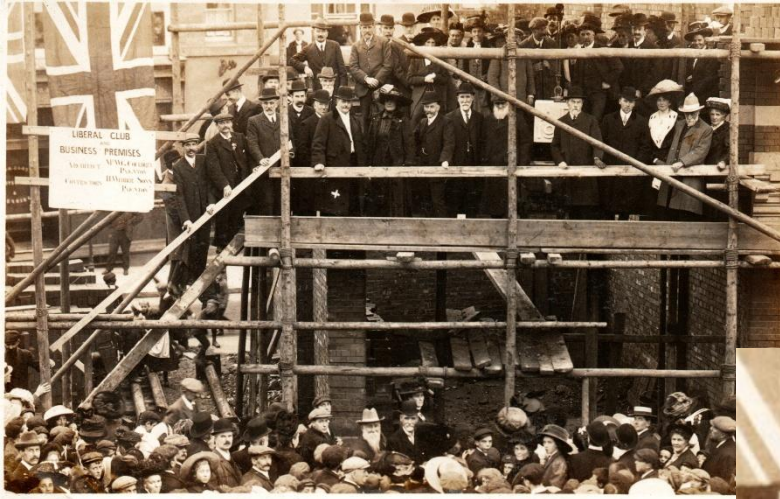


## THE PAIGNTON LIBERAL CLUB

The Liberal Club, also referred to as the Triangle, is located where Victoria Street, Totnes Road and Palace Avenue meet.



The Club was built in 1887 – the name survives on the front of the building. On the top is a fine cupola. This photograph shows the laying of the foundation stone.

The sign on the scaffolding reads:

LIBERAL CLUB and BUSINESS  
PREMISES  
Architect Mr W G Couldrey  
Contractors H Webber Sons, Paignton



Walter George Couldrey (1856 – 1950) was an Architect with offices at 14 Palace Avenue, Paignton. He was father to Major Walter Norman Couldrey ((1884 – 1970) who followed into his father's profession and eventually opened his own offices. Between them, they were responsible for a great many of Paignton's most impressive buildings.

Still today, the building bears its original name "Liberal Club".

The building stands out for its "cupola". In architecture, a cupola is a relatively small, usually dome-like structure on top of a building often crowning a larger roof or dome. Cupolas often serve as a roof lantern to admit light and air or as a lookout.

In 1911 The Electric Palace, or Triangle Cinedrome, was opened to the public by the proprietor, Major A.O. Ellis. Major Ellis envisaged the oncoming popularity of moving pictures. Arguably it was the first picture house to show movies in Paignton. A flag was flown over the tower to announce its opening and to entice Paigntonians to come and see the wonder of the moving magic lantern. This early postcard of the cinema shows the flag flying from the cupola.



Curious crowds soon filled the small 280 seat auditorium and were soon in roars of laughter at what they saw. Some of the first Charlie Chaplin shorts were soon favourites along with Laurel and Hardy, Harold Lloyd and Buster Keaton. The times were hard and severe, and it was a sheer delight to share the wondrous excitement with others, to be able to forget the world outside and lose oneself in the antics of those wonderful old classics which, even today, can still make us laugh when occasionally we see them on TV. Many comedians who followed admit they were inspired by the pioneers of the moving pictures. Morecambe and Wise, Benny Hill, and Arthur Askey to name a few.



The oval archway, which marks the spot where the foyer was situated in Totnes Road, is still apparent over what is now the tax office. One can imagine the queues of excited people waiting to go in. Unfortunately the narrow pathway was to be the demise of the old cinema because in 1949, following several accidents - one fatal - outgoing patrons being slow to adjust to daylight after the darkness inside, and with increasing traffic, it was obliged to close.

In 1935 Paignton Urban District Council acquired two floors of the former Liberal Club for use as a library. It was the responsibility of the Urban District Council to find suitable premises for a library, after which Devon County Council would provide staff, books and necessary equipment. There was public demand for a library in Paignton during the 1920s and into the 1930s but the Council could not find a suitable site. There was a possibility of the use of the two upper floors of the former Liberal Club at The Triangle, Totnes Road, but this was leasehold, and there was disagreement as to whether the lease should be taken for 5 years or 10. A number of Councillors felt that to tie themselves down to 10 years might mean missing a more suitable site. However, the Council finally agreed to the 10-year lease and the Library opened to the public on 18th December 1935. The opening ceremony was

interrupted by Rev. J. T. Whitehead, a Congregational minister, loudly complaining at the closing of the Reading Room at 7:00 p.m. or 7:30 p.m. as these hours did not give office workers much opportunity to use the Library – he was escorted from the building. Borrowers were allowed one fiction and one non-fiction ticket and children over the age of 12 were permitted to use the Children's section. Visitors' tickets were accepted. There had clearly been a need for a library in Paignton, as evidenced by the marked decline in book issues at Torquay following Paignton's opening.



In 1961 Paignton's Library moved to purpose-built premises in Courtland Road. Demolished in 2010, the library then moved to its new premises on Western Road, opening on 13<sup>th</sup> September 2010.

The Old Paignton Conservation Area Character Appraisal includes a description of the Liberal Club building, which falls within the Conservation Area. The link to this document is given below.

<https://www.torbay.gov.uk/media/7582/old-paignton-caa.pdf>

#### 4.1.66

The narrow triangular island block of 1-11 Totnes Road, 2-4 Dartmouth Road, a commercial complex of shops below with offices above, is even more visible than the Lloyds TSB bank to its northwest. Late Edwardian, it is built in a warm red brick with yellow limestone detailing to the bay windows, sill bands and architraves. The semi-circular second floor windows interpose some limestone in the brick vousoirs [*a wedge-shaped or tapered stone used to construct an arch*] which radiate out in sunrays, prefiguring a 1920s' motif. The flat roof is hidden by a brick balustrade pierced by thin slits. A cupola is located at the apex of the hairpin on the north; the blank façade on the south was never designed to be visible: it was revealed in the 1960s when the wider southern part of the building was pulled down so that Totnes and Dartmouth Roads could be joined in a gyratory system at this point.

Karen Chapman  
8<sup>th</sup> November 2025

#### Sources:

History of Torbay Library Services by Lorna Smith  
Old Paignton Conservation Area Character Appraisal – Torbay Council