

Willingham
Public Hall
1896

The
Early Years



The Willingham Public Hall
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Willingham Local History Series

Reprints

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The Willingham Public Hall 1896

A New Town Hall for Willingham

Mr. Fred Crisp, of the White House, New Southgate, and a native of Willingham,^a is about to do what has long been wished and hoped for, namely, to build a Town Hall, with the accompanying reading-room, committee-rooms, and accommodation for a caretaker, and to hand it over to the inhabitants of his native village free.

Mr. H. G. Few, who has had this object in view for some years, and has agitated for it persistently, will give the site for the buildings in a very eligible position in the village with a frontage on the High Street. As Vice-Chairman of the Parish Council, Mr. Few asked the members if they would be willing to take over the building in trust for the parish, when it is complete, as Mr. Crisp and Mr. Few would prefer this arrangement to handing it over to private trustees.

They willingly and unanimously accepted the responsibility. The following gentlemen were appointed a committee of management:- Rev. John Watkins, Rector; Rev. James Carvath, Tabernacle; Messrs. H. G. Few; Dr. Lewis; Edmund Smith; Cornelius Raven; E. S. Thoday and George Pegler.

Preparations will begin at once for the new buildings.

Willingham—New Town Hall

Mr. Fred Crisp, of the White House, New Southgate, has signed the contract for the erection of the New Town Hall in the High Street, Willingham. The buildings will include accommodation for a caretaker, a strong room for the security of parish documents, a reading room, and a room for games etc. The whole to cost £600., the munificent gift of Mr. Crisp to his native parish. Mr. H. G. Few gives the site for the buildings, and friendly parishioners will do the carting of the sand and the bricks free.

Messrs. Parren and Giddings, of Earith are the contractors for the erection of the buildings. The proprietor and the architect met on Monday evening to measure the site, and it is now being cleared of the buildings preparatory to digging the foundations.

The Cambridge Independent Press. 26th June 1896

A Public Hall for Willingham.

The Opening.

At Willingham the question of providing evening attractions of a recreative kind for people seems to have been settled. For some years past Mr. H. G. Few, a native of the village, has had it in mind to have built a public hall, where the villagers might go and spend an hour or two with benefit to themselves. In October last Mr. Few mooted the question to Mr. Crisp, who is also a native of the village. Mr. F. Crisp at once fell in with the idea, and offered to defray the cost of the building.

Plans were submitted by Mr. S. French, of Cambridge, and it was ultimately decided to erect a building, at the cost of £600., in the centre of the village, on a piece of land given by Mr. Few. Building operations were commenced by Mr. Giddings, of St. Ives, at the beginning of July, and on the 22nd of the same month the foundation stone was laid by Mrs. Crisp.

The building consists of two stories, on the ground floor is a suite of rooms for smoking, games, &c., together with rooms for the attendant. Upstairs are the reading and committee rooms, which on emergency, could

be converted into one. The furniture of the building was given by Mr. Few, and the games, including bagatelle, chess, dominoes, &c., by Mrs. I. F. Thoday, sen.

The new building was opened on Friday, when a tea, provided by Messrs. Crisp and Few, was given to people in receipt of parish relief and poor people over the age of 60 years, the families of Mr. Crisp and Mr. Few were also present. After tea members of the families of Mr. Crisp and Mr. Few went round and gave a new shilling^b to each of the old people present. As the old people were leaving the building oranges were handed to them.

Mr. S. Thoday said he had been asked to express the gratitude and pleasure they felt towards Mr. Crisp and Mr. Few for their generous gift. They had all enjoyed themselves in commemorating the event, and a building of that kind ought to be and would, he was sure, prove to be a boon and a blessing to many. (Hear, Hear,) There were sure to be found a few opponents to every good cause brought forward in a village, but they always lived those feelings down. He trusted those gentlemen who were opposed to the building would live to see the building prove to be a thorough success and a good thing for the people at large. (Applause.) He proposed a hearty vote of thanks to Mr. Crisp and Mr. Few. (Applause.)

The Rev. J. Carvath said that, it was said of the Methodists that they always expressed gratitude with a lively sense of favours to come. It would be ungracious to expect anything further beyond the gift from the donors themselves. It was a gift that ought to procure their sincere gratitude. It was not a gift to any political party in the village — to any religious denomination in the village — or to any social clique in the village, but it was a gift to one and all in the village. If they consulted the wishes of the donors, he was quite sure everyone in the village would use it. It was with unmixed pleasure, that he seconded the vote, which was one that claimed the sympathy of every man and woman present, and also of those absent.

The proposition was carried with acclamation.

Mr. Crisp, who was received with loud applause, thanked them for the vote they had passed. It gave him great pleasure to see them all there that night, and he hoped the Hall would be beneficial not only to the present generation, but those to come also. They did not wish it to be felt that it was a gift to any particular person, but that each would feel it was their own place. It would be beneficial to the youth, and the young men instead of being on the street, would go to the Hall and read their papers and books. He could not imagine that there was a feeling that the erection of the place

was not a right step. He had nothing to do with the building, but simply drew a cheque from the bank. (Applause) They could not please all, but he hoped they would please many. He would make himself responsible for the maintenance of the building until it could support itself. (Cheers and applause) He should feel proud to do so. Many of them knew him, and he was proud of Willingham. He thanked them one and all for coming to the Hall that night.

Mr. H. G. Few, who was also well received, said he was one of those who believed that a building of that character would increase in usefulness as time went on. Mr. Crisp had referred to his early days. He (the speaker) was one of Mr. Pegler's old pupils who felt very grateful to him, and he thought Willingham people did not appreciate Mr. Pegler at his true worth. He did not think every alteration in school management was an improvement. The teaching in early times was better and more useful than that they now got in the board Schools. The teachers had more latitude in the subjects they took, and what they taught was more calculated to help young men for the battle of life. There was too much machinery about the whole business. With regard to the building, he only mentioned it to Mr. Crisp, and he at once promised to help. He thanked them very much for the vote of thanks, and the best way of showing their thanks would be by a large number of them using the building. (Applause.)

Mr. Ephraim Thoday proposed a vote of thanks to Mr. Few, Mr. Crisp, and the ladies for serving the tea.

Mr. Edmund Smith seconded, and hoped they would have a happy and prosperous New Year.

Mr. E. Few said they had heard from the donors that the building was for no political or denominational purpose, but it was for the people. The Committee would provide them with all colours of political papers, and they would be able to discern for themselves which of the papers would be true to the interests of the nation.

At the conclusion cheers were given for the donors and their families. During the evening an enjoyable musical entertainment was provided by Miss Crisp and Miss Florence Few, and Messrs. Dewing and Collit(Sic) Ingle. Miss Kate Smith presided at the piano.

The management of the building is vested in a committee, consisting of Messrs. E. S. Thoday (chairman), F. Mustill and Edmund Smith (secretaries), G. Pegler (treasurer), A. Grant, H. Askew, Cornelius Raven, S. Ingle, J. Ambrose, W. R. Ellwood, jun, C. Allen, jun, D. Read, E. Ingle, W. Huckle,

and the Rev. J. Carvath.

The Hall was opened on Monday for general purposes. The enrolment of members up to 8 o'clock numbered 122. over 50 of these are annual members, the others being quarterly, monthly and weekly members. This is regarded as a very successful commencement. The three principle rooms—reading-room, games-room and committee-room, were occupied during the day. At 8 o'clock in the evening over 50 persons were to be found busy at various games, chess, drafts, dominoes, ludo, bagatelle, etc., etc. in the games-room, about 20 in the reading room, and the committee-room was occupied by members of the managing committee.

Cambridge Independent Press 15th January 1897.

Willingham — The Public Hall.

Thus far the Public Hall has been immensely successful in attracting the big lads and young men of the village to the enjoyment of their winter evenings in quiet and peaceful games in the basement room of the Hall, and here they remain until 10 o'clock. the rooms are very comfortably furnished and well warmed and lighted, and superior games are provided for their enjoyment. At present these young men and lads are seldom to be seen in the reading-room up stairs; some of them spend a portion of the evening there, chiefly over the illustrated papers and books, but their delight is in the games-room. Over 160 members have been enrolled, and it looks likely that the rule limiting the number of weekly members will have to be altered for want of room. The fees of membership are very easy, as annual members are charged only 5s.,^c ladies 4s.,^d quarterly 1s-6d.,^d monthly 7d.,^d and weekly 2d.,^d The papers taken at present include four dailies, illustrated papers, ladies' papers, with a number of magazines and reviews.

Over 100 members are in attendance every night. Any person looking in on Monday evening at about 8 o'clock might have counted 53 in the games-room and 42 in the reading-room, but this great success does not appear to be altogether an unmixed good, for there has been such a drain on the Evening Continuation Schools and the Technical Education Classes, that some of the teachers are threatening to close their classes, if the drain continues.

The Cambridge Independent Press 22nd January 1897

Willingham—The Public Hall.

A very pleasant evening was spent at the Public Hall, on Tuesday evening. That being the first anniversary of the opening of the hall, much interest was taken in the proceedings. A meat tea was provided in the hall for over a hundred of the members. Mr. Fred Crisp, the generous donor of the building, and Mr. H. G. Few, the earnest promoter of the institution, who gave the site and furnished the hall, were present at the tea, and their entrance to the tea room was enthusiastically applauded.

When the tables had been cleared the Rev. James Carvarth took the chair, and called upon Dr. Lewis to read the balance sheet, which had been handed in by the Treasurer, Mr. George Pegler. The statement was quite satisfactory as there is a balance in hand of £4-10s^e. This must be considered good when the smallness of members' subscriptions is taken into account. The total amount of subscriptions from members is £36-10-3d.^f for the year, the total income being £47-5-7d.^g and the expenditure £42-15-4d.^h

Mr. Crisp made an excellent speech, appropriate to the occasion. There were a great many young men present, and his advice to them, if well followed, would lead them on to a successful, manly business life. In referring to the balance sheet, he remarked that the item for the hire of the piano was considerable, and that it would be better to purchase one. The idea caught on. Mr. Edward Few said he would give two guineas towards buying one. Mr. Crisp and others followed, and the happy idea of sending a piece of paper and pencil down the tables for donations struck Dr. Lewis, and the idea was acted upon, and in a few minutes the amount of upwards of thirteen pounds was announced; so the hall will have a piano of its own.

In the course of his speech Dr. Lewis strongly advocated the formation of a debating class in connection with the hall, and the other speakers thought the formation of such a class or club would be an advantage. The Chairman proposed that the thanks of that meeting be given to Mr. Crisp and Mr. Few, for their generosity and for being present. This was carried with great applause. In replying Mr. Few complemented Mr. Crisp on being raised to the office of High Sheriff. Mr. Grant proposed thanks to the Treasurer (Mr. George Pegler), the Secretaries (Messrs. Edmund Smith and Fred Mustill), and to the members of the Tea Committee. This was carried unanimously.

Songs were given—"The Judge's Song" and "Rather," by Mr. I. F. Thoday; "The Home Said," by Mrs. C. Allen; and "The Wishing Cup," by Miss F. Few.

The Cambridge Independent Press 21st January 1898

The Public Hall

Oliver Cromwell —One day last week an oil painting of Oliver Cromwell, bust, life size... was received at the Public Hall, the generous gift of Mr. Hugh E. Hoare.¹ At present it hangs on the north wall, opposite the fireplace in the reading-room. The picture is in excellent condition, and is a valuable acquisition to the Hall. The Protector is equipped in full armour.

The Cambridge Independent Press 25th February 1898

Mr. Frederick Crisp, of Willingham.

The pages of the current issue of "*The Farmer and Stockbreeder*" are adorned by a portrait of Mr. Frederick Crisp, J.P., of Willingham. Accompanying the portrait is the following brief sketch of Mr. Crisp's career as a breeder of stock on a large scale:—

"It is probably safe to say that no fancier of the popular Shire has been more zealous in his attendance, and more lavish in his purchases at the leading sales for several years back than Mr. Frederick Crisp of New Southgate. Mr. Crisp seems to have been born under a lucky star. At all events, his business abilities, and good fortune have placed him at the head of a huge mercantile house, which he has built up by his own conscientious assiduity. It would appear that the magnitude of his commercial dealings have begotten a desire to enter into the Shire horse fancy, with the same spirit.

The accommodation at New Southgate was early found to be too small to do justice to the stock, and the acquisition of about 4,000 acres of land in the contiguous counties of Cambridge and Herts. enabled him to follow his farming hobby on a scale, which is probably not attempted by any other Shire horse breeder. The extent of his Shire stud may be learned from the fact, that he has about 200 mares and fillies at his Cambridge estate, and in

the fen district. Of these nearly 100 are in foal to the best stallions of the day, including such proving sires as Marmion. The acquisition of this splendid sire was probably the pluckiest thing Mr. Crisp has accomplished in the way of sale-ring bidding, and the results are justifying his courageous purchase. Old Lincolnshire Lad, too, ended his days in this stud, and his claim to a front rank cannot be disputed, with such mares as Starlight amongst many other notabilities. This superb mare, it will be within the recollection of all breeders, secured the championship on three successive occasions at The Agricultural Hall.

The periodic sales held at New Southgate have been attended by the light and leading in draught horse breeding, and when fillies like Mr. Victor Cavendish's two-year-old Southgate Charm can be bred, there is no doubt that the stud has a great future before it.

In other walks of breeding, Mr. Crisp has made his mark. He has a penchant for Aberdeen-Angus cattle, which he breeds on a scale no less extensive than his horse breeding operations. His singular success with Gilderoy, the renowned champion bull, is well known to followers of the fortunes of the show-yard. Mr. Crisp's herd is probably about the largest of the kind in the kingdom.

In a lesser degree he has extended his support to the Hackney, but the Shire and the *Blackskins* are his favourites. The owner of Marmion is a busy man, and, in addition to his business calls, finds time to discharge the honorary duties of J.P. and D.L. for the county of Cambridge, of which he also Sheriff. Everyone will cordially wish him success in a manner commensurate with the pluck, which has all along characterised his purchases."

The Cambridge Independent Press... 18th February 1898

^a Frederick Crisp was the second son of William and Betsy Crisp, William Crisp was described as Butcher and Publican, in the census of 1851. He kept a Public House at the western end of Church Street, Frederick was 2 years old in 1851.

^b 5p.

^c 25p The annual membership was still the same well into the 1950s

^d 20p., 7¹/₂p., just under 3p. and just under 1p. respectively

^e £4.50

^f £36.51

^g £47.28

^h £42.76

ⁱ Hugh E. Hoare was Liberal Party Candidate for West Cambridgeshire at this time.

Public Hall

Bye-Laws

That a Committee of Management be appointed consisting of 16 Members, 5 to form a quorum.

It is the duty of every Member of the Committee to see that no improper conduct be indulged in by any Member of the Hall in any room, and any Member of the Committee or Caretaker is hereby empowered to order any such disorderly person from the rooms of the Hall pending the decision of the Committee on the case.

That the minimum age for Membership be 14 years.

That no audible conversation be allowed in the Reading Room.

That the Billiard Table is for the use of Annual Members only, and to be managed by a sub-committee.

That all games be given up to other Members at the completion of the game, if requested.

That no Member be allowed to retain any paper or periodical more than 15 minutes after it has been asked for by another Member.

That spitting on the floor is strictly prohibited.

If any dispute arise as to the right of players to retain the Billiard Table an appeal shall be made to two or more Members of the committee and their decision shall be final, and this bye-law shall apply to all games.

Rules

That the fees for Membership shall be 5/- per annum, the year commencing Oct. 1st. in each year.

That no one be admitted a Member of the Hall unless proposed and seconded by two annual Members.

That the Hall be open from 12 noon to 10pm., Christmas Day and Good Friday excepted.

That the Committee shall have power to prohibit any games being played in the rooms that in their opinion may be objectionable.

That gambling of any description is strictly prohibited, and any Member using abusive, profane or obscene language, or using the rooms for any other purpose than that contemplated by the Committee shall be liable to be expelled from the Hall and all its benefits.

That the Committee shall have power to make bye-laws for their guidance in the management of the affairs, and also for the regulation of the conduct of the Members such bye-laws to be consistent with the rules.

That no paper, book or any article belonging to the Hall be taken therefrom without the sanction of the Committee.

That the Committee shall have power to expel or fine any Member who wilfully damages or destroys any paper, book or other property belonging to the Hall.

That no smoking be allowed in the Reading Room before 8pm. if four Members present object.


That none of the foregoing Rules shall be altered or rescinded except at a Special Meeting called for that purpose, seven days' notice of which shall be given to every Member of the Committee.

Dated 29th November, 1922.

Signed. H. G. Few, *Chairman.*

Walter Miles, *Clerk,*

Willingham Parish Council.

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