

## THE VICTORIA HALL AND FREE LIBRARY

From the writings of Joseph Dempsey Doyle, 1954

The donors of the Library had great difficulty in getting the local authority interested in the building and had assumed that their gift would be well received by both the Council and Lord Howard, the Landowner. They had engaged a firm of architects and had plans drawn up and estimates made before the site for the new building was agreed.

The plans and estimates of construction came to nearly £1,000 more than the original amount donated and, as no money was promised by the Council, they each raised their offer to £2,500.

The original site chosen was opposite the Market Ground but at this time the Glossop Brook still ran in the open across the south side of the Market Ground, Victoria Bridge was not yet widened as it is today and the pavements were very narrow, as was the roadway.

All these improvements to access and public safety would have to be made before building could begin and the foundations would cost an additional £1,000. Another cause for concern was that the users of the free library and the people at evening classes would be disturbed by the noise of the market and the fairs and 'Wakes' on the market ground over the brook.

These improvements were made by Lord Howard only after the eventual site for the Library and Hall was settled.

They never thought of having the noisemaking events moved as all these were valuable rent providers for Lord Howard who still owned the Town Hall, Market and Market Ground at the time.

The next site considered was at the top of Ellison Street on part of the old Glossop cricket ground behind the site of King Edward Avenue. It was close to a main road, not far from the town centre and the station. When this proposal was put before Lord Howard by Francis Hawke, his Agent, he refused to consider it as he wished to keep land to the east of Norfolk Street, and in view from the Hall, clear.

The Agent suggested that a site on Howard Street might be convenient but the closeness of the railway station and goods yards would be noisy and very smoky.

Finally a triangular site on Talbot Street was suggested, but this was rejected by the donors, and only at this point did the Council show any concern, particularly when Councillor Rhodes complained that Hawke wished them to build in a back street and if there was any future problem over the suitability of the site they wanted the blame to fall on the correct people.

Rhodes and Partington announced that if they could not have their chosen site they would reduce their offer to the original £4,000 and left the matter to the Town Council who appointed a deputation to meet Lord Howard. The final situation was that the Council was offered a building which they could not afford to build, on a site that suited nobody except Lord Howard, but rather than have nothing the Council agreed.

From this point there was a rush to get the foundations dug and walls in place so that the commemorative stones could be laid on the same day, Queen Victoria's Jubilee, as the Public

Baths and Hospital by the Wood family. Neither the Council nor any individual member would sign the contract for the library and so it was left to Councillor Partington to sign it alone. As the donation was now £1,000 less the plans were altered and only two entrances were provided instead of four and costs rose by over £700 to meet the price of deep foundations and raised architects' fees.

Other cost cutting measures soon deleted decorative masonry features, reduced the height of the tower and substituted cheaper slates and hall floorboards, but then to retain the quality of the build, an extra £350 was found to keep to the plan.

When the final bill, excluding furniture, came to £5,200 Partington found himself liable for the balance. He went to the Council and announced the situation he was in and suggested that, if the town ratepayers would adopt the 1855 Public Libraries Act, a penny rate could go towards running the building. Other than this he said, the council would have to find some way of making the building useful.

Much local controversy ensued and in a packed Town Hall meeting, Councillor Rhodes stated that if they did not adopt the Libraries Act there would be an awkward situation since the donors did not want a 'white elephant' on their hands and since the Council had not signed the contract the building would belong to Councillor Partington, not the public.

The Libraries Act was adopted but 'the Vic' has had a troubled history ever since.

The final words of Joseph Dempsey Doyle, writing in the Glossop Chronicle and the 'Co-operative Home' Magazine nearly 60 years ago, in 1954, are here in full:-

"The Remedy?

The only solution that would give Glossop an assembly hall and ancillary accommodation suitable to need appears to be the reconstruction and redesigning of the Town Hall and Market and with the present rating and prospective rating such a proposal is out of the question. We must manage with 'the Vic' as it is: a building like the Vic today would probably cost something like £30,000. The donors meant well: did as good a job as circumstances permitted and they deserve to be remembered and honoured."