

Welford-on-Avon · from the village archive

The Welford Memorial Hall

How a parish garden by the maypole became the village's war memorial, and how two villages kept a one-storey hall standing for a hundred years.

Drawn from the scanned folders of the Welford archive. Grey references such as 23/91–96 give folder and item. Companion essays: [the Great War](#), [amateur dramatics](#), [the Parish Council](#), [royal visits](#), [the maypole](#), [the Conservation Area](#) and [St Peter's Church](#).



The Memorial Hall in 1932. A mounted print from the archive, labelled in ink. The half-timbered gables, the leaded windows, the lamp over the entrance and the noticeboard by the gate all match the description given at the opening nine years earlier. 53/11

Across the road from the maypole in Welford-on-Avon stands a long, low hall with a tiled roof and a gable to the street. Most people who pass it see a village hall: the place for the flower show and the jumble sale, the pantomime, the polling station, the toddler group and the parish council meeting. Its full name is the Welford and Weston-on-Avon Memorial Hall, and set in its front wall is a stone that reads "To the memory of the men of Welford-on-Avon and Weston-on-Avon who fell in the Great War, 1914-1918". For a hundred years the building has been both things at once, a war memorial and a place to dance. That

double purpose was argued over before a brick was laid, and it has come back every time the hall needed saving.

This essay tells the hall's story from the scanned papers of the village archive. It starts with the parish cottage that stood on the site before 1914, follows the appeal of 1918 through a collapse in 1920 and a newspaper quarrel in 1923, and describes the building that opened in December 1923. It then follows the hall through the trust deed of 1926, the clubs and dances of the interwar years, the royal visit of 1938, the British Legion after 1945, and three crises over money and masonry in 1975, 1985 and 1991. It ends with a second memorial stone, unveiled outside the hall in 1994.

The sources are uneven. The building years of 1918 to 1923 are well covered, because a villager pasted the newspaper reports into a scrapbook, now 23/91–107. So are the 1970s and the crisis of 1990–91, which survive in a file of the hall's own papers, 60/04–07. The years between are known mostly from the papers of the clubs that used the hall, which mention it in passing. No minute book of the management committee before the 1960s is in the archive, and the architect's plans and the original deeds are at the Warwickshire County Record Office, not here. The closing notes set out where the sources disagree and where they run thin.

Before 1918A cottage, a garden and a cider house

The hall stands on ground that the parish already held long before anyone thought of a memorial. The parish council minutes of the early 1900s keep returning to a small property in the main street: a cottage and garden, owned by the parish and let to a tenant, described as "adjoining the old Cider House". In 1904 the council decided not to re-let it, although three villagers applied for it: F. Gould, Miss S. C. Tipping and Charles Horn. In 1905 G. Ellis Garrard, a solicitor of Evesham, asked to buy the property, and the council declined to sell 12/09, 18/13.

The cottage was in poor repair. In 1915 its tenant, C. Horne, asked the council whether he might repair it himself and live there rent-free for the rest of his life. The minutes do not record a clear answer, and Horne died in 1917. Within months the council saw a use for the vacant plot. On 31 October 1917, before the war had ended, it called a parish meeting to offer the garden as a site for a Parish Room. On 17 April 1918 it resolved to keep the site for that purpose. On 29 January 1919 the minute heading has changed, and the plot is now "Parish Garden Site for War Mem. Hall". In 1920, when there was talk of selling parish property, the sale of this plot was deferred until the question of the hall site was settled 18/14, 19/21.

The neighbouring property, the Cider Mill, was a separate holding. In 1911 the council records it as belonging to John Harris, "a pauper lunatic", and let to Charles Horne, who seems to have been the same man as the cottage tenant 18/14. Traces of the mill outlasted the hall's building. Alec Bryan, writing much later, placed the remains of the old cider mill next to his own house beside the hall 11/25.

Bryan also left the fullest description of the site before the hall. In a short note in 11/04 he says that the hall was built at a cost of £860 and opened in December 1923, that the site had belonged to Lord Sackville, and that it had held an old, low cottage which was already in ruins before the First World War and was overgrown with brambles and a grape vine. A photograph by Sir Benjamin Stone, now in the Birmingham collection, shows the maypole with Magpie Cottage behind it and the gable end of a small cottage on the spot where the hall now stands 10/25. That is very probably the parish cottage of the minutes.

Bryan's statement that the land was Lord Sackville's does not sit easily with council minutes that treat the cottage as parish property to let and refuse to sell. The difference came up in public in 1923, as described below, and it is one of the disagreements listed at the end of this essay. Gilda Gray, writing about Welford after the First World War, gives the ground a third name. "A village hall as a war memorial, to be built on the Spring Garden, was the major controversy," she wrote, "and deep were the wounds in the fight for it!" 03/01–19. The archive does not say plainly whether the Spring Garden and the parish garden were one and the same, though the timing makes it likely.

1880s–1923 Rooms before the hall

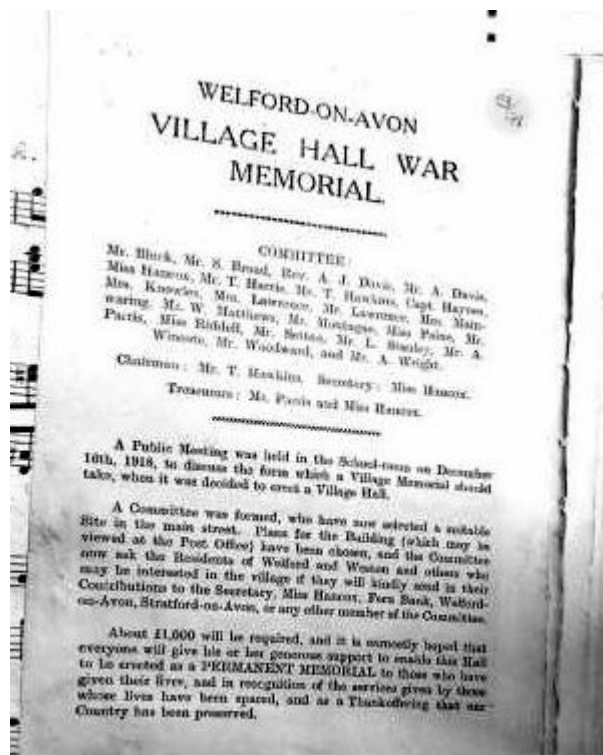
Welford was not without a public room before 1923, but what it had belonged to someone else. The best known was "the Gymnasium" in Tudor Vale. Cleveland Green, who owned Welford House in the 1870s and 1880s, had three cottages gutted and turned into a single long room. It was let to the village for whist drives, dances, concerts and physical training classes, and it held a free library and a small museum of curiosities, among them man-traps and a stuffed crocodile 11/06, 19/47. The building had a long afterlife. The Army used it in the Second World War, and it was bought by Corah in 1955.

Other groups made do with what they could find. In 1923, the year the hall was built, the choral society, the folk dancers and the Morris side were all meeting at "the Barn". The schoolroom served for public meetings, by permission of the Rector, and the meetings about the memorial hall in 1918 and 1923 were held there. Neither of these was a place that the village itself owned and ran.

The need was felt long before the war. Alfred Dingley, who was to be the hall's sharpest critic, still agreed that "Welford certainly needed a covered recreation place or hall badly enough. It had wanted one for twenty years or more" 23/91-96. The question in 1918 was never whether Welford should have a hall. It was whether a hall could honestly be called a memorial.

December 1918 The appeal

The Armistice was barely five weeks old when Welford decided on its memorial. A public meeting in the schoolroom on 16 December 1918, called by the chairman of the parish council, resolved that the village should "erect a Village Hall as the War Memorial". A printed appeal followed. A small and rather faded copy survives in the scrapbook 23/91-96, and its text was quoted again in full by the committee in 1923, when its intentions were called into question.



The appeal of December 1918. The leaflet survives only as a small scan, but its heading, "Village Hall War Memorial", and the list of the committee can still be made out. 23/91-96, PDF p. 17

The appeal asked for about £1,000. It described the purpose in a single long sentence, and every clause of it would later be fought over:

About £1,000 will be required, and it is earnestly hoped that everyone will give his or her generous support to enable this hall to be erected as a permanent Memorial to those who have given their lives, and in recognition of the services given by those whose lives have been spared, and as a thankoffering that our country has been preserved.

Appeal of December 1918, as quoted by the Memorial Hall Committee, October 1923 23/91–96

So from the first the hall was meant to do three things: remember the dead, honour the men who came home, and give thanks. The committee was large. Twenty-two names are printed: Mr Bluck, S. Broad, the Rev. A. J. Davis, A. Davis, Miss Hancox, T. Harris, T. Hawkins, Captain Haynes, Mrs Knowles, Mr and Mrs Lawrence, Mrs Mainwaring, W. Matthews, Mr Montague, Miss Paine, Mr Parris, Miss Riddell, Mr Setten, L. Stanley, A. Wincote, Mr Woodward and A. Wright. T. Hawkins, who was also chairman of the parish council, took the chair. Miss Hancox of Fern Bank was secretary, and she and Mr Parris were joint treasurers. The site was to be in the main street, and the plans could be seen at the Post Office.

Many of these names recur through the hall's history. Mrs Knowles, the Rev. A. J. Davis, Alfred Davis, Montague, Mainwaring and Woodward were all among the nine trustees appointed in 1923 and named in the trust deed of 1926. A Bluck sat on the hall's committee or its trustees in 1918, 1952, 1964, 1981 and 1991. The Great War itself, and the nineteen men from the two villages who died in it, are the subject of the companion essay on [Welford and the Great War](#). Their names are not carved on the hall's stone. The archive's list of them is at 22/08.

1919–1920 Coyney's Leys and the first collapse

The appeal went well at first and then stalled. By early 1920 the committee had about £540, and the building it had in mind had become far dearer. The estimate of £1,100 had risen with post-war prices to between £2,000 and £3,000. Fund-raising had leaned on fêtes and entertainments, which some villagers thought unseemly for a memorial. The full sequence of what followed is set out in a long run of reports in the *Stratford Herald*, pasted into the scrapbook 23/91–96, p. 6. The year is not printed on the cuttings, but the run of dates and the Rector's later reference to a new committee "chosen at a meeting in 1920" place it in the first months of 1920.

The man who tried to break the deadlock was W. H. Marks. He proposed a cheaper hall of timber, cement and asbestos, and offered to raise or give £400 himself by June. A public meeting on 3 February adopted his scheme. A week later, on 10 February, Marks was given a free hand to find a site and a playing field, and a gala week was planned for Whitsun.

Then, on 26 March, the glebe field called Coyney's Leys came up for sale. It was about nine acres. L. Stanley wanted four acres for the village, and had written asking Marks to buy on his behalf at up to £100 an acre. Under the arrangement between them Marks bought the whole field for £500. What

happened next is told only in part. "Disparaging remarks" were made about the purchase, and on 30 March Marks wrote to T. Hawkins, as chairman of the parish council, withdrawing from the scheme entirely.

The public meeting that followed was bad-tempered. J. R. Black, the county councillor, said that the County Council had stood back from bidding for the field as allotments because the village wanted it. H. Hawkins offered to buy the whole field himself and give four acres to the village. W. Matthews spoke of a meeting at the Bell the night before the sale, which T. Hawkins said he knew nothing about. When Stanley was asked to give up his share of the field for the village, the report gives his answer in four words: "I decline to do so." J. R. Phillips proposed a deputation to Marks and Stanley, seconded by Mr Windsor, and the Rector, Miss O. Hancox and Phillips were chosen to go.

The deputation achieved nothing. Marks let it be known that he would hand the land over if two gentlemen, whom the paper does not name, apologised to him. They refused, and Stanley would not part with the field. The old committee resigned with about £394 in the bank, and the meeting resolved that the money should be kept for a village hall 23/91–96, p. 7.

The resignation meeting gives a glimpse of the frustration. F. Blundell complained that the committee had grown from three people to thirty. T. Hawkins said that the parish council was "fed up". A new committee of ten was elected: H. M. Woodward, Mr Poltre, E. V. Parriss, J. Hawkins, A. Wincote, S. Brown, Mrs Willet, Mrs Knowles, Mrs J. Basson and Miss Le Measurer. Four of the ten were women.

The *Herald* ran an editorial headed "Welford's War Memorial", which called the dispute "too trivial" to stand in the way of a memorial and compared Welford unfavourably with Broadway. Marks stayed involved in village life. By 1924 he was president of the Welford sports club, and the club's minutes record his resignation on 2 May 1924, before he left on a long voyage 63/01.

Alfred Dingley of Avondale wrote to the *Herald* on 24 April. His letter is the first of several, and it set out the objection he would press for the next three years:

The so-called Welford Memorial failed as it deserved to fail. From its inception the original scheme was nothing short of a pretence, and apparently its promoters expected Welford people to regard the war as a happy and fortunate circumstance to enable them to obtain what had so long been wanted, namely, a much-needed village hall. ... the scheme was inaugurated with fêtes, fireworks, and frivolity.

Alfred Dingley, letter to the *Stratford Herald*, 24 April [1920] 23/91–96

Dingley was not against a hall. He praised Marks for "the merit of honesty", since Marks "made not the slightest pretence of it being a memorial in any way" and "simply went for that which he well knew was always meant and intended, viz., a hall and football field". His complaint was against the word memorial, which he thought had been used to draw money from "simple-minded and innocent folk".

1920–1923 "Welford's Counterfeit Memorial"

The new committee worked quietly for three years. Its records have not survived in the archive, but its method was explained afterwards. Building prices fell from their post-war peak, and the committee waited for them. "When the appeal was made," its chairman wrote in 1923, "it was generally known that such a hall as was needed could not be erected under a cost of £2,000, but that eventually the cost of building would come to such a level as would be within the means of the community, and in the intervening time the necessary funds could be acquired." By the summer of 1923 the committee had £634 and was ready to build.

Plans were drawn by J. H. Knight, an architect from Stratford-upon-Avon, and accepted at a public meeting in the school with the Rector, the Rev. A. J. Davis, in the chair. The tender of Messrs Smith and Unitt was accepted for a building somewhat plainer than the plans first shown 23/91–96, pp. 4–5. The plans then went to the Rural District Council, where they met two objections. Walter Gould wrote that the hall would block the windows of his house, which he held on a fifteen-year lease, and that these were ancient lights. Mr Bluck, a member of the council, asked whether the land belonged to the parish at all. Mr Bicknell thought it had originally belonged to Lord Sackville, and that the parish had once paid a small acknowledgment for it, which had not been claimed for several years, so that the parish had simply taken possession. Knight answered that ownership was no concern of the District Council, and pointed out that Bluck had earlier favoured a scheme on this very site. The plans were approved.

In September 1923, with the walls going up, Dingley wrote again. His letter, headed "Welford's Counterfeit Memorial", is the most quoted document in the hall's history.

The proposal it appears is to expend about 99 per cent. on the recreation part of the scheme, and with the remaining one per cent. or less get some sort or any sort of Memorial label or tablet, stick it in or on the counterfeit in the vain hope of giving semblance of reality, and then hope for it to pass current. ... In adjacent towns men may be seen uncovering when passing the Memorials

therein erected, but who will bare their heads in front of Welford's heartless imposture.

Alfred Dingley, "Welford's Counterfeit Memorial", *Stratford Herald*, September 1923 23/91–96

He recalled that the first scheme had been killed off by "a Welford ex-soldier, who declared the whole business nothing short of an invitation to dance on the graves of his dead comrades", and he ended by asking: "Why not a religious ceremony at opening to complete the hypocrisy."

Two replies came within the fortnight. The Welford-on-Avon Ex-Service Men's Association passed a unanimous resolution on 2 October 1923 to "dissociate themselves entirely" from the letter, adding that Dingley had not "displayed any sympathy or encouragement towards any scheme for the improvement of the social amenities of Welford village life". It was signed by W. H. Birch, chairman, and G. K. Haynes, honorary secretary. S. Bryan, chairman of the hall committee, replied at length. He quoted the 1918 appeal, insisted that "never at any time has the hall been considered as a memorial to the dead only", and explained the waiting game: "Such a hall as could not have been built three or four years ago under £2,000 is now being built for £800, in every respect up to the standard of our original ideal." He also announced the stone-laying.

Dingley's last letter conceded defeat without conceding the point:

Halls for the purposes village halls are quite appropriately used for, viz., entertainments, games, whist drives, dances, &c., become a mockery and a sacrilege when they masquerade as memorials to our glorious dead. ... My protest, sir, has failed. It was made on behalf of those who, alas, cannot enforce their own claims, nor would not do so if they could. They died for England, not for memorials, good or bad.

Alfred Dingley, second letter, October 1923 23/91–96

It is easy to read Dingley as a crank, and the ex-servicemen plainly did. But his objection was a common one in the 1920s, when villages up and down the country argued over "utility" memorials such as halls, cottage hospitals and playing fields against crosses and tablets. Welford in the end had both. The other memorial is the carved rood screen in St Peter's Church, the work of Joseph Northcott, described in the essay on [St Peter's](#). When the hall's chairman appealed for help in 1975, he made the same pairing: "The Hall was built to the memory of men from the villages who gave their lives in the Great War; the other Memorial is the carved Rood Screen in St. Peter's Church" 60/05.

October 1923The memorial stone

The stone was laid on Thursday 11 October 1923. A religious service was held on the site at half past three, which suggests that the committee took Dingley's sarcastic question as a suggestion. The scrapbook's report 23/91-96 describes "a large and representative audience". The Rector led the service and said he was glad to have been asked, "although the hall perhaps would be termed a secular building". He was sure the scheme "would have met with the hearty approval of those whom they had met that day to honour", and he noted the good turnout of ex-servicemen. He added that "their sympathy would go out to one who desired to be present, but whose life was in a very precarious state". The report does not name him.

The stone was laid by Private C. Marshall of the 2nd Battalion, the Gloucestershire Regiment, chosen as the oldest ex-serviceman in the village. He had served in both the South African War and the Great War. He said he felt it "an honour and privilege to represent the Welford-on-Avon ex-Service Men's Association in laying the memorial stone", and he hoped the hall "would help to promote unity in the village, act as a remembrance of our fallen, and also a permanent monument to those who were fortunate to survive". His words repeat, almost clause for clause, the three purposes of the 1918 appeal.

To the memory of the men of
Welford-on-Avon and Weston-on-Avon
who fell in the Great War,
1914-1918 Wording of the memorial stone, laid 11 October 1923

The address was given by the Rev. V. D. Siddons, DFC, of Evesham, a former captain in the Royal Air Force. He took a middle course between Dingley and the committee. Recreation, he said, "had its proper place in life, not only for men, but for women also", and when thinking of the men who had died "let them not forget the women who had sacrificed at home, not a few of whom had died of broken hearts". But:

No memorial used for recreation alone could be a fitting memorial; in fact no matter how the building was used could it be a complete memorial. A better and more religious England could be the only satisfactory memorial. In the degree to which the building tended to produce a fuller and better life would it answer its desired end.

The Rev. V. D. Siddons at the stone-laying, 11 October 1923 23/91-96

The hymns were "O God our Help in ages past", "God moves in a mysterious way" and "Jesu, Lover of my soul", and the service ended with the National Anthem.

The new Wesleyan President, the Rev. John E. Wak

the "Federation of Churches" was
and according to an ECU survey the
and the work of evangelizing will
very much of the value of the
spirit of unity in London in
Bible, history and Christian
which was pointed out by
Walter, was attended by 20
of various denominations. It
looked that the growth of the
British in a new group in Amer-
the American Church in Amer-
the influence of dealing with the
and was greatly complicated by the
the Church was conservative and
general lack of interest in
the will last trip into the Church



NORTON & LENCHWICK
DEATH OF THE HON. ALGERNON H
MILLS.

MEMORIAL STONE LAYING.

[illegible]

tion with the proposed Memorial Hall at the School for kind permission of

The death occurred on Saturday at the residence, Woodmont, of William in the family of Mrs. Mills, 1011 North Main street, near the corner of Glyn, Mills, Corrie & Co. Co. Lehigh street, after a long and painful illness.

Mr. Mills had been laid aside from duties by illness for some few weeks, but he recovered and returned to his duties many times in the City, for he was one in his sixty-sixth year, and maintained a vigorous nature and a cheerful disposition throughout his illness last August, so that he may be truly said to have died in his bed. The suddenness of his death is a sad proof that death can be difficult to be of intense poverty and application. A son of the late Lord Dillingham, the Hon. Algernon, died of his life in the same manner, from a banking house of Glyn, Mills, Corrie & Co. and his devotion to those interests was rewarded and rewarded.

Especially during the war years, when many representatives of the bank were engaged in the service of the country, the burden of work and responsibility was laid heavily upon his shoulders, and he was indeed one of the best and highest spirits which always characterized the firm. He was an inspiration to all who came in contact with him. In addition to his activities as a member of the firm, he was a director of a number of important corporations, institutions, and organizations, including the Central Loan Railways, the Box Insurance and the Sun Life Insurance Company.

LA BERRY RE-STARTED.—The dullness
of village life during the win-

[illegible]

The

A crowded public meeting in the schoolroom the following Monday dealt with money and management. The Rector gave a résumé of the scheme since 1918 and praised the committee chosen in 1920, which had "done splendidly". He could not resist a remark about the village's reputation. When he first came to

Welford, some twenty years earlier, it had been spoken of as "Black Welford". He had contested the description then, and "he was sure that no such charge could be made that day". The hall, he said, "would be an uplifting kind of building in the parish."

The figures he gave are the clearest account of the building's cost, and they are set out below with the final account published in 1924.

What the hall cost, 1923–24

Item	Amount	Source
Funds in hand, October 1923	£634	Public meeting 23/91–96
Original contract, Smith and Unitt	£669 10s	Public meeting
Extension made possible by a gift of extra land	£67 10s	Public meeting
Debit balance after architect's fees and other costs	£130	Public meeting
Promised towards the debit	£35	Public meeting
Total liabilities, excluding the boundary fence	£768 2s 1d	Bazaar report, 1924 23/91–96
Total receipts	£722 4s 11d	Bazaar report, 1924
Further sums promised	£15	Bazaar report, 1924
Raised by the bazaar sale	£30	Bazaar report, 1924
Shortfall remaining	17s 2d	Bazaar report, 1924

The meeting then made the hall a trust. Nine life trustees were elected: Mrs Knowles, Mrs J. Basson, the Rev. A. J. Davis, A. T. Montague, E. V. Parriss, V. Mainwaring, H. M. Woodward, F. J. Nelder and Alfred Davis. There was "considerable discussion" about the size and liabilities of the management committee, and it was fixed at fifteen so that sub-committees could be formed without calling in outsiders. Those chosen were Mrs Mainwaring, Mrs J.

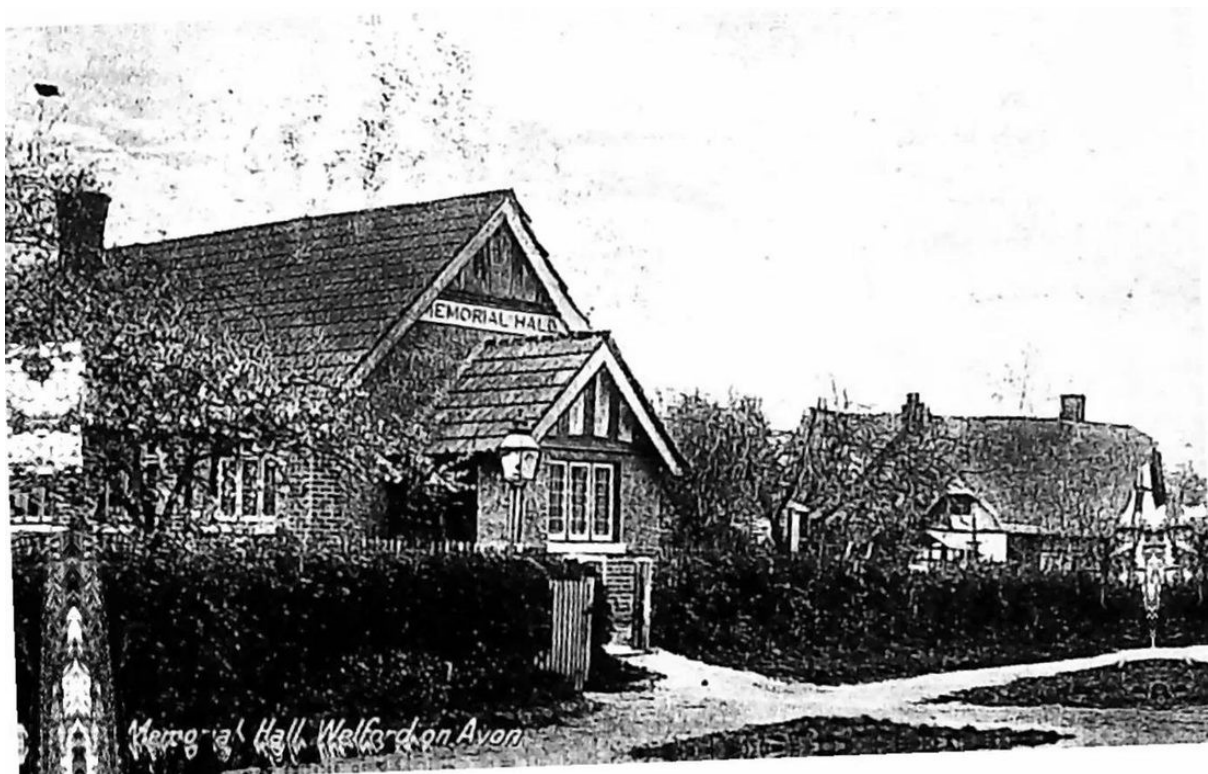
Basson, Miss White, Miss J. Hawkins, the Rev. A. J. Davis, F. J. Nelder, G. K. Haynes, W. Birch, H. Hawkins, J. Hawkins, W. Edkins, T. Blundell, E. Parriss, J. Bryan and Alfred Davis. Nelder, the station master at Milcote, became honorary secretary, and one of his first letters to the press acknowledged an anonymous gift of £5, "in memory of an old friend".

The new committee included both Birch and Haynes, the officers of the Ex-Service Men's Association who had answered Dingley. The men the hall was meant to honour were now among the people running it.

December 1923The opening

The hall opened in December 1923, a few weeks after the stone was laid. The newspaper report of the opening survives in the scrapbook, but a villager later pasted a 1950s newspaper over most of it, so that roughly a third of every line is hidden 23/97-107, pp. 4-5. Enough can be read to piece together the building and the day.

The hall was "situated in the centre of this old-world village". The architect was J. H. Knight and the contractors were Smith and Unitt. The main room was forty-eight feet long. The building was of sandstocks, a soft moulded brick, and was half-timbered, so that it "presents quite" a pleasing appearance and would look more "in character" with its neighbours "when time has performed" its work. It was roofed with Bridgwater tiles and glazed with leaded lights. Visitors came in through a vestibule with double swing doors. At one end was a small platform for meetings and entertainments, with a backcloth showing a woodland scene in oils painted by Mr George Dickinson. At the rear were a kitchen, "well fitted" with a sink, and "other offices", the polite word for lavatories. A stone "suitably" inscribed was set in the front wall.



"Memorial Hall, Welford-on-Avon." A postcard of the 1920s or 1930s. The hall sits back behind its fence, with the old thatched cottages of the main street alongside, much as the 1923 report imagined it looking once "time has performed" its work. 36/32

The hall was opened by Mrs Davis, the Rector's wife, on a wet or wintry afternoon. "She was sorry it was a bad afternoon," the report says, but the hall was crowded. She spoke of the years she and the Rector had lived among the villagers and of "the growing necessity" of such a building. She asked the audience, when they used the hall, to remember the men who had left their villages and died. She noted that a considerable sum was still to be raised before the hall was free of debt, and then handed over a donation of £20 in memory of her son, Basil Davis. It had been "her son's wish" that the money should be given for that purpose.

Basil Arthur Forbes Davis had died nine months earlier, on 1 March 1923. He was nineteen and an undergraduate at Magdalene College, Cambridge, and he was killed when his motorcycle collided head-on with another on the Milton Road outside the city. The long report of his death and funeral at Weston is in the same scrapbook 23/97-107, p. 13. So the hall was opened by a mother who had lost a son, though not to the war, and her gift joined the names of the war dead in the building's foundation.

Mr Blundell thanked Mrs Davis on behalf of the committee. Mr Lawrence proposed thanks to the gentleman who had given the stage. In the later afternoon the children of the two villages were given tea, oranges were handed

round, and each child received a small gift "in remembrance" of the day. Mrs E. V. Parriss and Mr Knight, the architect, both had a hand in the children's party. A concert followed.

The last of the debt was cleared the next year. A bazaar and social in 1924 reported that the hall, "completed and opened in December last", had already "proved a boon" through the winter. The sale raised £30. Mrs Basson of The Orchard, one of the trustees, supervised the social. The figures published with the report showed total liabilities of £768 2s 1d, not counting the boundary fence, and receipts of £722 4s 11d, with £15 more promised. That left a shortfall of 17s 2d 23/91–96, p. 6. For a scheme that had been given up for dead in 1920, it was a remarkably tidy end.

1926 The trust deed and the rules

The hall was put into a formal trust by a deed dated 1 September 1926. A copy is in the hall's own papers 60/04, 60/045. It describes the property as being in the "County of Gloucester", because until 1931 Welford and Weston lay in Gloucestershire. The nine trustees were those elected at the 1923 meeting, and the deed gives their occupations. Taken together they are a fair cross-section of the village's leading households in the 1920s.

The trustees, 1926 to 1981

Deed	Trustees named
1 September 1926	A. T. N. Montague, farmer; Mary Edith Brew Knowles, widow; Rev. A. J. Davis, Rector; Alfred Davis, school attendance officer; V. E. Mainwaring, estate agent; E. V. Parriss, grocer; F. J. Nelder, station master at Milcote; Holtham Mills Woodward, market gardener; Fanny Basson
7 July 1952	Survivors Montague, Rev. A. J. Davis and Nelder appoint Alice Clarke, Emma Carrick Rushton, R. E. Wright (schoolmaster), Edgar Mills Davis, Percy Halford Barnett (railway signaller) and Richard Butler Bluck
30 January 1981	Clarke, Wright, Barnett and Butler-Bluck appoint W. M. Johnson, Judith Ann Roberts, Eileen Woods and Sanna E. P. Bluck

The deed holds the hall in perpetuity for the inhabitants of Welford-on-Avon and Weston-on-Avon, under the name "The Welford and Weston-on-Avon Memorial Hall". Its sixteen rules provide for a management committee of up to

fifteen, elected each January at a public meeting. No intoxicating liquor was to be brought in without the committee's permission, and gambling and bad language were forbidden. The deed itself was to be kept at the Midland Bank in Stratford.

A scale of charges was printed with the rules. In winter the hall cost 3s 6d for the first hour and in summer 2s, the difference being the cost of heat and light. Chairs were a penny each and crockery 2d a dozen. Public meetings by bodies outside the parish paid 10s 6d. The cheapness was the point. In 1935 the committee organising the Silver Jubilee celebrations paid 4s 6d for its use of the hall 60/09.

The 1952 deed shows how slowly the trust renewed itself. By then only three of the original nine were living, and one of them, the Rev. A. J. Davis, had retired to Nairobi. His signature on the deed was witnessed by the Bishop of Mombasa. The six new trustees had been elected at the annual meeting of 23 January 1952, and the deed was witnessed by W. E. Swinnock, the producer of the dramatic society 60/04. The hall was registered as a charity on 25 November 1964. In 1969 the secretary, Ken Court, revised the rules. The trustees approved them on 21 October 1969 and they were sent off in August 1970, now twelve rules instead of sixteen and allowing three to five trustees. In November 1991 the Stratford solicitor Adrian Organ, of Geoffrey Parker Bourne, handed the deeds to R. E. Wright, who by then had been a trustee for almost forty years.

The fuller file on the hall, with its plans and trust deeds from 1926 to 1981, was deposited at the Warwickshire County Record Office as part of CR3640. The same collection holds a file on a "Memorial Hall bus shelter" for 1965 to 1971 50/41, a scheme the archive here does not otherwise explain.

1924–1939 "The hut": the hall between the wars

The hall's own records for its first thirty years are lost, but its annual meetings were numbered, and the numbers fix its start. The 40th annual meeting was held in January 1964 and the 67th in January 1991, which puts the first in about 1924 or 1925, the first winter after the opening 60/05, 60/06.

The clubs that used the hall tell the rest. The sports club, founded in 1924, held its meetings there, at first calling it the "Village Hall" and from 1925 the "Memorial Hall" 63/01. The tennis club met there from 1928 until at least 1937, and two receipts of 1936 for its use of the hall are signed in a hand that reads "P. H. Barnett" 63/03–06. The amateur dramatic society was founded at a meeting in the hall on 12 January 1928, and for the next half century the hall's stage was its home 61/01. Its story, from the first productions to *Outside Edge* in 1987, is told in the essay on [amateur dramatics in Welford](#).

The hall was also where the village did its public business. Public meetings moved there from the schoolroom. The Silver Jubilee meeting of 18 February 1935, chaired by the Rector as chairman of the parish council, was held in the hall, with about thirty present, and the Jubilee committee met afterwards in the hall's kitchen. Its plans included a cinema show by R. S. Wimbush, one of several film shows in the hall before the war 60/09. A public meeting in the hall on 10 May 1934 chose the trustees of the new village fête fund, whose deed allowed up to a quarter of the fête profits to be shared among the church, the Methodist chapel, the hospitals fund and the Memorial Hall trustees 57/06. Among those fête trustees was a Walter Leslie Dingley. Whether he was related to Alfred Dingley, the hall's critic of 1923, the papers do not say.

The fêtes themselves, held every August from 1937 to 1939 with a procession from the Maypole Green, decorated lorries, a baby show and bowling for a live pig, all ended with a dance in the Memorial Hall from half past nine until two in the morning, admission 1s 6d. The dances were organised by Mr and Mrs P. Barnett, to music from the Rhythm Revellers or the Regal Dance Band 54/02. The church held its sales in the hall, the football club ran whist drives there, and in 1937 the schoolchildren were taken to a cinema show 20/01, 57/01. Behind the hall, in the mid-1930s, Charlie Garner laid out the ground for the village's first bowls match, played against a team from the Birmingham police 47/80–90.

Somebody had to clean up after all this. In August 1936 the *Stratford Herald* printed a short interview with the hall's caretaker under the heading "Work hard and don't worry". She was seventy-six, a grandmother to twenty-six and a great-grandmother to one, and she kept a big garden "crammed with flowers". The cutting does not give her name 20/01.



A women's tea party in a village hall, undated. The proscenium stage, the long trestle tables and the dress suggest the 1950s. The photograph is filed among Welford material and the room is probably the Memorial Hall, but nothing on the print says so. 16/09

7 December 1938A royal visitor

The hall's most famous evening came in December 1938, when Prince George, Duke of Kent, came to see the dramatic society perform. The society had entered the Warwickshire Rural Community Council's drama festivals, and the Duke, as patron of the rural community movement, came to see a village company at home. The invitation, printed by the Rural Community Council and dated 30 November 1938, asked guests to the hall for 7 December to see *She Passed Through Lorraine* 62/01, 24/15, 42/05. Some later accounts give the date as 13 December. The companion essay on [royal visits to Welford](#) weighs the two.

WARWICKSHIRE RURAL COMMUNITY COUNCIL

(Affiliated to the National Council of Social Service).

An Organisation to assist the Revival of Social, Educational and Economic Life in Villages.

President—ALDERMAN SIR ARCHIBALD FLOWER, J.P.

First Vice-President—ALDERMAN ERNEST PARKE, J.P.

Vice-Presidents—

LADY THROCKMORTON. BRIGADIER-GENERAL LORD HENRY SEYMOUR, D.S.O., D.L., J.P.
P. LL. HANDLEY, Esq.

SERVICES—

ADVISORY BUREAU.
RURAL INDUSTRIES.
ADULT EDUCATION.
DRAMA AND MUSIC.
PLAYING FIELDS.
VILLAGE HALLS.
PRESERVATION OF COUNTRYSIDE.
SOCIAL SERVICE CENTRES.
PARISH COUNCIL ADVISORY.

Executive Committee—

Chairman—P. LL. HANDLEY, Esq.
Hon. Treasurer—A. E. NEEDHAM, Esq.

Organising Secretary—
W. N. LINDLEY RICHARDSON.

MIDLAND BANK CHAMBERS,
126, THE PARADE,
LEAMINGTON SPA.

Telephone | LEAMINGTON SPA 1848,
Telegrams |

November 30th. 1938.

Dear Sir or Dear Madam,

I am directed to invite you to be present at the Memorial Hall, Welford-on-Avon, on Wednesday December 7th., at 4.45 p.m., on the occasion of the visit of His Royal Highness The Duke of Kent.

Owing to the limited accommodation I should be glad if you would kindly present the ticket below at the door.

Yours very truly,

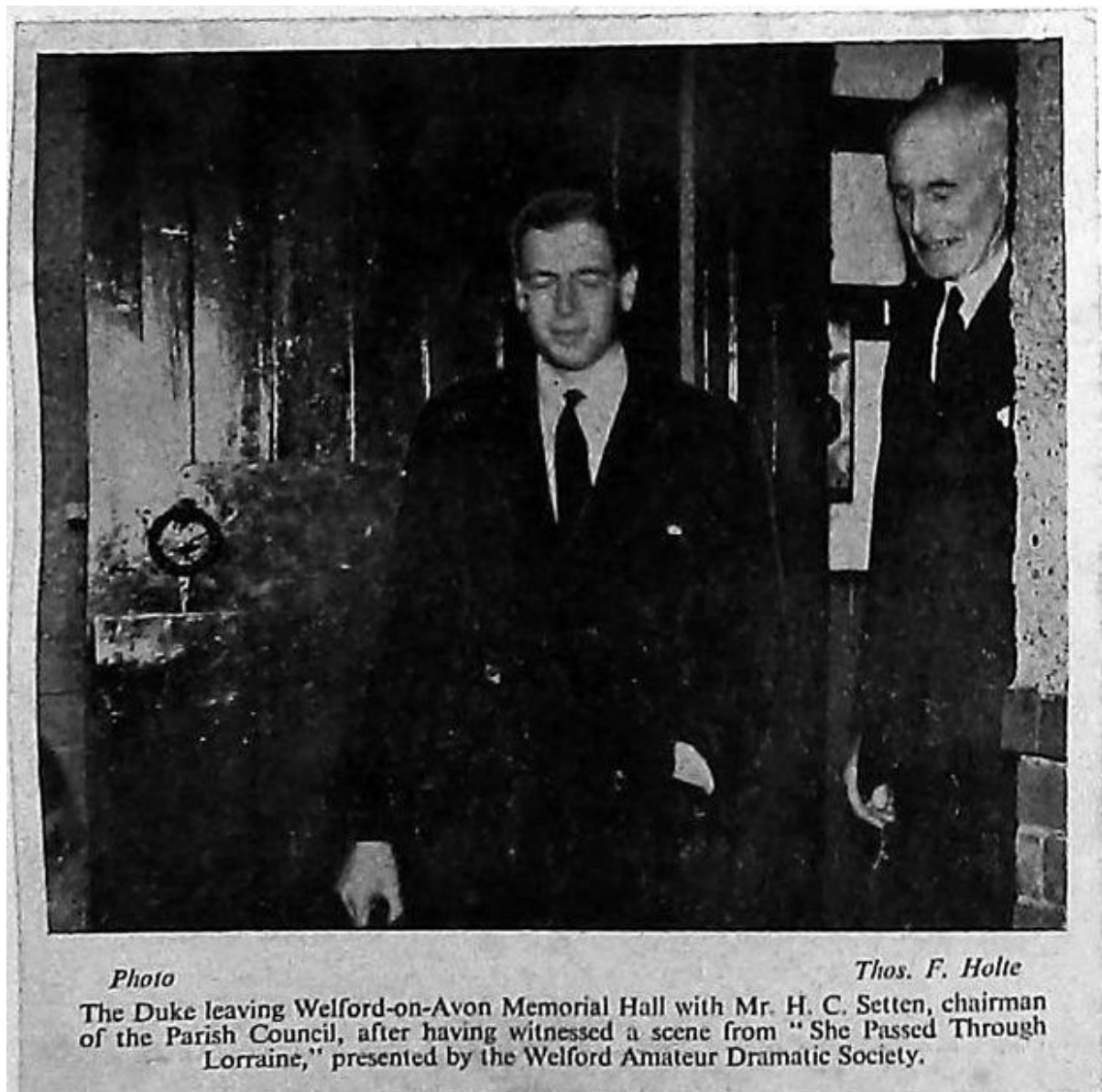
W. N. Lindley Richardson
Secretary.

The invitation. Card issued by the Warwickshire Rural Community Council on 30 November 1938 for the Duke of Kent's visit to the Welford players on 7 December. Copies survive in three folders. 62/01, 24/15, 42/05

A *Herald* reporter came too, and his piece is pasted into the dramatic society's scrapbook. He was more taken with the setting than the play. He described the fog, the maypole, the village children gazing at "the hut", and the four new garden seats that nobody was allowed to sit on. Inside, on the walls of the hut, hung two certificates from the Rural Community Council's drama festival judges, one an award of merit of 1929 and the other, of 1931, bearing a gold star for the best performance in the county. W. E. Swinnock had produced the society's plays for five years and had designed and built the scenery. On the night he was also stage manager, sound effects man, prompter and electrician 62/01.

The reporter's word "hut" is odd for a brick building with half-timbered gables, and it may have been affectionate, or a mistake. The programme for the

evening was painted by Mrs S. L. Atkin and showed the maypole, the hall and Magpie Cottage together, the same group that Sir Benjamin Stone had photographed before the hall was built 11/19, 07/01-11.



The Duke of Kent leaving the Memorial Hall, December 1938, with H. C. Setten, after the performance of *She Passed Through Lorraine*. Press photograph by Thos. F. Holte, pasted into the dramatic society's scrapbook. 62/01, PDF p. 204

1939-1953 War, the Legion and a new floor

The Second World War brought evacuees from Birmingham. Bernard Harris remembered that the evacuees shared the village school, and that the school and the Memorial Hall were used for classes in turns 36/13. The hall was not requisitioned, as far as the archive shows, though the old Gymnasium in Tudor Vale was taken by the Army. The Women's Voluntary Service ran a canteen in

the village, and when the war ended its committee gave £220 to the new British Legion branch.

That branch was born in the hall. At the annual dinner and concert of the Welford-on-Avon Ex-Service Men's Association, held in the Memorial Hall soon after the war, with forty-two local ex-servicemen and women "from the last war" present, a branch of the British Legion was formed, "to be known as the Welford and Weston-on-Avon branch". A. G. Rodenhurst became secretary and E. W. Greenwood treasurer, and R. E. Wright soon took the chair. The chairman of the old Association that evening was G. K. Haynes, who in 1923 had signed the letter answering Dingley 56/01. On the next day there was a church parade, and wreaths were laid at the memorial stone of the hall.

From then until the early 1960s the Legion held its annual meetings, its New Year's Eve whist drives and dances, and its November dinners in the hall. The New Year's Eve drive of 1951 filled twenty-one tables 56/01–15. At the branch's second annual meeting in the hall, on 25 November 1948, members asked for a memorial to the men of the second war. They chose a tablet in the parish church rather than anything on the hall, and the Rector and Wright discussed it in the hall on 3 December 1948 56/03. The tablet was unveiled in 1950.

The hall needed money after the war, and the village found it. The flower show, revived in 1943, gave £170 towards refurnishing the hall by 1948 and £190 by 1951, the second-largest of its gifts after the Forces Comforts Fund 54/01. The 1953 show at Manor Farm was held to buy new chairs and tables for the hall. Central heating went in at about the same time. In September 1950 the dramatic society guaranteed £10 towards it, and in 1951 the Legion agreed to contribute as well 56/06–07, 61.

The Festival of Britain public meeting was held in the hall on 19 January 1951 55/01. For the Coronation in 1953 the committee hoped to put a television set in the hall "if possible", so that people without sets could watch the service. The Coronation committee had money left over, and a suggestion to spend it on a wall in front of the hall was turned down in favour of two Coronation seats. In June 1955 the last £7 15s 1d was divided between the two churches, the chapel and the hall, which received £1 18s 9d 55/01, 55/09.

1950s–1960sThe main hub

For people who grew up in Welford after the war, the hall was simply where things happened. Mary, interviewed for the village's oral history project, called it "the main hub". She ran the youth club there from about 1958, at eighteen "the youngest youth club leader in Warwickshire", and she recalled that when she was May Queen in 1951 "everything came from the village hall", so that the

procession crossed the road from the hall to the maypole for the dancing 48/45-64.

Bill Johnson, the cobbler in Chapel Street, ran the band for the Saturday-night dances 31/06. Hubert Parriss at the Maypole, remembered as "a frustrated actor", produced a pantomime in the hall every year 49/21-22. One former resident, writing many years later, listed "the Memorial Hall: dances, Hubert's pantomime" among the things she remembered. Bert Jackson came to the hall in about 1950 to hear a workmate play in a local band, and at that "rather-deserted gig" met Peggy, whose family kept the Shakespeare Inn. They married in 1953 52/72. The infant welfare clinic was held in the hall on the fourth Wednesday of every month, from ten until noon, where a doctor and health visitor saw mothers and babies free and cod liver oil was handed out 49/07, 03/35, 05/02. The youth club held a Christmas bazaar at which Father Christmas arrived on a tractor-drawn truck "riding among the holly and the hay", and sat in "a corner of the stage made for him alone". The *Evesham Journal* headed its report "Christmas Bazaar: Hut Scheme Approved", referring to the club's plan for a hut of its own 50/102.



Muriel Dayer-Smith in the Memorial Hall kitchen, with the big tea urns on which every village function depended. The breeze-block wall suggests a later extension to the 1923 kitchen. Undated. 50/215

In 1958 the dramatic society gave its productions in aid of the Memorial Hall Improvement Fund 62/01. The hall's own accounts begin to survive in the 1960s. The 40th annual meeting was held on 28 January 1964. It was attended by the outgoing committee and two members of the public. The hall had been

let 274 times in 1963, and the kitchen 45 times, 73 more lettings than the year before. The caretaker was paid £78 13s 8d for the year, and a dance made a profit of £74 14s 9d 60/05.

The committee that year was Ethel Roberts, Jean Rimell, Mrs Arthur Smith, Mrs Ezra Smith, H. D. Kirk, Tom Holman, R. E. Wright, R. B. Bluck, A. Collins and F. Edgington, with Mrs V. A. Rimmer as treasurer and Mrs K. A. Gray as letting secretary. A list of charges from later in the decade shows who the regular users were: the Women's Institute and the British Legion's bingo at £1 5s a session, the youth club at 15s, the Guides at 10s, weddings, dances and carpet sales at £1 10s, the Weights and Measures inspectors at 17s 6d and the Children's Welfare clinic at 9s 10d 60/04.

Some charges for using the hall

Use	1926 Late 1960s	1983–85
First hour, winter	3s 6d	
First hour, summer	2s	
Public meeting by an outside body	10s 6d	
WI or British Legion bingo	£1 5s	
Wedding, dance or carpet sale	£1 10s	
Youth club evening	15s	
Local History Society meeting		£8, then £10, then £11

Percy Barnett became honorary secretary and treasurer in about 1956 and held the post for thirty years. When he retired in March 1986 the parish magazine carried a tribute signed "G.G.", who had known the hall for thirteen years. G.G. had "never known Mr. Barnett make a mistake in a booking", and listed the work he did beyond the minutes and accounts: "The stoking in winter since we installed central heating, extra cleaning, e.g. the windows, painting the outside doors, whitewashing the kitchen, turning out cupboards, repairing chairs and tables", all done "so very often secretly, for he hates public praise" 63/07. Barnett had been a trustee since 1952, when the deed described him as a railway signalman, and with his wife he had run the fête dances in the hall before the war.

Not everyone found the hall affordable. The Welford Local History Society was formed at a meeting in the hall on 12 December 1969, but in 1970 it moved its meetings to the school hall, which was cheaper though it had no kitchen. In November 1971 a Mr Brown suggested that the society join the dramatic society in a scheme to enlarge the Memorial Hall so that it would have a second, smaller room. Nothing in the archive shows what became of the idea 37/01-04, 18/02.

1974-1975 "The roof will have fallen in"

By the 1970s the hall was fifty years old and its income no longer covered its upkeep. In November 1974 the committee, through its solicitor R. W. Hemmings, applied to the village trust fund for a grant towards improving the stage and the kitchen. "The cost of operation of the hall," the letter said, "has risen and continues to rise rapidly and it is extremely difficult to maintain the hall from its revenue" 57/06-15. The file does not record an answer.

Early in 1975 the chairman, Winston Walker, wrote to the parish magazine. Walker was at the same time the honorary architect in charge of restoring St Peter's Church. Only six people had come to the annual meeting. The committee, he wrote, regarded itself as custodians, responsible for the hall's income and outgoings and nothing more, "because if £2,500 is not forthcoming within the next four years, the roof will have fallen in, and the Hall will be unusable". He suggested that the British Legion's funds be frozen and used to maintain the hall in the meantime 60/05.

The District Council then made matters worse. Before it would renew the hall's licences for plays, bingo and the Over 60s club, it required about £500 of work: extra lavatories, new hand basins and ventilated lobbies. Walker called a public meeting with a printed notice that did not mince its words. Without the work, "the Hall could be rendered OBSOLETE and become DERELICT. If this is what the Public wish, so be it." His committee, he wrote, not only managed the hall but painted its outside, polished its floors, cleaned its lavatories and mended its chairs, "but there is a limit to the good will, which I, as Chairman, am prepared to ask them to give." He reminded the village what the hall was for, and ended in capitals: "DO COME, AND SPEAK."

They came. The *Stratford Herald* of 27 June 1975 reported that residents "crowded into their Memorial Hall" on the evening of Monday 16 June "to find a way to save it from closure and bankruptcy". Walker put a single question to the meeting: did the people of Welford want a hall? The answer was a unanimous yes. He explained that inflation had forced the committee to raise its charges, and that as a result many local organisations no longer used the hall.

He wanted a grant from the parish council, which "would be a minimal amount on the rates".

Ron Lucas, chairman of the parish council and a district councillor, called the meeting a "mini-referendum". A grant of £500, he said, would mean 2p on the parish rate. He proposed that the parish council take the hall over and run it through a sub-committee, since "money would be more readily available to the parish council than to the hall committee", and said he was not impressed by the committee's fund-raising. Walker answered that the parish council had given the hall little help in the past. When Lucas said that the committee was trying to make the parish council out to be "a bad monster", Walker replied: "That is a damnable lie." David Noakes, a parish councillor, remarked from the floor that the meeting was "beginning to turn into a battle between the two chairmen, which is not the objective".

The outcome was a compromise. The meeting asked the parish council for a grant of £250 and set up an independent fund-raising committee, with a Mr Graham Robert as chairman, to raise more. A circular from G. Thompson later appealed for £700. The parish council agreed the grant, narrowly 60/05, 24/11. The relations between the hall and the council at this time are described in the essay on [the Parish Council](#).

1982–1989A pound a tile

The hall survived, but it was a building that needed constant attention. The winter of 1981–82 brought frost damage, and on 11 May 1982 the secretary, Rosemary Hale, wrote to R. E. Wright asking the village trust for help, as the hall's funds were "sadly depleted after the high costs of repairing the winter frost damage". The trust gave £200, among its last grants before it wound itself up 58/01–09. A larger proposal of £1,500 that year was rejected 60/01. A film show in aid of the hall raised £25.75 12/07. While repairs were going on, the history society met in the chapel. When it came back, it paid £8 a meeting, then £10 and then £11, and it hung a framed copy of the 1884 Ordnance Survey map of the village on the hall's wall 27/01–09, 24/20.

In 1985 the hall needed a new roof, at a cost of £3,300. The committee asked villagers to sponsor the tiles at £1 each. The parish council agreed to pay about £400 as its share of a Rural Community Council grant scheme, under which the council and the Community Council each met a percentage of the cost 60/06. Gifts continued through the decade. In 1988 and 1989 the dramatic society gave £140 and R. E. Wright £100 60/07. The committee of the late 1980s was led by Alex D'Adda, and several of its members had acted in the dramatic society's *Outside Edge* in 1987.

1990–1992Subsidence

The worst crisis came at the end of 1990. Subsidence and poor ventilation under the floor had done serious damage, and the committee commissioned a survey from Smiths Consulting Structural Engineers. In November 1990 it invited the trustees to a special meeting on 3 December, and a poster went up warning that the hall would close unless about £20,000 was found 60/06.

About seventy people came to the 67th annual public meeting on 31 January 1991. The engineer, J. Smith, set out five things that needed doing: new drainage, pruning the neighbouring conifers to five metres, underpinning the walls, checking the roof and replacing the floor. The work would cost £15,000 to £20,000 and give the hall another thirty or forty years. Rebuilding would cost twice as much. The conifers had been a worry for years. The committee said it had been dealing with the trees since 1982, and the engineer warned that new drains could be damaged by their roots.

Volunteers agreed to cost three options: rebuilding, by Ken Clifton; refurbishing, by Larry Sullivan; and repairs alone. Harry Manning asked whether a new hall might be built on land belonging to the Shorthouse allotment trust, but the parish council chairman, Fraser Pithie, said the trust's terms required the land to be used for allotments. Pithie reminded the meeting that the hall was a war memorial "built by the efforts of villagers nearly 70 years ago when the village was much smaller":

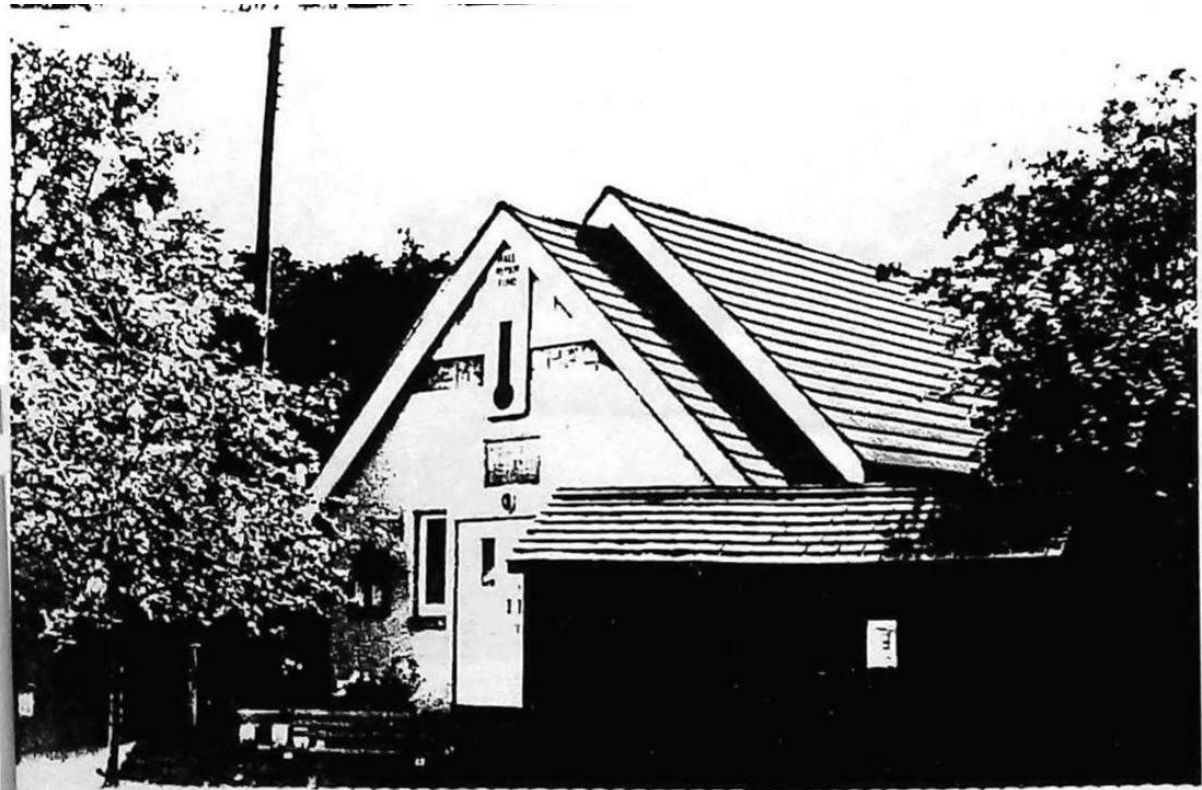
If we can't raise the required amount of money to give this village a hall of which it can be proud, surely it is a poor show; at least we must try, for not to try at all would be a gross abdication of our responsibilities to this village and to those who the hall stood in memory of.

Fraser Pithie, chairman of the parish council, January 1991 60/06

In a later letter Pithie suggested that the parish council might give a grant through the precept. Twenty-five pence a week on each person's poll tax would raise about £9,000, and a parish grant would attract matching grants from the District Council. He thought at least £20,000 would be needed, "and more than likely over £40,000".

The next meeting, an extraordinary public meeting on 7 March 1991, went badly for the committee. That same evening Alex D'Adda, who had chaired the hall for thirteen years, wrote to the trustees: "Due to views expressed this evening at the Extraordinary Public Meeting, we the undersigned have felt it necessary to tender our resignations." The letter was signed by D'Adda, Rosemary Hale as secretary, R. J. Briggs as treasurer, and P. Waldren, E. Neeld, C. Matthews, B. Ladbury and one other whose name cannot be read. They hoped "that other villagers will come forward to manage the Memorial Hall and that it will continue successfully for many years to come."

Others did, within four days. On 11 March 1991 a new committee met under Alan Smart as temporary chairman, with Barbara Ladbury, who had signed the resignation letter, as secretary and Jean Stone as treasurer. The outgoing officers came briefly to hand over. Their floor contractor's advice was that new flooring would cost about £3,500, or £8,000 if the joists proved rotten. The new committee planned a "400 Club" draw at £10 a ticket, stalls at the sports club and church fêtes, refreshments for runners in the Stratford Marathon, a door-to-door collection, and an approach to the British Legion branch for its remaining funds. Robbie Robinson made a target board to stand in front of the hall. Smart then announced that "after much confusion" the hall "remains open", with concerts, a monthly draw and an auction, and he thanked D'Adda's committee for their work.



The hall in 1992, from the Conservation Area study. The gable has been rendered and a porch added, and on the left stands the "Hall Repair Fund" board, very probably the target board Robbie Robinson made in 1991. The study describes the hall as "C20, detached, painted render, brick, interlocking tile roof, one storey". 15/08, fig. 88

The money came in. The accounts for 1991 show an income of £7,132 and a surplus of £3,849. In 1992 the hall spent £3,270 on repairs, received a grant of £2,000 and still ended the year with a surplus of £4,299 60/07. The 1992 Conservation Area study recorded the repaired building in its survey of the village centre 15/08, and the essay on [the Conservation Area](#) places it among its neighbours around the maypole.

1994 onwardsA second stone

In June 1994 the committee wrote to Bob Wright, still a trustee, about a scheme for a new kitchen, storage and, in time, changing rooms, to be paid for partly with a bank loan. The letter is cut off, and the archive does not say how much of the scheme was carried out 60/06.

Later that year the hall became a memorial for a second war. On Remembrance Sunday, 13 November 1994, an additional memorial stone to the men who died in the Second World War was unveiled outside the hall. It was paid for by the Royal British Legion branch, then near the end of its life. Canon Peter Barnes officiated, and a press photograph shows him with the Legion members Tom Marshall and Howard Hawkins 56/15. In 1948 the branch had chosen the church for its Second World War tablet. Forty-six years later it put its last public effort into the hall. The branch was dissolved in 2001. Before it closed it handed its Union Flag to the parish council, together with the duty of keeping the two-minute silence at the Memorial Hall each year.

The archive's coverage of the hall after 1994 is thin, but it shows a building in steady use. The Local History Society mounted its Golden Jubilee exhibition there in 2002 24/22. The parish council meets there 47/93. For the Diamond Jubilee in 2012 the hall provided the flag and the tables 53/43. In about 2010 Bob Brown gave the history society a talk on "The History of Welford Memorial Hall", whose notes do not survive in the archive 03/142.

1923–2023What kind of memorial

Alfred Dingley was wrong about one thing. He predicted that nobody would bare his head in front of "Welford's heartless imposture". In fact the Legion laid wreaths at the hall's stone after its first church parade, kept the two-minute silence there, and in 1994 chose it as the place for the memorial to the dead of the second war. The building he mocked as a dance hall with a label became, over seventy years, the place where Welford remembered.

He was right that it would be used for revelry. The first committee and the ex-servicemen never pretended otherwise. They said from the start that the hall was meant to remember the dead, to honour those who came home, and to give thanks, and that a building where the two villages could meet was the best way to do all three. Private Marshall hoped it would "promote unity in the village". The Rev. V. D. Siddons said that it would serve its purpose "in the degree to which the building tended to produce a fuller and better life". Its history is mostly one of tea urns and whist tables, roof tiles and drains, and of a small number of people in each generation who took on the committee, the stoking and the whitewash. The hall was built twice by the village: once in 1923, from nothing, and again in 1991, when it would have been easier to let it fall.

NotesWhere the sources disagree, and where they are thin

Where the sources disagree

- **Who owned the site.** The parish council minutes from 1904 to 1920 treat the cottage and garden as parish property to let, refuse to sell it, and earmark it for the hall 12/09, 18/13, 18/14, 19/21. Alec Bryan says the site belonged to Lord Sackville 11/04, and at the District Council in 1923 Mr Bicknell said the parish had once paid Lord Sackville a small acknowledgment and later simply taken possession. Both may be true: the parish may have held the plot for years on an old quit-rent that lapsed. The 1926 deed, now at Warwick, should settle it.
- **What the hall cost.** Bryan's note gives £860. Bryan's own letter as committee chairman in 1923 says £800. The October 1923 meeting gives a contract of £669 10s plus £67 10s for the extension, and the 1924 account gives total liabilities of £768 2s 1d without the boundary fence. The differences are probably fees, fittings and the fence, but no single figure covers everything.
- **The site of 1918.** The 1918 meeting chose "land near the Maypole", and the appeal speaks of a site "in the main street". The council minute of 1919 names the parish garden, and Gilda Gray calls it "the Spring Garden". These are probably all the same ground, but no source says so in plain words.
- **The year of the Coyney's Leys dispute.** The cuttings carry day and month but no year. The sequence fits early 1920, and the Rector's reference in 1923 to the committee "chosen at a meeting in 1920" supports it. It is inferred, not printed.
- **The size of the first committee.** The appeal prints twenty-two names. F. Blundell complained in 1920 that it had grown "from three to thirty". Both may be right at different moments.
- **The opening date.** The newspaper and Bryan both give December 1923, though the digit in Bryan's note has been written over. The numbering of the annual meetings (40th in 1964, 67th in 1991) points to a first meeting in 1924 or 1925, which fits a hall that opened at the very end of 1923.
- **The royal visit.** The invitation and most papers give 7 December 1938. Some later accounts give 13 December. The essay on royal visits discusses the evidence.

- **"The hut".** The 1938 reporter calls the building "the hut", which does not match a brick and half-timbered hall. It may be a borrowed nickname, or he may have been thinking of another building.
- **Percy Barnett's dates.** The 1986 tribute gives him thirty years as secretary-treasurer, from about 1956. But receipts of 1936 are signed "P. H. Barnett", and a Mr and Mrs P. Barnett ran the fête dances in the hall in 1937–39. He was plainly involved with the hall long before 1956, whether or not he held office.
- **1975 figures and names.** The *Herald* says the meeting decided to raise "another £50" and names the fund-raising chairman as "Mr Graham Robert". Other papers speak of a £250 grant and a target of £700, and the name is probably Roberts.
- **Where the subsidence was.** Papers of 1990–91 place the worst damage at the eastern end in one place and at the front in another.

Where the sources are thin

- **No early minute books.** Nothing from the hall committee itself survives in the archive before the 1960s. The years 1924 to 1960 are known only from the clubs and societies that used the building.
- **The opening report is half hidden.** About a third of each line of the December 1923 report is covered by a later newspaper pasted over it. The name of the gentleman who gave the stage, and some of Mrs Davis's speech, are lost.
- **No plans.** J. H. Knight's drawings, and the original deeds, are at the Warwickshire County Record Office in CR3640, along with an unexplained file on a "Memorial Hall bus shelter" of 1965–71. They have not been seen for this essay.
- **The names of the dead.** The hall's stone does not list the men it commemorates. The list is at 22/08 and is discussed in the essay on the Great War.
- **Unfinished stories.** The archive does not say what came of the 1971 idea of enlarging the hall with the dramatic society, how much of the 1994 kitchen scheme was built, or anything of substance about the hall after 1994.
- **Pictures.** There are good photographs of the outside of the hall in 1932 and 1992, but only one interior that can be named with certainty, the kitchen. The tea-party photograph 16/09 may or may not show the hall. No photograph of the 1923 stone-laying or opening has been found.

- **The caretaker of 1936** is not named in the cutting, and no list of caretakers survives.

Sources

- Parish council minutes on the cottage and garden, 1904–1920: 12/09, 18/13, 18/14, 19/21
- Alec Bryan's notes on the site and cider mill: 11/04, 11/25; Sir Benjamin Stone photograph: 10/25
- The Gymnasium: 11/06, 19/47; Gilda Gray's recollections: 03/01–19
- Scrapbook of *Stratford Herald* cuttings, 1918–1924 (appeal, Coyney's Leys, Dingley letters, District Council, stone-laying, public meeting, bazaar): 23/91–96
- Opening report, December 1923, and death of Basil Davis: 23/97–107
- Trust deeds, rules and charges, 1926–1991: 60/04, 60/045; Jubilee committee 1935: 60/09; Record Office references: 50/41
- Sports club and tennis club: 63/01, 63/03–06; dramatic society: 61/01, 62/01
- Fête committee and trust: 57/01, 57/06–15; fêtes 1937–39: 54/02; flower show: 54/01, 55/10
- Royal visit, 1938: 62/01, 24/15, 42/05, 11/19, 07/01–11
- Caretaker interview and other 1930s cuttings: 20/01; bowls: 47/80–90
- Evacuees: 36/13; British Legion branch, 1940s–2001: 56/01–15
- Festival of Britain and Coronation: 55/01, 55/09
- Post-war recollections: 31/06, 48/45–64, 49/07, 49/21–22, 50/102, 50/215, 52/72; infant welfare: 03/35, 05/02
- Annual meetings and accounts, 1963–1993, and the 1975 and 1991 crises: 60/05, 60/06, 60/07, 24/11
- Village trust grants: 58/01–09, 60/01; film show: 12/07
- Local History Society: 37/01–04, 18/02, 27/01–09, 24/20, 24/22, 03/142
- Percy Barnett's retirement: 63/07
- Conservation Area study, 1992: 15/08; later items: 47/93, 53/43
- Photographs: 53/11 (1932), 36/32 (postcard), 15/08 (1992), 62/01 (1938), 16/09, 50/215

