

Case Name: Westhoughton Town Hall and attached library

Case Number: 1486623

Background

We have been asked to consider Westhoughton Town Hall for listing. The application has been prompted by proposals for refurbishment and reuse. The town hall is connected by a first-floor corridor bridge to the library. As an attached building, our assessment of the town hall is including the library.

Asset(s) under Assessment

Facts about the asset(s) can be found in the Annex(es) to this report.

Annex	Name	Heritage Category
1	Westhoughton Town Hall and Library, including iron posts and gate to rear alleyway, and footbridge spanning alley	Listing

Visits

Date	Visit Type
20 June 2023	Partial inspection

Annex 1

The Draft List Entry are being assessed as the basis for a proposed addition to The National Heritage List for England.

Draft List Entry

Name: Westhoughton Town Hall and Library, including iron posts and gate to rear alleyway, and footbridge spanning alley

Location

MARKET STREET, WESTHOUGHTON,BL5 3AW

County	District	District Type	Parish
	Bolton	Metropolitan Authority	Westhoughton

History

Town Hall

Westhoughton Town Hall was built in 1903 for Westhoughton Urban District Council. A board of health had been formed in 1872, with its offices at the western end of Market Street. Substantial local industrial growth, particularly in the number of cotton mills, led to the establishment of the urban district in 1894. By 1900 civic leaders desired a dedicated town hall, and a site was available at the eastern end of Market Street, just south of the Glebe cotton-weaving mill.

Tenders were sought in June 1902, and the winning contractors announced in August (with a bid of £4,922) were Townson and Sons of Bolton. The architects of the building were the Bolton firm of Bradshaw and Gass, with the design probably by Arthur Hope. Arthur John Hope joined the architectural partnership Bradshaw and Gass in 1892, and became a partner in 1902. Hope, who had studied civil engineering, was never a full member of the RIBA, which might explain why the firm sometimes called itself Bradshaw and Gass even after Hope was made partner. The firm is of national reputation and designed many listed buildings. The foundation stones for the town hall were laid in April 1903, and it opened on 7 December 1904. The clock's bell was removed in 1947 due to vibration damage.

In 1974 Westhoughton became part of the Metropolitan Borough of Bolton and the town hall was used as council offices. From 1984 Westhoughton town council was established, with the town hall as its base. The first floor has been opened out with modern office fittings. The building was extended in closely-matching style in 1992, by the same architects. This involved the removal of most of the original flat-roofed, single-storey entrance bay to the east of the clock tower, although its rear wall was incorporated. It might also be when the original crowned finials to the shoulders of the tower were removed. The building is currently (2023) empty and awaiting refurbishment.

Library

In 1904, after having first secured some funding from the Carnegie foundation, the District Council held a limited competition to design a library for Westhoughton, to be sited to the rear of the town hall, facing Victoria Avenue (now Library Street). The library was among the first wave of Carnegie libraries built in England (the first in England was in Keighley, founded in 1902 and opened in 1904). The Public Libraries Act of 1850 had allowed municipal boroughs of over 10,000 inhabitants in England to fund library buildings and staff from a half-penny rate. This provision was gradually expanded but not widely taken up even after 77 new libraries were opened during Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887.

While not the first benefactor of multiple libraries in England, Andrew Carnegie (1835-1919) was by far the most prolific. Born in Dunfermline, he was an iron and steel magnate who was passionate about the availability of free libraries, funding approximately 3,000 libraries during

his lifetime and beyond, mainly in the USA and Canada, the United Kingdom and Ireland, but also across the globe. Carnegie grants required the site to be freely given, and did not include the cost of books.

In July 1904 the library competition was won by Halsall Tonge and Campbell, of Southport and Westhoughton. George Tonge was born in Westhoughton but had commenced independent practice in Southport around 1901, before partnering with Halsall and Campbell in 1903. It is not known if he was related to the WE Tonge who chaired the council at that time. By December 1904, when the winning design was illustrated in the *Building News*, it included separate reading rooms for ladies and boys, a reference room and a lending department, as well as a first-floor lecture hall to seat 500 people. In 1906 a further application to the Carnegie foundation secured a grant totalling £3,750. When it was formally opened on 1 August 1906 (after a 'soft opening' on 24 March), the library included a covered first-floor bridge link to the town hall.

In the 1970s the library was extended to the rear in contemporary style, with a large roof lantern over the extension's central staircase. The rear block of the library, which housed the reference room, half of the reading room and some first-floor offices, was removed, and some of the floor plan opened out so that only the southern side of the original spine corridor remains, in partial form, with openings created into the former lending department (now the childrens' library). The ceiling was also lowered in the ground floor of the main block, removing any original decorative cornicing and light fittings. A historic photograph of around 1910 shows that the front range originally had a balustrade above the cornice and a blind attic behind the front gable pediment. These have also been removed, and a plain brick parapet added.

More recently, a lift has been inserted within what was the ladies' reading room in the front range, and a bar inserted in the north-west corner of the lecture hall. An access ramp has been installed in the entrance hall, retaining the original steps beneath.

Details

Town Hall

A town hall dated 1903 by Bradshaw and Gass for the Westhoughton Urban District Council.

MATERIALS: Ruabon red brick with terracotta dressings, timber windows, blue slate roof.

PLAN: a linear range aligned east-west, with a clock tower towards the east end.

EXTERIOR: designed in Mannerist Renaissance style, the building faces south onto Market Street.

The south façade comprises the original five-bay symmetrical frontage, with projecting clock tower to the east, plus an additional three bays to the east of the tower. It has a plinth, continuous sill bands to both floors, plat bands, dentilled cornice with mutules, and a balustrade, and the ground-floor windows all have aprons.

The original range has a projecting three-window central entrance bay with a porte-cochere dated 1903, decorated with console keystone, swags and festoons, and supported by red sandstone Ionic columns, each with a single block. The panelled doors are original and surmounted by a decorative lintel with cartouche keystone. Over this bay is an open pediment supported by first-floor Ionic pilasters flanking the outer windows. The central window is surmounted by an oculus extending into the pediment with a giant keystone, all surrounded by rich surface decoration. To each side of the entrance bay are two bays, all with square-headed first-floor windows with keystone surrounds and arched ground-floor windows with voussoirs and grinning-mask keystones. The two upper left windows (to the council chamber) have leaded armorial glass. The outer pairs of windows are divided by cast-iron rainwater pipes with lead hoppers. Two asymmetrically-placed chimney stacks rise through the roof, and a gable stack is visible at the left. Also visible at the left are the projecting bays of the Library Street façade.

The tower to the right is of four stages, with a false election balcony with bowed iron balustrade over the ground-floor window, third stage with pilasters and arched pediments over clock faces, and a belfry stage with concave quadrants on the angles and pediments and bowed balustrades to each face, all surmounted by a ribbed copper dome with a globe finial. Above the plinth are two sandstone foundation stones inscribed in relief. Further to the right are three bays of similar detailing (the masks not however as good as the originals), with a door adjacent to the tower, accessed by a modern ramp.

The western façade to Library Street is gabled with all of the cornice and bands returning across its full width. To either side are two-storey canted bay windows, with a single ground-floor window between them. The bays only have a central window to the ground floor, but three lights above with armorial leaded glass. The gable has an elaborate central chimney stack with a blind niche, shoulders and cornices. The right-hand bay has a copper plaque commemorating 15 men from clubs of the Bolton and District Cricket Association who died in the Pretoria Pit mining disaster in 1910 (England's second worst mining disaster, which claimed the lives of 344 men and boys).

The north façade is of common brick with segmental-arched openings and stone sills. The majority of first-floor windows have armorial leaded glass. The central bay of the original façade is partially obscured by the first-floor link to the library. The ground floor of this bay has a decorative leaded window (displaced by the link) in a former doorway. To the left is the tall, arched stair window, which projects slightly. At the left the extension has a wide gabled stair bay which retains some of the decorative detailing of the original single-storey bay here, and two bays with brick soldier-course bands and modest corbelled cornice.

The east end has most of the bands of the front façade but a similar cornice to the rear. Above this it is gabled with a Diocletian window relocated from the original east end; below are plain windows.

INTERIOR: photographs indicate the survival of most of the plan-form and features of interest. Based on these and newspaper reports of the opening, the interior is understood to contain the following. The vestibule to the main entrance off Market Street has a marble mosaic floor, and leads to the staircase hall and main spinal corridor with arches springing from columns and pilasters, a grey-blue tessellated floor and light-oak panelling and door surrounds (also found in the former committee room). The main staircase has steps of marble mosaic and ornamental balusters, and a leaded decorative stair window. The first-floor Council Chamber has a double doorway with carved pediment over, and an arcaded west wall with bay window recesses at each side. The arcade and walls have pilasters with Ionic capitals, landscape paintings and Jasperware-style figures and animals in the spandrels. The ceiling has a cornice, deep cove and plaster panelling. Wainscot panelling in light oak is complemented by the original furnishings designed by the architects, comprising a horseshoe table and chairs with green leather stamped WUDC in gold. The windows have leaded lights with some armorial glass. Light fittings are later.

SUBSIDIARY FEATURES: to the rear are a wrought-iron railing and gate with Art Nouveau design, with octagonal cast-iron posts.

Library

A Carnegie library of 1904 by Halsall Tonge and Campbell for Westhoughton Urban District Council.

MATERIALS: Accrington brick with red terracotta dressings by Jabez Thompson of Northwich, blue slate roof, timber windows.

PLAN: double pile with deeper main block behind front range; flat-roofed extension to the rear with prominent roof lantern.

EXTERIOR: designed in Mannerist Renaissance style, the building faces west onto Library Street.

The five-bay west façade has a plinth, ground-floor sill band, string course, plat bands to both floors, and entablature with dentilled cornice (with plain brick parapet above).

The full-height central entrance bay projects under an open pediment supported by first-floor Ionic pilasters, over a rusticated ground floor with cornice and open Flemish pediment on pilasters, with an arched niche in the pediment with scallop shell and ribbon scroll inscribed CARNEGIE/ LIBRARY. Above the entrance pediment, the first-floor window is set in an arched niche that rises into the main pediment, with wreath and garlands above a lintel-cornice, and a cartouche and festoon above all. The entrance has panelled double doors and a radial fanlight. The (vertical sliding sash) windows of the outer bays have voussoirs to the ground floor and shouldered surrounds to the first floor, with prominent cornices and sills with aprons.

The north façade returns in a similar manner for two bays, but in common brick and with first-floor windows (now all blocked) with only voussoired lintels (and a modern air-conditioning unit). To the left are a further five bays, also in common brick, with the same plinth, sill band and string course, two plat bands and a simple cornice. The first floor has blind outer bays flanked by strip pilasters, and three central windows with projecting brick surrounds, simple moulded lintels and prominent sills with brick aprons. The ground floor has an arcade formed by springers and segmental window heads in alternating orange and red terracotta; four windows at the left and a smaller pair in bay 5 (all casements replacing sashes). The extension at the left is in plain brick walling with plain openings; six windows to the ground floor and a strip window at first-floor. Rising above the parapet is a large central roof lantern with north window.

The east and south façades of the extension are similar, with some blocked windows. The south façade of the library is of common brick to the rear of the link to the Town Hall, which is supported by brick buttresses and a segmental arch, and has two windows to either face. The east face of the link is of common brick and plain. The west face is of Accrington brick and is enriched with pilasters and bands. To the west of the link, the south façade is also of Accrington brick and terracotta detailing, with a return of the cornice and bands across the end of the front range, the sill-and-string bands continuing onto the main block, one first-floor window like those of the front, and ground-floor windows like those of the north side, the front-most being blocked.

INTERIOR: the entrance accesses a vestibule with panelled and leaded-glazed screen and doors, leading via a modern ramp (concealing steps) to the octagonal entrance hall, with Ionic pilasters, cornice and panelled plaster ceiling. Windows accessing the former lending department and boys reading room have lugged surrounds. Arched openings lead off to the north and south and the floor is parquet. The staircase returns to either side of the entrance, with a less elaborate panelled plaster ceiling, and decorative scrolled cast-iron balusters. The first-floor hall doors have Art Nouveau glass and handles. The hall has similar plaster decoration to the entrance hall below, with coved ceiling and central coving with ventilator (still extant). Windows have cornices and a pediment to the central one. A modern bar and lift are inserted in the north-west corner. The bridge link to the Town Hall has a plain interior with steps down. The body of the former library is largely altered with lowered ceiling and mostly removed walls. The extension has a large central stair lit by a timber-lined roof lantern, and galleried first floor.

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Map**National Grid Reference:** SD6559905930

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The above map is for quick reference purposes only and may not be to scale. For a copy of the full scale map, please see the attached PDF – 1487220_1.pdf.