

# MRS BROOKE'S SCRAP-BOOK



A talk given to the 'Combe History Group'  
on the 5<sup>th</sup> of February 1998 by  
Dr David L Booth

*in the*

**TEMPERANCE READING ROOM  
& COFFEE HOUSE**

*founded at Combe by Miss Adela Brooke*

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founded at Combe by Miss Adela BROOKE.

It is appropriate that this talk should be given in the Combe Reading Room, under a photograph of Miss Adela Brooke, because her mother's Scrap-book contains many items about Miss Adela's work to raise money for this Reading Room. Naturally most of the things in it were collected before 1882, when Mrs. Brooke and her two daughters came here to live in Combe House.

As her tombstone in Combe Churchyard tells us, Mrs. Brooke, who was born in 1813, was the only daughter of General Sir Willoughby Cotton and his wife Lady Augusta, a daughter of the Earl of Coventry.

One of the earlier entries in the Scrap-book is a printed poem, written before 1818, and dedicated to Mrs. Brooke's two aunts. It is entitled:

"LINES Addressed to the Ladies BARBARA and SOPHIA COVENTRY, on their presenting the Bard with a pair of Garters, of their own knitting."

and prefaced by:

*"The age of Chivalry is gone."* - BURKE

Here are the first few verses:

Thus Burke in modern days declaim'd  
And ru'd his hapless lot;  
But I, in days more modern still,  
Declare that it is not!

A ribband, from a fair one's hand,  
Was Knighthood's ancient meed -  
For this, the warrior's bosom glow'd -  
The Lover's breast would bleed.

And CHIVALRY, in later times,  
Has rais'd her banners high;  
While beauty held another boon,  
To valor's ardent eye.

A GARTER to her Edward gave  
(The theme of every tongue)  
Of him Fame's living book is full,  
And WINDSOR'S roofs have rung.

Edward III  
Order of the Garter  
St George's Chapel  
Windsor

While KINGS still court this envied badge  
To grace one honor'd knee,  
Far less than Poets, Princes are -  
For lo! there's two for me!"

3 more verses

The career of Mrs. Brooke's father, General Sir Willoughby Cotton, got off to an unusual start: at the age of 14 he was one of the leaders of a rebellion at Rugby School, of which the Headmaster was then Henry INGLES, known as the 'Black Tiger'. Here is the account of this rebellion from the Victoria County History:

"In November, 1797, a boy was flogged for firing a pistol in the yard of his boarding-house, thereupon windows were broken, and when the headmaster ordered the damage to be paid for by the fifth and sixth forms, the whole school was summoned, and desks and benches and other woodwork were piled up in the close and set fire to, Ingles's books being thrown on the top. A recruiting party of soldiers which chanced to be in the town was requisitioned. The boys then retreated to the island in the close, which had a moat round it, and the Riot Act was read, summoning them to surrender. Meanwhile a party of soldiers had crept to their rear and they were all taken prisoner. Many were expelled, and others severely flogged. Some of the ringleaders afterwards distinguished themselves as officers in the Peninsula."

*Victoria County History, Warwickshire, II, 364*

I have some sympathy with the Headmaster, but I am not surprised that the boys felt that the boy who fired the pistol had been flogged more severely than his offence had deserved. Willoughby Cotton joined the Army in 1798 and served as a Staff Officer in the Peninsula Campaign.

In 1830 Sir Willoughby went out to the West Indies to command the troops in Jamaica. The Scrap-book has a cutting from the London Gazette of 22 February 1832 which prints a dispatch from Lord Belmore, the Governor of Jamaica, in which he reports a recent slave rebellion. It is a fine example of an official trying to defend himself from an expected charge of incompetence! There had been much talk of better conditions for the slaves, and even the possibility of their emancipation on 1 January 1832, but the planters had allowed nothing to be done. Lord Belmore said that he had not had any warning of this discontent. Then, just before Christmas 1831, he received a dispatch reporting disorders near Montego Bay, at the other end of the island. Further reports showed that there was considerable rioting, and much damage to sugar plantations, in that region and elsewhere. Martial Law was declared. Sir Willoughby Cotton and two companies of the 84th Regiment sailed for Montego Bay as soon as the wind allowed them to leave Port Royal. You have just heard about Sir Willoughby's first experience with the Riot Act. His own use of it, 35 years later, brought severe criticism from a magistrate facing riotous slaves:

"Sir - I have this instant read a dispatch from Sir W Cotton to Major Pennefather; it is certainly an extraordinary document. He says that the troops are not to act until the Riot Act is read, and unless his Majesty's troops are insulted; the negroes are already strongly impressed with the idea that the King's troops have instructions not to act against them, and certainly, if this dispatch were published, it would confirm their opinion; I hope, most sincerely hope, this order will be immediately countermanded; if not his Majesty's troops, who are so well paid by the country, will be of little service to us."

The dispatch from Lord Belmore said that Sir Willoughby had rapidly restored order, and expressed his personal gratitude. A cutting from the Jamaica Courant of 29 April 1833 was more poetic:

"Major General Sir Willoughby Cotton, on quitting this island, will take with him the good wishes and sincere attachment of all parties and all classes in this island. There is no man to whom Jamaica is more indebted than to the gallant veteran. During the Martial-Law, when the island was devastated by incendiarism, rapine, and assassination, many amongst us considered his measures too lenient, but the result has proved he was right.

God forbid that one drop of human blood should ever be spilled in Jamaica than hard necessity demands: and we are glad to bear this testimony to Sir Willoughby Cotton that no soldier was ever more avariciously saving of human life than he has been.

By his judicious arrangements, he terminated the most dangerous insurrection under which Jamaica ever suffered, with the loss of not half a dozen British soldiers, and he reduced the insurgents to that condition that they were incapable of offering resistance.

Distracted as public opinion in Jamaica is on almost every other point, in this we agree that a better friend of the island and of humanity never existed than Major General Sir W Cotton."

Naturally there are many cuttings about Miss Adela's father, Colonel Henry Brooke. Among the 1848 cuttings about the Siege of Mooltan, a strongly defended city in the Southern Punjab, is [p97] a note that Major Henry BROOKE, 32nd Regiment, Military Secretary to Lieutenant-General Sir Willoughby COTTON, had been promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel in place of Lieutenant Colonel PATTERSON, who had been killed in action. This continued:

"With the above was forwarded to me a letter, dated the 19th September, informing me that Lieutenant-Colonel Brooke was up at Moulton by the 3rd of September, just one week before the action, which many persons are not aware of, his name not appearing in print. He performed, in little more than three weeks, a journey to the surprise of the natives. He travelled between forty and fifty miles for fourteen nights successively, on a camel, across a part of the country rarely traversed by a European without a servant, only a guide, and as he had never before tried a camel, it was most fortunate his not having been delayed on the road. He now commands the regiment."

Now let us move to Combe, with a cutting dated June 1882: [p90]

"That pretty little place at Combe in Oxfordshire, so long occupied by the late Colonel the Hon. Robert and Lady Louise Spencer, has just been let to a connection of the Coventry and Combermere families, Mrs. Brooke (widow of Colonel Brooke, C.B., aide-de-camp to the Queen, and only daughter of the late General Sir Willoughby and Lady Augusta Cotton), as a permanent residence for herself and daughters. Her eldest, and only surviving son, Captain Brooke, late 3rd Dragoon Guards, is male representative of the Brooke family in Ireland."

Three years later, in April 1885, there was a concert in the village school room in aid of the newly formed Combe Cricket Club. The programme [p88, Fig.1] had 11 items, starting with a pianoforte duet by Mrs. Brooke and Miss Adela. Five clergymen took part, although the Rural Dean, Mr Majendie, was unable to attend. The chair was taken by Mrs. Brooke's first cousin, Canon W H Coventry. His speech after the concert was reported in full by the Oxford Times: [p88].

After thanks to the performers at the concert, he added:

"Lastly (though I was not told to say so) your grateful thanks are due to the three ladies, your kind neighbours, who have taken so great an interest in the welfare of your club, and done so much to make it a success. With them I feel sure it has been no passing fancy, but that their kind assistance may be depended upon so long as it may be required.

There are many reasons why cricket should be encouraged; it brings all classes together. A good cricketer is ever welcome; it makes us temperate, obedient, lovers of fair play. I believe that if in Shakespeare's time cricket had been as popular as it is today, he would have told us that all the world is a cricket field, and all the people in it players. Each in our turn has our innings. Some make long scores, some go out without a run; some are caught out, some bowled, some stumped. But to all a chance is given, and the fortunes of the game are ever varying till the stumps are drawn and the game is over.

A good eye, a strong arm, and a merry heart make together a good cricketer, and a good cricketer would dare to track the cruel slave dealer to his desert haunts and punish him, or beard the Russian bear in his den and flog him till his tough hide aches.

One more plea for cricket. In these days of temperance, very hard words are often spoken against the village public house, and often very unfairly. Now, when the landowners and higher classes take no pains to provide a reading-room, a cricket club, or recreation in some form for young people, who is to blame, if instead of standing in the cold, the villagers congregate round the comfortable inn fire, drink more than is good for them, meet good companions and fall into bad ways. I believe the good cause of temperance is never so much helped as when the young men of a village have learnt that they cannot excel in manly outdoor games if they give way to the miserable love of drink, and the mischief that is sure to be found for idle hands to do."

The newspaper report from April 1885 ends with the following note:

"Mr Hughes (President of Combe Cricket Club), had the pleasure of receiving the following morning, from Mrs. and the Misses Brooke, an oak and silver cruet stand, in recognition of his willing assistance, both in the musical training of the members of the Combe Cricket Club, and in the arrangements for the comfort of the performers and the audience."

I am sure that Canon Coventry's encouragement played a significant part in the early history of the Combe Cricket Club, and in work of Miss Adela Brooke to found the 'Combe Temperance Reading Room and Coffee House', in which we are tonight.

In July 1885 there was a by-election because the Member for Woodstock, Lord Randolph Churchill, had been appointed Secretary of State for India. Here is a report of a political meeting at Combe and events upon the day of the Election: [p88]

"On Thursday evening, whilst a Liberal meeting was being held under the oak tree on the village green, the Conservatives, who had previously held a meeting, by kind permission of Mrs. Brooke and the Misses Brooke, on the Rectory House premises, came on the green to hear addresses from Mr Eyre, Mr Baumann, the Conservative candidate for Peckham, Mr Maguire, Mr Brearly. Basil A. Brooke, of Castle Blaney, Ireland, who is staying at the Rectory House, presided.

Nearly as soon as the second speaker had begun to deliver an address, a few Radical men and youths, who had just run out of a hay-field close by, commenced booing and shouting; one especially, who before he ceased running began booing. The speaker not knowing

exactly the cause, and turning round, saw a most obnoxious Radical without a coat, resting his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, and standing up like a brave little lawyer. This dominant Radical, and a little ignorant publican of the Cock Inn, with a few Radical friends, made it exceedingly unpleasant for the speakers; but although the speakers were prevented from having a fair hearing, it was perfectly well known that the Conservatives were in a majority.

About a quarter to eight on Friday morning Mr Hughes, assisted by Mr Wild and Mr C. Lockett, was astir, and busily engaged in preparing to send voters to the poll at Stonesfield. Captain Waller, of Charlbury, was the first to make his appearance with two horses and a carriage. Mr A. E. Ward, of Woodstock, also drove his horse and carriage, and Messrs A. and T. Cook, of Oxford, brought two conveyances. Mr Joslin lent his horse while Mr A. E. Ward's was resting, and Mr P. Davis drove his workmen to Wootton and Stonesfield. About 11.30 Lady Curzon and Lady Randolph drove into the village with their tandem, which was beautifully decorated with pink. A great crowd quickly assembled, and heartily cheered the ladies. When the state of the poll was made known here, the Misses Brooke allowed the Rectory House bell to be kept ringing for half an hour."

Mrs. Brooke added a manuscript note:

"Ld. Randolph Churchill's bye-Election. Ld. R's majority 160"

In December 1885 the Members of the Cricket Club met at Rectory House for a presentation evening [p88]. Mr Basil Brooke, who was going to Australia for the winter for the good of his health, presented a bat to F Lee MARGETTS for the best batting average. The 26 members of the club were:

Thomas HUGHES (President);	John OLDACRE; <i>(where Pat. Richardson)</i>	Edwin WARMAN;
<i>Ernest's grandfather</i> Walter BUSBY; <i>(Bob Key's home)</i>	Walter STROUD;	Fred OLDACRE (Club Capt.);
Albert COOMBES; <i>Paradise?</i>	Walter RAWLINS;	<i>near Mrs. Clark's</i> George BLAKE; <i>— next to Mrs. Clark</i>
Alfred BUSBY;	John WILD;	Thomas WOODWARD;
F Lee MARGETTS; <i>(Norwich)</i>	Edwin SLATTER; <i>— West End</i>	Stephen PUTT; <i>— Related to Miriam</i>
Harry WOODWARD; <i>Went to farm</i>	Joseph MARGETTS; <i>— related to Ted</i>	William RAWLINS; <i>(Old Post office)</i>
Thomas BEAMES; <i>— at Lew</i>	William FAULKNER;	Richard OLDACRE; <i>—</i>
Joab PHIPPS; <i>lived at</i>	James HUCKINS; <i>—</i>	Richard COLLIER; <i>Albert's</i>
John PHIPPS; <i>oak house</i>	David RAWLINS <i>West End.</i>	<i>Grandfather</i>

Their next recorded event was in May 1886, when there was another concert in the School Room. The room was crammed, despite pitiless rain. The programmes cost 1d, and £7.19.1 were collected for the club. Canon Coventry made a speech [p89] in which he summarised progress since foundation of the Cricket Club in the previous year (1885). The field provided by Mr Watts had had been levelled and fenced. Now they had to find money for buying a mowing machine and a tent as a refuge from summer showers. Last year seven matches had been played, of which four were won by Combe. The opening match of 1886, played on Easter Monday against Bladon, had been won by Combe.

The Scrap-book reports the Combe Cricket Club concerts for each of the next three years. In 1890 and 1891 the Club had a dinner at The Cock Inn. In September 1889 there was a concert in the School Room to raise money for re-hanging the Combe Church Bells [p92]. In August 1891 the Church Choir went to Rectory House for a Treat [p94]. In January 1892 there was a concert in aid of the Church Choir [p89]

Mrs. Brooke had opened the Rectory House garden to the public for one Sunday afternoon in July 1885, when 200 - 300 people came, and, among other things, enjoyed the roses which, we are told "are just now in extraordinary bloom" [p88]. But in August 1886 Coombe House was the scene of a Fancy Bazaar [p66] which attracted 748 people.

The Scrap-book has a small poster on pink paper [p66; Fig. 2]:

"A FANCY BAZAAR, (under distinguished patronage) will be held in the grounds of Coombe House, on Wednesday, August 4, 1886, in aid of the funds for The Temperance Reading Room & Coffee House to be established in Coombe"

The stalls were managed by: Miss Adela Brooke; Mrs. W H Coventry; Mrs. Burra; Mrs. Bartholomew; Mrs. Brooke; Miss Brooke; The Misses Labouchere Smith; The Misses Hearn; and The Misses Collier

who, we are told, all wore black & white with smart caps and aprons. The poster says:

"There will be a good refreshment stall where luncheon can be obtained. A full band will be in attendance and a variety of amusements will be provided: also fish pond, lucky bag, and bran pie."

The Great Western Railway Company issued cheap return tickets to Handborough and to Woodstock. The poster listed three trains to Handborough and four return trains from Handborough for Oxford and Paddington or for Cheltenham. Conveyances from Handborough to Combe cost 1/6 return; those from Woodstock to Combe cost 2/- return.

By permission of His Grace, conveyances drove through Blenheim Park. Blenheim Palace & Gardens were open to the public that day.

The Bazaar opened at 12:30 and lasted until 10 p.m.

Admission was 1/- until 5:30 but was only 3d for after 8 pm

Mr Hughes, the Schoolmaster, kept the gate all day.

The poster says:

"The tents and grounds will be illuminated in the evening with Chinese lanterns" and

"The talented artiste, Mademoiselle ROSSI, has kindly offered her invaluable assistance on the occasion, and will recite several of her most popular pieces during the day."

There were three tents. The largest had 6 stalls, with articles from Italy, France, Germany and Switzerland, and the "new VODRIAN ware or Irish Pottery". There was a large collection of flower and vegetable seeds from Messrs SUTTON of Reading and from Mr T S WARE, of Hale's Farm Nurseries, Tottenham. There was also a large number of useful articles, children's clothing, etc. as in our present Church Bazaars. Mademoiselle ROSSI recited poems in the second tent.

We are told that in the third tent:

"Miss Durant, from Oxford, in a bewitching eastern costume, exercised her arts of palmistry ..."

A Screen in a Louis XVI mounting, worked by Miss Adela, was raffled for the Fund at 2/6 per ticket.

The Duchess of Rutland was a Scottish lady who was a first-cousin once-removed of Mrs. Brooke's aunt, the Countess of Coventry.

'The Queen' magazine for March 1889 [page 70] carried an article by the Duchess entitled:

"Miss Adela Brooke's Successful Effort to Circulate Good Literature"

"Some of those readers of *The Queen* whose kind interest in reading rooms gives such encouragement to the movement may remember that for several years past (ever since 1885) Miss Adela Brooke, Coombe House, near Woodstock, Oxfordshire, has been endeavouring to collect funds to build and establish a reading room and coffee house in Coombe, a remote but very pretty village.

The poor men are very anxious that the building should be completed, and the money for it has been almost collected, Miss Adela Brooke working single handed to do so; but the site has still to be secured. Considerable disappointment having been felt among the men at the unavoidable delay, Miss Adela Brooke, in December 1888, five years after her efforts commenced, felt so sorry that there seemed



no immediate prospect of the reading room being established, that she determined to lend them books free. Those books will later form part of the reading room library, and I think that lending books, even before a reading room is established, is a most excellent way of preparing people for the coming boon.

Two kind ladies had given her five pounds to be spent in books, and a friend in London had chosen some. Miss Adela Brooke left a paper at every house in the village where there was a working man or youth, announcing that books would be lent."

The article says that on 2 December 1888 Miss Adela started lending from the harness room at Coombe House. 57 men came that day & asked for a variety of books, often on historical subjects. Miss Adela issued books from 4:15 p.m. till 6:00 and had 93 readers in 1889.

"Miss Adela Brooke has raised a considerable sum towards the building, the difficulty as to the purchase of the site continues, and she is most anxious to raise £100 to defray that expense. The building will be situated on the village green, in the centre of the village. The working men have begged hard for this resting place; and she has struggled hitherto single-handed, with no-one near to help, but perhaps, if the eagerness of the men to obtain books became known, more interest will be aroused. The coffee-house and reading-room will be established on non-sectarian principles, and will be managed when started by a committee of working men."

*It is now time for you to see slides of some of the cuttings and of the pictures in the Scrap-book.*

*The figures in the printed version are:*

1. Combe Cricket Club: Concert Programme: 28 April 1885
2. Poster: Fancy Bazaar: 4 August 1886
3. Poster: Fancy Bazaar: 9 September 1891
- 4 & 5. Cutting from 'The Queen', 3 December 1892  
"Miss Adela Brooke's Village Institute and Reading Room  
at Coombe near Woodstock"

As extra money was needed to pay for the furnishings of the Reading Room, there was another Fancy Fair at the Rectory House Wednesday September 9 1891 [p76]. The poster on pink paper [Fig. 3] says that the Fair was:

"Under the patronage of their Graces the Duke of Marlborough, the Duchess of Marlborough, the Duchess of Rutland" and  
"for the purpose of furnishing and finishing the Reading Room and Coffee House which has been lately built in Combe." and  
"A variety of attractions will be provided, including Recitations and Theatricals in the drawing room of Coombe House by Mrs. Frank Barnett and friends; Aunt Sally, tennis, cocoa-nut shies, photography etc. in the grounds."

The arrangements for this Fancy Fair were very similar to those in 1886. It took place in glorious weather. 229 people came and the proceeds were £75..4/1.5 less £9..14/9 expenses, so £85 was still needed.

An Oxford newspaper had a long review of the 1891 Fancy Fair [p76]:

"As everyone knows, the Reading Room was erected through the unceasing efforts of Miss Adela Brooke; it is an undertaking dear to her heart. The building was completed about twelve months ago, but Miss Brooke was resolved that it should not be opened until it was paid for, and set herself to work to attain the consummation of her hopes. She succeeded in raising about £900, but another £150 were



required in order that the movement should start free of debt, and it was to obtain this amount that the bazaar was held. ... These donors included H.R.H. Princess Mary Adelaide of Teck, the Duchess of Rutland, the Duchess of Marlborough, the Dowager Countess of Aberdeen, Mr & Mrs. G Herbert Morrell, Mrs. Bartholomew (Glympton Rectory), Rev. A & Mrs. Majendie, Rev. G Duncan, etc. ....

Many of the visitors to the fancy fair inspected the Reading Room, which is situated close by, occupying a very commanding position at the corner of the spacious village green. It is a red brick building, and has a picturesque and pleasing appearance. There are plenty of windows, and the interior has a bright and cheerful appearance. On the right of the entrance is a large room for men's games, containing a bagatelle table and several other games. It is a very pleasant room, containing three large windows. At one end is a platform and piano, which betokens many happy evenings during the winter months.

On the opposite side of the passage is the library and reading room, which, although not so large, is a very comfortable room. At the back are the kitchen and scullery, with every convenience.

A staircase in the centre of the building leads to the boys' room on the right, the caretaker's bedroom on the left, and the committee room at the back. The rooms upstairs, notwithstanding the sloping roof, are very commodious and airy. The fittings throughout the building are very handsome. Outside, an awning runs the greater part of the length of the front, under which garden seats are placed, making a very pleasant retreat for the summer evenings.

At the side of the building is a quoit and bowling green, the grass being as level as a lawn. There is also a skittle-alley, and facilities for playing the old-fashioned game of four-corners.

The building must prove a very great benefit to the village, and we hope that it will be freed from debt and opened this season. The architect was Mr W. Moore, of Oxford. The builder was Mr Wilkins, of Eynsham, and the clerk of the works, Mr R Clark, who carried out the architect's plan in a manner that gave the greatest satisfaction."

Meanwhile the Daily News had sent their 'Special Commissioner' into the countryside with orders to write articles exposing the alleged wickedness of the landlords and of the Established Church. [p78]

"Combe is on the far side of Blenheim Park from Woodstock, a poor benighted little place if its reputation counts for anything."

"A little further on in the village you have another interesting little object in the shape of a liliputian Wesleyan chapel. I don't know how the bit of land on which it stands came to be available for the purpose, but I was informed that it was the only bit in the place that could be got, and in order to make it do, one side of the building had to be planted in a pond, and the consequence is it always has been damp and uncomfortable.

A little higher up is the church, and an intelligent native with whom I strolled round pointed to one of the porches as having been at one time the Sunday-school room. There was no Dissent in the village at that time, and the parson's deputy in the school was one of the gardeners at Blenheim. The parson would look in and have a bit of a chat about the gardens and flowers up at the palace, and as soon as he was gone old Jemmy Whatever-his-name-was would send one of the children over to the Cock for a pot of beer.

'Many's a time I've sin children goin' into Sunday school with a pint of fourpenny,' said my informant."

[The Sunday School was started by Bartley Lee in 1819; the 'Old Cock' was rebuilt in 1828; and Methodist Chapels were built in Combe in

1823, 1827 & 1829; William BROOKER, the Parish Clerk from 1821 - 1836, was a leather dresser.]

The next letter from the 'Special Commissioner' started:

"LETTER XIII A MODEL VILLAGE CLUB September 17 [1891]"

"I closed my last letter by alluding to a point on which the inhabitants of Combe had taken a firm stand against an attempt to appropriate a piece of common ground to a purpose to which they had not given consent - a gratifying manifestation of spirit in one respect, though in another unfortunate and mistaken. It will be well worth while to give some account of this affair, because in one or two respects it is interesting and instructive.

The village in summer is a pleasant little place, with a triangular expanse of greensward in the heart of it. It was a very small slice from the edge of this village green that it was proposed to take for the purpose of enlarging a little the plot of ground required for a sort of village club. Few places could require it more. Across Blenheim Park, Combe is, I suppose, between two and three miles from Woodstock, but it is a long drive round by road. It seems far out of the world, and in the winter-time must be a depressingly dull, sequestered little nook. It has an old church a couple of chapels, and several public-houses; apart from these, any facilities for social intercourse were not only entirely lacking, but, as the people were nearly all of them extremely poor, and there were no leaders to set anything afoot, any such facilities seemed quite hopeless.

Some few years back, however, a couple of ladies, mother and daughter, settled here, and the younger, Miss Adela Brooke, planned the institution I have referred to. I am giving now an account of the matter in general terms. In some points of detail I may be subject to correction, but substantially the affair may be taken as I give it.

This institution was to be wholly for the public good. The scheme, I understand, was entirely Miss Brooke's; it was to be for the recreation and enjoyment of the villagers - a public-house without the drink, one reading-room for men and another for boys, a room for games, to be used occasionally for a little music, or a lecture, or such entertainment as might be found practicable; there would be a skittle-alley, a quoit-ground, and so forth. The village could not possibly afford either to put it up or to maintain it when it was up. The money would have to come from Miss Brooke or her friends.

Nothing could have been more reasonable than for this lady to expect that the people would have been delighted to give up a piece of their common land to such a purpose; "and", said one of them to me yesterday, "if her had a gone the right way to work her'd ha' had it sure enough."

It might, I am afraid, have been by no means easy for this lady to have hit exactly upon the right way. Miss Brooke is a High Churchwoman and a Conservative, and many of the villagers are Dissenters and Radicals. For her to win their confidence in an enterprise of this sort would, no doubt, have been difficult, and, so far as I can learn, she made no attempt to do so. She adopted the good old Tory plan of setting about to do the thing for the people over their heads, and without consulting them, instead of proceeding on the democratic principle of taking the people into her confidence and working with them.

The land, however, she could not get without the consent of the copyholders - the villagers themselves. The Duke of Marlborough, the Lord of the Manor, of course gave his consent to this appropriation of the land, but the proposal was brought before the court-leet, and a plain question put to the lawyer present.

"Muster lawyer, if us gives this land for the café,  
whos'n 'll it be?"

"It will be Miss Brooke's."

"And her can do as 'er likes wi' it?"

"Yes, it will be hers to do as she likes with it, but ---"

"And her could sell it if'er'd a mind?"

"Yes, no doubt she could if ---"

"Then us won't gi'it. We ha' had enough o' our land filched away  
from we, and we'll ha' no moe on't."

It was in vain that it was urged that the new institute was to be devoted to the popular good, and that, as other people would have to find the money, the people themselves might reasonably be expected to give what was in their power. Insuperable and unreasonable

distrust took possession of the villagers, or some of them at any rate, and on the other side, I fear, there was engendered a supreme contempt for 'ignorant Dissenters' and Radicals.

The work, however, went on; appeals for funds were made, and many of Miss Brooke's personal friends responded liberally. Land was bought at a cost of a hundred pounds just on the borders of the green, and right in the centre of the village the new institute was put up, at a cost, I am told, of six or seven hundred pounds.

The breach, however, widened, and before I had seen the new building I had heard a good deal about it. Miles away from Combe I heard of a lady who was begging in all directions for money to put up

"a kaffy or some't, and they do say as when the lease is out  
er'll go and live there, and ha' it for 'er own house."

Another opinion was that the place would prove the ruin of the village by encouraging gambling, and a Nonconformist villager was strongly of the opinion that young lads would be drawn in there, and become so hopelessly abandoned to bagatelle and draughts and that sort of thing that they never would be got to chapel any more.

So strongly had one good man felt the impending doom of all that was good and respectable in the place that when, in the early stages of the business, Miss Brooke had put some posts tentatively on the coveted bit of ground, he had gone by night and sawn them down, and later on, I understand, other saviours of society had gone during the hours of darkness and smashed in the patent ventilators, thus spiting the unfortunate contractor for the building, who, of course, had to renew them.

Well, I subsequently learned that the lease of the land will run on for a good six hundred years or so, and when I came to look at the place it was obvious at a glance that at the end of that time it would not be easy to effect its conversion to a convenient dwelling-house.

It was I found, in fact, a handsome and quite unique village club - quite an ideal little place - in red brick and red tiles and white timber, all designed with a practical sagacity and forethought and wise adaptation of means to ends altogether remarkable.

The room to be devoted to games had in it a nice bagatelle table, the gift of a gentleman in London, and on a small platform at one end of the room was a brilliant-toned little piano.

On entertainment evenings the women of the village will come here if they choose, and get a little music, or a little recitation, or a reading. There is a hatchway leading into a well-appointed little kitchen, where tea and coffee and other refreshments will be provided, and there is a reading room and library to be provided with papers and periodicals and books, also communicating with the kitchen, while upstairs there is another room for boys, who are apt to interfere with the comfort of the men.

There is a covered skittle alley for the younger men, and for the older men "four points" will be provided, while out on the lawn, where members may sit, smoke their pipes, and watch the play, arrangements have been made for quoits. Everything is built in excellent style, solid and substantial and durable."

The only complaint by the Special Commissioner was that Miss Adela would select the Committee of Management:

"Miss Brooke took my suggestion with the utmost amiability, but I fear she will hardly act upon it. There will be a committee, but, as I gathered, not a popular committee in the sense of being a committee of the people who were themselves to use the club."

He said that that was understandable as she would have to continue to subsidise the institute, as even the men on full wages made only 9/- or 10/- a week in winter. He said that she had raised all the money except about £85 needed to pay for the furnishings and equipment.

The Oxford Journal and the Oxford Times rose in defence of Miss Brooke [pp 80 & 74] The Saturday Review poured scorn upon the reports of the 'Special Commissioner' [p60] and the Globe published a long letter from "One Who Knows" [p79].

The write of that piece, who said that he was a 'native of Combe', claimed that of the 529 in the village, only four opposed the Reading Room, and none of those four were farm labourers. He said that the opposition was led by a man who had an unreasonable grievance against Miss Adela and who had admitted to having destroyed the posts by night. The letter says:

"The special commissioner paid his visit to Combe on the morning of a very fine day in the middle of a very wet harvest so he could not have interviewed a farm-labourer, whose services in the field were at a premium, and who could not afford to waste his time with a gentleman 'round on a Radical mission.' No! he left that sort of thing to the person who has so little to do in the day-time that he can afford to spend the night in the depredatory expeditions which our special commissioner considers evince 'a gratifying manifestation of spirit'."

However the Reading Room was finally opened in 1892, as the Duchess of Rutland told the readers of 'The Queen' in December that year [p67]

"Miss Adela Brooke's Village Institute and Reading Room  
at Coombe near Woodstock"

"On Tuesday, Aug. 2 of this year, after a two hours' journey from Paddington, I found myself, about 11, at Hanborough Station, on my way to Coombe. A more rural district than I drove through to reach the village cannot be imagined. I passed through a part of the park of Blenheim, and although I have been fortunate enough to see many splendid forest trees, I was amazed at the number of magnificent ancient oaks, gnarled and twisted into most strange shapes. Seldom, indeed, even in this land, where hearts of oak abound, could so many objects for the artist's pencil be found - fern grew high in the little dells and by the forest pools.

After leaving the park, and passing a solitary country, I arrived at a picturesque ivy-covered house, and was welcomed by the foundress of the institute in a delightful quaint drawing-room, full of rare china beautifully arranged, and old French furniture. Before Miss Adela Brooke entered into any business details, she took me over the house, which is full of dark oak panelled rooms and cosy corners - not the modern cosy corners, fitted up by fashionable upholsterers, but recesses with deep solid seats. In one room I was shown the beautiful ancient looking-glass that once belonged to the lovely Maria Gunning, afterwards Countess of Coventry, great- great-grandmother of Miss Adela.

Mrs. Brooke and her two daughters have long interested themselves much in the welfare of their poorer neighbours in this rural district, which is distant from any large towns, the thatched cottages and homesteads being far apart.

Miss Adela Brooke formed a strong desire to bring brightness into the lives of the dwellers in these homes. She thought that much might be gained by lending books to these men. A large number of them are employed on the princely domain of Blenheim. Many are gamekeepers, foresters, shepherds, and agricultural labourers, while not a few have been in the army. They are a fine, industrious, temperate set.

After making a collection of suitable books, Miss Adela Brooke left notes at all the different homes, informing the men that if they liked to come to the harness-room of Coombe House, on Sundays after church, she would lend them books, and would change them on subsequent Sundays. A very large number came to borrow the books; I think sixty appeared a fortnight after the first invitation.

The number steadily increased, and Miss Adela as steadily persevered. She found the men most interested in the history of the wars undertaken by the great Duke of Marlborough, and in the history of their country, in the series of the Victoria Cross; in short, they appreciated the books so much, that she determined, if possible, they should have a village institute, which should combine a reading and coffee room at Coombe. There she hoped the men would find a pleasant place to meet socially, to read their papers and books, and enjoy themselves. She also hoped they might listen to music in a bright room.

When she first formed this plan, its realisation seemed almost impossible. There was hardly any of the class called by the peasants gentry in the immediate neighbourhood - the palace and the domain stretching far and wide. However, for seven years and seven weeks, Miss Adela devoted her energies to the labour of love - of raising funds to build the institute. She wrote 21,290 letters; she enlisted the sympathy of the Press, and of friends far and near; she induced the villagers to help, and surmounted endless difficulties. Now, at last, by the fine tree on the village green, stands the very picturesque Combe Institute.

The rain poured as we made our way to it, but the interior looked so cheerful that we were quite exhilarated. The walls of the chief room are rose red; the woodwork white. Her Majesty sent Miss Adela Brooke her portrait and that of the Prince Consort, in recognition of the services of her father, Col. Brooke, C.B., A.D.C. to the Queen, and those of her grandfather, Gen. Sir Willoughby Cotton, G.C.B. Miss Adela hung these precious Royal gifts in the large room of the institute.

Col. Brooke won his C.B. by making a ride of 5,000 miles on a camel in an incredibly short period. He arrived just in time to head his regiment in the battle of the siege of Mooltan.

The arrangements are most complete; and I was told that the architect, Mr Wilkinson Moore, of Oxford; the foreman, Mr Richard Clarke, Eynsham; and the builder, Mr Wilkins, also of Eynsham, had taken the greatest pains with every detail.

Indeed, the effect is charming. There are curious old dark oak tables, which were picked up by the indefatigable foundress for less than she must have given for ugly modern ones. Her taste has done wonders.

Many books are to be seen on the library shelves. Games of various kinds are provided, and, to my special delight, there is a room for boys. This, I think, should be made a great point in every institute. A goodly number of ladies and gentlemen assembled who had contributed to the funds; and I saw among the crowd many honest faces beaming with pleasure - evidently some of the men who used to tramp over the snow for the books.

\* Queen Victoria's portrait was in the Reading Room when I first came to Combe in '77/78  
Where has it gone??

The announcement that the institute was open was to have been made in the covered bowling alley; but so many had assembled that we all stood on the grass. Some very interesting speeches were made by the clergy, and one by Lord Dillon, pointing out that institutes like this have a great effect in opening the mind, and how, through works which may be read in them, knowledge may be acquired on the natural curiosities and antiquities that may be found in many country neighbourhoods. He instanced the number of antiquities to be found in Oxfordshire.

I had lately been allowed to visit the Swiss Cottage at Osborne, where Her Majesty's children from their early years were encouraged to bring any interesting objects they collected. That museum now contains a large number of rare and curious objects collected by the Princes and Princesses from all parts of the world; a fine collection of birds shot by the Prince of Wales; geological specimens, carvings, wonderful butterflies, and many charming mementoes - one of the most interesting being a branch of a cedar of Lebanon, sent by the Emperor of Frederick of Germany. I thought how important an addition to reading-rooms even a small collection of curiosities would be.

A message was read from the Duke of Marlborough regretting his absence, as he was abroad. Lord Valencia, in a telling speech, said what a capital thing it would be for the men to have this cheerful place to retire to when their wives wanted them out of the way. This remark took very well indeed, much laughter following it.

The foundress, on being asked to speak, said a few very kind, simple words, in a pleasant informal manner, expressing her hope that the building would prove a lasting benefit to the people of Coombe; and she thanked, with much feeling, all present and absent who had helped her.

She then invited us to try the tea, which we did at the buttery hatch, and very good it was. The arrangements for the comfort of the caretakers had been made with great consideration."

The article by the Duchess says there was a Sale in the garden to raise more funds and discussed the choice of suitable books for readers. She ended her article with a flourish:

"One hundred and twenty members already belong to Miss Adela Brooke's institute, and often the notes of music float across the village green, and the honest old labourers read their papers in comfort, and new life and hope thrill the dwellers in the picturesque cottages."

The Scrap-book includes [p4] a report of the funeral of Mrs. Brooke, who died at the age of 85, on 17 March 1898, just under 100 years ago, and was buried here in Combe by the stile into the cricket ground. The family tombstone also records her youngest daughter:

"Adela Sophia Hargood BROOKE, born Oct 13 1846, died Nov 20 1902." with the text:

'They rest from their labours and their works do follow them.'

So I would like to end by thanking Mrs. Brooke for her collection of interesting cuttings, The Reverend Tom Griffiths for preserving the Scrap-book, and Miss Adela for the Reading Room which has given so much to the people of Combe.

Thank you.



## ITEMS DELETED TO SHORTEN THE TALK

One of the earliest entries in the Scrap-book is the list [page 16] of 3 Royal Dukes, 3 Dukes, 4 Duchesses, and 80 other titled people who, with 'other fashionables', attended 'The Countess of Coventry's Rout' "on Friday evening the 22nd." As the Duchess of St Albans, the Countess of Guildford and the poet Lord Byron were present, the 'rout' was probably on 22 November 1811 and not later than 22 December 1815.

The Scrap-book has several cuttings about Sir Willoughby's work as a Brigadier-General during the Burma War of 1825-26. The Cabinet Minister who proposed the votes of thanks to the generals, officers & men who had fought in the Burma War of 1826-7 said [p21]: "It was worthy of remark also, that much had been done by that new power which had been introduced in warfare for the first time - he meant steam."

Later, in reply to an Opposition remark, he said that the Indian Government had hired all the steam vessels then in India.

In 1886 Mrs. Brooke wrote [p20]

"The Thanks of the House of Commons to Sir A Campbell and my Father on the termination of the Burmese War 1826 - 7. Mention is here made of the 'new power Steam' by Mr Wynn. What would be thought now of the Power of Steam. Memo by A M Brooke, 1886"

The Scrap-book has several items about Sir Willoughby's later career, including his time as Commander-in-Chief, Bombay.

Mrs. Brooke was naturally proud of her mother's connections with the Earls of Coventry. The main seat of the Earls of Coventry was Croome Park, Worcestershire, which was bought in 1996 by the National Trust with the help of £4.9m from the National Lottery. The Scrap-book has a report [p61] from the Worcester Journal about a Royal Visit to Croome in August 1830, when the future Queen Victoria was 11:

"Yesterday, about half-past one o'clock, their Royal Highnesses the Duchess of KENT, Princess VICTORIA, and the Prince LEOPOLD arrived at Croome, and at two precisely sat down to a *dejeuné à la fourchette*, surrounded by the various members of the family, Major-Gen. Sir WILLOUGHBY COTTON, and most of the neighbours in the vicinity of this noble mansion. About three o'clock the open carriage and horses were put in requisition, for the parties to inspect the various beauties of this admired demesne, and their Royal Highnesses having walked to the dairy, rotunda, and magnificent kitchen garden, were driven by Viscount DEERHURST, in a double-bodied phaeton, to the church and flower garden; here some time was passed in the inspection of the various beauties of the enchanting spot, and it was observed that Prince LEOPOLD proved himself perfectly conversant with the nature and botanical names of all the plants that came under his inspection. From thence the cavalcade proceeded to the Panorama, and finally to Severn Bank, the seat of Viscount DEERHURST, the beauties of which are so justly and universally acknowledged, that we will not attempt to describe them. The open carriages and attendants formed a very lengthened procession, there being above a dozen of the former, from the oldest shape to that of the present day; the one driven by the Countess of COVENTRY was much admired, and the cortege seemed a source of much amusement to the Princess VICTORIA, who often looked back to view it with seeming delight and animation. The Royal Party were attended by Sir JOHN and Lady CONROY, and the Baroness LEHZEN, and returned to Malvern about half-past five o'clock, highly pleased with the scene throughout this joyous day. The Prince LEOPOLD shot on Monday with the Viscount DEERHURST, and had excellent sport, and shot brilliantly."



[Prince LEOPOLD of Saxe-Saalfeld-Coburg, son-in-law of George IV, became King of the Belgians in 1831

Viscount DEERHURST, the heir to Lord Coventry, then aged 47 double-bodied phaeton: an open carriage with four seats instead of the usual two

Sir JOHN CONROY: Equerry and business adviser to the Duchess of Kent  
Baroness LEHZEN: Queen Victoria's first Governess]

In 1829, the Worcester Herald noted [p59], among the notes of murders etc. on the reverse of the main cutting:

"An ingenious mode is adopted in the French diligences of applying the drag to the wheels, to prevent accidents in going down hill. It is effected by machinery, under the management of the conductor or guard, who is thus not obliged to alight in order to arrange the drag, as was formerly the case. Time and trouble is saved by this contrivance, which ought to be introduced in England in all heavy conveyances where any risk is apprehended."

But some things do not change: for example, on the back of one of the 1826 cuttings is a note [p15] about a disorder called the "epidemic cold" that was afflicting ship's crews in China.

The arrangements for the 1891 Fancy Fair were very similar to those in 1886. The fair lasted from 2 p.m. till 10 p.m.; admission was 1/- till 5 p.m., 6d from 5 p.m. till 8 p.m., and then 3d.

The poster lists three trains from Oxford to Handborough, two trains from the other direction and four return trains.

Here are some reviews of the Fancy Fair of September 9 1891 [74 & 76]

"By intercession of Mr Alfred LUCKETT, E S Stiddolph Esq., of Greenwich, presented a bagatelle table for the Reading Room."

"Some useful articles were contributed by H R H the Duchess of Teck and fruit and flowers were also sent from Blenheim Palace and Headington Hill Hall."

The Duchess of Marlborough was active selling fruit from Blenheim & buying things to give away. The Stallholders were Miss Adela, Mrs. Bartholomew (Glympton), Mrs. Hughes, Mrs. & Miss Fanny Phipps, Miss Lockett & Miss Cornelia Lockett.

Rev. G Duncan (Woodstock) and Miss Bartholomew ran the cocoa-nut shy & Aunt Sally. Mr Albert Lockett helped Miss Adela organise things

Mrs. Frank Barnett & Miss Bennett gave a theatrical performance in the drawing room. Among those present were: G H Morrell Esq. M.P. and Mrs. Morrell; J Mason Esq. and Mrs. Mason & the Misses Mason; Major & Mrs. Waller; Mrs. Cummins; Mrs. & Miss Sieveright; Mr Charles Davies; Mr & Miss Bennett; Mr R B B Hawkins, Mrs. & the Misses Hawkins; Mrs. John Joslin; Mrs. Chichester

Mr W I Palmer, of Reading, had sent £5 worth of temperance literature Walking sticks came from Mr Workman's factory in Gloucestershire and seeds from Messrs Sutton & Mr T S Ware, Tottenham. Other gifts were from The Mazawattee Tea Company; Messrs Branson (Coffee);

Mr Boffin (Oxford) who sent a hamper of goods; Mr Bowl (Charlbury) mineral waters; Mr Woodward (Woodstock) meat;

From the Village: Mrs. Phipps, Mr & Mrs. Joselyn, Mrs. Fullerton, and Mrs. Honour all donated goods

Mr G Herbert Morrell MP & Mrs. Morrell sent fruit & flowers

Two tents on the lawn: at least six stalls: lists of donations

Recitations and two theatrical pieces were given in the drawing room.

"Arrangements were also made for lawn tennis, but no one availed themselves of the game."

"In the evening the grounds were illuminated with Chinese lanterns, depending from the trees and tents, which produced a charming effect."