

**TOWN HALL EXTENSION.**  
BUILDING VALUED AT £10,000.  
BRINGS IN LESS THAN £100 A YEAR.  
ALDERMAN MARTIN AND "A WASTE OF TIME."

C.T. Dec. 28, 1929

Ald. Martin put up a strenuous fight at the last meeting of the Council for the proposed extension of the Town Hall to be undertaken out of "unexpended balances in hand," and became bitingly satirically.

The discussion developed into a financial debate, which showed that the Council is in a thoroughly healthy financial condition, and the contributions of the members relating to this aspect of the question were fully reported in our last issue.

The Town Hall Committee made no fewer than 12 recommendations as follows:

(a) Decorating: That the Town Hall premises, with the exception of the kitchen and the Art Classroom, be re-decorated on the same lines as previously, and that tenders be obtained for carrying out the work.

(b) Town Clerk's Offices: (1) That a connecting door be constructed between the Town Clerk's offices. (2) That the Town Clerk be empowered to purchase a second hand office desk at a cost not exceeding £10. (3) That the floor of the front office be covered with cork carpet, and a rug, and quotations and samples be obtained for submission to a future meeting of the committee. (4) That three chairs be purchased at a cost not exceeding £2. (5) That shelving, with a cupboard underneath, be placed on the south side of the front room.

(c) Heating: (1) That, in view of the proposed new method of heating, the fireplaces in the large hall be bricked up and the mantelpieces removed. (2) That the tenders for heating be considered at this meeting of the Council, and the one considered most suitable be accepted.

(d) Town Hall Extension: That, instead of pressing for sanction to borrow the necessary capital, the extension of the Town Hall be carried out with the unexpended balances in hand.

(e) Decorations of the Proposed Extension: (1) That the walls, after plastering, be given a "Sankmar" finish. (2) That reconstructed stone be used in the place of Portland stone. (3) That the frieze be omitted from the specification.

There was first some discussion as to procedure—whether the recommendations should be taken clause by clause, or whether the clause dealing with carrying out the work out of unexpended balances should be taken first.

The Ministry's letter was again read, in order to put the position clearly before the members, after which the Mayor thought that a rescinding resolution ought to be passed, as the Ministry inquiry had intervened between a previous decision of the Council and the present recommendation.

The Town Clerk (Mr. W. D. Platt) stated that the new resolutions were similar to those withdrawn previous to the inquiry, so that a rescinding resolution was not required.

ALD. LANE OPPOSES.

Ald. F. A. Lane, J.P., pointed out that clauses a and c were structural and b dealt with furnishing, which might be dealt with separately. Again, the Ministry intimated that there would be no difficulty in securing a loan for central heating purposes, but the difficulty was in the Town Hall extension. While he was in favour of renovating the Town Hall and heating it properly, yet he was opposed to the extensions, which he considered to be spending money needlessly at the present time. There was the possibility of the Borough's boundaries being extended and also of the rooms in the Town Hall now being used by the County Council for technical education coming into the hands of the Corporation. If the work were done now, the Council might regret it afterwards. The new members of the Council knew nothing about the proposed extensions and would therefore be voting in the dark on the resolutions.

Ald. Martin suggested dealing with item d first, as a good deal hinged upon its fate. If that were defeated then he was opposed to any expenditure whatever, as to redecorate the building now and carry out structural alterations in two or three years time would be a sheer waste of time, as the hall would have to be decorated again

Vice-Admiral Reeves moved that the clauses be dealt with as set out, stating that there was no reason why the Town Hall should not be heated, and there was every reason why they should not carry out the extension now.

The Town Clerk said that the Council were getting rather into a fog regarding the matter, and it was eventually decided to deal with item d first.

"ALL OR NONE."

Ald. Martin, who then opened the discussion proper on the subject, gave an outline of the scheme for the benefit of the new members of the Council. He traced the history of it from March or April last, stating that the Town Hall Committee reported two or three times to the Council, who intimated their approval of the lines that the committee were following, and finally approved the scheme of alterations by the casting vote of the Mayor. An inquiry was ultimately held by the Ministry of Health as a result of a letter written to them by a Burgess (now an ex-member of the Council), and in making the present recommendations the committee had before them the letter of the Ministry of Health. They went into the matter fully with the Borough Accountant, who assured them that the money was available and could be used for the purpose without inconvenience to himself as Borough Accountant or to the Borough. On that understanding it was proposed that the work should be paid for out of the capital now lying in the bank. It was much better to do that, because it was surprising the amount of interest that a capital expenditure of £1,400 would swallow up.

Warming to his subject, Ald. Martin said that the Town Hall premises were valued at £10,000 for insurance purposes and the income received from all sources was less than £100 a year. "As business men I say that it is a standing disgrace to us that we should own a valuable property in the centre of High Street and be satisfied with an income of less than £100 a year from it. We came to the conclusion that if the hall is put into decent condition, it ought to bring in as many hundreds as it does tens of pounds now," he said.

In conclusion, he stressed the necessity of a new Council Chamber, adequate cloak room accommodation, a retiring room with access direct from the stage, a strong room for important documents and moneys, central heating and improved accommodation in the Town Clerk's office.

"RELEASE CAPITAL."

Coun. Russell Oakley, in seconding, said that the scheme was absolutely necessary for the proper carrying out of the work of the Council, and it would enable them to get a very fine revenue by letting the Town Hall. They would never do any good under present conditions. It would also provide work for some of the unemployed during the winter months, and it was the duty of a local authority in these days to release capital so as to put more money into circulation. One would hesitate about spending £1,500 if it had to be thrown into the current year's rate or would increase the ratepayers' burden, but as the Council had the whole of the capital cost in hand there was no reason why it should not be utilised.

Ald. Barnes opposed the proposal to meet the cost out of the moneys in hand, as did Couns. Emerson, Tucker and Shave and Ald. Lane.

Ald. Lane said that the Town Council only paid one-third of the cost of the rooms used for technical education, the County Council providing one-third and £450 was raised by public subscription. He agreed with making the Town Hall comfortable, and said that if it were made comfortable for whist drives, dances and concerts it should be comfortable enough for the Council. He could not see what was wrong with the present Council Chamber, where they always met when

he was first a member. He could not see any reason for spending hundreds of pounds to build another room. They had 20 members at present, but if the Borough were enlarged this number might be increased to 30 or 36 and they might find the proposed new Council Chamber altogether too small. He was absolutely opposed to the suggested new building at present unless they had something different put before them.

The Mayor said that he had taken up seriously with the Director of Education the question of the rooms at the Town Hall now used by the County Council, and was informed that the art room would be vacated as soon as the new school was opened, which was expected to be at the end of the summer holidays. He could not see any reason for building a new Council Chamber.

"75 PER CENT. OPPOSED."

"Coun. Douglas Galton congratulated Ald. Martin on the presentation of his case, but said that he could not agree with it. He doubted whether the lettings would increase very much, as the church people were sure to continue using the Church Hall. He could not understand what was the matter with the present Council Chamber. He had recently fought an election in the Central Ward and visited pretty well every house in the ward and could honestly say that at least 75 per cent. of the electors were absolutely opposed to spending this money on the Town Hall. The extensions were not at all necessary.

Coun. Major Saunders, in opposing, said that it was understood the vacant plot at the rear of the Town Hall should be used for enlarging the main hall, and if the extension took place as planned the new chamber would look out on the back yards of High Street on one side, with a blank wall on the other, and one of the most beautiful views to be seen in Christchurch would be shut out.

Ald. Martin, replying to the discussion, stated that he had not received very much support and a good many red herrings had been drawn across the trail. After emphasising that the Borough Accountant had advised that the money could be utilised for the scheme, Ald. Martin declared: "You are failing in your duty to the burgesses if you do not carry it out, because you will not be making the best use of those assets which they sent you here to preserve. Fancy being content with a paltry £90 a year on an investment of £10,000—you are not worthy to be called business men. You talk about a refuse destructor. We had an interview with an interested party to buy a place. We met those men, we fooled them and we never attempted to come to grips with them.

Ald. Lane said—"

Ald. Lane (interrupting): I rise to a point of order. This is a personal thing. I never said a word about a refuse destructor tonight. If there are going to be personal attacks in this way I claim the right to reply.

"A STANDING DISGRACE."

Ald. Martin said that the invariable attitude of some members was that they would support any improvement "when the proper time comes"—which the speaker interpreted as "Never." He said that one gentleman had told him that he would take the Town Hall on four different sessions three nights a week if the improvements were carried out. As regarded the rooms used by the County Council they would be required for office accommodation, especially when the Borough was enlarged.

"I realise that the Council is against me and that we as a committee have wasted our time," he concluded. "For myself that doesn't matter. I have only got to earn my living, but the way that this Council has treated the committee is a standing disgrace to the annals of public business. I leave it to the Council to vote for it or not as they like, but I am sure of the unanimous support of the committee.

The clause to carry out the work from unexpended balances was then defeated.

The Council then considered the other items.

Ald. Barnes said that he would vote against the whole thing, and it could be brought up

again in 12 months time.

Coun. Tucker favoured putting in central heating and decorating the Town Hall, the condition of which he said was an absolute disgrace.

Coun. Spickernell said that alterations would have to be made to the Town Hall in a year or two, and he agreed with Ald. Martin that it would be an unnecessary expense to do the work now.

Coun. Russell Oakley remarked that all the proposals were interlocked, and it would be difficult to carry out one improvement without the other.

The Mayor suggested referring the matter back to the committee.

Coun. Oakley: If you like to appoint another committee, yes, but not the present one, which has brought up recommendations which have received the full approval of the Council without a single dissentient vote on two occasions; and I would wish the new committee joy.

#### TOWN CLERK'S OFFICES.

Dealing with the recommendations affecting the Town Clerk's office, Ald. Martin said that he was absolutely ashamed to bring forward the proposal that the Town Clerk should find a second hand desk which might be made suitable for his office. "It means" he said, "that our Town Clerk would have to go round to second hand shops and the auctions to find a desk that could be converted for his purposes at a total cost not exceeding £10.

Coun. Oakley proposed an amendment that the Town Clerk's office be properly and adequately furnished, and that the Municipal Committee be instructed to bring in a recommendation accordingly, based on what the Town Clerk thought was fairly and legitimately required for his office.

Coun. Gelsthorpe, in seconding, remarked that the dignity of the Corporation impelled the Council to provide the Town Clerk with proper facilities for carrying out the duties of his office.

Coun. Shave said that the Council had had enough of this job. It was getting from the sublime to the ridiculous.

The Council agreed to the proposal for a connecting door between the Town Clerk's offices and carried the amendment regarding furnishing.

Coun. Major Saunders proposed, and Vice-Admiral Reeves seconded, that central heating be carried out by loan.

Ald. Martin satirically remarked that it was really unnecessary. "I have three coats on now and another one at home, and I can bring a hot water bottle and a foot warmer, and as the meetings do not last more than six or eight hours I can do very well," he said.

Coun. Spickernell, who had been looking at the plans, said that he could not see any provision made for a boiler house for central heating—an important matter in connection with the proposed extension.

At the end of the debate Ald. Martin expressed thanks on behalf of the committee for the bouquets and encomiums which the council had showered upon them for their labours, and added: "We are exactly where we were last March—moving backwards."

Coun. Shave rose to say that he did not agree with this, but the Mayor closed the discussion by stating that "it is only the final repartee."

All recommendations were defeated except alterations to and furnishing of the Town Clerk's office.