

REOPENING OF THE GUILDHALL, Lyme Regis 1889

LYME REGIS JUBILEE MEMORIAL

The Devon and Exeter Daily Gazette, Tuesday January 22nd 1889

Transcribed by Jane Williams, August 2015

Appendix by Graham Davies

Yesterday was a day of very considerable interest for the inhabitants of the ancient borough of Lyme Regis, and the town presented quite a gala appearance, the occasion for the demonstration being the re-opening of the Guildhall. The building dating from the early part of the seventeenth century, and having fallen into a sad state of decay a movement was set on foot about two years ago to restore the fabric, and add to it a tower as a Jubilee memorial. The work originated with a generous offer on the part of the Reverend Edward Peek to restore the internal fittings of the hall at his own expense, and he requested his architect, with the consent of the Corporation, to examine and report on the building. On examination the hall was found to be in a dangerous condition. The north wall was greatly out of the perpendicular, and some of the old beams rested only on an inch-and-half of the wall. On receiving the architect's report, the council decided to have plans drawn for pulling down a portion of the building and setting the wall back in order to widen the roadway, which at the time was exceedingly narrow and dangerous. The former entrance opened on to the narrowest part of North Street and was approached by a very inconvenient and steep flight of steps. These have disappeared and the entrance is now at the west end. Three broad steps lead up to a wide and handsome porch which gives access to the main staircase leading directly into the Sessions Court. The general internal arrangements of the Court have been preserved and portions of the old fittings, which were found to be of oak when numerous coats of paint had been removed, have been preserved, and the new fittings added are carried out in the same style, made of, best Riga wainscot. The old muniment-room at the back of the Court has been converted into a Council Chamber or Mayor's parlour, and an entirely new fire proof muniment-room has been constructed in the tower. The Royal Arms, which probably date from the Restoration of Charles 11., have been cleaned and replaced at the back of the Mayor's seat in the Court; and the old panel on which are emblazoned the Town Arms has found a permanent resting place in a panel over the mantelpiece in the Mayor's parlour instead of hanging in a frame in the Court. In this room has also been placed a bit of old oak wainscoting, restored. The Guildhall buildings now consist of a circular tower at the north west corner, the Sessions Court, Mayor's parlour, and offices, and underneath a lock-up store and the butcher's market, the latter improved and remodelled so that it is open to the street through an arcade of two arches, filled in with a neat wrought-iron railing. Over the Sessions Court is an entirely new roof in one span, having in the centre a bell-turret. The old roof was in two spans and very much lower. The alteration gives greater space and air with better ventilation. The walls are mainly built of local pebble stones, with Ham-hill stone dressings; the roof is covered with greyish green slates and red ridge tiles. In the gable over the entrance porch, the town arms are embellished with foliage, all richly carved in Ham-hill stone; an ornamental addition to the front for which the town is indebted to its old member, the last Parliamentary representative of Lyme Regis, Colonel Pinney, of Somerton Erleigh. The north-west tower stands on the site of the two old prison cells, one on the ground floor for men, and the other over it for women. The iron-cased door of the men's prison has been reinstated and opens into a space underneath the main staircase, and there the old stocks and old other relics are now stored. The grating of the women's cell has been ? into the wall above, and an inscription on a stone above the door records the story of its previous use. In an arched recess of the entrance porch, on a circular entablature of Ham-hill stone, is cut the following inscription:-

The work was begun A.D.1887
Henry Henley, Mayor

In commemoration of
The 50th year of the reign of
QUEEN VICTORIA,
This tower was built, and the rest
of the guildhall reconstructed and
improved, the fabric at the cost of
the town, the fittings of the Court
at the sole cost of the Rev. Edward Peek.

And ended at Christmas, AD., 1888,
Zachary Edwards, Mayor

The general works have been carried out by Mr H.T. Cooper, builder, of Lyme Regis; the internal fittings for the Rev. Edward Peek by Mr Henry Randall, also a builder of the town, the whole being executed from the designs and under the superintendence of Mr George Vials, A.R.I.B.A, Ealing, London.

The reopening ceremony was fixed for noon yesterday, and shortly before 12 o'clock a procession was formed at the top of Broad-street and walked through the town to the Guildhall in the following order, the Lyme Artillery Volunteers providing the band and guard of honour:-Band, guard of honour, choir, Rev C Myers (Vicar), Rev. G Wotton, Rev Canon Woodcock, Rev E Peek, Rev A R Sharpe, Rev G C Hutchings, Rev R C Pearcey, Sergeants at Mace, the Mayor (Mr Zachary Edwards, B.A.), Aldermen Henley, G Osborn and S Osborn; Councillors E Baker, F Dollin, M Lawton, J Martin, J G Philpot, T E D Philpot, F Radford, H Randall, E H Wallis, and J E Wallis; Mr C Preston, Town Clerk; R H Hillman, Magistrates Clerk; F Wills, Borough Treasurer; W Rugg, Cobb Master; F Dunster and A J Beer, Borough Auditors; H Foxwell, Water Bailiff; guard of honour. Arrived at the Guildhall the architect handed the Mayor the key of the main door, and the company proceeded to the Sessions Court, where the opening ceremony took place. Spectators were admitted by ticket, and among others present were Mr A T Adams, J.P., Mr J W Preston, J.P., Captain Chappell, Mrs Bungay, Mrs Rogerson, the Misses Newnham, Miss Green, and many others.

The Mayor offered a dedicatory prayer, and a hymn was sung by the choir.

The Mayor then addressed his fellow citizens of Lyme Regis, and said they had heard the solemn words in which the Vicar had dedicated the hall henceforth and for ever to the purposes of justice and equity, and he hoped that the Magistrates would therein do their duty and administer justice indifferently without fear or favour or respect to man's appearance. He hoped that the Councillors might also act wisely, and consult not their own interests only, but the interests of all classes and parties. While he continued to hold that emblem of delegated authority (a small silver mace, which forms part of the Municipal regalia) by God's help so he would act, and, although he was not the keeper of their consciences, he ventured to affirm on their behalf that the Justices and Councillors would also so act. He did not know whether on entering the building they noticed an inscription engraved in stone, recording for information not only of themselves but also of those who came after, that the buildings had been restored as the thank-offering of the people of Lyme Regis for the fiftieth year of Queen Victoria's reign. The ceremony of that day was the consummation of the Jubilee rejoicings and gladness two years ago. They would also see recorded in the inscription that although the external portions of the building had been done at the expense of the townspeople, yet the internal fittings had been carried out at the sole cost of their valued citizen Mr Peek. (Applause.) In the old days of Rome there was a State officer named a curule aedile, whose duty it was to beautify the city with public buildings at his own expense. That was an office much coveted by the grandees of Rome, partly from pure patriotism and partly from ambition. What these old Romans did to gratify ambition and vanity Mr Peek had done out of love to God and goodwill to men. (Hear, hear) This was not the first time they had had to thank Mr Peak for generous gifts to the town, and they would be ungrateful indeed if they did not acknowledge them in a becoming manner. Another contributor he could not pass over, although he must not mention his name, had given the large sum of £100, and he did not intend to limit it to that sum if there should be further need. (Applause) He ought also to mention Colonel Pinney, a man he differed from in opinion, but for whom he had the greatest respect; he loved and venerated him for his great and general urbanity of manner. Colonel Pinney being unwilling to sever his connection with the town he represented so long, had at his own expense put up the Town Arms over the entrance gate (Applause) Those gentlemen were worthy of esteem and praise, but while acknowledging their generosity, it must not be forgotten that their thanks were certainly due to the architect, Mr Vialls, who had paid such attention to every detail of the building as was seldom shown by any architect – (applause) – he had worked with his whole heart and in a most conscientious manner. He had not given them a grand building architecturally, still there were some remarkable merits considering the materials of which it was built and the skill he had shown in turning round the entrance from its old position facing the street to that which it now occupied. Mr Vialls had given them not only a fine building but a comfortable one, far superior to that in which the Civic Fathers of the town were condemned to sit in formerly. (Hear, hear) He was sorry to sacrifice one part of the old hall, not on account of any architectural merits, but because of its historical associations, but he was converted to Mr Viall's plan as soon as he saw it. There was but one feeling in the Corporation, and it was that the work had been done entirely and thoroughly. (Applause) Nor should they pass over the contractor. Though some thought he had been very long over his work they must all admit that he had done it substantially and completely, and they need not be at all afraid that it would

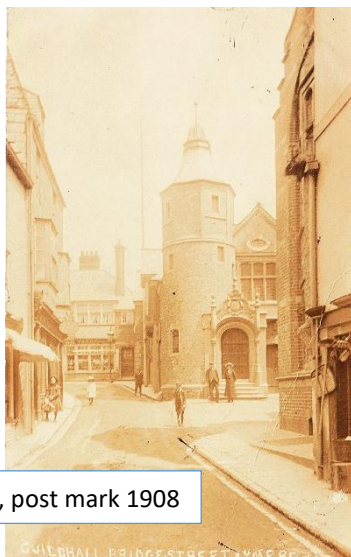
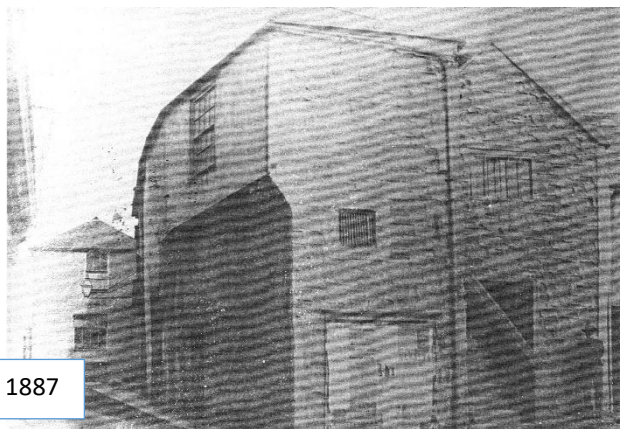
tumble about their ears. (Hear, hear) Mr Randall, who as a Councillor had given great attention to the building, and who, under Mr Peek's direction, had carried out the internal fittings, was also entitled to a word, aye, to a thousand words of praise. (Applause) His Worship then formally declared the Guildhall open.

The choir sang "God Save the Queen", the band outside playing the accompaniment, and the ceremony concluded with hearty cheers for her Majesty, for the Mayor and clergy, the architect, and the contractors. In the evening most of those present at the opening of the Guildhall met again at a public dinner, which took place in the Masonic Hall. The Mayor (Mr Z. Edwards) presided with Mr M.C. Preston and Mr R.H. Hillman as Vice-Chairman. The company numbered about 100, and included in addition to those already mentioned Colonel Cotton, Major Wallis, George Baker, Shepherd, J Wallis, Martin, M Lawton, H Holling, Miller, G Lou?, C. Radford, H Lane, Porter, Burg, Wood, Caister?, W E Hussey, Stevens (2), Cox, Legg, Rogerson (2), Huxford, Searl, Miller, W Wilson, Palmer, Baker, M Farnham, W Chalmers, Wiscombe, Wills, How, Grimes, Restorick, Brice, Cooper, C Ball, Woodman, Sansome(2), J Rugg, E Rugg, S Govier, Boon, Wynch, &c. A first-rate dinner at a very moderate price was provided by Mr John Groves, of the Royal Lion, the following being the bill of fare:- Soups-clear and hare; fish-cod and soles; joints-roast beef and mutton and pork, boiled beef and mutton, and fillet of veal; poultry-chickens, boiled turkey and goose ;game-pheasants, hares, and haunch of venison; sweets-mince pies, plum puddings, apple tarts, jellies, blanc mange, and dessert. The Volunteer Band, under the direction of Mr W. Docking, enlivened the townspeople during the afternoon with some excellent music, and in the evening played a choice selection of popular music at the Masonic Hall. The fine peal of bells in the old church tower were also rung merrily at intervals throughout the day.

Appendix (Museum archives)



Guildhall before 1887



Guildhall, post mark 1908



Watercolour of Guildhall & Old Walls by Lady Pittar 1891