

George Stephenson Memorial Hall

Derbyshire Times Saturday 22nd August 1857

The Derbyshire Times asserts that, as was said the previous week in the D.T., that the majority of people in Chesterfield and neighbourhood want to, and will, erect a monument, or statue, to honour George Stephenson. The only regret is that it hasn't happened sooner.

"It has all been for the want of a starter that the machinery has not set going, but once the steam is generated and the fly-wheel of action is started, depend upon it, the mechanism of committees and subscribers, like well-constructed cog-wheels, will work harmoniously. We have, in proposing the memorial, only lighted the fuel already piled at our hands, and when we saw the smoke we knew too well that the blaze was coming, and that the public feeling was aroused."

Although there was talk, little else happened for nearly 15 years.

In 1873 the council of the Society of Engineers, the Mechanic's Institute and the Technical Educational Classes joined forces to find a building in Chesterfield where they could have a home base.

Chesterfield was in need of a building to accommodate the Mechanic's Institute, a Science and Art Class, a scheme extending university education to people, the Chesterfield and Derbyshire Institute of Mining, the Civil and Mechanical Engineers, a museum, a library, lecture rooms, a small laboratory and a public hall.

A Sites Committee was appointed to select the best position for the building. Ultimately they selected the site where it is now but, prior to this, the Bowling green and the Municipal Hall had been mentioned.

On the 19th April 1873 it was proposed in a letter that the difficulty in raising funds towards the building would be obviated if the Corporation would give the land; and the site should be the Bowling Green or the Municipal Hall.

On the 1st May 1873 the Chesterfield Town Council met to discuss the issue. The Corporation resolved that the gentlemen interested in the scheme should furnish a definite plan. The different Committees met with the Committee of the Town Council in December 1873 where the Council agreed to grant the site at a nominal rental and, in February 1874, the offer was accepted and plans were advertised for. The issue of subscriptions towards the building was not pressed in 1873 as there had been a new wing of the Chesterfield Hospital built, even though there had been good subscriptions promised.

The Derbyshire Times of 10th October 1874 reported that at the meeting of the Chesterfield and Derbyshire Institute of Engineers there was promised subscriptions of £3,200, and that was without 'pressing' people.

The Derbyshire Times Saturday 4th December 1875

There was to be a public meeting on the 9th December at the Market Hall at 2pm. The topic would be the building, finance and the appointment of governors and terms of trust deed. The Duke of Devonshire would preside.

Derbyshire Times Saturday 20th October 1877

Relaying the events towards laying the Foundation Stone which happened on the 17th October

"The Duke of Devonshire headed the subscription list with £500; Sir William Jackson gave £500; the Wingerworth Iron Company, £250; the Butterley Iron Company, £200; the late Mr Drabble, £200; Mr. Seeley, £200; Messrs. Oakes, £200; Mr. Alfred Barnes, £155; the Marquis of Hartington, £150; J.J. Barrow, Esq., £110; Lord Edward Cavendish, £110; Mr. F. Swanwick, £110; Mr. J.R. Barrow, £100; the Duke of Rutland, £100; the Hardwick Colliery Company, £100; and there were a large number of other subscriptions for smaller amounts."

[There was also £1,000 granted under the Public Libraries Act.]

The amount of people subscribing increased as the Committee persevered; it had helped that the Municipal Hall as a site had been abandoned because the general public had been against it – people were more apt to give to a popular site. However, the funds did not seem to warrant the completion of the whole of the plan, and a discussion to erect only a part of the building took place.

A number of gents argued that with the large sum of money already subscribed, £7,000, it would be safe to go into debt for the completion of the building and leave the payment of the debt when the public had had a little breathing time. This was agreed, and the Sheffield Banking Company, through their manager, Mr. R. Parker, of Chesterfield, who had been supportive of the scheme, agreed to lend the required sum. The interest upon the loan was secured by a guarantee fund to which a large number of gentlemen signed.

**(Spencer Compton Cavendish,
Marquis of Hartington)**



Lord Hartington consented to lay the Foundation Stone with Masonic Honours, he being Provincial Grand Master of Derbyshire, on the 17th October 1877.

The design of architects Messrs. Smith and Woodhouse was chosen for the building but, according to the Derbyshire Times, it had been, *“so modified that it is hardly necessary to refer to it.”*

Messrs. Smith and Woodhouse, of Manchester, the architects, give the following description:

“The building is situated at the junction of Corporation St. and St. Mary's Gate. In general arrangement it is divided into 2 sections – One, comprising the Free library and Science and Arts Schools may be termed “Institute” portion; and the other, the public hall with its accessories, the “Public Hall” portion. The entrance to the Institute portion is in Corporation St. beneath the tower, the ground floor being reached by a short flight of steps. It (the ground floor) consists of a reading room, 34ft. by 26ft; library, 38ft. by 21ft; lecture hall, 40ft. by 33ft; and 2 classrooms. The first floor is devoted to science and art teaching, and consists of a laboratory, elementary art teaching room, modelling room, master's room, store room for models and museum. In the basement floor are placed the keepers' rooms, store room, serving room, lavatories etc. and heating chamber.

The principal entrance to the public portion is in Corporation St, a second entrance being provided in Station Rd; access to the gallery is obtained from each; the hall is 68ft. by 47ft., and including the gallery, which is continued round 3 sides, contains seats for 900 people; there are 2 retiring rooms, to be used as committee rooms, and ante-rooms, to be used also for committee rooms, and ante-rooms for the artists, having a special entrance.

The hot water system of heating will be adopted, and through ventilation will be obtained by means of shafts from each room connected with a main shaft, in which the current of air is induced by the waste heat from the boiler. The building will be constructed of brick-work, relieved with stone dressings, and the style of architecture is gothic, of simple detail.”

Laying the Foundation Stone: The Decorations:

Although it rained on Tuesday night, Wednesday morning opened bright and fine.....we may remark that the site was gay with the flags of all nations, while from the lofty old crooked spire the flag of Old England waved proudly in the breeze. Large numbers of visitors arrived by train and the whole town and district was en fete. Lord Hartington was accompanied by his brother, Lord Edward Cavendish, the popular President of the Mining Institute, and the scene was graced by the presence of Lady Edward Cavendish and many other ladies.

The Chesterfield Town Council decided against an official system of decorations and left it to the people to decorate the route. At a Council meeting at the Municipal Hall on the 8th October 1877 the expense of decorating the route and building site was discussed. As money was already being spent for printing, putting up platforms, preparing the site of the building, music and bell ringers, it was agreed that paying for decorations too would be too much for the building fund to bear: Money was still tight. Asking for subscriptions for a decorating fund was dismissed too – people were already subscribing to the building fund, and it was too late in the day for it to be a success anyway. It was decided that, *“private individuals should be invited to do as much as possible in the way of decorations.”*]

Mr T.P. Wood had a collection of 3 large “English National” banners over the top of his premises, and smaller banners of different nations below them. At the entrance to the town from West Bars and Brampton is a line of large flags stretched across the street; the same decorative effect was adopted in windows of a large proportion of houses. Several large banners suspended from the New Station Hotel were the first to welcome visitors by rail; and the Derbyshire Times had suspended a large Royal Standard and 3 other National flags from its office.

Laying the Foundation Stone: The Procession and Ceremony:

The procession was marshalled in the Market Place by Sgt. Major Sanders of the Chatsworth Rifles. The column was headed by the Volunteer band, followed by members of the Manchester Order of Oddfellows. Then came a numerous body of Civil Engineers followed by the Mace Bearer of the Corporation, who was supported by Chief Constable Else and a venerable officer of the police force. Then came his Worship the Mayor (John Marsden Esq.), wearing his scarlet robes, cocked hat, and gold chain and badge of office. The members of the Corporation brought up the rear. As the procession neared the enclosure, the whole body “opened ranks” as the military men have it, through which the Mayor and Corporation passed and took port on the north side of the enclosure.

The Grand Master of the freemasons (the Marquis of Hartington) and his brethren posted themselves (the officers with the boundwards of the foundation stone) and the members on the most advantageous positions for viewing and assisting in the event.

On the west side of the enclosure were stationed a company of the Chesterfield Rifles under arms, and on the opposite side, under an awning, were the ladies of Chesterfield in considerable force. The Grand Master assisted by his Deputy, H.C. Okeover, of Okeover Hall, proceeded with the ceremony.

When the head of the Masonic procession arrived at the entrance to the Ground, the Brethren divided into left and right, and faced inwards, forming an avenue in which the R.W.P.G. Master (preceded by his sword and Standard bearers), passed, the P.G. Officers and Brethren followed in inverted order, the Master and Wardens of Lodges preceding the Master Masons. The P.G. Officers remained near and the other Brethren passed on to the places appropriated for their use.

The officiating Brethren took their positions round the Stone, as follows:-

In the East – The R.W. the P.G. Master; the D.P.G. Master, with Square; W. Master, with corn.

In the West – P.S.G. Warden, with Level; W.M. with Wine; P.G. Chaplains.

In the North – P.G. Treasurer; P.G. Secretary; P.M., with Trowel; P.M., with Mallet; W.M., with Salt

In the South – P.J.G. Warden, with Plumb Rule; W.M., with oil; P.G. Superintendent of Works, with Plan.

ANTHEM

Except the Lord conduct the plan,
The best concerted schemes are vain,
And never can succeed;

We spend our wretched strength for nought,
But if our works in Thee are wrought,
We shall be blessed indeed.

O let relief and truth abound,
fraternal love to all around
With purest lustre shine;

That all the earth our works may see,
And give the glory, Lord, to Thee,
The heavenly light divine.

Sir H.M. Jackson, Bart., Q.C., M.P., presented a Silver Trowel to the R.W.P.G. Master, and invited his lordship to lay the Stone.

The Stone having been laid a prayer was offered by the P.G. Chaplain. The Inscription to be deposited in the Stone was read by the P.G. Secretary. The P.G. Treasurer, by the P.G. Master's command, deposited in the cavity of the Stone, various Coins of the present reign. The cement having been laid on the lower stone by the P.G. Master, the upper one was slowly let down. Solemn music.

The P.G. Master then addressed the spectators, according to the ancient custom as follows:

"Men, women, and children here assembled today, to behold this ceremony, know all of you that we be lawful Masons, true and faithful to the laws of our country, and established of old, with peace and honour in most Countries, to do honour to our brethren, to erect magnificent structures, and to fear God, the Great Architect of the universe.

We have amongst us, concealed from the eyes of all men, secrets which cannot be divulged; but these secrets are lawful and honourable, and not repugnant to the laws of God or man. They were entrusted in peace and honour to the Masons of ancient times, and have been faithfully transmitted to us; and it is our duty to convey them unimpaired to the latest posterity.

Unless our craft were good, and our calling honourable, we should not have lasted for many centuries, nor should we have been honoured with the patronage of so many illustrious men in all ages who have ever shown themselves ready to promote our interests, and to defend us against all adversaries.

We are assembled here today in the presence of you all, to assist in laying in ancient form, the Foundation Stone of the Stephenson Memorial Hall, which we pray Him to prosper for the promotion of Godliness, harmony, and brotherly love, till time shall be no more."

The Brethren all exclaimed - *"So mote it be."*

The P.G. Master then said - *"Brother J.G. Warden, what is the proper jewel of your office?"*

P.J.G.W. - *"The Plum Rule."*

P.G.M. - *"Have you applied the Plumb Rule to the external edges of the stone?"*

(He does so)

P.J.G.W. - *"I have, R.W.G. Master, and the craftsmen have done their duty."*

P.G.M.- *"Brother S.G. Warden, what is the proper jewel of your office?"*

P.S.G.W. - *"The Level."*

P.G.M. - *"Have you applied the Level to the stone?"*

(He does so)

P.S.G.W. - *"I have, R.W.G. Master, and the craftsmen have done their duty."*

P.G.M. - *"Brother D.G. Master, what is the proper jewel of your office?"*

D.P.G.M. - *"The Square."*

P.G.M. - *"Have you applied the Square to the parts of the stone that should be square?"*

(He does so)

D.P.G.M. - *"I have, R.W.G. Master, and the craftsmen have done their duty."*

P.G.M. - *"Having all confidence in your skill in the Royal art, it now remains with me to finish the work."*

The Architect then delivered to the P.G. Master the Mallet, with which he gave 3 knocks, and declared the stone laid in due form.

The P.G. Master then delivered to the builder the several implements for his use.

The Plan and Elevation of the building were delivered by the Architect to the P.G. Master for his inspection, who, having approved of the same, returned them to the Architect for his guidance.

The P.G. Chaplain, then received the Cornucopia from its bearer, and presented it to the P.G. Master, who strewed some grains of wheat upon the Stone, and said - *"We strew this corn as the emblem of plenty"*.

The J.G. Warden then presented the cup of wine to the P.G. Master, who sprinkled the Stone, and said - *"We pour this wine as the emblem of cheerfulness and joy."*

The S.G. Warden presented the Ewer of Oil to the P.G. Master, who poured the oil on the stone and said - *"We pour this oil as the emblem of prosperity and Happiness."*

The D.G. Master then presented the Salt to the P.G. Master, who sprinkled it on the stone and said - *"We sprinkle this salt as the emblem of wisdom, fidelity and perpetuity; and may the all bounteous Author of nature bless this district, this ancient town, the county, and the kingdom at large with abundance of corn and wine, and oil and all the necessities, comforts and conveniences of life."*

The Brethren - *"So mote it be."*

The 100th Psalm was sung, followed by a prayer by the P.G. Chaplain.

The Marquis of Hartington gave a short speech followed by the National Anthem.

THE ORDER OF THE GENERAL PROCESSION

Police Band

The Present Officers of the Friendly Societies of the District of Chesterfield, four a-breast.

The Committee of the Science and Art Classes.

The Committee of the Mechanics' Institute and members.

The Committee for the University Extension Classes.

Council and Members of the Chesterfield and Derbyshire Institute of Mining, Civil, and Mechanical Engineers.

Tradesmen of the Town of Chesterfield.

The Stephenson Memorial Hall Committee.

The Contractors, The Architects, with Plans.

The School Board.

The Mayor and Corporation of Chesterfield.

The Borough Magistrates.

The Members for the County.

The County Magistrates and Local Gentry.

(The Mayor and Corporation will first enter the Site, and will take up position near the Stone; the other Members of the Procession within the bracket following to places assigned to them).

Private Lodges of Freemasons (highest numbers going first), with their respective banners; the Officers wearing their Collars and Jewels.

The Provincial Grand Lodge of Freemasons.

Police.

The Derbyshire Times Saturday 29th March 1879 Presentation to Mr. Martin

The Derby Mercury Wednesday 16th July 1879 Summary: It opened on the 14th July 1879.

"OPENING OF THE HALL

The Stephenson Memorial Hall, Chesterfield, was formally opened on Monday afternoon by his Grace the Duke of Devonshire.

The day was observed as a general holiday, and most of the places of business were closed. Flags and Banners were plentifully displayed, and nothing was wanting to make the proceedings a complete success except fine weather, and unfortunately the town was not favoured with this. Heavy showers of rain fell during the day, making it damp and uncomfortable for pedestrians. Notwithstanding this circumstance, great interest was taken in the proceedings. Large numbers of persons flocked into the town from the surrounding districts, and at an early hour the doors of the Hall were besieged by hundreds of people anxious to gain admittance to witness the opening ceremony.

The Duke proceeded to the Lecture Hall of the institute of Engineers, and was received by the Trustees and Committee of the Hall, Mr. F. Arkwright, M.P., Admiral Egerton, M.P., the Council of the Engineers, Mr. Fitzherbert Wright, Mr. Oakes, Mr. J.J. Barrow, Mr. J.B. Barrow, the members of the Chesterfield Corporation, the Town Clerk, the Architects, the Clerk of Works, and other gentlemen of the district.

After a few words of welcome to those assembled, the Duke made an inspection of the building and afterwards was escorted to the platform of the large and beautiful public hall, which was crowded by a brilliant assemblage, and when his Grace appeared he received a very cordial welcome.

The Duke and party came to the hall in processional order. First came Mr. Superintendent Else, carrying the mace, then the Mayor of the Borough (Mr. Pearson), Mr. J. Cutts (Town Clerk), Mr. J.S. Smith, Alderman Wood, Marsden and other members of the Corporation: the trustees of the Hall, Admiral Egerton, M.P., Mr. F. Arkwright, M.P., Captain Jeudwine, Mr. Jones, C.E., Professor Stuart, Mr. J.B. Barrow; the Architects, and other gentlemen, the platform being crowded.....

THE BANQUET

A Grand Banquet was held in the evening in the Gaiety Theatre, the caterer being Mr. Robert Rimmer, of the Station Hotel, and his catering was excellent in every respect. The theatre was prettily decorated for the occasion with flags and evergreens. His Grace the Duke of Devonshire presided, and he was supported on his right by the Mayor of Chesterfield, Mr. Arkwright, M.P., Mr. Nesfield, J.P., the Rev. G. Butt, M.A., Vicar of Chesterfield, and Mr. Bemrose, the ex-Mayor of Derby. On his left he was supported by Mr. Bluns, Admiral Egerton, M.P., Mr. Bateman, Professor Stuart, Mr. A. Barnes, Mr. Evans, and Mr. Coke; and among others present were the Rev. J.M. Mello, Messrs. Lucas, Bright, J. Brown, Jackson, White, Hazlehurst, Cutts, Gee, Hofton, Carrington, C.S.B. Busby, Busby jun., Bagshawe, Milnes, Jeudwine, T.P. Wood, J. Gothard, Bluett, Mason, and Robinson. After the banquet the ladies were admitted into the boxes of the theatre...."

Sheffield Daily Telegraph Thursday 17th July 1879 The Exhibition

Describes, by a critic, the oil paintings that were loaned for the exhibition including those by, Turner, Fielding, Lawrence, Landseer, Lely, Cooper and many more. Also loaned were 2 busts of George Stephenson and a model of the Rocket engine. There was a talk in the lecture hall on the "Life and Works of George Stephenson".

Sheffield Independent Friday 18th July 1879 The Exhibition

The Derbyshire Times Saturday 24th January 1880

FIRST ANNUAL MEETING OF SUBSCRIBERS.

On Monday the first annual meeting of subscribers to the Stephenson Memorial Hall was held in the lecture room of the Hall. Only a few attended; the Mayor (J. Brown Esq.) who was elected as chairman, Messrs., A. Barnes, J.P., J.P. Jackson, J.P., A. Carrington, J.P., G.A. Rooth, J.P., R. Parker, B. Douglas, J. Bagnold Smith, W.F. Mills, J.W. Fearn, W. Robinson, W. Knowles, and the hon. Sec. Mr. W.F. Howard.

Mr Howard read the annual report: “ *The first annual report of the Committee of management of the Stephenson Memorial Hall, for the year ending December 31st 1879....*”

The building was in full occupation, with the exception of the Free Library and Reading Rooms. For a few weeks after the opening, (on the 14th July 1879), there was an exhibition of paintings and other works of art, scientific apparatus and geological and mineralogical specimens that took place; and several scientific and other lectures were given. The committee trusted that the opening would attract many more subscriptions but it didn't. The only ones were from, the Duke of Devonshire, £200, which made his total £700; Fitzherbert Wright Esq., £100; William Arkwright Esq., £25; Bateman Esq., £10; Tow, Esq., £10; Mrs. Waller, £2; and Mr. Humble, £2 2s. The net profit made by the exhibition hall and a concert given by the Choral Society was £96 1s. 11d. The Corporation had paid the £1,000, as agreed, for lease of rooms to be used as a free library and reading room, and they had contracted them to be fitted up, so they were soon to be open. The committee had apportioned the rooms in the building for different uses; but, although there was a lot of space more was needed particularly for the art and science classes, whose numbers of students had considerably increased. The use of the Hall had been popular since it opened, but the committee could not judge what it would be like long-term. The Hall was chargeable with the interest of £1,000 at 4%, lent by the Sheffield Banking Company, the interest being guaranteed by a number of gentlemen, who were entitled to take credit for the net receipts in reduction of their liability. The use of the lecture hall was popular too.

The committee had had an audit of the accounts from the commencement, made by Messrs. Broomhead and Brownlow, from which they found that the total cost of the building, furnished, including liabilities up to November 14th 1879, when the audit was made, had been £13,362 15s. 1d., and that on balance of assets and liabilities, the undertaking was £5,288 17s. 11d, in debt. Of this £4,000 had been borrowed from the Sheffield Banking Company at 4%, and an additional sum of £500 at 5%, leaving £738 17s. 11d. to be obtained to discharge the claims of the contractors and others. There was still about £170 from promised subscriptions that remained unpaid.

The committee recommended a further temporary loan be arranged. Temporary because they thought that they might get more subscriptions and a Fancy Fair to be held the following October. What wasn't included in the assets was £500 payable by the Science and Art Department of the Government; because it couldn't be claimed when there was a greater debt upon the building higher than that amount. As soon as the total debt decreased then the £500 could be claimed.

The committee expressed their high appreciation of the long, valuable and freely given services of Mr. Howard, as hon. Secretary, and regretted they would be losing him: The tax on his time had become too much. Mr Gorman, the hall-keeper, would give up one of his duties in order to become secretary in the place of Mr. Howard. The committee felt that he could do it as the principal work had been completed.

The report was to be printed and circulated amongst the subscribers and friends.

Six gentlemen were then elected for a committee to manage and carry out the Fancy Fair: The Mayor and Messrs. Barnes, Carrington, Jackson, Mills and Douglas.

They all agreed that money was badly needed.

The Derbyshire Times Wednesday 8th September 1880

The proceeds, after expenses, of the concert that was held last Friday, was £50 17s. 8d. The money went to the building fund.