

# Town hall reaches 160-year anniversary milestone

ALSTON town hall, which was built on land donated by Greenwich Hospital in the old vicarage garden, this year passes its 160th anniversary milestone.

The cost of the building was covered by £2,000, raised by public subscription, with a further £640 for the savings bank which was paid for from bank funds.

It was designed in a gothic style by architect A. B. Higham, of Wakefield, and work began on 10th June, 1857.

The foundation stone was laid by Hugh Lee Pattinson FRS (the famous chemist who was born in Alston in 1796), on 15th July, along with a bottle containing artefacts and details of the committee.

The stone has long since been "lost" with numerous attempts to find it proving fruitless.

The ground floor held the Literary and Mechanics' Institute Library, a reading and newsroom, a boardroom for the Poor Law Guardians as well as the registrar's and later district council offices, while upstairs was a

**STANDING TEST OF TIME: The town hall and (inset) the workings of its distinctive clock.**



spacious public hall capable of holding up to 400 people.

This was used for a variety of purposes including meetings, concerts and county court sessions.

The annex on the east held the savings bank and a dwelling house. A public holiday was declared for the opening

ceremony on 27th December, 1858.

In 1859 there was the addition of a rather special clock thanks to Mr. Pattinson who had proposed (at an estimated cost of £300) a "handsome clock tower and to furnish it with a good clock that will strike the hours and chime the

quarters on two bell with three illuminated glass dials".

The clock has been described as "a hidden gem" as it is one of only a few three-train pagoda framed clocks in the country and one of the earliest Cooke clocks with his single five-legged gravity escapement.

The company went on to use this as the escapement of choice for a buyer wanting a top specification. The clock (wound by hand) has not worked for the last couple of years but the Friends of the Town Hall hope to remedy this in time to celebrate the 160th anniversary of the clock.

More information on and photographs of the clock can be seen in the latest book from Steve and Darlah Thomas, *The Turret Clocks of T. Cooke and Sons of York*, which will be available as a reference copy in the library shortly (donated by the Friends of the Town Hall).

The clock was supplied by the well-known clockmakers T. Cooke & Sons who described it as "an eight-day clock, striking the hours on a bell of 5cwt, and the

quarters on two bell with three illuminated glass dials".

again to public fundraising and grants the building reopened in the late 1990s. The savings bank and dwelling may have gone but the ground floor now houses the Local Links Centre run by Eden District Council and comprises a tourist information centre offering both county and district council services. In 2008 this was boosted by the return of the library.

There is currently an exhibition, "Alston Moor Remembers 1914-1918", raising funds for the upkeep of the war memorials.

There are a number of small offices available to rent as well as the main hall. Although now able to hold only a fraction of the number of events it used to, the hall is still used for concerts and pantomimes. In recent years the Friends of the Town Hall have shown the wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton as well as England, World and European cup football matches to raise funds for its upkeep.