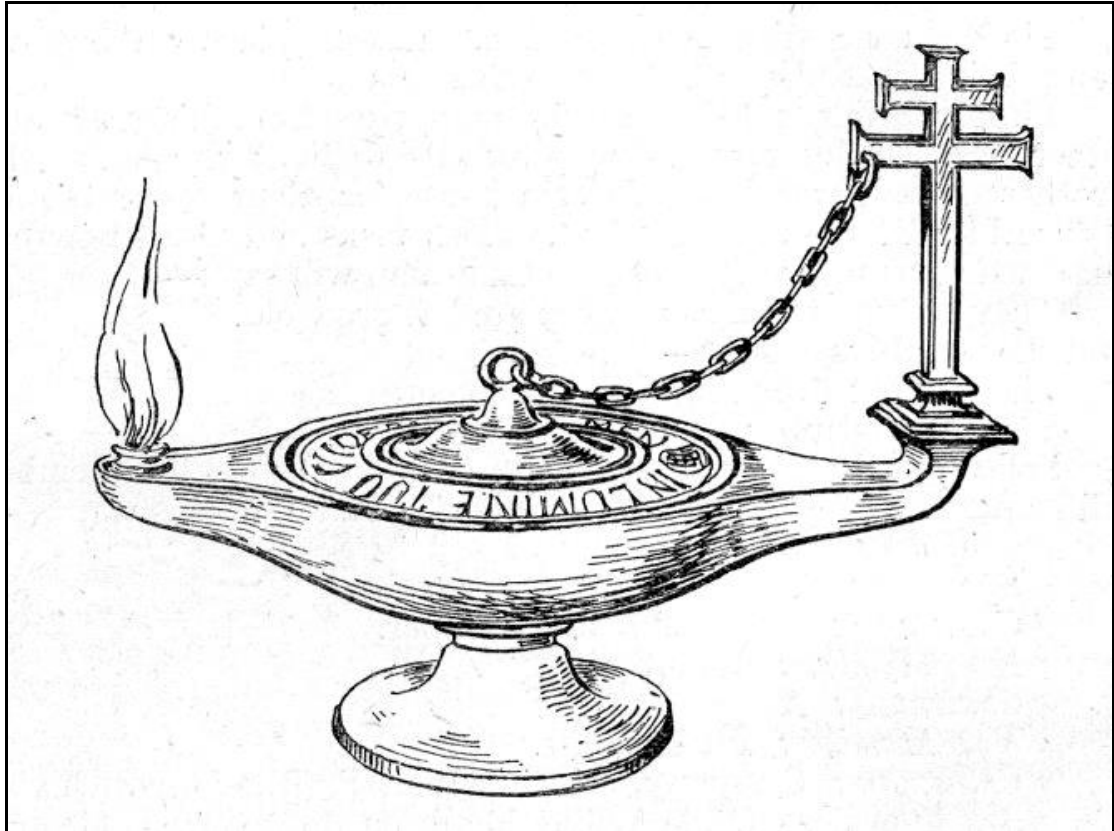


COLEORTON BRANCH OF THE TOC H



Barclay Baron's original design sketch of the Toc H oil lamp

BY SAMUEL T STEWART - SEPTEMBER 2021

INTRODUCTION

A SYNOPSIS OF THE HISTORY OF THE TOC H MOVEMENT

The Toc H is a voluntary body founded in 1919 following the First World War with the aim of supporting ex-soldiers who had visited Talbot House in Poperinghe in Belgium for rest and recreation.

In 1915, an army chaplain the Reverend Phillip Byard (Tubby) Clayton was sent to France and then on to the town of Poperinghe in Belgium. Sitting a few miles back from the trenches around Ypres (nowadays known by its Flemish name Ieper), Pops, as the soldiers called it, was a busy transfer station where troops on their way to and from the battlefields of Flanders were billeted. Clayton, universally known as Tubby, was instructed by his senior chaplain, Neville Talbot, to set up some sort of rest house for the troops.

A large house at number 43 Gasthuisstraat (at that time the street was called by its French name - Rue de l'Hôpital) was leased from a wealthy brewer Monsieur Coevoet Camerlynck, who was pleased to rent it temporarily to the British Army having moved his family elsewhere. It first opened its doors on December 11th 1915

Renting a hop merchant's house, temporarily vacated by its owner – to use as his base, Tubby Clayton decided to steer away from the traditional church style establishment and set up an Everyman's House. It was named "Talbot House" in honour of Gilbert Talbot (Neville's brother) who had been killed earlier in the war. Talbot House soon became known by its initials TH, and then, in the radio signaller's parlance of the day as Toc H. For most of the Great War, Talbot House offered an oasis of sanity to the men passing through Poperinghe.

A chapel was established in the hop storage loft of the house. This became a focal point for many and was known as the 'heart' of the House. Some of the soldiers had their confirmation here and many attended their first communion in this special place. Sadly, for many, this would be their last.

After the war, the Toc H movement grew quickly and attracted many influential people including the Prince of Wales who was an active supporter. It not only delivered varied social services but became a centre for debate on the issues of the day and used its influence in schools to educate the children in the way of the Toc H.

In 1922, Toc H was granted a Royal Charter and in 1925 Toc H Australia held the first World Chain of Light, a 24 hour vigil where lamps are lit around the world.

In 1930, thanks to the generosity of Lord Wakefield, one of Tubby Clayton's dreams came true when the original Talbot House in Poperinghe was bought for the movement. It remains in the hands of the Talbot House Association, an Anglo-Belgian organisation.



Rev. Philip Tubby Clayton

By the 1930s, there were thousands of members around the world carrying out charitable work.

Of course, like most organisations, things changed in 1939 when many of its members were called to fight for their country overseas. Those who were left (along with The League of Women Helpers), turned their attentions to helping the war effort by starting Service Men's Clubs both at home and abroad in the theatre of war. For many future members this would be the way they came to Toc H. **This can be related to the starting of the Toc H branch at Coleorton**

Following the Second World War, the Toc H started to establish itself again and was able to return top its charitable work in the communities. There was much more to the activities of the Toc H than this, but that will be left to the reader to research, if of interest.

In the 1940s and the following 50 years, although undergoing many changes the Toc H was a powerful movement. However, by the end of the twentieth century membership was declining as members were getting older and branches were having to close, not helped by new legislation which came in making it less attractive for branches to take on projects. It was also proving a challenge to attract younger members.

However, we are told that Toc H trustees and members finally accepted that a radical rationalisation was required. This is underway and Toc H expects to emerge from a period of disarray to become a stronger, voluntary movement still guided by the original ethos founded in Talbot House over a century ago.

THE TOC H LAMP OF MAINTENANCE AT TALBOT HOUSE



Photograph copyright greatwar.co.uk

The oil lamp used by Padre Tubby Clayton in the Chapel at Talbot House is known as "The Lamp of Maintenance."

Every year on the occasion of Tubby Clayton's birthday, the Lamp of Maintenance is lit in the Upper Room at Talbot House in Poperinge for 24 hours. It is lit from 9pm on the night of 11th December until 9pm on 12th December. The lighting of the lamp at Toc H Poperinge is the start of a series of lamp lightings in all the Toc H branches around the world. This is known as "The **world chain of light**"

TOC H BRANCH LAMPS

A Toc H lamp was introduced as a badge of merit and could only be awarded branch status from group status at the discretion of the Central Council. If the central council were happy that the group unit was ready to become a branch then a lamp could be bestowed on them as a symbol. Apparently, from 5th June 1923, the Central Council appointed a Guard of the lamp. They were a committee whose duty was to regulate and safe guard all matters regarding lamps. The Guard would recommend promotion to the Central Council and the branch would then be expected to submit a petition. If granted, the Lamp would be loaned to the Branch in stewardship to be returned or recalled if the standards fell or the Branch closed.

THE SILENCE OF REMEMBRANCE

A Branch was expected to light its Lamp at every meeting although precisely when was not prescribed. The ceremony was simply referred to as "Light". At an appropriate time, the Chairman would call "Light" and all present would stand. The room lights were dimmed and the lamp was lit. It was placed where all in the room could see it and one was expected to gaze on the flame and not to shut one's eyes. The words of Remembrance would then be spoken by the leader. The original words were based on the middle stanza to Lawrence Binyon's famous Ode To Remembrance (Itself a subset of three stanzas for the seven stanza poem, For The Fallen)

***With proud thanksgiving let us remember our Elder Brethren
They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning,
We will remember them.***

The last line would be echoed by those present. A full minute's silence followed before the lamp was extinguished and the room lights turned back on. Later, an alternative form based on The Prayer of St Francis was introduced.

THE INITIATION CEREMONY

A second ritual that utilised the Lamp was the Initiation Ceremony of a new member. In this ritual the lighted lamp was put in the candidates hands by the chairman and the following dialogue played out

Chair: What is this?

Candidate: The Lamp of Maintenance

Chair: What first lit it?

Candidate: Unselfish sacrifice

Chair: What alone will maintain it?

Candidate: Unselfish service

Chair: What is service?

Candidate: The rent we pay for our room on earth

THE ABOVE INFORMATION HAS BEEN COMPILED FROM VARIOUS INTERNET SITES IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

COLEORTON TOC H



A - Samuel Stewart b.1899 (Married Agnes Bird b.1901)
 B - John Whyman (Married Clarrie Stewart b.1902)
 C - Roland Hill (Married Ada Stewart b.1904)
 D - Bill Saddington (Married Sarah Ann Stewart b.1889)
 K - George John Leeds (Billy) Headmaster Coleorton School

E - Laban Clifford (Married Clarrie Maria Stewart b.1891)
 F - Les Saddington (Married Joan Gamble)
 G - Jabos Emmerson (Mg'r of Snibston Colliery & Magistrate)
 H - Jack Richards of Stoney Lane, Coleorton
 J - Aurthur Hancock (Married Winifred Saddington)

PHOTOGRAPH THOUGHT TO HAVE BEEN TAKEN c.1946

The Toc H meeting hut was built in 1936 at the bottom of Laban and Clarrie Clifford's small holding adjacent to Pit Lane off the Upper Moor Road.

Labon Clifford was a founder member of Coleorton Toc H and both he and his wife Clarrie (nee. Stewart and great Aunt of the author) were staunch members of Coleorton Primitive Methodist Chapel



Photograph taken outside their cottage on the Upper Moor

Clarrie first met her future husband Laban Clifford (1895-17th Jan 1985) when he lived in one of the colliery houses opposite the George Inn, Coleorton when he was home on sick leave from the Second World War with a broken leg. They were married in 1919 after which they first rented and then purchased their cottage and land on the Upper Moor, just beyond the entrance to Pit Lane from the Beaumont Estate. After the war, Laban went to work as a coal miner at Snibston Colliery where his father was under-manager and where Laban later became a deputy.

Clarrie (b.9th April 1891-m. 1919 - d.1994) lived to the ripe old age of 103 and was one of the large Stewart family of Lount where she was the youngest of nine children.

It is thought that the following article relates to Coleorton Toc H becoming an official branch of the organisation 10 years after it was established, and a lamp was awarded accordingly to celebrate this *as explained in the introduction*.

The Leicester Illustrated Chronicle - Saturday 19th October 1946

The work of the Toc H did not finish with the end of the war, they had a great deal of work to do in the times ahead, Lt. Colonel Sir Robert Martin told representatives from Toc H units in the East Midlands area at the post war festival in the Y.M.C.A, hall at Leicester. Sir Robert commented on the large attendance. The meeting followed an afternoon service at the Leicester Cathedral conducted by the Provost, the Very Rev. H. A. Jones. The Bishop of Leicester and the provost were amongst those present in the evening.

One of the features of the week end celebrations was the lighting of lamps at six new branches - Coleorton, Rushton, Knighton, Spencer, Whitlesey and Ramsay.



Some members of Coleorton Toc H leaving Leicester Cathedral

RE-DEDICATION OF COLEORTON TOC H

Leicester Evening Mail - Saturday 05 September 1953

On the 17th birthday and re-dedication celebrations of Coleorton Toc H in 1973, over 100 members of various Toc H branches from Ashby, Swadlincote, Bardon Hill, Swannington, Whitwick and Packington attended.

Mr. T. Carr of Moira conducted a service in St. Mary's Parish Church, Coleorton when the lesson was read by Ken Knighton, and the "**Ceremony of Light**" was taken by Mr. Laban Clifford.

The Rev. H. Hazlehurst, of Ashby, was the chief guest at the Guest Night, over which Mr. C. V. Knighton presided.

Mr. Clifford recalled, when he was interviewed in 1975, aged 80, that there were still ten members who regularly attended, but he was the only founder member left. It is not known when the Coleorton branch of the Toc H ceased to operate, but it was probably soon after that.

At the time of his retirement in July 1973, Mr. B. J. T. "Ben" Smith, the headmaster of Coleorton School, was, for 20 years, the secretary of Coleorton Toc H and the Coleorton Church Council. He was also the longest serving member of the parish council.

Leicester Mail - Wednesday 26th September 1951

COLEORTON SERVICE AT THE ANGEL INN

Twenty one pounds was raised by collections and sale of produce at the 4th annual harvest festival service at the Angel Inn, Coleorton.

This is being divided between parish church funds **and for the old people of the village administered by the local Toc H.**

A MEMBER OF COLEORTON TOC H

Leicester Evening Mail - Monday 16 July 1956

20 YEARS MINER'S AGENT RETIREMENT OF MR. WILL ROWELL

A MINER who left the pit and helped to steer the North Leicestershire coalfield through industrial misfortunes to its present prosperity retires from his Coalville office tomorrow—his 65th birthday. He is Mr. William (Will) Rowell, of Wilford House, (opposite the [George Inn on Loughborough road](#)) Coleorton, and with the end of his service, his post, that of miners agent for the coalfield, will be extinguished. His successor will be an administrative officer working at the same office in Bakewell

street, Coalville, in association with Mr. Rowell's colleague, Mr. Frank Smith, secretary of the Leicestershire branch of the National Union of Mineworkers.

WELFARE WORK

Mr. Rowell was elected miners' agent by an area ballot 21 years ago while he was working at New Lount Colliery. His interest in welfare, industrial relations, politics and church work, however, started many years earlier. He served as secretary of the Check Weigh Committee, union representative, trustee of the pithead baths and trustee of the Accident Club. He has been a member of the Loughborough Division Labour Party Executive for 39 years and its president for 30 years. He has been a Methodist lay preacher for 40 years **and is a member of Coleorton** Toc H. Some years ago he was appointed a county magistrate.