

Lincoln Drill Hall History

The Birth of the Drill Hall

From 'The Times' on Monday May 26th, 1890:

"Mr. E. Stanhope (i) opened a new volunteer drill hall at Lincoln on Saturday. The hall has been presented to the Lincoln Volunteers by Mr. Joseph Ruston (ii), a former M.P. for the city, and the total cost is about £10,000.

"The Drill Hall, erected in 1889-90, from plans by Messrs. Goddard and Son, is of red brick with freestone dressings, and consists of offices, men's club, orderly room, gymnasium and men's recreation room, sergeants' room, magazine, armoury and Morris tube range, band room and caretaker's quarters."

"Not only have the Headquarter Companies of the 1st Lincolnshire Volunteer Battalion been provided with a drill hall that embraces every requisite, but the building, with its frontage of 55 ft to Broadgate, is an ornament to the city. The front elevation, of red brick and stone, with Ancaster dressings, presents a military aspect, with its embattlements and watch turret. The gateway is 10 ft wide, and above it the Royal arms are skilfully carved out of stone.

"On entering we find to the right the officers' room, an apartment 24 ft by 18 ft; to the left, the Adjutant's room, of the same dimensions, with an office for the Sergeant-Major. The large hall beyond is 140 ft long by 50 ft wide, and a moveable platform will be fitted for meetings and other purposes. The floor has a special feature, suitable for the purposes of drilling. It is formed of wooden blocks 10 in by 2 ½ in by 1 ½ in., laid in pitch, on a solid foundation of concrete and cement. This deadens the sound of a body of men marching and manoeuvring. The armoury is 62 ft by 15 ft, of sufficient capacity to store the whole arms of the battalion if at any time necessary; adjoining this is an armourer's workshop and a magazine, where several hundred thousand rounds of ammunition could be stored.

"On the north side of the hall is a gymnasium, 50 ft by 30 ft, with lavatory attached, also stores for military clothing and accoutrements, with adjacent closets, and the quarters of the Sergeant-Major.

"Mr Ruston has not forgotten that disastrous times for the poor may again unhappily overtake us, and in connection with the hall he has therefore provided a soup-kitchen, fitted with coppers and every appliance for cooking food.

"Near the entrance gateway a broad and easy staircase gives access to a balcony capable of accommodating 150 people, commanding a view of the hall. Behind this balcony and fronting Broadgate is a large reading and recreation room for the men, and the non-commissioned officers' recreation room will be comfortably furnished."

- (i) *The Right Honorary Edward Stanhope, Secretary of State for War and Member of Parliament for Horncastle.*
- (ii) *Joseph Ruston was elected as a Liberal MP for Lincoln in a by-election in June 1884. He was re-elected at the 1885 general election but did not stand again in 1886. He established Ruston, Proctor and Company, agricultural implement makers and engineer, on the site now occupied by Siemens.*

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From military to public use

For most of the first part of the 20th Century it was used as a military & police training hall, but was also available for entertainment and was used by Joseph Ruston's employees for regular social events and dances. After the Second World War, all kinds of events began to be staged in the Drill Hall from televised wrestling to bingo, roller skating to live bands. The Rolling Stones famously played here on 31 December 1963, prior to their appearance on the very first Top of the Pops the next day! Other notable acts who performed at the Drill Hall include Arthur Brown, Spooky Tooth, Barclay James Harvest, UFO, Budgie, The Stranglers, The Skids, The Damned, Stiff Little Fingers, The Adverts, Elvis Costello & The Attractions, Ultravox, Psychedelic Furs, Judas Priest, Diamond Head and Iron Maiden.

Rebirth

By the late 1990s, the Drill Hall had begun to fall into a state of disrepair and was closed in 1999 due to the electrical systems being unsafe. There were calls to demolish the building but, after huge pressure from the community, the decision was taken to instead invest in its refurbishment.

Five years and a £2.6m renovation project later the building was re-opened in 2004 as the Drill Hall we know and love today. As part of the refurbishment, a highly flexible state of the art auditorium and modern café bar was created within the huge main hall of the building. The orientation of the building was also reversed – the original entrance on Broadgate was not sympathetic to accessibility and performance access requirements, leading to the construction of a main entrance on Freeschool Lane.

Lincoln Drill Hall was run by City of Lincoln Council until September 2010, at which point the management of the venue was handed over to Lincoln Arts Trust Ltd, an independent registered charity.

In the summer of 2011, 4 technicians with an angle grinder came together to improve our lighting capabilities by installing a flown lighting grid. Here's how they did it:



This project was kindly funded by The Dawber Trust.

Video provided by Mike Hurley.