

The Town Trust and the Town Hall

Winchcombe's old Town Hall had become "very dilapidated and unsafe" by the 1850s. The Bailiffs and Burgesses of the corporation decided to remedy this and advertised for tenders to rebuild the High Street wing with its covered area and large room above. They agreed a plan having "due regard to the limited sources of income" and accepted the tender of £283 from Messrs J. & R. Davis of Prestbury. The money could only be raised with a mortgage provided by the brothers John and William Dent of Sudeley Castle. In February 1871 more building work was discussed. It was decided to enlarge the Town Hall "in accordance with the architectural style of the building and on the site of the present stone one" in order to provide a magistrates' retiring room with a waiting room beneath. A renowned Cheltenham architect, Mr W. Knight, was asked to submit a plan and a tender of £388 15s was accepted from Mr Pearson for the construction work, with £5 per week penalty clause for failure to complete within 3 months. The work was completely finished by February 1872.

The Town Trust and some items from its records

The Municipal Corporations Act of 1883 led to the end of Winchcombe's Corporation and its Bailiffs and Burgesses. They were replaced by seven elected Town Trustees, who in May 1891 received the old Corporation's property, including the two Borough Maces, the Seal, the Minute Book, the Accounts Book and a cheque in hand for £35 18s 3d. The Town Trustees now became responsible for the Town Hall and its contents.

At early meetings amongst the items discussed were the installation of 3 gas burners in the Market Place (*i.e. the covered area*), a request by the Rev. R. N. Jackson for space under the Town Hall for storing the Fire Apparatus and the drawing-up of a list of hire charges. Concerts were 7s 6d for two hours, professional entertainments 12s 6d and dances from 7s 6d to 16s 6d according to duration. Fires for heating were 2s 6d extra. It was agreed that arches under the Town Hall should be part boarded up and glazed and the arch nearest the Hall door fitted with folding doors (*evidence is still clearly visible*) In 1894 Mr E. Adlard asked for use of a room for Technical Education Classes. Permission was granted at 3s per night, but no practical illustration of "carpentering" or woodcarving allowed!

The Town Hall Clock

On July 1st 1898 Mr R. H. Prance of Hampstead offered to erect and present, at his own expense, an 8 - day clock with two illuminated dials, provided the Trustees would take charge of it. They accepted and after discussion eventually decided to place it in its present position. It was handed over in September and Mr Champion, the Caretaker, was paid £2 10s yearly for looking after it. By 1900 it was noted with concern that the gas lights illuminating the clock's dial had led to an increase of £4 in the Hall's gas bill. A public subscription was opened to commemorate Mr Prance's gift.

The Market Place, Forecourt and Stocks

In 1900 the hire of the Butchers' standings below the Town Hall produced £21 4s yearly in rent. (*Rails for hanging meat still remain under the ceiling*) In 1906 the Parish Council wished to erect a urinal on the Town Hall's premises (*presumably the Forecourt.*) The Trustees "could not

entertain their proposal"! (See also 1912 below) In 1909 Mr Terry was granted permission at 3s per night to sell fish, (but not to cook it) under the Town Hall on Saturday evenings.

When the condition of the Stocks was discussed in 1912 it was agreed that they should be oiled yearly in March, in dry weather, at a cost of 2s. Mr J. Oakey was asked to produce a plan for a shelter for them. (100 years later his shelter still protects them) The Sanitary Inspector stated that if the Hall was let for dances further sanitary accommodation must be provided as the use of the front of the Hall and the Market place as a urinal was highly objectionable!

In 1914 a severe hailstorm broke 26 of the diamond panes in the High Street window. In 1915 the subject of a "fried fish or chipped potato shop, which would be very objectionable in the centre of the town" was considered. In 1918 the Police insisted that the Town Hall's doors should open outwards and Mr Oakey undertook to see to this. The Trustees discussed whether to move the town's Fire Apparatus, stored at Gretton Road, to the Market Place. This was rejected because of concern that people would tamper with it if the gates were left unlocked.

Winchcombe's first cinema performance

In 1918 the Cotswold Cinema Co. requested use of the upper room for a Cinema exhibition. Although the Rev. R. N. Jackson was strongly opposed, permission was granted at 7s 6d per night for 3 months. The "machine" (*projector*) in a fireproof box would be in the attic of No 4 North Street, transmitting the pictures through a window in the north end of the Hall and the company would pay for the alterations. (*The Town Trust then owned No 4, the former Marquis of Granby*) Film shows continued for several years.

Accounts Book

The Accounts Books give income received from hire of the Town Hall rooms, the butchers' and other stalls in the Market Place and the hire of the standings in Abbey Terrace. They show the wide range of uses of the Town Hall. The serious side of life was catered for by the monthly Petty Sessions Court, the County Court, the Savings Bank, Emigrants' Agents, the Labourers' Union, the Band of Hope, the Salvation Army and the Rev. R. N. Jackson's "Good Templers," along with various lectures, classes and school meetings.

Far more numerous were entertainments reflecting the latest enthusiasms, such as Albanian Minstrels, Imperial Star Minstrels and Sunlight Minstrels. Other events included Mr Douglas's Panorama, a Phrenological Entertainer (*he "read" bumps in people's heads*), Singing Pilgrims, the Two Hearts Dramatic Company and numerous concerts and performance arranged by local people. There were frequent Balls and Dances, such as Mr Tovey's Quadrille Parties, Club dinners, dancing classes and Tea parties.

The Trust's standings in Abbey Terrace hosted shows such as Bostock & Wombwell's Wild Beast Menagerie and Wax Works in addition to the Mop Fairs, which continue to the present.

All information is taken with permission from the Town Trust's records.

Researched and transcribed by Barbara Edward 2012