

NOTES FROM THORNHAM

We've missed our village hall during the covid closure. Having seized the opportunity to have the builders in, it will be good to see it reopening. So now is the ideal time to reprint the report of the first opening almost 100 years ago – from the *Diss Express*, Friday 5th December 1924. Amazing what could be done then for £820!

“ The opening of the new Parish Hall and Reading Room, created in memory of the late Lord and Lady Henniker, took place on Wednesday afternoon.

The building, which stands on a most convenient site, is a great acquisition; it is splendidly equipped, and represents the successful culmination of local efforts spread over a number of years. The opening ceremony attracted a large number of people, and the hall was taxed to its utmost capacity.

The platform looked altogether charming with its tasteful floral decorations and curtaining. Certainly the interior gave a very sure indication of the cosy and comfortable home the new building is likely to become. The Rev. E. Bingley as chairman of the Memorial Committee, extended a welcome to everyone present. He hoped they would agree with him that they were very fortunate having Lord Henniker with them at the opening ceremony.

The new hall, he went on to explain, was built by Mr. Robert Scott, and its interior had been beautified by the ladies of the Committee, backed up by Mr Palmer, the estate agent, behind whom was their old friend Mr Young. What the Committee would have done without Mr Young's help he did not know.

For a long time, he continued, Thornham had possessed a reading-room given by the late Lord Henniker, but it was rather small. In 1913, when village halls were opening up all over the country, the general feeling amongst the inhabitants of Thornham was that there was a need for a more commodious assembly place for the purpose of recreation and social intercourse. After consideration it was decided that they could not do better than erect a parish hall in the memory of the late Lord and Lady Henniker, who had endeared themselves to Thornham, and left behind a memory that was still very sweet.

Having obtained from the present Colonel (the

Lord Henniker) the promise of a site, an appeal for financial assistance was launched, and so liberal was the response that within a few months no less than £120 was received in donations. Then there came the appalling tragedy of the war, which necessitated the postponement of all their plans.

In 1920, however, they returned to business; the Committee put amazing energy into their task, and by means of fetes and similar functions, succeeded in raising £400 to supplement the £120 already given. But in spite of this achievement, there remained another £300 to be raised. This last amount had generously been loaned by Lord Henniker, at a low rate of interest, and he hoped it would not be long before it would be possible to clear this loan off.

As to the object of the new hall, it simply stood as an endeavour to brighten and enliven village life, to provide pleasant and wholesome forms of recreation, especially for the young. He hoped, too, that it would be used from time to time (or the purpose of raising money for good causes. He looked forward to seeing the men and lads and indeed the women and girls, too—gathering there of an evening to read the papers and books and to play games.

It was hoped that in the course of time a lending library would be established and lectures arranged, while, of course, whist drives, concerts and dancing would be promoted periodically. Last but not least, he earnestly hoped that the place would serve to promote good fellowship and destroy any feeling of isolation in life.

I now declare this hall open for the benefit of the two Thornhams” (Thornham Magna and Thornham Parva), he said in conclusion, “and with it every possible success.” The company afterward enjoyed a short but very delightful concert, the biggest share of which fell to that accomplished violinist, Miss Marguerite Loriot. Subsequently, tea was served by the Ladies' Committee. ”

