

Through The Eyes of a Freemason

I am the Freemasons Hotel, I was built in 1896 and have lived near the Centre Point Shops in Midland all my life. My name is so-called because I used to be a local meeting place for Masons (if you didn't know a Mason is a worker who builds in brick or stone). Anyway, this is my story, it is set in the year 1905 and it all revolves around this historic building, the Midland Town Hall.

One day a group of councilors from the Council of Midland came into my bar and started talking about what was going to happen during the week. A few conversations later I overheard that they had decided they wanted a town hall for Midland. But there were a few problems, they didn't know what it was going to look like, what it would have in it, where it was going to be and what it was going to cost. They argued and argued and argued some more until they didn't know what to build so the council chose to hold a competition. The competition was to see who could draw the best town hall so they could finally decide and use the winning design for the new town hall. There were three entries altogether and the winner was Mr. R M Hamilton of the Hamilton and Henderson Architects, and he won with the "French Renaissance" style.

The design that I saw on the piece of paper was made from mainly bricks and terracotta tiles. It had a circular tower on the left side with a hemispherical dome on top of the tower and a big clock in the centre of the whole building. The council first needed to calculate exactly how much it would cost for materials, equipment and wage for workers to build this grand structure. After days of calculating, eating and drinking in my bar they found out that the cost to build would be approximately £15,000. The council then worked out how much money they had only to find that they only had £7500, this meant that they didn't have enough money to build my new neighbour. The Council couldn't decide whether to choose a different design, or only construct half of the building. After a long discussion or argument (it was so loud I don't know which), they decided to construct only half of the building which included the dome and add the clock when they had enough money. Some residents were pleased that the council had finally made a decision but all the workers in Midland hated the idea of a Town Hall without a clock because they all relied on the town clock to tell them what time it was. So without a clock on the Town Hall most workers were late for work and penalized for not arriving on time. And if they did turn up to work late their wages were cut dramatically. But I personally was quite pleased they had finally come to a decision because I was rather tired of all the bickering about the new building in town, and as a Hotel I didn't care for time, people that I knew were on the go all of the time.

The construction of half Town Hall commenced in 1906. The construction was very loud and disruptive for me and my residents, but we didn't mind, it was going to pay off later, I was going to get a new neighbour and the residents of Midland were getting a great landmark. On the 24th of April 1906 foundation stones were placed by Premier Rason and the mayor of Midland Junction. It was opened by Premier N J Moore on the 23rd of January 1907 and the whole town gathered to see. In 1923 the council finally had saved

up enough money to make a clock tower but they were again clueless of what it was going to look like until someone thought of an idea. This someone spent days in my bar thinking of designs for the clock tower. Then one day he thought of a great idea and rushed to see the Council.

“What if we made a square clock tower on the dome as a soldier’s memorial from the great war?” the man said.

A majority of the council thought he was in a whole different world, but personally I thought it was a great idea. Finally they ended agreeing with the man’s design which cost the Council £480 to construct. I would like to take credit for the clock tower design because the man that thought of the idea spent a lot of time in my bar.

On the 18th of November 1923, Governor Newdegate unveiled the large square clock tower for a memorial for soldiers. The clock turret had four dials, each eight feet in diameter, which face North, South, East and West. Extra Council chambers were added to the eastern side of the building in 1923 to 1924. Internally, the old building now still has all the original features that I remember when it first was built in 1907. The additions to the eastern side of the building allowed a separate entrance to the main hall, also glass windows were added to the front of the building on top of the new entrance. With all these new additions it made the town hall bigger and better.

This Town Hall is one of the places with major importance as it relates to other early constructed public and commercial buildings in Midland. This particular Town Hall is known as one of the best Town Halls constructed in the 1900’s, and I couldn’t agree more. Another important feature of the Town Hall was the stage constructed for performances and announcements, I thoroughly enjoyed the entertainment that was presented on the stage. This was made in replace of an old neighbouring school stage. I saw that there were also plaques outside the front entrance that commemorated the fallen soldiers in the Great War (1914 to 1918). Inside the gigantic theatre there were two plaques that read: “Town of Midland Municipality, roll of honour”. Back then most residents of Midland added their name to the plaque. Over time the plaques started to fade, so special efforts were made to restore the plaque to near original condition.

In the 1990s I found that the Midland Town Hall was not getting used as much as it use to. So the council decided it needed a good clean and upgrade. They then cleaned the whole Town Hall inside and out and also renovated a part of the building to make a council discussion room. This made me extremely happy because it is really important that the Town Hall is recognised for its beauty and longevity.

So that’s everything I have seen and heard about the Midland Town Hall, and I think the Midland Town Hall is very important part of Midland because it is part of its heritage, it is also a place for remembrance, the town hall also holds many special treasures and secrets from 1906 up until now and holds a whole new story in itself.