'DEWSBURY MATTERS'

in conjunction with Kirklees Heritage

Present a Tour of the Town Hall
As part of Heritage Weekend ‘99
This booklet has been written to assist the guided tour of the Town Hall Buildings as part of the Heritage Open Weekend '99.

This is a 'Dewsbury Matters' publication.
'Dewsbury Matters' is a new local group formed in the last year to create an interest in the Town's history and development through the ages. This is the fourth event in the last year, and other events are planned during the oncoming months, all within the Dewsbury area.

Our aim is to arrange stimulating visits and talks which cover broad aspects of interest in the social and environmental development of the town.

If you have enjoyed this visit and found this publication interesting and informative, and feel that you would like to know more about the group and other future events, then call me, Stuart Hartley on 01924 456810 or John Disken on 01924 464101

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DEWSBURY TOWN HALL AND THE SURROUNDING AREA

To write about the Town Hall in isolation from the town would be very difficult, without putting it into context with the surrounding area would not express its importance to the town and townspeople. Factors that affect the construction of most buildings, in this case the Town Hall, are invariably mixes of social, economic and physical considerations. That is why this history of the Town Hall takes into account what happened in the surrounding area, it relates to the history and development of Dewsbury as a town, and later as County Borough status integrating the development of the Corporation and the Town Hall.

Dewsbury had grown into a large town as a result of these various social and economic factors; probably the most influential was the development of the ‘shoddy’ trade as early as 1813. By the 1870’s the triangle formed by Dewsbury, Batley and Heckmondwike was handling over 70% of the world’s shoddy trade. The towns’ population grew rapidly from the latter part of the nineteenth century. Furthermore the creation of the huge railway network destined to cover most of the country over the ensuing years had begun to take hold in Dewsbury, and by 1880 Dewsbury boasted four railway stations. Three were mainline ‘through’ stations and one a terminus, it was this terminus on the Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway which stood majestically on the site to the front of where the Town Hall was destined to be built some twenty years later. Early twentieth century images of the centre of Dewsbury (see page 19) often show both buildings, and no doubt the layman would say that the railway building dominates the Town Hall, it may do so, but the railway came first.

A plan of the rail links in area in 1880, also showing population increases
The Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway station building was built along the line of Dewsbury Beck that flowed from the general direction of Crackenedge Lane. Prior to 1865 this watercourse was in excess of twenty feet wide at this point, and acted as an open sewer for all that could be discharged into it. This meant that the whole area was permeated by all the foul smells that the beck could muster as it collected all its waste products en-route from the Morley border. It was not a pretty site to behold. Fortunately the beck was culverted to allow the building of the station over the top of it. This operation hid the offending beck and controlled the stench from within. Incidentally on Crackenedge Lane this very same polluted beck had mill ‘races’ running below the mills, (see the 1851 Ordnance sheet) in order to turn the water wheels for power as well as turning the mill grindstones, several of these grindstones were in the ‘Town Flour Mill’! The beck still follows the same line today, albeit in a much larger diameter culvert laid some twenty years ago, and no longer acts a foul sewer, it is now intended to remove rainwater from the area.

Part of the centre of Dewsbury taken from the 1851 Ordnance Survey Sheet
In 1862 through the 'Incorporation Enquiry' Dewsbury had been designated a Borough Council with increased Local Government status. Prior to this date meetings of the Town Council were held in premises near the top of Bond Street on the north side, these offices were too small as the business of the Council grew. At a Committee meeting on the 30th September 1885 they reported that the accommodation was inadequate in floor are and inconvenient for the transaction of business, therefore the need for a new civic building became necessary. At a sub-committee meeting on the 30th January 1885 a move was made, and it was decided that the County Borough needed a fine new building from which to conduct its affairs, a building of importance and character. Councillor James Austin expressed a strong desire to add extra accommodation below the Town Hall to be used as an exchange where merchants could congregate. The room to be well lit with the newest system of lighting, electricity to be generated in an engine room. This became the 'Exchange Hall', and is still called that today.
The Town Hall was built during the reign of Queen Victoria, completed in 1889 to the plans of Holtom and Fox, a local firm of architects from within the town. The new Town Hall would be designed specifically for this purpose. It would cater for the towns' needs for the many civic offices such as town clerk, schools, highways, lighting, sewerage, rating, town planning, police and courts, mayoral proceedings etc., all these and other departments were to be housed in the Town Hall.

The site chosen was elevated and overlooking what was, and still is called the 'Market Place'. This was one of the sites of the actual market trader's stalls; this is the open area to the west of the Town Hall, currently the pedestrianised area facing the front of the Town Hall. In the mid 1880's this was the most energetic part of the town, the area was a hive of activity with the townspeople and traders doing business. The area was cobbled with a shelter in the centre, this was known as the 'Cabman's Shelter'. It served as a pick-up point when the old horse drawn carriages operated from here. However, this was originally built not for the benefit of the cabmen, but for the market traders who operated from within the square. In these hard times robberies were commonplace, but the security of the shelter allowed them to count their daily takings in the relative safety.

View of the 'Cabman's Shelter' in the Market Place

The new Town Hall would be sited near to, and overlooking this bustling centre of activity. The location was a difficult triangular sloping site, previously covered with a series of dilapidated old buildings housing various businesses. Here once stood the Albion Hotel, a well known hostelry whose landlord was Edward Hemmingway.
There was several other buildings of inferior character consisting of a beer house called The Cross Keys, Wheatley's Butchers, and adjoining was a 'Florist and Seedsmans' shop established in 1878, by the proprietor Mr. W. Ballance. Evidence shows that in 1886:-

'..........the Corporation requiring the place, he moved to his very central position at 27, Market Place, a roomy and convenient shop, with large plate glass window, offering excellent facilities for display, whilst there is a large and commodious warehouse behind..........'

The East end of The Market Place prior to the Town Hall being built

A closer view taken of the buildings prior to demolition in the mid 1880's
A Hussar (dress of the Crimean War) posing outside the Albion Hotel, circa 1883
All these properties were purchased by the Council to make way for the new building. They were sited approximately where the Wakefield Road entrance to the Town Hall is now, and faced the site of the former Manor House built in the 17th century. The manor house gave its name to Manor Street, and was home to the Lords of the Manor of Dewsbury. It was a very ordinary looking building, its only architectural merit were some coffered plaster ceilings to the ground floor reception rooms. It was vacated at the turn of the century and finally acquired as the site for a new theatre, it was demolished around 1906.

View of the Manor House just prior to demolition, taken in 1905

The relatively short-lived Empire Palace Theatre followed this. A palatial building erected by Messrs G W & G E Smith of Leeds at a cost of over £20,000. This opened in 1909 but to the dismay of many of the townsfolk it closed in 1955, a mere 46 years for such a splendid building.

The Empire Theatre as townspeople would remember it

Looking back this was a tragic loss to the people of Dewsbury and now in its place stands the insipid, out of character, 1960's concrete office block known as 'Empire House'. Had the Empire had the greater support of the local community and the owner more confidence in its future, it may still be standing there today. Dewsbury people mourned its loss, but failed to support the theatre in its hour of need. This was
1955, and there was no Planning legislation which could have preserved it for future generations. It was only in the latter 1960's that such protection could have been offered, sadly too late. The Empire only need have survived another decade and it would be there today. The theatre would undoubtedly have been the subject of a preservation order, this would have designated it as a 'Listed Building' of historical interest. Dewsbury would have still had its own Empire Palace Theatre.

The sad demise of the Empire Theatre during the week after its closure in 1955

The main entrance to the Town Hall is situated where once stood the 'Shoeing Forge and General Smith, Wheelwright etc.', belonging to Mr Craven Spivey, as well as a large timber yard. The back yards of these premises faced the lines and yards of the towns' terminus of the 'Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway'. Spivey's forge was established around 1870, and was the oldest and largest of the kind in Dewsbury. However, to allow the clearance of the site he had to move opposite, to new premises in Manor Road, at the time a description of the business was described thus:

'...........within easy reach of both town centre railway stations, the Town Hall and market place, and are of an extensive character, well equipped for all the purposes of a large and still increasing business.........
The staff is large, and consists entirely of men who have been selected for their special skill and knowledge of the business..........

Mr. Spivey has devoted a lifetime to the study of farriery and the formation of the horse's hoof..............

In a county where the roads are chiefly of stone this is obviously a matter of first class importance. In addition to working for the leading business firms and private residences in the town, Mr Spivey has shoeing contracts with the railway companies which serve this busy and important centre..........

There is also in connection with the business a wheelwright's department, the vehicles turned out are mainly intended for business purposes, and drays, carts, wagons etc., are built on order or from drawings supplied.

Photographs of Alderman G A Fox and Mr Craven Spivey, the Blacksmith

The plans for the Town Hall, or more correctly known as 'New Municipal Offices, Courthouse and Police Station' were drawn up by Holtom and Fox in 1885. Once the Corporation had decided on the appointment of the architects, Mr Henry Holtom had to resign his seat as Alderman of the Borough. They were instructed by the Corporation to prepare plans for a building which was not to cost more than £30,000. This he did and they were examined by the Committee, and the Council, with special reference to accommodation needed, and when tenders were invited it was felt that the plans had been well thought out. The design pulls together a large and varying number of different spatial requirements into a classical style building. The building was quite spectacular; it was modelled on Leeds Town Hall, and even today retains its original style through some very careful restoration work. The firm of architects and surveyors was a well established Dewsbury practice, dating from 1865, situated in extensive, well appointed offices in Westgate, the original practice was established in Market Place by partners William Holtom and William Bulmer. This partnership was dissolved in 1870, upon which Mr T W Conn joined the firm, on his retirement in 1883 a certain G A Fox, son of a Batley shoddy merchant joined the firm. Fox had
served his apprenticeship as a surveyor with the prominent North Eastern Railway Company based in Darlington, then assistant surveyor at Ulverston and finally County Surveyor in Carnarvon. He became a partner in the firm when Holtom and Connorn split up, and by 1890 was its proprietor. Holtom left the firm and entered into public life, he became a JP for the Borough and in 1884 achieved the position of Mayor of Dewsbury.

Fox was also responsible for the design of the nearby Morley Town Hall, completed in 1894, along with public buildings and council offices in Burnley, Nelson, Barrow and Swansea. He also completed Wesleyan Chapels at Thornhill, Batley, Ossett and Middlesbrough plus several other local buildings. Fox rapidly became a very well known and respected local businessman, resulting in his election to the Dewsbury Council just over a hundred years ago in 1893. He was the member for St John's Ward, and became Mayor of the Borough only a year later in 1894-95, such was his local standing and popularity. He was later made an Alderman of the Borough with a unanimous vote.

After the campaign for the incorporation of the Borough of Dewsbury between 1857 and 1861, the first Mayor of Dewsbury was Dr. George Fearnley. Of course he would never have held office in the Town Hall, it was built over twenty years later. Below is a picture of him with all the new Dewsbury County Borough mayoral regalia.

![Dr. George Fearnley during his term as the first Mayor of Dewsbury in 1862](image)

The foundation stone was laid at 2.30 p.m. on the 12th day of October 1886. According to the Dewsbury Reporter "A day as it proved was rich with rain, and the foundation stone was laid amid great public rejoicing by the mayor Thomas Bateman Fox JP., and afterwards gave a luncheon in the Masonic Hall. There was a general holiday, universal decorations, a procession, bands of music illuminations etc. In the evening the Mayor and his good wife held a reception in the Industrial Hall".
The formal invitation to the laying of the foundation stone, October 12th 1886

The main contractors for the construction of the Town Hall were Messrs Chadwick & Sons of Staincliffe, at a cost of £25,500. According to the Dewsbury Reporter, September 21st 1889:-

The firm was an old respected business who had carried out some important local works, the last being the Queen Victoria Jubilee Board School in Wellington Road. Messrs Chadwicks regularly employ a Great number of artisans, chiefly joiners and masons, but also engineers and other ironworkers under the management of Mr Henry Simpson, and it is a source of pride to them that the workmen trained at the works, and their own apprentices, have done their best of the admirable woodwork that adorns the interior indoors, windows, and wainscoting, to say nothing of the carpentry in the construction of the pile of buildings.

Rent received from School Board, Waterworks Board, and Chamber of Commerce would be at least £55 per annum !

Just over three years later the Town Hall was officially opened at 11.30am on Tuesday 17th of September 1889 by the Mayor of the time, Alderman John Walker J.P. of Lees House, Dewsbury.

The opening day was declared a general holiday in the town, and created much pomp and ritual, with all the local notables attending the function, there were also several brass bands playing music to accompany the opening formalities. Several ceremonies took place during the day to allow the many guests to attend the opening function. There were several variations of tickets and invites sent to all the various dignitaries. The main event was 'A Grand Procession' assembling in Savile Town at 12.30-p.m. marching through the Borough to the new park known as 'Crow Nest'. From here Head Marshal William Frederic Fox followed a route through the town streets into the Market Place, terminating in front of the impressive new Town Hall. The guests, visitors and spectators in the Town Hall were all seated in the magnificent Victoria Hall, designed to accommodate over 1500 people, there were other halls such as the Exchange Hall, the Council Chambers and Mayor's reception rooms.
The Corporation of Dewsbury
request the honour of the Company of

AT THE OPENING OF THE NEW TOWN HALL,
BY THE RIGHT WORSHIPFUL THE MAYOR, (JOHN WALKER ESQ.)
ON THE 17TH OF SEPTEMBER, 1889.
AT NOON.

An early reply addressed to the Town Clerk is requested.

Examples of the tickets issued to the Various Officials
The list of Officials and Dignitaries attending the Opening Ceremony
The total expenditure was in excess of £40,000, displayed in the front entrance are brass plaques commemorating names of many of the benefactors, one of which was Sir Mark Oldroyd. It was originally suggested that the citizens of the town could add to the Town Hall's beauty by making gifts to it. This idea was mooted by Sir Mark Oldroyd, a local businessman and MP, who lead the way by donating the expensive clock, great bell and chimes for the tower, at a cost of nearly £1,000.

A further group of local benefactors provided the money for a large proportion of the stained glass windows, these were Alderman John Wormald JP., Mr Charles H
Marriott JP., then Lord of the Manor, The Chamber of Commerce along with The Dewsbury and District Tradesmen’s Association. These are referred to in the Planning Department’s ‘Listed Building’ description as they are outlined in the document. This describes the building thus :-

The main frontage is three storeys high and five bays wide, the outer bays being rounded and crowned by double pavilion roofs. The centre bay is framed with a pedimented Corinthian order supporting the clock tower and cupola. The front of the building gains additional height due to the slope below the first floor level and the very wide splayed stone steps leading up to the main entrance, this with its massive decorated wrought iron gates and fan screen in the projecting porch. Two arched doors, side by side, with polished brass locks, panels and handles lead into the entrance foyer, this has an ornate mosaic tiled floor. Opposite are the doors leading into the impressive Victoria Hall.

The stained glass windows within the Town Hall are fine specimens of the glass stainer’s art. On the right of the doors into the Victoria Hall are two superb windows. The first one is a window depicting various aspects of Dewsbury's trade, shopping, textiles, electrical goods and the market. The background is a detailed street map of the town’s centre as it was in the fifties, this window was unveiled on May 1st 1952. The former window, which was donated by Dewsbury and District Tradesmen’s Association (now The Chamber of Trade) was destroyed as a result of enemy action in 1940 during the second world war, this also depicted trade and showed the various devices used in the trades carried out within the town.

The second window shows the coats of arms of the various Lords of the Manor of Dewsbury dating back to Edward the Confessor in 1058, up to Jeremiah Marriott and his son in the 19th century. Mr Charles H Marriott JP, then Lord of the Manor of Dewsbury provided the finance for this very informative window. Messrs Winfield’s Ltd. of Birmingham, eminent manufacturers of stained glass, made the windows in 1889 specifically for the new Town Hall. Several of the coats of arms on this window can also be seen on windows in the nearby Minster, formerly the Parish Church. The families shown on the window are:-

Edward the Confessor, Azure, a cross fleurie between five Martlets.
Edward had a manor in Dewsbury.

William the Conqueror, Gules, two Lions passant guardant in pale, or.
The manor was in possession of William the Conqueror,
whose three successors bore the same coat of arms.

The Earls of Warren(ne), Cheeky and azure, William Rufus granted
the manor to the Earl of Warren. The first evidence of ownership
is a grant, without a date, by William Earl of Warren of the Church
of Dewsbury, to the Priory of Lewes in Sussex. This was founded by
The first earl in 1077, he died in 1121 when Ralph, Archbishop of
Canterbury confirmed the Priory and all its possessions, including
many Yorkshire Churches.
Gilbert-le-Despenser, Quarterly 1 & 4 argent, 2 & 3 gules pretty or, on all a bend sable. Gilbert disposed of the ‘advowson’ of Dewsbury to Edward III, in the 22nd year of the King’s reign. (advowson : right of presentation to benefice) (benefice : material livelihood of incumbent of a parish, rectory or vicarage)

Edward the Third, France and England quarterly, 1 & 4 France ancient azure, semee de-lys or, 2 & 3 England, gules, 3 lions passant, gardant in pale, or.

Henry the Eighth, 1 & 4 France modern, that is, azure, 3 fluer-dy-lys or, 2 & 3 England, 3 Lions passant, gardant in pale, or. On the suppression of the monasteries, the Rectory Manor of Dewsbury became vested in Henry VIII.

James the First, Quarterly 1 & 4 Grand quarters: France modern and England quarterly; second grand quarter; Scotland. Third Grand quarter; Ireland. James I granted the Rectory Manor to Vernon and Naylor, as trustees of Sir George Savile.

The Savile’s, Argent on a bend sable, three owls on the first.

Peebles, Argent on a chevron engravled sable, between three poppinjays or Parrots, verte a cinquefoil. John Peebles, called the Devil of Dewsbury, bought the Rectory Manor House from Thos. Savile in 1672, and from him it passed onto his daughter Elizabeth, Wife of the Rev. Joseph Richardson.

The Richardson’s, Sable on chief argent, three Lions heads, erased of the field. Wm. Westbrook Richardson, in 1792, sold the manor to a Charles Steer, who in the same year resold to Richard Milnes, who became bankrupt, and in 1799 his assignees sold the manor to John Carr of Wakefield.

The Carr’s, Per pale gules and azure, on a chevron embattled Argent, three estoiles argent. In 1874, Mr Jeremiah Marriott of Dewsbury, the father of the present owner, bought the manor from Messrs John Francis Carr and Robert Carr.

The Marriot’s, Barry of six, or, and sable. Crest – A talbot passant sa. Collared and chained, or. Motto Virtute et Fide.

All the heraldry terms are of old English origin, and without expert knowledge of the translation it is very difficult to understand, there are the types of shield, colours, ornamentation and divisions.

On the next page there is a comprehensive synopsis of the terms used.
MARSHALLING: 1. Impalement. 2. Quartering. 3. Dimidiation. 4. In pretence.


Glossary of all the heraldic terms
As you slowly ascend the imposing staircase, look up and you will see the glazed atrium and imposing ornately decorated ceiling. On the right there is a large trifoliate window, i.e. three adjacent windows forming the whole picture, this was by courtesy of Alderman John Wormald JP. This depicts St Paulinus preaching Christianity to the heathens on the bank of the river Calder in 627 AD. The side panels show King Edwin and Queen Ethelburga who were among the first converts to the Christian Faith. Edwin was baptised in York on Easter Day 627. The window bears the crest and arms of the Wormalds. Beneath the heraldry, above the group of Britons listening to the great missionary, is the Borough Seal of Dewsbury. The window also shows the 'Wheel Cross' associated with St Paulinus; the chequered shield of the Warren family and the fleece which was the symbol of the thriving woollen industry in Dewsbury.

At the top of the stairs, to the right hand side of the balcony doors are a pair of elegant stained glass windows, donated by The Chamber of Commerce, both dating from 1889. The first depicting the early woollen industry, shows a female figure holding a distaff spindle and whorl, both were implements used in hand spinning. She is shown standing by the side of a bale of cloth and a roll of blankets, again depicting the wealth that Dewsbury was founded upon. It bears the figure commerce, both this and the previous one were designed by Mr Lawrence Scott, landscape and portrait painter formerly of Dewsbury, now of London.

The next window further to the right depicts science, again a female figure surrounded by scientific apparatus, a prism, a telescope, dividers, globe and scroll. The lower part of this window shows a scene of Dunford Bridge reservoir near Huddersfield, for many years the main source of the towns drinking water supply. This very decorative window was designed and made by Powell Bros. of Leeds, there is an inscription dedicated to a local dignitary who was obviously a very busy individual, it reads:-

John Tweedale.
Originator of the Dewsbury and Heckmondwike Water Works.
Chairman of the Dewsbury Local Board of Health 1851-1861.
Chairman of the Water Works Board 1856-1861.
Mayor of Dewsbury 1864-1865.

View of The Market Place showing the imposing Town Hall, around 1910
The inclusion of a Borough Police Court within the Town Hall was essential, this was due to the fact that The Royal Hotel, at the junction of Manor Road and Wakefield Road (the present site of Barclays Bank) used to house the Dewsbury Courtroom on the first floor. When the Hotel moved premises this left a need for new courtroom facilities. Unfortunately there are no photographs in existence of this hotel, which was demolished in the late 19th century. It held a major position in the life of Dewsbury. It was more than just the hotel, it combined extensive livery stables to the rear of the premises on Manor Road, along with the courtroom as already mentioned. The adjoining stables provided overnight staging accommodation, food and water for the teams of horses which drew the coaches on the routes from the north of England to London and the south. The hotel provided food and a bed for the travellers who were fortunate enough to afford it. The Royal Hotel then moved from this site to the west end of the Market Place, on the redevelopment site which was formerly occupied by The Crown and Cushion Inn until 1851, and had now become Dewsbury's premiere hotel and noted meeting place of the eminent and distinguished. By the year 1895, according to the Dewsbury Gazette, it was known as The Royal Commercial and Family Hotel, Market Place, proprietor Mr. J C Schofield and managed by Mr R A Mackay, and was described thus:-

".........having been restored and re-built in order to bring it into line with the tastes and requirements of modern life,.........this hotel, a handsome structure of Yorkshire stone, is one of the largest in the district,.........within three minutes walk of any of the three main railway stations and close to the principal business centres of the town....."
The building still exists in the shape of Lloyds Bank, formerly Barclays Bank premises, albeit today a reduced version. At the end of the last century the four storey hotel premises had a facade of five bays. The top three floors were all bedroom accommodation, the ground floor being the main working part of the hotel and reception rooms, we now see a building three storeys high, the upper on having been removed and re-roofed, but the biggest difference is in the width. The two right hand side bays have now disappeared, and in place is what was formerly the entrance to the cinema which used to occupy the adjoining site.

Once the Royal Hotel had been demolished and the site cleared, new development took place, and it was in the form of a banking company, just as it is today, in fact the very same building. The first establishment on this site was The West Riding Union Banking Company Limited, whose head-quarters were in nearby Huddersfield, although in reality it originated in Mirfield in 1811, and was initially known as The Mirfield & West Riding Union Bank. The present Company was formed in 1836, moved into these premises in the 1870's and some twenty years later in 1895, the manager was George H Burras Esq.

An account of the bank as appeared in The Dewsbury gazette of 1895
The wealth generated within the textile industry meant that the bank flourished in this period of ever increasing prosperity in the West Riding of Yorkshire. The architectural style of the bank reflected this, it is built in a Renaissance Palazzo style, coursed local ashlar stone, with square edged filigree decorated quoin stones. Vousoirs adorn the window arches decorated alternately with the heads of St George and Britannia below a heavily projecting cornice and string-course. There is one 'Ram's Head' over the original corner entrance to the bank, this signified the prosperity upon which the bank was founded, the wool trade. The bank has remained there ever since, although the names have changed somewhat. It was the Lancashire and Yorkshire Bank at the turn of the century, Martins Bank took over the concern in 1930 until Barclays Bank took over Martins in the late 1960's and still remains today as Barclays.

Apart from the earlier change to the entrance, the only other major external changes to this building took place when Barclays undertook a refurbishment programme in the mid 1960's. The building was stripped of its magnificent stone balustrades to the roof and second floor window balconies. Despite this 'vandalism' it was listed by the department of the Environment, ironically the local Planning Authority could have prevented this damage if they had have had the courage to apply a 'Building Preservation Order' in advance of its listing. What we have to remind ourselves of the fact that in this period of the 1960's, the 'ordinary man in the street' did not give a damn about any kind of preservation, probably did not even know what the word meant. It was now the fashion to get rid of the old and replace with the new, and the wholesale destruction of town and city centres was now taking place at vast rate throughout the whole of the UK. Dewsbury was rather fortunate in this not happening on a very large scale.

However, some 110 years almost to the day since the Town hall opened it still stands majestically overlooking the old Market Place, it has certainly stood the test of time.
ROYAL VISITS TO DEWSBURY AND THE TOWN HALL

Several royal visits have taken place over the years, a few are highlighted below.

July 10th 1912 King George V and Queen Mary, note the motorcade of cars to the front of the Town Hall, this was part of a visit to the West Riding.
May 30th 1918, King George V and Queen Mary are greeted on the Town Hall steps by the Mayor, Alderman Walter France.
THE TOWN HALL IN MORE RECENT TIMES

The Town Hall has featured in many newsworthy items over the years. Its situation at the conversion of the two steep hills from Leeds and Wakefield meant that large vehicles often lost control and careered down either of the cuttings and embedding themselves in the side of the Town Hall. In the 1950’s a large grassed mound was constructed to help protect the building from such ‘runaways’, it went some way to helping the problem, but still failed to stop the most serious threat to the town centre. On a Friday afternoon in July 1967 a road-tanker containing a highly inflammable liquid gas hurtled down Leeds Road, hit the mound causing it leave the road and crashed sideways into the Wakefield Road entrance to the Town Hall. This caused the whole vehicle to embed itself into the building. This accident created the greatest threat of destruction to Dewsbury in its history, had it exploded, the amount of explosive gas would have been sufficient to have destroyed a substantial part of the town centre.

This was an accident which was in 1915, a Bentley’s Brewery waggon crashed into the Town Hall losing its load of 21 barrels of beer and killed a passenger.
DEWSBURY HITS THE HEADLINES FOR THE WRONG REASON

More recently, one winter evening in 1981, pictures of the Town Hall were flashed all around the globe via the world’s newsreels.

Peter Sutcliffe, known as ‘The Yorkshire Ripper’ had committed murders in West Yorkshire from as far back as 1975 in Chapeltown, Leeds. Sixteen years later he was apprehended, in Sheffield on January 2nd 1981, This related to an offence the Mirfield area, and was brought to Dewsbury Police Station where he was arrested for a vehicle number plate irregularity on his car. The first announcement that a man had been arrested in connection with the Yorkshire murders came on Sunday evening at 9.00pm., reporters had been hastily called to a press conference at Dewsbury Police Station. He stayed until his appearance at Dewsbury Magistrates Court at 4.00pm on Monday 5th of January. A crowd of around 1,500 people braved the bitter cold snow flurries to hoping to catch sight of Sutcliffe. Over 100 press filled the wood-panelled ‘Number One’ courtroom.

The Clerk to the Magistrates, Mr Dean Gardner read two charges to Sutcliffe. One, that between 16th and 18th of November 1980, at Leeds he murdered Jacqueline Hill. Two, that between 13th of November and January 2nd he stole two motor vehicle registration plates to a total value of 50p, the property of Mr Cyril Balmforth of Cooper Bridge Spares, Wakefield Road, Mirfield. Mr Maurice Shaffer, County Prosecuting Solicitor informed Magistrates that Sutcliffe was not legally represented. The whole hearing only lasted seven minutes, after which Sutcliffe was remanded in custody for eight days. On his departure from the Court the crowd hurled insults and abuse at him.

Eventually he was sentenced to life imprisonment on the 22nd of May 1981 for the murder of thirteen women, and attempting to murder seven others.

Tight security as the crowd assembled to watch the arrival of Peter Sutcliffe at Dewsbury Magistrates Court on May 5th 1981
The Dewsbury Coat of Arms granted in 1893.
Translation is 'God is our Refuge and Strength'
The chequers represent the Warrene Family, Earls of Surrey.
He was also Lord of the Manor of Dewsbury.
The owls and crosses derive from the arms of the Savile and Copley families.