

Manchester's 'Renaissance Gothic' Building: Kimpton Clocktower Hotel

Perhaps as surprising as my analysis of [St Philip's Church, Salford](#), as a Gothic building, is this post, which examines the newly re-named Kimpton Clocktower Hotel (March 2020).

Formerly known as The Palace Hotel following its £7m conversion to a hotel in 1996, and between November 2018 and March 2020 as The Principal Hotel, the building considered in this post was built originally as the offices for The Refuge Assurance Company (known as The Refuge Friend in Deed Life Assurance and Sick Fund Friendly Society). What we see today was built in three distinct phases and relates to the increasing demands that The Refuge Assurance Company placed upon the building.

The original structure was built in 1891 by Alfred Waterhouse, a local Manchester-based architect, and it comprises the block on the corner of Whitworth and Oxford Streets (Phase 1) on the diagram; this original building did not include the famous and iconic 66m-high tower. An additional block (triangular at the rear) was added to the original structure to the south on Oxford Street (next to the train line and bordering the River Medlock) in 1910 by Alfred Waterhouse's son, Paul (Phase 2a), and the tower and linking was added in 1912 (Phase 2b). An additional block was added to the east of the complex in 1830s on Whitworth Street (Phase 3).

This post concerns the original, Alfred Waterhouse building. The complex, at least to me, is surprisingly ONLY Grade II* listed (Historic England list entry number 1271429, see [here](#), and listed on 3 October 1974).

It is, as widely recognised, one of the most distinctive, attractive, and recognisable of Manchester's buildings. The Wikipedia entry on Waterhouse claims the building, completely incorrectly, to be Jacobethan. Instead, it is an eclectic mixture of styles that is quite clearly of Renaissance inspiration, as well as Baroque. This means the building is essentially heavily ornamented in the Classical style, but the traditional forms and ornament of ancient Rome are reinterpreted in an energetic, highly ornate, and excessively stylized manner.

Note, for example, the Classical pilasters and columns flanking the windows on the façade. The pilasters are filled with Classical florets; this is something quite absent from ancient architecture. The windows above that are flanked by columns have a barley-twist fluting, once again quite unusual in this particular form and the nearest, but quite separate model being Solomonic columns.