

THE OPENING OF THE VILLAGE HALL

This is a contemporary description of the opening formalities of Slip End Village Hall. It was typewritten on the back of three strips of light brown, figured wall paper. The date 24th July 1909 was written on it in ink. The extract along with it's unedited grammar is as follows.

SLIP END INSTITUTE OPENING OF THE NEW HALL SUCCESS OF THE ADULT SCHOOL MOVEMENT 24th July 1909

Nothing succeeds like success, says the old adage, and the success with which the Adult School Movement at Slip End achieved its inauguration, and which has continued with it throughout it's two and a half years of its existence in the Village, is a striking proof of the saying. Saturday saw the commencement of a new epoch in the history of the movement locally, and with the formal opening of the new institute. The religious and educational sphere of the work has been considerably widened and amplified. The erection of a new institute was primarily the outcome of the vigor of the Luton Schools who have already established branches at Dunstable, Stopsley, Leagrave, Sundon, Markyate and Redbourn, all being now in a flourishing condition.

As already stated, it is something over two years since the Friends Adult School began to hold its meetings in the Council School of the Village. And the large number of members who immediately enrolled themselves has been steadily maintained ever since. And the figures of membership stand today at about 182, made up of 65 men and 117 women, who have generally evinced an enthusiastic interest in the welfare of the organisation. It was natural that with a large membership like this that the members would speedily wince a desire for a building of their own, and the result of their united efforts assisted by a number of sympathisers from without, is the erection of a commodious building to be devoted almost exclusively to Adult School purposes. The building itself is a striking demonstration of what can be got from plain brick and wood when the utmost effort is spent on making the most of them.

It is a plain but substantial and snug building, well lighted, usefully furnished and having a committee room and kitchen, and in the main room a platform or stage, the whole providing accommodation for 250 persons. The interior walls have been decorated and have a comfortable panel all round of deal oak stained. The main room can be divided into 2 smaller ones as occasion demands by a movable partition. The architect of the building was Mr Morley Horden F.R.I.B.A and the contractors Messrs. Neville of Luton.

The Total cost will be £750. This amount has been raised with the exception of £150 and that sum it was hoped would be cleared £100 towards the general funds of the institution. One special reason for desiring it was that no provision has been made for lighting it, the institution as yet and when this is done it will mean another considerable outlay though a large portion of the £750 - £500 in fact has been raised by the assistance of many interested friends, who have given liberally out of their riches. The fact stands to the credit and it's no disparagement to anybody else to suggest that in all probability the members themselves have actually borne the greater share of the burden. Although it may be incidentally remarked, the place has been erected by members of the Adult School it is not intended that the use of the building shall be narrowly confirmed to be members only.

The promoters intend it to be a Village Hall for the use of the Village where in addition to the Sunday Services



various forms of innocent recreation can be indulged in.

The test of membership up to the present has been the record of four attendances quarterly, and a weekly offertory has been taken to defray expenses. Now it is proposed to abolish the weekly offertory and substitute a small charge for membership at least as far as the mens department is concerned. The womans department will remain as it is. The character of the weekly services will go on unchanged. The mens services consist of a lecturette on any educational topic and the usual bible lesson, and in the afternoon the womens classes will continue the Bible lesson solely. The keynote of the whole services has always been of an entirely non sectarian character, and the sole idea is to gather into the schools that section of the community which for various reasons does not find its way into the more orthodox establishments.

These are various auxiliary institutions which the members of the school have brought into existence within the two years. There is the Sick benefit, thrift club, cricket and footballs clubs, and a Brass Band, which under the leadership of Mr. B. Baker keeps a great deal of interest alive in the district, and which in its own way very ably seconds the efforts which are continually being put forward by Mr and Mrs T. Brigg, the Presidents respectively of the two departments, to create a healthy and progressive interest in the welfare of the school and Village generally.

The opening ceremony on Saturday attracted a good deal of attention both in Slip End and Woodside, and there was a large gathering outside the building when the time arrived for the formal opening of the doors. As there was an uncomfortably strong breeze blowing, no attempt was made to have it out of doors. The ceremony was formal. Mr Francis Crawley at one entrance and Mrs Crawley at the other turned the key of the lock and walked in, the large assembly following. Mr Edward Brown took the chair of the raised platform, and was accompanied by Mr and Mrs Crawley, the Misses Joan and Julyan Crawley, Mr and Mrs T. Brigg, Mrs Nott and Mrs Mackenzie. In the audience were noticed Mr and Mrs Collings Wells, Mrs E. Brown, Dr and Mrs Edwards, Mr. W. Austin, Mr and Mrs. J. Johnstone Haye, Miss Rose, Miss Higgins, Miss R.F. Higgins, Mrs Wiseman, Mrs W. House, Mr Douglas Cook, Mr Alfred Lynn, Mr Morley Horder, Mrs and Miss Chantler, Mr. E. Nott, Mr Redwood, Mr and Mrs Percy Brown, and Mrs Brown, Mr H. Brown. Mr. and Mrs. G. H. Latchmore, Mr. T. H. Bond (Rushden etc)

The proceedings commenced with the singing of the hymn "Stand up for Jesus", after which Mr. E. Brown offered a short prayer. "The Adult School Movement has it's surprises" observed the Chairman as Mr Crawley rose and announced that in view of the great trouble, care and skill taken by Mrs Briggs, they had ventured to bring a basket of roses from Stockwood Gardens and he would ask his daughters to present them to Mrs Brigg. The young Ladies performed their part very gracefully. Mr Crawley then in short address said that he was told that in an institution such as that they were not concerned with Politics or Sects, (hear - hear) but all were welcome to come and listen to the words of wisdom which would be addressed to them. The men who smoked would be enabled to enjoy a pipe of tobacco in comfort of an evening, and the Ladies would have the chance of meeting together for a talk, and doubtless they would have plenty to say to each other. (laughter)

If he had been told a year ago that a beautiful hall like that would be built at Slip End he would have said that it was impossible. The Hall had cost £750 as it stood and it had all been paid for. (applause)

The chief pioneers had been Mr and Mrs Brigg. Mrs Brigg's father was generous enough to say that he would give the last £100 if they could raise £50 and they would be pleased to know that the smaller sum had been realised and the amount duly gaine. If the inhabitants of the Parish had not been equally liberal with their subscriptions in proportion to their means they would not have had the hall at all. Now it remained for them to keep it going. It could not be done for nothing and they must keep up their subscriptions annually as they did to other clubs. He was delighted to be able to help at the opening of the hall and he wished it every success. Mr Brown thanked Mr Crawley and announced another surprise. Hilda Hughes, the small daughter of the Secretary of the Womens School and Derek Groom the son of the Secretary of the mens school came from a side door and disclosed a handsome bouquet of sweet peas and carnations, and handed it to Mrs Crawley. The gift was graciously accepted and Mrs Crawley, addressing the audience said she had been allotted two tasks but did not know she was to receive payment for them. The first task was that of unlocking the door and opening the Ladies Side of the Hall. That was very easy and charming, but the second was not so easy. Mr Brigg had told her that a speech would be expected of her. That word speech was a thing which filled her with terror. Proceeding fluently however Mrs Crawley said that she fully endorsed all that Mr Crawley had said, and she wanted to add her share of praise and congratulation, that the building had been opened free from debt. There was however another debt which was not so easily cleared off.

The debt of gratitude to all who had been instrumental in gathering the funds to build that beautiful place. She trusted that while that debt could never be paid it would never be forgotten. The proportion of the building brought to her mind the unity of the structure, and she thought they might draw from it the necessity for harmony and unity in all their lives and in all their dealings with their neighbors. She trusted that there would never be a discordant note of kind struck within that building. It was with infinite pleasure that during the last four years she had watched the growth of friendliness, kindness and good fellowship throughout that neighborhood, and she trusted that the Hall would be a ministering and overpowering and ever working power for good, and a barrier against all that was evil.

The Chairman said that he thought that they were all agreed that this was an important occasion. He would however go further and say that this was an imperial occasion, by which word he meant also size and quantity as given in the dictionary. They were not only grateful to Beds, Bucks, and Herts, but to Yorkshire also for the possessions of that Beautiful Building. Speaking of the necessity for the Hall, he predicted that the Country or Countries which had most institutions of that sort, would come to the front quicker than those which had not that kind of building. If a land was covered with Village Halls like that it would be uplifting the people to a higher plane of life. They could meet there for good fellowship and arrive at a mutual understanding. Praising that building as they did he knew that they would guard it jealously in the future. There was this thing about the Adult School Movement, it grew with the advancing years. The work begun there had made a fresh mark put on it that day by the presence of Mr and Mrs Crawley and they believed the movement would flourish still more in the future.

Mrs Mackenzie who is a Vice - Chairman of the National Adult School Association, followed with an address and the aims of the movement. Sometimes she said the adult school did not go ahead as rapidly as they thought it might, and one of the reasons was perhaps that they did not sufficiently consider carefully all the forces working in the same direction, so that they failed properly to link themselves with existing institutions. If they would do that they would find that there was room for an Adult School everywhere. They found men and women with whom they wished to keep in touch all the week as well as Sundays. It was found to be imperative to have a place on their own, one which would guarantee permanence, and help them in their everyday life.

At Redbourn they had got an old factory. At Dunstable an old stable and the men had managed to make a very pleasant home for themselves. At Markyate they had procured an old Chapel and in another place they had acquired an old Mansion House. The speaker referred to the importance of rightly influencing the young life of the village before they drifted to the temptation of the towns or the distant colonies that they would stand wherever they settled, as splendid examples of the Manhood and Womanhood of the Empire, which would make their countries as great as they wanted them to be. There was room for the Adult School movement there. They stood as an open door for all sorts and conditions of people. They were absolutely unsectarian and non party in politics. They discussed all questions before the country however and gave everyone freedom because it was only by doing that that they arrived at the truth. There were among them earnest churchmen and non-conformists. There were about 1000 mens and 600 womens Schools with total membership of 100,000 all of which influences were making for healthy clean lives, and to make earnest God fearing men and women. If she had any complaint to make against societies which had gone before it was that their doors were not sufficiently wide all the days of the week and all hours of the night so that they might save some from the evil temptations that were all around them. She was pleased to find at Redbourn, men who could not go to work because of the wet weather enjoying themselves in the schoolroom. It was their duty to provide some open door where there was a good deal of casual work so that the men could go for a quiet game and for peace and quietness. The Adult Schools were working with all existing agencies. They were always on the side of that which uplifted and almost everything which dragged down, and therefore they could claim that they were in hearty co-operation with the Churches, Chapels, Missions and other agencies at work in the Villages. They believed theirs was a progressive movement which went forward with the times. Mr Brigg, who was received with a round of applause, thanked the members of the Adult School at Slip End for the way, the generous way they had contributed to the building fund. They made a beginning in a small way. The two schools jointly in the last two and half years had raised £100 and the rest of the money had been subscribed by friends who sympathised with them and had been willing to help them. To them all they wished to express their deep gratitude. The previous Saturday he was looking forward to how he could make an appeal to them to reduce the debt. That had all gone entirely owing to the extra ordinary help received during the week and the readiness with which their appeal had S7 been responded to. They had not got sufficient funds to provide artificial light and at present had to go home when the sun went down. It was hoped to provide acetylene gas so that there would be one brilliant corner at Slip End. He was not forgetting one who had given his services so generously in designing the Hall. The Committee were conceited enough to feel that when they had £100 they could tell anyone how the house could be built but by good

fortune they fell into the hands of Mr Horder who had produced that splendid thing which would be "a thing of beauty and a Joy forever". Slip End would be a kind of Mecca for all places on the look-out for a Village Hall. He would also like to speak not only of Messrs Neville but of the way their men had worked. Only eighteen months had passed since they acquired the ground from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners who could not give them the ground but sold it to them for the nominal sum of £10. Mr Brigg in conclusion invited anyone to join and extended a hearty welcome to all. Anyone over 17 years of age could belong to the School which he hoped would be strongly supported. The hymn "Onward Christian Soldiers" was sung, and then Mr P.B. Groom who had accompanied the singing asked for a hearty round of applause for Mr and Mrs. Crawley in appreciation of their services. Mr Crawley in response to the applause thanked the audience on behalf of Mrs Crawley and himself for the way in which they had been received and said they earnestly hoped the School would be a success from every point of view. After the opening ceremony the company adjourned to the Council School where about 250 partook of tea Mr Burgess being the Caterer. After tea a return to the Hall was made where a Public Meeting took place. The proceedings opened with a hymn and a prayer, after which the Chairman Mr G. H. Latchmore gave a very helpful address. Then came a series of two minute addresses by representatives from Schools at Rushden, St Albans, Redbourn, Dunstable, Leagrave, Markyate, and Slip End. The Womens Choir contributed an item "The Sailors Chorus" and in response to demands for an encore sang a new setting to "Onward Christian Soldiers". Mrs Mackenzie of Redbourn gave a splendid address and the applause that followed her closing remarks showed how much the audience appreciated her straight talk on matters concerning Adult School Work and the future of the Village Hall. Mrs T. Brigg briefly addressed the meeting emphasising the need for individual effort and hearty co - operation on the part of its members.

Mr. T. Brigg on rising to give the financial statement was greeted with prolonged applause. After the collection had been taken the singing of a hymn and prayer brought to a close a day which will long be remembered in the Village. The total proceeds were just over £46 towards the final clearing of all liabilities on the building Sir Julius Werner contributed £50, and with the proceeds raised on Saturday and other contributions a total sum of £840 has been obtained. This will enable the members of the School to install light and furnish the Building.

The first meeting of the Mens Adult School was held in the Village Hall on Sunday 25 July 1909. Mr T Brigg presided and Mr Bond of Rushden was the speaker. In the afternoon a united meeting of the Mens and Womens School was held under the presidency of Mrs Brigg supported by Mr Bond and Mr Pattison and brought the series of opening services to a close.

The author of this report is unknown, but thankfully has left us a rich insight into the village life and Adult School movement at the turn of the century.