Lancaster Civic Vision

Celebrating our Heritage – Enhancing our Environment – Shaping our Future

MORECAMBE CLOCK TOWER

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The Clock Tower on Morecambe's Marine Road Central is one of the town's smaller but more distinctive landmarks. It symbolises the late-Victorian and Edwardian expansion of the town in terms of population and facilities, adding to its growing reputation as a major seaside resort. The Clock Tower was installed on the seafront next to the Central Pier and around half a mile from the Winter Gardens and Harbour.



The Clock Tower in 2021 (Source: the author)

As the visitors 'promenaded' they might need to know the time – meal times at their boarding house or the times of shows – but they did not have a watch. As the photographs at the end of this guide show, this was a bustling part of Morecambe.

Usefully, public toilets were right next to the Clock Tower (underground and with a landscaped roof area). They have since been rebuilt at ground level.

The Tower's story starts with the generosity of Alderman and then Mayor John Robert Birkett JP who had pledged £400 of his own money (nearly £50,000 in 2020 value) to part-fund a public library for Morecambe.

This plan fell through when the Council refused to raise the rates to pay for its upkeep. Birkett then switched his donation to the construction of a Clock Tower. He made his proposal formally to the Council in March 1905 with the aim of 'opening' the Clock Tower on 22 July.

The Tower was designed by Cressey and Keighley, a short-lived architectural practice on Euston Road, Morecambe. It was built by Messrs Edmundson. The clock was made by Rhodes of Lancaster and there is an internal vertical ladder within the Tower to give access to the clock mechanism.

There is a memorial and foundation stone laid by the Mayor's wife on 24 June 1905. After very rapid construction, the Tower was declared ready on 6 September 1905 and the clock was illuminated for the first time two days later. Oddly there was no formal opening or unveiling ceremony.

There was an objection to the Tower's location from a neighbour who said it would damage his view but this was overruled. One councillor did not approve of so much building on the seaward side of the Promenade. An alderman thanked the Mayor for his generosity but recalled the criticisms made while it was being built. The month after it was opened, there was a debate in the Council about whether they could afford to illuminate the four clock faces. The Mayor's generosity did not extend to its running costs.

In practice the Mayor's £400 did not buy the town all that much Tower. It is only 46 feet high (14 metres). It is built in a striking design of red brick with buff sandstone banding and dressing.

There used to be benches around the base between the four corner buttresses, each with a roof to give sheltered seating, but these have been lost.

The Tower was partly functional – to give the time to those without watches – and partly to decorate the Promenade. The Central Pier next door and much else of Morecambe in its heyday have disappeared. The Clock Tower remains.

Here are some photographs of the Clock Tower area in busy times, taken from Lancashire County Council's Red Rose Collection, which we gratefully acknowledge. The first two are Edwardian, taken soon after the Tower had been built.







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