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WAS ANGLESEY THE BIRTHPLACE OF BIRMINGHAM TOWN HALL?

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Following the untimely death of his first employer, Matthew Philips, the twenty-two year old Joseph Hansom from York embarked upon his career by transferring his allegiance to John Oates in Halifax.¹ He can scarcely have foreseen that this would lead him to the Isle of Anglesey and then in 1832 to his greatest, or at least his most publicised, work, the Town Hall in Birmingham. Nor could he have envisaged the bankruptcy which ensued. This article shows how Hansom was able to make use of members of one extended family to generate repeat business. It also shows how the use of Anglesey marble (carboniferous limestone) influenced his later career as an architect in the Midlands and in Lancashire.

In 1828 Hansom went into partnership with the Welsh-born Edward Welch, another of Oates's assistants, and this took both men to Wales to enlarge Penrhos Hall (1829), near Holyhead for Sir John Stanley.² The commission may have been vicariously generated by Welch's father, a surveyor, land agent and auctioneer based in Berth, in the parish of Llanbedr Dyffryn, Denbighshire.³ Before moving to Halifax the family had lived in Overton, Flintshire, within easy reach of both Buckley and Broughton, the sites of two early Church Commissioners' churches designed by Oates.⁴ It therefore seems likely that when work was required at Penrhos, and again in Beaumaris, Welch would recommend his eldest son as one of the architects. Other commissions on the island followed in quick succession, all in Beaumaris: the gaol

(1829); the Bulkeley Arms Hotel (1831); the Trainer's [Chantry] House, (c.1831); and finally Victoria Terrace (1830–33).

Division of labour between the two partners is difficult to ascertain, for Hansom still had work in York, and he, Edward Welch and his brother John Welch were all working intermittently on the Isle of Man for several years. It was Hansom who negotiated with the local authorities regarding the Church Commissioners church of St John at Toxteth Park, Liverpool in 1828, suggesting that he was the dominant partner.⁵ He claimed responsibility for all the work in Anglesey, though it is evident that Welch's input was considerable.⁶ Plans for Penrhos, one of which is dated 1829, include one signed by Welch and another by Hansom and Welch (Fig. 1).⁷ Two references in the journals of Sir John Williams (second Baronet), for whom they re-organised and extended Bodelwyddan Hall (Flintshire, now Denbighshire), name Welch, with no mention of Hansom (Fig. 2),⁸ though he may have been noted as a local contact rather than claiming seniority. The remodelling of Bodelwyddan and the announcement of the competition coincided, putting Hansom under such pressure that he had to ask Welch to submit his entry for him as he was 'dashing between Liverpool, Anglesey and York'.⁹ The two partners made separate entries.¹⁰ When difficulties arose later over Birmingham Town Hall, Hansom was in Anglesey for several weeks trying to resolve problems over the late delivery of stone, whilst Welch was holding the fort in Birmingham.¹¹

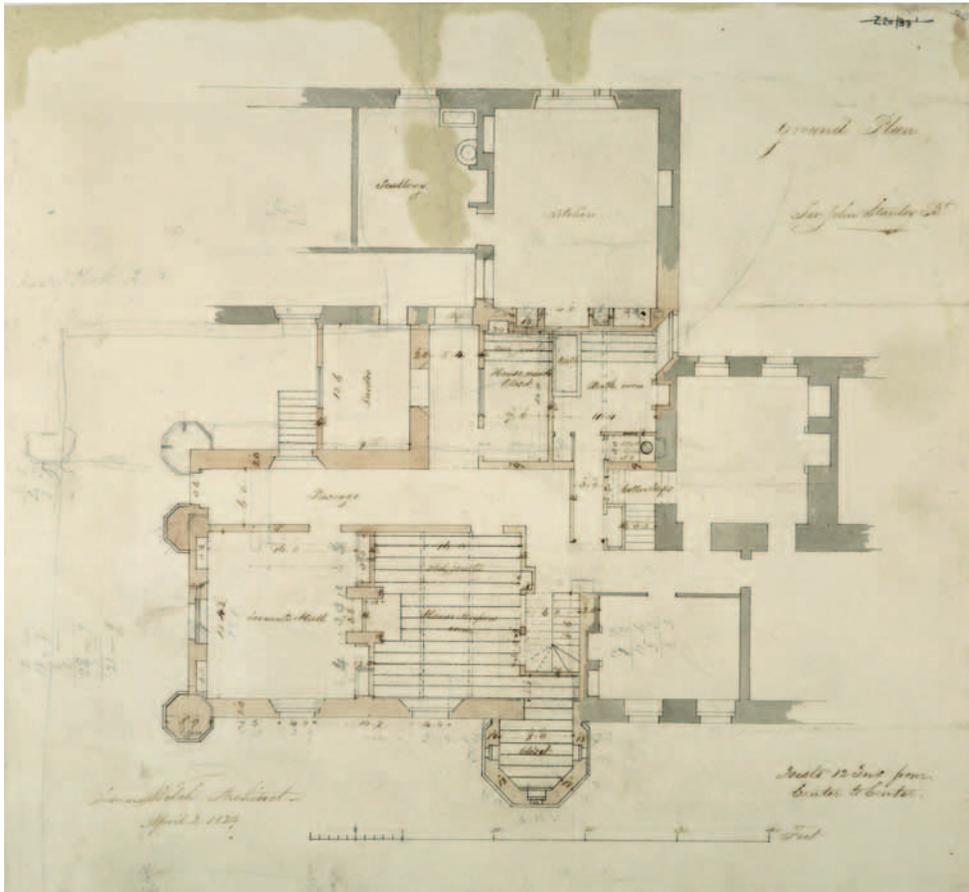


Fig. 1. Plan of additions and alterations to Penrhos.
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ANGLESEY

1829 saw the start of the re-building of the Beaumaris gaol, and the establishment of Hansom and Welch’s connection with the Isle of Anglesey. Beaumaris was a small market town built outside the castle walls after 1296, and governed by a chartered Corporation. As Liverpool grew to be a major sea port, and with the arrival of Telford’s Menai Suspension Bridge (1826) and the accompanying new government-backed road serving as a postal route between London and Dublin, the town was effectively side-

lined.¹² To counteract this, Sir Richard Bulkeley paid for a new road, connecting the bridge to his home at Baron’s Hill, adjacent to the ruins of Beaumaris Castle.¹³ By 1824, Beaumaris Corporation was already discussing how the town could be developed, at the same time raising its social status and promoting it as a tourist centre.¹⁴ As the largest property owner in the area, Sir Richard was closely involved.¹⁵

The first move was to build Green Edge (1824–5), a terrace of six houses on the sea front, built by



Fig. 2. Bodelwyddan: sketch by Sarah Hay-Williams, wife of Sir John, before colonnades were re-sited. (Reproduced by kind permission of the Claydon House Trust: *Bodelwyddan Memoirs*, vol. 1, 10/974/1)

John Hall of Bangor, for a cost of £3,475.¹⁶ No. 6 housed the Beaumaris Book Club, Beaumaris News and a billiard room.¹⁷ The overall aim was to attract professional residents.¹⁸ As a tourist attraction, hot salt-water baths with bathing machines were built in 1828.¹⁹ They were demolished in the late nineteenth century, but the two-storeyed, rubble stone chimneystack remains (Fig. 3).²⁰ This closely resembles the water tower at the gaol, suggesting that Hansom and Welch may also have constructed the baths.²¹ It then became apparent that the county gaol, also on the sea front, did not comply with the 1823 Gaols Act.²² It was, therefore, demolished and a new gaol, designed by Hansom and Welch, was erected in 1828–9, well away from the sea-front. The contract reinforced their reputation and

underpinned their connection with the Bulkeley and Williams families. Welch's estimate for the total cost of the new, two-storey goal was £6,006, but this escalated to £8,000.²³ It was solid and fortress-like in appearance and was surrounded by walls sixteen feet high (Fig. 4).²⁴ The advertisement inviting contractors was in the names of Hansom and Welch of York, though Welch undertook to superintend the work personally.²⁵ The plan, before modification, was T-shaped, and Welch agreed to payment of three per cent on expenditure, with £20 for travelling expenses.²⁶ Masonry work was carried out by William Thomas, one of the builders of the church in Toxteth.²⁷ Some of the old materials were used to face the side of the hotel which Hansom and Welch built in 1831, whilst iron-work was transferred to the



Fig. 3. Boiler house stack, Beaumaris.



Fig. 4. New gaol, Beaumaris.

All photographs were taken by the author unless otherwise stated.



Fig. 5. Bulkeley Arms Hotel, main entrance on Castle Street.

new gaol.²⁸ One of the signatures on the conveyance of the old gaol was that of Richard Bulkeley, now Williams-Bulkeley, quoting his address as Trostryafon, near Penmon, the site of his quarry, where stone was extracted for the gaol, the Terrace and the Town Hall.²⁹ Penrhos is conveniently seven miles north-east of Beaumaris.

Sir Richard's next venture was the building of the Bulkeley Arms Hotel, initially the Williams Bulkeley Hotel. To do this it was necessary to demolish part of the old town wall, together with the Crown Inn, the Manchester Hotel and many other properties, eventually ending up with a fifteen-acre plot.³⁰ Sir Richard either already owned or purchased most of them, but there were prolonged delays due to disputes over the custom and practice of grazing rights on The Green.³¹ The hotel is

a three-storeyed, double-fronted building with Neo-classical detailing. The balcony, over a grand Soane-like porch, dominated Castle Street to the front, with the rear looking onto the sea (Fig. 5). Both elevations, which were faced with Penmon stone, have Hansom's trade-mark pediments over the first-floor windows, first used in his dispensary in York (1827) and repeated in the subsequent Victoria Terrace.³² Hansom and Welch are quoted as being the 'Bulkeley in-house architects' and the main users of Penmon quarry at this time.³³ A small property which they built and faced with stone was No. 24 Church Street, residential with a shop on the ground floor (Fig. 6),³⁴ in the heart of the medieval part of Beaumaris, to which the market was relocated in 1826.³⁵ Another house that may be by Hansom and Welch is Trainer's House, so called because it



Fig. 6. 24 Church Street, Beaumaris.



Fig. 7. Trainers (Chantry) House, Beaumaris.

was the home of Sir Richard's race-horse trainer, and now named Chantry House, at the rear of the Bulkeley Hotel (Fig. 7). This is a three-storey ashlar-faced building, with attic and basement, and shows some similarity to the hotel in its use of tripartite lintels and panelled aprons.³⁶ Horse-racing was a popular pastime of the gentry, and Sir John Williams mentioned attendance at several race-meetings in his journals.³⁷ The closeness of the relationship between the Stanleys of Penrhos, the Bulkeleys at Beaumaris and the Williamses at Bodelwyddan is illustrated both in the 'Beaumaris Memoirs' and in the diary of Mary Elizabeth Lucy, John Williams's sister, who lived at Charlecote in Warwickshire.³⁸ The Williams family was very mobile, travelling frequently between Penrhos, Bodelwyddan – spectacularly remodelled

by Hansom and Welch in a castellated style in the 1830s – and Charlecote. Records clearly show the affection which the Williams family had for their homes and the money they were prepared to invest in them, an interest which extended to a proactive supervisory role.³⁹

It was now suggested that an additional terrace be built, far grander than Green Edge, overlooking the Menai Straits, and filling the gap between the hotel and the baths. An early example of the civic pride which was about to spread steadily across the country, this was an integral part of a conscious master-plan to raise the town's profile. The project was essentially commercial in nature and was instigated jointly by Sir Richard Bulkeley and Beaumaris Corporation. As architects of the

gaol and the hotel, Hansom and Welch were well placed. Neither the plans of the local architect, John Hall, nor those submitted by the architects John Foster, from Liverpool, or Edward Haycock, from Shrewsbury, were selected, perhaps because none adequately conveyed the sense of municipal status which was sought.⁴⁰

Victoria Terrace was Hansom's first major use of Anglesey marble. The appeal of his design was its likeness to John Nash's Park Crescent (1812) at the southern end of Regent's Park in London, and John Wood the younger's Royal Crescent in Bath (1775).⁴¹ Hansom's plan called for a unified frontage, but his tendency to introduce unconventional features led him to arrange it in such a way that the sides slanted away from a strong central pediment instead of curving inwards (Fig. 8),⁴² rather like the prow of a ship.⁴³ Each of the ten units was to be sold separately and designed internally according to the wishes of the buyer, with the Corporation retaining overall control and collecting ground rent (Fig. 9). No 'trade or business which may be nauseous or offensive' was permitted, neither were any alterations without the permission of the Corporation.⁴⁴

The 1830 specification placed so much emphasis on aesthetics that no sign of rainwater was permitted at the front of the building.⁴⁵ In addition:

Every house shall have between them a Party Wall ... and a Party Wall dividing each court ... 2' thick and not less than 7' high.

Bearing timbers of the Roof and Floors of each House must be of Memel or Dantzie Pine.

Outside joinery may be good American Pine.

Wall of the Principal Front to be of Penmon white stone.

Gutter behind blocking courses ... of good width laid with 8lbs cast lead.

Each house shall take its own water from the Front by trough spout lined with 5lbs milled lead and conveyed downwards by iron leaden fall Pipes.

Roof to be covered with best Welsh Queen Slates laid upon sawn Fir Laths, secured by Copper Nails.

There shall be good slop or other drains laid from each house into the proposed main drain of the back lane.

All front windows shall not have glass of inferior quality.⁴⁶

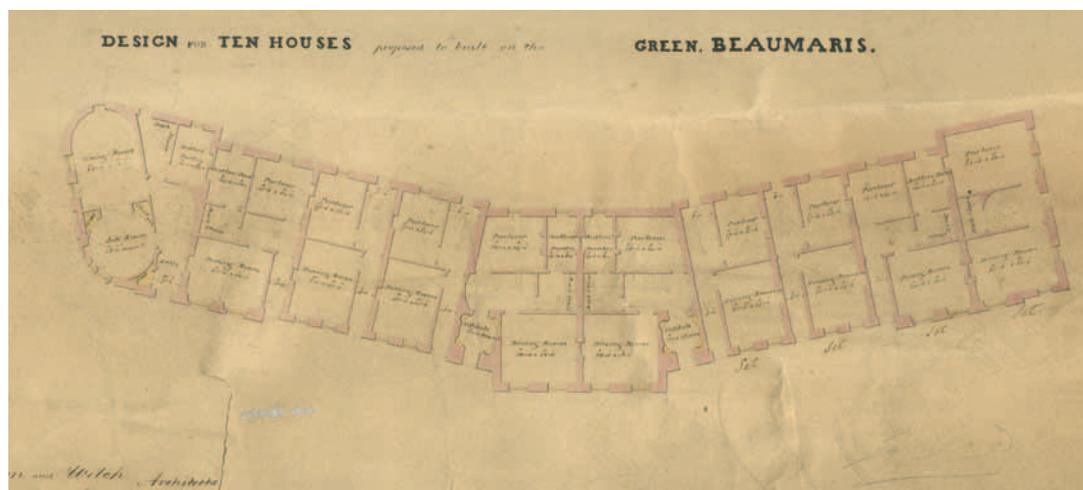


Fig. 8. Hansom's plan of Victoria Terrace.

(By kind permission of Archives and Special Collections, Bangor University: uncatalogued)



Fig. 9. Victoria Terrace central pediment.

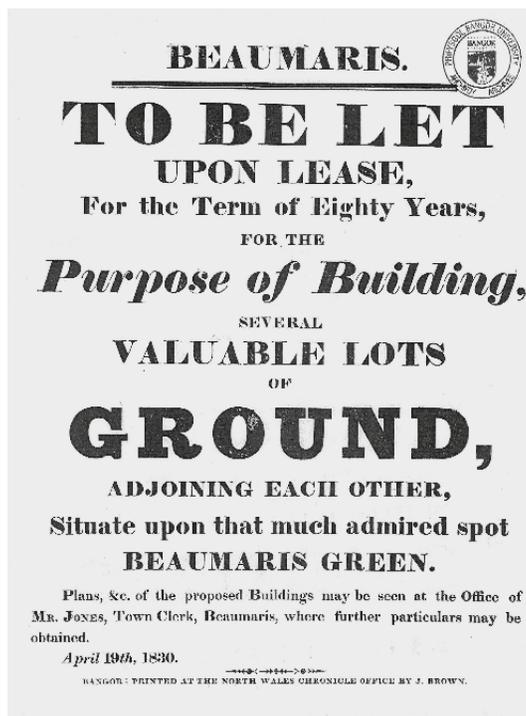


Fig. 10. Victoria Terrace, notice seeking tenants.
(By kind permission of Archives and Special Collections,
Bangor University: 601-P)

An additional specification, two years later, stated that there should be ‘a trap door 1 ft. 6 in. square on the front of each house sufficiently low in the roof to prevent its being seen from the Green.’⁴⁷

Problems which complicated Hansom’s work-schedule were the erratic timing of the sale of the properties, multiple use of different builders for each of the units, and unavoidable absences on the part of the architects.⁴⁸ On one occasion a buyer complained that a partition wall was too thin, on another one unit had to be pulled down and re-built, and on a third the buyer refused to pay the architects’ fees of £33, which had to be covered by the Corporation.⁴⁹ The project achieved its objective, however, when Samuel Butler, future Bishop of Lichfield and Sir John Jervis, MP for Chester

from 1832 and later Solicitor General, became leaseholders.⁵⁰ Fleetwood Hesketh, uncle of Sir John Williams of Bodellwydan, took on the lease of unit no. 4 (No. 14).⁵¹ Hansom was retained on an *ad hoc* consultancy basis to oversee work of the individual builders.⁵² In 1832 Richard Bulkeley, President of the local Eisteddfod, hosted the Duchess of Kent and the thirteen-year old Princess Victoria.⁵³ They stayed at his hotel whilst on a three-month tour of the Midlands and Wales, but their trip was cut short as the town had fallen victim to cholera.⁵⁴ It was suggested that the hotel be called the ‘Royal Victoria’, but Bulkeley was not prepared to forego his name in the title, and instead the Terrace, which was incomplete at the time, was named after the future Queen (Fig. 10).



Fig. 11. 'The View of BEAUMARIS and of the NEW TERRACE BUILDINGS on the Green', engraver H. Harris, c.1840s. Green Edge can be seen to the right of Victoria Terrace.
(Original lithograph held by National Library of Wales)

BIRMINGHAM TOWN HALL

Since the middle of the eighteenth-century Birmingham had always had aspirations to emulate London. By 1816 its lighting was considered to be as good as that in Parliament Street, Westminster.⁵⁵ It was a town of multiple independent workshops and always commercially astute. For Hansom, developments in Birmingham occurred alongside those on Anglesey. On 3 December 1827 the Street Commissioners – the town's main governing body – agreed that a new Town Hall was essential, due to the 'Increase in Magnitude of the said town of Birmingham and the Number of Inhabitants thereof'.⁵⁶ In 1828, even before Hansom and Welch started work on Penrhos Hall, the Commissioners were haggling over alternative sites. In order to achieve this, they needed to raise a loan and increase rates, for which an Act of Parliament was required.⁵⁷ A sum of £45,300 was allocated to Birmingham for general improvements to the town, with £25,000 for the Hall, including the purchase of a site.⁵⁸ The secondary purpose, or perhaps the driving force,

was to host music festivals in order to raise funds for Birmingham General Hospital. Joseph Moore, founder and organiser of the triennial festivals, lobbied the Street Commissioners, and presented them with a petition signed by 1,100 people. It was proposed that the building should be able to accommodate at least 3,000 people, for which a site of 2,200 square yards was eventually allocated. It was not until January 1831 that a collector of rates was appointed and April 1832 that the first brick was laid.

Before the competition was announced, there was wrangling over the choice of a site.⁵⁹ It is ironic that 'being behind schedule' was the excuse used for the subsequent dismissal of Hansom from the project, when the town's Street Commissioners were responsible for many of the delays. Things were different at Beaumaris, when Hansom was dealing with the Town Clerk and a small group of people. His problems were comparatively minor, and often a backlash from the burden placed upon him by his dealings over the Birmingham Town Hall. Of the 98 unelected Street Commissioners, chaired

by Paul James Moon, a Liberal Quaker who had been a private banker before becoming chairman of the Birmingham Banking Company, most were unsupportive of the architects despite the prestige and huge benefits they hoped the project would bring them.⁶⁰ A dedicated Town Hall Committee of four was initially formed, rising to 17 in July 1828, with 29 authorised to raise a sixpenny rate to pay for its completion in September 1830.⁶¹ The needs of the Music Festival Committee, who had a vested interest, also had to be met.

Unlike Victoria Terrace, where there was a restricted competition, by invitation only, the Birmingham competition was open to all comers. It was advertised on the front page of *The Times*, and received 69 entries, but took nearly six months to decide upon a winner, with numerous changes along the way.⁶² Several weeks elapsed before ten designs were selected and displayed in the Public Office, the centre of Birmingham's administration and forerunner to the Town Hall. The Committee was then tasked with reducing these to three. Some of the designs, however, of which Hansom's was one, had assumed a larger site than that which was available.⁶³ They were, therefore, asked to resubmit. Thomas Rickman, another competitor, had always considered the plot to be too small and the budget insufficient.⁶⁴ In his diary, he referred to Hansom's entry as 'the Anglesea one'. A further two months passed before a decision was made as to the final three. These were also displayed publicly, but that of Charles Barry, which had been completely altered, was now replaced with one by the local John Fallows: blatant jobbery as Fallows, who was known to have lobbied several Commissioners, had not been on the original short-list of ten.⁶⁵ Hansom was finally awarded £100, Fallows £60 and Rickman and Hutchinson £40. Hansom's first design was a T-plan. He was only able to retain the required size of the Great Room (140 feet long by 65 feet wide and 65 feet high), by changing to a rectangle and extending the podium over the footpath.⁶⁶

Hansom's design featured a replica of the Temple of Castor and Pollux (then believed to be Jupiter Stator), from the Forum in Rome, resting on a stone podium. The idea, or perhaps the inspiration, came from the decision to use Penmon marble.⁶⁷ An added incentive was that Sir Richard Bulkeley, MP for Beaumaris between 1832 and 1837 and a Radical who was conversant with the political climate in Birmingham, agreed to donate stone from his own quarry, in the hopes that the publicity he received would generate new business.⁶⁸ This offer enabled Hansom to prune his estimate to the bare minimum, something he was later to regret. Having already won three small competitions for the Church Commissioners, the Town Hall in Birmingham was in quite a different league, and when Hansom saw the advertisement, he declared that he 'would have it!'⁶⁹ The winning of a major competition was vital to his future career, yet his role was undervalued by the organisers, who showed no respect for the burgeoning architectural profession.⁷⁰ Birmingham Town Hall was a much larger and far more complicated job than any Hansom had encountered in his early career, though there are obvious parallels with Victoria Terrace in Beaumaris: not only obtaining and clearing a site and raising loans, but also the desire to use buildings to raise the status of the town.

The project was fraught with difficulties and irregularities. It was a slow and protracted business, with all the rigmarole of early competition mismanagement. Frequent changes were made, both before, during and after the competition. 'Rules' were broken by both competitors, whose names became known to members of the Committee, and by the Committee who changed their terms of payment once work was under way.⁷¹ It was at Hansom's behest that extra stone was employed, to make full use of the island site, by facing the west wall as well as the original north and south sides, but this was, in part, his undoing. Firstly the Anglesey quarry could not cope with the workload, and secondly the Commissioners, who had

already refused to pay travel expenses, refused to cover the extra cost.⁷² Reasons they gave were that ‘it was not in their power’ and they ‘had no money for the purpose’.⁷³ Hansom had to beg money from Beaumaris Corporation, declaring: ‘whenever I come here I pay all the money I can scrape together and have this time left myself nearly without ... if therefore you would be good enough to send me £10 next week’.⁷⁴ The Birmingham Commissioners were both swayed by and suspicious of the estimate provided by Hansom’s builders, which undercut all others by at least £6,000. William Thomas and William Kendal, were the same builders as those used by Hansom and Welch at Toxteth and Penrhos (Fig. 12). Their estimate of £16,648, out of a budget set at £17,000, left virtually nothing for architects’ fees. Hansom, however, ‘repeatedly and confidently’ assured the Committee that work could be done at a profit. To safeguard themselves, the Commissioners required the architects to provide financial sureties

in addition to those of the builders, and in so doing, once again denigrated their professional status. Following custom and practice with young, unknown architects, Hansom was asked to produce two referees. He turned to Sir John Soane and John Foster of Liverpool, both of whom suggested amendments.

Early reports were favourable. The *Birmingham Journal* described it thus:

‘the length of grand hall 140 feet, breadth and height both 65 feet, surrounded by basement 23 feet high, raised on 32 Corinthian columns about 36 feet high and 3ft 6ins in diameter. It was built of Anglesey marble, “a material which is of peculiar hardness, possesses great durability of character, is more white than the finest granite, and more capable of being wrought into fine and delicate mouldings”’.⁷⁵

Praise for both stone and building was consistent. Apart from its great durability, Anglesey marble was purported to be dirt-resistant and to whiten with



Fig. 12. Birmingham Town Hall, working plan by William Thomas and William Kendall, copied by Charles Edge 1861. (By kind permission of Birmingham Record Office: 1703/1/15, photograph Helen Ball)

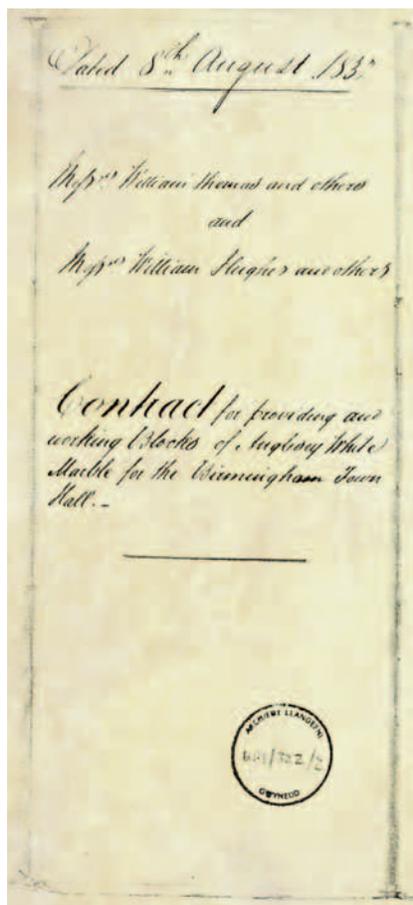


Fig. 13. Contract for Anglesey Marble, Thomas and Hughes. (By kind permission of Anglesey Archives: WM/322/2)

age, though it is possible that Hansom was at fault by laying some of the stone with the bed going the wrong way.⁷⁶ The stone had been used previously for the Britannia, Menai and Conway bridges, and also at Birkenhead docks. On his trip round Anglesey in 1877, Philip Brannon stated that he regretted that the stone was not used more widely in London, for example for the Nelson memorial.⁷⁷ Robert Dent considered that ‘no other building in England can [could] exhibit such a glorious range of columns’; whilst Conrad Gill claimed that

‘the reputation of the town was raised; a higher standard was set for its public buildings, and a great contribution was made towards the growth of civic spirit’.⁷⁸ When it was built, the scale of the Town Hall dominated the other buildings in the area.⁷⁹ It met the criteria which Charles Barry was to lay down thirty years later, namely:

‘A Town Hall should be the most dominant and important of the municipal Buildings of the City ... give expression to public feelings upon national and municipal events ... should be the exponent of life and soul of the City. To fulfill these conditions it should occupy a central and elevated position, isolated from surrounding buildings ... be a lofty structure ... provide for occasional displays flags, illuminations fireworks ... so arranged as to afford the means of holding public meetings within it and addressing public gatherings of the people around the exteriors’.⁸⁰

The contract for stone was drawn up between William Thomas (builder) *et al*, and William Hughes (stonemason) *et al* for finding, providing and, crucially, working blocks of Anglesey White Marble for the Town Hall (Fig. 13).⁸¹ Stone was to be in sufficient quantity and of the best quality, free of cross-beds and shells. Work was to be as specified by the architects and builders, and supervised by the Beaumaris surveyor, Jonathan Russell, who would certify and pay for work weekly, providing that it was ready for ‘fixing, fitting, or jointing together’, and achieved the right level of ‘perfection’.⁸² A sum of £45 would be paid for each fluted column, including the base, up to the capital. Capitals were carved on site to avoid damage in transit. The fluted columns were then to be carefully packed in cases provided by the builders and delivered to Beaumaris Harbour, where their responsibility ended. Hansom was fortunate in that he received concessions with regard to transport, when Captain Bradshaw, a Trustee of the Bridgewater Canal, granted free use of docks and tonnage.⁸³ However, already behind schedule due to delays on delivery of the stone, Hansom needed

to work throughout the winter and was dependent upon the elements for safe and speedy passage. He would stay up all night watching the weather vane.⁸⁴ He had already lost '£200 in cash and five times that amount from delay and trouble' when the Anglesey stonemasons defaulted on their contract.⁸⁵ He spent several weeks in Beaumaris trying to make alternative arrangements, but was obliged to despatch stone to Birmingham in large, unworked blocks, some of 100 tons. This required extra men, who had to be trained on site.⁸⁶

Another occurrence, quite outside his control, was the death of two of his workmen. They fell from the top of the building when a hook snapped inside one of the pulleys being used to raise the roof rafters. No-one was held to blame, and Hansom, who proclaimed his deep shock, chaired a meeting to invite subscriptions in aid of the masons' families.⁸⁷ Sir John Williams happened to be returning to Bodelwyddan from a visit to his siblings in Warwickshire, and passed through Birmingham the day after the accident. It made such an impression upon him that he recorded the event in his Memoirs.⁸⁸ A black streamer was flown from the spot where the accident occurred and a memorial to replicate a section of a column on which the mason had been working was mounted on a pedestal and placed in the churchyard of nearby St Philips (Fig. 14).⁸⁹ Newspaper reports suggest that there were two hundred men working on the Hall at the time.⁹⁰

By 1833 doubts were raised as to completion on time. The Music Festival had already been postponed for one year and the Commissioners were agitating. Agitation also came in another form when Hansom and Welch both became embroiled in local politics which had national repercussions.⁹¹ Birmingham had always been a town of political activists. The first sign of social discontent had been the Priestly Riots in 1789, and there were more in 1808, when Anglicans clashed with Dissenters over the building of a wall.⁹² The time-frame of the town Hall, 1830–1834, coincided with the elections

of Richard Bulkeley (now Williams-Bulkeley) as Member of Parliament for Anglesey, and Thomas Attwood and Joshua Scholefield as first Members to represent Birmingham.⁹³ Working in the heart of so much turmoil and change, it was impossible for Hansom not to get drawn in. He was, in effect, radicalised. He fell under the joint influences of Daniel O'Connell, the political campaigner for Catholic Emancipation and first Catholic Member of Parliament; Thomas McDonnell, the fanatical but well-meaning priest who was also a member of the Birmingham Political Union; Thomas Attwood, the banker who part-funded building work and instigated the Great Reform Bill, and above all, Robert Owen, co-founder of utopian socialism and the Co-operative movement.⁹⁴ Whilst the Street Commissioners are sometimes blamed for his fall from grace, due to their harsh and unyielding attitude, and Welch said the Anglesey stone was his undoing, his radicalisation was as much to blame as any other cause.



Fig. 14. Memorial to John Heap.



Fig. 15. Birmingham Town Hall.

The mass rallies which O'Connell held in Ireland were copied by Attwood in Birmingham. His Great New-Hall Hill Meeting of 3 October 1831 attracted 100,000 people. It was the Catholic priest, McDonnell, who brought O'Connell to Birmingham. Both he and Hansom took part in rallies.⁹⁵ Attwood's campaign was based on reforming trade laws and reconciling masters and men, very much in tune with the philosophy of Robert Owen, who had just returned from America, and whose first national Co-operative Congress was held in Birmingham in 1831.⁹⁶ Hansom maintained that he could have reduced his building costs by twenty per cent had he used more machinery rather than steadfastly supporting the local work force.⁹⁷ Owen's intervention was the most disruptive because it led to building strikes, even one at the Town Hall when workers complained that their rates of pay (based on Liverpool) should be higher in Birmingham. More than that, Hansom's attention was directed to resolving strikes in Manchester and Derby, and his personal resources were spent on the building of a Builders' Operatives Guild Hall in Birmingham. In September 1833 he was advertising for new contracts from those who were 'suffering inconveniences from differences between Master Builders and Workmen'. Correspondence shows that Welch was equally involved in the Owenite activities.⁹⁸ The foundation stone for the Guild Hall was laid on 28 November 1833, during the peak of his difficulties.⁹⁹ Despite his indisputable 'Herculean' efforts and a further injection of funds from the Attwood bank and Welch's father, Hansom was deluded as to the inevitability of the final outcome.¹⁰⁰ Without these distractions, he might have been spared bankruptcy.

Determined that the Music Festival, already postponed for one year to allow for the building work, would take place in 1834, the Street Commissioners began to call in sureties in order to complete the work. Hansom and Welch had both taken out life insurances, Messrs Lloyd of Anglesey and Tench put down £2,300 and £500 respectively,

with John Welch, Edward's father, contributing a total of £3,610.¹⁰¹ All this was lost. John Foster, the architect whom Hansom had beaten in the Victoria Terrace competition, and who had condoned the initial design for the Town Hall, offered to report on the state of the building, which he said was 'skilfully and well done' (Fig. 15).¹⁰² He was then asked to complete what Welch described as work being nothing 'other than that of a clerk of works'.¹⁰³ The Commissioners were obliged, of course, to keep within their allotted financial constraints, but they were not entirely successful, for, after bringing in Foster to put the finishing touches to Hansom's work, they had to extend the building to include extra space for an organ. This was carried out by the Birmingham architect Charles Edge and the total cost eventually rose to £30,000.¹⁰⁴ Edge was a Street Commissioner and one of the original short-list of ten, entered as Edge and Johnson. He was brought in again in 1846, when refinements and further additions were required, needing, of course, yet more Anglesey stone. Edge inherited none of the pitfalls which had beset Hansom, though he had suffered delays at the hands of the Street Commissioners when building the Market Hall (1832–5), the design for which he based on Charles Fowler's Covent Garden Market Buildings (1828–30). The final cost of the Market was over £67,000, disproportionately greater than the Town Hall.¹⁰⁵

For Hansom, the day of reckoning came in March when he was unable to pay the rent for his brick-yard, his wharf and his home. Though Welch had said that the stone was their undoing, the design was entirely dependent upon it, and without the Anglesey marble the building would have lost its impact. Hansom also blamed the stone – at least the delays in supplying it – the changes in terms of payment and the additional requirements, and he declared that the Commissioners had known from the outset that their estimate could not be met. The bankruptcy was widely publicised, and *Berrow's Worcester Journal* summed up the situation pragmatically, when it stated



Fig. 16. St Margaret's Church (The Marble Church), Bodelwyddan.



Fig. 17. Fossils found at base of St Walburge's church. (Photograph Peter Hatfield, by kind permission of Bernard Taylor Partners)

that the architects had 'contracted for the building at a sum far below what they could possibly execute the work for'.¹⁰⁶ But despite the difficulties encountered in their construction, both Anglesey and Birmingham owe some of their most notable buildings to Hansom's diligent endeavours and his inspirational use of Anglesey marble.¹⁰⁷ In turn, the Town Hall – which Frank Salmon saw as the architectural climax of English Neo-classicism – enabled Birmingham to develop a European reputation for musical excellence.¹⁰⁸

CONCLUSION

Bankruptcy led to the break-up of Hansom's team. Welch was the one who suffered most. He entered the competitions for Fishmongers' Hall in London and the Kensal Green Cemetery, but he won neither, and, though he carried on working, he never achieved his full potential. John Gibson, one of their pupils was more fortunate. He transferred to Charles Barry before going independent, working for the Williams family, both at Charlecote in Warwickshire and in North Wales, where he built a memorial church (the 'Marble Church') near Bodelwyddan in 1856–60 (Fig. 16).¹⁰⁹ The Williams family also provided work for William Kendall, who moved close to their Warwickshire home and took up the post of Steward to their friend, the Earl of Warwick; Hansom singled Kendall out for praise in his 'Statement of Facts'.¹¹⁰ Of William Thomas little is known, other than that he was briefly involved in Hansom's magnificent church of St Walburge (1850–4) in Preston.¹¹¹ Some Anglesey marble must have found its way there, judging from fossils found in the stonework at the base (Fig. 17).¹¹² The church was built in red brick, but the tower was described as being 'of grey Welsh limestone, which will whiten with age and exposure'.¹¹³

The Birmingham competition certainly did 'make Hansom's career', though not perhaps in the way he envisaged. He moved to Leicestershire and

subsequently transformed himself from the ‘Socialist architect’ into the ‘Catholic architect’.¹⁴⁴ When he was dismissed by the Commissioners, their treasurer Samuel Tertius Galton resigned in sympathy. Hansom had been aware that his overt socialist activities engendered a measure of hostility towards him, but it was through Galton that he acquired the job of erecting the Bromsgrove Lickey Memorial to commemorate the late Earl of Plymouth in 1834 (Fig. 18). Galton was the brother of John Howard, Deputy Lieutenant and High Sheriff of Worcester, where socialist activities were also rife.¹⁴⁵ The eighty-foot high memorial was built of Anglesey marble, and work was superintended by Welch’s younger brother, John.



Fig. 18. Bromsgrove Lickey Memorial.

ENDNOTES

- 1 A.H. Cox, *These Stones, The Story of ‘The Builder’ and of other Builders* (London, 1937), p. 75.
- 2 Designed by James Defferd in 1812: H.M. Colvin, *Biographical Dictionary of British Architects, 1660–1840* (New Haven and London, 2008), p. 308. The property was owned at the time by Stanley’s mother, Margaret Owen. Sir John became first Baron Stanley of Alderley Edge and was High Sheriff for Anglesey from 1809; he married Ellen Williams, sister of Sir John Williams (second baronet) of Bodelwyddan Hall, near St Asaph.
- 3 Denis Evinson also suggests that Hansom’s presence in Wales was attributable to the Welch family: ‘Joseph Hansom’ (London MA thesis 1966), p. 29, n.2. For John Welch senior, see, for example, National Archives, IR 29/49/65, 29/50/5.
- 4 Parish records at Flint Record Office. Oates designed twelve Commissioners’ Churches, mainly in Yorkshire: Colvin, *Biographical Dictionary*, p. 756.
- 5 The first tender was rejected due to a miscalculation by one of the contractors: Church Commissioners file 21744 (letter from Hansom to Jenner, 30 March 1830). See also M.H. Port, *Six Hundred New Churches: the church building commission 1818–1856* (Reading, 2006), p. 111.
- 6 Hansom claimed that all work on Anglesey was ‘entirely of my charge’; Joseph Hansom, *A Statement of Facts relative to the Birmingham Town-Hall with an appeal to the rate-payers and inhabitants of Birmingham* (Birmingham, 1834), p. 4.
- 7 Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) Drawings and Archives Collection, Plans 67636, 67367, 67368, showing extensions to the property, thought to include some castellation. See also Butterfield, ‘The Story of Penrhos’, unpublished typescript, Bangor Archives and Special Collections (BASC), 2014. Penrhos was a precursor to the re-organisation of Bodelwyddan Hall for Sir John Williams (from 1830). The house, which was in existence for over 300 years before the Owens took possession, is now largely derelict.
- 8 Tudor Edwards proclaimed that Bodelwyddan was the most ambitious of Hansom’s country houses: ‘Architect of Catholic Tastes’, *Country Life*, 2 Sept. 1982, pp. 690–691. See also

- 'Bodelwyddan Memoirs' (journals of Sir John Hay-Williams, 1818–1859), Claydon House Trust, Buckinghamshire.
- 9 *The Times*, 2 December 1830; Hansom, *Statement*, p. 5.
- 10 Hansom, *Statement*, p. 5.
- 11 Co-operative College, Manchester, record office, 676 (Letter from Hansom to Robert Owen of the Co-operative movement, 23 February 1834).
- 12 R. Hayman, 'Architecture and the development of Beaumaris in the nineteenth-century', *Archaeologia Cambriensis*, 153 (2004), p. 109. Hitherto Beaumaris had been on the the main sea route between Liverpool and Holyhead, with steam packets from 1822; 'Conservation area character appraisals, Beaumaris area', www.anglesey.gov.uk/journals/2011/09/28, p. 15, accessed 24 November 2015.
- 13 L. Nottingham, 'Victoria Terrace, Beaumaris', *Transactions of the Anglesey Antiquarian Society and Field Club* (1994), p. 23.
- 14 *Ibid.*, pp. 23–24, citing BASC, BA/2/11 (minutes and account book of 'Committee for Managing Matters Relating to Building in Beaumaris Green' 1824–33).
- 15 Hayman, 'Beaumaris'. p. 107, n.3; BASC, Barons Hill Plans 6496, 8211; Conservation appraisal, p. 16 and Appendix IX.
- 16 Hayman, 'Beaumaris', p. 112; Nottingham, 'Victoria Terrace', p. 27.
- 17 Hayman, *ibid.*, p. 112.
- 18 Hayman, 'Beaumaris', p. 112; Nottingham, 'Victoria Terrace', p. 27.
- 19 Hayman, 'Beaumaris', p. 112; 'Beaumaris a History Trail' (pamphlet, 1985), p. 19. See also *Pigot's Directory* (1828), p. 687.
- 20 Hayman, 'Beaumaris', p. 112.
- 21 *Ibid.*; conservation appraisal, p. 34.
- 22 4 Geo IV c.64; see Hayman, 'Beaumaris', p. 114.
- 23 Anglesey Archives (AA), W/A/G/335 March 1828; WQ/A/G/334; WQ/A/G/334, 5 March 1828; Nottingham, 'Victoria Terrace', p. 27. The design was unnecessarily large and elaborate resulting in the closure of the goal in 1878; Hayman, *ibid.*, p. 114.
- 24 Conservation appraisal, p. 32; Evinson, 'Hansom', p. 301. For innovative planning, see R. Haslam *et al.*, *The Buildings of Wales: Gwynedd* (New Haven and London, 2009), pp. 107–8.
- 25 *North Wales Chronicle* 14 February 1828; AA, WQ/A/G/417. Thomas is noted as 'of Holyhead' in *This Cursed Place ... Beaumaris Gaol and Court House*, p. 11 (Isle of Anglesey County Council, c.2005).
- 26 AA, WQ/S/OB/6 (Hilary Sessions book of orders, adjourned session 19 Feb. 1828).
- 27 AA, WQ/A/G/365–366.
- 28 Nottingham, 'Victoria Terrace', pp. 28, 29; Samuel Lewis, *Topographical Dictionary of Wales*, I, 1833, p. 30, cited by Hayman, 'Beaumaris', p. 114; E. Neil Baynes, 'The early history of Beaumaris Castle', *Transactions of the Anglesey Antiquarian Society and Field Club*, (1927), p. 61; Conservation appraisal, p. 16.
- 29 AA, I-142 (Conveyance of the Old Gaol of Beaumaris, 21 December 1829).
- 30 Hayman, 'Beaumaris', p. 107, p. 114, n. 3.
- 31 Nottingham, 'Victoria Terrace', pp. 24–25. for details of property owned by the Bulkeley family see Conservation appraisal, Appendix IX.
- 32 Hayman, 'Beaumaris', p. 114; see also, for example, his Terrace in the High Street, Lutterworth, Leicestershire (1840).
- 33 Hayman, 'Beaumaris', p. 111.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 119; Haslam, *et al.*, *Gwynedd*, p. 110.
- 35 Conservation appraisal, p. 22.
- 36 Hayman, 'Beaumaris', p. 115.
- 37 John Pinfold, 'Horse Racing and the Upper Classes in the Nineteenth Century', *Sport in history*, 28/3 (September 2008), pp. 414–430.
- 38 A. Fairfax-Lucy, *Mistress of Charlecote: The Memoirs of Mary Elizabeth Lucy* (London, 1983).
- 39 See Sir John Williams, 'Bodelwyddan Memoirs' and Fairfax-Lucy, *Mistress of Charlecote*.
- 40 Seven uncatalogued plans, including two elevations, are held in BASC.
- 41 M. Girouard, *The English Town* (New Haven and London, 1990), pp. 69–71, 157.
- 42 Hayman, 'Beaumaris', p. 114; Evinson, 'Hansom', p. 31.
- 43 Nottingham, 'Victoria Terrace', p. 30.
- 44 *Ibid.*, p. 33.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 36.
- 46 *Ibid.*, pp. 34–35.
- 47 *Ibid.*, p. 35.
- 48 *Ibid.*, p. 37.
- 49 *Ibid.*, pp. 37, 38; see also Town Clerk's correspondence, BASC, ii 596.

- 50 Nottingham, *loc. cit.*, pp. 40–41. Unlike other resorts undertaking similar missions, such as Bournemouth, Llandudno and Torquay, Beaumaris was able to retain its exclusivity by not having a railway connection: Hayman, ‘Beaumaris’, p. 123.
- 51 BASC, 601-P (bundle of papers relating to the erection of houses on Beaumaris Green, 1824–30).
- 52 BASC, Beaumaris Clerk’s Correspondence; Anthony Peers, *Birmingham Town Hall*, (Farnham, 2012), p. 53. See also AA, LWQ/A/G/380–3, 386, 391, 392.
- 53 *North Wales Chronicle*, 21 August 1832; *Morning Post*, 25 August 1832; ‘Bodelwyddan Memoirs’, 24 August 1832; ‘Anglesey and Victoria’, *Transactions of the Anglesey Antiquarian Society and Field Club* (1975), pp. 36–37.
- 54 *North Wales Chronicle*, 21 August 1832; Hayman, ‘Beaumaris’, p. 112; ‘Bodelwyddan Memoirs’, 24 August 1832. See also G. Penrhyn Jones, ‘Cholera in Wales’, *National Library of Wales Journal*, 10 (1957–58), p. 285.
- 55 C. Gill, ‘Birmingham under the Street Commissioners 1769–1851’, *University of Birmingham Historical Journal*, 1 (1948), p. 257.
- 56 Birmingham Record Office 422407 (Extracts from Minutes of Street Commissioners 1827–1835, relating to the building of the Birmingham Town Hall 1834). The remit of the Improvement or Street Commissioners as set up in 1769 was to ‘keep streets clear, well lit and free of obstructions’, by which was meant buildings encroaching upon roads; to this was added policing in 1801, then roads and street lighting in 1812; see Gill, *loc. cit.*
- 57 The Town Hall was just one small section of the much larger Act of 1828 ‘for better paving, lighting, watching, cleansing, and otherwise improving the Town of Birmingham in the County of Warwick, and for regulating the Police and Markets of the said Town’, Local and Personal Act. 9 George IV c. liv.
- 58 With £7,000 set aside for the plot, this left £17,000 for the building.
- 59 See Birmingham Record Office 422407 (extracts of Minutes of Street Commissioners, July 1828–August 1830).
- 60 Wrightson, *Annual Directory of Birmingham* (1831).
- 61 Birmingham Record Office 422407 (Minutes of Street Commissioners 1827–35). Members of the Town Hall Committee and those authorised to increase rates are named on a plaque inside the Town Hall.
- 62 *The Times*, 16 Dec. 1830.
- 63 It transpired that the size had not been clearly specified.
- 64 RIBA Collection, Rickman Diaries, 9 Dec. 1832.
- 65 *Ibid*, 28 Feb. 1831; 6–7 June 1831.
- 66 *Architectural Magazine*, 11 (May 1835), pp. 19–20.
- 67 Described the stone as being remarkably pure lime carbonate, of ‘incontestible superiority’ by Philip Brannon, ‘A Visit to the Marble Quarries of Anglesea’, *North Wales Chronicle*, 24 Mar. 1877.
- 68 R. Dent, *The Making of Birmingham: being a history of the rise and growth of the Midland metropolis* (Birmingham and London, 1894), p. 376; *Penny Magazine*, 21 June 1834, p. 240.
- 69 Hansom, *Statement*, p. 5.
- 70 John Armstrong Lane, ‘Win a competition and you’re made’, *RIBA Journal*, December 1865.
- 71 Hansom, *Statement*, p. 7.
- 72 This amounted to £850, which Hansom was prepared to cover for the sake of improving his design; Hansom, *Statement*, p. 8.
- 73 *Ibid*, p. 7.
- 74 BASC, iv, 55; Nottingham, ‘Beaumaris’, p. 32.
- 75 *Birmingham Journal*, 7 Dec. 1833.
- 76 *Architectural Magazine*, p. 21; Brannon, ‘Visit’, p. 2; personal communication.
- 77 Brannon, *loc. cit.*
- 78 Dent, *Making of Birmingham*, p. 472; Gill, ‘Street Commissioners’, p. 279.
- 79 Dent, *Making of Birmingham* p. 376; see also ‘Birmingham from the South’, steel plate engraving from sketch by S.T. Davies.
- 80 R. de Hall, *Halifax Town Hall* (Halifax, 1963), cited by Girouard, *op. cit.*, p. 210.
- 81 AA, WM/322/2 (‘Contract for providing and working Blocks of Anglesey White Marble for the Birmingham Town Hall’, 8 Aug. 1832).
- 82 *Ibid* (‘Schedule or Specification referred to in the Articles of Agreement’).
- 83 Hansom, *Statement*’ p. 8.
- 84 *Ibid*, p. 9. The journey was 80 miles by sea and 100 by canal.
- 85 *Ibid*, p. 8.

- 86 *Architectural Magazine*, vol. II (1835), p. 24.
- 87 *Birmingham Journal*, 2 Feb. 1833.
- 88 Williams, 'Bodelwyddan Memoirs', 31 Jan. 1833; *Birmingham Journal*, 2 Feb. 1833.
- 89 *Birmingham Journal*, 2 Feb. 1833.
- 90 *Ibid.*
- 91 Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (Harmondsworth, reprinted 1977), p. 85.
- 92 Gill, 'Street Commissioners', p. 270.
- 93 The town was as yet unincorporated, and its trend-setting Hall pre-empted the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835: 5 & 6, Wm. IV, c.76.
- 94 AA, WM/322/3 ('Assignment of monies between Messrs Hansom and Welch and others to Messrs Attwood & Co', 1833).
- 95 *Berrow's Worcester Journal*, 3 April 1834.
- 96 F. Podmore, *Robert Owen*, p. 400.
- 97 Hansom, *Statement*, p. 13.
- 98 Co-operative College archives, Manchester, 653 (letter from Welch to Owen, 23 Aug. 1833) and 660 (the Grand Meeting of Lodges to meet Robert Owen, Joseph Hansom and Edward Welch in Manchester, 12 Sept. 1833).
- 99 *Liverpool Mercury*, 27 Sept. 1833; *Leicester Chronicle*, 7 Dec. 1833.
- 100 Hansom, *Statement*, p. 10; AA, WM/322/3 ('Assignment of monies between Messrs. Attwood & Co. and Messrs Hansom and Welch', 23 Aug. 1833).
- 101 Dent, *Making of Birmingham*, p. 377.
- 102 Anonymous (Edward Welch), *Architectural Magazine*, vol. II (4 May 1835), p. 26.
- 103 *Ibid.*, p. 27.
- 104 *Ibid.* (18 May 1835), p. 325.
- 105 Gill, 'Street Commissioners', p. 277.
- 106 *Berrow's Worcester Journal*, 1 May 1834.
- 107 F. Salmon, *Building on ruins: the rediscovery of Rome and English architecture* (Aldershot, 2000), p. 152.
- 108 P. Drummond, *The Provincial Music Festival in England, 1784-1914* (London, 2016), p. 68. See also A. Elliott, *A Brief History of the Birmingham Triennial Musical Festivals 1784-1912* (Birmingham, 2000).
- 109 Gibson remodelled and extended Charlecote, the Warwickshire home of Mary Elizabeth Lucy, sister of Sir John Williams. St Margaret's Church, Bodelwyddan (the 'Marble Church'), was built for Margaret, Lady Willoughby de Broke, another sister of Sir John, in memory of her husband; the nave is built of Anglesey marble.
- 110 Hanson, *Statement*, p. 9.
- 111 Tom Smith, "'We will build as far as we have the means": Raising St Walburge's 1850-1866', *North West Catholic History Society* (Wigan, 2006).
- 112 A letter of 11 Aug. 2009 from Peter Hatfield of the Bernard Taylor Partnership, describes the tower and spire as being the same igneous limestone as that used in Birmingham. The church was built in phases (church 1850-54, tower 1855, steeple 1866); the steeple stands at 309 feet high and remains the tallest church steeple in England.
- 113 *Preston Guardian*, 5 August 1854.
- 114 R.W. Postgate, *Builders History*, pp. 84-88; Frank Podmore, *Robert Owen: A Biography* (London, 1906), pp. 442-5.
- 115 Political Unions had been formed in both Bromsgrove and Worcester.