

Edward Holmes - Architect

An article dated November, 1894, in the Moseley Society Journal states: "Mr. Edward Holmes is a striking personality, both in appearance and character, and I doubt if there is a man in Moseley better known and more highly respected." Such is fame. However, there are some buildings still standing which he designed, and there is the family tomb at the front of St. Mary's Church.



Figure 1 - Midland Bank, corner of New Street and Stephenson Street, Birmingham

Holmes was born in 1832 at the Kings Heath end of School Road, at Laurel Cottage - the site is now part of the car park of Cambridge Road Church - and he died at 'Wyndcliffe', one of the large villas at the other end of School Road, near to Wake Green Road. Educated at Birmingham Free Grammar School, New Street, he walked to school every day. He served two apprenticeships in architects' offices in Birmingham, and in 1852 he set up practice at 4 Waterloo Street, moving in 1858 to 25 Temple Row, and also practicing from his residence at No. 2 Wellington Terrace, Balsall Heath.

Buildings designed by Holmes which are still standing include St. Mary's, Bristol Road, Selly Oak, but his greatest achievement is generally recognised to be the former Midland Bank at the corner of New Street and Stephenson Place, a building now occupied by Waterstones. The bank, which had first opened in 1836, occupied premises in Union Street,

but some twenty years later the business required larger premises, and Edward Holmes drew the Board's attention to an available site in New Street. The leasehold was acquired from King Edward's School, and Holmes was commissioned to design a head office to be erected there.

He also designed the Exchange Building on the opposite corner in 1863-5, and a large extension to this in 1877. It had a 'busy' Gothic facade, in contrast to the classical style of the bank opposite. It was demolished in 1965.

His practice included a number of churches in Warwickshire and Staffordshire, and he also won the competition for designing the Masonic Hall in Molesworth Street, Dublin, in 1866.

Holmes helped to form the Birmingham Rifle Volunteer Corps. He had a favourite muzzle-loader which he preferred to all the more modern firearms. He was a keen fisherman and cricketer, and was a member of the Old Victoria Cricket Club which played on a field which is now in Highgate Park. He was Vice-President of the Moseley Football Club and appeared on the ground every week in



Figure 2- Masonic Hall, Molesworth Street, Dublin

his characteristic white top hat. He belonged to a billiards club and a bowling club, and was a keen huntsman, running with the Worcestershire Hounds. It is not known what he did in his spare time!

In retirement he became much involved in local politics and was at one time Chairman of the Kings Norton Board of Surveyors. He was well known an arbitrator in labour disputes.

Holmes died in 1909, leaving a widow, his second wife Mary, and a “numerous growing family”. His son by his first wife, Edward Briggs Holmes, appears to have followed his father's profession. He designed the stylish frontage to Villa Park. Fanny Laura Holmes, probably a sister, died at the original Laurel Cottage in 1933, aged 89.

Fred Price
from Some Moseley Personalities Volume II 1994

Sources:

Obituary, Birmingham Post, 31st March, 1909;

Warwickshire and Staffordshire in the Buildings of England series by N Pevsner;

St Mary's, Moseley, Memorial Inscriptions by D Horton;

Monumental Inscriptions, Birmingham Society of Genealogy and Heraldry;

Moseley Society Journal, Vol. I, No. 10, November, 1894.

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