



# Clock Stories for Sussex Day, Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> June at 1:00pm

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Welcome to the Stepping Out walk on clocks this Sussex Day. I'm Alex, one of the museum's volunteers and today I'll be assisted by David and others.

Today we're going to be looking at the history and stories behind some of the street clocks around Bexhill. The walk is just less than 2 miles, looking to finish at Bexhill West Station in time for the grand re-starting of the clock by the mayor at 2:45pm.

It's all on the flat but as usual please be careful when crossing roads and be aware of other users on busy pavements.

## Introduction

Bexhill has a total of 26 publically visible clocks, these include 3 sundials. Curiously none of the 23 churches in the town have any visible timepiece! And only 16 of these clocks remain in good working order. A newly formed Bexhill Heritage group has recently taken on the project of restoring the West Station clock which is where we'll be heading towards today and you'll witness the number of disused clocks being reduced to 15.

We will be visiting eight of these old timers, and if you are interested to see a map listing of all the clocks, you may check out my website Bexhill-OSM.

## Route

*Bexhill Museum – Egerton Park main lawn*

📍 **Bowling Pavilion.** This building was originally built as a park café in the late 1930's – we don't have an exact date - it is now used as changing rooms for the bowling green. I do know the workings of the clock have been changed to electric in recent times.

Now while we're here I'm going to mention some significant Bexhill clocks that we won't have time to visit today.

**Bexhill Hospital.** [\[PHOTO 1\]](#) This tower and clock is a tribute to Admiral Charles Anson, Chairman of the Board of Management 1930-33, who was considered the hospitals 'founding father', it was started on October 1934 by his wife. You may have noticed the hands haven't been going round as of late, as the mechanism that works the clock face is currently being repaired. You may also find a smaller Synchronome, pendulum clock inside one of the wards that would have been used to synchronise all other clocks in the hospital.

**Bexhill Amateur Athletic Sports Centre.** [\[PHOTO 2\]](#) This was built on the 12<sup>th</sup> May 1937, and much of its construction was funded by members of the public who could buy a brick for a shilling – if you visit the centre you can find their names still engraved into the outside walls today. This photo shows the building during the Second World War surrounded by sandbags as a 'Casualty Service Depot and Decontamination Centre', one of two around Bexhill to aid civilians in the event of a gas attack, fortunately these depots never used.

### *Egerton Park main lawn – Clock Tower, West Parade*

① **Clock Tower.** [PHOTO 3] The tower was the work of architect Robert Hembrow and built by Gastin & Ransom of Bexhill, it was to celebrate King Edward 7<sup>th</sup>'s Coronation on 9th August 1902 but due to poor planning it was not completed until two years later in July 1904 with a understandably low-key start. It is made of imitation bath stone and originally would not have been painted; this colour scheme was chosen by the council in 1992. Unusually it is not a listed monument. The clock face is not original and attributed to Andrew Kemp and Norman Holmes. In July 2004, a plaque was unveiled by the Mayor Stuart Earl to finally put King Edward's name on the memorial's south face. The clock mechanism itself was made by Wright & Sons, a local watch and clockmaker. You can see the 'flatbed movement' at work by looking through one of holes in the door and shining a torch (such a mobile phone) through the other.

### *Clock Tower, West Parade – The Colonnade, Central Parade*

② **Jubilee Sundial.** [PHOTO 4] Originally placed next to Buxton's Kiosk in 2002 to celebrate Queen Elizabeth II Golden Jubilee by the Rotary Clubs of Bexhill and Senlac, it was moved to the Colonnade in 2012 during the West Parade redevelopment, and now celebrates the Diamond Jubilee. A wishing well built in 1980, also by the Rotary Clubs, was also removed in 2012; this has now been replaced with the coin collector in Marina Court Garden.

### *The Colonnade, Central Parade – Shelter, East Parade*

③ **De La Warr Court.** Residents of De La Warr Court thought it would be nice to have a clock overlooking the Promenade, and as it happens, one of the residents was a local clock maker and offered to put the a clock in top aperture in 2003.

**Marina Gardens, Floral Clock.** This flower bed was once used as a decorative clock, where the mechanism was set in the ground under the flowerbed, which was then planted to visually appear as a clock face with moving arms which also held bedding plants. We don't know if it is still operational.

### *Shelter, East Parade – Bexhill Station, Sea Road*

④ **Bexhill Station.** There have been three separate stations here since 1846; one was located where Sainsbury's carpark is now, the second was on Devonshire Square, and in 1902 – just one month after the West Station opened – they amalgamated to form the long station platforms and station we see today.

**Clock House.** Built in 1888, it is a mystery to why it has this name. The earliest record I can find refers to this as a wine merchant in 1906

**Jubilee Clock, Old Town.** [PHOTO 5] Bexhill's oldest clock was unveiled to mark Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in June 1887. On the 20th June 1908 a fire broke out at the then Cave Austin & Co grocer's warehouse which gutted the building and destroyed the workings of the clock. Thankfully the clock's casing was found to be not too badly damaged so the clock was given new workings, restored to its original state, and ceremonially restarted on King Edward 7<sup>th</sup>'s birthday, 9th November 1908. Both the original and replacement mechanism was provided by a local clockmaker, Mr Shindler.

### *Bexhill Station, Sea Road – Bexhill Youth and Community Centre, Station Road*

⑤ **Bexhill Youth Centre.** [PHOTO 6] Celebrating their 130<sup>th</sup> year, the building was opened by the 7th Earl De La Warr during 1888 as the Jubilee Memorial Institute, to commemorate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee. It contained a reading room, smoking room, committee room, card room, bar parlour and, later, a billiards room. There was a terra cotta medallion of Queen Victoria over the eastern doorway with the inscription *Bexhill Jubilee Memorial Institute 1887* cut into the stonework, this is barely visible today. The Centre's 1965 clock was given by friends of Richard J Toleman, a Medical Officer of Bexhill from 1948 to 1964 in commemoration of his devoted services to the youth of the borough.

Bexhill Heritage's project coordinator is visiting the building's clock this Wednesday to see what would be involved in its restoration.

*Bexhill Youth and Community Centre, Station Road – Town Hall Square*

⑥ **Town Hall.** [PHOTO 7] The Town Hall clock was unveiled on the 11<sup>th</sup> July 1955 by the then Mayor Mrs J. O. Alexander as a reminder to citizens of the "passing of time and the importance of using it well". The desire to erect the clock came from various members of the public, as they considered the building was not quite complete. It was also remarked that councillors would be able to now arrive at meetings on time!

[PHOTO 8] The building itself was designed by Henry Ward and opened on the 27<sup>th</sup> April 1895 by the Mayor of London Sir Joseph Renals. Extended in 1908 to create a new council chamber, again in 1937 along Amherst Road and merged with a house on the west wing in 1962. The tax office now job centre, behind, was built in 1989.

The town hall site was bought from the De La Warr Estate but the Square was a gift.

**Taxi firm clock.** You can find similar ones online for £20 - in fact there's another just like it hidden away in the Old Town.

*Town Hall Square – Victoria Hall, Victoria Road*

⑦ **Victoria Hall.** Originally this was a **Congregational** meeting hall, reading room and private school and later an educational and entertainment venue. It was so-called because it opened in August 1887 during Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee. Since 2010 both Victoria Hall and the adjacent St. John's United Reformed Church have been developed into an activity centre for young people, called St John's Centre. Most recent redevelopments to the building have seen the distinctive oriel bay window removed and an additional floor added. Above this replacement window you can see a circular sandstone bas relief of Queen Victoria which is at risk of further erosion.

*Victoria Hall, Victoria Road – Beeching Road*

⑧ **Pedestrian subway.** [PHOTO 9] Now this is unrelated to clocks, but it recently intrigued me. Some of you may remember that underneath where we stand today was once a pedestrian subway that went under the West Branch Line, it linked Colebrook Road to the west to Victoria Road the east. It was contemporary with the line itself, and removed in the early 1970's when the industrial estate was built. It still exists (you can find it down this slope), and its sole purpose is to now carry Egerton Stream as it makes its way down to Egerton Park and out to sea [possible mention concrete pier].

*Beeching Road – Bexhill West Station, Terminus Road*

📍 **Bexhill West Station.** [PHOTO 10] A four and a half mile branch line was ceremonially opened between Crowhurst and Bexhill on 31<sup>st</sup> May 1902 by the Crowhurst, Sidley & Bexhill Railway Company which had been promoted by the Earl De La Warr together with other local businessmen and landowners. The branch would offer a quicker route to Bexhill than that already provided by the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway whose own Bexhill station on the Hastings to Brighton line had opened more than fifty years earlier. Despite the shorter route to London, passengers actually continued to prefer Bexhill Central station and in 1917, the Railway Executive Committee ordered the closure of the branch from January 1917 until March 1919. The line's demise was confirmed by its inclusion in the Beeching Report, and it finally closed 54 years ago, almost to the day on the 15<sup>th</sup> June 1964.

This terminating station, hence the Terminus Road name, is recognised as a Grade II listed building designed by Barry and Mercer, built of yellow and red brick and Bath Stone dressing, Welsh slate is used on the roof which is crowned by a clock tower. Just below is the weight driven mechanism made by Gillett and Johnston. During its time as a station, the clock would have been wound once a week, many of those minders have written their signatures inside the turret. Alas, after its time as a station, the mechanism was left unwound and fell into disrepair... until today.

[PHOTO 11] A new conservation group for Bexhill was set up in November last year and one of their first projects was to see if they could get the clock ticking again. With a team of diligent volunteers (including myself) and sponsorship help from members of the public, the mechanism and its four faces have been brought back to complete working order.

The restarting ceremony will start at about 2:50pm, there will be a speech by the mayor, presentations, choir and poetry; and you'll be able to ask lots of questions about the clock to the panel of volunteers. So feel free to stick around and enjoy the festivities. On behalf Bexhill Museum, thank you for joining us on this Clock Stories for Sussex Day walk.

**Finish**

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**Note: The tour was put together to raise funds for Bexhill Museum, so if you enjoyed it please consider sending them donation at <https://bexhillmuseum.org.uk>**

#1: Bexhill Hospital | c1950



49642 Bexhill Hospital

## #2: Bexhill Amateur Athletic Sports Centre | c1940



#3: Clock Tower movement | 2017





#4A: Jubilee Sundial | 2007



#4B: Rotary Wishing Well | 2006



#5: Jubilee Clock | 1908



#6: Bexhill Youth Centre | 1891



#7: Town Hall clock | 1955



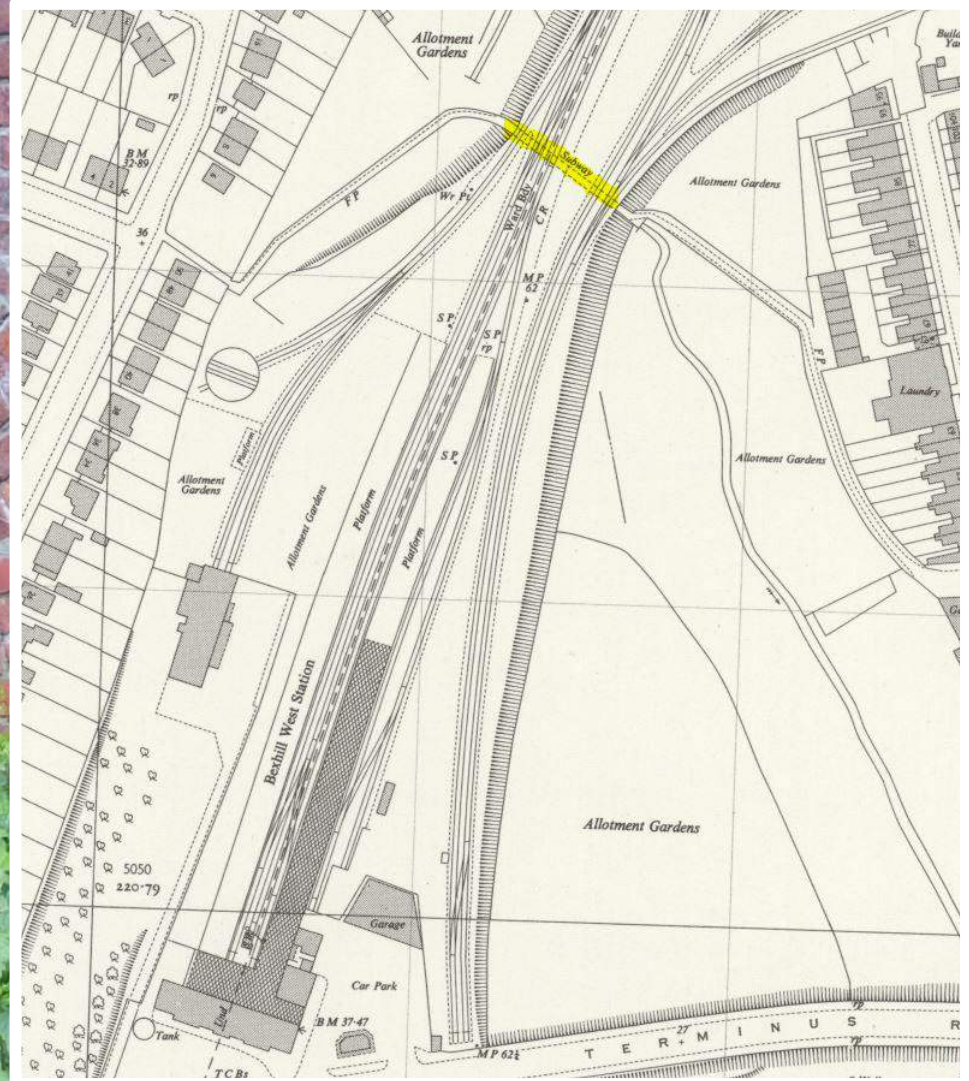
*Mr. J. Harmer, a member of the Borough Surveyor's staff, unpacks the Town Hall clock.*



#8: Town Hall | c1900



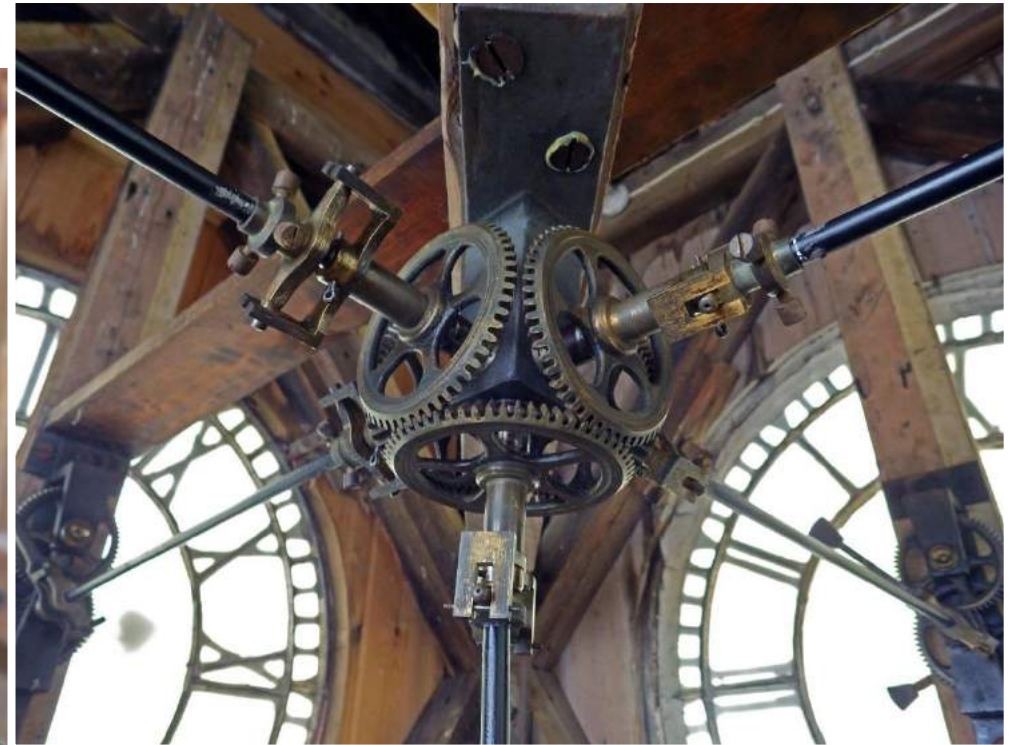
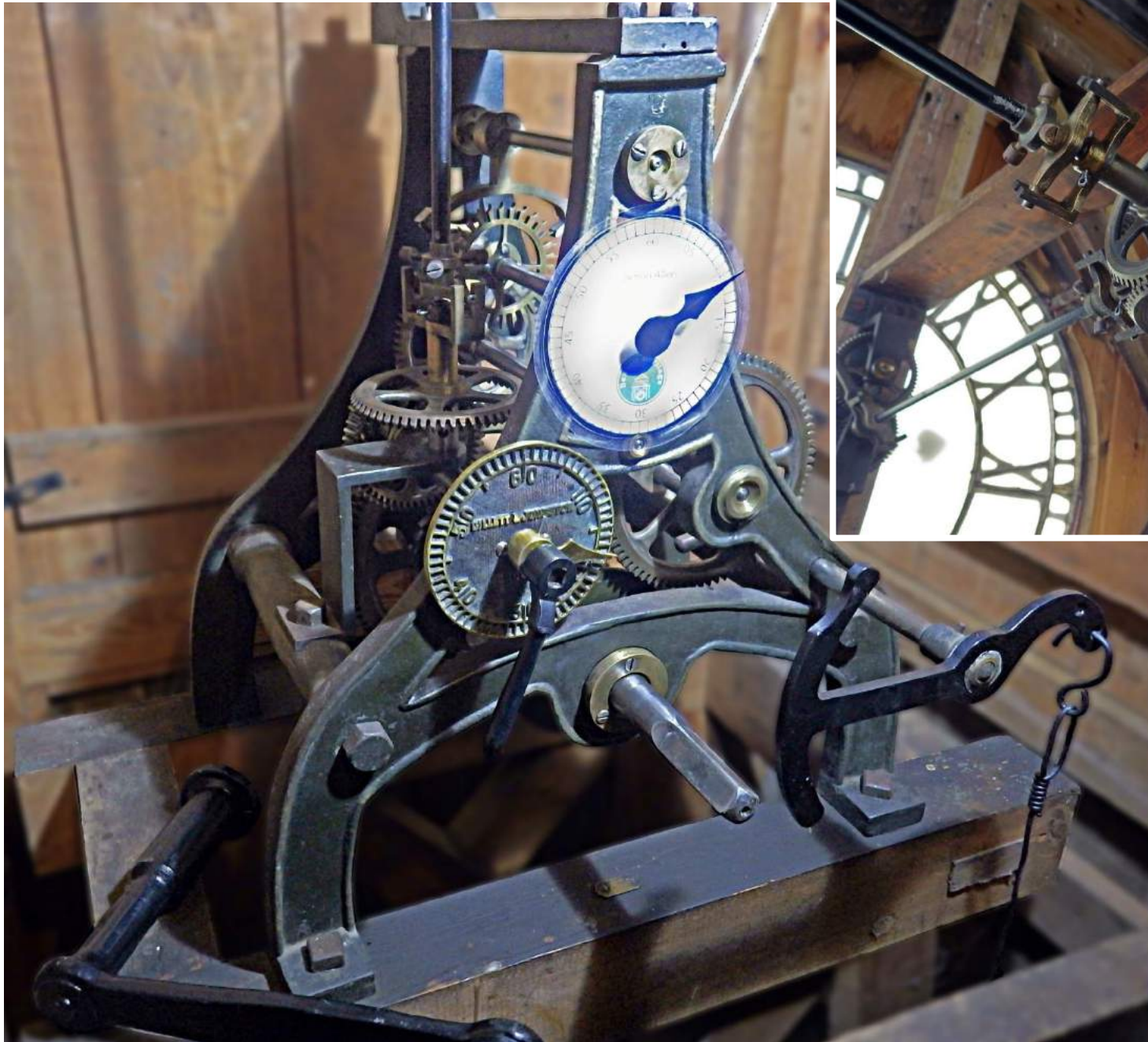
#9: Bexhill West pedestrian subway | 2018 | 1955



#10: Bexhill West Station | 1905



## #11: Bexhill West Station mechanism | 2018



**Top:** Inside the turret are the brass bevel gears that drive the hands, they are connected through a 'leading off rod' to the movement below.

**Left:** The movement is powered by weights, connected through a set of pulleys and maintained by a pendulum. Note the handle used to wind the clock; this is done once a week.