

The Malton Institute

Introduction

An overview of the history of the Malton Institute can be had from 'The Malton Institute - Its Rise, Progress, and Prospects' which appeared in the Malton Messenger, 1st April 1854

This institute was established on the 5th June, 1838, under the title of the 'Malton Mechanics Institute,' the object of which as stated at the first meeting for its formation on the 16th of the previous month, is to promote the diffusion of useful knowledge among the working classes, by the establishment of a library, by occasional lectures, and by the instruction in the practical branches of art and science. The theatre, by the liberality of the Earl Fitzwilliam, was offered as a suitable building, and, at a cost of about £200?, it was converted into an excellent lecture room, a small room was also built

adjoining to it for a library and reading room. Donations for this purpose were made by Earl Fitzwilliam, the late and present Earls of Carlisle, the Members for the Borough, the hon. Wm. Duncombe, Marmaduke Langley, Esq., the late and much regretted Wm. Allen, Esq., and other friends to the cause.

The necessary alterations having been made, the Institute was opened on the 13th Feb. 1839, by an address from Dr. Murray, of Scarbro', on the general benefits of knowledge; since which time about a dozen lectures have been delivered annually, principally gratuitously, by friends to the Institution; the funds not admitting any great outlay upon paid lecturers. An excellent library has likewise been formed, consisting of about 1,200 volumes.

A Falling Membership

When this Institute was first formed, it numbered about eighty members of the first class, 100 of the second class, and sixty of the third class; but, from various causes, these numbers gradually declined to 38, 33 and 60, respectively, in 1844. At this period the Institute became allied with the 'Yorkshire Union,' the funds, however, were too low to admit of its deriving all the advantages which might otherwise have resulted from this alliance. In the year 1847, the committee determined to make an effort to increase the number of members, and to extend the usefulness of their Institution by such means as appeared to them the most eligible. An annual soiree was at this time commenced, and as certain prejudices and misapprehension existed as to the objects intended, the name was now altered to that of 'The Malton Literary Institute.' These soirees have proved particularly attractive and interesting, for which the members are especially indebted to the ladies of Malton and to the Philharmonic Society, for their ready co-operation with the committees from year to year.

Notwithstanding these changes, the finances of the Institution were not much improved, as, in the year 1849 there was due to the treasurer £18; and, although there was a tolerable attendance of the third class members at the evening school during three evenings of the week, it was sufficiently apparent that fresh efforts must be made, or all the advantages which such an Institution is calculated to yield, to the town of Malton would be lost. With a view, therefore, to the 'improvement of the physical condition of its members, and in order to afford them the opportunity for recreation and enjoyment, combined with profit and advantage,' a field was taken and divided into 24 garden allotments of half a rood each; these were entered upon on the 6th April, 1850, and proved so generally acceptable that 30 more allotments, adjoining the others, were entered upon in April, 1851. The majority of these gardens have been so well and carefully cultivated as not only to be remunerative to the occupiers, but also a real public benefit.

The Reading Room

In August, 1852, the Malton Institute entered into union with the Society of Arts, and this has been attended with many valuable advantages. Several excellent works have been presented to the Institute by this highly useful Society; two copies of their weekly journal are forwarded gratis; cards of admission are granted to their meetings, lectures and exhibitions in London, and many other benefits are derived which it is unnecessary here to enumerate.

In addition to the general instruction given, during three evenings of the week to the third class members; grammar is taught every Monday evening by Mr. Charles Marshall; mental and commercial arithmetic, each Thursday evening, by Mr. John Smith; drawing and moulding, every Friday evening, by Mr. John Gibson.

Much, however, remains to be accomplished. The present reading-room is too small and very inconvenient, and few members are induced to visit

it. If a commodious room, easy of access, could be attached to the present premises, and supplied with newspapers and other periodical publications, it would be incalculably beneficial to a very numerous class of persons, who would be exceedingly glad to have such an opportunity of spending their leisure hours. Classes also would then be formed for mutual instruction by reading, discussion, &c. In the meantime it is very desirable that all the gentry, tradesmen, mechanic, &c., of the town and neighbourhood, should enrol themselves as members, and thus afford sufficient funds for supplying both instruction and amusement, in all the various ways which may be thought desirable, upon the most economical terms. In fact, 'The Malton Literary Institute' might form a kind of nucleus for carrying out, or at any rate commencing, the various improvements which time may render necessary to the well-being of the inhabitants.

A Little More Detail

Reports in the press describe the early history in a little more detail:

A number of resolutions contributing to the formation of the institute are recorded in the York Courant. A meeting of the subscribers took place on the 25th May 1838 in the Town Hall for the purposes of choosing the officers and committee for 'conducting the affairs of the Institute,' and was chaired by Wm. Allen. Earl Fitzwilliam was chosen as patron, Lord Milton as president, Henry Smithson (borough bailiff) and Wm. Allen as vice-presidents, Mr. Malcolm of the District Bank as treasurer, and two secretaries in Mr. Charles Marshall (school-master) and Mr. John Smith of the City and County Bank. At this point there were about 170 subscribers. A scheme for selecting the committee members was agreed and the meeting was adjourned until Tuesday 29th May 1838 when the names of those appointed to the committee were read. Elected out of the first class: Mr. Samuel King, Mr. John Hopkins, Mr. John Slater, Mr. Abraham Sewell, Mr. J. Pratt and Mr. John Cumber (replaced by Mr. Thos. Reed of Norton). Elected out of the second class: Mr. John Booth, Mr. John Sawyer, Mr. Matthew Edwards, Mr. W. Flint, Mr. T. Read, Mr. T. Banks and Mr. John Nelson. This meeting was then adjourned until Tuesday 5th June when the

committee would lay before the meeting the 'rules and other regulations of the Society.' [1]

In August 1838 the cost of converting the Theatre to the purposes of the Institute were estimated at no more than £100. [2] The plans were to provide a reading room and library and a 'large and commodious lecture room, which will also be available for the Flower Shows, as well as for the holding of any large meeting, on any public business, the want of which has long been felt as a disadvantage in Malton' [3].

Initial meetings were postponed, awaiting the completion of the conversion of the Theatre. This was completed to an extent early in 1839. We believe the accommodation remained usable as a theatre as events continued to be run there, the theatre becoming known as The Theatre Royal. It is likely the Institute and Theatre were at the back of the Subscription Rooms, but in the early 1930s being 'overbuilt' by the Milton Rooms.

A public meeting was scheduled for the 31st January 1839. At this meeting, members were to pay their subscriptions, 'at least one quarter in advance, and a copy of the rules, and an institute ticket, will be

issued to each member.' A ticket to admit a friend to the first opening lecture was also given. [4] At the public meeting on 31st January 1839 it was reported that the books belonging to an old Public Library in the town, now fallen into disuse, were given to the Institute and formed the basis of the library.

The opening meeting and lecture was held on 13th February 1839, with around 250 people in attendance [5]

All may not have been well in these early days as in October 1839 it was reported that income from members was £66. There being 78 members of the first class; 97 members of the second class, and 40 of the third class. Further, that donations towards the expense of converting the building were a little over £140 but the expenses were £214, and the further costs of providing a room for the library and museum were £70. [6]

By March 1840 there were over 200 members, upwards of 2,000 volumes had been circulated and there were 50 regular attendees at the elementary school. [7]

The leading newspapers of the day were provided in the Newsroom, these were agreed at the annual meeting. Once a year these were auctioned to the highest bidder. In 1875 the list was The Times, Standard, The Daily Telegraph, Daily News, York Herald, Leeds Mercury, Yorkshire Post, Newcastle Chronicle, Illustrated London News, The graphic, Saturday Review, The World, English Mechanic, The field, Punch, Judy, Fun, Figaro, Yorkshire Gazette, Eastern Counties Herald, Malton Gazette and Malton Messenger. [8]

Early in 1892 the library at the institute was said to have over 2,000 volumes, and the subscription was 10s. [9]

References

[1] York Herald, 2 June 1838

[2] York Herald, 4th August 1838

[3] York Herald 3 November 1838

[4] York Herald, 26th January 1839

[5] Yorkshire Gazette, 16 February 1839

[6] Yorkshire Gazette, 5th October 1839

[7] Yorkshire Gazette, 7 March 1840

[8] York Herald, 15 December 1875

[9] Yorkshire Evening Press, 29 January 1892