

Demolition of the Assembly Rooms Cobb Gate, Broad Street, Lyme Regis

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Graham Davies, April 2020

In 1928 the Assembly Rooms in Lyme Regis, on the site of today's Cobb Gate car park, consisted of two parts: the original Rooms built in the 1770s on the site of former warehouses and the Victoria Hall added to the town side of the building in 1866.



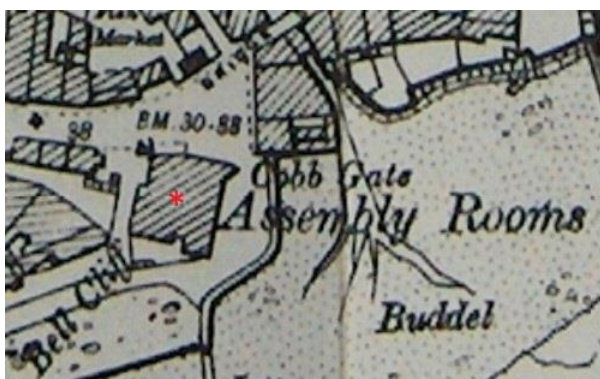
Assembly Rooms 1814



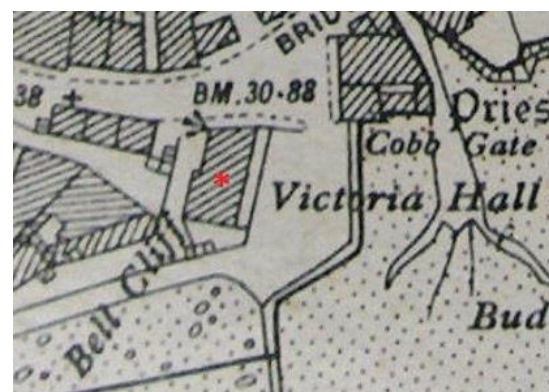
Victoria Hall

It is not the intention here to repeat the work of the late Jo Draper, former consultant archivist at Lyme Regis Museum, but to concentrate on the demolition of the "Assembly Rooms & Victoria Hall" building which was not a single task in 1928 as I had previously thought.

The big storm of 1927 weakened the foundations of the original building. Following the Borough surveyor's report to the Town Council in March 1928 that the Assembly Rooms were unsafe, the building was demolished almost immediately to make way for a car park.



* Assembly Rooms & Victoria Hall in 1903



* Remaining Victoria Hall in early 1929

The Museum curator Dr Wyatt Wingrave entered the debate on the remaining Victoria Hall when describing it as 'the unlovely annexe in yellow bricks'.

In a somewhat fractious meeting of the Town Council in February 1929 to decide the fate of the Victoria Hall it was decided by a narrow majority that the hall should remain.

There was a great difference of opinion in the town concerning the matter. In late March 1929 the Town Council decided to hold a postcard poll of the electors of Lyme Regis. The options were:

1. Demolish the Victoria Hall at an estimated cost of £275 and use the site for a car park or other purposes (the profit from parking cars on the Assembly Rooms site from May last to January this year was £146).
2. Make such reconstructive alterations as were absolutely necessary (estimated at £1,050) so that the building might again be used with safety and profit.

'Seasider' writing in the Western Gazette expressed his views that the Victoria Hall was a hideous structure, probably one of the ugliest buildings in Dorset. 'But, worse than this, it blots out what would otherwise open up a unique and charming view of the old Cobb and the bay.' He suggests that every voter in the forthcoming referendum should visit the spot and 'picture to themselves what a splendid addition to the beauties of the town would result by removal of this structure.'

The results of the postcard poll were announced on 12th April:

In favour of demolition	458
In favour of re-conditioning the building	295

Within a week of the poll results the Victoria Hall had been demolished.

References

British Newspaper Archive

The Victoria Hall, The Square by Joe Draper, All Over The Town, December 2006