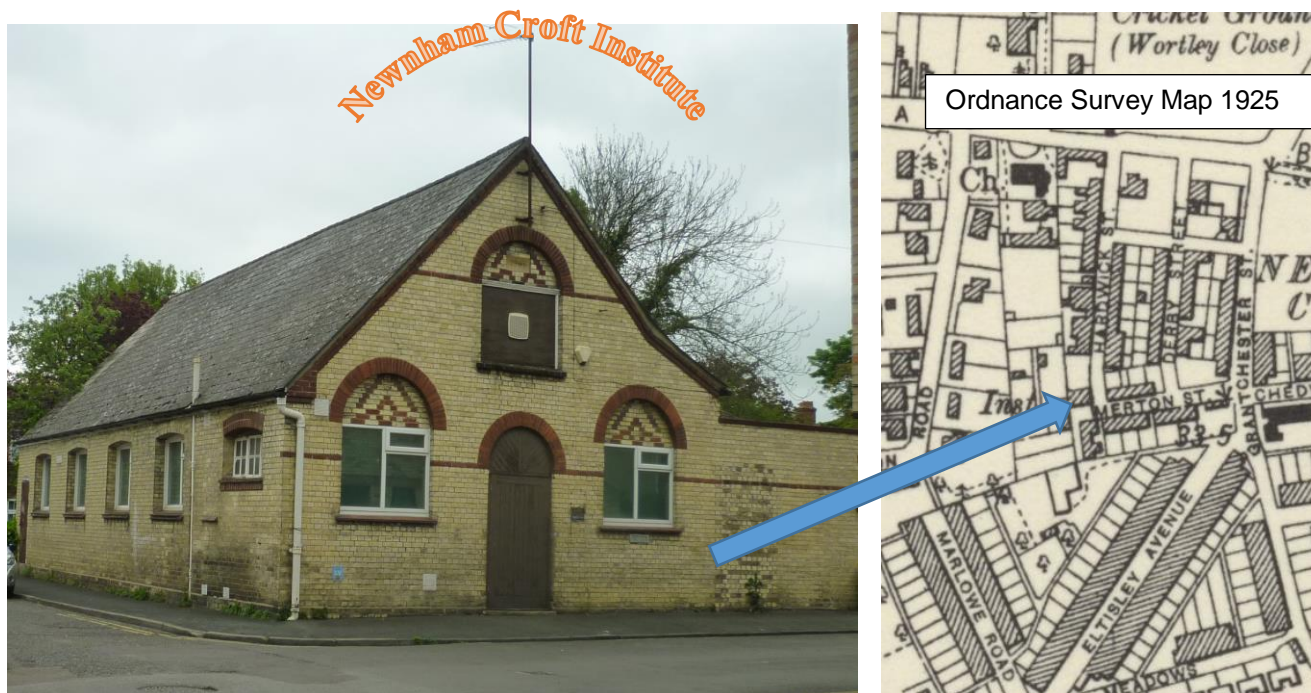


The Newnham Croft Social & Sports Club, Hardwick Street (founded ca. 1900, dedicated building 1909) Final version



History: The working men's club movement started around the middle of the 19th century and reflected the Victorian ethic and Temperance movement. The clubs fulfilled a number of functions: as places where working people could meet and relax together, as centres of self-improvement and education, as a response to gentlemen's clubs. They were an antidote to the public houses and in early days offered no alcohol.

The Building: The Newnham Croft Institute as it was called at its official foundation in 1902¹ was a relatively late example of a working men's club. The growing community and thriving businesses of Newnham Croft provided momentum for a club. Before building its dedicated headquarters, the members used to meet at the turn of the 20th century in the rooms above the Parish Hall². In March 1909 it came to the Notice of the Club Committee that Selwyn College was intending to replace its Temporary Hall, so the Club offered to dismantle it and take away the materials for their new building for £25.³ This offer was happily accepted by the Bursar, who as a token of gratitude donated a gas pendant to be installed in the new club building. In the meanwhile an appeal launched in 1906 had collected the necessary funds of £160.12s. 6d. to buy a piece of freehold land in the south west corner of Hardwick Street, formerly occupied by one of Newnham's many pleasure gardens, and adjoining 'the spot where the club premises at that time stood'. A Mr Nicholas, architect, was instructed to draw up plans, and Mr Willows (who had also directed the demolition of Selwyn's Old Hall) erected it. After another rather more fraught round of fund raising, the building was able to be completed by 1909, as testified to under the gable, ready for its inauguration by the Master of Selwyn College, Dr Murray, on 12th March 1910⁴. The first President is recorded as Hugh Foster Esq. 1901-05 on the Club Honours Board (see p.2). The Newnham Croft Institute receives its first mention in Spalding's Directory in 1911, with custodian F.G. Reeves.

In Feb 1918, the Institute secured the neighbouring plot of land for £125, with a view to extending the Institute⁵, but was unable to exploit it until 1929 for lack of sufficient funds when it finally went up at a cost of around £1300.

¹ Honours Board in the Newnham Croft Social & Sports Club

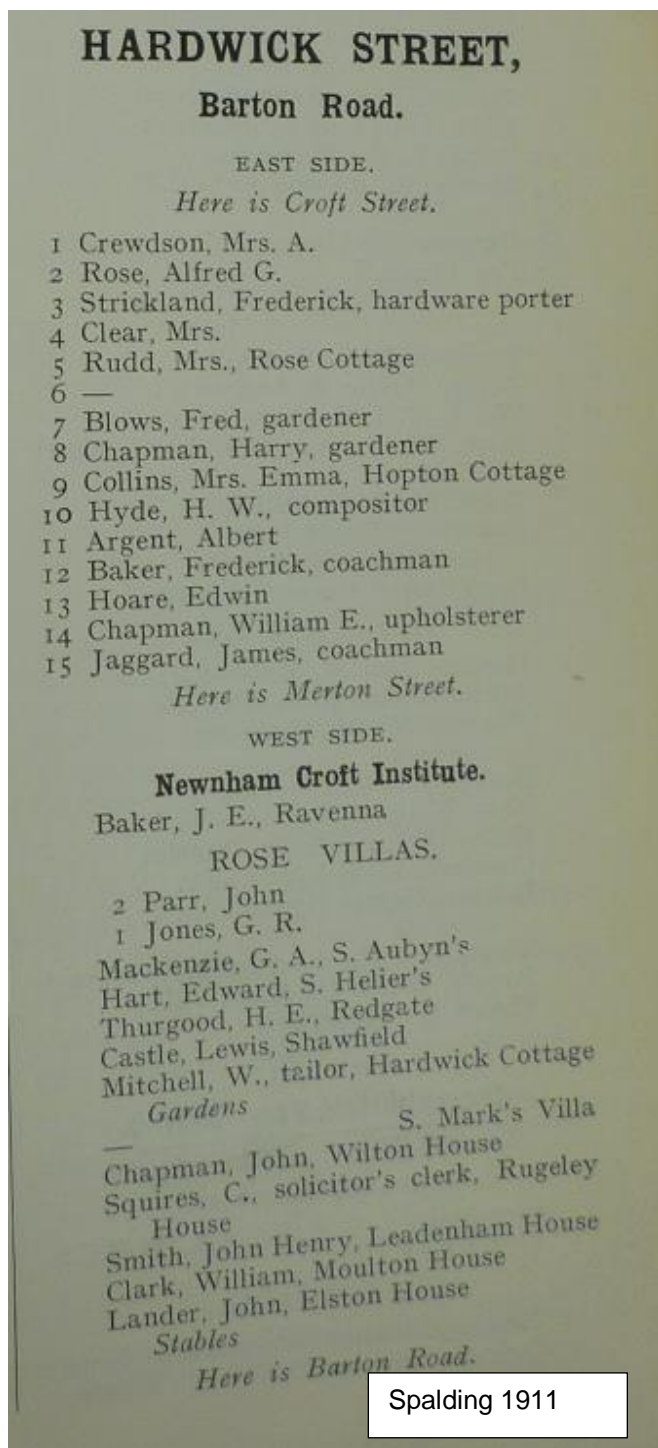
² Minutes of the St Mark's Church Committee, 1910 (Grantchester Parish Records, Cambs County Council)

³ Minutes of Newnham Croft Men's Social Club March 1909

⁴ Cambridge Chronicle 18th March 1910 p.8 (Cambridgeshire Collection)

⁵ Newnham Croft Institute Minutes, 20th Oct. 1914

Membership: A reading of Spalding around this time reveals that all manner of traders lived and worked in the Croft, who would have formed the backbone of the Club. In Hardwick Street alone over the years there are listed: surveyor, clerk, stationer's assistant, furniture salesman, joiner, tailor, gardener, milliner, compositor, grocer's porter, plumber, butler, printer's reader, lay clerk and bandmaster, and a sergeant major of Cambridge University Rifle Volunteer Corps. The membership was not restricted to the trades, but included professionals, such as Dr J.C.H. Dalton⁶, Prof.W.W. Buckland, Regius Professor of Civil Law, Dr William Balfour-Gourlay, Botanist and President of the Institute 1942-57. By 1917 there were 165 members, 269 in 1931. Many members were also members of the Chamber of Commerce. Two Vicars of St Mark's Parish Church were members: the Revd. Septimus Symonds in early times and later in 1931 the Revd. J. F. Medley.



Activities: The mainstay of the Institute were Billiards and card playing. Russian Pool was also popular and Whist drives were held. 1919 saw the introduction of Bagatelle, and 'Snooker Pool' first mooted by the then Secretary, F. Rayner. It also marked the founding of the Sports Club.

Football and Cricket also featured prominently. The Games Committee organised a Cricket Match on 7th July 1914. The Bowls Club was formed in 1924. 'Ping Pong' was introduced 1931 when a table was donated by the former President, Dr Dalton.

Various Trophies were won including the Humphrey Challenge, the Major Rhodes Cup.

Charitable donations: Sport and charity would be combined: for example, a Whist Drive was held in 1924 in aid of the National Institute for the Blind. Coulson, founder of the building firm, donated his prize from the Billiards Handicap to the Red Cross Auxiliary Hospital in Wordsworth Grove (4 March 1918).

Library: A Rifle Club had come into being in 1910 with a range on the premises (although how the space was sufficient remains a mystery). However, already in February 1916 the decision was taken to convert it into a Reading Room becoming then a Library with a Librarian.

Entertainments: At a couple of meetings in 1908-10 Frederick Piggott, dairy farmer, proposed that a Concert be organised. A Sub-Committee was later formed to organise a Christmas Children's Party. This was planned with as much detail and formality as planning the Institute's building, even producing a balance sheet showing how £38.19s.8½d was

⁶ Dr. James H. C. Dalton. Born in Cheshire. Studied medicine at Trinity College, Cambridge. Elected to represent Castle Ward in 1898 and became an Alderman in 1900 for St. Andrew's Ward; Mayor from 1903 to 1904; wrote papers relating to smallpox vaccination (<https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/>)

to be spent⁷. There was also a Festivities Sub-Committee, which decided the menus in detail (oxtail soup, plaice with anchovy sauce, boiled mutton and caper sauce, and so forth). Boxes of oranges seemed a favourite for the children. The ladies were co-opted to help but were not as yet members. At Christmas 1926, the Cambridge Poppy Day Committee were granted leave to place a collecting box in the Institute, a practice which has been revived recently in 2017! Entertainers in 1926 included 'Professor' Privet, The Magpies, The Cambridge Concert Party. Failing that, members of the Club Committee obliged as 'artistes' to entertain the children. Messrs. Tolliday and Lambert clearly enjoyed 'mucking in', as we would say today, organising parties. There would be an Annual Dinner at which dignitaries such as the Mayor were invited. Dances were held. The first mention of a Cinema party for children was in 1930.



The Bar: Victorian attitudes to alcohol persisted and were hotly debated in the Club, the Reverend Septimus Symonds, who sat on the Committee, advising against its introduction, until 1910 when he was out-voted by 23 to 10 and a Licence obtained⁸. Throughout 1921 the interpretation of a new law limiting licensing hours vexed the Institute. An appeal was coordinated by the Institute with other Working Men's Clubs in Cambridge to appeal to the Magistrates' Court, since they were concerned about loss of revenue from the bar. In the end the hour of closure of the bar was set at 10:30pm. The Bar Steward was elected each year and was expected to keep a careful account of takings both at the bar and from billiards, obviously a major source of day-to-day revenue. Mr West received a talking-to in 1929 for slackening, but so improved his performance by the end of the year securing a 28% margin that he was re-elected⁹.

Objects of the Institute: The emphasis gradually became less missionary but rather more recreational. Nevertheless, the 1974 Constitution retained some of the original wording expressing the high minded Objects of the Club, which '*shall be to carry on the trade of club proprietors by providing for the use of its members the means of social intercourse, mutual helpfulness, mental and moral improvement and rational recreation*', echoing its Victorian foundations. On 4 November 1913 the Committee drew the line at the offer of a lecture on 'Recent finds in Egypt' as being 'unable to secure a good audience'.

Nevertheless, the theme of self-help in various forms remained. A Self-Help Club was in full swing in the early '20s¹⁰, being a kind of mutual insurance club to provide sickness and death benefits. In Feb 1916 it was proposed to convert the Rifle Range into a Reading Room. By 1917, 22 members had joined the Book Club. By 1920 it was designated the Library and the Librarian, Mr Houlton, would frequently report donations of books, such as a full set of Dickens, and grants were given from the main fund towards the purchase of books. The DIY element continued and the indefatigable Mr F Reynolds, clearly a very capable carpenter, was always offering to build bookcases or mend windows and so forth, in addition to doing his stint as Secretary (see more below). Nor were the needs of the unemployed overlooked and the Institute contributed to the Borough Unemployed Fund.

Management: Indeed, the do-it-yourself spirit was fundamental and Mr Tolliday, President of the Building Committee, who frequently but not always chaired the Committee Meetings over a period of 20 years, carried out with his own hands in February 1915 alterations to the 'lavatory' together with another Committee Member, F. Rayner - Secretary. A reading of the Minutes reveals on the one hand a practical rigour and formality in the conduct of the Institute's affairs, and on the other

⁷ Minutes of the Sub-Committee Children's Party December 1922 ff.

⁸ Newnham Croft Institute Minutes, July 1910

⁹ Newnham Croft Institute Minutes 2nd Oct 1928-11th Sep 1933

¹⁰ Newnham Croft Institute Minutes, Jan. 1916 – Jan. 1921

hand a democratic approach and a strong sense of sharing, such as a rotating chairmanship and in the delegation of tasks¹¹. The Committee were a group of people with a strong sense of purpose, showing sound organisational and hands-on skills. They would often set up Sub-Committees for specific objectives. They soon instituted a salaried Custodian to caretake the building. Later accommodation for him was built on the adjoining land to the north (see below).

The Institute was structured and conducted its business in the following manner. There was a President (Dr Dalton at the start) who presided at AGMs and acted as a mentor on occasion. Then there was a management Committee which met every other week in winter and once a month in the summer, with 'Special Meetings' to discuss urgent matters. The AGM elected the President and other Officers. The Chairman was a separate figure who was elected at the first management Committee Meeting after the Annual Meeting. A Vice-Chairman was elected at the same time. This yearly rotational system ensured full commitment by all Committee members. Absolutely every item discussed ended in a motion (or action item as we would say) with proposer and seconder, or was 'laid on the table' to be raised at the next meeting. The Minutes would systematically record new members. Sub-Committees were often formed to come up with solutions to specific matters.

Matters discussed in Committee included routine maintenance of the Billiard tables, making a good deal on the purchase of a second hand one, new packs of Cards, concern with proper auditing of the accounts, alterations to and expansion of the building as the membership grew, hiring out the hall.

The Institute became registered under the Friendly Societies Act in 1929.

Off-Shoot Clubs: Over time the Institute sprouted numerous Clubs and Associations: the Sports Club, the Games Club, the Share-Out Club (later the Self-Help Club), the Cricket Club, the Football Club, the Youth's Club, the Allotments Association (which was more stand-alone but shared membership and met at the Institute – for a fee), the Bowls Club, the Book Club.

Allotments Society: This was affiliated but not an integral part of the Institute. However a number of members belonged to both clubs, and many interactions are recorded in the Institute's Minutes. By 1918 the Allotments Society 330 acres under cultivation around Cambridge and served a real function during WWI in contributing to food production. Indeed, the Institute Minutes of 4 May 1918 justify keeping the bar open until 10pm because allotment holders would work until 9pm in summer after which they would 'need to obtain the necessary refreshment that is essential to the carrying on of the National Work of Food Production'. The Allotments Society Minutes are kept in the Institute's (now Club's) Archive.

Hirings: The premises were hired out for a variety of purposes: as a Polling Station (1st Nov.1912), the University Hare & Hound Committee, on 26th March 1913 to the Women's Suffrage Society for a Public Meeting, Grantchester and District Horticultural Society, Grantchester Football Club meetings, the Boy Scouts. Typical fees in early days were £1. They typically eschewed requests for political rallies or meetings as being 'against the rules'¹².

Gifts: Apart from the gas pendant from the Bursar of Selwyn in 1909, the Institute subsequently received other gifts many of them books as it building up its Library, including a set of Scott's novels. Other gifts were Sporting pictures (July 1914). Mr J. Whitehead, Town Clerk, with whom the Institute was negotiating the purchase of land for their extension, gave a magnificent gift of a new billiard table in February 1914. Donations of all sorts came streaming in. In 1918 donations were received towards prizes for a Billiards and a Russian Pool Handicaps, a subscription to *The Nation* by a Dr Doncaster. Other gifts were a Visitors' Book and a Deed Box for the Secretary to be placed in Barclay's Bank.

The First World War: The first rumblings of war were in December 1913 when the Cambridge Territorials were given permission to put up their recruitment posters on a board outside. The

¹¹ Newnham Croft Institute Minutes, 24th Jan. 1912 to 1st Dec. 1915

¹² Newnham Croft Institute Minutes 9 December 1918

following month the Institute let them have the club room free of charge for a concert. During Summer 1914 the Committee had been discussing what use the building could be put to in the context of the war when, on 1st September - one month after war broke out (28th July), a detachment was found to be encamped on Lammas Land and Coe Fen. The vote was taken to invite them to use of the Institute from 6:30 to 9:30 each evening free of charge. In another initiative, the Rev Symonds suggested starting a fund in aid of Belgian Refugees and Tolliday approached Baron von Hügel, Professor of Anthropology living on Barton Road. As a result all male Belgian refugees residing in the district were granted free use of the Institute. The Institute also contributed to the Cambridge Daily News Tobacco Fund earmarked for the Royal Engineers.

Then the 'honey moon' period ended. By 18 Dec. 1914 the Institute had received a summary request to accommodate a mess for 130 soldiers of the Westmoreland & Cumberland Yeomanry. The Committee voted to propose a hire of 2s.10d. a day. In October 1915 the 'East Anglian Field Artillery required the Institute for messing and to have absolute control of the Building'. Then in November 1915 came the turn of the E. Anglian Brigade Communications Column. The Committee quoted the same terms as before but this time the Billeting Officer batted them down to £1 for the hire. As brigades came and went the Committee did its best to negotiate, with the help of Mr Whitehead, Town Clerk (see above), for the orderly use of their premises, but were dealt a rather rough deal. They did succeed in receiving compensation for items that had gone missing such as cigarettes and, oddly, boundary bricks, as well as damage to a brass lamp.¹³

Various members of the Institute were called up, and some fell in action (see details of the Memorial Board on page 5). The Minutes of 1916 report the sending out of messages of condolences from the Committee.

In the midst of this, as far as possible it was business as usual. For instance the Billiard Club went ahead with the Cambridge & District Billiard League competition, as it did with a Cribbage Tournament and the Billiard Handicap Final. Nevertheless in 1914, a number of events had to be abandoned due to the pressures of War: the Cricket match, the annual Children's Party, the running competitions. Interestingly though, as we have seen, the Rifle Range was turned into a Reading Room even before the war ended.¹⁴

Involvement outside the Club:

A few months before WWI broke out, on 7th March 1914 the Institute was proposing a Public Meeting concerning the need to build a footbridge over the river at 'Snobs Bathing Point'. This was then put to the Borough Council, who replied saying they would take it into consideration when purchasing Lammas Land from the group of colleges which owned it. (See Appendix B)

Prominent members of the Committee(s) in the first 20 years of the Institute (later Club):

C. J. Tolliday* - Chairman 1906-15 (Chamber of Commerce) lived at 17 Selwyn, then Barton Rd
Federick Rayner** - Secretary 1916-21, linotype operator, lived at 32 Grantchester Street
F. Reynolds*** - Chairman 1918, Secretary 1921, builder, lived at Daisy Cottage, 7 Merton St
William Ernest Ellis - owned the Derby Street Bakery 1890-1914, lived at 1 Grantchester Street
C.E. Lambert, building contractor with yard in Derby Street, but residence in Fulbrooke Rd
Revd. Symonds (in the first decade) - curate then vicar of St Mark's
H. Coulson - founder of Coulsons the builders, lived at 57 Eltisley Avenue - joined 15 May 1916
W. Keech - University Press employee? Tortoise stove bought through him (mins 2 Feb 1916)
H. Mason - fruiterer at 32 Eltisley Avenue
Albert Argent - carpenter's machinist, 11 Hardwick Street
W.B. Kett - founder of Rattee & Kett, the building firm
William Brockett - University Museum assistant, lived at 15 Eltisley Avenue
J. Cooper - long-standing Treasurer,
William H. Cornwell - compositor, lived at 38 Grantchester Street
John Gautrey - gas fitter, lived at 13 Grantchester Terrace

¹³ Newnham Croft Institute Minutes, December 1913-1915

¹⁴ Newnham Croft Institute Minutes, Jan 1916-Jan 1921

*C.J. Tolliday: owner of a light engineering company which continued to trade looking after gardening equipment until 1980 or so in King's Road, was an initiator and a negotiator

**F. Rayner: as Secretary his minutes betray a wry sense of humour and an enjoyment of writing.

The final paragraph in his Minutes of 1st March, which he entitles 'Nothing Doing', sums up the way many a committee meeting might end:

'Then some of the Members of the Committee went home, others fell asleep and the remainder did a lot more talking, and eventually nothing was decided upon except that Mr Reynolds and the Treasurer offered to go and look at the Huts [being Army Huts as a temporary extension]; and the Secretary call a special meeting if necessary.'

***F. Reynolds stands out as one the most enterprising members of the Institute. As a member of the General Committee and the Building Committee he was constantly coming up with ideas. Clearly a gifted carpenter he would often come to the rescue offering to carry out mending jobs. He designed the Honours Board (see below) and made the Billiards Trophy case.

Today: The Club now draws members from further afield than just the Croft or Cambridge. Women were admitted in the early 1970's and the Constitution was rewritten in 1974 to comply with the Friendly Societies Act of that year. Snooker has overtaken billiards, and Ping Pong has been ennobled to Table Tennis. Card playing continues and other entertainment of a more sedentary nature, such as 'needles and natter', take place. There continues to be a cross-section of society, reflecting the changes in the Croft. There is a thriving football club. Plans include reviving running competitions. It encourages sports among younger people. Whilst some working men's clubs have had a change of use from their original function, the Newnham Croft Social & Sports Club, like the Salisbury Club, has never stopped being a social club since the start.

The Honours Board:



Two boards honour respectively leading Committee Members of the Institute (now Club) from its inception in 1902 to the 1960s, and members who served and died in WWI.

The Honours Board on the left (proposed 2nd Feb. 1914) is topped by the Building Committee, which was chaired by Mr C[harles] Tolliday, Mr W.H. Cornwell the stationer (who later took on the Post Office in Grantchester Street) appropriately as Secretary, and Mr H.W. Ellis of the Bakery, and. Tolliday also sat on St Mark's Church Committee. The General Committee had Hugh Foster Esq as its first President from 1901 to 1905, followed by Alderman Dr J.C.H. Dalton until 1924. Many of those listed were members of the Chamber of Commerce, some aldermen, others bore the title of Dr, so there was a social mix from the start.

The Memorial Board:

First proposed in 1916, it was executed in oak by Messrs Prime & Co. (Mr Prime being a member) in late 1919. The Memorial board on lists Members who fell in the First World War. Regiments listed are the 11th Suffolk Regiment, the 9th Bedfordshire Regiment, the 1+1st Cambridgeshire Regiment, the 2nd Borders and the Post Office Rifles. Second on the list is Lance Corporal William Horace Humphreys of the 11th Suffolk Regiment who lost his life aged 24 at the Battle of the Somme on 1 July 1916. He was son of William and Eliza Humphreys, who lived at 'Bronlea', 81 Barton Road. He is remembered at the Thiepval Memorial.



Architecture: The building falls within the Edwardian period. Its decorative but sober brickwork and detailing is worthy of note. The three gable end windows in the street façade are surmounted with ornamental red brick arches, which contrast pleasingly with the overall Cambridge gault brickwork. The windows emphasize the triangular aspect of the gable end, one being centrally placed over the main door and the two on the ground floor symmetrically placed on either side of it. Horizontal red brick string courses also serve visually to bind the façade. It is unfortunate that at some time in the past the upper window was boarded and a rather obtrusive ventilator placed in it. The exterior of the building would benefit from some cleaning and discreet relocating of the rather obtrusive TV aerial, trailing wire and ventilator. The NCSSC building can definitely take its place as a noteworthy and historic building alongside a number of other working men's clubs in Cambridge which date back to the Victorian and early Edwardian periods. Other examples are Castle End Mission near Mount Pleasant, built in 1884¹⁵ and now a Methodist church, and in Mill Road the Salisbury Club, the latter of which is rather more ornate but of similar proportions to the Newnham Croft Club. They share the feature of being one storeyed buildings with a prominent pitched roof. The Salisbury Club has a gable end on its façade. The Salisbury Club has BLI status¹⁶ and the Castle End Mission is being considered for BLI listing at the time of writing¹⁷. Interestingly the architects of the two earlier Victorian clubs favour a red brick ground with white or moulded brick ornamentation.



Importance to the Community: The Newnham Croft Social Club is definitely an important landmark not only architecturally, but also symbolically. It has a strong historical association with the evolution of the Croft and continues to play a central role in community life in Newnham. Its doors are open to new members, groups and individuals wishing to hire the hall.

It continues to perform a significant function as a gathering place for all kinds of activities, for those with varying interests. It has a bar pleasantly L-shaped to face into two rooms and the extension has been opened up to provide a comfortable seating area with sofas. It also supplements the Community Hall in hiring out space when the Hall is overbooked.

For all the above reasons, it is worthy of listing as a Building of Local Interest, in line with the other working men's clubs listed above.

T. Elliott
 On behalf of the South Newnham Neighbourhood Forum
 31st May 2018

¹⁵ Castle End Mission website

¹⁶ Information provided by Salisbury Club Mill Road

¹⁷ Information provided by Cambridge City Council

