

THE IMPORTANCE OF 2027 FOR A YEAR OF SPECIAL FESTIVITIES IN BUXTON: ANNIVERSARY OF SOME KEY EVENTS

(27/08/2026 version)

1. EVENTS IN 1877 150th anniversaries

i. THE OPENING OF THE BUXTON IMPROVEMENTS COMPANY'S NEW CONCERT HALL (NOW KNOWN AS THE OCTAGON) AND THE GRAND OPENING CONCERT.

The first full spa season of the New Concert Hall took place in 1877. The formal opening, however, took place late in the 1876 “spa season” on 30 August. A celebratory concert took place one day later. Details of the opening ceremony, the programme for the celebratory concert and the local reaction to these two events appear in Appendix 1.

The Editor of the Buxton Advertiser wrote early in 1877 about the new Concert Hall *“There is now after some months experience, reason to believe that we have a Concert Hall, spacious and ornamental..... and its usefulness will be more apparent next season after a full summer’s run.”*

At the conclusion of the 1877 season, the new concert Hall was believed to have performed well in terms of the environment it provided. The quality of the music being performed, however, was seen as needing to go up several grades to match. (The Buxton Herald and Gazette of Fashion 4 October 1877)

The musical dimension of the New Concert Hall opening ceremonies and of Queen Victoria’s Golden Jubilee is significant. The Duke of Devonshire’s Band had performed in the Pavilion Concert Promenade Room (now café and retail area) since the former was built in 1870. It had also performed regularly in the forecourt of The Crescent. A note on how these musical offerings evolved into what we see in the present day is presented in Appendix 4.

2. ANNIVERSARIES IN 1887

140th ANNIVERSARIES

i. THE LAYING OF THE FOUNDATION STONE OF BUXTON TOWN HALL

The foundation stone for the new Town Hall was laid in 1887 and coincided with Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee (see section iii below). A full description of the event is given in Appendix 3. The building was opened formally two years later.

The new Town Hall was to provide a suitable home for the expanding roles of local government in Buxton. It was also planned that the Town Hall would help extend the summer visitor season around the year through the provision of a quality cold weather venue. It was also to provide facilities for local groups and entertainments. The first floor was designed as "a large room" to be used for balls, concerts, dances, flower shows and conferences.

The pressure to commit more space for civic facilities grew rapidly once the Town Hall was actually built. Other rooms were planned for a free lending library. Space for a museum and art gallery was not initially included. The Free Library and Reading Room, once established, was a massive success.

Developments in archaeology and palaeontology created a golden age for academics and amateurs alike and the geology of the Peak District and immediate area around Buxton yielded many findings. These revealed the existence and co-existence of diverse mammalian species including man - a subject about which there had been much controversy. The findings also enlightened the Roman presence and later Romano-British influence within Buxton and the local area. Prospective donors of associated artifacts, and those of later periods, were frustrated by the lack of facilities and the apparent inability of local people to make further facilities available. The prospective gifts could not be accommodated beyond a very modest scale. This came to a head as the 1920s progressed. The enhanced need for further and continuing education provisions also exacerbated pressures on the Town Hall's accommodation.

The dilemmas were finally resolved when Buxton Borough Council took the decision to buy the empty Peak Hydropathic Hotel on Terrace Road. 1927 saw the internal modification and fitting out of the building for Free Library and Art Gallery, Museum and further education purposes. It was also planned to house

the Court (sessions formerly held in the Eagle Hotel) and several local government departments.

The year was a time of planning, anticipation and pride for the Council and townspeople.

ii. **QUEEN VICTORIA'S JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS**

The main celebration weekend in Buxton was 7/8 July 1887.

- **Special Fireworks Display and Japanese Feast of Lanterns.**

The date of this celebration was close to the main national weekend of planned celebrations for the Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee. The event took place over the lake in the Pavilion Gardens and was accompanied by performances of the Pavilion Gardens String Band and by its Brass band. Details of the exotic attractions presented are given in Appendix 2.

(Event advertised in The Buxton Herald, 28 June 1877)

- **Buxton Floral Fete**

This took place in the Market Place and is also believed to have been part of the Jubilee celebrations. According to Frank Hambleton of Buxton "Spatown" Past and Present's Facebook page, the word Fete was often used by the Victorians for celebrating a special holiday, commemoration, Centenary or Jubilee. There were many such floral displays in the Queen's jubilee year.



The photo belongs to Keith Sandy and was repaired by Frank Hambleton.

3. EVENTS IN 1927 100 YEARS AGO

- i. **BUXTON BOROUGH COUNCIL PURCHASED AND TOOK OVER THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE PAVILION GARDENS, THE OPERA HOUSE, THE HIPPODROME (LATER PLAYHOUSE) AND 23 ACRES OF LAND FROM THE BUXTON GARDENS COMPANY (SUCCESSOR TO THE BUXTON IMPROVEMENTS COMPANY) ON 21 SEPTEMBER 1927.**

The purchase price was £29,550 10 shillings. The sale and purchase was facilitated by the Buxton Corporation Act 1927. The Act brought many advantages but did, however, preclude the use of the Opera House for stage plays, except in very limited circumstances. The restriction had come at the Committee stage of the Bill, following intervention from the Theatrical Managers' Association. This feared that with a public corporation in ownership, Buxton Borough Council might subsidise theatrical performances, thus competing unfairly with private theatres. Ten years later in 1937 it was possible, nevertheless, to bring briefly The Old Vic Company for the annual Theatre Festival, which had been started up in the intervening years.

There is not much mention of how this transfer of facilities to public ownership was viewed at the time. However, 21 years later, celebrations marking the 21st anniversary of the takeover by Buxton Borough Council were reported in the Buxton Herald (19 August 1948). These celebrations lasted a week and included a costumed ball, popular songs 1927-1948, a gala dance, novelty items and competitions, chamber music concert, symphony concert, celebrity weekend concerts, midnight film show and fashion show.) They were mentioned again in The Buxton Advertiser on 17 October 1990.

Buxton facilities put into the public arena 100 years previously had evidently come to be highly valued.

- ii. **THE MOVE OF FREE LIBRARY, MUSEUM, EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES AND COUNCIL DEPARTMENTS TO THE FORMER PEAK HYDROPATHIC HOTEL**

This was an exciting but complex task. Planning occupied not only 1927 but also 1928. The museum and library moved early in 1929.

iii. **AWARDS AT BUXTON AND NORTH DERBYSHIRE MUSICAL FESTIVAL IN 1927**

Buxton had become something of a cultural hub. The award ceremony for this Festival, now known as Buxton Music, Speech and Drama Festival (founded in 1907), was reported by Sheffield Daily Telegraph. This Festival was founded in 1907. During the 1927 Festival, the junior classes were said to be well-filled and overall participant numbers were 900. This Festival embraced large and small amateur choirs, drama groups, piano and orchestral classes for ensembles and soloists. There were also classes relating to the spoken word. Participants came to Buxton from as far away as Sheffield, Leicester, Stoke on Trent, Liverpool and south Lancashire. (Sheffield Daily Telegraph 26 May 1927) The name changed later to Buxton Music, Speech and Drama Festival. This annual music festival is still in existence.

iv. **OTHER NOTABLE BUXTON EVENTS IN 1927**

- **THE OPERA HOUSE OFFERED “A WIDE RANGE OF PERFORMANCES”**

The range extended from a Rudolph Valentino film to Bizet’s Carmen and also Verdi’s “Rigoletto”, performed by “the famous O’Mara Opera Company”.
(Buxton Advertiser 22 April 1992. Presented under the heading “A Bird’s Eye View of the Past”).

- **BUXTON LINKED TO AMERICA BY TRANSATLANTIC PHONE LINES**

This is a reminder of the exciting technological developments going in 1927. The cost of making calls was £15 for three minutes, paid even if bad weather interrupted the call.
(Buxton Advertiser 22 April 1992 Under the heading “A Bird’s Eye View of the Past”).

- **OPENING OF SAFETY IN MINES RESEARCH STATION AT BUXTON**

Opened 14 June 1927.
Shields Daily News 14 August 1928

- **ENGLISH FOLK-DANCE SOCIETY’S SUMMER SCHOOL HELD IN BUXTON. INCLUDED AN EXHIBITION DANCE IN THE TOWN HALL**

This is an example of a national cultural event being hosted in Buxton. Stars of the show were the Handsworth (Sheffield) sword dancers, all of whom were coal miners. They were said to possess the secret of a traditional sword dance handed down by their forebears. Not danced by anyone else. The men

had done an extra shift overnight to enable them to spend a day in Buxton to present their dance. "Clad in white linen trousers and black leggings and old-fashioned blouses, they delighted a large audience by their enthusiastic and skilful dancing."

Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail 12 August 1927

- **FILM "THE FAST LADY" SHOWN AT THE "SPA CINEMA ABOUT A 1927 VETERAN CAR. (INDIRECT REFERENCE TO 1927)**

A collection of veteran cars and owners were invited to the premiere of the film. Shown in Buxton in 1963.

Buxton Advertiser 3 May 1963

- **THE BANDS CONTINUE**

The Buxton bands mentioned in relation to 1877 festivities continued through to 1927. In the interim, two further bands had been started. These were the Burbage Band and the Fairfield Buxton Band.

APPENDIX 1

1. THE PROGRAMME FOR THE OPENING OF THE NEW CONCERT HALL

“BUXTON GARDENS

*Opening of the Buxton Improvements Company's
NEW CONCERT HALL AND ADDITIONAL GROUNDS AT BUXTON
ON WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 30TH 1876 BY
HIS GRACE THE DUKE OF DEVONSHIRE, KG
BAND of the 1st KING'S DRAGOON GUARDS
Will play during the day.*

*GRAND ORCHESTRAL CONCERT under the direction of Mr Julian Adams (the
musical director of the Company)*

*MAGNIFICENT DISPLAY OF FIREWORKS by mssrs CT Brock and Co of the
Crystal Palace.*

ADMISSION FOR THE DAY ONE SHILLING

Excursion trains returning after the Fireworks.

(For particulars see bills.)

W F MILL, Sec.”

ii. THE GRAND OPENING CONCERT

The items included in the Grand Opening Concert were:

*“Madame Osborne Williams singing “Lady of the Sea”, “The Hay is i’ the Mow”
and the Scottish song “Huntingtower”.*

*Mr Sims Reeves to sing Pinsuti's new song “Smile and Bid Me Live”, “My Pretty
Jane” and “The MacGregor's Gathering”.*

Solo violin performance Mdlle Bertha Brousil

Solo Pianist and Conductor Julian Adams.

Accompanist Snr Bisaccia.”

*(Both events were advertised in the Stockport Advertiser and Guardian on 25
August 1876.)*

iii. GENERAL COMMENT

The Directors of the Buxton Improvements Company, which owned the Pavilion Gardens (land and buildings) were fiercely criticised for their

handling of both events by the press and the public. This was evident through the Editorial and letters to the Buxton Herald on 7 September 1896. The Chair of the Buxton Improvements Company, Dr Robertson, was seen as gushing and tasteless in his appreciation of the Duke of Devonshire and to grossly overstate how remarkable this occasion was. The room layout was such that the VIPs could not be seen by the audience. Dr Robertson was also seen to have slighted the Chairman of the Midland Railway Company, in his presence. The company was one of two companies which had brought many new visitors to Buxton and enhanced its accessibility. The building itself and the architect Robert Rippon Duke were highly praised, especially for the former's acoustics.

The Grand Opening Concert was also unfortunate. Performer Mr Sims Reeves (vocal soloist) failed to put in an appearance at the concert, believing that the climate of Buxton had made him unwell and performing would put his voice at risk.

APPENDIX 2

DETAILS OF THE EVENING EVENT TO CELEBRATE QUEEN VICTORIA'S GOLDEN JUBILEE

"A GRAND SPECIAL FIREWORK DISPLAY and JAPANESE FEAST OF LANTERNS given by Messrs C T Brock and Co (sole Pyrotechnists to the Crystal Palace, the Philadelphia Exhibition. Etc) on SATURDAY, JULY 7TH, 1877 consisting of Grand Display of Aquatic Fireworks on the Lakes; beautiful feast of Chinese and Japanese Lanterns, including

Monster Christal Palace Shells

Aerial Maroons, Parachutes.

Revolving Silver Fountains.

Grand Illumination of the Gardens.

Double Guilloche Wheels.

Mammoth Cascade of Golden Fire, falling 30 feet.

Batteries of Mines and Saucissons.

Magnesium Balloon, and

Flight of One Hundred Large Rockets.

THE STRING and BRASS BANDS will play during the Evening – the former in the Pavilion, under the direction of MR JULIAN ADAMS, the latter in the Grounds during the Fireworks.

ADMISSION AFTER FIVE O' CLOCK , 1s.

The Grounds will be cleared at Five o' Clock, and No tickets issued by the Company will be available for the evening of July 7th.

The Grounds will be finally Closed at Ten o' clock.

Special Trains will run to Buxton, returning after the Fireworks"

(The Buxton Herald, 28 June 1877)

APPENDIX 3

THE LAYING OF THE FOUNDATION STONE OF BUXTON TOWN HALL

The foundation stone was laid in 1887 and coincided with Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee. It was a community event. It was described in the Derbyshire Advertiser and Journal (24/6/1887) as follows:

"On Tuesday, the residents and visitors were early astir. The various clubs, Sunday School teachers and children met in the Crescent and went in procession to the site of the new town hall, public offices, free library and shops which it is intended to erect on the grounds of the old Market Hall...."

The Manchester Courier filled out the picture as follows:

"The laying of the foundation stone was undertaken by EC Milligan, Chairman of the Local Board, the Duke of Devonshire being unavailable and his depute the Marquis of Hartington being unable to attend on the day.A procession was formed in the Crescent headed by the Warslow Band, followed by clubs, Fire Brigade and engines, representatives of Devonshire Hospital, Buxton and Fairfield Local Boards, 2300 children, etc"

A hymn was sung, a prayer said and the architect William Pollard was given a trowel and James Salt (proprietor of the building company) a mallet. The foundation stone was put in position amid a loud blast of trumpets and an address was given by Mr Milligan comparing Buxton in 1837 and 1887. The event concluded with the National Anthem. The foundation stone is located by the main entrance on the Market Place side of the building.

The building process doubtless went through the normal good spells, trials and tribulations but details of these are not recorded in public media. The building was opened formally two years later.

APPENDIX 4

EVOLVING MUSICAL PROVISIONS IN BUXTON

Bands thrived in Buxton during the 19th century and beyond. The Burbage Band came into existence in 1861, Fairfield Band in 1865 and both bands continue today, augmented more recently by the Harpur Hill Band.

The Pavilion Orchestra was set up under the Musical Director and Conductor Julian Adams in the 1940s. He was a leading musical figure. He had enjoyed success in a career taking in Dublin, Edinburgh, Paris and London before coming most immediately from the Spa Room Concerts at Harrogate. The Pavilion Orchestra evolved into the Spa Orchestra in 1947, providing programmes in the summer season and around Christmas. This lasted until the 1960s when a series of concerts presented in the town by the Halle Orchestra led to the development of a “Buxton Festival of Music” which had a season in the summer for many years. As we know theatre festivals, opera festivals, and later Buxton International Festival evolved, supported by this rich background. The 1960s and 70s brought popular music festivals too, using the town’s indoor facilities as well as out of doors. There were some important names, such as The Beatles, having a presence. This diversity is seen today with a lively Fringe Festival, starting some 40 years ago, accompanying Buxton International Festival and the slightly later Gilbert and Sullivan Festival. Buxton Music Society, also came into existence, encompassing an excellent amateur choir and orchestra. The Society is going from strength to strength. In recent years, the High Peak Music Centre has evolved to offer opportunities to young people to participate in choral and orchestral ensembles and orchestras. There are two community choirs. The Opera House also offers diverse programmes of music, dance and theatre offerings throughout the year.