

‘Here, by experiment’: Edgar Wood in Middleton

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Abstract

Edgar Wood and Middleton are closely entwined. Until his fifties, Wood engaged in the life of his native town, while his architecture gradually enriched its heritage. The paper begins with Wood’s character and gives an insight into his wider *modus operandi* with regard to fellow practitioners. A stylistic appraisal of his surviving Middleton area buildings draws attention to his individual development of Arts and Crafts architecture, a pinnacle of which was Long Street Methodist Church and Schools. The impact of J. Henry Sellers is examined, and the emergence of their subsequent modernism is traced through a number of pioneering designs. Stylistic connections with Charles Rennie Mackintosh of Glasgow and the Viennese architect Josef Hoffmann imply that Wood’s experiments were sometimes part of a wider stylistic development. Finally, a small cluster of Middleton houses summarizes Wood’s architectural journey, illustrating his incremental transition from Arts and Crafts to early Modern Movement architecture.

Keywords: Edgar Wood; Middleton; Arts and Crafts; J. Henry Sellers; Modern Movement; art nouveau; art deco; Long Street Methodist Church; Elm Street School; Charles Rennie Mackintosh; Josef Hoffmann

Edgar Wood was a remarkable architect whose work lies mainly in and around his home town of Middleton, midway between Manchester and Rochdale. He was a leading Arts and Crafts practitioner with an international standing, yet is almost completely absent from present-day narratives of the movement. The historian J.H.G. Archer nevertheless established Wood and his partner J. Henry Sellers as significant figures of early twentieth-century architecture.¹ He embarked on his study early enough to have been able to interview Sellers towards the end of his life, as well as other friends and colleagues of Wood. The breadth of Archer’s work provided the present researchers² with a problem of what to study; his pamphlet of 1966 describing Wood’s life, with its catalogue raisonné of his buildings, is still the definitive account of his career.³

In 2010 the 150th anniversary of Edgar Wood’s birth was marked in Middleton by lectures, concerts, exhibitions, an architectural trail and a photographic

¹ A short summary of J.H.G. Archer’s work with regard to Edgar Wood is contained in Clare Hartwell and Terry Wyke, ‘John H.G. Archer: An Appreciation’, in *Making Manchester: Aspects of the History of Architecture in the City and Region since 1800: Essays in Honour of John H.G. Archer*, eds Clare Hartwell and Terry Wyke (Manchester: Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society, 2007), 6.

² The author is grateful to Andy Marshall, Geoff Wellens, Alan Gardner, Kerrie Smith, Nick Baker, and Christine and Geoffrey Grime for their contributions.

³ J.H.G. Archer, ‘Edgar Wood: A Notable Manchester Architect’, *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society*, 73–4 (1963–64), 153–87, reprinted as *Edgar Wood (1860–1935): A Manchester ‘Art Nouveau’ Architect* (Manchester: Printed for the Society by Dawson & Co., 1966).

exhibition by Andy Marshall, whose pictures illustrate this paper. The highlight was a £2 million Heritage Lottery Fund award to restore the Edgar Wood buildings in the town centre. The grant was very timely. A great loss occurred in 2002 when the Junior and Senior blocks of the outstanding Durnford Street School were demolished. Today several of his buildings are at risk, while others suffer from ill-considered alterations. Long Street Methodist Church and Schools were at the point of being abandoned before being acquired by the Heritage Trust for the North West.

The local authority, Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council, is now interested and involved in Edgar Wood and has partnered the study of his legacy on which this paper is based. It presents findings about Wood's character and his development as an architect, including links to local vernacular buildings and contemporary influences, that aim to present his work as a unified body that is part of Manchester's heritage.

'Even not seeing a man you can feel his influence'

Edgar Wood was born in 1860, the son of a wealthy mill owner, and lived in Middleton most of his life, playing an active role in the local Liberal Party and Unitarian Church. He attended the local grammar school and married Annie Maria Jelly, the daughter of its headmaster, in 1892. An arts and crafts all-rounder, Wood established his small architectural practice in Middleton after he qualified in 1885, expanded to Oldham by 1889, finally moving to Manchester in 1893. After a successful decade as a prominent designer and craftsman, he joined forces with J. Henry Sellers, and produced stylistically advanced modern buildings. In 1922 he retired early to paint in Imperia, north-west Italy, where he died in 1935.

Nikolaus Pevsner wrote of Wood and Sellers: 'Here, by experiment, two Lancashire architects of no great renown got as near as anyone in England to the most progressive European and American work of 1900–14.'⁴ However, this achievement is hardly plausible without a significant contemporary standing and connection to this progressive international work, and there are several indications of this linkage. For example, Wood's work was exhibited at the Architectural League of New York in 1900 and at the international exhibitions of Turin and Budapest in 1902. He was published in foreign architectural journals as well as in British publications read abroad. The *Architect and Engineer of California* used Wood's Long Street Methodist Schools (1899) as late as 1917 to illustrate progressive design in education.⁵ Wood also trained two pupils who moved to other influential practices. Cecil Hignett (1879–1960) trained from 1896 to 1900 and worked subsequently with

⁴ Nikolaus Pevsner, *Lancashire 1: The Industrial and Commercial South* (hereafter *South Lancashire*), The Buildings of England (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969), 49.

⁵ Horace G. Simpson, 'Notes on Recent Progress and Tendencies in Schoolhouse Design', *Architect and Engineer of California*, 50:3 (September 1917), 47.

Raymond Unwin and Barry Parker on Letchworth Garden City.⁶ His successor, Dennis Bamford, trained for two and a half years before moving to Beresford Pite in late 1903,⁷ a move that made room for the arrival of J. Henry Sellers.

The reason for Wood's lack of historical renown lies in the man himself. Although he had 'immense energy and great driving force to everyone he came in contact with', and was 'the sort of man who always gets his own way',⁸ the *Middleton Guardian* described him as someone with 'a sensitive disposition' and a 'natural shyness'. In particular, he was a person who 'eschewed public life' and 'liked to labour in the background', and was 'one of those quiet men who did good by stealth'.⁹ His great energy was therefore tempered by natural modesty and a deep desire to stay in the background, something fatal to historical prominence. Wood also retired early, and from his Italian home observed his reputation beginning to disappear. J.H.G. Archer discovered in Wood's papers a newspaper cutting of a 1933 *Spectator* review of John Betjeman's *Ghastly Good Taste* where the reviewer pointed out the omission of Wood from an overview of recent architecture. Wood had underlined his name, and at the foot of the column had written 'Hurrah!'¹⁰

Wood's self-effacing character can be inferred from various instances in his life. When he was pressed to stand as a Liberal candidate in the local election of October 1893, his newspaper election notice, sandwiched between the detailed manifestos of his rivals, merely stated: 'Having been requested to offer myself as a Candidate at the forthcoming Municipal Election for this Ward, I have pleasure in placing my services at your disposal.'¹¹ Needless to say, he was not elected, and a short time later was behind the scenes quietly organizing a series of concerts and lectures.¹² Much later, in the 1930s, when unanimously elected President of Middleton Liberal Club, he explained explicitly, 'Figure heads to me make but little appeal.'¹³

A comment of 1898 in *The Studio* similarly illustrates a background role as a craft-worker: 'the full extent and value of his labours in the Manchester [*sic*] Art Workers' Guild are only known to those who have enjoyed the stimulus of

⁶ British Architectural Library, Royal Institute of British Architects, *Directory of British Architects 1834–1914*, Vol. 1: A–K, compiled by Antonia Brodie et al. (London and New York: Continuum, 2001), 907.

⁷ *Ibid.* 103.

⁸ G.A.E. Schwabe, in a letter to J.H.G. Archer, dated 12 April 1950, quoted in John Archer, 'Edgar Wood and J. Henry Sellers: A Decade of Partnership and Experiment', in *Edwardian Architecture and its Origins*, ed. Alastair Service (London: Architectural Press, 1975), 384, and John Archer, 'Partnership in Style', in *Partnership in Style: Edgar Wood & J. Henry Sellers: An Exhibition for European Architectural Heritage Year, Manchester City Art Gallery, 16 October–16 November 1975* ([Manchester]: Manchester City Art Gallery, 1975), 5.

⁹ *Middleton Guardian*, 19 October 1935, 4, col. 3.

¹⁰ John H.G. Archer, 'Edgar Wood and the Architecture of the Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau Movements in Britain', 2 vols (MA thesis, University of Manchester, 1968), i. 193.

¹¹ *Middleton Guardian*, 28 October 1893, 4, col. 3.

¹² *Ibid.* 9 December 1893, 5, col. 2.

¹³ *Ibid.* 26 March 1932, 5, col. 5.

fellowship with so conscientious and earnest a craftsman.¹⁴ In discussing the setting up of the Northern Art Workers' Guild, J.H.G. Archer considered evidence from James Lenegan (b. 1870), a fellow craftsman who worked with Wood on an early house, Halecroft, and who, in 1893, took over his Middleton teaching work. Lenegan recalled to Archer how it was Wood who, around 1892 or 1893, mentioned that he was interested in launching a craft society. Wood duly did this, holding monthly meetings in a disused part of a Manchester warehouse. However, art teachers and amateurs subsequently joined, to the dissatisfaction of the craftworkers, and the society was therefore reformed in 1896 with Walter Crane as its figurehead and renamed the Northern Art Workers' Guild.¹⁵ Wood had launched the initiative with ideas and labour but decided to pass on the leading role.

Wood's professional modesty can be observed in 1904 when, at the height of his international standing, he entered into an equal partnership with the then unknown J. Henry Sellers, and from 1905–07 when he 'ghosted' for G.F. Bodley with regard to various repairs, a new roof and a boiler-house for Middleton Parish Church.¹⁶ At the RIBA Town Planning Conference of 1910, a seminal international event, he participated as a leading practitioner on a committee of the Executive, but avoided the limelight by joining the 'Honorary Interpreters Committee' as interpreter to the Italian delegation.¹⁷ Wood's avoidance of the public eye is perhaps why Alastair Service described him as an extraordinary and isolated figure in *Edwardian Architecture* (1977).¹⁸ However, the London-based architect Michael Bunney presented him in the 1907 German periodical *Moderne Bauformen* as the very opposite, a networker, believing that 'practising artists should remain in contact with one another to keep the tradition of British domestic architecture alive, so that beneficial developments might be possible.'¹⁹ This combination of artistic drive, self-effacement and networking ability perhaps explains why Wood designed some of the most progressive architecture of his time yet is largely unknown today. With the passing of his generation, his reputation disappeared from view.

The significance of Wood's work was recognized by the German architectural theorist and founder member of the Deutscher Werkbund, Hermann Muthesius. He discussed him in *Das englische Haus* (1904) alongside Arts and Crafts

¹⁴ Esther Wood, 'The Manchester Arts and Crafts Exhibition', *The Studio*, 15 (1898), 127.

¹⁵ Archer, 'Edgar Wood and the Architecture of the Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau Movements in Britain', i, 108–9. Note that *The Studio*'s 1898 reference to the 'Manchester' Art Workers' Guild was perhaps an accidental use of the name of the earlier organization.

¹⁶ Monthly 'Church News and Notices', 1905–07 (kept in the church vestry), describe Mr Bodley as the consulting architect. Edgar Wood was reported as examining the roof in December 1905, and the Restoration Fund Accounts of 31 December 1908 record him receiving the architect's fee.

¹⁷ Royal Institute of British Architects, *Town Planning Conference, London, 10–15 October 1910: Transactions* (London: RIBA, 1911), 15.

¹⁸ Alastair Service, *Edwardian Architecture: A Handbook to Building Design in Britain 1890–1914* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), 57.

¹⁹ Michael Bunney, 'Edgar Wood', *Moderne Bauformen*, 6 (1907), 49–76 (translated by Lisa Davey for Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council), here at 49.

practitioners such as Voysey, Baillie Scott and Mackintosh, characterizing his buildings as 'exceptionally interesting' and describing him enthusiastically as 'one of the best representatives of those who go their own way and refuse to reproduce earlier styles'. Wood's interior design is particularly highlighted: he is described as having 'a great creative power in which a certain poetic gift is dominant'. His Banney Royd house at Edgerton, near Huddersfield, is illustrated with six photographs, more than any other building in this classic study of British domestic architecture.²⁰ Two years earlier, the architect Barry Parker wrote an article called 'Beauty in Buildings and Some Things That Lead to It' for the American Arts and Crafts periodical *The Craftsman*.²¹ It was illustrated with ten photographs of the finest buildings of Venice and Florence, together with an image of Edgar Wood's Lindley Clock Tower, Huddersfield, which was discussed after St Mark's Basilica, Venice, without so much as a comment. Parker used Wood's clock tower as his leading illustration and, in associating his design with some of the greatest examples of Italian architecture, paid him no small compliment.

It had nevertheless been a feat to sustain an avant-garde practice in the parochial world of Middleton. Wood's buildings divided local opinion, and commissions were heavily dependent upon family and friends. On the news of his death in Italy, the Middleton Unitarian minister recalled the 'sneers of contempt and the jeers from men' when his First Church of Christ, Scientist, Manchester, was built. He similarly suffered with regard to Durnford Street Schools, Middleton, 'about which all sorts of criticisms were offered at the time'. The minister nevertheless concluded with a tribute to Wood's integrity: 'It is singular that I should be saying all this and I never saw him. Such is the power of personality that even not seeing a man you can feel his influence.'²²

'Continuous movement and experiment'

Edgar Wood's architecture varies greatly in appearance, yet there is a steady line of development, which J.H.G. Archer described as 'continuous movement and experiment'.²³ Archer structured Wood's output into three distinct phases: 1885–95, early buildings before his 'architectural emancipation'; 1891–1903, those inspired by the Arts and Crafts; and 1903–16, 'Partnership and experiment', the Wood and Sellers era.²⁴ In **Table 1** the surviving buildings of the Middleton area are grouped in a similar manner and further subdivided into eight stylistic phases, cross-referenced to important examples elsewhere.

²⁰ Hermann Muthesius, *The English House*, Vol. 1: *Development* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2007), 147–209. Originally published in German as *Das englische Haus* (Berlin: Wasmuth, 1904).

²¹ Barry Parker, 'Beauty in Buildings and Some Things That Lead to It', *The Craftsman*, 2:3 (June 1902), 105–17.

²² *Middleton Guardian*, 26 October 1935, 5, col. 3.

²³ Archer, 'Edgar Wood and J. Henry Sellers: A Decade of Partnership and Experiment', 382.

²⁴ Archer, 'Edgar Wood and the Architecture of the Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau Movements in Britain', i. Chapters 7, 8 and 10.

Chronological Eras and Phases	Detached Houses	Semi-Detached Houses	Terraced Houses
1884–89 EARLY BUILDINGS First Phase	Extension to 133 Manchester Old Road	West Lea	
1889–94 EARLY BUILDINGS Second Phase	Westdene The Cottage, Birch	Redcroft and Fencegate Briarhill	Birch Villas, Birch
1894–98 ARTS AND CRAFTS Third Phase	Barcroft, Rochdale	2–4 Schwabe Street, Rhodes	31–37 Broad Street, Rhodes
1898–1906 ARTS AND CRAFTS Fourth Phase	98 Hollin Lane	51–53 Rochdale Road	34–48 Rochdale Road 16–46 Hilton Fold Lane 1–25 Amy Street 11–15 Norman Street
1906–08 PARTNERSHIP AND EXPERIMENT Fifth Phase	Extensions to Rhodes Mount House, Rhodes	22–24 Mount Road	104–106 Higher Wood Street Manor Villas, Chadderton 3 Harold Street
1907–09 PARTNERSHIP AND EXPERIMENT Sixth Phase			
1908–10 PARTNERSHIP AND EXPERIMENT Seventh Phase	Edgecroft, Heywood 36 Mellalieu Street		
1911 onwards PARTNERSHIP AND EXPERIMENT Final Buildings		165–167 Manchester Old Road	Broadway, Fairfield, Droylsden

Table 1 Surviving Edgar Wood buildings in the Middleton area (including Rochdale, Heywood, Oldham, Droylsden and Manchester)

Churches	Schools	Commercial and Other	Important Buildings Elsewhere
Temple Street Baptist Church	Rhodes Schools, Rhodes	Drinking fountain and horse trough, Birch Guardian Buildings	
Silver Street Wesleyan Chapel, Rochdale		Williams Deacon and Manchester and Salford Bank	Halecroft, Hale, Altrincham Briarcourt, Lindley, Huddersfield
		George and Dragon public house, Rochdale Victoria Hotel, Rochdale Stable, Gardeners Arms public house, Rhodes	Lindley Methodist Church, Huddersfield Norman Terrace, Lindley, Huddersfield
Long Street Methodist Church First Church of Christ, Scientist, Manchester	Long Street Methodist Schools	The Studio (Arkholme) Solicitor's office, 5 Greaves Street, Oldham	Banney Royd, Edgerton, Huddersfield Lindley Clock Tower, Huddersfield The Homestead, Hale, Altrincham
Roof and extension to Middleton Parish Church Additions to First Church of Christ, Scientist, Manchester		Dronsfield Brothers office, Oldham (Sellers) Jubilee Park staircase, exedra and drinking fountain	The Garth, Hale, Altrincham Parsonage House, Penistone, Barnsley
	Elm Street School (Wood and Sellers) Durnford Street Infant School (Wood and Sellers)	33–37 Middleton Gardens	Dalneyveed, Barley, Hertfordshire Upmeads, Stafford Rose Hill, Huddersfield (interior)
			The Castle, Burnley
		Independent Labour Party clubhouse Weaving-shed, Mutual Mills, Heywood (Sellers) Lee House, Great Bridgewater Street, Manchester (Fairhurst, Sellers and Wood)	Lydgate Sunday School, New Mill, Holme Valley Royd House, Hale, Altrincham

NB Table lists all surviving buildings, excluding minor extensions, where authorship is confirmed by documentary evidence. The buildings are in Middleton unless stated otherwise.



Plate 1 Rhodes Schools, near Middleton, 1884 (photograph by Andy Marshall).

Early Buildings

First Phase: 1884–89

Wood was articulated to Alexander William Mills and James Murgatroyd from 1878 to 1883,²⁵ and may have worked on the Gothic-styled Manchester High School for Girls, Dover Street (1881–86, listed Grade II),²⁶ a building that is now part of The University of Manchester. Significantly, with regard to his later work, he also spent time with Potts, Pickup and Dixon,²⁷ presumably between 1883 and 1885. Edward Potts pioneered reinforced concrete construction in cotton mills, and Wood may have contributed to Cavendish Mill, Cavendish Street, Ashton-under-Lyne (1884–85, listed Grade II*), one of the world's first reinforced concrete buildings.

Wood's first independent commission, Rhodes Schools, Broad Street, Rhodes, near Middleton (1884, listed Grade II), was built for the Schwabe family, educational reformers, fellow Unitarians and regular clients. Here is the same soft orange brick

²⁵ British Architectural Library, Royal Institute of British Architects, *Directory of British Architects 1834–1914*, Vol. 2: L–Z, compiled by Antonia Brodie et al. (London and New York: Continuum, 2001), 1046.

²⁶ There are three grades of Listed Buildings in England and Wales: the most important is Grade I, representing around two per cent of the total listed; the next is Grade II*, making up around six per cent; with the remaining ninety-two per cent being ranked as Grade II. Grades I and II* are collectively known as 'outstanding' Listed Buildings.

²⁷ *Middleton Guardian*, 19 October 1935, 4, col. 3.

as at the Manchester high school but no historicism. The north side has an expressive quality, with four strong brick dormers rising through the roof, framed by a pair of gabled entrance porches with round-headed doors for Boys and Girls (**Plate 1**). The gables all have kneelers and finials. Owing to the slope, the south elevation contains a basement arcade of twelve round-headed arches, which opened onto the playground for children's shelters. Such dormers, gables, kneelers and round arches subsequently became an essential part of Wood's architectural vocabulary.

Wood's earliest residential design, a gabled brick extension to 133 Manchester Old Road (1885), is unexceptional save for a finely detailed curved bay window of sandstone. West Lea, 161–163 Manchester Old Road (1887), is a pair of semi-detached houses in a double gable design that is also built of high-quality stonework. Inside, Wood's decorative hand is visible in subtle ceiling mouldings of flowers and foliage, painted glass and Japanese-style gesso door panels with birds, branches and Flora and Pomona maidens.

Temple Street Baptist Church (1889, listed Grade II) is more experimental as it is built around a framework of timber and iron posts supporting the roof. Internally, the main body is separated from the aisles by wooden panels containing doors opening into small schoolrooms. The panels can be lifted out of the frames to provide additional space for larger gatherings. The gabled front façade, with its arcade of nine round-arched windows, central round-headed door and a blank rose window, is striking. The general character suggests Wood's later interest in geometrical design, comprising simple shapes in orange and yellow-cream brickwork and chequer-board tiling. Guardian Buildings, 23–25 Market Place (1889), the office of the *Middleton Guardian* newspaper, likewise had a simple, direct design; its tall two-bay shop front with two oriel windows above was topped by a twin gable.

These buildings are non-historicist symmetrical designs, which show Wood as a young individualist prepared to work from first principles. There are few traditional references, yet Langley Hall Farm (1885, demolished) was asymmetrical and strongly vernacular, with buttresses, flagged roofs and diaper work. The adjacent Langley Hall was demolished for its materials, and dismantling this ancient building must have given Wood a profound insight into vernacular design and construction. He began introducing such detailing into his polite architecture, using the traditional buildings of the area as his pattern book.

Second Phase: 1889–94

Westdene, Sefton Road, Archer Park (1889), was Wood's first attempt. It is a tall asymmetrical house using a gable and ridge arrangement, with buttresses, overhanging eaves, tall chimneys, leaded lights and a cat-slide roof. A mullioned window (now replaced) set high in the prominent gable was reminiscent of one in Ye Olde Boar's Head public house (1632, listed Grade II*), a timber-framed structure in Middleton. Like Temple Street Baptist Church, the materials were vivid: red brick for the ground floor; white render above; and red tiles for the roof

and a two-storey bay. The well-lit interior is arranged around a large hall, with a picturesque staircase rising through the three storeys of the house. The distinctive ground-floor doors have three panels, square at the top and bottom with a narrow panel between, and a possible source for this was a seventeenth-century door (now destroyed) at Tonge Hall, Middleton (1580s, listed Grade II*). Art nouveau styling is evident in the door finger-plates and stained-glass windows. In 1894 Wood added a large bay window containing leaded glass vigorously decorated with briars and roses. Filling the entire ceiling of the room behind is a plaster roundel of maiden-like angels intertwined with briars and honeysuckle. It is Wood's finest ceiling.²⁸

Westdene established an explicit role for craftsmanship in Wood's buildings. He subsequently blended vernacular, Jacobean and art nouveau motifs using a wide range of techniques and materials. Some of this was presumably done by his own hand since at this time he was highly active running classes and exhibitions in handicrafts, particularly woodworking and furniture making. He began on 21 September 1889, when the *Middleton Guardian* contained a notice stating, 'The Carving Class at the Workshop, Long-Street, will commence on Monday, October 7th. Edgar Wood,'²⁹ and the following year he organized an exhibition of the furniture and carving by his twenty-four young students.³⁰ He spent the ensuing three years holding similar classes and exhibitions in Middleton, Heywood and Hale, before handing over his Middleton initiatives to the Council's Technical Classes in 1893. The Council thanked him for 'giving much of his leisure time in inculcating the young minds a love of handicrafts and in teaching wood carving and in inducing young men to take up these subjects,'³¹ and this local success was complemented two years later when he received national exposure as a furniture designer in the art periodical *The Studio*.³²

The Cottage, 757–763 Heywood Old Road (1894), in rural Birch near Middleton, was a mill-owner's house created from the ruins of a fire. The entrance hall had a strong Jacobean theme, but externally the house was almost a cottage ornée with theatrical bargeboards, chimneys and oriel windows. Nearby Birch Villas, 531–535 Langley Lane (1892), is a short terrace for three lower mill managers that blends vernacular and Jacobean motifs using a rich palette of brick, stone, render, timber, a slate roof and contrasting red-tiled dormers. Its general symmetry is not immediately obvious as it runs down a slope, with the lower end becoming an expressive focal point. The mill owner, R.J. Wood, introduced picturesque housing and environmental improvements to revive the village, including erecting a drinking fountain, now on Heywood Old Road (1888, listed Grade II), designed by Edgar Wood.

²⁸ There is an identical ceiling at Briarcourt, Lindley, Huddersfield.

²⁹ *Middleton Guardian*, 21 September 1889, 1, col. 1.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 12 April 1890, 4, col. 6.

³¹ *Ibid.* 22 April 1893, 8, col. 6.

³² G.W. [Gleeson White], 'The Manchester Arts and Crafts. Second Exhibition', *The Studio*, 5 (1895), 135.



Plate 2 Williams Deacon and Manchester and Salford Bank, 1892 (photograph by Andy Marshall).

In 1892 Wood used harder-wearing materials for urban Middleton, to resist damage by atmospheric pollution. The Williams Deacon and Manchester and Salford Bank, 3 Market Place (listed Grade II), is a sophisticated design in pink-coloured terracotta (**Plate 2**). It is defined by three bold gabled dormers, where the impact is heightened by the symmetry of the upper floors not being carried through to the ground floor. In a novel approach to disposing rainwater, four striking art nouveau hoppers drain to a disguised trough at first-floor sill level. Wood sculpted naturalistic ornament in the terracotta over the main doorway and on a string course, with bead-and-reel enrichment running beneath the trough.

Briarhill, 37–39 Rochdale Road (1892), is a pair of almost symmetrical semi-detached houses in a free Queen Anne style, where two double-storey curved bay windows, with attenuated pilasters, break the eaves line. They are topped by simple triangular dormers containing semicircular lunette windows. The large central gable also has an angular feel, while the front wall has semicircular depressions, aspects that again suggest an interest in simple geometry. The redness of the brickwork and terracotta is unrelieved, but the roof has green, blue and purple slates randomly mixed together giving a variegated pointillist effect, demonstrating an emerging interest in delicate colours and textures. The interior contains a blend of Jacobean, art nouveau and vernacular styling, the highlight being a curved plaster ceiling of swirling flowers.

At this time, Wood also designed Old Road Unitarian Church (1892, demolished),³³ using the same red brickwork and terracotta. It was his own church, on which he lavished large-scale frescos in 1900³⁴ and further internal decoration in 1909.³⁵ His church activities are not known, but he wrote each year from his retirement home in Italy and made a special donation of paintings to hang in the schoolroom. In one of his letters he affectionately describes its influence on him:

The memories of Old Road Chapel are to me so sacred . . . and though my thoughts and aims are by temperament absorbed in artistic endeavour, my gratitude to Unitarianism is immense as indirectly I feel I owe to it a broad and unbiased outlook; my father gave to his family and left to us a jewel of faith as peculiar as a priceless legacy.³⁶

In 1891 Wood designed his own house, Redcroft, and its attached neighbour, Fencegate, 33–35 Rochdale Road (listed Grade II), the construction of which nearly ended his fledgling career when he was struck by falling wet plaster and blinded in one eye.³⁷ Here, Wood moved beyond the styling of Briarhill and established his long-term direction with what Sellers later called the ‘Lancashire farmhouse style’; buildings derived from the everyday rural dwellings of the locality. Redcroft and Fencegate possessed a homespun folksiness and a refreshing lightness of character that simply defied the smoky atmosphere of urban Middleton. Wood was not alone in the direction that he was taking. Describing Redcroft and Fencegate, Nikolaus Pevsner noticed that the mullions and transoms of the windows were ‘close to Voysey’,³⁸ whose characteristic square stone mullions first appeared the very same year in 14 South Parade, Acton, Ealing (listed Grade II*). Both architects seem to have arrived simultaneously at the idea of an unadorned aesthetic combining traditional lime-washed rendered walls and simple vernacular detailing. It was perhaps an early example of Wood’s networking ‘so that beneficial developments might be possible’. On closer inspection their approaches are different — Voysey’s is rational while Wood’s is theatrical. The front of Redcroft appears as a lime-washed two-storey farmhouse with a large attic, but the rear becomes a three-storey brick silk-weaver’s cottage. A romantic timber and flag entrance porch, hidden behind a tall gable chimney-stack, separates the two and they are never seen together.

Inside Redcroft the rooms are efficiently arranged off the hall except, as an artistic gesture, the upper floors are accessed by an impossibly narrow turning staircase. To get furniture and larger items upstairs, Wood inserted a large trap-door in the ceiling above the hallway. This was like the coffin hatches found in old cottages, and shows Wood borrowing practical as well as stylistic ideas from old houses. The

³³ *Middleton Guardian*, 4 June 1892, 4, col. 2.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 30 June 1900, 5, col. 6.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 27 March 1909, 5, col. 2.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 26 October 1935, 5, col. 3.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 5 June 1891, 5, col. 1.

³⁸ Pevsner, *South Lancashire*, 350.

highlight of the living room was a carved overmantel containing seven tall, painted gesso muses, four of which survive.

On Fencegate, Wood used the Briarhill motif of a two-storey bay rising through the eaves to a dormer, repeating it again on 51–53 Rochdale Road to the north, thereby connecting the three quite differently styled buildings. The inspiration for this unusual arrangement may have been Hopwood Hall (listed Grade II*), a multi-phase courtyard house where there are two examples. Its interior has several Jacobean panelled rooms of great individuality, which were once extravagantly supplied with matching furniture. Wood made sketches of the joinery, implying that it was also a source of his Jacobean motifs.

Silver Street Wesleyan Chapel, Rochdale (1893, listed Grade II), was conceptually similar to Temple Street Baptist Church but fashioned in the new style. Vernacular motifs from houses and farm buildings are not easily transferred to a church, and one notices Wood concentrating on materials, with a combination of traditional brick, stone, render and pargeting. Sloping buttresses are the only vernacular form used. The distinctive rounded church window with seven lancets can be traced to a sixteenth-century east window at Middleton Parish Church (listed Grade I).³⁹

Arts and Crafts

Third Phase: 1894–98

In this phase, Wood maintained the breakthrough of Redcroft and Fencegate by further utilizing the vernacular for inspiration. Barcroft, 193 Bolton Road, Rochdale (1894, listed Grade II), built for an artist friend, Benjamin C. Brierley, consequently had a more robust appearance, with a large central chimney and big stone roofing flags (now replaced), which from then on replaced the more flimsy red tiles. Inside, the vernacular informed the planning with two multi-purpose rooms accounting for all the non-service ground-floor functions. A single space, a hall as traditionally understood, combined the functions of an entrance hall, staircase and sitting room, while a large living space containing an inglenook and a square corner bay window served as dining room, study and drawing room. Wood created an authentic-looking inglenook closely resembling that of Tonge Hall, with a fire-window and a heavy bressummer supporting two large farmhouse-style beams.

Located on a sloping site, 2–4 Schwabe Street, Rhodes (1895), has a prominent and sculptural lower end, formed by two projecting gables, front and side, each supported by buttresses. The gables framed a pretty porch decorated with splat balusters, normally found on vernacular staircases. A similar gabled arrangement is used at nearby 31–37 Broad Street (1896, listed Grade II), the first of a line of artistic and more practical by-law terraces. Whereas the other buildings of this phase have brick ground floors and white render above, this design is almost completely

³⁹ The window was removed in the mid-nineteenth century. Four surviving windows have five lancets.



Plate 3 33 Broad Street, Rhodes, 1896 (photograph by Andy Marshall).

of common brick, with which Wood evoked the delicate and subtle surface beauty found in local Georgian cottages (**Plate 3**).

At 31–37 Broad Street, Wood extracted the maximum from the standard housing plot: lobby, hallway, large parlour with bay window, substantial living room, scullery, a cellar, and four bedrooms on the first floor. The houses are wider and less deep than the standard design, allowing better-proportioned and illuminated rooms as well as front gardens and better-arranged rear yards. There is much in the way of internal craftsmanship, including gesso door panels with an unusual pattern of crosses, octagons and lozenges that was almost certainly derived from the ceiling to the Queen's Room atSizergh Castle, Kendal, showing that Wood was using motifs from further afield. Confirming this source, a bespoke mantelpiece has a rectangular art nouveau line pattern that terminates at the corners in small inward-pointing chevrons, a figure found in the panelling of the Inlaid Chamber atSizergh.

Wood's manipulation of unadorned traditional forms for picturesque effect was also evident in Marland Mission Church, Rochdale (1897, destroyed), which successfully addressed the difficulty of using the vernacular for church buildings. It also marked a move to traditional open-roof structures, instead of the underboarding of his earlier churches. Two inns in Rochdale (both 1897), the tall and asymmetrical George and Dragon, 1022 Manchester Road, Castleton, and the symmetrical, box-like Victoria Hotel, 148 Spotland Road, show Wood using motifs in a symbolic way. Both have gables formed from projecting trusses supported on corbels, a rare detail found at Ye Olde Boar's Head public house. Similarly, diagonal

'dragon beams' found at Tonge Hall were symbolically introduced in the George and Dragon. It was as though Wood dismantled traditional architecture and reformed it into new combinations for his own architectural purposes, as he had done literally with Langley Hall. The Lancashire farmhouse style was at its most organic and sophisticated at Dunarden, Archer Park (1897), a large house that has sadly been lost. In this design, Wood laid stone flags on a hipped roof, contrary to traditional practice, which allowed the tall chimneys and gabled projections greater visual prominence.

Fourth Phase: 1898–1906

The hipped roofs signalled a more wilful and inventive approach, reflecting Wood's increased assurance, control and maturity. He explained his method in a lecture to a Middleton audience: 'Mr Wood said the first thing an architect should consider was utility, and after that should introduce as much variety as possible into his work. In nature they found endless variety. Human beings could not hope to cultivate variety to the same extent but they should cultivate it as far as possible.'⁴⁰ An early example is a shop and seven houses, 34–48 Rochdale Road (1898), where Wood borrowed a distinctive gable arrangement from Ye Olde Boar's Head, a pair at one end balancing a single gable at the other, but overlapped the paired gables in a completely non-vernacular way while adding a striking corner oriel window of original design.

Stylistic innovation was nevertheless subservient to an established building tradition, where one existed. Profiling Wood — 'our master' — in the German periodical *Moderne Bauformen*, Michael Bunney described how Wood had woven the Huddersfield tradition of stone building into the new houses he designed. On the other hand, with Lindley Clock Tower, Huddersfield (1902, listed Grade II*), there was no such tradition and he was 'entirely reliant on his own methods'.⁴¹ Wood put it more directly, 'For no less preposterous than the attempt to raise dead styles is the requirement to invent for ordinary buildings a new one.'⁴² Such ordinariness is well expressed in 98 Hollin Lane, Middleton (1906), his final and most efficient design in the Lancashire farmhouse style. It comprises a simple box of common brick and render fronted by a two-storey rectangular bay window that breaks the eaves. Three tall chimneys rise from the hipped roof. Bunney concluded that Wood limited himself with such a high regard for tradition; a pertinent point in light of the sheer artistry Wood displayed when a new American denomination commissioned a church plus reading room for its first British building. With little in the way of convention to constrain him, Wood's First Church of Christ, Scientist, Daisy Bank Road, Manchester (1903, listed Grade I), is a truly original design that

⁴⁰ *Middleton Guardian*, 25 February 1905, 5, col. 2.

⁴¹ Bunney, 'Edgar Wood' (translated by Davey), 51.

⁴² Edgar Wood, 'Address to the Manchester Society of Architects', 11 October 1911, unpublished type-written text, 6. Copy held in Middleton Library, Local Studies Section.

marks the culmination of this phase.⁴³ It is famously described by Pevsner as ‘pioneer work, internationally speaking, of an Expressionism halfway between Gaudí and Germany about 1920, and it stands entirely on its own in England.’⁴⁴

Long Street Methodist Church and Schools



Plate 4 Long Street Methodist Church and Schools, 1899 (photograph by Andy Marshall).

Constructed a few years earlier, Long Street Methodist Church and Schools (1899, listed Grade II*) are a remarkable succession of connected buildings arranged around a courtyard garden. Across this space, Wood successfully integrated a series of opposites — sacred and secular, expression and restraint, axial and informal, and rational and romantic. The plain and simple mass of the church contrasts with the complexity and richness of the school buildings, combining the characteristics of a formal composition and an organic street scene (**Plate 4**). Wood’s design almost certainly originated during or before 1894,⁴⁵ the year the site was acquired, and while subsequent innovations over three phases, such as stone flags, open roofs and art nouveau forms, enhanced the appearance of the buildings, the concept and layout remained unchanged.

⁴³ A detailed description by J.H.G. Archer can be found at <<http://manchesterhistory.net/edgarwood/work2.html>>, accessed 31 May 2012.

⁴⁴ Pevsner, *South Lancashire*, 48.

⁴⁵ David Morris, ‘Date of the Initial Design for Long Street Methodist Church and Schools, Research and Conclusions January 2009 to March 2010’, unpublished report produced for Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council.

Seen close up from Long Street, the church soars dramatically, with its verticality enhanced by clasp buttresses, a tall bay window and a wilful 'keystone' that rises up from the high gable window to become a finial. The small infants' schoolroom on the left-hand side is treated in a similar way while, in between, a long line of steps and wall to the garden introduce a touch of horizontality around the focal-point gateway. The foil to this architectural drama is the subtly textured header-bond brickwork and almost identically coloured Runcorn sandstone, which give the building an undifferentiated surface colour and texture. While recognizably a church, the plain surfaces, organic use of materials, vertical attenuation and flowing art nouveau tracery speak of an abstract expressionism not found in traditional church architecture. The design was particularly forward looking and demonstrates Wood's inclination to combine expression in form with restraint in materials.

The interior of the church is conventional, with an open chancel facing west highlighting its Nonconformist credentials (**Plate 5**). The styling is exceptionally



Plate 5 Interior of Long Street Methodist Church (photograph by Andy Marshall).

restrained, almost abstract, with the same subtle header-bond brickwork and striated red sandstone found outside. Close inspection reveals a second brick type, slightly more orange, which subtly highlights the aisle windows. The pitch-pine pews of the nave were originally stained green as a contrast to the orange-red interior. One is struck by the large, clear-glazed chancel window, with its chevron pattern softened by the organic tracery. The architectural focus nevertheless lies at the chancel steps, with a line of art nouveau fittings and furniture comprising pulpit, lectern, minister's caquetteuse-styled chair, kneeler and font, unified by the simple stone chancel screen. Beyond this the chancel is plain yet intimate, and was originally plainer still, without panelling. The oak furniture includes art nouveau choir stalls and a second minister's chair and kneeler, but Wood's scheme, which was never completed, fizzles out at an undistinguished mid-twentieth-century Gothic altar and panelled reredos.

The open roof space was designed with alternating pseudo-hammerbeam and scissor trusses. Wood boarded the underside of the roof in the same red-brown timber as the trusses and purlins, making the contrast between the elements minimal. The whole roof therefore has a darkened texture, with the underside of the trusses catching the light from the windows. With a brilliant touch he fixed small, square, inverted timber caps at the apex of the arched braces of the hammerbeam trusses, thereby giving the roof an alternating rhythm, drawing the eye along the church to the windows at each end. The tall Gothic arcades appear modern, having no capitals; yet medieval examples can be seen at Prestwich Parish Church (listed Grade I), the historic church of south Middleton. Sitting directly above are clerestory windows, staggered in relation to the arcade, likewise symbolically borrowed from nearby Middleton Parish Church where a clerestory was added to an earlier arcade. The combined effect of all these devices is sufficient to weaken the normal structural logic, allowing an increased sense of horizontality and movement that counters the tall interior. The *Buildings of England* series summed up the interior as 'a knockout',⁴⁶ and Wood's sophistication and lightness of touch are rare and novel.

The smaller-scale Sunday Schools face eastwards and northwards onto the formal garden, with an external treatment of lime-washed render that lightens their shaded aspect. The focal point of the east-facing elevation is an attenuated gabled lecture room, which hides a quarter of its true width in adjacent structures either side via a pair of chimneyless 'inglenooks'. Although almost symmetrical, the east elevation is slightly off-axis to the main gateway opposite. The north-facing buildings, by contrast, are picturesque, with the tall bay window to the ladies' parlour (staff-room) commanding a clear view of the garden (**Plate 6**). The white-rendered façade is enriched with header-bond brick, Runcorn stone, smooth brick, leaded-light windows and the stone flags of the roof that run low across the single-storey parts.

⁴⁶ Clare Hartwell, Matthew Hyde and Nikolaus Pevsner, *Lancashire: Manchester and the South-East*, *The Buildings of England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 512.



Plate 6 Long Street Methodist Schools, 1899 (photograph by Andy Marshall).

Although these elements are traditional, the overall effect is modern and sophisticated, marking the culmination of Wood's Lancashire farmhouse experiments.

Like the church, the school has unadorned open-roof structures supporting its heavy flagged roofs. That of the lecture room comprises two king-post trusses, which have a pair of curving struts rising from the base of the king-post in a plant-like way, elegantly expressed against white plasterwork. The other roofs are all under-boarded in dark timber, as in the church. The infants' schoolroom has a pair of heavy trusses that combine king-posts and queen-struts to emphasize strength and security. A romantic roof over the ladies' parlour is apparently supported by a pair of arched brace trusses. However, under-boarding runs beneath the collar-beams to hide a touch of Edgar Wood whimsy. One side of the arched braces is fake, as they are set within larger hidden trusses that span both the parlour and the corridor behind; a preference for poetic truth over structural honesty. By far the largest space is the school hall, which Wood spans with six spectacular queen-post trusses that sit on long knee-braces to gain the required extra width (**Plate 7**).

To Muthesius, Wood formed 'the bridge to the poetical and imaginative north of the British Isles, to Scotland,'⁴⁷ by which he meant C.R. Mackintosh, whose Queen's

⁴⁷ Muthesius, *The English House*, Vol. 1: *Development*, 173.



Plate 7 Interior of Long Street Methodist School Hall (photograph by Andy Marshall).

Cross Church, Glasgow, is broadly the same date, designed in 1897, built in 1898 and opened in 1899. The decorative styling of the two churches is compared in **Plate 8**; window tracery, chancel wall and steps, balconies, columns, roof trusses and smaller windows are all very close. Other similarities to Mackintosh's work include: the post and wall at the entrance of Long Street Church, which are like those to the entrance on the east front of the Glasgow School of Art; the minister's chairs, which resemble those by Mackintosh for Windyhill House, Renfrewshire (1900); and a pair of leaded-light door windows with red roses in the church, which have a direct equivalent in Mackintosh's House for an Art Lover (1901). Finally, the interior of Wood's school hall gable wall is divided into three bays with grid-like windows above and below the balcony, beneath which three classrooms were created by partitions (now removed) attached to the rear of two columns (see **Plate 7** above); an arrangement that is echoed in the gable wall of Mackintosh's 1907 library to the Glasgow School of Art (1896–99). Whether Mackintosh and Wood knew one another, 'in language and in line', is considered by Archer; the evidence at Long Street adds further weight to his conclusion that 'the probability becomes virtually a certainty'.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ John H.G. Archer, 'Edgar Wood and Mackintosh', in *Mackintosh & his Contemporaries in Europe and America*, ed. Patrick Nuttgens (London: John Murray, 1988), 74.



Plate 8 Long Street Methodist Church and Schools (left) and Queen's Cross Church, Glasgow (right) (photographs by Andy Marshall).

Wood changed his main building material during this expressive phase, the lime-washed render giving way to the more muted tones of common brick. He proceeded carefully since common bricks had an acceptable place only at the rear of a polite house. His initial experiment at 31–37 Broad Street was succeeded three years later by the asymmetrical 16–46 Hilton Fold Lane, 1–25 Amy Street and 11–15 Norman Street (all 1899), where the common bricks are stridently variegated. The facing bricks used for the principal elevation facing Hilton Fold Lane appear to be a concession to normal practice.

The same year Wood made the breakthrough on a pair of middle-class houses, 51–53 Rochdale Road (1899, listed Grade II), where he combined common brick and stone textures in an almost painterly way, with leaded lights carrying the delicate character across the windows with minimal interruption. The façade has a simple tripartite symmetry and a grid-like discipline so that the building's picturesque qualities stem largely from the materials. The box-like form is softened by the use of dormers, while a slight asymmetry is introduced in the bay windows. The same approach can be seen in a symmetrically designed solicitor's office at 5 Greaves Street, Oldham (1901, listed Grade II), built in an attractive yellow stone with a striking art nouveau doorway as its centrepiece.

53 Rochdale Road was occupied by Wood's friend Charles Jackson, an art dealer and photographer, who shortly afterwards commissioned a photographic studio on an adjacent site.⁴⁹ As at Barcroft, one finds an artist friend associated with a creative turn for The Studio, 1 Towncroft Avenue (1901, listed Grade II, renamed Arkholme), Wood's first experiment with a large flat roof of reinforced concrete, which covered an austere common brick box at the rear of the building. In 1903 Charles Jackson introduced Edgar Wood to J. Henry Sellers, after photographing a concrete-roofed extension that Sellers had built to 9 Alexandra Road, Oldham.

Partnership and Experiment

Fifth Phase: 1906–08

In this short transitional phase, expression is tamed and a new architecture appears following Wood's discovery of Sellers's extension to 9 Alexandra Road, Oldham (1903), and their subsequent partnership of around 1904. The red-brick extension comprises two connected flat-roofed boxes stepping down from the rear of the house, the lower one being a billiards room with two curved bays. The bay on the garden elevation is a large Jacobean-style window with modern squared mullions and transoms, while that on the end elevation is of masonry and originally formed a marble-lined curved internal recess for a fireplace. The other elevations are plain and windowless, and the overall effect is governed by its simple geometry. The leaded glass is patterned with diamonds, triangles and parallelograms, providing a foretaste of the geometrically decorated rich interior. The extension must

⁴⁹ *Middleton Guardian*, 9 November 1901, 5, col. 1.

have deeply impressed Wood as it is the obvious precursor to his later work, and it is fascinating that at the very height of his career he was sufficiently captivated to begin synthesizing his own architecture with that of his new friend and colleague.

As with earlier changes, Wood progressed incrementally. Stylistically, working-class cottages were the most accessible of his designs, and a picturesque pair of cottages, 104–106 Higher Wood Street (1907), seems hardly affected, except that white render evenly covers the whole building in an ordered eighteenth-century manner. The similarly rendered terrace Manor Villas, 1092–1104 Middleton Road, Chadderton (1907), has Georgian quoins and greater formality and symmetry. The row is broken up into three blocks as it runs down a slope, creating a greater sense of individuality for each dwelling. The diminutive artisan house, 3 Harold Street, Archer Park (1908), also has a formal air and a flat concrete roof over its scullery. All three designs have round-headed fanlights combined with canopies projecting between the door and fanlight, a blend of Georgian and vernacular motifs.

At Rhodes Mount House, Broad Street, Rhodes (1906), two extensions by Wood to an existing tall picturesque house justify their concrete flat roofs by not obscuring existing windows, while another allows a first-floor balcony above a bay window. The styling sits halfway between the Arts and Crafts and the modern. A more mature expression is a monumental staircase, exedra and drinking fountain (1906, listed Grade II), designed to frame the view of Middleton Parish Church from Jubilee Park and Long Street. A landing at the top of the staircase is rectangular, with a semicircular recess for the exedra, a motif taken from classical architecture. Two large U-shaped cut-outs in the walls are repetitions of the motif



Plate 9 22–24 Mount Road, 1907 (photograph by Andy Marshall).

and impart a sculptural quality to the otherwise simple ashlar slabs. Striations in the red stonework run randomly through the structure.

Sellers was the first to express fully the new aesthetic in a building. Dronsfield Brothers, Ashton Road (formerly King Street), Oldham (1906, listed Grade II), is a flat-roofed office formally designed with cubic wings framing a narrow entrance bay rising to a short recessed tower. Shortly afterwards, Wood designed 22–24 Mount Road (1907), a traditional pair of flagged-roofed semi-detached houses with a two-storey flat-roofed box projecting outwards at the front, countering the picturesque materials (**Plate 9**). Wood believed that ‘so long as we have no new style in construction we have none in architecture’,⁵⁰ and this transitional design can be seen as a metaphor, a new style of construction growing out of tradition.

Sixth Phase: 1907–09



Plate 10 Elm Street School, 1909 (photograph by Andy Marshall).

The buildings of this phase were radically different to anything of their day and are celebrated as high points of Wood’s and Sellers’s modernism. Elm Street School (1909, listed Grade II*, now Elm Wood School) was principally designed by Sellers under their joint names (**Plate 10**). It is a symmetrical building using the rectangle and semicircle motif to shape a substantial garden at the heart of the composition. The motif also informs the architectural detailing, bestowing a quiet unity to the design. The semicircle is expressed as a concave single-storey limestone façade with

⁵⁰ Wood, ‘Address to the Manchester Society of Architects’, 6.



Plate 11 33–37 Middleton Gardens, 1908 (photograph by Andy Marshall).

a long line of leaded-light windows and a central doorway. Behind rises an impressive brick clerestory of nine Georgian round-headed windows lighting the main hall. At either end, short limestone-capped towers rise a little higher. The height of the clerestory is possible only because flat concrete roofs are used on the surrounding classrooms. Two sides of the garden are enclosed by groin-vaulted arcades with semicircular openings, which connect the school entrances to the road and provide shelter for the children.

Internally, reinforced concrete beams supporting the roof are honestly expressed without decoration, imparting a very modern appearance. However, the main hall is roofed with timber trusses and slate, unseen behind a parapet, allowing a fine plaster ceiling decorated with a large rectangle and two semicircles. The corners have inward-pointing chevrons, and a similar motif can also be found in the corners of the rectangular lawn of the garden.

Wood and Sellers also designed the larger Durnford Street Schools (1908, listed Grade II), now largely demolished. The surviving Infant block is similar to Elm Street School, a hall with clerestory surrounded by flat-roofed classrooms, but the internal aesthetic is even more severe. In 1908 Wood designed a row of shops, 33–37 Middleton Gardens (formerly Manchester New Road, listed Grade II), which required a more commercial expression of modernism. His response was to create three large panels of white and green chevrons, made up of diamond-shaped tiles covering the whole of the first floor, and the result can be seen as an early form of art deco (**Plate 11**).

As there are no houses of this phase in the Middleton area, it is necessary to consider Dalnyveed, Bakers Lane, Barley, Hertfordshire (1907, listed Grade II*, now

called Hill House), and Upmeads, Newport Road, Stafford (1908, listed Grade II*), similar designs by Wood that respond differently to their respective sites. Upmeads has greater formality and elaboration, while the slightly earlier Dalnyveed appears more resolute. Their front and rear elevations have a tripartite symmetry, with the two outer parts having balanced asymmetrical arrangements of mullioned and transomed windows. At the front, two projecting cubic wings frame a recess (concave at Upmeads) that contains the main entrance, while at the rear the central bay with a door to the garden is narrower and almost flush. By contrast, the sides are asymmetrical, allowing greater freedom for designing the room layouts and more varied aspects from the garden.

Such blending of classical formality with vernacular informality could also be quite witty. Wood provided Dalnyveed with an axial approach that goes down a slope to a modest front façade, where the symmetry seen from a distance is disrupted by service buildings projecting forward to one side. As one approaches, the initial grandeur gets ever weaker until one arrives at a comfortable, sheltered entrance of domestic proportions. At Upmeads the humour is reversed, as Wood created a grand entrance façade but no axial approach, instead it appears suddenly when one enters the courtyard from a constricted side entrance. Sellers gave Wood ‘an insight into the beauty of Greek work and in planning, the layout in the grand manner, working for long views and vistas.’⁵¹ Here it was an insight he liked to subvert.

J.H.G. Archer remarks that the use of geometrical ornament may connect Wood to the Viennese Secession,⁵² and **Plate 12** shows several architectural similarities between Upmeads and Josef Hoffmann’s Palais Stoclet, Brussels (1905–11, World Heritage List). The garden front of the Palais has a recessed curved panel between two cubic wings, like the main façade of Upmeads, and the window styles are similar. Upmeads has the very specific motif of a narrow central panel rising beyond the top of the building into an added storey; Palais Stoclet has the same motif used for a tall staircase window on the right-hand side of the road front. Upmeads also uses a two-storey hall to connect its ground-floor entrance corridor to a long first-floor corridor running at ninety degrees; a similar arrangement occurs at Palais Stoclet. Finally, both buildings have their edges and tops highlighted; Hoffmann used raised moulded tiles, while Wood used concave recessed moulding for the edges and contrasting stone for the tops. The effect in both instances is to enhance the modern cubic styling. Further examples include the polygonal bay at Palais Stoclet, which is similar to that on Wood’s extension to Rhodes Mount House (see **Plate 12**), and the general disposition of structures and covered walkways that enclose the front garden at Elm Street School, which is like that of the rear garden at the Palais.

According to Hoffmann’s biographer, Eduard F. Sekler, the earliest reference to a design for Palais Stoclet is November 1905, with drawings of the façades being

⁵¹ G.A.E. Schwabe, in a letter to J.H.G. Archer, dated 12 April 1950, quoted in Archer, ‘Edgar Wood and J. Henry Sellers: A Decade of Partnership and Experiment’, 376.

⁵² Archer, ‘Edgar Wood and Mackintosh’, 72.



Plate 12 Upmeads, Rhodes Mount House and Palais Stoclet. Top left: Upmeads, Stafford (photograph by Andy Marshall); top right: Palais Stoclet, Brussels (*Moderne Bauformen*, 13 (1914), 33); bottom left: Rhodes Mount House, Rhodes (archive photograph provided by Geoff Wellens); bottom right: Palais Stoclet, Brussels (photograph by Jean-Pol Grandmont, Creative Commons Licence).

made by August 1906. The ground floor had been built by the winter of 1906, and the building was finished, except for the cladding, by 1908. The curved recess was a late alteration replacing a flat one, inviting comparison with the same change Wood made between the design of Dalnyveed and Upmeads. Early plans of Palais Stoclet also involved internal curved recesses to the entrance room and main hall,⁵³ both similar to Wood's and Sellers's recesses of 1903 onwards. On the final building Hoffmann placed this motif at the end of a long canopy that shelters the first-floor balcony.

While there are no published records of Wood (or Sellers) going to Vienna or meeting Hoffmann, his travel paintings indicate that he could have stayed there as part of his recorded journeys to Italy, in 1899, 1901, 1905 and 1907,⁵⁴ and almost annually thereafter. Hoffmann also travelled to England and

⁵³ Eduard F. Sekler, *Josef Hoffmann: The Architectural Work* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 76–9.

⁵⁴ The author is grateful for the assistance of Jan Green with regard to Wood's paintings.

Scotland to visit Mackintosh in December 1902,⁵⁵ and if, as speculated, Wood was also creatively involved with Mackintosh, a meeting may have taken place that year. Intriguingly, one painting shows that Wood was in Belgium in 1906 during the construction of the Palais.⁵⁶ Consequently, there were several opportunities between 1901 and 1907 for Wood and Hoffmann to have met.

Seventh Phase: 1908–10



Plate 13 Edgcroft, Heywood, 1909 (photograph by Andy Marshall).

Two Middleton houses show Wood putting aside the symmetry, Roman bricks, Bath or Portland stone and recessed corner mouldings of the last phase and returning to the vernacular for his reference. Edgcroft, Manchester Road, Heywood (1909, listed Grade II), is a simple common brick box, half covered with a steeply pitched roof of stone flags (**Plate 13**). The corner entrance is set inside the building so as not to disturb the general cubic form. The fenestration is irregular with no expressed sills or lintels, in the manner of local cottages, and there is no attempt at symmetry. Two full-height bays, placed near the corners, are the principal architectural

⁵⁵ Peter Vergo, *Art in Vienna, 1898–1918: Klimt, Kokoschka, Schiele and their Contemporaries* (London: Phaidon Press, 1975), 131.

⁵⁶ *Interior of the Church of Notre Dame et Saint Perpete, Dinant, Belgium, 1906.*

features. The building has an expressive form combined with extreme plainness and sits attractively in a small high-walled garden.

36 Mellalieu Street (1910, listed Grade II) is also asymmetrical, with a flat roof, vernacular diaper patterns and a two-storey bay with attenuated pilasters. However, the house is a modified symmetrical design where one bay of a pair was simply left off. Wood's drawings show both bays, and closer inspection reveals other differences. For example, the pilasters have banding (as on 22–24 Mount Road and 3 Harold Street), the entrance and parapet are slightly more ornate and there are no diaper patterns. Although signed November 1910, the drawings themselves are not dated, and it is possible that they pre-date this time and were part of Wood's transitional phase of 1905–07. Thus the original formal styling was subsequently reworked to give an asymmetric, vernacular feel when constructed.

Final Buildings: 1911 Onwards

In 1912 Wood built his last pair of middle-class semi-detached houses, 165–167 Manchester Old Road (**Plate 14**), adjacent to his very first pair, West Lea. Treating his old design as a starting point, he derived from it the pitch of the gables, string courses and general symmetry. He combined these with an abstract motif, a triangle, which determined the outline of the main elevation. To achieve this he allowed the roofs of two outer entrance porches to continue the line of the main roof downwards towards the ground. The main fenestration, however, was subsumed within a rectangle formed by a pair of two-storey bays, with two lines of strip windows wrapping around the bays. These are of Georgian proportion, subdivided into twelve rectangular quarries per window. Finally, the shape of the door glazing, door heads and garden entrances (now demolished) is circular, so that Wood created the whole façade from a series of simple triangles, rectangles and circles; an extraordinary reinterpretation of a traditional semi-detached house.

Wood assisted the newly formed Middleton Independent Labour Party in several ways, giving a talk on 'Comparisons in Domestic Architecture' in 1905,⁵⁷ creating the header for its newspaper, *The Herald*, in 1906⁵⁸ and designing a clubhouse in 1910.⁵⁹ A second design was erected on Milton Street in 1912.⁶⁰ It is an end-on building facing down a slope, with the lower end having a stepped gable formed from art deco pilasters rising from a flat-roofed entrance porch. The gable is flanked either side by large bay windows. On the long road elevation, subtle raised panels frame five round-headed windows, lighting the hall. For the first time in twenty years Wood dispensed with leaded lights, replacing them with Georgian-styled timber windows with glazing bars. Tiny Westmorland slates carry the texture of the common brick walls onto the pitched roof.

⁵⁷ *Middleton Guardian*, 25 February 1905, 5, col. 2.

⁵⁸ A copy of the header is in Middleton Library.

⁵⁹ *Academy Architecture and Architectural Review*, 37 (1910), 8, 78.

⁶⁰ *Middleton Guardian*, 27 July 1912, 6, col. 1.



Plate 14 165–167 Manchester Old Road, 1912 (photograph by Andy Marshall).

Wood and Sellers built a housing scheme for Fairfield Tenants Ltd at Broadway, Droylsden (1913), which was never completed owing to the First World War. It was the culmination of Wood's experimentation in working-class housing and was highly innovative. The idea of subdividing a terrace, as at Manor Villas, was further developed, with single-depth houses broken up into semi-detached and short rows arranged around lawns and raised gardens, connected by walls and arches. The materials are similar to the Milton Street clubhouse, common brick with tiny slates for the pitched roofs. However, the doors rather than the windows are set in raised panels. The windows are highlighted with darker bricks, as are the corners of the buildings, a detail taken from houses in the adjacent Fairfield Moravian Settlement.

An arrangement of tall Georgian-styled windows on the ground floor and horizontal weavers' windows above unifies the varied houses. Earlier Wood motifs, such as two-storey bays that break the eaves and octagonal bay windows, are reworked to match the formality of the design.

At Broadway, Wood and Sellers pioneered a 'cubic' modern Georgian style for small suburban cottages, which at the time were overwhelmingly designed in the vernacular idiom. The nearest contemporary parallel is the larger-scaled neo-Georgian houses at Corringham Road, Hampstead Garden Suburb (listed Grade II*). These were built in 1913 by Wood's friends Unwin and Parker, and again one suspects that he was networking at the cusp of new developments.

Although Wood retired early in 1922, he and Sellers remained in contact. Their modernism can be seen in two late designs by Sellers. A two-storey weaving-shed for Mutual Mills, Mutual Street, Heywood (early 1930s, listed Grade II), is plainly and rationally built in variegated common brick. It has an abstract corner focal point of a two-storey entrance and adjacent tower, both subtly shaped by flattened buttresses and raised panels. A little earlier, Harry S. Fairhurst and Son erected Lee House, Great Bridgewater Street, Manchester (1928–31, listed Grade II), an eight-storey base of a proposed seventeen-storey tower comprising three diminishing cube-like blocks. It was designed by Sellers with assistance from Wood, in their earlier art deco styling refashioned to suit this very large, box-like steel-framed building. Brick pilasters, broad at the corners, run the full height of the structure, alternating with canted bronze windows subdivided into 'leaded lights' (now replaced). The piers and corners were subtly highlighted using recessed mouldings, and the ground floor and top were faced in Portland stone with art deco ornament. Had it been completed, Lee House would have been one of the highest buildings in Europe and is a fitting climax to the unique architectural partnership of Wood and Sellers, who had both reached 70 years of age when it was completed.

'The next step in an orderly development'

In 1911 Edgar Wood lectured on originality and its relationship with tradition:

True originality is to be found by those who, standing on the limits of the sphere of the unknown, reach out naturally to some apprehension and understanding of what is beyond. . . . [The future is] the next step in an orderly development — the true men of progress are those whose point of departure is a deep respect for the past.⁶¹

Wood rejected both historicism and absolute originality; art was 'at once retrospective and progressive'.⁶² Originality was rooted in tradition, and an artist who had absorbed the past could 'help himself from where he will',⁶³ justified by the

⁶¹ Wood, 'Address to the Manchester Society of Architects', 6.

⁶² *Ibid.* 7.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 6.

'alchemy' of its transformation. Wood thus synthesized vernacular and Jacobean forms and motifs and, in partnership with Sellers, Georgian and Regency traditions too. His architecture involved the lively development of tradition, and his concern for keeping tradition alive drove his networking. Its character can only be guessed at but it most likely involved the sharing of ideas, approaches, motifs and sources. Sensitive to the stylistic arguments of the recent past, Wood had no interest in developing a new style. Style was 'a bad word to use and never enters the mind of an artist, it is the language entirely of the antiquarian and classifier.'⁶⁴ Rather, individual artists working in widely dissimilar ways were bound by the same creative force. Thus artistic expression, not style, was the fundamental concern, as demonstrated in Wood's networking with the young architect Charles Holden, who recounted that Wood 'didn't approve of my use of his idiom.'⁶⁵

Wood pondered how to respond to the new material of reinforced concrete. It made it easier to roof complex building plans but, as Peter Davey points out, Wood's designs were 'simple assemblies of rectangles, very easy to roof under pitches.'⁶⁶ Instead he saw the deeper aesthetic potential of the new material. With Sellers he grasped the opportunity to create flat-roofed cubic buildings combined with new forms of geometrical decoration. This breakthrough might be compared to Wood's initial pioneering of white-rendered Arts and Crafts houses. Both were aesthetic decisions containing a romantic denial of everyday reality, whether that was the effect of industrial pollution on fragile lime-wash or the reality of waterproofing a flat concrete roof.

Architectural Legacy

At the heart of Edgar Wood's legacy lie Long Street Methodist Church and Schools. Here he was able to address the crowded architectural tradition of church building on his own terms, creating a plain brick style that anticipated the church architecture of the first half of the twentieth century. On the other hand, school design was relatively new, which allowed him greater freedom to experiment. The church remained traditional while the schools were refreshingly original. The whole composition is therefore both traditional and modern, a place where the medieval, vernacular, art nouveau and Arts and Crafts are harmoniously integrated. If the synthesis of tradition and originality lies at the heart of Wood's philosophy, then Long Street Methodist Church and Schools must be its finest expression.

Wood's outstanding buildings belong to a wider legacy of continuous architectural development, with specific lines of experiment into the design of houses, cottages, churches and schools. A remarkable cluster of six houses illustrates in miniature the passing of a most significant moment in European architectural history: Briarhill, Redcroft and Fencegate, 34–48 Rochdale Road, 51–53 Rochdale

⁶⁴ *British Architect*, 56 (1901), 306, quoted in Archer, 'Edgar Wood and Mackintosh', 73.

⁶⁵ Eitan Karol, *Charles Holden: Architect* (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2007), 66.

⁶⁶ Peter Davey, *Arts and Crafts Architecture* (London: Phaidon Press, 1995), 123.



Plate 15 The emergence of modernism. Top left: Briarhill, 37–39 Rochdale Road (archive photograph provided by Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council); top right: Redcroft and Fencegate, 33–35 Rochdale Road (*Moderne Bauformen*, 6 (1907), 59); middle left: 34–48 Rochdale Road (*Moderne Bauformen*, 6 (1907), 61); middle right: 51–53 Rochdale Road (archive photograph provided by Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council); bottom left: The Studio, 1 Towncroft Avenue (archive photograph provided by David Morris); bottom right: 36 Mellalieu Street (archive photograph provided by Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council).

Road, The Studio and 36 Mellalieu Street vividly demonstrate the emergence of twentieth-century modernism from the break-up of nineteenth-century historicism, each succeeding design being simpler and clearer (**Plate 15**).

The fact that Wood's work is concentrated in Middleton may yet work to his advantage. A century after he was active, it is now easier to see that what he built should be preserved and admired en masse. The fine grain of his smaller projects illuminates the outstanding designs of the Long Street Church and Schools, the First Church of Christ, Scientist, and, with Sellers, Elm Street School and Lee House. If we add Banney Royd and Lindley Clock Tower in Huddersfield, and Halecroft and Royd House at Altrincham, twenty miles north-east and south-west respectively, we have a collection of eye-catching buildings with an abundant setting to complement those of Charles Rennie Mackintosh in Glasgow in the context of European *fin de siècle* architecture.