

## A Wesleyan Hall Turned Commercial Venture

It is no secret that Albert's Schloss and Albert Hall at 27 Peter Street in Manchester are at the center of town's night life.

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The building that they occupy is the newest example of Gothic architecture considered yet in this series for Haunt Manchester and Visit Manchester; it is, nonetheless, a really interesting example of Gothic design's flexibility and, indeed, longevity beyond the confines of the British Middle Ages (the period when the style originated in and evolved during, in structures like Durham Cathedral (**Fig.1**) and Gloucester Cathedral (**Fig.2**)).

The building considered in this post is Grade II listed by Historic England (list entry number [1246727](#)) and it was added to the register on 30 April 1982 (**Fig.3**). This grade means that it is of historic significance, but not of the utmost or exceptional significance—grades II\* and I are reserved for these structures respectively—but, that said, 92 per cent of all listed buildings come under the grade II status.<sup>1</sup> The Albert Memorial Hall's real significance today is to Manchester's social scene, but also, from the perspective of architectural historians, it is an important demonstration of Gothic's malleability; the former criterion is certainly not what Historic England uses to assign listing grades(!), but the latter is especially revealing. The building's significance in terms of architecture and design (despite there being a model of the Hall hung from the ceiling of the entrance to Albert's Schloss) goes, I am sure it is not unfair to say, largely unnoticed by the majority of revellers flocking to the bar and hall upstairs.

Originally built in 1910 as a multi-purpose hall for the Manchester and Salford Wesleyan Mission—one of the main Methodist groups active in Manchester—the Albert Memorial Hall was designed by William James Morley (1847–1930) who had offices in Bolton, Greater Manchester, and Bradford, Yorkshire. Morley submitted the winning proposal for the design of the Albert Memorial Hall, and at this point in his career he had designed numerous Methodist chapels, churches, and schools as far apart as Paisley in Renfrewshire, Scotland, and Helston in Cornwall. Morley's building is also significant within the context of the Methodist Forward Movement that commissioned large central halls—buildings designed to reach poor city-centre residents left behind when the socially mobile moved out to the suburbs—given that it was one of the largest at the time of construction.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/your-home/owning-historic-property/listed-building/>

The ground floor of the Albert Memorial Hall accommodated offices and lecture rooms (this is now the [Albert's Schloss 'Beer Palace'](#)), and the upper level housed a large auditorium seating more than two thousand people (disused for decades, but now fully restored and converted into a functioning and popular music venue, [Albert Hall](#)). Morley was fully experienced working in a clearly recognisable Gothic style, having designed, amongst other structures, the Wesleyan Chapel, Chamberlayne Road, Kensal Rise, London (1900) (**Fig.4**), and Beeston Methodist Church, Nottinghamshire (1902), known previously as Chilwell Road Methodist Church (**Fig.5**). The superficial treatment of the gables rising between the distinctively plain pinnacles located at each corner of the towers in these two earlier buildings, as well as cusp-less tracery in their windows, can be seen as leitmotifs, or traits, of Morley's Gothic. Generally, it can be observed that the surfeit of minute decorative ornament found in later medieval Gothic architecture, as seen in many Gothic buildings, such as York Minster (**Fig.6**), was not part of his Victorian reinterpretation of the style.

Morley's pared-back style can be seen to have evolved further when he turned to design the Albert Memorial Hall. The distinctive façade is finished in Burmantofts architectural faience (glazed ceramics), with the glazed surface of the pottery tiles easy being easy to wash—particularly helpful given the build-up of grime from the pollution of industry. The overtly Gothic characteristics on the Peter Street façade of the structure include the panelling with low-rise ogee arches in the heads (**Fig.7**). The ogee arch is a more decorative variant of the Gothic pointed arch, and it became especially popular in England's Decorated (c.1290–1350) and Perpendicular (1332–Tudor period) Gothic phases. These ogee panels on the Peter Street façade, curiously, do not align with the vertical glazing bars (mullions) of the two top-most window registers; they, consequently, deviate from the general alignment principles typically governing both Classical and Gothic architecture.

The uppermost windows of the hall's façade match Morley's Gothic buildings already mentioned in that they are entirely absent of the C-shaped cusp motifs seen in the windows of York Minster (**Fig.6**). The notable difference, however, is that the Gothic windows on the Peter Street façade are expressed without reference to the pointed arch (**Fig.8**); where we would typically expect to find pointed arches governing the forms of lancets, as well as windows head, these features are made entirely from rounded forms: in essence a classicised version of Gothic. The same applies to the pediment over the central bay of the Peter Street façade. Even the bay window's string of blind pendants seen on the far left of **Fig.3** should be made from pointed arches, but they are, instead, rounded. These Classical forms match the Baroque (Classical) characteristics of the entranceway to Albert Hall to the east (right hand side) of the structure (**Fig.9**).

Morley's Albert Memorial Hall, consequently, is designed in a peculiar style where Gothic architectural components and characteristics are executed according to Classical forms. The choice of at least some Gothic elements for a Wesleyan Hall, however, makes sense, given the style's traditional association with Christian structures. Morley's modification of the Gothic style, and the building's execution in modern-manufactured materials, ultimately speaks to the time that it was designed and constructed.

## Captions

Fig.1: Durham Cathedral, northern façade from the Galilee Chapel to the North transept. © Peter N. Lindfield.

Fig.2: Gloucester Cathedral, interior range of the Cloisters. Courtesy of Michael D Beckwith (CC0 1.0).

Fig.3: Albert Memorial Hall façade viewed from Peter Street. © Peter N. Lindfield.

Fig.4: Wesleyan Chapel, Chamberlayne Road, Kensal Rise, London. © Julian Osley (CC BY-SA 2.0).

Fig.5: Beeston Methodist Church, Nottinghamshire. © Andrewrabbott (CC BY-SA 4.0).

Fig.6: Western façade of York Minster. © Peter N. Lindfield.

Fig.7: Detail of the ogee panelling on the Peter Street façade of the Albert Memorial Hall. © Peter N. Lindfield.

Fig.8: Detail of the 'Gothic' tracery windows on the Peter Street façade of the Albert Memorial Hall. © Peter N. Lindfield.

Fig.9: Comparison of the Gothic and Renaissance details of the Peter Street façade of the Albert Memorial Hall. © Peter N. Lindfield.