

## **The Haseley Archive**

### **The Haseley Community Plan of 1876**

For the Haseleys 2011 is the year of the Community Plan. At a crowded January meeting in the village hall the Haseley community shared views and ideas on what we most valued about the Haseleys, and ways in which village life might be changed and improved. A steering group was formed and, through a process of discussion and consultation, will identify villagers concerns, needs and ambitions for the Haseleys. These will be used to prepare a community plan which will set out a vision explaining how the Haseleys may want to develop, and the actions needed to promote this vision.

In 1876 a similar energy and enthusiasm were being harnessed to promote the development of the Haseleys. The architect of change was Canon Henry John Ellison, who had been appointed Rector of St. Peter's Church early in 1876. Ellison was almost sixty three years of age on appointment. Described by his contemporaries as a man of missionary zeal, Henry John Ellison was moved by two great moral crusades. The first of these was temperance, the consumption of alcohol being a major concern in nineteenth century England. In 1862 he had founded The Church of England Temperance Society and was to remain its President until 1891. His second crusade was the improvement of the spiritual and temporal life of the rural working class.

In 1876 most people living in the Haseleys were agricultural labourers and their families. Agriculture was in deep recession, wages were low and work uncertain. They lived in homes which were often overcrowded, damp and insanitary. Villagers rarely travelled far, and for many social life centred on the public house. Their lives were ones of deference, to the Church, to patriarchy and to those with wealth and power. For the rural poor the Haseleys were no bucolic idyll.

Within a year of his arrival, and following discussions with people of influence in the Haseleys, Canon Ellison had established 'The Haseley Improvement Society'. This was a general management committee which was to encompass a wide range of branches, all of which were concerned with improving the social, economic and moral welfare of villagers. Branches included the Gardening Society, the Cricket Club, Night School, the Penny Bank, a lending library and a clothing club. There was also a 'Young Mens Club', which became the Village Institute in 1891. Membership of most branches involved the payment of a weekly subscription. Each branch also had 'Honorary Subscribers', wealthy benefactors who underwrote the financial viability of each club or society.

The Gardening Society was established by Canon Ellison in 1879. The highlight of the year was the annual Flower (and vegetable) Show. This was held in the Rectory grounds, and always before the harvest was gathered in.

There were two main categories of entrants, 'cottagers' and 'amateurs'. Cottagers worked the land for a living, amateurs did not. Cottagers paid no entry fees and won cash prizes. Amateurs paid entry fees, with certificates as prizes.

Cricket had been played in the Haseleys long before Canon Ellison arrived; what he gave the club was long term stability. He provided a permanent cricket pitch for the club, as well as finance for clothing, equipment and travel to away matches. The cricket team contained both 'gentlemen' and 'players', with gentlemen often identified by the suffix 'Esq.' on the team sheet.

It was only in 1880 that schooling was made compulsory for children between the ages of five and ten years, and school fees were charged at Great Haseley school until 1891. Any kind of secondary education would have been beyond the financial reach of most Haseley families. By the early eighties, and with the active co-operation of the school headmaster Joseph Bower, Canon Ellison established a night school to enable young men to continue with their education. Classes were held twice a week and a fee of one penny a week was charged. Fees were refunded to students who attended regularly and whose work reached the required standard. In 1890 twenty five 'lads' were regularly attending night school.

The establishment of a lending library was a way of encouraging villagers to read both for self improvement and pleasure. The library was open once a fortnight and a fee of one penny a month was paid by subscribers.

The Penny Bank was founded to encourage a culture of thrift and saving, particularly amongst young men. Canon Ellison was concerned that they were spending their money on drink, rather than saving for the future. The Haseley Parochial Report of 1886 warned that 'It is specially hoped that young men of the village will begin to lay up their spare pence and thus have store for rainy days which are sure to come to all.' In the same year eighteen villagers had deposited £14-00 in the Penny Bank.

The Clothing Club was established for the use of wives and children of agricultural labourers, with money deposited in the club 'safe from men and drink.'

The Young Men's Club was established by Canon Ellison as a social alternative to village pubs, and was open every evening from 6:00 to 8:00 pm. Social activities were provided and food and coffee sold at cost. By 1885 the

club had thirty two members. In 1886 it opened its doors to women as well as men, and became 'The Village Club'.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1891 the club moved into new purpose built accommodation and was re-named 'The Village Institute'. The cost of building the Institute was paid for by Canon Ellison. The Institute was open every week day evening, except for those Monday and Wednesday evenings when parish meetings occurred. The quarterly subscription, giving admission to both Reading and Recreation Rooms was one shilling and sixpence; to the Recreation Room only, one shilling. In the Reading Room the Daily Telegraph, Daily Graphic and Rural World newspapers were provided .

The Village Institute soon became a centre of village life; with meetings of clubs and societies; and concerts, lectures, entertainments and political meetings being held there. The Village Institute building still exists, it is the former school building directly opposite the village hall.

There were many fewer societies for women of the Haseleys, and these societies reinforced a dominant cultural view that women should marry young, have large families and be unconditionally supportive and understanding of their husbands. The Haseley Girls Friendly Society, a society of mutual help for 'ladies and working girls', was emblematic of this view, encouraging purity, dutifulness, faithfulness and thrift .

What are we to make of the legacy of Henry John Ellison and his Community Plan of 1876 ? He came to the Haseleys with a mission to improve the community life of its people and he had considerable success in achieving this. Canon Ellison had worked diligently to ensure that the Haseley Improvement Society provided a secure framework within which village clubs and societies could establish themselves, and then grow and thrive.

In 1894, at the age of eighty one, Canon Ellison gave up the living of Great Haseley and retired to Windsor. This was also the year in which civil Parish Councils were first established. These formed part of a coming democratic world, including the beginnings of the welfare state in the early years of the new century. This world built on Canon Ellison's legacy of concern for all, but also transformed the rigid social hierarchy which he took for granted.

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