with a town facing circulation core at the rear of the building. This aspiration in particular would involve costs and fund raising well beyond the previous efforts. After hearing Kate's talk and, being mindful of the team behind her, we can be assured that the future of Stretford Public Hall is in safe and capable hands. [David Astbury]

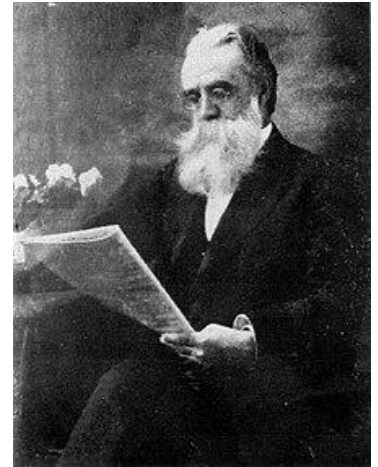
'We, The Manchester Group of the Victorian Society, are proud to support the group who maintain this important Victorian building which might otherwise have been lost.'

“One of the Busiest Men in Manchester”: W. E. A. Axon (1846-1913)

Talk by Lucy Evans, 12 February 2025 at the Friends Meeting House

At the February meeting of the Manchester Group Lucy Evans shared her enthusiasm for and extensive knowledge of William Edward Armytage Axon. Lucy has tracked down over 1000 books, pamphlets, articles (including many in the LCAS Transactions), obituaries, poems, translations, stories and dialect pieces and has recently completed his biography.

Born illegitimate in 1846, he was rescued from neglect by the Axon family, growing up with them in Hulme. Self-educated, but frail in body, he earned his living through assorted careers as librarian, commercial secretary, journalist, editor and author. His jobs included first employed as a boy assistant in 1861 he became deputy librarian of the Manchester Free Library at Campfield in 1867, editor of the “British Architect” for three years and on the literary staff of the Manchester Guardian for around thirty years until C P Scott let him go with a five-year pension.



Axon was a significant figure in the Vegetarian Society, temperance, and equality movements. He was so highly regarded by the African American activists that he received an honorary degree from their Wilberforce University. He was also an important figure in the history of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society, an almost unbelievably prolific writer and social reformer. He belonged to an incredible number of societies, not only ones local to Manchester and region but national ones like the Royal Society of Literature, and the Library Association. A passionate humanist,

The range of subjects is breath-taking, and he had a real talent in compressing and clarifying complex topics. This was crucial to him as his guiding principle was that knowledge was only of value when it was communicated and used for the public good. As librarian, journalist, author and lecturer, he delighted in sharing his stupendous learning with others. He became a star of Notes and Queries, the Victorian bibliophile's internet. Used to scrimping himself, he produced several short and affordable works for those who had little time or money.

After retirement, he and his second wife, Setta, (died 1910), supplemented their income by running the Simple Life vegetarian guest house at Southport. Throughout, he worked ceaselessly as an unpaid social reformer and still made time for his beloved antiquarian pursuits and his poetry.

In 1866 he first married Jane Woods of Dukinfield, the couple having four children, The family moved firstly to Patricroft where Axon was briefly employed by the Antilles Phosphate and Chemical Company and later to Fern Bank, Higher Broughton. Following Jane's death he married Setta, a daughter of Jacob Luft of Steligstadt, Hesse in 1892.

In 1868 he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and received an honorary degree of LLD from The Wilberforce University of America. However, the award he craved most of all, that of Honorary Master of Arts, was only granted by the University of Manchester a mere two months before his death. By this stage he was so ill that the University authorities were forced to go to his home to bestow the award.

William Ernest Armytage Axon died on 27 December 1913 at his home in Victoria Park. Following a memorial service at Cross Street Unitarian Chapel he was laid to rest in the grave of his first wife, Jane Woods, at St Paul's Churchyard, Kersal. The congregation was composed largely of representatives of the organisations with which he had been associated.

Lucy Evans's talk did not disappoint. Everybody present felt their knowledge of the man had been expanded and enhanced. Thanks to Lucy. [AND]

PAST EVENTS

George Shaw in Uppermill

Talk by Dr Peter Lindfield on 8 March 2025 at Christ Church Friezland followed by a walk round Uppermill

Dr Lindfield is an architectural historian based at the University of Cardiff specialising in Georgian and Victorian architectural fashion—especially the Gothic Revival—as well architecture's application to the allied arts of interior design, decoration, and furnishing. He is a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London and former lecturer at MMU. He has worked extensively upon the early Victorian architect, antiquary, and forger George Shaw (1810–76) of Uppermill, and recently curated the exhibition 'A Royal Tudor Bed and a Northern Rogue' at Manchester Cathedral and Chetham's Library featuring the marriage bed of Henry VII found by Shaw in the 1830's and recently rediscovered, which was the inspiration for the many high class fake Tudor beds and other furniture items he provided to Victorian aristocracy and Chetham's Library itself.



George Shaw (1810-1876) was a self-trained English architect specialising in Gothic revival churches and other buildings. He was also an antiquary and collector of medieval, Tudor and Jacobean relics, including books, armour, furniture and architectural salvage. From about 1830 he began to convert his parents' farmhouse in Uppermill into a 'Gothic' manor house with interiors inspired by Sir Walter Scott's home at Abbotsford, Scotland. For the interior woodwork Shaw used a combination of salvaged late medieval woodwork

together with joinery and carving of his own invention. He later named the house St Chad's and it survives today as Uppermill Public Library (see picture above). Unlike many architects, Shaw not only designed buildings but also built them, using predominantly local workmen under his direction. He designed and built a number of churches mainly in what is now greater Manchester, but he also undertook commissions further afield, in North Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire, Lancashire and North Wales. A less well-known side of Shaw's work was the manufacture of fake furniture, stone monuments and other decorative items. It grew out of the experience he gained repairing and restoring antique furniture and woodwork as he transformed the interiors of his own house and other buildings.

We were delighted to meet in Christ Church Friezland, built by Shaw in 1850, as was the rectory next door, with additions in the 1860's (north- west tower, south transept, north aisle, organ chamber and vestry). Dr Lindfield spoke about his interest in Shaw, who he described as 'George Shaw the omnivore.' There is no one complete catalogue of his work, and new information continues to appear on him: information on his woodwork was found recently in Australia and new information has appeared on Shaw's relationship with the Duke of Northumberland. All this remains to be catalogued. Shaw was a contemporary of Pugin, who with the architect Charles Barry worked on the Palace of Westminster from 1844-52. Barry redesigned Gawthorpe Hall in the 1850's and Shaw did some work there, evidenced in drawings found in Barry's office. Did Shaw and Pugin have contact with each other? Endless possibilities! Basically, if it looks like Shaw, it probably is Shaw. What can be seen at Christ Church is both 14th

century Gothic and Tudor in style. Shaw was making furniture up until his death which he claimed to be genuinely old e.g. furniture at Whalley Abbey made in the 1870's but from 1000-year-old oak. From the start he was a picture collector, a maker and a documenter of fine historic items. Son of a woollen manufacturer, by the age of 18 and working as a salesman for his father, he was making himself into an armigerous landholder- a gentleman. Churches, country houses, castles, ruins, even Roman forts- they all interested him. He was particularly interested in anything to do with the Radcliffes, his mother's family. If he saw something in a house with a connection to them, he wanted it- if the price was right!

In January 1830 he started re-shaping the family home, renamed St Chad's. His father (or uncle) had torn down a much older house and replaced it with a rather dull modern Georgian house. Shaw decorated the façade with lots of gables and details to resemble (in his opinion) what was there before. His interest in the past was reflected in his religious views: as a staunch Protestant he opposed Catholic Emancipation, went to church twice on Sundays and at other times in the week if he missed; and was a friend of Dr William Hay, vicar of Rochdale, who had been present as a magistrate at Peterloo. Interestingly Dr Hay was a fellow collector- of books and pamphlets, commonplace books and scrapbooks of newspaper cuttings (now at Chetham's and in the John Rylands Library), and coins. Shaw built his own chapel at St Chad's, which surprisingly was furnished in a very Catholic way with a rood screen from the old Uppermill chapel and a crucifix with Christ, as well as helmets and pikes! He felt he deserved a romantic historic home because of his descent from gentry- a country house in all but name. Unfortunately, it has shallow foundations like Shaw's country house for the Platt family, Ashway Gap at the eastern end of Dovestones reservoir, which had to be demolished in the 1980's.

Shaw had a clear idea of what makes for good and bad Gothic, exemplified at Christ Church. The woodwork, the stonework and the brasswork are all Shaw. His use of the mouchette- a motif frequently found in 14th-century [Gothic](#) tracery and characterized by a combination of elliptical and ogee curves, resulting in a pointed and circular end, particularly in window tracery, is a characteristic found in his windows here and his other churches, and in the woodwork of the pulpit and choir stalls. Mouchettes and other geometric patterns like trefoils were commonly incorporated into carvings and decorative elements of Gothic Revival structures. Pugin was fond of using them in his metalwork. Other woodwork includes the poppy-head choir stalls, reredos and chancel panelling. One can describe Shaw's woodwork as 'highly recycled in various permutations:' over 100 people worked in his factory at Uppermill making as well as restoring 'antique' furniture and fittings, doing everything for him. Shaw's much-vaunted coat of arms can be seen over the door as you exit the church.

The talk was followed by a visit to the village of Uppermill to the north of Greenfield where the church is situated. On a glorious spring day, we looked at Uppermill library, which was originally St Chad's House, Shaw's home. The interior room is richly decorated with many elements of different periods including seventeenth century woodwork and a nineteenth century staircase and much work of the 1830s and 1840s. The room reflects Shaw's ancestry with a frieze with shields of the Shaw and Radcliffe families and royal coats of arms, reflecting his aristocratic aspirations. A coat of arms from a marriage bed is thought to be Tudor. The painted glass windows have the Radcliffe and Shaw coats of arms, of which Shaw was very proud, but in no way entitled. On the opposite side of the High Street is the Saddleworth Institute of 1859 also by Shaw. Typical of Shaw buildings, it is plain on the outside and rich inside. The front elevation uses the stylised letter "S" mouchette, and an hourglass-shaped shield.

We are indebted to Dr Lindfield for a fascinating talk in the peace and tranquillity of Greenfield, and lively walk on a busy Saturday in Uppermill. (AWD/DF)

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Christ Church Friezland – broach spire. ©AND 8 March 2025

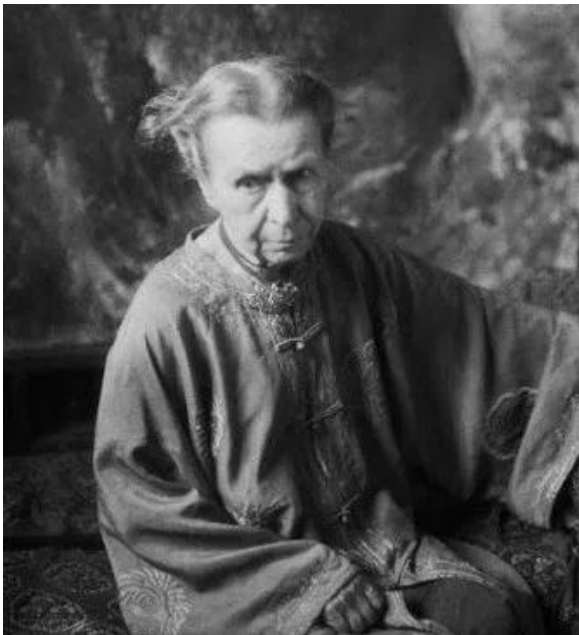
PAST EVENTS

The Artist Annie Swynnerton

Wednesday 26 March 2025. 7pm at the Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester

A Talk by Rebecca Milner, Curator of Fine Art at Manchester Art Gallery

Annie Louisa Swynnerton, (nee Robinson) ARA was a British painter best known for her portrait and symbolist works. She was born in Hulme, Manchester into an aspiring middle-class family in 1844. By the age of 17 she was living in a large house in Prestwich Park together with her parents and six sisters. Home educated until, age 25, she attended Manchester School of Art located in the Royal Manchester Institution building (now Manchester Art Gallery). At the time study of the nude was considered an essential part of artistic training but, due to the moral codes of the day, this was denied to female students. Despite this constraint and determined to succeed as a professional artist, Swynnerton demonstrated great skill and achieved medals and awards for painting in 1870 and 1871. In 1873 she was awarded one of two national scholarships which consisted of a medal and £11. The money funded her trip to Rome in 1874 with fellow MSA student Susan Isabel Dacre (1844-1933), who had worked in Paris and studied art in the Louvre. Together in 1878/9 they went on to study at the Academie Julian in Paris and maintained a life-long friendship and working relationship.



From 1871 Swynnerton, her sisters and Dacre exhibited work in the Annual Exhibition at the RMI. Frustrated by the continued lack of access to studying from life and excluded from membership of the Manchester Academy of Fine Art, Swynnerton and Dacre established the Manchester Society of Women Painters in 1879 to support female artists. This was disbanded after the acceptance of female membership of MAFA on an equal footing to men in 1884. An ardent supporter of women's suffrage, Swynnerton was a friend of the Pankhursts, and the Garrett family who were the subject of many portraits including one of Millicent Fawcett.

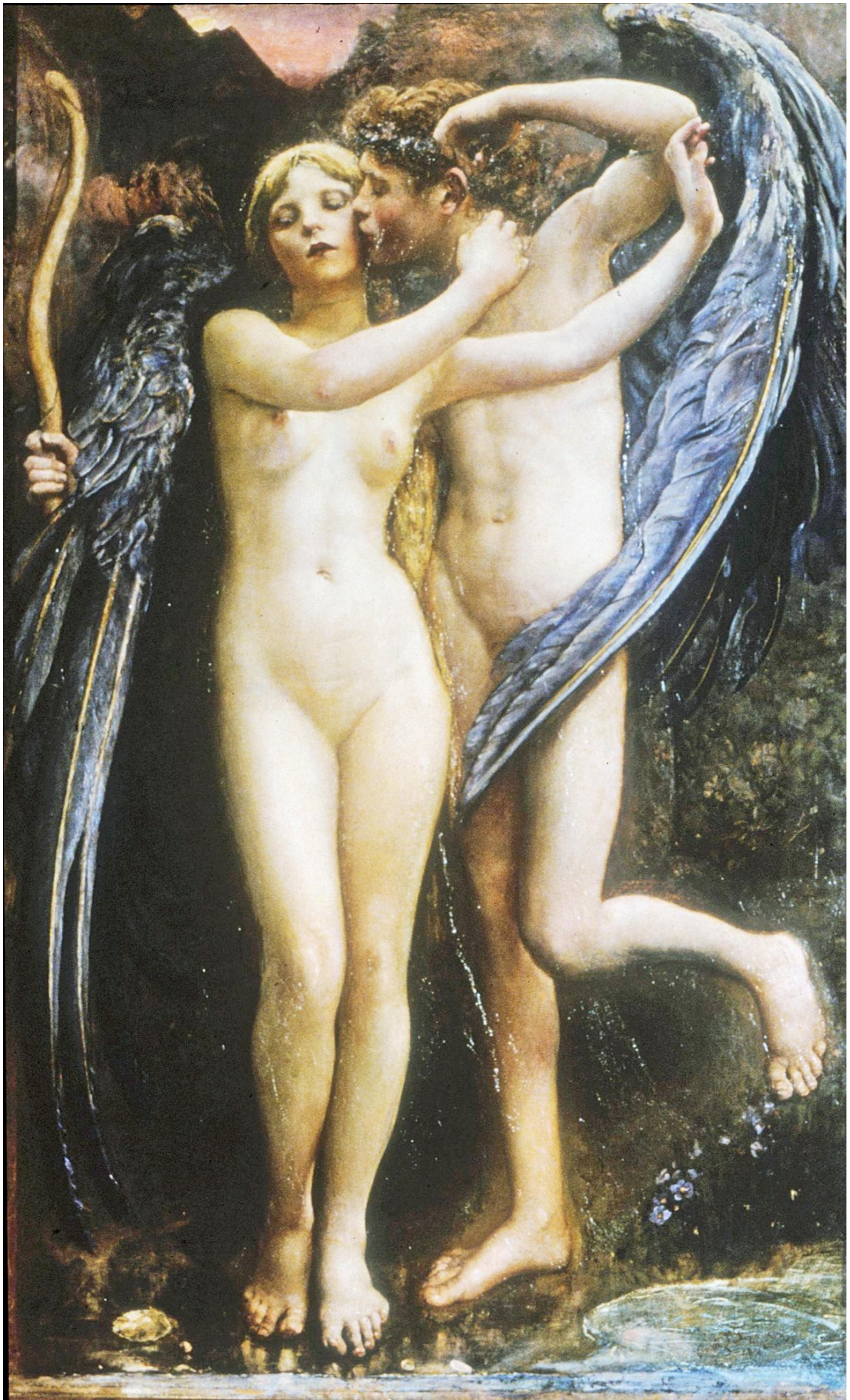
Swynnerton had married the monumental sculptor Joseph Swynnerton (1846-1910) in 1883. For almost three decades they divided their time between Italy and London. She maintained this after his death until illness and an accident left her unable to travel. Around 1931 she moved from London to Hayling Island, Hampshire attracted by the warmer weather and quality of the light. She continued painting out of doors almost every day until her death aged 89 in 1933.

By the 1890s Swynnerton had achieved an international reputation. Working in various traditional genres she produced over 200 paintings including portraits, landscapes, nudes and subject pictures inspired by history, literature, mythology and her imagination. Influenced by both G. F. Watts and Burne-Jones, her work was much admired by John Singer Sargent who supported her election as an associate member of the Royal Academy of Art in 1922. Her work is held in public collections in Britain and overseas with the largest holdings in Manchester Art Gallery, Tate and Glasgow Museums.

Our thanks to Rebecca for a most interesting and illuminating lecture. [Moira Stevenson]

Illustration Annie Louisa Swynnerton, - above

Illustration Cupid and Psyche 1890 by Annie Swynnerton. Galley Oldham - right



FUTURE EVENTS

George Edmund Street at Swinton

Saturday 26 April 2025 at 11am: at St Peter's Church, Swinton M27 0WA, at the invitation of Fr Jeremy Sheehy

An opportunity to visit St Peter's, Swinton built to the designs of the Victorian architect G E Street, the bicentenary of whose birth was celebrated last year. The visit includes a talk by Anthea and Neil Darlington on Street's relationship with the influential Heywood family.

St Peter's Church stands on Chorley Road, Swinton, at its junction with road and close to Salford Civic Centre. The church was built in 1869 at a cost of £18,000, largely at the expense of the Heywood banking family and replaced a chapel-of-ease on the same site. The 2004 edition of Pevsner's *Buildings of England, Lancashire: Manchester and the South East* says 'One looks at St Peter's with respect ... we ought to be grateful for three such Victorian churches distant from each other by only a few miles [St Peter's, Swinton, St Augustine's Pendlebury and St Mark's Worsley]. Pendlebury and Swinton stand out above any contemporary Gothic buildings in France or Germany.'



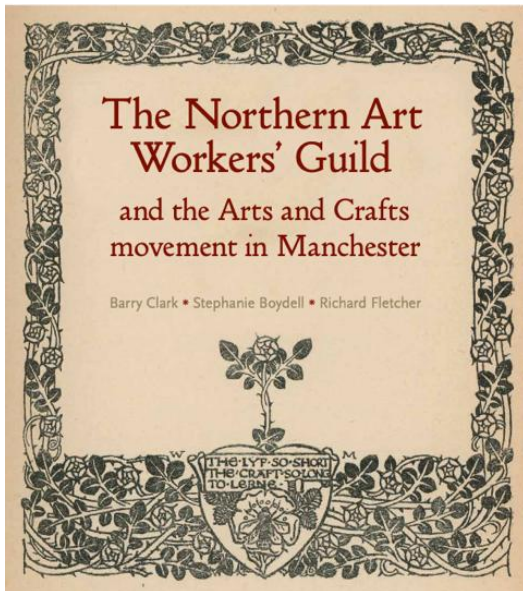
Photo: St Peter's Church from the north-east. P13074-2 © Neil Darlington.2019]

FUTURE EVENTS

The Northern Art Workers Guild and the Arts and Crafts Movement in Manchester

Wednesday 14 May 2025 7pm at the Friends' Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester Cost: £10 No booking required.

A talk by Barry Clark following the publication of "The Northern Art Workers' Guild"



The Art Workers' Guild was an organisation established in 1884 by a group of British painters, sculptors, architects, and designers associated with the ideas of [William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement](#). The guild promoted the 'unity of all the arts', denying the distinction between fine and applied art. The Northern Art Workers Guild followed in 1896, and until the publication of the book in 2024 its history has been largely overlooked or made up, partly because its membership records have never been found. One thing that can be stated categorically is that unlike the national organisation, women were members from the start. Edgar Wood and Walter Pearce were early Masters, and Will Mellor its secretary for many years. This book is a major study giving us at last a reliable history of the Guild and its members, and its role as 'an essential component of the Arts and Crafts movement located in the heart of industrial England,' and co-

written by Barry Clark, Stephanie Boydell and Richard Fletcher.

Stephanie is Curator at Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections Museum with a specialist responsibility for the Manchester School of Art collection of art, craft and design. Barry is an independent researcher, craft bookbinder and member of the Manchester Society of Bookbinders. Richard is a researcher who has written and lectured on architectural history throughout the North-West.

Ancoats – canals, cotton mills, and housing

Tuesday 20 May 2025. 12.30pm- 2pm

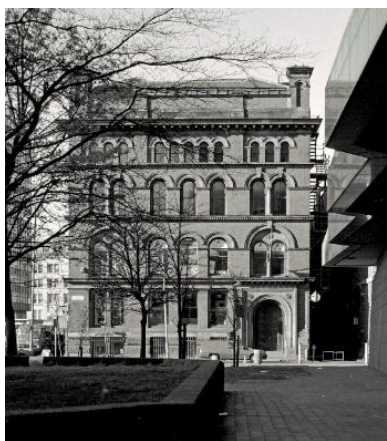
A lunchtime walk round Ancoats led by Ken Moth meeting at the corner of Newton Street and Piccadilly at 12.30pm. Cost £10.00. Booking essential.

Ancoats has been described as the cradle of industrialisation. Why was Manchester so important in the infancy and development of the Industrial Revolution and why was this area on the north-eastern fringe of the Georgian town so attractive to early entrepreneurs? What happened and what can we see now? Come along to find out.



Ken Moth, conservation architect extraordinaire, Chair of the Northern Buildings Committee 1991-2024 and Casework Trustee for the Victorian Society for many years. Together with Mark Watson, Ken had provided a conservation report on Victorian buildings in our area to the AGM over many years. Ken spent 50 years in building conservation, his interest being sparked by being asked in 1973 to join the campaign to save York House. The walk should last about an hour and a half, and it is hoped to attract those with an interest in the period and its buildings who work in the city centre.

Manchester's Warehouse Legacy



Saturday 7 June 2025 pm £10.00

Ken Moth will lead a second walk looking at some of Manchester's finest remaining warehouses, including those by Edward Walters (1808-1872), architect of the Free Trade Hall.

Details to be confirmed

Lunchtime Visit to John Rylands Library

Tuesday 17 June 2025 12.30pm £10.00

A tour and talk led by Rory Chisholm, chartered architect and Associate Member of the Manchester Academy of Fine Arts.

The John Rylands Library was founded by Enriqueta Rylands in memory of her husband John Rylands, textile manufacturer and Manchester's first multi-millionaire. She purchased the incomparable collection of printed books belonging to the 2nd Earl Spencer and the manuscripts of the Earl of Crawford as the founding collections. Designed by Basil Champneys and opened in 1900, it is one of the finest examples of neo-Gothic architecture in Europe and is indisputably one of the great libraries of the world. The library became part of The University of Manchester in 1972. It now houses the majority of Special Collections of The University of Manchester Library, the third largest academic library in the United Kingdom.

Details to be confirmed



Victorian and Edwardian Non-Ecclesiastical Stained Glass

Wed 25 June 2025 at 7 for 7.15pm Stretford Public Hall £10.00



Talk by Veronica Smith, stained glass artist, conservator and researcher. Veronica is the author of 'Stained Glass and the Victorian Town: Rochdale Library, Museum and Art Gallery.' She has recently been involved in the conservation and refurbishment of the stained glass in Rochdale Town Hall.

Details to be confirmed