

19. Dalton Village Hall



Dalton Village Hall is not of great architectural interest in itself, with the possible exception of the six full-width laminated wooden beams which are structural members typical of the 1960's and which support the roof internally. The Hall itself does, however, represent a prime example of communal self-help from before the days of radio, television, the cinema and widespread car ownership.



After the end of the First World War life in rural area such as Dalton returned to some semblance of normality, but below the surface several things had changed. Cheaper imported cereals had led to the closure of numbers of corn mills, including the one at Dalton village, as well as the return of many local fields to pasture with a consequent reduction in the number of

hands needed on the land.

At the same time, the change in social attitudes following the war made the relatively isolated living on local farms less acceptable, and a need for some place to meet socially – other than at an occasional sale or hiring – was felt by many. So it was that, year or two after end of the war, a Mr. Forster passed by the now-deserted Dalton corn mill on a Sunday stroll and conceived the idea that it could possibly serve as a meeting-place for social activities. He obtained the sanction of the landlord – Mr. Collingwood – to proceed with his plan and gathered a group of volunteers to progress the work.

The volunteers themselves came from all around the area and were led by Mr. Fred Hall, whilst a group of Trustees was formed to own and run it. The volunteers had to give of their time mostly in the evenings; John Spearman the joiner brought his apprentices and local farmers helped with haulage of bricks, timber and sand. Financial support came by way of both large and small donations from every section of society. The disused machinery in the old mill was first stripped out, then new floors laid and the building made good and completely redecorated. It was decided to name it the "Collingwood Institute" after the landlord who granted his permission to use it [1] and The Institute was formally opened with a social evening in the autumn of 1921, pictured here.



The Collingwood Institute was very successful – the activities held embraced all kinds of social gatherings and drew attendance from a wide area including: Dalton, Heddon-on-the-Wall, Dissington, Birney Hill, Medburn, Throckley, Westerhope and Ponteland. However, by the end of the 1950s the premises appeared to be too small for the size and number of activities, and it was therefore resolved to seek new and larger premises. The necessary funds to plan for and erect a new hall were raised over a number of years by means of donations and fundraising events.

The required land for a new building was obtained in 1963 by an arrangement whereby "the Trustees of the Institute should convey to the Church Commissioners the land at Dalton containing 210 square yards or thereabouts with the buildings thereon now occupied by the Institute in exchange for the Conveyance by the Commissioners to the Trustees of the Institute of a site for

a New Institute comprising two pieces of land at north Dissington containing .367 acres or thereabouts and having a frontage on the road from Dalton to Callerton.”



The architect for the building was a Mr. Ridley and the lowest Tender of £5,691.00 was accepted out of the four obtained. The present building was opened on the 12th of September 1964, and special invitations were issued for those attending. It was not, however, until the 4th of October in the same year that the name "Collingwood Institute" was formally changed to "Dalton Village Hall". [2]

By coincidence, the remains of a *sawmill* quite close to the present Village Hall can still be seen but this is not within the curtilage of the Hall, which is reputed to have been erected on the site of the former cottage(s) for the miller(s). The wheel-pit is still visible and the stone-encircled outlet of the tail race which passes underneath the footpath can also be seen. The leat feeding the mill originated from the River Pont about half a mile upstream and passed by the front of Dissington Hall to an ornamental pond which served as a reservoir; the retaining wall of this pond has since collapsed. A metal plaque at the top of the bank down to the river commemorates a Conservation Award in 1989 for "the achievement of the Eachwick Anglers in restoring a section of the River Pont as a game fish habitat."

[1] "History of Dalton Institute" in verse, written by John Moffat circa 1921. A copy in the possession of the Trustees of Dalton Village Hall.

[2] The Collingwood Institute Minute Book for 1961 to 1976, by courtesy of the Trustees of Dalton Village Hall.