



Late 19th century



Early 20th century



1941

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Cover photograph by Julie Millowick ©

# PORTLAND'S 1863 TOWN HALL



The Municipality of Portland was proclaimed on December 17, 1855, following the Municipal Districts Act of 1854. The land on which the Town Hall now stands was set aside in 1858, and planning for the building of a new Town Hall began in 1862.

The Borough Council offered a £10 prize for a design for a new Town Hall. A consensus could not be reached upon which of the three entries would be the winning design. Engineer John Barrow's design was proclaimed the winner after the toss of a coin, but once the building tenders were in, Barrow's design was found to be double the cost of the £600 budget.

The design of municipal surveyor and architect Alexander Ross was eventually chosen, but Barrows declined to return the £10 prize.

The foundation stone was laid on September 21<sup>st</sup> 1863 by William Learmonth, the Mayor of the Borough of Portland. The day was a great occasion. A procession was led by the town band, followed by the Volunteer Rifle Corps, various orders of Masons, the Town Councillors, clergy, school children and citizens.

Constructed of locally quarried basalt, stonemasons for the building were Messrs Robb & Co., with the carpentry work carried out by Sedgewick and Jeffrey. The building was opened on May 24<sup>th</sup> 1864, but without the fanfare of the laying of the foundation stone. Ironically, there is no recognisable foundation stone for the building.

In the 1930s the building was extended to accommodate the growing number of services Council now provided including water, sewerage, health. Further extensions were added in the 1950s and 1960s.

Portland Town Council operated from the building until 1969 and in the late 1970s when the building was first set up as a museum, all the timber additions were removed.

## *Original plans and drawings by Alexander Ross*

