

# Aylesbury's Disappearing Heritage

The old Electricity Showrooms in Exchange Street are currently being used by Aylesbury Vale District Council and will be demolished in the next few months when their move to Gatehouse is complete. The building which is not listed has a rich history and is important in the development of the town between the wars.



Photo courtesy of Roger King

By 1930 the supply of electricity reached almost every home in the town and the Borough were agents for the local supply from the Central Electricity Board. Local villages were plugging into Aylesbury's supply and lines of demarcation had to be drawn in the case of some rural areas. For example Cheddington and Ivinghoe were supplied by Luton Corporation but Wing was supplied by Aylesbury. The Borough Council had an Electricity sub-committee whose members read like a Who's Who of Aylesbury. The Chairman was Cllr Taylor and the others were the Mayor, Aldermen Jowett and Adkins, Viscount Stopford and Councillors Cannon, Gerrett and Standing.

In April 1930 the electricity committee considered plans submitted by Messrs J S Quilter & Son, Architects, for 'the erection of Show-room, Offices and Stores'. It was resolved that the plan be approved and applications be made to the Electricity Commissioners for sanction to raise the necessary loan, and to the Unemployment Grants committee for recognition of their proposals for the purpose of the grant. In June of that year, in order to get their loan, the committee were required to ensure that 50% of the men who would work on the building would be transferred from a depressed area. The tender of £11,868 from Webster & Cannon of Aylesbury, who at the time were one of the largest public, utility and commercial builders in Southern England, was accepted. Work commenced on August 11 1930.

The service provided by the showroom was applauded throughout and the Borough burghers were very proud to have this as an addition to their town. It showed them to be modern and forward-thinking. Therefore an important person was required to cut the ribbon at the opening ceremony. That person was Ramsay Macdonald, the Prime Minister, who opened the building in April 1931 amongst much fanfare and publicity.



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It ceased to be an Electricity Showroom in 1967, and has been used by Aylesbury Vale District Council as offices and a council chamber since 1996. It was highly commended for its refurbishment in The Aylesbury Society Good Design Award in 1996.

The showrooms are just one of the many interesting 1920s and 1930s buildings that have disappeared from Aylesbury's skyline over the years. Others include the Keith Garages frontage in Bicester Road, the Territorial Army Centre in Oxford Road and the 1935 Open Air Swimming Pool in Park Street. Some landmarks remain. Let us hope they can be protected as a reminder of the town between the wars.

**Roger King**

Electricity Showrooms 1971



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