

Edgar Wood

IN HUDDERSFIELD



Edgar Wood was an innovative architect of the late 19th and early 20th centuries who left a deep mark on the appearance of Huddersfield, both through his own work and his influence on others. Lindley Clock Tower (above) is his most prominent local work, and is one of ten buildings wholly or partly by Wood in Lindley and Birkby, which are described in this leaflet.



Born in Middleton, near Rochdale, in 1860, Edgar Wood was the sixth of eight children of successful mill-owner Thomas Broadbent Wood and his wife Mary. She was the daughter of John and Charlotte Sykes of Lindley, and this family connection to Huddersfield became very important to Wood's architectural work.

Though it was expected that he would follow his father into business, Edgar had ambitions to be an artist. In a strict, Unitarian household, this did not find favour, and as a compromise he trained as an architect with Mills & Murgatroyd of Manchester. The young Wood found the office routines dull and, not long after qualifying in 1885, he set up in practice for himself. His first commission, for a drinking fountain and shelter in Middleton market place, came from his step-mother Jane Anne (Haigh). Throughout his career, family and friends continued to be significant clients in Middleton, Huddersfield and Hale (Cheshire).

Edgar Wood saw architecture as an art. He eschewed large scale commercial practice, working initially with one assistant and later with a sole partner. In the best traditions of the Arts and Crafts movement, he designed, detailed and supervised all aspects of his buildings, including stained glass, furnishings, sculpture and metalwork. He became a leading member of the Northern Art Workers' Guild, established in Manchester in 1896.

Wood's early buildings revived aspects of traditional design. Richly detailed and very romantic, Briarcourt and Banney Royd are clearly influenced by his knowledge of local buildings from the seventeenth century, though in their planning and detail, these are very much modern houses. At Banney Royd the elongated forms and interwoven designs of Art Nouveau add to the richness of the interiors, whilst the Lindley Clock Tower is regarded as one of Wood's Art Nouveau masterpieces, alongside the First Church

of Christ, Scientist, Victoria Park, Manchester and Long Street Methodist Church and School, Middleton.

About 1904, Wood entered into an informal partnership with James Henry Sellers, which was to lead to the design and construction of flat, concrete roofed buildings, like the Durnford Street and Elm Street Schools in Middleton, that are among the most advanced designs of their time in this country. A 1908 row of shops in Middleton anticipates the inter-war Art Deco style.

Wood was president of the Manchester Society of Architects from 1911–12, and enjoyed a considerable reputation in Europe, particularly in Germany. Following the death of his father in 1909, he was financially independent and did not undertake any more large commissions. After the First World War he turned to painting, settling in Italy in 1922, where he died in 1935.

LINDLEY

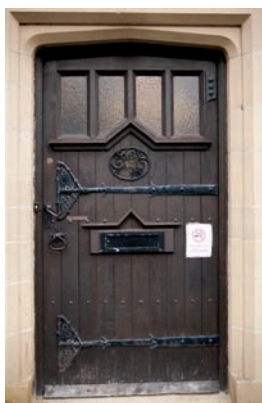


Almost all of Wood's buildings in Lindley were commissioned by the Sykes family, who owned the textile card manufacturing business at Acre Mills, and particularly by James Nield Sykes, whose own mansion, Fieldhead, still stands – albeit disused – on Lidget Street near St Stephen's Church.

In 1894 Edgar's sister Annie married their cousin Herbert Higginson Sykes. Herbert's father John, Edgar's uncle, gave the couple the land and funds for a new home as a wedding present. This gave Wood his first opportunity to build in Huddersfield, and **Briarcourt, Occupation Road** (1894–5) was the result.

The house is recognisably part of the revival at that time of a local Yorkshire style of Jacobean manor. Imposing externally, with its fine porch, deep bay windows and multiple gables, it is most





notable for its interiors, where Wood added many contemporary Arts and Crafts features to the historical style. Particularly striking are the main oak staircase; the decorated plaster ceilings; the inglenook fireplace in the dining room, with a plaster-work frieze above; and the painted frieze in the morning room (the latter by Wood's regular collaborator F W Jackson, also of Middleton). In upstairs rooms the exposed timber beams, in some cases open to the roof, give a particularly Jacobean flavour. Furniture throughout the house, including some fine sideboards, is also by Wood. The house was extended on the west side in 1904 by a local



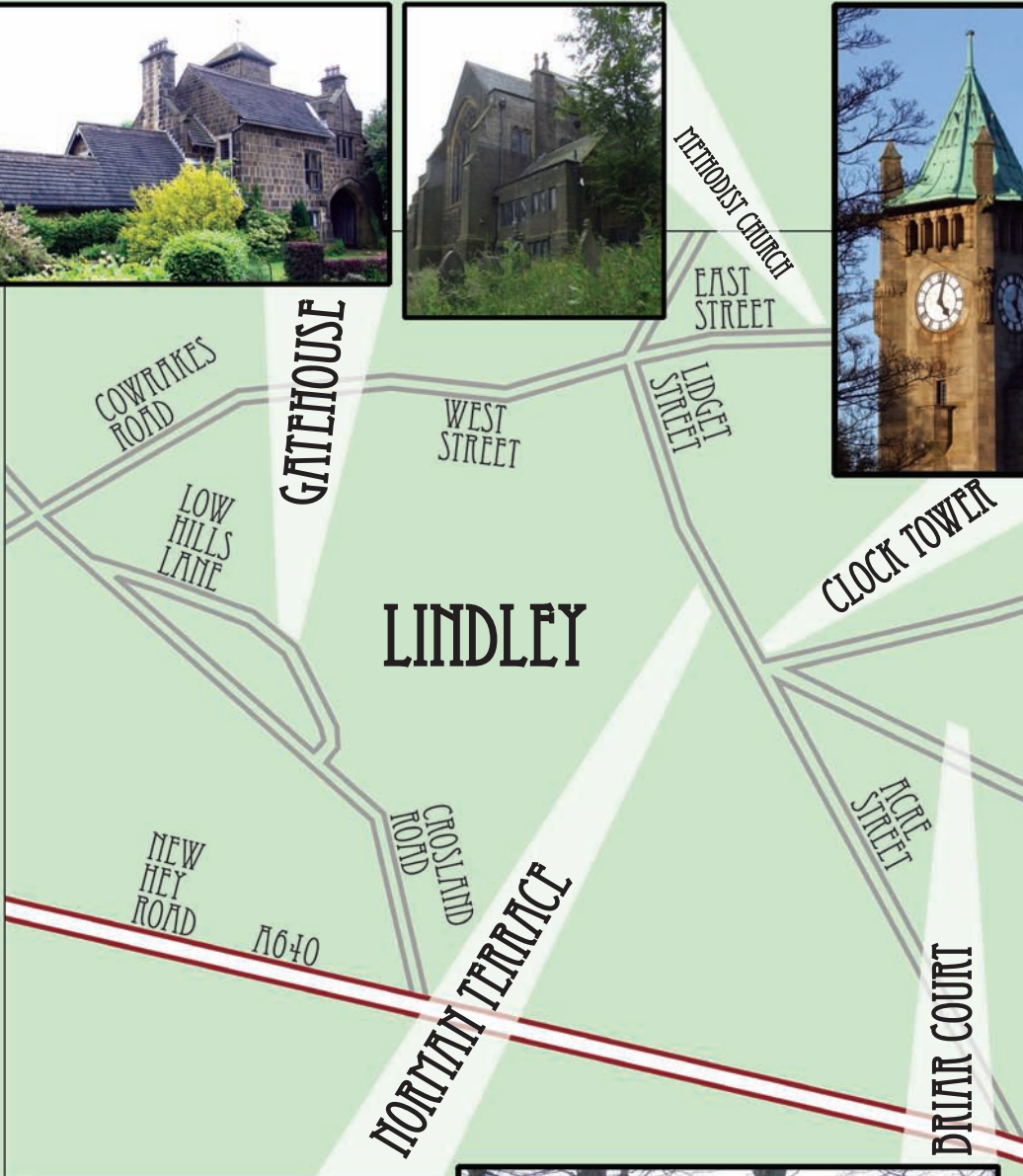
architect, apparently to improve circulation, and on the east side in 1906 to add a third floor. Since 1961 Briarcourt has been used by Kirklees Council as a social services facility.

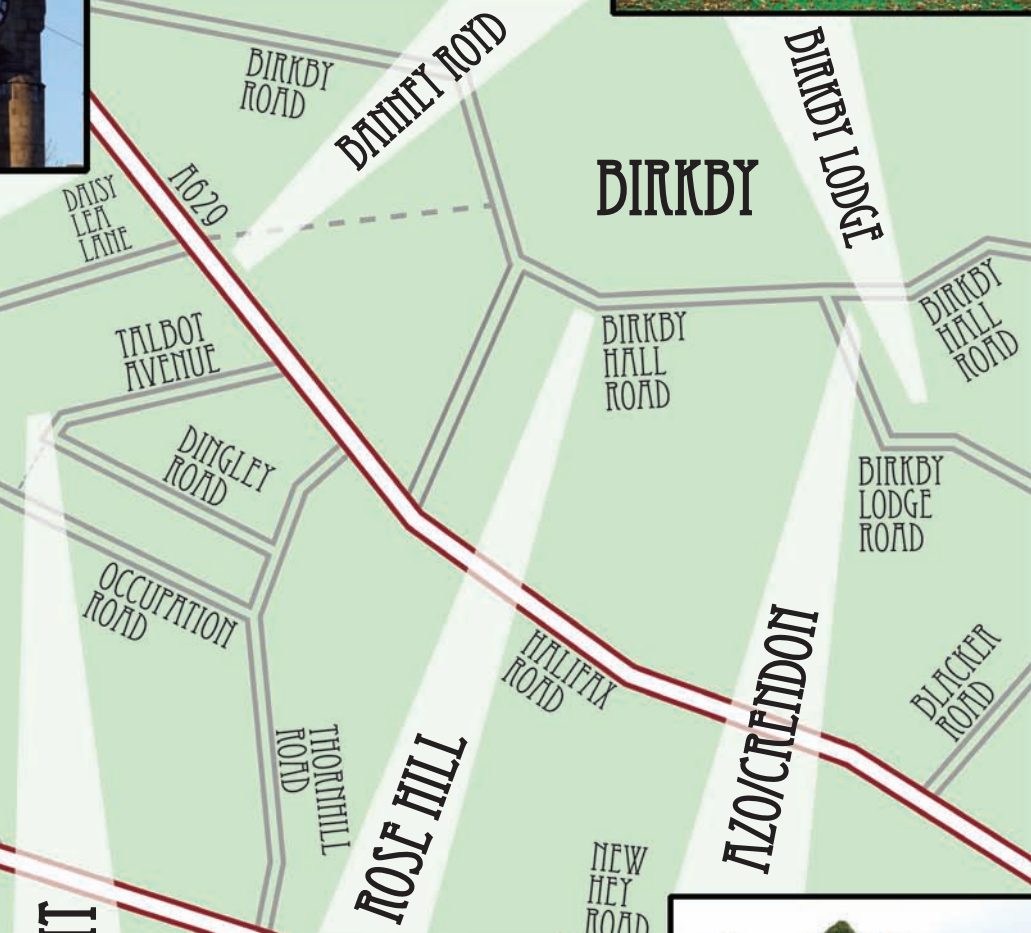
Just behind Briarcourt another substantial house by Wood – **Ridgemount, Talbot Avenue** – is privately occupied and almost hidden from view. This too offers a range of characteristic features, including a broad canted bay and crenellated porch externally, ‘Jacobean’ woodwork, moulded plaster ceilings and elaborate ironwork on internal doors.



The Sykes family had a long association with **Lindley Methodist Church, East Street**. Mrs James Nield Sykes laid the foundation stone of the present Gothic revival building, which dates from 1867–8 and was the work of George Woodhouse, a native of Lindley who had an architectural practice in Bolton. When the trustees decided to extend the church in 1894 they turned to Wood, who designed the new chancel, vestries and organ loft, providing also for a new heating system. The two-storey extension, which exploits the fall of the land at the rear of the site, harmonises with the existing building, though Wood’s hand can be seen in the detail, and to a greater extent in the furnishings of the chancel. The altar table is an outstanding example of furniture design and clearly the work of an artist-craftsman. An angel representing the Christian virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity stands in the centre of the relief carvings of scenes which depict the Homeless, the Sick, the Ignorant and the Poor. The cost of the extension was borne by James Nield Sykes and his daughters.









Skyles was again Wood's client for **Norman Terrace, 11–15 Lidget Street**, a row of three cottages built in 1898 for his workers at Acre Mills. The accommodation comprised a hall, living room and kitchen on the ground floor, and upstairs three bedrooms and an attic. There was also a cellar with a sink, boiler and coals area, and a garden with ashes house. Although small, each cottage had an indoor toilet, an unusual feature for working class housing of that date.

Reflecting local traditions, the sandstone used for walls and roof matches the older buildings around them; the rows of windows (especially at the rear) echo the 'weavers' windows' that can be seen all round the district; and the carved lintels are loosely modelled on seventeenth century examples (one of which can be seen on the almshouses in East Street). Nevertheless, the two-storey bay of the central house, and the canopy porch with window above to light the hall-way, are distinctive features in Wood's repertoire, and variations of them can be seen in many of his buildings in Huddersfield and Lancashire, such as the Clergy House at Almondbury and along the Rochdale Road, Middleton.



In very different style is the **Gatehouse, Low Hills Lane**. This unusual building of 1900 marked the entrance to the Fieldhead estate (now built over), providing coachman's accommodation of parlour and kitchen with two bedrooms above. The bedrooms are at different levels due to the height of the arched gateway, and a spiral staircase in the asymmetrically placed turret gives access to a small roof balcony,

further complicating the roof line. Art Nouveau influences can be seen in the massive oak gates with their tapered slit windows and narrow strap-like hinges and the elongated keystones above the upper storey windows. However the overall form and features are less typical of Wood's work at this time.



Sykes' final commission from Wood is among his most important works – **Lindley Clock Tower**, which has stood at the corner of Lidget Street and Daisy Lea Lane since 1902. As the inscription above the entrance tells us, it was commissioned by James Nield Sykes, “for the benefit of his native village” (and perhaps also to wake up his workforce!).

The Art Nouveau clock tower stands 83 feet tall, its height exaggerated by the diagonal corner buttresses which terminate with pinnacles above the eaves of the copper-clad octagonal pagoda roof, now with characteristic green patina. Built from local stone, its walls more than two feet thick, the tower is given further vertical emphasis by the mullions to the bell chamber, slit windows and the beautifully carved elongated figures placed above the doorway and near the tops of the four buttresses.

These figures and the copper roof were the work of sculptor Stirling Lee, whom Wood employed on several occasions. The sculptures above the door explore the theme of Time, while those on the buttresses portray the eternal virtues, Truth, Love, Purity and Justice. The gargoyles rearing out from the four corners of the tower, described as ‘The Beasts Fleeing from the Towers of Time’, depict Lazy, Vicious, Cunning and Greedy Dogs. An asymmetrically placed spiral stair leads to a balcony below the belfry, occasionally open to the public, who can also view the clock mechanism. The Clock Tower is a Grade 2* listed building.



BIRKBY



With his architectural versatility established in Lindley, and his family connections to the local business community, Wood was able to undertake several residential commissions in nearby Birkby.

The best known of these, indeed his most important local commission and now Grade 1 listed, is **Banney Royd** off Halifax Road. Standing in seven acres of ground, this was completed in 1902 for W H Armitage, partner in the accountancy firm of Armitage & Norton and a friend of James Nield Sykes. The use of local materials, and features like gables and mullioned windows, give the house solidity and a grounding in local tradition, but in other respects it was strikingly modern. Technically advanced and unusual in using cavity wall construction, the house is oriented so that the main living areas, the drawing room, dining room and library, face south over the terrace gardens and can all be accessed from a central hall. Internally and externally, Banney Royd contains Wood's most inventive display of Art Nouveau detail, best seen in the main entrance on the north front, where the arched porch is flanked by tapering and diagonally placed buttresses, and in the solid oak doors with large brass finger plates with sculpted floral designs.



In 1918, Banney Royd was sold to the textile magnate Sir Emmanuel Hoyle. During the Second World War it was taken over by the Civil Defence Committee, and subsequently by the West Riding Fire Service. In 1966 it became the Huddersfield Teachers' Centre, and was later sold by the local authority, once more to become a private home.

Armitage's partner George Pepler Norton owned **Birkby Lodge, Birkby Lodge Road**, a large house of the 1840s, and while working on Banney Royd for Armitage in 1900, Wood was commissioned by Norton to design additions to Birkby Lodge. He extended it to the west with a two-storey wing containing a drawing room on the ground floor and two bedrooms above. While not particularly distinctive, the exterior does include one of Wood's favourite two-storey canted bays. The original interior had a medieval flavour, with exposed ceiling beams, wood-panelled walls, alcoves and inlaid veneers. A painted frieze of the Holy Grail legend, again painted by F W Jackson, reputedly included Wood's features in one of the knights.



Nearby at the corner of Birkby Lodge Road and Birkby Hall Road are **Azo House** and **Crendon** (formerly Kynance), a pair of semi-detached houses designed by Wood in 1903 for Joseph Turner and W H Hughes. Azo's unusual name derives from a range of synthetic dyes produced by the important local dyes and chemicals firm of Read Holliday, of which Turner was chief chemist and then chairman.

Wood made clever use of a small site to build two 'semis' which, with doors placed asymmetrically to the sides, appear to be one large mansion, with its front facing the garden. This asymmetrical treatment can be seen in several of his pairs of houses in Middleton, including his own. Here it results in a curious appearance from Birkby Hall Road, where a low range of outhouses backs onto the pavement. Although the two plans are practically identical, Wood treated the elevations differently, with his favourite devices of large gables, dormers, and two-storey canted bays, one of which breaks through the eaves. Smaller details are, as always, meticulously designed, especially at the entrances: scrolled iron brackets supporting the porches, leaded glass and door furniture. Each house contained a hall, dining and drawing rooms, kitchen and scullery on

the ground floor, and three bedrooms and a bathroom on the first floor. The attic contained two bedrooms, presumably for servants.

At the western end of Birkby Hall Road, **Rose Hill** has notable interiors by Wood and Sellers, described as being among the most adventurous in Europe for their date. Their 1909 decorative scheme – including original furniture and walnut panelling supplied by Taylor & Hobson of Huddersfield, together with marble chimney pieces and plaster ceilings – has earned the house a Grade 2* listing. Externally, the only indication that this is any other than a late 19th century building is the long canted bay on the east elevation which is typical of the Wood-Sellers ‘partnership in style’.

Apart from the Clock Tower, Banney Royd and Rose Hill, all the buildings described above are Grade 2 listed. There are no other known works by Wood in the Lindley/Birkby area, but there are other houses reminiscent of his style, and it is intriguing to ask whether any of these are by Wood but unattributed. It is more likely that such examples attest to his influence on later local architects.



This leaflet has focussed on the area where Wood’s local work is concentrated. However visitors to the area should not miss the **Clergy House, Stocks Walk, Almondbury** (1898), the **Vicarage, Thurlstone** (1906) and **Unitarian Sunday School, New Mill** (1910).

For information about the many buildings by Wood & Sellers in Middleton (Rochdale) see:

www.link4life.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=c.showPage&pageID=964

Please note that, apart from the Clock Tower, all the buildings described are in use and not normally open to the public. We encourage you to enjoy them from the public highway, but please respect the privacy of the owners and occupiers.



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