

The Phillimore Fountain

The Phillimore Fountain was erected in 1885 as a memorial in memory of the late Rector the Reverend Greville Phillimore. It replaced a stone obelisk, but was moved in 1903 to a location near the church where it still stands. The text that follows, containing many extracts from the Henley Standard, was originally published as an article written by Hilary Fisher entitled The Phillimore Fountain in Journal No. 24 of the Henley Archaeological & Historical Group, Spring 2010. The photographs have been added.



The Obelisk, erected in 1785. In the background the previous town hall replaced 1901.

It was resolved that the Council think it desirable to sanction the removal of the obelisk and the erection, of the drinking fountain as near to that site as may be thought desirable by the Council, subject to the erection of a sufficient number of lamps by the Phillimore family, and to plans being submitted and approved by the Council.

The seconder of the motion, Mr Simmons, said.....

he entertained no regard for the obelisk, did not know of any historic tradition attached to it, and no one seemed to know why it was placed there. A drinking fountain would be a nice addition and would improve the town.

However Mr Plumbe felt that.....

the fountain placed where the obelisk stands would be most unsuitable. The base of the memorial is about 10ft whereas the obelisk occupies only a base of about 0ft. It would be an impossibility for a fast driver from Duke Street to turn with safety...

Mr Hews was.....

averse to the removal of the obelisk belonging to the town and putting up a private memorial in its place.

Many councillors aired their opinions, but when it came to a vote only three members voted against, so the report was carried.

A final attempt to retain the obelisk came another fortnight later, in December 1884, when

The Mayor read a petition signed by 64 Burgesses of the town requesting that the obelisk remain where it now stands, and that another site be found for the memorial in question

however it was felt that the petition was too late, that a decision must be reached, and the proposal that

the plan as now laid before the Council be accepted

was carried by 7 votes in favour, 3 against and 3 abstentions.

In January 1885 details of the proposed memorial were laid before the General Purposes Committee who recommended them for sanction by the Council. At the same meeting the committee recommended that the obelisk should be re-erected in Northfield End at the junction of the Marlow Road and the Fair Mile.

The local paper was silent on the subject for four months until reporting in May that the old pump and the obelisk had been removed, the latter to its new location, and that

the basement is being prepared by Cllr Clements for the erection of the memorial fountain, which

it noted on 20 June rather cryptically,

is a showy but rather delicate-looking structure, and will, we are afraid, sorely tax the patience of Sergt. Fry when the hoarding is removed.

The hoarding was duly removed on Saturday 27 June 1885.

but no ceremony of any kind took place. The unsightly lights completely spoil the appearance of the fountain, which ought to be at least six feet higher and is, so we hear, really two feet lower than was shown on the plans approved by the Corporation, so that any alteration will most probably have to be made.

The fountain was designed by James Forsyth of Hampstead, and the four corner lamps by Hodge of Hatton Garden.

The Phillimore family formally offered the Memorial for acceptance by the Corporation on behalf of the town and also, the Mayor reported,

were willing to meet the Corporation in any way. He would suggest that the Memorial be raised

A month later the Architect, Mr Forsyth, offered the General Purposes Committee sketches showing the fountain being raised by 2ft 6ins, and Mr Walter Phillimore wrote that

the family did not hold themselves bound to execute any alteration other than that shown on the original plan.

The local paper did not report further negotiation, however, a fortnight later the issue dated 3 October 1885 recorded

The hoarding is again being erected around the Memorial fountain in the Market Place, so that something is probably about to be done to improve the appearance of our "White Elephant"

and, in the following week's issue

The workmen have been very busy this week reconstructing the structure, and it will be raised 2ft 6ins higher than before, partly by inserting a band of plain white stone above the granite, and tracery introduced above the arches over the panels. It is thought that this addition will improve the appearance of our "Elephant" very much.

Councillors were still not happy with the lamps around the fountain and proposed that they be removed and, to light the crossroads, larger lamps be placed at the Duke Street and Bell Street corners Col Makins M.P. had written offering to pay for some short granite pillars to protect the Memorial if the Council thought it necessary.

The local paper dated 17 October 1885 recorded

Mr Clements said he thought the time had now arrived when Mr Phillimore's offer of the Memorial could be wisely accepted, and he moved the following resolution "That the Drinking Fountain presented to the Town by Mr C. B. Phillimore on behalf of his family and friends, in memory of the late Rector of Henley having been finished to the satisfaction of the Town Council be now accepted, and that the thanks of the Council for this useful gift is hereby given to Mr Phillimore and his family."

The resolution was carried unanimously.



The Fountain shortly after completion with its four lamps.



...and only a few years later, without its four lamps.

The Memorial stood at the "Cross" for some 17 years, presumably becoming increasingly hazardous as the amount of traffic increased. Perhaps there had been suggestions for its removal in the intervening years, and perhaps it was the offer of the Coronation Committee in 1902

to give the balance of the Coronation Fund to the Council to remove the Phillimore memorial from the Market Place and erect in its place a lamp pillar light

that spurred the Council to take action.

The local paper dated 31 October 1902 recorded the above offer together with the proposal that the memorial be placed in the small enclosure at the end of the almshouses, on the west side of the churchyard. The Mayor had discussed the matter with Sir Walter Phillimore and took Rev. Phillimore's widow to see the proposed new site. Sir Walter then wrote..

.....that as they had no power in the matter they could not really object to the removal. Still the family hoped that the monument was not going to be shelved and that it would be well cared for. They did not wish to stand in the way of public improvements but at the same time they were sorry if it was necessary for the memorial to be moved, and suggested that a better place than near the Church would be in the middle of the Market Place.

The Mayor said he had told Sir Walter that his suggestion could not be considered for a moment, as if the memorial was moved there it would impede the traffic. The site near the Church was an absolutely perfect site.. and was the Council's original preferred site and the present site was only granted in a grudging manner.

Local paper 7 November 1902

Sir, Cannot our Town Council leave our only drinking fountain alone, or have they only just discovered that we are in the dark at that particular spot? Why not put a lamp at the top of the fountain.....

The Council then had to convince the Charity Trustees that the relocation was a good idea. As a large proportion of the Trustees were also members or ex-members of the Council this was not too onerous. At the meeting of the Charity Trustees on 28 November 1902 the Mayor, as a Trustee, reported the Coronation Committee's offer and the Town Council's wishes on the matter

that the Phillimore Memorial be moved from the Market Place to some other and more suitable place, as it constitutes a danger to traffic in its present position (He) spoke of the advantages which would arise.. (the site) was really the most appropriate site which possibly could be found.

The Rector said he would be sorry to see the Memorial moved from its present position, but of course that was a matter the Town Council had within their province. (He read) the latter portion of a letter which Sir Walter Phillimore had asked him to lay before the Trustees

"I learn now that the matter comes before your next Trustees' meeting. This puts Mrs Phillimore and myself in a great difficulty. To put the Memorial in the Almhouse site, railed off and shut up, would be an outrage

(N.B- There used to be a railing around the church from the corner of Longlands to the remaining portion of railing along the road's edge.)

If, as the Mayor thinks, the Trustees can, and will, throw the spot open, it is a different matter But we still do not like the position, and the more we think of it the less we like it. What we should desire, if possible, would be that the Town

Council should have the opportunity to reconsider the matter and especially our proposal of moving the fountain IN the Market place. We do not like REMOVAL FROM the Market Place. If it must be removed, we are not sure that the Churchyard site (if legally practicable), or even Northfield End, would not be sites as good." The Rector added that he thought the fact of the fountain being so near to the Churchyard would constitute an attraction to the children, who would, perhaps, be the cause of a nuisance.

The Trustees voted by 5 votes to 3 to grant

the use of the land between the parish Church and Dr Smith's house (Longlands) for the purpose of the erection of the fountain the conditions being that the Council pay a quit rent of 2s. 6d. per year carry out all the necessary work in connection with the removal and re-erection of the memorial, make good the drainage, and that the railing be moved in order to give complete access to the fountain. The charity trustees were not in a position to sell the land, or to give it.

The Council agreed, after it had been pointed out

.....that the Covenant, or Agreement which the Charity Trustees stipulated the Corporation should enter into, was not legally binding

The following week's paper predictably carried letters opposing the decision:

Sir ...I learn with great surprise and regret that the Town Council have resolved to remove the fountain erected in memory of the late Rector the Rev. Greville Phillimore, to a situation which is both unsuitable and inconvenient. The removal of the memorial will not only deprive Hart Street of one of its most picturesque features, but will also cause pain to those who erected it. I am informed, tho I trust incorrectly, that the Town Council intend to place upon the site which is now occupied by the Memorial - a lamp post. I sincerely trust that the inhabitants of Henley will (before it is too late) bring "pressure to bear", and thus prevent the accomplishment of so ill-advised and unfortunate a project.

Sir I see Is it too late to protest against this step? waive for a moment the question of the propriety and good sense of the proposed change, In the present day memories are short and those who erect a Memorial must apparently be prepared to see it removed in the course of a few years. But is the change needful? I have driven about the town constantly for the last 20 years and have never found the memorial in the way; or heard others complain of it as an obstruction; and if the light in the Market Place is insufficient let double lamps be erected ...

None the less by the end of December 1902 an agreement was drawn up and signed between the Town Council and the Charity Trustees relating to the siting of the Memorial on the Trustees' land adjoining the almshouses, to which the Corporation Seal was duly affixed.

In the first months of 1903 the Council invited tenders for

| *New enclosure for Drinking Fountain*

and having received two estimates, accepted that of Messrs Rogers Bros. at £9-12s-0d as being the lowest and (they) accepted Mr Barton's tender of £27-10s-2d

| *for removing and refixing the Memorial*

and the surveyor has been instructed to get his work in hand forthwith

Henley Standard 1 May 1903 reports

| *The work of removing the Phillimore Memorial from the Market Place to its new home close to the Parish Church is now in hand, and the tedious operation of taking the Fountain to pieces has throughout the week been watched with interest by not a few people, many of whom doubtlessly feel a pang of regret that the fine structure should be relegated to the comparative obscurity of the enclosed space in Hart Street. the work is in the hands of Mr Barton.....*

Henley Standard 15 May 1903

| *Sir, I am sorry to see the removal of such a familiar landmark as the Phillimore Memorial, and sincerely wish the Corporation could have seen their way to have removed the loafers and tramps who have congregated round it instead. Their number is on the increase, and now we shall be able to see them by night as well as by day*

The following week the paper commented

| *Now that the Memorial Fountain has been removed..... it is seen, sentimental considerations out of the question, that a great improvement is effected. The centre of the junction of the four thoroughfares being now quite clear, traffic is greatly accelerated, and, in the opinion of many, the best improvement to be effected would be in the way of letting matters stay as they are. In other words it is felt that a centre lamp is not absolutely necessary and that its room is more valuable than its light will be*



The Phillimore fountain in its current (2012) position between the church and almshouses