

Famous faces: The Duke of Wellington and William Wilberforce stayed at The Tontine; Samuel Holberry wanted it as a stronghold; and historian David Price

Time of the Tontine

Famous inn was toast of the town

IT is a building which few people today have heard of and which there is no physical trace of ever having existed.

But 230 years ago this month in January 1783, the foundation stones were being laid for a huge Sheffield venue which would be at the heart of the city's civic, cultural and economic life for more than half a century.

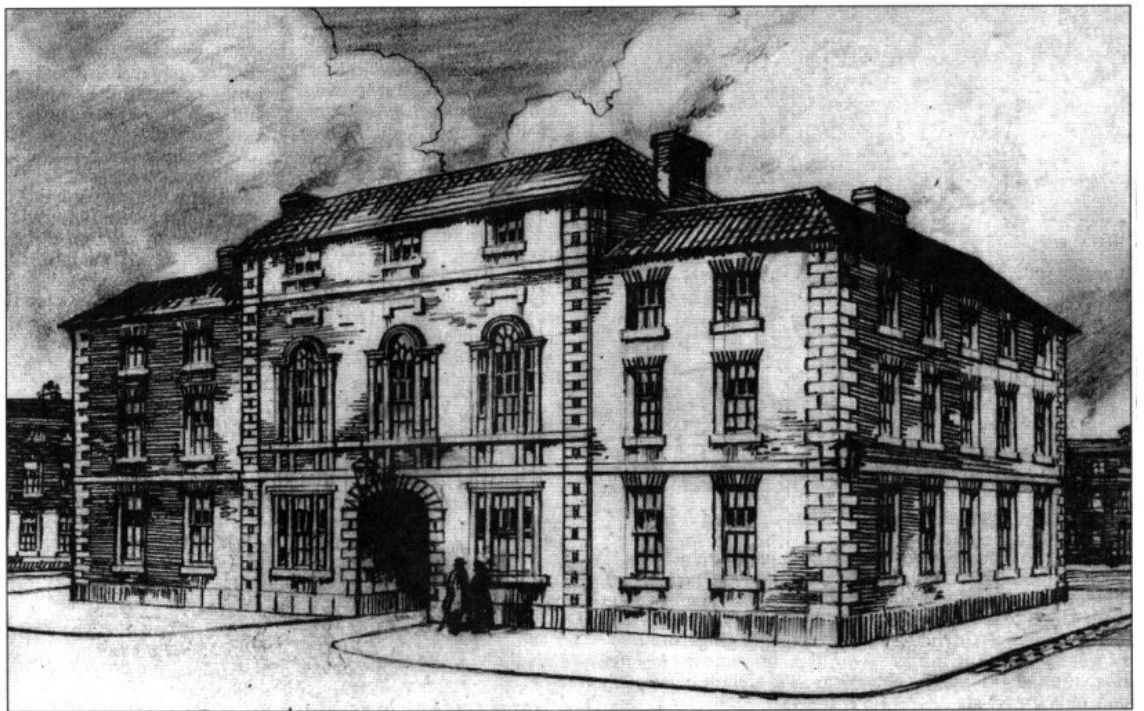
The Tontine Inn, which stood in Dixon Lane, became renowned across the north of England for its world-famous guests, opulent 12,000 square foot banqueting hall, and potent ales brewed in the onsite brewery.

The Duke Of Wellington and William Wilberforce stayed there. Master Cutlers entertained in its bar. And the radical Samuel Holberry considered it of such importance, it was one of two buildings he attempted to take over during his failed 1840 uprising. The other was the Town Hall.

At its height, in a pre-railway age, 13 stagecoaches left every single day for other parts of the country, making it one of the busiest transport hubs in Yorkshire.

Today, The Star brings you this picture from the city's archives to celebrate this largely forgotten anniversary.

"It was very much at the centre of Sheffield life," says historian David Price. "It would have been one of the largest inns and one of the grandest buildings in the city at that time.



Grand: The Tontine Inn, an artist's impression from 1941.

"It was opposite the Town Hall, then in Waingate, and was the first place many visitors to the city saw so it was not only very busy, it was of some considerable strategic importance and considered of some prestige."

Building started on the site - now Wilkinson - on January 4, 1873.

Fifty of the wealthiest men in Sheffield each put up £100 towards the cost of the hotel, with equal shares of future profits or losses. It opened - complete with stables for 60 horses, small cottages for hotel staff and premier rooms on the second floor - in 1785.

"To say it would have impressed people is an understatement," says David, of

Tontine titbits

THE Tontine had some great moments...

- **YOUNG politician William Wilberforce chose it to celebrate after announcing he would contest the Yorkshire parliamentary seat in the 1790 General Election. He won and went on to become globally famous as an anti-slavery campaigner.**
- **RADICAL Samuel Holberry planned to seize the**

venue in 1840 and use it as a base to launch a liberal revolution. As it was, he was arrested at home before a shot was fired.

■ **A GIANT pie for the city's poor - two feet wide and one foot deep - was cooked by Tontine chefs for Christmas 1837. It included turkeys, partridges, geese, pigeons, pheasants, rabbits and one leg of veal.**

Oakhill Road, Nether Edge. "That's what it was designed to do, and it did."

This was a time when the current Cutlers' Hall still

had not been built, and the old one, constructed 60 years earlier in 1725, was starting to fall into disrepair. It meant much of the city's elite social

and cultural life moved to the Tontine, including social balls and election counts.

It also did its fair bit for charity. In December 1837, chefs there cooked a monster Christmas pie to feed the city's poor.

"The building reflected a growing confidence in the city," says David. "It's a shame there's no mark of where it was."

And yet when the end came, it was swift.

With the arrival of the railway, coaching inns like The Tontine became obsolete almost overnight. It closed on October 23, 1849, and was demolished two years later to make way for the Norfolk Market Hall.