



All Change on the High Street

Heritage Open Days
Organised by Salisbury
Civic Society

Shop 14 **Waterstones** High Street, New Street chequer

Although the outside of the building has a modern shop front, the first floor has three tall, arched windows, a reflection of its construction as the Assembly rooms. On the roof is a cupola with a four faced clock showing W H Smith instead of numbers. The weather vane is based on a W H newsboy. On the New Canal side of the building a blue plaque explains the building's connections with the 19th century Dr Middleton who helped rid Salisbury of typhoid.

The ground floor and part of the first floor have been extensively modernised but the front of the first floor has retained the high ceiling and plaster cornice from its origins as the City's Assembly rooms. An arched opening high on one wall may have been a viewpoint from which concerts and dancing could be watched.

History

In the 18th century the Fountain Tavern had an Assembly Room attached for the 'Best People' to have Balls, Concerts and Dinners. In 1802 two new Assembly Rooms were built and in 1804 the Triennial Salisbury Music Festival was held in the new rooms 'graced by elegant and beautiful women in a squeeze not to be surpassed in the British Empire'.

In 1840, Franz Liszt gave a recital and there was also a visit from the Viennese Ladies Orchestra. 1847 saw the visit of Ethiopian Harmonists, playing bones, banjo, tambourine and violin. Jenny Lind (the famous 'Swedish Nightingale') sang here and gave money to Laverstock church. In 1887 the Assembly Rooms hosted dinners, dances, meetings, whist drives and wedding receptions. There was also a talk on a Polar Expedition 'musically accompanied and illuminated by a very powerful hydrogen lime light'. In 1924 the building was acquired by W.H.Smith and alterations made to the ground floor. In 1926 the upper rooms were refurbished as the Adland Ball Room with a sprung floor and spotlights plus a small oak panelled room called the Danvers Room and a 'crush hall'. The cupola, clock face and weather vane were also added. The weather vane is unusually topped by a newsboy.

During the second world war the upper floor was partly given over to accommodation and catering for some of those who worked on spitfires in the town. Until 1960 the Assembly rooms were managed by Sutton's restaurant next door, but when this changed hands they were finally closed for public functions. The building was further modernized in 1965. WH Smith moved to the newly developed Old George Mall. The building was acquired by Waterstones in 1995.

