

Introduction

At the lavish opening ceremony of the Royal Holloway College in 1886, William Henry Crossland presented Queen Victoria with an album of his drawings of Royal Holloway College – the phantasmagoria of a building he had created for Thomas Holloway in Egham, Surrey. This, Crossland must have reflected, was truly the high point of his life and of his career and a long way from the Huddersfield quarry business where he had grown up. A well-known and much-praised architect, he proudly offered the Queen his own work in a gesture that underlined the extent of his success. As he gloried in the admiration of his College – a highly successful architect at the peak of his career – he could never have foreseen that in just a few years, he would have fallen from this peak into obscurity.

W.H. Crossland is often described using terms such as ‘maverick’, ‘enigma’ and ‘mysterious’. Indeed, among the architects of the second half of the nineteenth century who have left great buildings for posterity, Crossland has remained a shadowy figure, although he has also been described as one of the finest architects of the day.¹ In addition to the Royal Holloway College, his portfolio includes two more glorious buildings now listed as Grade I, as well as a collection of more than twenty other listed buildings², that does not include his restoration work on ancient churches (several of which are also listed at Grade 1). He is known to have built seventeen churches and to have restored or rebuilt another thirteen, but there may be more of his work that is still unknown. He also designed many secular buildings. It has been said of him that his ‘versatility in adapting historical styles was astonishing, even among Victorian architects’.³ Yet, despite most of his buildings surviving to

1. *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 10 May 1885.

2. <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1415452> (accessed 21 November 2016).

3. Williams, Elizabeth, ‘An Architectural History of Royal Holloway College, Egham, 1876-87’ in *Surrey Archaeological Society Journal*, 1986, p. 95.

the present day, little is known of him and almost nothing is known of the last few years of his life. No obituary was written for him and his burial or cremation place is a secret still waiting to be discovered.

Several people, including Sir John Betjeman, have tried hard to uncover Crossland's secrets, but have always come across gaps in information, loose ends and big question marks. So far as is known, he left no diaries, logbooks or other records of his work, and, towards the end of his life, he destroyed all the work he had in his possession. His work was documented in architectural journals, but the only substantial piece of writing linked directly to him is the record of an address he gave to the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1887, the year after the formal opening of the College. This address is preserved among the Transactions of the R.I.B.A.. Copies of plans of some of his buildings, a few letters and a small number of other documents are scattered thinly over several archives, but these sources paint only a partial picture.

Much of what little is known about Crossland is by way of short accounts, with surprisingly little connection made between his work in the north of England and his work in the south. The most substantial pieces of work on Crossland, so far, are a master's degree thesis by L.J. Whitaker, submitted in 1984 and held by Manchester University, and an account by Edward Law, dated 1992 and published on the internet.⁴ However, recently available digitised material has provided information that was unavailable to earlier researchers, filling some of the gaps, tying off some of the loose ends and providing some answers regarding Crossland's life and career. In particular, the nineteenth-century newspapers digital archive⁵ and online archive catalogues proved to be rich resources.

It is clear that Crossland had a good, even privileged, start in life. His architectural training was under George Gilbert Scott, which gave him a certain status, and he went on to seek out and grasp opportunities. He ran a busy practice in the West Riding of Yorkshire mostly designing and building churches, for which he established a good reputation. He also designed numerous secular buildings, particularly in his home town of

4. Edward Law's work, *William Henry Crossland, Architect, 1835-1908*, <http://homepage.eircom.net/~lawedd/WHC1.htm>, is divided into seven Parts. Each Part is presented as one extended page. Footnotes therefore refer to the relevant Part.

5. All material from newspapers (except *The Times*) was sourced from the online databases *19th Century British Library Newspapers: Part 1 and Part II: 1800-1900* (British Library Newspapers/Gale Digital Collections). *The Times* was sourced from *The Times Digital Archive*. For the sake of brevity, references cite the newspapers only. In the instances of some material sourced online, particularly from classified advertisements, only the newspaper issue number is cited, as no page number is provided in the online source.

Huddersfield, but also nearby in Elland, Halifax, Dewsbury and Leeds. Only a few of his Yorkshire projects took him further afield. He travelled abroad several times during his life, visiting France and Belgium, and, according to Edward Law, he went to Switzerland when he was working on Rochdale Town Hall. He also spent time in Canada.

Little is known of the office support that Crossland had. He mentioned ‘assistants’ and ‘clerks’ occasionally in some of his letters, and from around 1867 his Chief Assistant was essential to the success of many of Crossland’s projects. This was Mr A.J. Taylor, who worked for Crossland for more than a decade. He may also have employed the architect William Bakewell for a while at the end of the 1860s.⁶ It would have been normal practice to take on architectural pupils both for the fees such training would provide and because routine drafting tasks could have been given to pupils, allowing Crossland to pursue more strategic obligations. However, details of pupils, if any, remain unknown.

Few images of Crossland remain and almost nothing is known of his personality, although the designer C.R. Ashbee said of him: ‘I like him – he is a fine quiet man with a dreamlike dignity in him.’⁷ He won the long-term confidence of wealthy patrons, suggesting reliability, honesty, integrity, hard work, fairness and the ability to work to schedules and deadlines. This confidence in him was to yield large dividends.

Alongside his architectural skills, Crossland was also a talented artist. He sketched and painted, mentioning his sketches in his report preceding the restoration of Almondbury Church.⁸ He exhibited at the Royal Academy first in 1855 and then from 1869 (when he moved his office to London) for the next fifteen years.⁹ Little of his artwork remains, but the Royal Holloway archive holds a charcoal cartoon by him showing the interior of the chapel. He understood the precarious role of artists, and in his address to the R.I.B.A. in 1887, he devoted a considerable part of his speech to a plea for sculptors to be better recognised and supported.

Until he moved south, his work held almost entirely to the tenets of the Gothic revival and his churches show a clear understanding of Gothic forms¹⁰, revealing him as a true disciple of his master, George Gilbert Scott, and of the principles of Augustus Pugin that Scott so thoroughly absorbed.

6. Douglas, Janet, correspondence 2017.

7. Quoted in Saint, Andrew and Richard Holder, ‘Holloway Sanatorium: A Conservation Nightmare’, *The Victorian Society Annual*, 1993, p. 25, citing the Ashbee Journals.

8. West Yorkshire Archive Service Kirklees, DD/RA/C/box 36, Crossland, W.H., *Report of the Proposed Restoration of the Parish Church Almondbury*, Copy, 1872.

9. Law, Edward, *William Henry Crossland, Architect, 1835-1908*, 1992, Part 1.

10. Whitaker, L.J., *W.H. Crossland* (master’s degree thesis), University of Manchester, 1984, p. 245.

His style was generally based on the Decorated or 'Second Pointed' style, but included elements from earlier periods, which he combined with confidence. It was not until much later in his career that he showed any interest in other architectural styles, and even in his later work elements of Gothic are often evident. Some consider that his buildings in Huddersfield have been undeservedly overlooked nationally in favour of his three magnificent buildings that are now listed at Grade 1.¹¹

Crossland designed churches only for the Church of England. He was a member of the Ecclesiological Society and subscribed to their journal, *The Ecclesiologist*.¹² He was therefore well aware of the Society's design guidelines for new churches and restorations, and he designed with its principles in mind, several of his designs being reviewed in the journal. His early church buildings were mostly in Huddersfield or within a few miles of that town and all were built of stone, as there was a plentiful supply from the quarries in the locality. He understood how decorative stone and wood carving could bring a building alive and, depending on the funds available, used it as much possible, favouring a local Yorkshire sculptor by the name of Samuel Ruddock to work on several of his Yorkshire churches. As Whitaker observed, 'His largest and most important churches show Crossland to be aware of the ideas prevalent in contemporary church architecture and also to be capable of originality and experiment.'¹³

Throughout the 1860s, church-building provided Crossland's main income. The character of his church designs depended on the funding available, and there was a great difference between, for instance, St Stephen the Martyr, Copley, near Halifax (1865), which had the support of a wealthy patron, and St James the Great, Flockton (1869), which was built with limited funds. He also designed shops, houses, lodges, schools and offices and attempted to secure larger projects by entering architectural competitions. The number of commercial and other non-church commissions increased as he established his reputation as a talented architect, and the major buildings of his career amply demonstrate his outstanding architectural ability.

This book sets out to place William Henry Crossland in his rightful position in the pantheon of great Victorian architects. Drawing on recently available material, as well as the work of earlier researchers, it attempts to provide a more detailed picture than has previously been available of a man

11. Gibson, Keith and Albert Booth, *The Buildings of Huddersfield* (Stroud 2005, reprinted 2009), p. 98.

12. Douglas, Janet, *William Henry Crossland*, unpublished notes of lecture delivered at Cannon Hall, Cawthorne, South Yorkshire, 21 April 2012.

13. Whitaker, p. 65.

who wrote of himself, 'I found myself leading a life we architects read about but few experience.'¹⁴ The narrative is chronological with glimpses of his private life and discussion of his building projects as he worked on them. Some of his works were completed quickly and some needed a protracted period of development so that, at any one time, he was managing several projects at varying stages of maturity, including both new buildings and restorations. A hectic work programme becomes evident, as these projects, particularly later in his career, could be some 200 miles apart at a time when transport was limited.

This is the first account of Crossland's life that places him at the centre of the narrative, unravelling some of the mysteries in his history and enabling, for the first time, an appreciation and understanding of his life and work. It is supported by new photographs and contemporary images.

14. Crossland, W.H., 'The Royal Holloway College', *R.I.B.A. Transactions*, Second series, Vol 3, 1886-67, p. 145.