

# NOW and THEN

## Town Hall/Old Cinema, Market Place. (Part 1)

This issue's building is Ringwood's most controversial. Now usually referred to as the Old Cinema, it was originally built in 1868 at the expense of Mr John Morant, the Lord of the Manor of Ringwood, as his new Town Hall. It replaced the old Georgian Market Hall that had stood in the middle of the Market Place which was taken down and partially re-erected on the site now occupied by Allum & Sidaway.

The new Town Hall was designed by T.H.Wyatt and built by Messrs Bull & Son of Southampton in a French classical style unlike anything else in Ringwood. This was at a time when many old town halls in England were being replaced by new grander Victorian ones. The building was made of red brick with Bath stone dressings and featured a balcony and the Morant coat of arms over the entrance. It housed a large Corn Exchange for use on Wednesday market days, a magistrates' room and other offices, including a library and reading-room.

Ringwood Market was in its heyday, with many agricultural advances promising a rosy future. Unfortunately this prosperity was soon followed by an arable slump in the last quarter of the 19th century, due to imported corn from USA and Canada, so the Corn Exchange as such was never a great success. Nevertheless it was well-used for balls, plays, concerts and indoor games until 1916 when the Morant family were forced to sell off almost all their estate



This photo is the earliest known photograph of Ringwood and shows Frampton's original shop in 1850 which later became the site of the Town Hall in 1868. (From Ted Baker Collection)

The new Town Hall was opened on July 1st 1868 amid great celebrations by Mr Morant who arrived from his home in Brockenhurst by train. Triumphant floral arches were erected along his route from Ringwood station to the Market Place with a triple arch at Friday's Cross displaying the words 'Welcome to the Lord of the Manor' on one side and 'Plenty Peace & Happiness' on the other. This was the time when

in Ringwood, including the Town Hall.

The building was then turned into the town's first cinema, the Picture House. This of course was in the days of the silent films of Charlie Chaplin and other favourites. The first lessee was Charles Valentine Jones, shortly followed by Barrington Lynham of Broadshard Lane. Mr Lynham had been an Edwardian jockey who had won the Derby on a horse named Pole Star. In 1931 he wired the cinema for sound and changed its name to Victoria, but externally the cinema still retained its former Town Hall appearance.

(Part 2 in Aug/Sept issue)

