

John Douglas 1830 – 1911



The father of the architect, John Douglas senior, was born in Northampton and his mother was born in Aldford, Cheshire. No records have been found to show where or when his parents married but we do know that John Douglas was born to John and Mary Douglas on April 11th 1830 at Park Cottage Sandiway near Northwich, Cheshire.

Little is known of his early life but in the mid to late 1840s he became articled to the Lancaster architect E. G. Paley.



In 1860 Douglas married Elizabeth Edmunds of Bangor Is-coed. They began married life in Abbey Square, Chester. Later they moved to Dee Banks at Great Boughton. They had five children but sadly only Colin and Sholto survived childhood.

After the death of his wife in 1878, Douglas remained at the family home in Great Boughton before designing a new house overlooking the River Dee. This was known as both Walmoor Hill and Walmer Hill and was completed in 1896.

On 23rd May 1911 John Douglas died, he was 81. He is buried in the family grave at Overleigh Cemetery, Chester.

Examples of the Work of John Douglas

The earliest known design by John Douglas dates from 1856 and was **a garden ornament**, no longer in existence, **at Abbots Moss for Mrs. Cholmondeley**.

Hugh Lupus Grosvenor, first Duke of Westminster, saw this design and subsequently became Douglas' patron paying him to design many buildings on his estates, the first being **the Church of St. John the Baptist Aldford 1865-66**.

Other notable works include :



1860-61 south and southwest wings of Vale Royal Abbey for Hugh Cholmondeley second Baron Delamere

1860-63 St. John the Evangelist Church, Over for the second Lord Delamere as a memorial to his first wife Sara. This was the first ecclesiastical commission that Douglas received and it contains many features that were to be included in future church designs. At the west end of the south aisle corbels are used for the first time. Corbels, which carry weight, vary in size and design jut out from the wall. The exterior is sandstone, rock faced and there are a variety of window shapes.



1865-67 Grosvenor Park Chester

An information board at the entrance to Grosvenor Park in Chester lists the areas designed by John Douglas and gives details of the cost of the construction.

The architect John Douglas also played a key role in the making of the park. As attested to in his final bill he was responsible for the design and construction of the entrance lodge, the park wall and railings including the entrance gates, the river wall, and a well cover and pumps for Billy Hobby's Well. The construction period took 124 weeks and Douglas' total bill came to £781.13s.0d.

The official grand opening of the new park, renamed Grosvenor Park in honour of the Marquis of Westminster's gift was recorded in detail by the local papers. The Chester Chronicle wrote "... the procession was one of the greatest ever witnessed in Chester, and it was about a mile in length".

The Lodge at the entrance to **Grosvenor Park** is now a café. This was the first known building where Douglas had used black and white. It was his patron, the Duke of Westminster, who suggested the use of black and white which was to become a prominent feature in his later designs in Chester.



1865 The Congregational Chapel Over (now the United Reformed Church)

An elaborate polychromatic design featuring brick pinnacles with sandstone toppers and finials, conical roofs and arched windows with straight bases. Corbels can be seen just below gutter level. The granite pillars in the porch were a gift from John Douglas.



1873-5 St. John's Church Hartford, Cheshire. In 1863 the new parish of St. John, Hartford was constituted, but by 1873 the church was not only too small for the congregation but was also falling into disrepair. It was decided to build a new, larger church and John Douglas was chosen as the architect. The tower and the extension shown on the right hand side were later additions.

1874-5 Remodelling St. Mary's Church, Whitegate

Lord Delamere funded the extensive remodelling of the exterior of the church by Douglas but the interior remained largely untouched.



1879-80 Terrace of houses Grosvenor Park Road, Chester

Douglas built these properties on his own land. Most of the houses are built of red Ruabon brick. The terrace has steep roofs and octagonal turrets at either end.



1881-3 North and South Wales Bank, now the HSBC, Eastgate Street, Chester

The lower storey of the building is of red sandstone with brick upper storeys which have stone dressings. Originally the building was designed as a combined gentleman's club and a bank. The building was designed with Fordham. In 1908 the building was enlarged, by which time Minshull had replaced Fordham.

1887 -9 Tower St. John's Church Hartford, Cheshire

The original design was for a west tower and broached spire, which is a spire built on a square base, however a new design was drawn up and the tower as we see it today was built between 1887 and 1889.



1888-9 Parker's buildings, model tenements, Foregate Street, Chester

The flats were designed by Douglas and Fordham for the first Duke of Westminster and were intended for retired employees from the Eaton Hall estate.

1895-7 East side of St. Werburgh Street, Chester

Douglas bought the land to stop what he considered to be an unsuitable development. The buildings are half timbered black and white at the suggestion of the Duke of Westminster.



1899 The Diamond Jubilee Memorial Clock was commissioned by the Chester councillors in 1897 to celebrate 60 years of the reign of Queen Victoria.



1898-1901 Public Baths Chester. The baths were built for Chester City Council on land owned by John Douglas. The lower storey is in red Ruabon brick with stone dressings, the upper storey is half timbered and the chimney stacks are brick.



1902-1903 Church of St. John the Evangelist, Sandiway

Although Douglas lived and worked in Chester it seems he still had great affection for his birthplace. The church was built partly at Douglas's cost. He gave the land and paid for the lych-gate and chancel.



Manor House, Sandiway

Douglas's father (John Douglas Snr.) entered into an agreement to buy the original property (a farm-house) in 1845. The exact date of when it was re-modelled into this substantial manor house, is unknown. Sandiway Manor is now a residential care home for the elderly.



1903 Houses 1-11+13 Bath Street Chester. These houses show the conical roofs and tall chimneys present in many of Douglas' designs.

Many of the houses were built of high quality sandstone and have turrets with hipped dormers.



Douglas Cottage



1904 Widening of the North Aisle, St. Chad's Church, Over

Douglas's work at St. Chad's is commemorated in an engraved tribute in the stonework of the aisle in which he widened.

Douglas went into partnership with D.P.Fordham from January 1884 until his retirement in 1898. In 1899 Fordham was replaced by C.H. Minshull.

There are many more buildings in and around Chester designed or restored by Douglas and several attributed to him. Aldford, Eccleston and Sandiway are some of the villages where it is possible to see further examples of his work.



**Cottages in
Eccleston**

Design features found in the works of John Douglas

There are common features which appear in many of the works of John Douglas. His work can be divided into the five styles of architecture that he used, namely **High Victorian, Vernacular, Germanic, Gothic and Elizabethan** although some of his designs were a mixture of styles.

High Victorian style was at the height of its popularity between 1850 and 1870. This type of design includes features such as steep sloping roofs, coloured roof slates, bold geometric shapes, polychromatic brickwork and painted woodwork. From the 1860s his designs include many High Victorian features such as seen on the clock tower at Vale Royal Abbey and Over Congregational Church.

Clock Tower, Vale Royal Abbey



United Reformed Church, Over



Vernacular architecture is based upon using the materials found locally and Douglas was influenced by the black and white revival in Chester. Many of his buildings are half timbered, have decorative brick work, high chimney stacks or detailed wood carvings.

Public Baths, Chester



Lodge, Vale Royal Drive, Whitegate

**Grosvenor Park Road,
Chester**



Germanic/Gothic style appeared at the end of the High Victorian period and although Douglas had never visited Germany these designs reflected the roofs, towers and timberwork found in the Rhine and Moselle region of that country. The Grosvenor Club and North and South Wales Bank has a narrow four storey gable and a hexagonal turret in the Germanic style.



The terrace of houses on the east side of Grosvenor Road Chester (1872) also exhibit features of this period. The buildings have high, steeped roofs and several gables and some have ribbed chimney stacks. At either end of this terrace are houses with octagonal turrets.



The best example of this type of design is the former Cheshire County Constabulary building at 142 Foregate Street Chester.



Acknowledgements

Reference material came principally from:

*The Work of John Douglas by Edward Hubbard published by the Victorian Society,
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