

Plans of the Public Hall, Windsor Street, Leamington Spa (CR634/9/10)

January's document of the month takes us back in time to Windsor Street in Leamington Spa during the Victorian era. The document in question is a plan created in 1884 for alterations to the Public Hall which once stood on Windsor Street. Today the street is pleasant but fairly unremarkable, however the buildings, now demolished, were once examples of Leamington's best architectural, cultural and enterprise landmarks.



Proposed alterations to the Public Hall on Windsor Street, Warwickshire County Record Office CR634/9/10

The Public Hall

When the Town Hall of Leamington Spa is mentioned, most of us probably think about the current premises on the Parade, however until its demolition and replacement the Public Hall was situated on Windsor Street, and was first opened in 1854. The Public Hall was built by the

Leamington Literary and Scientific Institution as a purpose built space for their increasingly popular lectures and concerts¹. Through this role the Hall became a focal point of the town, attracting a large number of visitors and hosting many notable speakers, including classical musicians and, especially, the National Agricultural Labourers' Union.²

After the Leamington Literary and Scientific Institution closed the building was sold to Mr Ebenezer Gould who commissioned the alterations for which we now hold the plans. The architect employed for the job was a Leamington local himself, the famous John Cundall, whose work can be seen around the town. This work includes the present Town Hall on the parade and St John's church on Tachbrook Street amongst others.³ Commenting on the distinctive style of the buildings Cundall designed, Lyndon F. Cave has suggested that he was inspired by French Gothic detail in his designs.⁴ This is perhaps reflected in his ideas for the Public Hall.

As well as playing host to the Leamington YMCA, the Public Hall later became the headquarters of the renowned removal company Mousell Brothers in 1896. Indeed the 1919 Spennell's directory included an advertisement for Mousell Brothers including a beautiful picture of the Public Hall as it was. The page largely advertises the conversion of the hall into a store for the company and describes it as, "the largest and best ventilated warehouse in the Midlands."⁵ As well as extensive storage space, the Public Hall on Windsor Street also gave the company space to hold auctions and following house clearances.

¹ W.G. Gibbons, "Leamington: From Humble Village to Splendid Spa 1800-1850." *The Semele* (1979-1985): 66.

² *Ibid*, 67.

³ "John Cundall, Architect," Leamington History Group. Last modified 27 July, 2017, <http://www.leamingtonhistory.co.uk/john-cundall-architect/>

⁴ Lyndon F. Cave, *Royal Leamington Spa: A History* (Chichester: Phillimore and Co Ltd, 2009), 133.

⁵ Spennell's Directory, 1919 ed. Page 6.

SPENNELL'S ANNUAL DIRECTORY FOR 1919.

LEAMINGTON SPA DEPOSITORY.

Careful Packers and Moderate Charges.



MOUSELL BROS., LTD.,
Removal Contractors & Storers,
WINDSOR STREET, LEAMINGTON SPA.

INSPECTION INVITED of the largest and best ventilated Warehouse in the Midlands. In consequence of their Increasing Business, Messrs. MOUSELL BROS. have converted the PUBLIC HALL into a huge Store for the reception of Furniture of all kinds. Pictures, Musical Instruments, etc.

An image of the Public Hall as it was survives in the Spennel's Directory for 1919
Warwickshire County Record Office CR634/9/10.

Unfortunately however the hall's future was not safe. It was quickly demolished to make way for new developments in 1957⁶. Although it had formed such a large part of Leamington's architectural, cultural and entrepreneurial history relatively little was made of the demolition and just over 60 years later, surprisingly few of us are likely to remember its existence.

The Plan

The Public Hall certainly had a long and interesting history, the plans we hold give an insight into its role and function. However, like all of our other documents, they also have a story of their own to tell.

The featured plan is part of a larger bundle concerning suggested improvements to the Public Hall, including showing the interior chambers of the hall. Most of these are too large for the case, but are available to be seen in the searchroom at Warwickshire County Record Office on request. A further collection also details the process of altering the building. Besides the plans used here, we also hold further documentation of the proposed alterations, including contracts and interior plans of the hall⁷. Together these collections demonstrate what a great deal of use building plans can be, in showing exactly how a building looked, its functions and purposes.

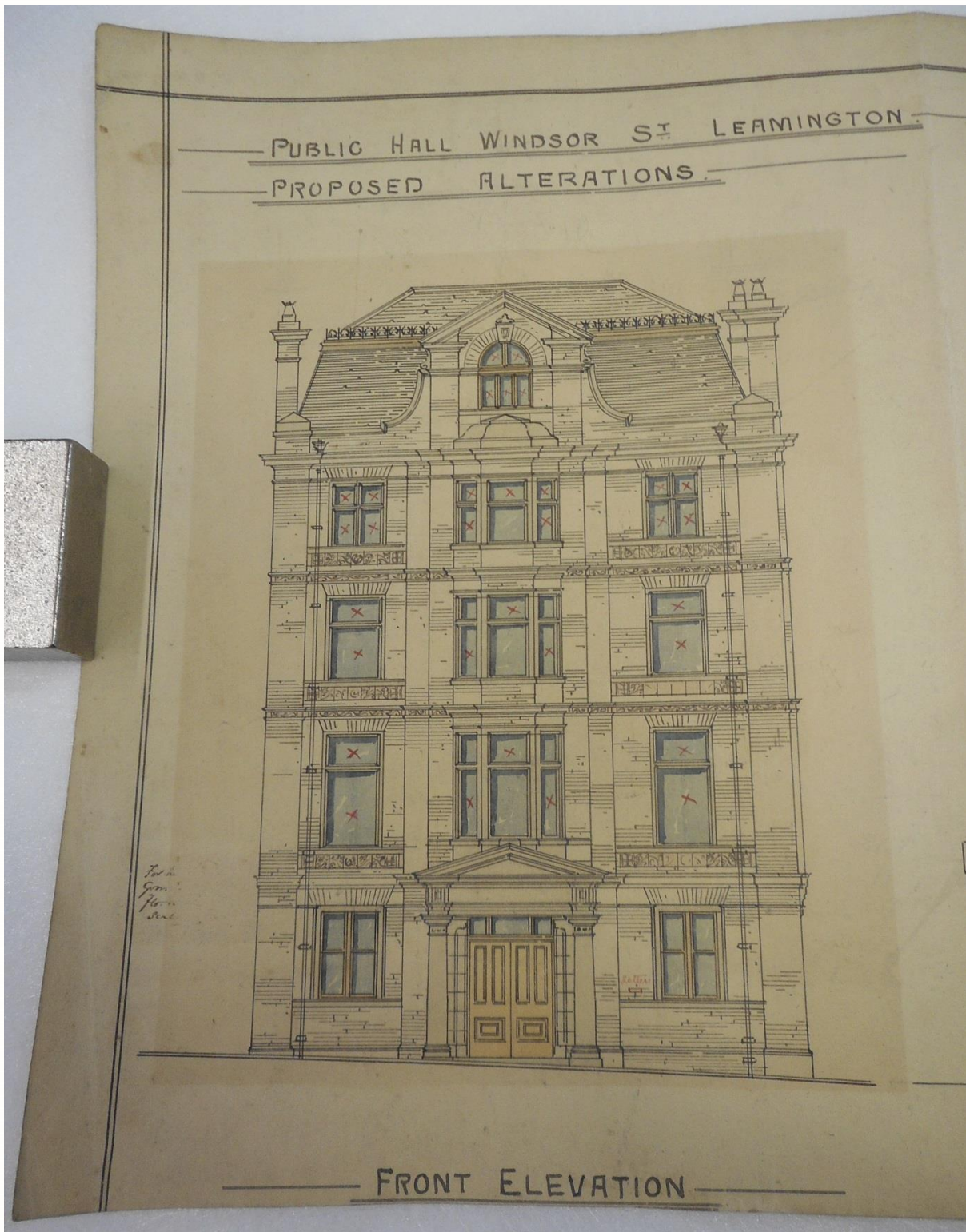
The plan shown here is particularly interesting because it seems that at one time or another, a former owner took advantage of its beauty by putting it in a frame on display. The side elevation of the plan is folded back, and there is discolouring of the front image indicating that it was enclosed in a frame and exposed to light. Intriguingly, on closer inspection it is clear that annotations have been removed or covered on the plan, leaving it pristine in a frame. However, from the perspective of

⁶ W.G. Gibbons, "Leamington: From Humble Village to Splendid Spa 1800-1850." *The Semele* (1979-1985): 68

⁷ See CR 2487/Z3132 Warwickshire County Record Office

a local historian this is an awful shame because it obscures the architect's notes from the plan.





Discolouration indicates that the Front Elevation was once framed for display.
Warwickshire County Record Office CR634/9/10.