

The Trentham Institute



Trentham Institute and part of Trentham school, with the Hunt stables beyond, in 1903 [Warrillow Collection University of Keele]

The Institute was erected in 1894 on the site of the old Trentham Inn and designed in the Kentish vernacular style by the estate surveyor Thomas Roberts. Aimed at the educational improvement of villagers by its benefactor, the 4th Duke of Sutherland, it was used for various activities during its lifetime. Its facilities included a billiard room, a stocked library, reading room and classrooms, a kitchen and refreshment bar, the latter being open to the public. There was also a workshop for handicrafts, together with quarters for a tenant caretaker.

In 1912 Henry Swift Penson is listed as the steward and B. S. French as the secretary.

The Institute was used regularly for meetings for the parish council and for public meetings and events. On 21 March 1919 one well attended meeting was held to decide on a scheme for a suitable war memorial for Trentham. There was a general feeling that they could not allow the services of the men from the village who had fought for them, and in many cases given lives for them, ever to be forgotten. Ultimately, it was unanimously decided that a fund should be raised to assist the dependents of men from the village who had fallen in action and to render help to the wounded and disabled; also that a cross be erected to commemorate the war service of the villagers.

By 1921 the refreshment room had become something of a liability: droves of Potteries holiday makers used the Institute as a catering establishment when they visited the Park. An estate report stated: "The unruly mob do a certain amount of mischief and leave behind them a terrible mess! The villagers have become 'somewhat chary' of using the Institute for parish gatherings etc."

Prior to WW2, the premises were also an important RAF Volunteer Reserve Training Centre. A number of these units were set up across the country and their purpose was to provide a pool of trained men who, when qualified, could be posted to RAF squadrons. When war was declared in Sept 1939 they were classed as mobilised. Considered important enough to have a Wing Commander as Commanding Officer, nearly 200 personnel were under training at Trentham early in 1939, including 20 pilots, 64 wireless operators / air gunners, 10 observers and 100 ground staff. A number of these went on to have distinguished service careers.

During WW2 the Trentham Centre continued to be used for administration and ground crew training, maintaining links with Meir Airport. Afterwards, it trained personnel in use of radar, a number progressing to early warning stations such as Hack Green (Secret Bunker at Nantwich). The RAF finally left Trentham in the 1950s and the Institute was demolished in 1956.



Trentham Village about 1900 [Private collection]