

SKELTON'S VILLAGE HALL

SON'S TRIBUTE TO FATHER'S MEMORY

A Memorial to the Late Mr. J. C. Toppin

Lady Mabel Howard Performs Opening
Ceremony

Although not yet quite completed, the large and handsome hall, which has been erected in the village of Skelton to the memory of the late Mr John Castlehow Toppin, of Musgrave Hall, was yesterday formally opened by Lady Mable Howard, Greystoke Castle.

That this ceremony was not delayed until the building is ready for use was since Mr Frederick Toppin, who is the generous donor of this handsome tribute to the memory of his father, is returning in a few days to the United States, where he holds the position of Vice-President of the International Mercantile Marine Company of New York, a combine which controls the White Star Line and other great shipping lines.

As explained in these columns a fortnight ago, when we reproduced a sketch plan of the building, this hall is being built, furnished and presented to Skelton by Mr. Toppin as an act of filial devotion and in memory of his father, who will always be remembered as the head of a family which has held an honoured place in the public life of the county and in the agricultural life of the district for many generations. The late Mr. J. C. Toppin who died in 1915 at the venerable age of 80 years, was an alderman of the Cumberland Council, and the chairman of Penrith Rural Council, as well as a Guardian of the Poor for the long period of 57 years.

When completed the hall will make a splendid addition to the communal amenities of Skelton and will be the envy of many neighbouring parishes. It is situated on an excellent site in the heart of the village generously given by Mr G. Carleton Cooper, Carleton Hall, and has a frontage to the road of something like 100ft. The architect, Mr. J. H. Martindale, Carlisle, has designed a most substantial and

artistic building. In the front there is a porch or veranda giving access to a corridor running across the end of the large hall. On the right is the billiard room, 25ft by 18ft with recess, on the left will be found the reading room, 20ft by 18ft, with kitchen or services room in the rear. Ample cloak room accommodation is provided with lavatories for ladies and gentlemen on each side.

The main hall is a spacious room, 50ft by 20ft, which will seat 200 people, it has a platform, 22ft by 10ft, at the west end, and there are three doors for the public and two for platform purposes. In addition, there are retiring rooms on each side of the stage. A notable innovation is the provision for cinema purposes, of a lantern room at the end of the hall with fireproof floor and ceiling, and a stone stair giving access with an iron door at the foot. Beneath the kitchen is a cellar for the heating apparatus, which will have a low-pressure hot water system very simply arranged with pipes below the floor and radiators in suitable position. The rooms are well proportioned, and the large hall and billiard room have roofs of hammerbeam construction. A carved stone panel has been fixed in the entrance hall bearing the following simple inscription: "The John Castlehow Toppin Memorial Hall." The building is of local stone and the roofs of Westmoreland green slate.

Mr. F. Toppin is not only giving the building, but is completely furnishing it, including among his gifts being the billiard table and piano, while the kitchen will be replete with utensils for teas and entertainments. Mr. Wm. Grisenthwaite, Penrith, is the principal contractor, and Messrs. Hetherington Bros., Penrith, are responsible for the electric light installation. The heating apparatus has been supplied by Mr. Corbett, Carlisle. In addition, it was announced yesterday that part of the land at the rear of the premises, included in Mr. Cowper's gift, is to be laid out as a bowling green.

Mr. J. H. Toppin, the present representative of the family at Musgrave Hall, has acted as executor throughout the building operations, and he had the co-operation of the following committee: Messrs. J. Watt, I. Grindal, J. Holliday, J. Simpson, T. Wetheral, E.T. Sharp, Jos. Watt, A. Kitchen, and R. Grindal.

THE OPENING CEREMONY

There was a very large gathering for yesterday's ceremony, which was of a family and parochial character. No public announcement had been made, but an invitation had been extended to every house in the parish to be represented. In addition, there were members of the family and a few friends. Altogether upwards of 300 people were present, and following the actual ceremony, the company were hospitality entertained to tea which was served in the large hall. While this part of the program was in progress, selections were given to Mr. Wishart's orchestra from Penrith, and this added to the pleasure of what was already a most pleasing gathering.

Mr. Frederick Toppin presided, supported by the Lady Mabel Howard, and Mr. J. H. Toppin. Members of the family present included Mr. and Mrs. C. Toppin and Miss Toppin, Malvern; Mrs. Muir and Miss Toppin, Musgrave Hal; the Rev. and Mrs. G. Sharpe Ostle; and Mr. and Mrs. A. C. Kilburn, Murragh Hall; and with them was Mr. F. Tabor, New York, a friend of Mr. Toppin. Others present were

Mr. J. C. Parker, The Laithes; Mrs. Carleton Cowper and Mr. G. Carleton Cowper, Carleton Hall; Mr. E.O. and Miss Bolton, Leeming; Canon and Mrs. Monnington; Mrs R Monnington and Miss Monnington; Mr. and Mrs. J. Smith, Greystoke, etc. Mr. Martindale, the architect, was accompanied by Mrs. Martindale, and Mrs. Grisenthwaite was present with her husband, Mr. A. Grisenthwaite, the contractor.

Mr. F. Toppin, in opening the proceedings, addressed the company as " neighbours and friends all," and said that if anyone ever had any doubt as to the success of a building like that in the parish of Skelton that assembly, representing practically every home in the parish, would be a sufficient answer. For a great many years it had been evident to all in that village that a building of that character was sadly needed in the parish - a building in which one might see the social life of the people gather and revolve, and the death of his father in the early months of 1915 seemed to his brothers, his sisters and himself a fitting opportunity of placing at the disposition of the parish just such a building as this. At that time, of course, they were engaged in a much more serious occupation, and at the close of the war conditions throughout the world were of such a nature that it was felt impossible, and certainly undesirable, to go ahead with a scheme of this kind. The aftermath of the war was even worse than the war in a great many phases of their life, but in the late months of last year it was felt that conditions had so moderated as to allow them to proceed.

A committee of representative men of the parish was called together to handle the matter, and he wanted to say that the work of this committee from the start had been excellent. The question of site was very carefully considered, and it was decided that this site was undoubtedly the best that could be procured. The village owes an endless debt of gratitude to Mr. Geoffrey Cowper - (applause) - for his spontaneous generosity for donating that site for the benefit of the village in which his forbears had been interested in so many generations. The plan submitted by Mr. Martindale was accepted, and when that building was completed, it would be a monument to his skill. The contractor, Mr. Grisenthwaite, obtained the work in strong competition, and he only had to point out the work that had been put into the building to show how merited his bid was. During the past month he (Mr. Toppin) had spent a good deal of time around the building and had watched the workmen at their duties, and he would like to say that he had never seen more efficient, hard working or better men engaged in any work than those who had been engaged in the erection of the building. (Applause). He took off his hat to those men, from the foreman (Borrowdale) down to the smallest hod carrier. (Applause).

Continuing, Mr. Toppin said that, as he was leaving Skelton within the next few days, there were one or two matters he desired to mention in regard to the general conduct of the hall. When the scheme was originally launched last year, he made it very clear to the committee that this building and all it meant should be completely and absolutely non- sectarian. The Churchman, the Methodist, the Baptist or the person of any other religious denomination stood on equal ground here. (Applause). He wished that to be very clearly understood. Secondly, he desired that

the hall should be run very largely for the benefit of the younger men, and he thought that it should be run and governed as to make it to the utmost extent attractive to them. He desired that the committee should always have this in mind, and with that intention in mind it was recently arranged that three of these younger men should be added to the committee to act as a link between the elder and younger elements of the parish. Thirdly, he thought the committee should ought very carefully to consider the desirability of allowing the ladies of the parish to share the privileges of that building, certainly during some fixed hours, possibly during the afternoons, when it would not otherwise be used by the male sex. (Applause).

He did not desire to say more as far as his part was concerned, but to ask Lady Mabel Howard to open the hall. He well remembered one dark night over 40 years ago when a huge bonfire was set going on the Summer Grounds in Greystoke Castle Park to celebrate the arrival into the district of a lady who they all knew better than he did. Since that time Lady Mabel Howard had entered into the public life of the county and neighbourhood and had attained a position in the esteem and regard of everybody of which any lady might well be proud. (Applause). During those long years of active public life, she becomes closely associated with his father, and he believed a strong bond of admiration and esteem arose between them in their public work. Lady Mabel had graciously come to them to do them the honour of opening the building and nobody could do it with greater distinction. (Applause).

Lady Mabel Howard said she was very gratified when Mr. Toppin asked her to open the hall which he had erected in memory of his father. She always remembered when she first came to Cumberland meeting Mr Toppin for the first time in the hunting field. She was then a novice, and he gave her some good advice which she never forgot. Her first introduction to public life was under his chairmanship, and she thought then, and she was quite certain now, that she could never sit under a more able or more kindly chairman, so fair and so just in all his rulings. There could be no more memorial, so fitting has his son had just erected to the memory of one who spent all his life in working for others and in trying to help them and do good for them. (Applause).

Mr. Frederick Toppin had said that he believed there was a strong bond of friendship existed between his father and herself. There was, indeed that bond, and everyone who went into that hall, who attended the gatherings, social and otherwise, would do well to remember the late Mr. Toppin and to follow in his footsteps. This building was going to be a magnificent one, indeed, and in erecting it, Mr. Toppin, who now, alas, spent most of his time at the other side of the Atlantic, had given proof of his affection for his home and his old neighbours. (Applause). She was very glad to hear him say a word for the women, because women nowadays had so many gatherings of their own, and it had been rather difficult for them to know where they could meet. Everyone in the parish, now and for all time, would thank Mr. Toppin for his great generosity in giving them this

building. She declared it open, and felt sure that everyone presents, as well as future generations, would spend many happy hours under its roof. (Applause).

Mr. Toppin thanked Lady Mabel Howard for attending, remarking that she returned from the Continent for the express purpose of taking part in that gathering.

This part of the proceedings was about to conclude, when Mr. J. C. Parker said he would like to express himself on behalf of the parish their thanks to Mr. Toppin for this magnificent gift. He had in the past been a most generous supporter not only of parochial affairs, but of others in the district, but had been too modest to allow his good deeds to be known. This building was, indeed, a memorial worthy to the late Mr. J. C. Toppin who was a man who was very highly respected and did much good work for the county and district. The remarks about Mr. Frederick Toppin's kindness applied also to Mr. Harry Toppin and other members of the family. (Applause).

Mr E. T. Sharp, on behalf of the committee, also expressed gratitude to Mr. Toppin for his gift of such a beautiful building. Mr. Toppin had told them that the committee had a lot of work to do, and he could assure him that their gratitude would not be expressed in words alone by actions as well. The building would stand as a memorial not only to Mr. J. C. Toppin, but to its generous donor and the whole of the family at Musgrave Hall. (Applause).

Mr Toppin briefly, and modestly, returned thanks, and said that he could only hope that as years rolled on the building would grow in usefulness and be something of which the parish of Skelton would be proud. He added that the use of the piece ground at the rear of the hall so generously included in Mr. Cowpers gift had been under consideration, and it had been decided to proceed with the laying of a bowling green. (Applause). He hoped this would add to the attractions of the building, and it would be ready for play next summer. (Applause).

There having been no ceremony outside the building, the silver gilt key, the gift of Mr. Martindale, was handed to Lady Mabel privately by Mr. Toppin. The key is inscribed "J.C. Toppin Memorial Hall, Skelton. d.d. J. H. M 1923 Memoria justi cum landebus." Mr Toppin also asked Lady Mabel to accept from himself a small, but beautiful, clock as a memento of the occasion.

The ladies who had charge of the tea were Mesdames Moore, Wetheral, Holliday, Wood, Simpson, Watt, Blaylock, Mitchinson, W. Bainbridge, E. Brainbridge, Bell, Jopson, Arnison, and Grindal, the misses Grindal, Jopson, Johnstone and Wood.