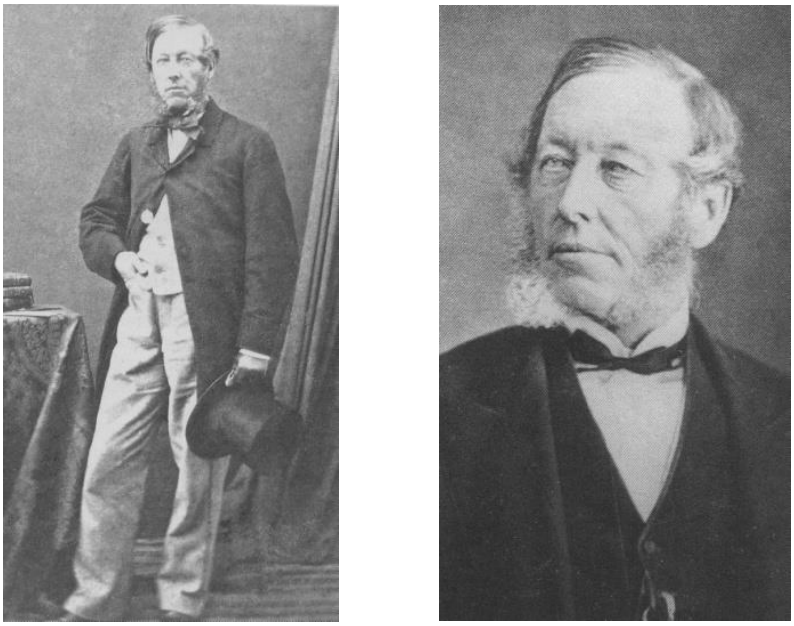
Lancaster Civic Vision

Celebrating our Heritage – Enhancing our Environment – Shaping our Future

EDMUND SHARPE: LANCASTER'S RENAISSANCE MAN

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On 10 Fenton Street there is a green heritage plaque to Edmund Sharpe. What is remarkable about him is the breadth of his achievements and contributions to Lancaster during his 68 years (1809–1877).



Edmund Sharpe

His family moved to Lancaster from Knutsford when he was 14 and he was then educated at Sedbergh School and St John's College, Cambridge. After architectural tours in Belgium, Germany and France he returned to Lancaster and set up as an architect in 1836, based in Penny Street (his mother's house) and then Sun Street after 1836.

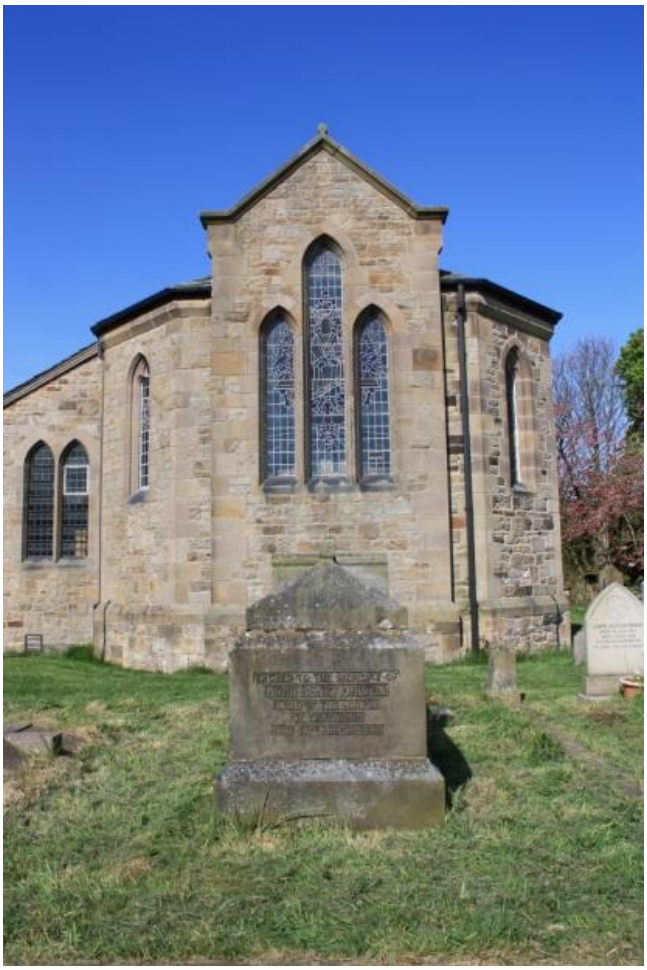
He had limited formal training in architecture. Yet he prospered and in 1838 took on E.G. Paley as his pupil. In 1845 Paley became his partner and after 1851, when Sharpe retired

from practice, the firm was run by a succession of Paleys and Austins in St Leonard's Gate and then Castle Hill until 1942.

Between 1836 and 1851 Sharpe worked on 64 commissions (some latterly with Paley). These included churches – locally, Holy Trinity (Morecambe), St Thomas (Lancaster), Holy Trinity (Wray) and Christ Church (Glasson). Further afield Holy Trinity (Blackburn) was perhaps his best design.

He also designed road bridges and railway works – the Galgate viaduct for the Lancaster and Preston Junction Railway, the North West Hotel where the Midland Hotel now stands in Morecambe, and the former Green Ayre Station in Lancaster.

He made additions to civic buildings such as Lancaster Castle, Lancaster Workhouse and the Moor Hospital; and he remodelled local country houses such as Capernwray Hall, Hornby Castle and Wyreside Hall.



Christ Church, Glasson (1840)



Holy Trinity, Wray (1840)

His earlier works favoured a Romanesque style that he had seen on his recent continental tours – rounded arches and church towers above the choir rather than at the west end. Latterly he moved to an early Gothic style with narrow, pointed-arch windows. He

experimented with using terracotta to give a lighter colour to the exteriors. The Romanesque and the terracotta came together in his last church building, St Paul's in Scotforth (1874–5), just along from his final home in what is now Brunton House.

As an architect he was innovative and an experimenter. As an historian of architecture he was nationally important for his publications on the development of the Gothic style in the 12th to 16th centuries. By the time of the major revival of the Gothic in Britain after 1850, he had largely left architecture.

He contributed to the civic life of Lancaster as a town councillor in the 1840s and was Mayor in 1848. He was among the leading campaigners for safe systems of drinking water and sewage disposal in Lancaster in the late 1840s and early 1850s; the campaign was eventually successful.

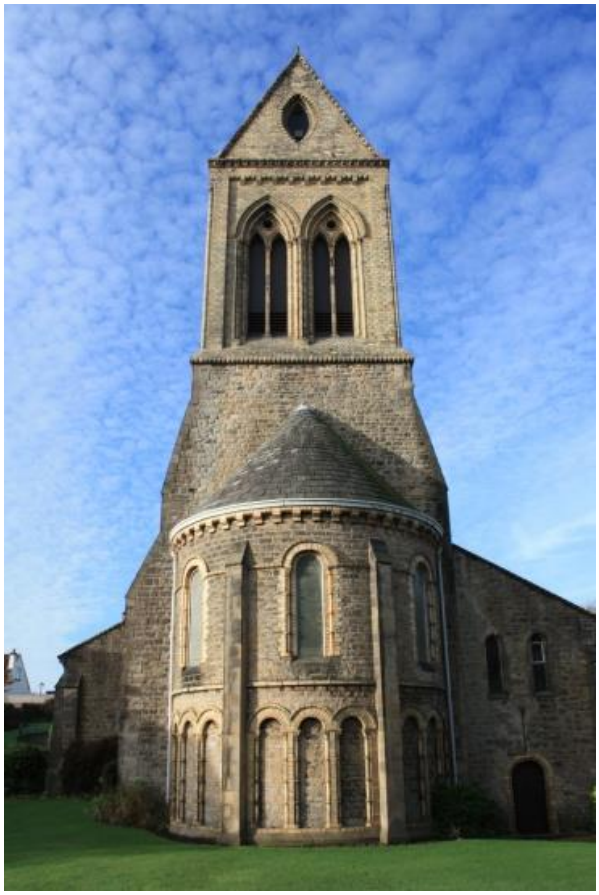



Skew Bridge and Conder Viaduct, Galgate, West Coast Main Line (1838–9)

He was a keen sportsman, helping found the Lancaster and Lunesdale Cricket Club (1841), the Lancaster Rowing Club (1842) and the Choral Society – he also played the organ and clarinet and built harmoniums.

He bought the Theatre Royal (now the Grand Theatre on St Leonard's Gate) and remodelled it in 1843 as The Music Hall. The Athenaeum (a club for entertainment and lectures that he helped found in 1848) met there and later he bought the Hall. He owned the Phœnix Foundry from 1852, which made equipment for railways, and he managed it after 1867 when he finally retired to Lancaster after a period in north Wales and Geneva working on railway and tram projects.

He died in 1877 and is buried in Lancaster Cemetery on Quernmore Road with his wife and near the Paleys and Austins who took over and expanded his architectural practice and with whom he was linked by marriage.





St Paul's , Scotforth (1874–5)

Edmund Sharpe was so many things – an architect, engineer, historian, entrepreneur, civic leader, campaigner, sportsman and social innovator. Such a breadth of contributions to his adopted town is certainly worthy of a green plaque on the Fenton Street home he designed and lived in for 11 years.



Further reading

G. Brandwood *The Architecture of Sharpe, Paley and Austin*. Swindon: English Heritage, 2012.

J. Price *Sharpe, Paley and Austin: A Lancaster Architectural Practice; 1836–1942.* Lancaster: Centre for North-West Regional Studies, Lancaster University, 1998.

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