

A Hidden Gem in Salford: Arlington House, Bloom Street

Thomas Worthington (1826–1909), a Manchester-based architect, is certainly familiar to readers of my recent architectural post for Haunt on the Visit Manchester site. I have covered Worthington's Memorial Hall (1864–66) [here](#), and his City Police and Session Courts complex (1867–73) [here](#). Worthington also designed numerous other buildings in central and Greater Manchester, including Nicholls Hospital (1879–80), Ardwick, (**Fig.1**) which has latterly housed the Ellen Wilkinson High School; this imposing structure on the A57, Hyde Road, shares numerous visual and aesthetic similarities with buildings realised earlier in Worthington's career.

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Of the Hospital's architectural features and characteristics similar to Worthington's earlier buildings, perhaps the most obvious is the used of red brick and yellow sandstone in a considered manner to create a polychrome effect typical of the Victorian Gothic Revival. This polychrome effect, as noted in my earlier post on his Memorial Hall, followed the suggestions of John Ruskin, a notable exponent of, and writer on, Gothic in the Victorian period (**Fig.2**). Further similarities linking the Hospital to Worthington's earlier buildings include the use and appearance of the Gothic tower with high-corner turrets, known as bartizans, high-pitched roof, and machicolations. The Hospital's Gothic Tower is incredibly similar to, if a simplified version of, the corner tower on the Minshull Street façade of the City Police and Session Courts building (**Fig.3**).

Nicholls Hospital was listed Grade II* by what is now Historic England on 3 October 1974 (list entry number [1291812](#)), indicating its high significance to architectural history and Manchester, and on these counts it is equal to Worthington's [Minshull Street court building](#) and the [Memorial Hall](#), both of which are Grade II*. The animal grotesques, so obvious on the Minshull Street façade of the Police and City Session Courts, were once part of the Nicholls Hospital's façade too, however they were removed from the tower in the twentieth century. Another similarity linking this building with his earlier output is the form of the Gothic windows, especially those projecting from the tower at the roofline.

Despite my making a fuss about Worthington's Nicholls Hospital—an architectural jewel that is today lost in obscurity and hidden in plain sight as an anonymous backdrop to an all-too-congested arterial route in and out of Manchester—this post doesn't concern the Hospital. This architectural jewel, speaking to Worthington's style found in his other notable contributions to Manchester's city centre architecture, introduces and acts as a reference point to the topic of my post: the office building constructed for the Gas Board on Bloom Street, Salford, in 1880. The Gas Board Office building is today known as Arlington House (**Fig.4**). Grade II listed by Historic England on 18 January 1980 (list entry [1386086](#)), and,

hence, slightly less significant than the buildings already mentioned from Historic England's perspective, it is just off the main thoroughfares of Trinity Way and Chapel Street in Salford, and close to the centre of Manchester. Despite its centrality, Arlington House is easily missed by anyone seeking to explore Manchester's and Salford's architectural jewels.

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This authorship of this building is a mystery; currently no traced evidence pointing to the architect responsible for the office 'block' has come to light, and, as such, it is like so many structures that have lost, or simply do not have any attribution. The building, upon close and careful inspection, can be read like a book. Doing so reveals certain characteristics and architectural devices that are similar to Worthington's other and earlier buildings in Manchester, including those mentioned already in this post. These similarities have led people to suppose Worthington either designed Arlington House, or that it was designed by someone else in direct imitation of his style. So if not by the hand of the Manchester architect, it can certainly be considered Worthington-esque in flavor.

So what makes the case that this is a Worthington project? Firstly, the already mentioned polychrome effect is employed: red brick and yellow sandstone are used in choice ways to highlight the building's architectural and decorative features, such as columns, arches, and bartizans (**Fig.5**). Secondly, the tall tower with high-pitched roof and bartizans is also a notable feature of the structure; its centrality of the building's identity and the specific form and ornament match very closely the towers of the City Police and Session Courts building and Nicholls Hospital (**Fig.6**), just pared back further. The animal grotesques seen on his other buildings, such as the City Police and Session Courts building, are also found on Arlington house: here they flank the first-floor bay window at the centre of the façade (**Fig.7**). Much like over the main entrance on the Minshull Street façade of the City Police and Sessions Court building, it is also possible to see Manchester's coat of arms, but this time instead of appearing in a circle it is located within a barbed quatrefoil; a shape that happens to form the main decorative effect applied to the Minshull street doors to the court building. Finally, each level of window is different on each register, much like found on the City Police and Session Courts building and the Memorial Hall.

The short stubby columns characteristic of Victorian Gothic are found flanking the Bloom Street entrance to Arlington House, as well as at the centre of two paired windows above this in the tower; this choice architectural form can also be found on the main entrance to the court buildings on Minshull Street (**Fig.8**). The architectural elaboration in the area, or vertical 'bay', containing the entrance, or main entrance for the City Police and Session Court building, also marks out its importance to the building in a subconscious way.

Despite this raft of close similarities linking Arlington House with numerous other Gothic buildings by Worthington, there is one main difference: the use of round-headed windows on the ground floor. Unlike his other buildings considered here, the round-headed windows compromise the wrought and overwhelmingly Gothic characteristics of the rest of the façade. Does this irregularity suggest another architect? Did Worthington, by 1880, push the envelope of his Gothic architecture beyond the envelope of the pointed arch to include the rounded arch?

Well, to my mind, there are further aspects of Arlington House's façade visible in **figs7–8** that are odds with the nature of Worthington's Gothic. Firstly, the entrance's archway is ornamented with a band of ten circular floral motifs; these motifs punctuate the arch in an awkward manner where the relationship between plain surface and ornament is quite unlike Worthington's style. He used such motifs, such as on the upper levels of the City Police and Session Courts building, but the way in which they are deployed here does not chime with their earlier use. Secondly, the trio of quatrefoil 'tiles' (alternating $x + x$) beneath each window of the first-floor bay are equally awkward, too spread out, and not treated in the coherent way that Worthington did, for example, on the Albert Memorial (**Fig.9**) in front of the Town Hall in Manchester (1862–65), and which will be discussed in a subsequent post. Finally, the tops of the dormer windows are covered in a floral diaper pattern—something that was employed in medieval Gothic architecture, such as on the interior of Westminster Abbey, London, but which Worthington does not appear to have, by 1880, employed in his own exterior architecture. Whilst not preventing Arlington House from being recognized as a building by the Manchester-based architect, to my mind it certainly raises subtle differences—and perhaps even evolutions—in his style.

Irrespective of this question, Arlington House is an easily overlooked and bypassed gem spitting distance from the centre of Manchester. Its form, appearance, and 'style' demonstrate the longevity and development of Worthington's Gothic style. Much like the evolution of Gothic architecture in the medieval period, Gothic architecture in Victorian Britain also developed.

Image Captions

Fig.1: Nicholls Hospital: façade facing the A57. © maps.google.com.

Fig.2: John Ruskin, Loggia of the Ducal Palace, Venice, 1849–50. 08.227.39. Courtesy of www.metmuseum.org.

Fig.3: Comparison of the Gothic towers on Worthington's Nicholls Hospital (l), and the City Police and Session Courts (r). © Peter N. Lindfield.

Fig.4: Bloom Street façade of Arlington House, Salford. © Peter N. Lindfield.

Fig.5: Comparison of the polychrome on Arlington House polychrome (l) and the City Police and Session Courts (r). © Peter N. Lindfield.

Fig.6: Comparison of the towers on Arlington House (l), City Police and Session Courts (c), and Nicholls Hospital (r). © Peter N. Lindfield.

Fig.7: Animal grotesques on the façade of Arlington House. © Peter N. Lindfield.

Fig.8: Architectural elaboration of the entrances to Arlington House on Bloom Street (l) and the City Police and Session Courts on Minshull Street (r), noting the use of short stubby Victorian Gothic columns. © Peter N. Lindfield.

Fig.9: Detail of the Albert Memorial, Albert Square, Manchester. Photograph by Mike Peel, www.mikepeel.net (CC-BY-SA-4.0).