

Edgar Wood Research Project - Historic Building Record Sheet



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Name and Address of Building -

Former Independent Labour Party Club House, Milton Street, Middleton, Manchester

Architect - Edgar Wood

Date - 1911/12

Building Type - Club House

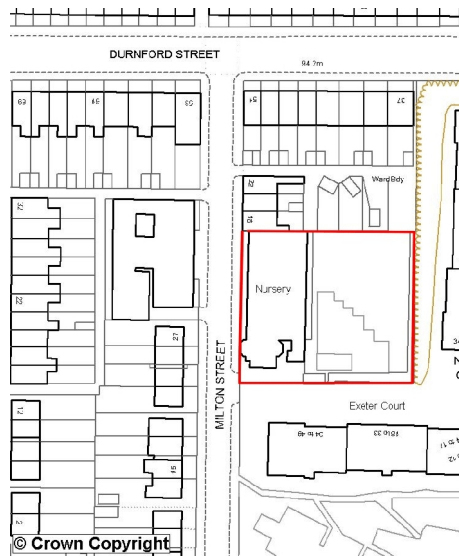
Description - This was the club house and headquarters for Middleton Independent Labour Party. It was designed by Edgar Wood in 1911 and opened in 1912, being reported in the Middleton Guardian of July 27th. The significance of the ILP Club House is in its unique combination of an early Labour Movement heritage building and an internationally important first generation modern movement architect. The building was briefly noted in Sir Nikolaus Pevsner's 1973 article on the English proto-modern movement, *Nine Swallows - No Summer*. The Club House is an excellent example of Wood's modern style applied to a very functional low-cost building. It combines subtle materials, tiny Westmorland green roofing slates and mottled walls of common brick, with expressionist form at the lower end where two large unhistorical bay windows with concrete lintels flank the first known English example of an Art Deco stepped gable (i.e. comprised of pilasters) and a modern concrete flat-roofed porch. To balance the drama, five tall arched windows framed by pilasters have raised panels which are half-lost in the general texture of the long elevation to the road.

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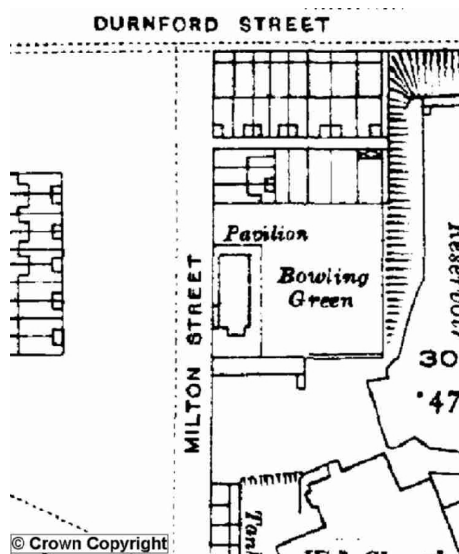


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Location Plan



1929



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Sources -

The ILP Club House was rediscovered by the Edgar Wood Research Project and its authorship by Wood verified by further study at Middleton Local Studies Library where the newspaper report was found (attached below). Edgar Wood historian, John Archer subsequently confirmed authorship and provided an illustration of an earlier design from Architectural Review of 1910 (reproduced below).

Post Construction -

The Club House was extended to the north in a similar style after 1929 to create a new larger entrance.

Ownership also passed to the Council around this time and it was began a long life as a children's nursery. It is not clear whether the northern extension was carried out by the ILP or the Council. Standards were changing at that time and it could have been by either.

In the 1960s a flat roofed extension was abutted as the nursery grew in popularity. In recent years the building was used as a family centre which subsequently had to close due to government financial cutbacks. The Council was forced (due to more cutbacks) to auction it two years ago when it has since remained empty. A very recent planning application proposes to greatly alter it via a conversion to flats.

Prior to the closure of the nursery and family centre, the Council undertook some sensitive repair guided by its conservation officer. The building was partly re-pointed in lime mortar because old cement mortar was causing erosion of some bricks. This was matched exactly to the original using mortar analysis. The top of the gable, which had suffered from heavily blown bricks, was carefully repaired to the original form with matching new brick. The rotten porch door and windows were replaced on a like-for-like basis.

Historic close-up photographs have not been found but the historic form of the building can be seen in the background of other photos. These show it has survived as built though subsequent changes have hidden the original end and rear elevations.

Architectural Interest -

The present-day entrance lies in the later addition to the north. The original doorway, however, is located in the small box-like extension on the lower southern gable end. This small porch, accessed by modest steps, originally contained small cloakrooms and probably was either side of the doorway. The placing of utilitarian uses at the entrance was a modern movement idea arising from functional design - this is an early example.

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The ILP Club House was originally sited in an open semi-rural location and the southern end was highly visible and accessible. Wood allowed the downward slope to provide extra drama for his modernistic entrance. The Club House was the first building on the street and a sunny gable facing downhill for the architectural focus would have made sense at that time. Subsequent development in the vicinity has obscured this somewhat.

The stepped gable of rising columns over a cubic porch is a unique example of modern Art Deco expression, especially considering the very early date. It rises from the concrete flat-roofed porch with no ornamentation.

The porch leads to a former club room with the large bay windows at each end, followed by a public hall. This presently has 1930s flexible subdivisions at the southern end, forming small rooms for the later nursery, an historical nuance. The ceiling is underdrawn with an old lightweight suspended ceiling with sections missing which expose unaltered the original smooth, plain ceiling moulding and window tops. The long side with the large windows to the club room and the hall faces west and thus catches the afternoon and evening light, something essential for the users who would arrive mostly after work. Thus the orientation is rational and responds well to the needs of the client group.

The 1929 map confirms a small garden lying to the south of the gable end, allowing space for access when built, while that to the north was tightly closed in by a boundary fence. This was later breached with the northern extension designed in the same styling, possibly by J. Henry Sellers, who had taken over Wood's practice by this time. Original internal tiling of this phase survives. It is very similar to that at nearby Durnford Street School (Grade II) and Elm Street School (Grade II*). These were designed by Wood and Sellers, with the detailing by Sellers. This and the concrete flat roofed form suggests that J. H. Sellers designed the extension. To the east lies the 1960s modern-styled abutted extension for the nursery and then the ILP bowling green, used until recently as the nursery play area.

Despite the visual austerity, the hall windows and detailing are pretty and feminine. This is the first building in Wood's architectural development to use Neo-Georgian styled timber windows. However, their use is roguish and a pair of limestone springers creates a semi-circular shaped 'tin hat' top that Wood also used on the principal central window of First Church of Christ Scientist, Manchester (Grade I listed). Wood's approach to architectural detail here is eclectic involving the synthesis of motifs. This motif, like that of the gable, subsequently became an Art Deco leitmotif, a good example can be seen on the 1930s third floor extension to the Long Mynd Hotel, Shropshire (photos attached below).

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Historic Interest -

The Club House is the most architecturally advanced of its type in the country for its date. The combination of the Deco-like flourish behind an austere cubic entrance box in 1911/12 is twenty years ahead of its time. The response of the contemporary Middleton observer must have been incomprehension, though by 1912 the town had become used to such buildings from its favourite son - see the newspaper extract at end of this document.

The building is also of great historic interest as a rare example of early socialist ILP architecture, inexpensively built but with artistic, technical and futuristic aspiration. It shows Edgar Wood was connected to the local Socialist movement, despite his own nominal Liberal politics. A Middleton Guardian report describes a talk Wood gave to the Middleton Independent Labour Party in 1905 and he also designed its newspaper header, so this was not a one-off occurrence.

The combination of rooms is instructive. The club room would probably have doubled for committee meetings while the hall would have been used for public meetings and hustings. Though called a Club House, this was also the party HQ and meeting hall.

Group Value -

The Club house lies close to several other Edgar Wood buildings including the Infant Building of Durnford Street School and Long Street Methodist Church.

Perceived Threat -

The building has been empty for three years. It is at risk from theft and vandalism but currently the greatest threat is an application to convert the building into 10 flats which would destroy much its historic form, interest and appearance.

Conclusion -

The significance of the former Middleton Independent Labour Party Club House lies in its unusual, possibly unique, combination of being a rare political building type relating to a momentous aspect of political history (the rise of the working class Labour Party) that has been designed by the only significant Edwardian modern movement architect, the arts and crafts designer Edgar Wood. It's special interest is therefore cross cutting, historical and architectural - and it is completely unique. It is almost certainly the only example of its type, form at this date in existence and interrogating the listed building databases has not found any similar example. the nearest modern movement building is possibly The White Hall, Clatterfield Gardens, Southend on Sea, but much later of 1934 (listed grade II). The only other is the much more traditional Tennis Club House, Ashworth Lane, Bolton, Greater Manchester (listed grade II). However, neither are political party buildings. ILP buildings, which are particularly thin on the ground, especially if architectural interest is taken into consideration.

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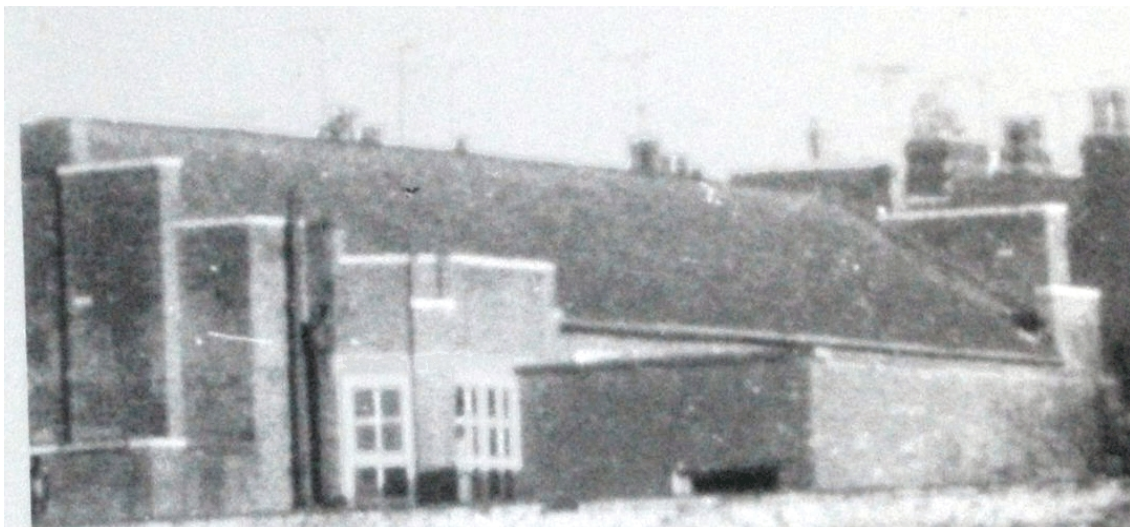
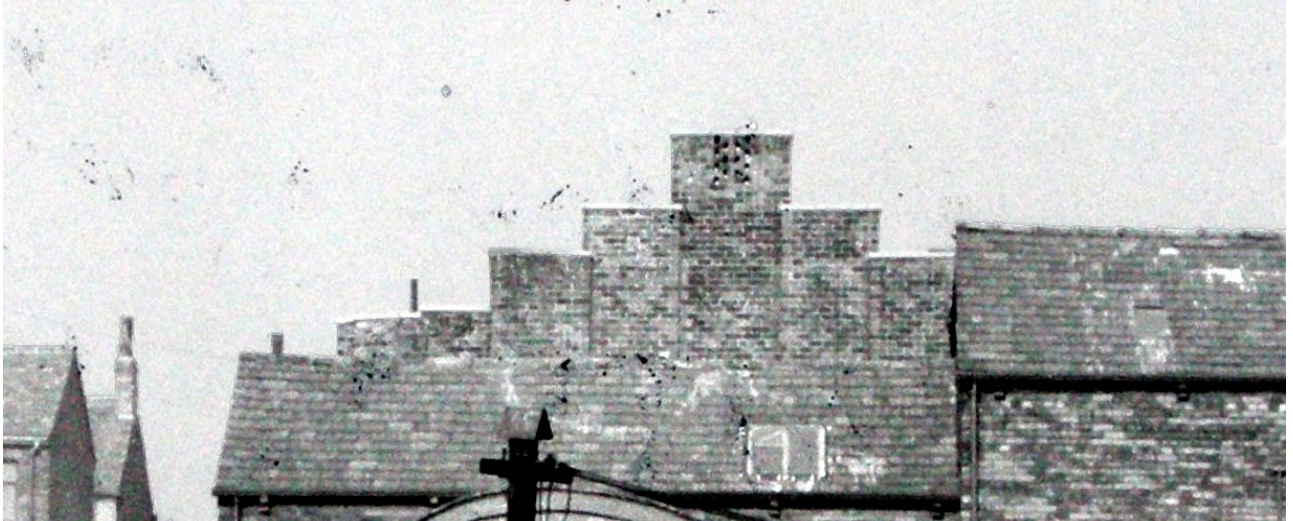
The building was designed by Edgar Wood in 1911 and built in 1912. It is an expressionist modern design - modern in its plan form, its elevations and its detailing and use of materials.

Despite its relatively low cost design, due to the client being a group of working class textile workers, the building's design is at the cusp of European architecture, the transition from arts and crafts/art nouveau to modern expressionism/art deco. It is difficult to categorize. All of Edgar Wood's buildings of this period are the most advanced in England. After 1903, they are mostly houses except a monumental staircase, two schools, a Sunday school and a short row of shops. The ILP Club House complements these and shows what modernism could do even on the smallest of budgets.

The building is associated with the Arts and Crafts movement, in its use of local materials and, to some degree, traditional forms though used in a wilful manner. However, it is expressionist in its form and intent and functional in its planning. These aspects are of artistic interest because these movements had not entered mainstream architecture at the time of the Club House was built. it is a prophetic building.

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Extracts from Old Photographs



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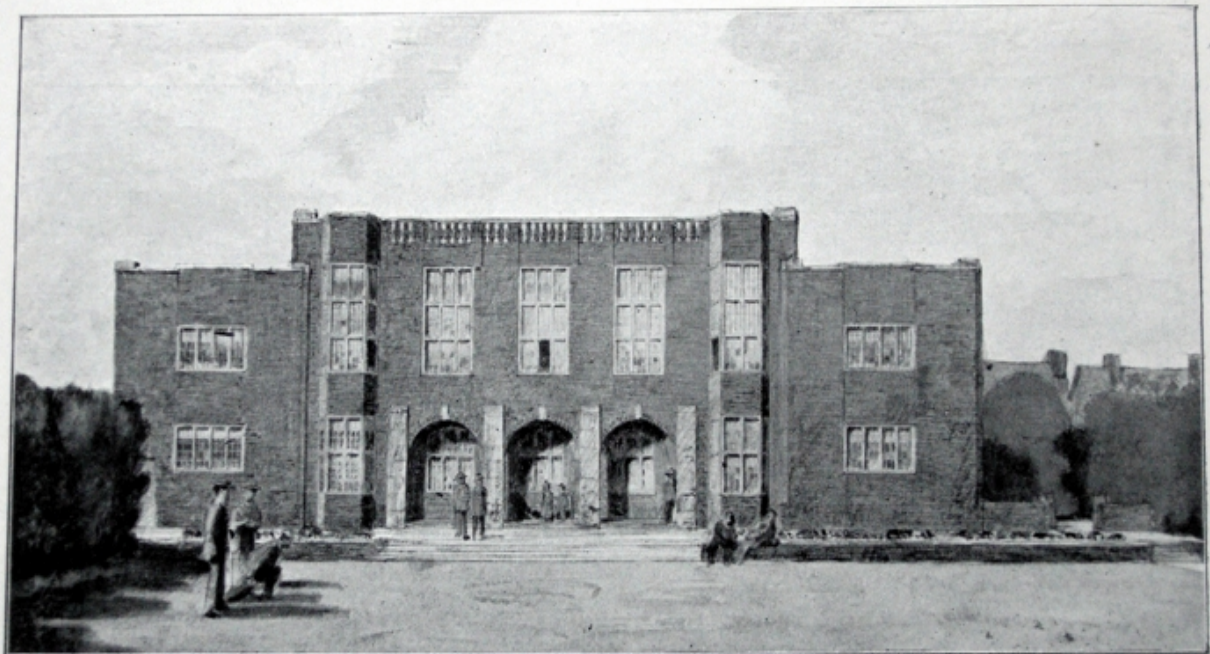
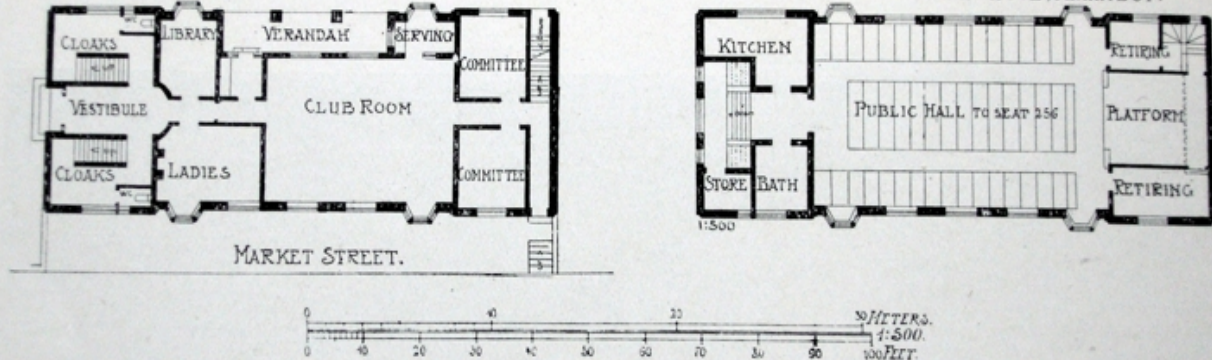


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Architectural Review, 1910¹.—England.

'CLUB HOUSE FOR THE INDEPENDENT LABOUR PARTY MIDDLETON.

EDGAR WOOD, ARCHITECT.



Club House for the Independent Labour Party.

(For Plans, see p. 78.)

Earlier 1909/10 scheme for a larger building with a reinforced concrete roof. It is probably for a different site as the land is flat, there are houses in the background and the orientation is quite different. It is likely that this two storey design was too large and expensive for what was a working man's political party. Provided by John Archer

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Extract from Middleton Guardian report titled "MIDDLETON I.L.P. - OPENING OF NEW CLUB ROOMS", 27th July 1912 (Middleton Local Studies Library)

"Saturday last was the most memorable day in the history of the Middleton branch of the Independent Labour Party, for the new hall and club were formally declared open under most auspicious circumstances. It is at the cost of much labour, energy and time that this handsome building has been erected and better premises could hardly be desired. The building is a strong and serviceable one, and is erected on a similar scale to the Durnford street schools. As a matter of fact the design of the same architect - Mr. Edgar Wood - was the one accepted and he has a style which is unique. The premises are situated off Durnford street and the site consists of about 160 square yards. The club contains a spacious hall, a large club room and all modern conveniences; it is well provided with windows and there is a complete electric installation. There is sufficient ground left for a bowling green and gardens, which are being laid, and it might be of interest to our readers to know that no license for the sale of intoxicating drinks will be applied for."

place on Tuesday at Middleton Cemetery.

Mr. Edgar Wood delivered an address to a good audience in the Middleton I.L.P. Club on Sunday evening, on the subject of "Comparisons in Domestic Architecture." A number of cartoons were placed on the walls illustrating good and bad architecture. 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. He condemned certain bricks, which he said made houses look as though they had been painted. He admired the type of brick in some of the older houses in Middleton; the old bricks were not made in strict conformity to size and shape, and there was therefore more variety in the construction of houses. Mr. Wood spoke very strongly in favour of leaded light windows, because proxy was one of the things desired, and if they had large plate glass windows they very often curtailed out the whole of the light. The speaker also touched upon the heating of houses, and gave the meeting to understand that the English system was very much behind that of the Continent and America. He was questioned at the close as to the cost of good houses, and argued that they need not cost more than bad ones, because in many of the houses there was a deal of unnecessary stonework and so-called ornamentation.

A Floral Party was held on Saturday in the Mid.

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1930s Art Deco - Long Mynd Hotel, Shropshire - the Deco leitmotif above the word HOTEL is that Wood used over the hall windows at Milton Street ILP Club House and First Church of Christ Scientist (below).



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The design of header for the ILP Herald designed by Edgar Wood. Historic handwriting is on the back and is a record of the contributors. Item in Middleton Local Studies.



of 4000 copies monthly.

The principal writers were

1. Arthur Lealand. Editor, 2 James Howard
special articles
3. W. Jones Brown Hortus Siliensis.
The Garden.
4. James H. Munro.
Miscellany & Speeches
5. Harvey Hilton - Argus
The Outlook.
6. Tom Owen Special Articles

The name plate was supplied by Edgar Wood.