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## **Some Cheltenham Buildings – mainly designed by John Middleton and William Hill Knight**

By Brian Torode (copyright Cheltenham Local History Society)

### **FOR COUNTY HISTORY DAY**

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#### **St John's Lodge**

St John's Lodge is an impressive building, commanding a most prominent position on Tivoli Circus in the Andover Road.

The Lodge was built between 1835 and 1845 on land which was up to that time, part of Tivoli Nurseries- a Victorian Garden Centre. The building plot was purchased for £310 and within a short time the impressive house had been let to a Reverend Forster, who from about 1853, accepted as a lodger, on behalf of the Countess of Huntingdon's Missionary Society, a young African Prince- Prince Caulker. The Prince remained for six years, studying at Cheltenham College, during which time he became blind.

By 1864, the house was occupied by a retired Army Officer, the Hon John Curzon, who lived there with his wife, four children and servants.

From 1870, St John's Lodge became the home of Lady Sturt, widow of Charles Sturt the famous Australian explorer, whose son was then living in the Lodge. The Sturts had originally lived in Tivoli Road, later moving to Clarence Square. It was while living there that Her Majesty Queen Victoria honoured Charles with a knighthood, but he died before receiving the accolade. As he was held in such high esteem by Her Majesty, she allowed Charles' widow to assume the title 'Lady.'

Lady Sturt died at St John's Lodge in 1887 aged 85.

The property has been a commercial premise for some years but in 2013 it was purchased by Fiona Fullerton who plans to restore it to a family home.

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## Dorothea Beale's House



The Cheltenham Ladies College began life in 1854 as a proprietary school in Cambray House, premises located between the Promenade and the Bath Road. Four years later, a new Principal was appointed – Miss Dorothea Beale. So successful was she that by 1871, Cambray House was far too small for the number seeking admission.

A new site was purchased on the corner of St George's Road and Montpellier Street. John Middleton, a local architect, was invited to submit designs for a new building. His designs, dated 1871, provided for the original College Building, now almost entirely swamped within the present building, and a residence for the Principal. The first range of buildings had been completed by 1873 and the Principal's house was occupied by 1874.

The Principal's house, seen on the right of the picture, was a single bay, two storey structure plus loft space, with a rather ecclesiastical style entrance porch. Alterations were later made to the house but it was demolished when further additions to the school along Montpellier Street were made between 1889 and 1890s.

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## St Hilda's College, Western Road



The foundation stone of St Hilda's was laid 10<sup>th</sup> August 1884 and the official opening took place just 15 months later.

Miss Dorothea Beale wished to provide an opportunity for formal training for those of her girls who wished to enter the teaching profession as Senior School teachers. At the time, no such provision was available and the Council of the Ladies' College approached John Middleton to design a Students' Home or Residential College, primarily for girls who wished to become teachers, with a Council and Lady Principal of its own.

The official opening by the Bishop of Gloucester, took place on 17<sup>th</sup> November 1885, just nine months after Middleton's death, the latter part of the contract having been supervised by his son and partners. The builder was Mr Collins of Tewkesbury.

The building is in the Elizabethan style, of red brick with Bath stone dressings and mullioned windows. The extensive frontage on to Western Road was considerably and sympathetically extended at the beginning of the twentieth century and the interior was the subject of major refurbishment and upgrading in 2002.

In 1939 the whole of College was requisitioned by the Government – some only for a short while – but St Hilda's remained in Government hands until 1944.

St Hilda's is still a College Boarding House and a landmark in the road in which it stands.

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### **The Ladies' College Sanatorium**

Liddington Close, just below the junction of Leckhampton Road with the Old Bath Road, has been developed on the site of the former Ladies College Sanatorium. This was completed to the designs of John Middleton in 1879 and served as a sanatorium until 1895 but the property was retained by the Ladies College until 1964. Sale particulars for the property in that year indicate a substantial premises rather gloomy in appearance, the Tudor style chimneys being the only attractive feature.

The ground floor comprised eight rooms, operating theatre, baths etc and a small Matron's flat. On the first floor were twelve rooms with baths, and a housemaid's pantry. The property was approached from Leckhampton Road by a gravel stone entrance through mature lawns and gardens.

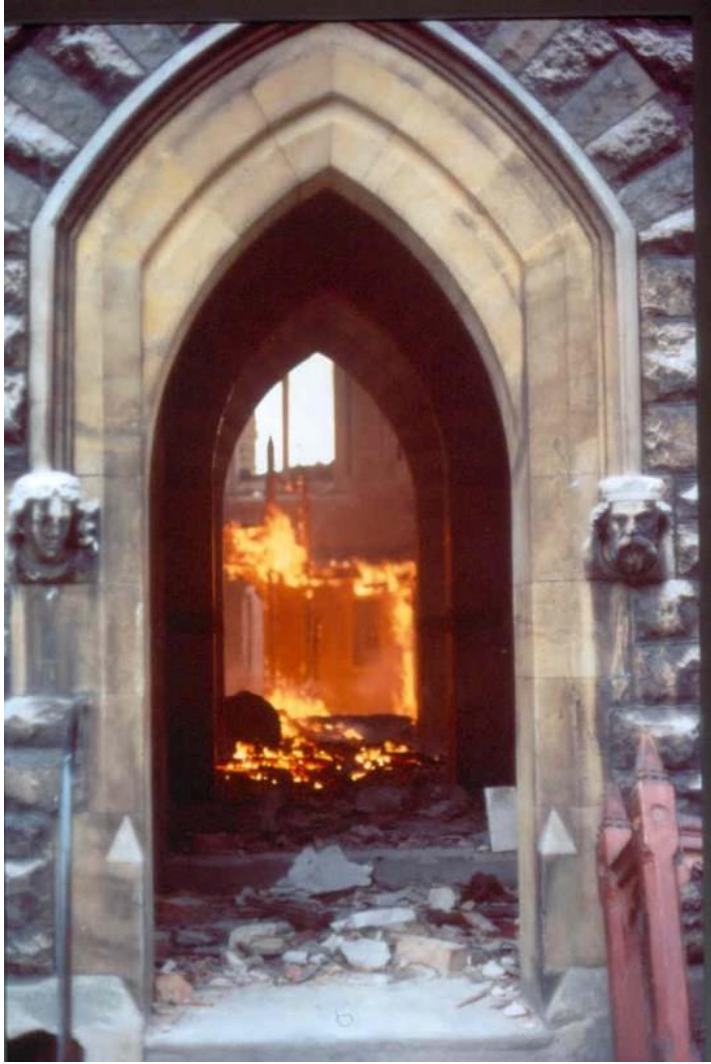
Middleton's final account amounted to £1,318.

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## Westholme



Middleton's own house, designed by him and built for him and his family, stood directly behind Christ Church. Legend has it that he spent in the region of £80,000 on the house and imported continental craftsmen to carry out the beautiful, ornate stone work that graced the interior. The Victorian tiles that surrounded some of the fireplaces were the work of William Morris and Sir Edward Burne-Jones. Many of the rooms boasted carved fireplaces, deeply undercut corbel sculptures and much fine marble and stonework. Much of the interior woodwork and some carvings were salvaged by the Bowes Museum and are on display in a 'Middleton Room





The house originally stood on a site of approximately one acre but was savagely demolished in 1971 to be replaced by flats, having served for some years as Abbeyholme Old People's Home.

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## Eastholme



In the north east corner of Wellington Square stands a residence which bears a striking resemblance to two buildings designed by Middleton – one, Bartlow now demolished which stood on Leckhampton Hill, and the other, the Managers House at the Mythe Waterworks in Tewkesbury.

Although the plans for the house in Wellington Square – named Eastholme – have not come to light, circumstantial evidence and comparison with known Middleton houses supports the theory that Eastholme is to his design.

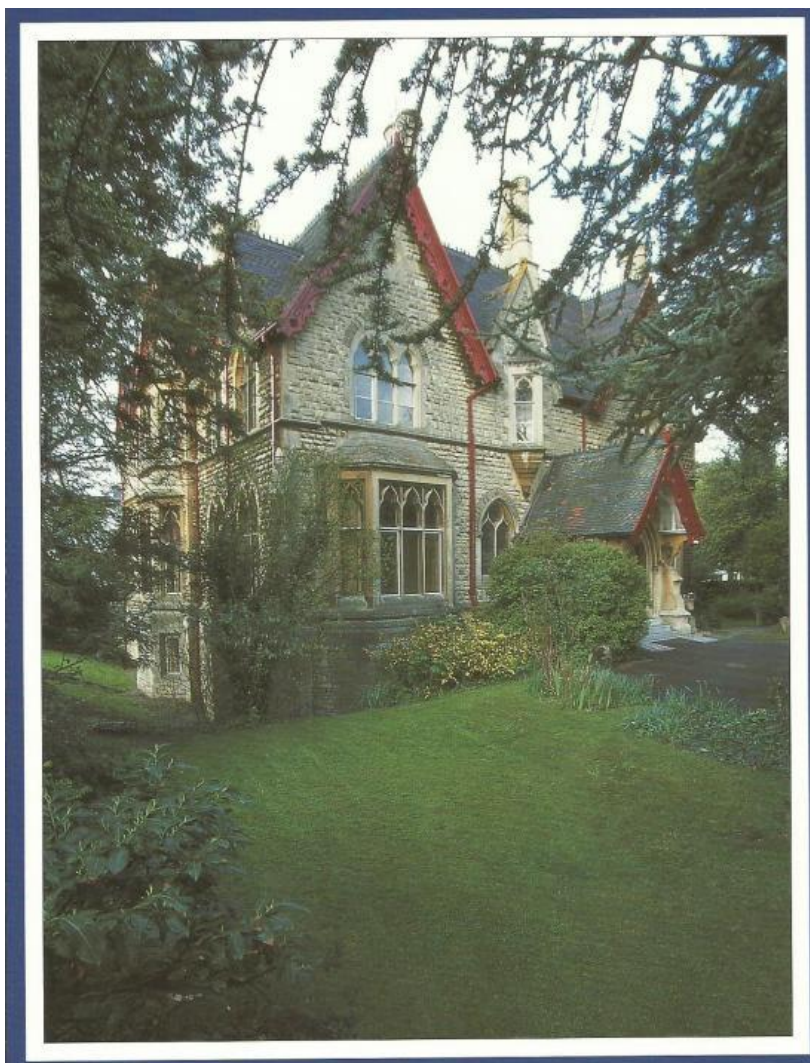
The house, which appears in the register of new buildings for 1867 is of red brick with ashlar dressings, and decorated with seven rows of blue brick banding forming an intricate pattern. The decorative barge boards and finials to the several gables are original. Internally the house boasts a profusion of all things Gothic: glass panelled doors, ceiling arches, timber staircase, mullioned windows and panelled, stencilled ceiling in the dining room. This latter room also contains a buffet recess under a Gothic arch identical in style and proportion to the one Middleton designed for his own home, Westholme.

In 2012 the house was on the market for £1,650,000

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## Dewerstone



Dewerstone stands on the corner of College Lawn and Thirlestaine Road and bears an uncanny resemblance to Middleton's own house, Westholme. The house is an impressive structure of the Gothic revival style with a banded tile and fish scale decorated roof, tall ornamental ridge stacks in twos and threes with cornices and ornamental ridge tiles and end stack. The house comprises two storeys and a basement and attics in three gables. The barge boards are an unmistakable feature of the house and something of a trademark of Middleton's villas.

Middleton's ledgers show correspondence and estimates with Rev Southwood from 1860, and from late 1864 Dewerstone was occupied by the Reverend Gentleman. Rev Southwood was the Headmaster of the Military and Civil Department of Cheltenham College and the house was his own private property, never used as a boarding house and never owned by College.

A large extension to the rear bears the date shield 1871 and above two windows on the west face of the house are two carved heads of a lady and gentleman – presumably Reverend and Mrs Southwood for whom the house was built.

The 1901 sale particulars make much of the internal stained glass windows, the ornate ceiling cornices the massive internal chimney pieces and massive design of the staircase handrails. 'The house is most splendidly built of stone in a most costly manner, and possesses unusual solidity, while its architectural features are exceptionally attractive, forming a most charming and complete example of domestic Gothic style.'

Sadly the house today is not owner occupied and is in desperate need of lots of TLC.

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### **Cheltenham College Boarding Houses**

Revd. Alfred Barry was appointed Principal of Cheltenham College in 1862 and one of his immediate concerns was the improvement of Boarding House provision. There were three main boarding houses at the time of his arrival and he set about modernising these. He then initiated the building of another four new houses –Teighmore, Leconfield and Christowe being among the first to be constructed by the Boarding House Company, followed soon afterwards by Hazelwell. The Cheltenham Looker on commented that the external appearance of the houses 'exhibit neither taste nor comeliness and the longer they are looked at the less they are admired. Fortunately for the artistic pretensions of the town, they do not occupy prominent positions.'

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### **Hazelwell**

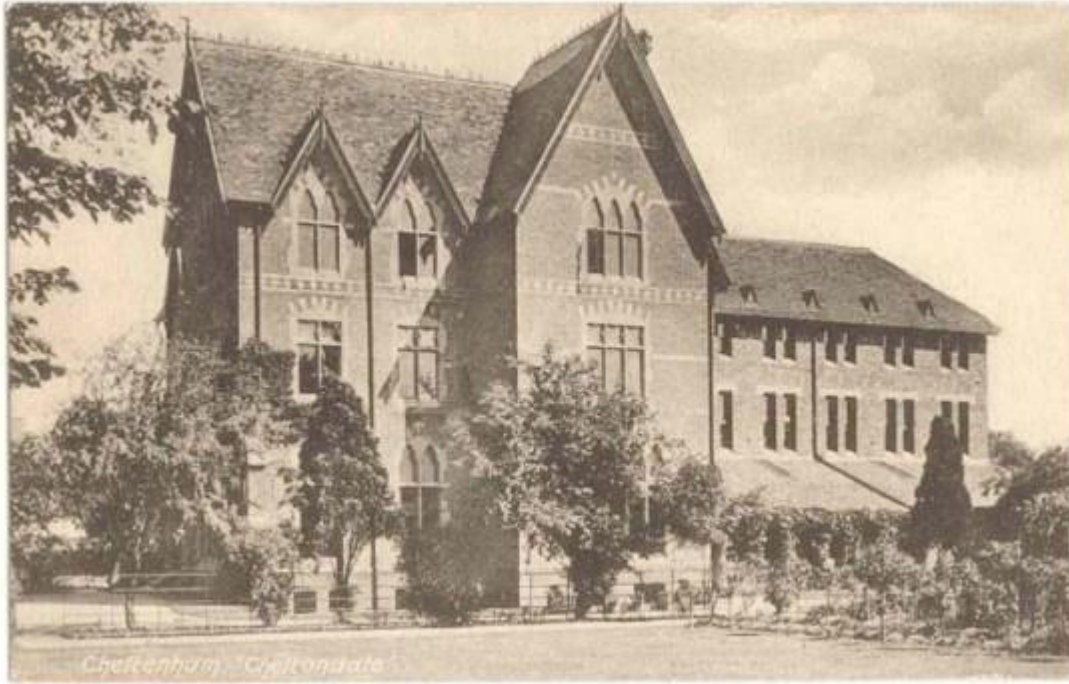
This house, in College Road, was the only one of the four new houses **not** built by the Boarding House Company. It was built as a private enterprise by an existing College Housemaster, Rev Samuel Green. He chose a local architect, William Hill Knight who had designed the Cheltenham Synagogue in 1839. The Cheltenham Examiner described it 'a commodious and imposing edifice.' Hazelwell is still a College House today and has been repeatedly updated and modernised internally since its opening.

### **Leconfield**

Another of Knight's designs, costing in the region of £4,000 was Leconfield also in College Road, which followed the pattern of the other contemporary boarding houses with a Master's house at the front, and long wings at the back with Common Room, Hall, senior boys' studies, dormitories etc. The average accommodation in each house was 45. Leconfield was used as a Boarding House by United States Army personnel during the WWII.

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## Cheltondale



Cheltondale was the last of the Boarding Houses to be built, completed in 1869 at a cost of £4,000. The architect was John Middleton, whose plans are dated 1867. The builders were WC & L Channon, who did a considerable amount of work for Middleton. The House stood in College Road on a site now occupied by the Pathology Department of the General Hospital to whom it was sold 1981 and demolished in 1982 .