

## 2.2 History of the Building

Before even the first foundation stone was laid in 1846 the City Hall complex was already attracting positive attention. A drawing of its Boscawen Street elevation was included in the Royal Academy's Summer Exhibition in 1838 and the catalogue records a "North West view of the Town Hall, Royal Stannery Court and Markets at Truro, Cornwall, about to be erected from designs of Messrs Cope and Eales." (Berry et al, 1997.) It is possible that the same drawing is singled out for mention in the *Athenaeum Journal of Literature, Science and Fine Arts* in 1845, which describes the Town Hall as "a handsome piece of Italian design and bold character." (Berry et al, 1997) The same year, the *Royal Cornwall Gazette* newspaper invited contractors to provide prices for "the erection of new Halls and Markets at Truro" to a design by the architect Christopher Eales of the firm Messrs Cope and Eales Architects, based at 21 Langham Place, London (RCG, 1845) The tender was won by a Mr Prior of Helston, Cornwall at a price of £8328 (Berry et al, 1997).

The style was Italianate classicism, in part popularised by Albert, Prince Consort and best known in his own design of Osborne House on the Isle of Wight. Modelled on an Italianate villa, Osborne House was completed between 1845 and 1851 by Thomas Cubitt and was much published during and after its construction. Eales would have been aware of that project and his own drawings demonstrate restrained elegance, highlighted with opulent details, typical of the Italianate style. Eales' austere, masonry forms of the market hall are picked out with painted and gilded mouldings and other details at the frieze and ceiling level (Fig 16). It also appears there was an original intention to infill the portal openings on the City Hall side with timber and glazed section doors (Fig 17-18) although this was not realised.

The City Hall complex was completed remarkably quickly, opening with a ceremony presided over by Mayor Clements Carlyon in 1847 (RCG, 1847). Contemporary drawings show a building that externally is remarkably unchanged today. The only obvious difference is the addition of the clock tower on the Boscawen Street elevation which occurred in 1858 when the existing turret was taken down and a taller tower, some 15ft in height and topped by a weather vane, was added to accommodate a clock 'with illuminated dials' (RCG, 1858.) Whilst records confirm the completion of the City Hall elevation in 1847, they also suggest the Back Quay elevation may be somewhat later.



Fig 18. Design for Truro City Hall's interior c.1840s (Cornwall Records Office)

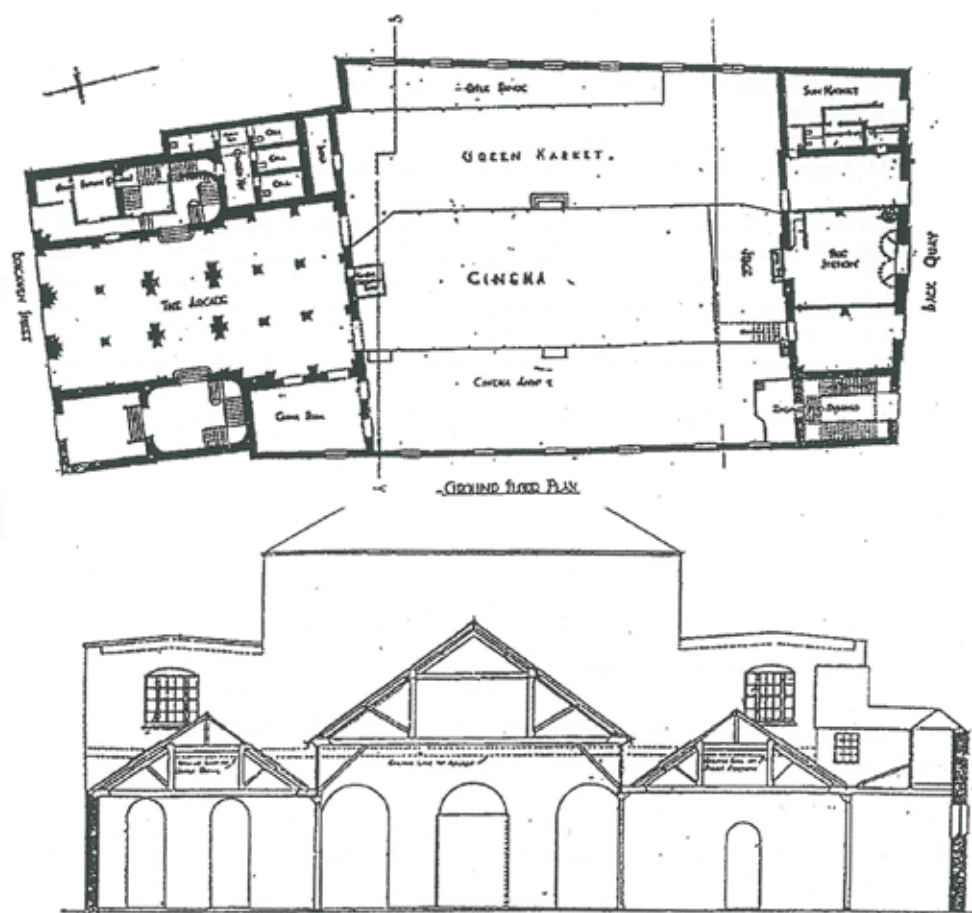


Fig 19. Plan of the City Hall and Hall for Cornwall plan and section through the Hall for Cornwall, 1924 (Cornwall Records Office)



Fig 20. The City Hall roof following the fire in 1914 (Hall for Cornwall)

Whilst a covered market on the ground floor existed beneath the civic spaces it may not have been enough. Newspaper articles of the time imply that plans and elevations for a new 'pig market, fish market and corn exchange' were presented during a Town Council meeting in 1866 (RCG, 1866), suggesting that the market space was extended south. This is confirmed by an unreproducible 1876 ground floor plan, which labels a fish and pork market at the Back Quay end and a large open space that would have been the corn exchange behind. The drawing also confirms the position of the Fire and Police Stations which were on the Boscawen Street side.

With the site filled on both sides, subsequent ordnance survey plans do not show much change to the external composition of the City Hall complex. The interior, however, continued to change drastically and mostly within the Back Quay market hall section of the complex, both in terms of functions as well as spatial layout. Subdivided with time into three 'aisles', the spaces consisted of vegetable stands, an ice-rink alongside added in 1907, further followed by the addition of a cinema in 1912 (Lynne, 1992) (Fig 19). Although the space suffered a significant fire that gutted most of the building in 1914 (Fig 20), by 1919 the now well partitioned space was officially known as the 'County Picture Theatre and Truro Skating Rink Co' (RCG, 1919). While the Boscawen Street façade continued as the main elevation, Back Quay was made both more prominent and usable when the River Kenwyn was covered over in 1923 (Fig 21), creating a public space and parking area in front of the southern facade (Bird, 1986). In 1924 the Back Quay building's market hall interior was remodelled to create a public hall that was completed in 1925. Carried out by the firm of the Thornley and Rooke (Berry, 1997), a newspaper article describes:

*"the conversion of the existing Town Hall into a Public Hall accommodating 1000 persons on the ground with the usual cloakrooms. A stage, suitable for the presentation of stage plays and dressing rooms... were also asked for with the additional stipulation that the existing annexe, or Green Market, should be so arranged that it could be utilised in connection with the public hall when required... the existing building at either end of the market hall had to remain untouched, with the exception of the old police station and cells, which were available for us in connection with the new scheme... the problem, therefore, resolved itself into remodelling the existing premises, to obtain as far as possible the usual amenities generally found in connection with a public assembly hall."* (RCG, 1924)



Fig 21. The covering of Back Quay in 1923, the Hall for Cornwall visible on the right (Hall for Cornwall)





Fig 22. OS Map 1933 (Cornwall Records Office)



Fig 23. The demolition of the Public Hall to construct the Hall for Cornwall in the 1990s. Notice the barrel vaulted roof (Hall for Cornwall)

The triple pitched roofs over the three aisles of the market hall were replaced with the new public hall's barrel vaulted roof on Doric columns (Fig 23). The main entrance was from the Boscawen Street side to the north, whilst the stage was at the south end. The east aisle was open whilst the west aisle was subdivided by a dressing room. It was also during this remodelling that the prisoners cells were removed from the Police Station in the north eastern corner of the City Hall section (the Cafe today) whilst various partitions and other alterations were added in both the City Hall and Hall for Cornwall sections. (Berry, 1997) While traces remain, most of these have been lost as extensive remodelling to the interior was undertaken in the 1950s. Mezzanine levels were inserted to both the City Hall and Hall for Cornwall and adjustments made to accommodate these; the partial loss of the north-eastern stair dates from this period. The public hall received additional facilities for the public and performers whilst a mezzanine balcony and staircase dating from the 1920s remodelling were lost.

With the economic difficulties of the WWII and the wider economic decline of Cornwall in the mid-20th century, the City Hall complex began to deteriorate. Whilst the City Hall itself continued to operate as before, from the late 1960s onwards the rest of building was either disused or frequently changing functions. An example is the flea-market that was organised in the market hall space beneath the city hall in the 1970s (Berry, 1997). Beginning as a response to commercially troubled times it continues in the same space to this day (Fig 14). In the 1980s, worried about the state of this prominent building, Carrick District Council sold a 125 year lease for £1.00 to Benjamin Luxton, a Cornish opera singer who planned to return the buildings into a performance venue (Berry, 1997). In the 1990s a high profile, community led campaign, was started to secure funding. In 1995, Arts Lottery funding was received for the conversion of the premises to a concert hall with an additional funding mix from Carrick District Council, Cornwall County Council, various trusts, foundations and companies as well as funds raised by local people. An HLF application was made in 1996 but was deemed ineligible in early 1997 due the Hall for Cornwall Property Trust's constitution not meeting the required definition of an eligible recipient under the 1980 National Heritage Act (this restriction was subsequently removed in a later Act of Parliament). Nonetheless, the most extensive rebuilding program to date got underway (Figs 23-24) and the Hall for Cornwall was finally opened in 1997. Whilst the scheme was thorough in its scope, with the entire central section gutted and a lot of the Back Quay spaces rebuilt, the project was still completed with shortfalls that continue to plague the usability of this important performance venue today.



Fig 24. The construction of Hall for Cornwall in the mid 1990s looking north (Hall for Cornwall) [2]



## A Brief History of Theatre in Cornwall: The Middle Ages to Today

Cornwall's longstanding theatrical tradition starts in the Middle Ages. The most famous Middle Cornish play is *Ordinalia*; a trilogy of medieval mystery plays which date from the fourteenth century. The three plays, *Origo Mundi*, *Passio Christi* and *Resurrexio Domini*, were written in Middle Cornish, had stage directions in Latin, and would have been performed over three days in permanent theatres called 'rounds' (Trussler, 2000). Two other plays originate from the Middle Ages and are written in the vernacular: *Beunans Meriasek* (completed 1504) and *Beunans Ke* (written c.1500). The latter was re-discovered in 2002, when it was identified among the private collection of Welsh scholar J. E. Caerwyn Williams in a donation to the National Library of Wales. The Cornish dramatic tradition is continued through the work of Cornishmen Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch (1863-1944), William Golding (1911-1993), Colin Wilson (b.1931), Donald Michael Thomas (b.1935), poems of A. L. Rowse (1903-97) and productions of Nick Darke (1948-2005). As well as producing plays, writers and poets, Cornwall features heavily as a setting in the dramatic arts; for example, Thomas Hardy's *The Queen of Cornwall*, and Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Pirates of Penzance* are set in Cornwall. Arthurian episodes, places, and characters are often localised in Cornwall; ranging from the Marquis of Bath's sketch of the life of Arthur (c. 1428) to Robert Stephen Hawker's nineteenth century imagining of Arthur in *The Quest of the Sangraal* and the second act of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* (Koch, 2006).

Traditionally, particular places have been set as places for performing plays, especially for the duration of festivals (Brown, 2001). The Minack (Cornish for 'rocky place') is an open air theatre. The vision of Rowena Cade, it is situated four miles from Land's End and presents drama, musicals and opera from May to September (Fig 25). The stunning coastal landscape and dramatic siting of the Minack theatre has ensured that modern theatre-going in Cornwall has reached a global audience. Cornwall has a 'tradition of cheerful anarchy, physical exuberance' and 'power of elemental forces' (Mackey, 1997) which is showcased through its theatrical productions and continues to this day.



Fig 25. The Minack Theatre is a continuation of the Cornish theatre tradition (ABA)

## 2.3 Building Layout Today

Externally, the City Hall complex, accommodating the Hall for Cornwall is not much altered from when it was built. Constructed in Cornish Carn-Brea granite ashlar, both the City Hall and Hall for Cornwall have hipped roofs in Cornish Delabole slate. The roofline is embellished with granite ashlar stacks and a modillion cornice line.

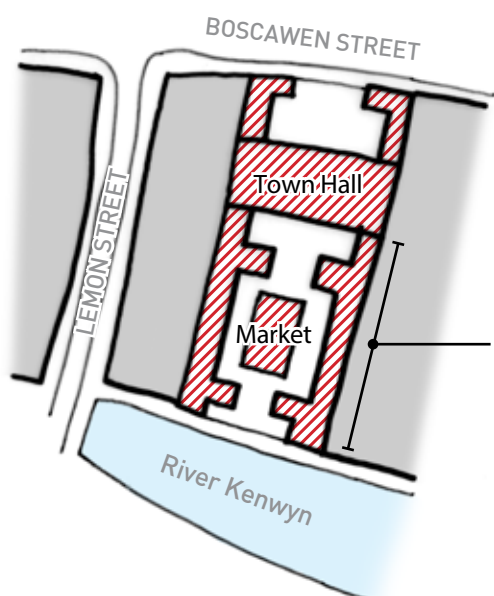
The principal, and front, elevation faces Boscawen Street, to the north. On the ground floor it is composed of five equally sized bays with rusticated ashlar and vermiculated jambs and rounded arches springing from moulded impost strings. Triglyphs and mutules create a Doric entablature on the interfloor cornice line. The first floor elevation is in plain ashlar under a crowning eaves cornice with heavy modillions, surmounted by a pedimented clock tower in a sparser classical style. The internal layout of the café to the east and tourist shop to the west date entirely from the late twentieth century. The inner market hall retains original fabric that has been added to. The coffered ceilings have moulded cornices, carved on square granite piers and round arched openings. These portals lead off the hall and historically gave access to fine, cantilevered 'open-well' granite staircases with wrought iron balustrade. Of these, only the west survives intact and gives access to the City Hall spaces on the first floor. These comprise a formal stair landing, a mayors' parlour, council chamber and committee room. Although altered, all of these spaces contain some original fabric. The eastern staircase was lost when the police cells were removed in the 1925 remodelling.

The south elevation, facing onto Back Quay, is plainer. The elevation is also composed of five bays and arched openings but is not as flat as the north elevation, in fact the façade of the three central portals breaks forward with a further break by the central bay. A mid-floor entablature crosses all three surfaces but does not extend to the symmetrical side bays to either side. The elevation is finished with plain ashlar masonry with rusticated quoins and masonry surrounding the round arched openings. The central doorway has moulded imposts. The windows on the symmetrical side bays have moulded, keyed arches on consoles over pilasters and stand on moulded sills and brackets. Of the central five windows, three are centrally attached with one symmetrical on either side. All have rusticated vouissoirs and key stones. The eaves of the roof are hidden by an original moulded modillion cornice. In the southern, Hall for Cornwall, most finishes and spatial layouts date from the 1990s.

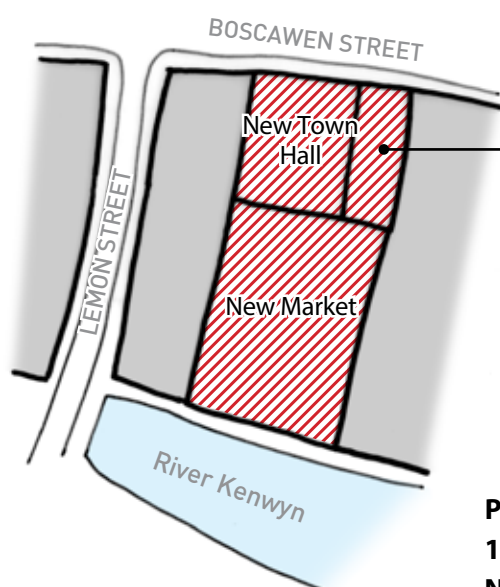
The Hall for Cornwall section was remodelled in the 1990s and has very little original historic fabric, what survives is limited to the first floor. There it retains some fine bolection moulded panelling as some original fire places and sash windows. The rest of the spaces, including the ground floor foyer, the mezzanine level, the main theatre area and its auxiliary rooms are entirely new and their construction often required stripping back, if not complete excavation of, existing fabric.

For clarity, please see the spatial function drawings on pages 4 and 5 and the phasing diagrams on pages 20 and 21.

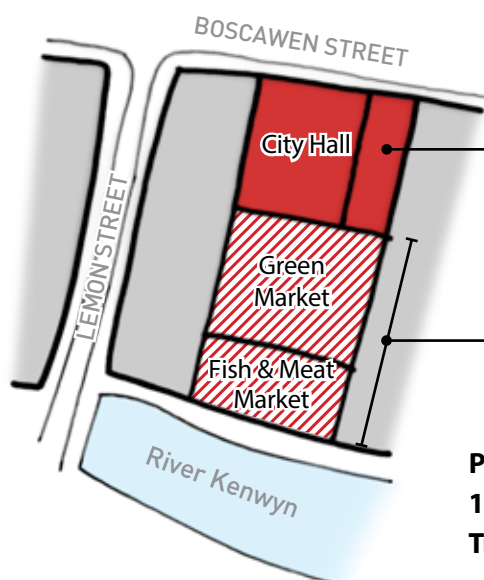
# Phasing Diagrams



**PHASE 1**  
**1809–1847**  
**Civil Town Hall & Market**



**PHASE 2**  
**1847–1876**  
**New Truro Market House & Town Hall**



**PHASE 3**  
**1876–1912**  
**Truro Market House**



## Phasing Diagrams

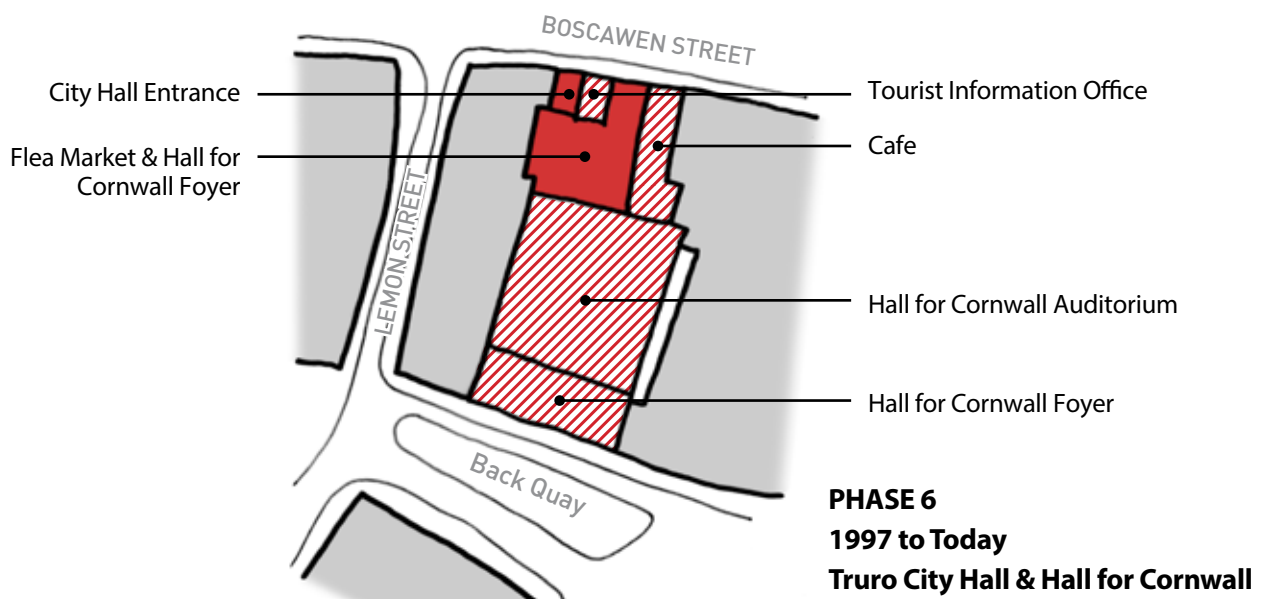
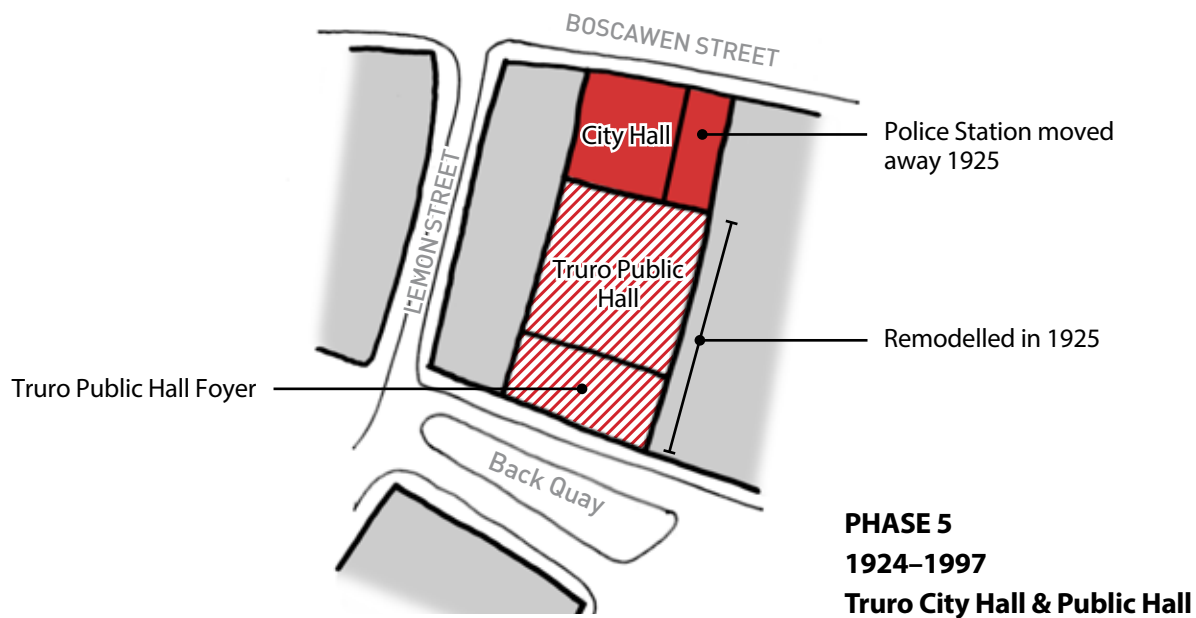
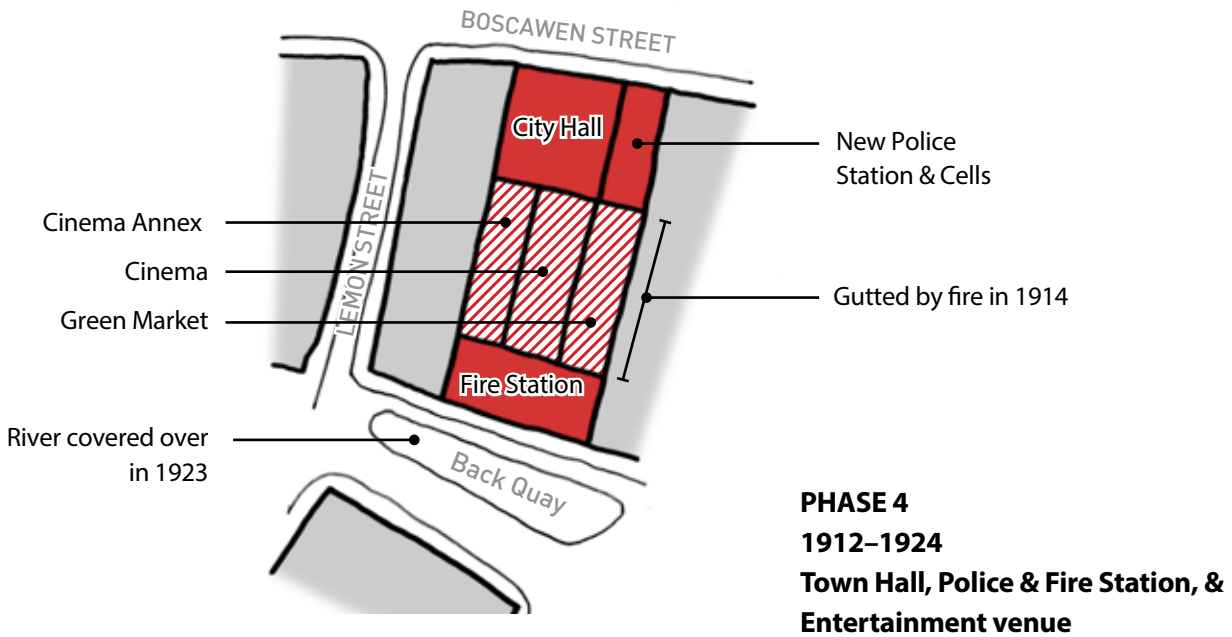




Fig 26. The River Kenwyn before the 1923 covering over with the Hall for Cornwall to the left (Hall for Cornwall)



Fig 27. Boscawen Street in the 1930s with the City Hall to the left (Hall for Cornwall)