



The Winter Garden – a brief history.

The Winter Garden was built by the seventh Duke of Devonshire in 1875 and is the oldest building in Devonshire Park. Designed by architect Henry Currey, it originally consisted of three main parts, the Floral Hall, the Pavilion (now the Gold Room) and the two-storey entrance block. Henry Currey's work was influenced by Decius Burton, to whom he was apprenticed, designer of the great conservatory at Chatsworth and the Palm House at Kew Gardens and Joseph Paxton who designed Crystal Palace. Indeed the Winter Garden once was described as a "miniature Crystal Palace "

The original building consisted of cast iron columns and timber beams with glazing infills to the panels – no brickwork was used above the ground. This gave the building the special character typical of Victorian architecture like seaside piers, conservatories and Winter Gardens. It also created the conditions necessary for the exotic plants and palm trees to grow inside.

A guide to Devonshire Park published in 1896 reports that the Floral Hall was used as a skating rink in winter and a concert hall in the summer, with occasional flower shows and meetings.

In 1910 the large stage area extension was added on the park side of the Floral Hall and the crush areas and staircases were revamped in the flamboyant Edwardian style of the day

Eastbourne Council bought the Winter Garden in 1929. It later became Eastbourne's main conference venue, especially after the building of the Congress Theatre in 1963, connected to the Winter Garden through the Congress Restaurant. In 1984 the Devonshire Park Halls were added to create more exhibition space.

The colours and designs used in the refurbishment completed in April 1994, are based on the Victorian originals and include exact copies of 1870's stencilling. Architect Richard Crook based the wallpapers, colours and carpets on the work of Owen Jones.