

**GEORGE HEATON (1840-1910), ENGINEER AND ARCHITECT**  
"FORESIGHT, SAGACITY AND THOROUGHNESS"



In 1874 he was appointed architect for the Victoria Buildings in King Street, Wigan, and had established an office there by 1877.

The end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and start of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries was a period of momentous change in Wigan. New legislation in the spheres of public health and education combined with technological advances and industrial prosperity to create a substantially altered urban environment. Dilapidated and insanitary housing in the town centre was swept away to be replaced by new streets lined with grandiose public and commercial buildings, reflecting the wealth and confidence of Wigan's more prominent citizens and benefactors.

A significant proportion of the late-19<sup>th</sup> and early-20<sup>th</sup> century buildings still standing in Wigan town centre and the wider Wigan

Metropolitan Borough are the work of local architect and engineer George Heaton. Active between 1865 and 1910, initially alone and then in partnership with W C Ralph and son F G Heaton, he designed "numerous flamboyant buildings using the Old English and Renaissance Revival styles and materials [in particular, red Ruabon brick and terracotta] fashionable at this period". His legacy includes several Grade II-listed properties plus 17 others in the town centre "deemed to be of significant townscape merit and ... possible candidates for future Listings", as well as numerous buildings and examples of transport/sanitation infrastructure situated elsewhere in the Borough and beyond.

George Heaton was born on 9 March 1840 in Pemberton and is listed on the 1841-1861 census returns as a resident of Goose Green together with his father, a "paviour", and siblings. In 1862 he married Jane Rogerson at the Church of St John the Divine, Pemberton. Together they would have seven children before Jane's death in 1879. In the meanwhile he had become a pupil of the Wigan Borough Surveyor J L Hunter, and oversaw the construction and/or renewal of the Corporation's waterworks, sewage mains and outfall works.

As the Wigan Observer would later note in its obituary, it was by this means that he gained valuable engineering experience and came to the notice of the celebrated engineer and sanitarian Sir Robert Rawlinson, spending a short period in Sir Robert's service in London and – it was reported - being offered by him "a highly lucrative and influential position in Egypt". George, however, "found it ever against his inclinations to seek public honours and distinctions, and preferred to come back and devote his talents to work in his native town".

Commencing practice on his own account in the late 1860s, George was engaged as surveyor for the former Hindley Local Board and oversaw various public works in that and the neighbouring townships. In 1877 he designed a Wesleyan school for approximately 100 children which was built by Mr C B Holmes of Cross Street Sawmills, Wigan. Other design and construction projects attributed to him during this period include St Peter's Schools and the Cemetery, Lodge and Chapel at Hindley (respectively 1873 and 1878-1880); the Scarisbrick Street Baptist Schools (1875); 20-22 Clifton Street; 5-15 Swinley Road (c.1876, now Grade II-listed); 4-20 Swinley Lane; Southport Promenade extension (1879); Wigan Public Baths (1881-2); and Bradford's Bowling Cemetery.

In 1880 George married second wife Tabitha Margery Holden, with whom he would have another 10 children, and the couple initially set up home with Tabitha's mother in Southport. By 1884 he had been admitted to membership of the Manchester Society of Architects and to associate membership of the Institute of Civil Engineers, and in 1889 he was initiated into United Grand Lodge of England Freemasons, Antiquity Lodge, at Wigan. About this time he and Tabitha moved with their children to 54 Earl Street, a self-built family home in the Gothic Revival style featuring an Italianate door surround and an exposed gable truss; features which can also be seen at 1 New Market Street and at "Brentwood", 251 Wigan Lane, for which designs he was also responsible. His Jacobean Revival-style public baths at Bootle were completed in 1888, this following execution of his designs for The Rock Hotel at Warrington Road, Lower Ince a year earlier.

In 1892 George formed a partnership with the London-born architect William Chasen Ralph (1848-1913). Projects undertaken by the pair included the fitting out of three newly-erected shops at Ashton-in-Makerfield (1891); business premises at Hindley (1892); the Ship Inn and stables on Millgate (1892-3); the "rich Flemish Renaissance Style" Wigan Reform Club at 15 King Street West (1893); the Royal Hotel at the junction of Standishgate and Station Road (1893, now lost); the Yorkshire Bank (originally Powell's Chambers) at 35-37 Market Place (1892); reservoir conduits, etc at Billinge (1892); reconstruction of Wigan's tram network (1892); the Grade II-listed St Mark's Church at Newtown (1891-2); school buildings at Newtown (1893); and the Church House-now Tudor House on New Market Street (1893).

With the addition of George's eldest son, Frederick, in 1894, the partnership entered a prolific phase during which some of Wigan's most iconic town centre buildings were designed and constructed. These included Makinson Arcade and 54-56 Market Place (1897-8); buildings on the corner of Station Road and Millgate (1896, now lost); 1-5 Market Street and 26-38 Market Place (1904-6, now Grade II-listed); 2-14 and 25-29 Library Street (1899-1903); the Prudential Assurance Building at 16 Library Street (1905, Grade II-listed); 2-5 King Street West; 12-20 Wallgate (1897, subsequently altered by others; Grade II-listed); 25 Wallgate; 42-50 Wallgate; 58-60 Wallgate; 2-5 King Street; 25-27 Hallgate (1896); the Westwood Estate Office at 5 Rodney Street (1896, Grade II-listed); shops and business premises - Cowling Buildings and Market Buildings, for Richard Makinson - on Mesnes Street (1895); the Powell Boys' Reading Room - later a library and museum - on Station Road (1895, now lost); 1 and 38-44 Standishgate; auction rooms on Bretherton Row (1897); and the building - now The Anvil - at the corner of Dorning Street and Hallgate (1898).

Commissions for new public houses were frequently received from the local breweries such as Magee Marshall & Co. In addition to the previously-mentioned Ship Inn on Millgate and the former Royal Hotel on Station Road, the partnership designed the Griffin Hotel at 94 Standishgate (1905, Grade II-listed); the Raven Hotel at 5 Wallgate (1904, Grade II-listed); the "Classical Revival"-style Victoria Hotel at 52 Wallgate (1894, Grade II-listed); the Roebuck Inn at 41-3 Standishgate (1900, the surviving façade is Grade II-listed); the Bowling Green on Wigan Lane; the Pagefield Hotel at 168 Gidlow Lane (1902, Grade II-listed); a public house on Frog Lane (1908); and the Springfield Hotel at 47 Springfield Road (1903, Grade II-listed). Other HRH-designed public houses subsequently lost to town-centre redevelopment include the White Lion, the Bull's Head and the Old Dog Inn on Market Place, the Park Hotel (Hope Street) and the Golden Lion Inn (Wallgate).

Terraces of workers' houses designed by Heaton Ralph & Heaton were also built during this period, as well as residences for "the better sort" such as those at 12-22 and 38-41 Bridgeman Terrace and 6-20 Spencer Road.

Further afield, the firm was responsible for the Britannia Bridge Council Schools; schools at Standish Lower Ground (1895); St George's Parish Schools (1895); water mains at Haigh (1895); a hotel at Chorley (1894); police stations at Higher Ince and Spring View (both c.1900); the Rumworth Rink at Bolton (1903); new council offices at Abram, Hindley and Ince (all 1903); the Coach and Horses at Lowe Ince; the Victoria Hotel at Platt Bridge (1904); the workhouse/infirmary at Billinge; the Conservative Club at Ashton-in-Makerfield (1905); extensions to the Ashton-in-Makerfield Infectious Diseases Hospital (1906, jointly with Messrs Heywood & Harrison); and the "mildly Arts and Crafts"-style vicarage for the Church of St John the Evangelist at Hindley Green (1910).

Two more of George's sons joined the business, one as an architectural assistant and the other as a draughtsman.

In 1910 designs were submitted to William Benson Theatre Enterprises of Wigan for a proposed "People's Palace & Opera House", but - as with the planned north aisle at St Thomas' Church, Golborne, for which Heaton Ralph & Heaton had produced designs in 1897 - this seems not to have been built.

On 8 October 1910 George Heaton died at his home, 54 Earl Street. A funeral service at St Michael's Church was followed by interment in the family vault at Lower Ince cemetery. Notifying its readers of these events, the Wigan Observer stated that-

"Mr Heaton was a prodigious worker, and had little time for pursuits apart from his business. Probably he had also as little taste as time for public positions. Yet he ... will be a greatly missed figure, for he represents a link with past forms of local government and old associations of Wigan and the surrounding districts. He was an eminently capable engineer and surveyor, whose work remains to give proof of his foresight, sagacity, and thoroughness....".

Anthony Pilgrim  
February 2023

## Sources

Pollard, R and Pevsner, N: "Buildings of England: Lancashire: Liverpool and the South-West" (Yale UP, 2006)

Powell, P: "Firmness and Delight: Heaton and Ralph of Wigan and Their Buildings" in St Mary and St John Parish Magazine (Part I Autumn 1996, pp.18-20; Part II Winter 1996/7, pp.18-19)

Wigan Town Centre Conservation Area Appraisal, April 2010

<https://manchestervictorianarchitects.org.uk>

<https://historicengland.org.uk/>

[www.jwconservation.co.uk](http://www.jwconservation.co.uk)

<https://pubheritage.camra.org.uk>

The Wigan Observer & District Advertiser

The Wigan Examiner

Wigan Building Preservation Trust

Further images of local Heaton Ralph & Heaton buildings can be found, with associated commentary, as follows-

Raven, 5 Wallgate: <https://www.wiganbuildings.co.uk/building.php?id=434>  
Bowling Green, 106 Wigan Lane: <https://www.wiganbuildings.co.uk/building.php?id=789>  
1-5 Market St: <https://www.wiganbuildings.co.uk/building.php?id=590>  
12-20 Wallgate: <https://www.wiganbuildings.co.uk/building.php?id=576>  
26-32 Market Place: <https://www.wiganbuildings.co.uk/building.php?id=519>  
34 Market Place: <https://www.wiganbuildings.co.uk/building.php?id=589>  
36-38 Market Place: <https://www.wiganbuildings.co.uk/building.php?id=587>  
54 Earl St: <https://www.wiganbuildings.co.uk/building.php?id=905>  
Makinson Arcade: <https://www.wiganbuildings.co.uk/building.php?id=784> and  
<https://www.wiganbuildings.co.uk/building.php?id=669>  
Roebuck Inn/41-3 Standishgate: <https://www.wiganbuildings.co.uk/building.php?id=1087>  
Prudential/16 Library St: <https://www.wiganbuildings.co.uk/building.php?id=516>  
Reform Club/15 King St West: <https://www.wiganbuildings.co.uk/building.php?id=675>  
25 Wallgate: <https://www.wiganbuildings.co.uk/building.php?id=854>  
Ship Hotel, Millgate: <https://www.wiganbuildings.co.uk/building.php?id=670>  
Griffin/94 Standishgate: <https://www.wiganbuildings.co.uk/building.php?id=500>  
Springfield Hotel: <https://www.wiganbuildings.co.uk/building.php?id=464>  
Victoria Buildings/36-44 King St: <https://www.wiganbuildings.co.uk/building.php?id=861>  
Victoria Hotel/52 Wallgate: <https://www.wiganbuildings.co.uk/building.php?id=430>  
Westwood Estate Office/5 Rodney Street: <https://www.wiganbuildings.co.uk/building.php?id=429>  
Public Baths/Millgate: <https://www.wiganbuildings.co.uk/building.php?id=1060>  
Auction Rooms/Bretherton Row: <https://www.wiganbuildings.co.uk/building.php?id=688>  
Anvil/Dorning St: <https://www.wiganbuildings.co.uk/building.php?id=679>  
Tudor House/New Market St: <https://www.wiganbuildings.co.uk/building.php?id=1088>  
Former Powell Library/Station Road: <https://www.wiganbuildings.co.uk/building.php?id=832>  
Pagefield Hotel/168 Gidlow Lane: <https://www.wiganbuildings.co.uk/building.php?id=471>  
5-15 Swinley Rd: <https://www.wiganbuildings.co.uk/building.php?id=883>  
18-20 Spencer Road: <https://www.wiganbuildings.co.uk/building.php?id=823>  
Brentwood/251 Wigan Lane: <https://www.wiganbuildings.co.uk/building.php?id=693>  
St Mark's Church (Newtown): <https://www.wiganbuildings.co.uk/building.php?id=550>  
Former Abram UDC offices: <https://www.wiganbuildings.co.uk/building.php?id=593>  
Former Hindley UDC offices: <https://www.wiganbuildings.co.uk/building.php?id=628>  
Former Ince UDC offices: <https://www.wiganbuildings.co.uk/building.php?id=695>  
Rock Hotel (Ince): <https://www.wiganbuildings.co.uk/building.php?id=879>