



Town Hall, Grove Road, Eastbourne, BN21 4UG  
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### The Building of the Town Hall

The development of the new town of Eastbourne began in earnest in the late 1840s. The branch railway line to Eastbourne from the main line at Polegate opened in May 1849. That same year Terminus Road was constructed and a year later, the Gilbert Estate asked the Eastbourne Vestry Meeting to take over and maintain the road. This was approved by the Vestry on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1851. The Vestry had met until this time at the Church but the growing complexities of local government encouraged the Board of Guardians for the Poor for the Eastbourne Union of parishes to ask John Haine to build a new Vestry Hall for them at a cost of £270. Under the terms of the Local Government Act 1858, a Local Board was elected in 1859. This body took over most of the civil matters that had been controlled by the Vestry Meeting and continued to hold its meetings in the Vestry Hall that had been placed near the sheep wash at the bottom of Grove Road. Other bodies such as the Burial Board met there as well as the Poor Law Guardians and the Local Board.

The accelerating pace of growth led to demands by the early 1870s for a Town Hall where all the officials could have offices and where there could be adequate meeting rooms. The population of the town had grown from 3,433 in 1851 to 10,342 by 1871, and continued expansion was expected. The Local Board passed a resolution to build a Town Hall in 1874 but still the debate continued. Convenient sites were sought at reasonable prices. First choice was part of Sussex Gardens (now the section of Terminus Road that includes Boots the Chemist) that was available for £12,000. The next major site was that between the junction of Furness Road and South Street (now Crown Business Centre). £3,250 would have secured this site that G F Chambers saw as creating a splendid Town Hall Square with St Saviour's Church on the opposite side. Both prices were declared too much and the search continued. The 7<sup>th</sup> Duke of Devonshire, typically, came forward with an offer. For £3,000 the Local Board was offered the site of the present Town Hall. The site was known as 'Stocks' Bank'. At some time, the parish stocks had been situated here but in 1879 there were some buildings and houses from one of which the Town Surveyor worked. The offer was accepted.

Having settled the site the next task was to obtain some plans. An open competition was organised for this. Twenty-three plans were submitted anonymously with code names for the designs. The closing date was 15<sup>th</sup> February 1880 and soon afterwards the winning design was announced. 'Forward' had been submitted by William Tadman Foulkes of Birmingham and he received a £75 premium. Arguments recommenced over the plans and there was a public viewing. Mr Schmidt, the Town Surveyor, submitted some simpler, less expensive plans. It was decided to let Henry Currey, the 7<sup>th</sup> Duke of Devonshire's architect, examine the plans. He came out in favour of the Tadman Foulkes' plan with some modifications. On 7<sup>th</sup> May 1883, the Local Board finally approved the plans.

The next step was to find a builder and tenders were invited. The lowest submitted was from the local firm of Messrs. Dore in the sum of £28,745. When asked to provide sureties they could not find enough guarantors. The contract was called in and after debate was offered

to James Peerless. His was not the next lowest tender, but he was local, which most of the other contractors were not. There were some murmurs about the award of the contract to this builder, but he found his backers, who included James Berry Morris, local businessman and ironfounder. By the time the contract was signed, the Local Board had been replaced by the Borough Council. The contract was signed on 9<sup>th</sup> June 1884. Work started almost immediately and the Clerk of the Works was appointed from 168 applicants in July at the weekly wage of £4. Lord Edward Cavendish, the 7<sup>th</sup> Duke's youngest son, performed the official foundation stone laying ceremony on 9<sup>th</sup> October 1884. Two years later the building was complete but not fully furnished. There had been the hope that Queen Victoria might visit the town to open the Town Hall but this was not to be and the Mayor, Alderman George Boulton, performed the ceremony. The building was opened on 20<sup>th</sup> October 1886 with a ceremony and luncheon and two days later there was an evening reception. The Town Council met in the Council Chamber for the first time on 25<sup>th</sup> October 1886.

The building cost £35,000 and it is thought that a further £10,000 was spent then and in the next two to three years on the furniture and fittings. Materials chosen were of the best quality. There were marble pilasters for the Grand Stairway, Main Hallway and Assembly Room, oak panelling in some rooms and decorative plaster ceilings. Some floors were of oak strip or parquet. Doors, door surrounds and window casings were of oak. The hallways, corridors and passages on the ground and first floors were given marble mosaic floors. Minton tiles decorated the lavatories and cloakrooms. The stained glass was manufactured and installed by a Birmingham firm and another Birmingham company provided the stone and wood carvers.

The Clock Tower was built as part of the overall design but a few years were to elapse before a clock was installed. In October 1891 Messrs Gillett & Johnston of Croydon were asked to install the clock at a cost of £700.

The accompanying reproductions of the plans show the two main and public office, floors with their envisaged use in 1886. There are echoes of the Renaissance here as the most important rooms are on the first floor and approached by the Grand Staircase. The circular Reception Room is immediately ahead at the top of the stairway. Four semi-circular niches were provided to display statuary. A doorway led out on to the balcony over the main entrance. On one side of the Reception Room lies the Mayor's Parlour and on the other side, the Assembly Hall. The Council Chamber with its separate access stairway and Council withdrawing and waiting rooms form another section and the whole of the first floor is completed by the Town Clerk's suite of offices.

On the ground floor, one end of the building was set aside for the administration of justice. At the rear of the building was a one storey outshoot – the Magistrates' Court. Whilst within the main building were the rooms for the Magistrates, Justice's Clerk and the County Court Officials. There was a room for solicitors and barristers and waiting rooms for defendants and witnesses. At this time, the Police Station was near the Vestry Room at the bottom of Grove Road so Police Cells were built into the basement at this end of the building. Two rooms sufficed for the Borough Accountant and the Rate Collectors. Across the corridor the Medical Officer of Health and his Inspector of Nuisances had another pair of rooms. The Town Surveyor and the Building Surveyor each had a pair of rooms as well. There was a Committee Room, two spare offices and two rooms for the caretakers. The attic and basement rooms were not in use as public offices. There were five entrances to the ground floor of the building. The main entrance with its canopied doorway leading up to the first floor with the rooms for formal entertainment. The Saffrons Road entrance led to the stairway up to the Council Chamber. One of the Grove Road entrances was for the use of

those attending the Magistrates' Court. The other doorway close by, led to the stairway giving access to the service rooms behind the stage of the Assembly Room. A small back entrance was provided close to the caretakers' rooms. Today, only the main entrance is in general use.

The small amount of accommodation for the officers and staff of the Council may appear very small. In 1886, several of the officials were not full time employees of the Council. The Town Clerk, John Henry Campion Coles, was practising solicitor in the town. The Borough Accountant was connected with Lewes Old Bank (later Barclay's Bank), and the Medical Officer of Health was responsible for the health of the whole of East Sussex. Over the century, the use of the offices has changed. New departments have appeared, grown in size, and moved out into other premises. The use of the offices changes from time to time and today all the office accommodation is given over to the legal department of the Council and the Town Council itself.

**Written by Vera Hodson with the help of information from Marie Lewis and John Milton.**

Sources:      Local Board and Town Council Minutes  
                  The Builder 10<sup>th</sup> April 1880, and 13<sup>th</sup> November 1886  
                  GF Chambers – East Bournemouth Memories of the Victorian Period  
                  Eastbourne Gazette 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1944  
                  HW Fovargue – Municipal Eastbourne, 1883 – 1933  
                  RJ Graham – Eastbourne Recollections

## EASTBOURNE'S FIRST TOWN COUNCIL, 1883

Many of the civil affairs of the Parish of Eastbourne were conducted by the Local Board from 1859 to 1883 – just on 25 years. The Local Board had 24 members throughout this period. At elections there was a single list of candidates for the whole parish. Those who polled the most votes filled the vacancies, and did not represent any particular part of the area. Where the system was unfair was that the greater the value of property held the more votes one had. In 1858 the Duke of Devonshire, the Rev. Thomas Pitman (Vicar of Eastbourne), and John Gosden (Farmer of Rodmill Farm) had 12 votes each. Frederick Tooth, and John Tooth (owners of 17 to 23, Grand Parade), and John Filder (Farmer of Susans Farm) had 8 votes, and so on. The 1832 Reform Act had given the vote to all males with a 40/- (shilling) freehold, or £10 copyhold, or £10 leasehold, or £50 tenancy holders. In 1867 the franchise was extended to £5 copyholders, £5 leaseholders, and £12 tenancy holders. It was this latter qualification on which the voter's list for the 1883 election was based. It is reckoned that nationally this qualification allowed only 16% of the adult population over 20 years old to vote. Alterations in 1884 (after the Eastbourne election) gave the vote to all males over 21 who had a house – this brought the proportion of the population who could vote up to 28%.

The Municipal Corporations Act of 1882 replaced the old voting system by dividing the area into wards – four in the case of Eastbourne. However the population was concentrated in developing parts of the parish, and the wards were roughly similar in area. This gave an unequal number of voters in the wards – Central Ward 1,166; East Ward 1,083; St. Mary's Ward 603 voters; and, West Ward only 196 voters. Each voter only had one vote in a ward if he held property there. Six councillors were to represent each ward, and in addition there were to be two alderman for each ward.

At the elections held on 1 November 1883 those elected were:-

<u>Central Ward</u>			<u>East Ward</u>		
Wallis	622	b	Haine	434	c
Sutton	510	c	Rudd	414	c
Tomkinson	483	b c	Bennett	403	
Strange	393	b	Vine	384	
Hillman	373	b	Wenham	318	
Jeffery	359	a b	Francis, W.	242	b
<u>St. Mary's Ward</u>			<u>West Ward</u>		
Boulton	245	c	Pearson	123	c
Cardwell	204	b c	Morrison	118	c
Chambers	181	b	Lawrence	91	
Skinner	177		Hayman	81	b
Colgate	171	a b	Key	64	
Jackson	170		Harding	58	

At the first meeting of the Council Councillor G. A. Wallis was elected Mayor, and Dr. G. A. Jeffery Deputy Mayor. Apart from Wallis, who declined to take two honours, the two councillors from each ward with the highest number of votes were raised to the Aldermanic Bench. This meant that there had to be a by-election three weeks later, on 22 November, to make the number of councillors up to six again. Elected this time round were:-

<u>Central Ward</u>		<u>East Ward</u>	
Mitchell	268	Bradford	228

Adams 255 a b

Pearce 203

**St. Mary's Ward**

Pocock 200

Coster 189

**West Ward**

Ellis 73 d

Gorringe 69 a b

**Notes**

- a – denotes a member of the Local Board from its inception
- b – denotes a member of the Local Board at its demise
- c – elected alderman at the first council meeting
- d – Dr. Ellis's nominated paper was not properly filled in for the first election. Neither was that of C. Simmons at the first election, and he still failed to gain a seat this time. He was subsequently successful, and returned to the Council, as did another ex-Local Board member John Chiseelt Towner, who declined to stand in 1883.

Vera Hodsoll. November 1983.

Corrections and additions welcomed.

## The Town Hall

The foundation stone was laid by Lord Edward Cavendish on 9<sup>th</sup> October 1884. The building was opened by the Mayor on 20<sup>th</sup> October 1886.

The Architect was Mr W T Foulkes of Birmingham and builder, Mr James Peerless of Eastbourne. The site cost £3,000 and the building £35,000. The clock was added in 1892 at a cost of £700.

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## The Town Hall Clock

The clock was installed in 1892 at a cost of £700.

When first installed, the clock was made to chime and strike 24 hours a day.

A night silencer was fitted at a later date.

Possibly around this time, dial lighting was introduced, the clock acting as the time switch. The clock was wound manually twice a week, on a Wednesday and Saturday, by two men. This took approximately three-quarters of an hour each time.

In 1964, a new bell was cast and fitted, because the old one had cracked. A new supporting girder was also fitted.

At this time, automatic winding was fitted and the clock was overhauled. Dial lighting was converted to strip lighting with its own electric time switch.

A monthly visit was made to check the clock and ensure that the time was correct until 1981 when a complete overhaul of the clock and all hammer linkages was carried out.

The clock has been maintained since 1951 by Mr Hobbs (an ex-employee of Brufords of Eastbourne)

## The Council Chamber Paintings

1. The First Mayor, Alderman and Town Clerk of the Borough of Eastbourne,  
1883 – 1884.  

(by, Henry Gales)
  
2. Alderman Miss Alice Hudson, JP  
  
The first Woman Mayor of the Borough, 1926 – 1928  
Also Mayor, 1943 – 1945  
Freeman of the Borough  
Picture presented by public subscription  

(by, J Sargent Jagger)
  
3. Alderman Lieutenant Colonel Roland Vaughan Gwynne, DSO, DL, JP  
  
(Now Sir Roland Gwynne)  
Mayor, 1928 – 1931  
Freeman of the Borough  
Picture presented by public subscription.  

(by, J Sargent Jagger)
  
4. Alderman Henry William Keay, JP  
  
Mayor, 1893 – 1894, 1898 – 1901, 1906 – 1908 & 1922  
Freeman of the Borough  
Picture presented by public subscription in 1933 to commemorate Alderman Keay's  
membership of the Council since 1883 (50 years).  

(by, Albert H Collings)
  
5. Alderman Arthur Edward Rush, JP  
  
Mayor, 1938 – 1943  
Freeman of the Borough  
Picture presented by public subscription in 1943 on the occasion of the Diamond  
Jubilee of the Borough.  
The amount subscribed (£1,179) was presented to War Charities at the request of the  
artist.  

(by, Captain Oswald Birley)

## Mayor's Parlour

The Mayor's Parlour is on the first floor of the Town Hall. It is a room in which there are many paintings, selected by present and past Mayors and also silver and glass accumulated over the years from presentations. There are photographs of Royal visitors to the town including King George V, King George VI and the Queen Mother; our present Queen and Prince Philip and the late Diana, Princess of Wales.

There are numerous plaques donated by visiting organisations to the Borough and Regiments who hold Freemen status.

The room is private to the Mayor and he/she uses it to entertain visiting dignitaries; parties visiting the Town Hall as his/her guest and occasional meetings with officers and fellow Councillors. The spacious room looks out on the junction of Grove Road and South Street. It has oak panelling over its lower walls and the oak furniture, with red leather upholstery, matches in with this. Despite the heavy oak furniture, the room is bright and cheerful and has a certain dignity about it. It is connected with the Reception Room (where Register Marriages take place) which is also used sometimes in association with the Parlour.

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|----------------------------------|---|
| The Mace                         | - Presented by Mr Carew Davies Gilbert at the Incorporation of the Borough. Solid Victoria Silver – Gold Gilt. Weight: 10 ¼ lbs.  |
| Mayor's Chain                    | - Presented by the Duke of Devonshire at the Incorporation of the Borough. Additional links presented by subsequent Mayors.   |
| Mayoress' Chain                  | - Presented by public subscription by the women of Eastbourne to commemorate the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.  |
| The Mayor's Ivory Hammer         | - Presented by Mr Alderman Boulton at the Incorporation of the Borough.   |
| The Mayor's Robe                 |   |
| The Distinguished Visitor's Book |   |
| Paintings                        | - A selection from the Towner Art Gallery.  |
| The Constable's Tipstaff         | - Made of mahogany, surmounted with a carved crown, emblazonment with the Royal Arms and the words 'Hundred of East Borne'. Gift of C G (probably Charles Gilbert) 1789. A tipstaff was a sign of law and authority carried by a Sheriff's Officer, Bailiff or Constable. |

## Civic Plate

- Rose Bowl - Presented by Wm. Bruford and Son Limited, on the occasion of the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II and to commence a collection of civic plate.
- Rose bowl - Presented to Mr Alderman A E Rush on his admission as a Freeman of the Borough. Presented back to the Corporation by his sisters after his death.
- Silver Salver - Presented by the Society of Civil Servants to commemorate their conferences in Eastbourne in 1951, 1953 and 1954.
- Silver Inkstand - Presented by Alderman Miss E M Thornton and Miss Madge Thornton to commemorate the Mayoralties of their father, Mr Councillor R T Thorton, of Alderman Miss Thornton and of Alderman R G Thorton.
- Large Rose Bowl,  
Pair of Silver  
Dessert Dishes and  
large Silver Salver - Presented by Alderman Miss E M Thornton.

## Staircase and Landing

### Coats of Arms in Stained Glass Windows:

- |                          |   |  |
|--------------------------|---|--|
| Top (from left to right) | - | Diocese of Chichester.<br>Rural Deanery of Pevensy.<br>Mr Alderman G A Wallis (First Mayor).<br>Mr Alderman C Boulton (Second Mayor).<br>Borough of Eastbourne.<br>County of Sussex. |
| Bottom (left)            | - | The Cavendish Family.  |
| Bottom (right)           | - | The Gilbert Family.  |
| Mottos – Borough         | - | Meliora Sequimur – Let us follow better things.  |
| Cavendish                | - | Cavendo Tutus – Safe by Caution.   |
| Gilbert                  | - | ---  |

### War Memorial 1914 – 1918

### Photographs of all past Mayors

- |          |   |  |
|----------|---|--|
| Painting | - | Reverend Thomas Pitman<br>Formally Vicar of Eastbourne.<br>Picture presented by public subscription in 1887.<br>(by, Chris Dutton)   |
| Statue   | - | The First Marquess of Willingdon.<br>Freeman of the Borough.<br>Viceroy of India, 1931 – 1936.<br>This is a plaster cast of a marble statue by Sir William Reid Dick, RA, erected in Delhi in 1942.<br>Cast presented by the Sculptor in 1945.<br>On the base are photographs of the original statue and of Lord Willingdon. |

### Ground Floor Corridor (West)

Shields presented by HMS Eastbourne and by Naval vessels visiting the town.

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### No. 1 Committee Room

Paintings - From the Towner Art Gallery permanent collection.

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### Reception Room

Busts - King George V.  
Presented by public subscription as a memento of the Royal visit to the town in 1935.  
(by, Albert Toft)

- Alderman W E Morrison  
Mayor in 1889 – 1892.  
Presented by public subscription  
(by, Bruce Joy)

This is the room used for Register Office marriages.

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### Assembly Room

Paintings - Alderman G A Wallis  
Charter (i.e. First) Mayor, 1883 – 1885.  
Picture presented by public subscription on the occasion of the opening of the Town Hall on 20<sup>th</sup> October 1886.  
(by, Henry Gales)

- Alderman J A Skinner  
Mayor – 1894 – 1897.  
Picture presented by public subscription.  
(by, Arthur Hacker)

- Alderman Sir Charles O'Brien Harding

Mayor – 1902 – 1903, 1915 – 1919 & 1924 – 1925.

Freeman of the Borough.

Picture presented by public subscription.

(by, L Calkin)