

What's so special about this building at 33 King Street? KINGS COURT, BLACKBURN

As well as being of architectural interest, it actually has a unique place in the history of Blackburn.

The building was constructed in 1804. Its construction was sponsored by the 'Blackburn Assembly'. It has had a number of users in the past 200 years.

It was first used as the Blackburn Assembly Rooms included an Inn and a place for dancing and musical entertainment, auctions etc. There were 25 bedrooms, 7 eating rooms (including a coffee room), 2 kitchens, offices and stables for 20 horses on the site. In addition there were the actual Assembly Room, a 'News Room' and a Billiards Room. It had, according to historians, 'costly chandeliers, girandoles and rich furniture'.

For many years it was an important meeting place and was well used. All events of importance were held there, the first being the King's birthday on 6th June 1804.

In 1808, the building was besieged in one of a series of sporadic disturbances in the town. This was provoked by the gathering of the 48th Foot Regiment in the courtyard of the building.

In June 1815 it was the scene of celebrations following the Battle of Waterloo when Lieutenant Colonel Poole held a Grand Banquet in the Assembly Room.

It was used as a hotel, originally known simply as 'The Hotel' many years later to become 'The Royal Hotel'. It was also an established coaching house. From 7th April 1806 daily coaches set off from there to Burnley and Preston.

By 1824, the building was known as the 'Odd-Fellows held office there. It has also been called the 'Rechabites Hall' where 'musical concerts, penny readings, recitals, mesmerisers and phrenologists' were held.

The building was also known as the 'Sessions Rooms', although this seems to actually have been one of the rooms ('The Sessions Room') inside the building in which regular sessions were held. In early Victorian days prisoners were examined in the Assembly Room of the Royal Hotel.

A Leypayer's meeting at the building on 14th January 1836 formed an enquiry into the

possibilities of a new hall for Blackburn. In 1850, the Blackburn Charter of Incorporation was drawn up in this building. It was also the site of the formation of the new Town Council in 1851, and the first Mayor of Blackburn, J William Hornby was installed as Mayor there.

Incorporation officially took place on 28th November 1850 with the necessary petition to Queen Victoria. The first election and first Mayoral Oath was sworn on 10th November 1851. The first meeting of the Blackburn Town Council was held in the 'Sessions Room' on 12th November 1851.

At a meeting of the Council on 9th November 1852, it was decided that:-
'The Rooms may be used for all Municipal purposes including sittings of the Borough Justices'.

The final Council use of the building was to hold the Council Meeting there on 3rd October 1856. Following this the new Town Hall was used for all Council meetings etc from 30th October 1856.

In 1894, building was sold to the Philanthropic Burial Society. The front of the building was rebuilt in 1894. The Highway and General Drainage Committee approved building plans for 'additions to offices' King Street by the Philanthropic Burial Society' on Monday 28th May 1894.

In 1939, the Ministry of Labour bought the building. In more recent times the building was used by the Department of Employment until the early 1990's. Since then it has been vacant.

The building at 33 King Street has therefore a very important place in the civic and social history of Blackburn. In a newspaper article on 18th October 1957, George C Miller referred to it as the focus of Blackburn's social life during the 19th Century.

It is a disgrace that the building has been allowed to deteriorate into its present poor condition. It does not reflect well for the town that one of its main gateways is such an eyesore. The current owners of the building, East Lancashire Deaf Society (ELDS) intend to restore it, not only to contribute to improve the appearance of this area of the town but also to ensure its continuation as an important part of Blackburn's history.



'Life in a cotton town - Blackburn 1818-48' by Brian Lewis 1985

A newspaper reporter, Luke S Walmsley quoted on 11th February 1922 that, 'it is too good and sincere a building not to rise again to a worthy destiny'. This statement has had its doubters, but the proposals by ELDS who have renamed the building 'Kings Court' makes it a distinct possibility that it will not only have a very important history but will also be intimately linked with Blackburn's development in the future.



'Photograph of the Royal Hotel from The buildings of Blackburn' produced by Blackburn Civic Society 1997