

Case Study: Worcestershire's Village and Community Halls

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20th-century non-domestic buildings and public places in
Worcestershire



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Adding a new layer

20th-century non-domestic buildings and public places in Worcestershire

Worcestershire's Village and Community Halls

Village Halls and their derivatives, including Parish Halls, Parish Rooms, Memorial Halls, Remembrance Halls, Peace Halls, Victory Halls and Community Halls and Centres, remain at the heart of many Worcestershire communities. The communal value of these modest, unassuming buildings, both as facilities and as focal points for activities and education, has long been recognised. The aesthetic, historical and evidential value of Village Halls is less well appreciated and there remains a limited framework of understanding in support of their wider recognition and constructive conservation. A Village Hall, in contrast to a Church Hall, Mission Hall, Club House (e.g. British Legion) or Institute can be described as a public asset, run by and for the benefit of a whole community and managed by a voluntary management committee representative of that community.

With approximately 10,000 across England,¹ the humble Village Hall acts as a vital community hub, particularly in isolated rural landscapes and in urban and semi-urban areas with greater levels of social deprivation; the majority host a wide range of community-led activities, clubs and societies, encouraging people of different ages and backgrounds to meet and socialise. Worcestershire has 196 Civil Parishes, the majority of which have at least one Village Hall, although some smaller parishes share facilities with one or more of their neighbours. The county towns and City of Worcester all have Community Halls or Centres, the majority of which are associated with post-war or later housing estates with a higher percentage of families living on a low income or from ethnic minority backgrounds. Community Halls and Centres in towns and cities are more likely to be owned and managed by local councils or charitable trusts, on behalf of local councils.

Like many 20th-century buildings, Village Halls reflect changing societal attitudes to education, health, welfare, community life and recreation as well as inter-war and post-war developments in manufacture and construction, including that in prefabricated or modular buildings. Their architectural character varies enormously but the majority were built with the same core elements to their internal design, notably a central main activity or assembly space together with ancillary accommodation in the form of an additional small hall or rooms. Many halls were sited within, or designed to incorporate, 'communal' green space, for additional recreational opportunities.

A 2014 National Survey of Village Halls lead by Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) revealed that, out of 1,300 responses, nearly a quarter of halls were built before WWI, while an estimated 600 (46%) were built to commemorate WWI or individuals who perished during the conflict. The survey also concluded that, in many rural communities, the Village Hall remains the only all-inclusive meeting place, and as such, offers vital support to help combat loneliness and improve quality of life, particularly for those least mobile.

¹ ACRE Action with Rural Communities in Rural England <http://acre.org.uk/our-work/village-halls> (Accessed 2019).

The changing nature of society, including in many rural, semi-rural and urban estate communities, has left the future of many Village Halls insecure, the main drivers for change: a decline in volunteers, an isolated position and/or the high cost of insurance, maintenance and repair. The results of a survey undertaken as part of the South Worcestershire Infrastructure Study Update (2019) concludes that monthly usership of local Village Halls/Community Centres is at 48%. Of the respondents, 70% reported that the quantity of Village Halls was sufficient but that there was a need for improvements to quality.

Halls and Historic Environment Records

As with many late 19th- and 20th-century buildings, Village Halls and their derivatives (including Church Halls, Institutes and Club Houses) have, up until now, been poorly recorded on both the Worcestershire County and Worcester City Historic Environment Records (HERs). As of October 2018, only seven ‘halls’ were recorded on the City HER and 54 on the County HER. In the main these records related to either pre-20th-century buildings, later converted into halls or halls recorded as requisitioned by the Defence of Britain Project. With the exception of pre-20th-century buildings, the architectural character or history of the buildings themselves was rarely acknowledged. Out of the total number of records on the City and County HERs, 18 (30%) were associated with pre-19th-century buildings; 13 (21%) were associated with early 20th-century (pre-1918) buildings; 22 (36%) were associated with buildings dating to the inter-war period and 8 (13%) were associated with buildings dating to the post-war period.

Out of the 54 halls recorded on the County HER, only nine are designated as nationally significant buildings. Conservation Areas may also provide an effective tool for protecting some undesignated halls, although given the nature of dispersed historic settlement in many parts of the county, there are many sited away from the villages where these Conservation Areas are designated. None of the halls recorded on the City HER have listed status, although three – No. 14, Comer Gardens Institute, No. 9 (Flats 1–6) (former Railway Mission Hall), East Street and St Martin's Church Hall, Victoria Avenue – are recorded on the [Worcester City Local List of Heritage Assets](#). Out of the nine listed halls in County, only one, Overbury Village Hall, was purpose-built. Its designation can be attributed to its architectural significance as a Domestic Revival composition of 1895–6 designed by Richard Norman Shaw for Robert Martin.

Table of nationally designated Village Halls in the County of Worcestershire

WSM01890	School, now Parish Hall, Chapel Lane, Wythall	School, now Parish Hall. 1840 with some later remodelling and repairs. Brick with low-pitched slate roof	Grade II listed (ref.1100175)
WSM02294	Church Hall, Church Road, Belbroughton	17 th -century cruck barn converted into Church Hall by William Weir in 1912–15. Timber-framed	Grade II listed (ref. 1100150)

		with brick infill on a sandstone base, shallow-pitched slate roof.	
WSM05409	St Andrew's Church, Pershore	Former church with Norman origins. Regular services ceased to be held in the building in 1957 and since 1961 it has been used as a Parish Hall.	Grade II* listed (ref. 1387033)
WSM05994	Village Hall, Main Street, Elmley Castle	Originally a collegiate establishment of 14th-century foundation. Village Hall since 1992. Timber-framed and coursed stone.	Grade II listed (ref. 1116583)
WSM10929	Lifford Memorial Hall, Station Road, Broadway	Built in 1915 by A.N. Prentice as a private theatre and later bequeathed to the village as a reading room and meeting place. Erected in memory of James Wilfred, 5th Viscount Lifford. Limestone rubble with stone slate roof.	Grade II listed (ref. 1215941)
WSM17059	Village Hall, Clifton Upon Teme	17 th -century house, now west wing of Village Hall. Timber-framed with rendered infill on a high rubble plinth and a plain tile roof.	Grade II listed (ref. 1349302)
WSM12989	Village Hall, Overbury	Village Hall built in 1895-6 by Richard Norman Shaw for Robert Martin. Snecked dressed limestone rubble with ashlar dressings and a machine-tiled roof	Grade II listed (ref. 1349983)
WSM38763	The Old Chantry, B4204, Martley	Formerly the Chantry School and master's house, now Parish Hall and Caretaker's House.	Grade II listed (ref. 1082958)

		Dated: "The Chantry School 1913", by Corlette and Nicholson of Lincolns Inn, London. Timber-framed with brick infill on brick plinth with a plain tile and copper roof.	
WSM12808	Church House, Rectory Lane, Areley Kings, Stourport	Church House, now Church Hall. About mid to late 16th century. Timber-framed with plastered and painted brick infilling to panels and a plain tile roof. In a state of deterioration in the 1990s. In 1997 the Building Preservation Trust Ltd helped to fund and oversee restoration and modernisation of the building. With additional HLF funding, work began in 2005 and was completed in 2006. The building is now used as a venue for a variety of functions and activities.	Grade II listed (ref. 1217941)

County Historic Environment Records associated with Village Halls specifically have been enhanced through a 'call for information', in the form of a questionnaire, to Parish Councils (see Appendix 1). A total of 19 consultation responses were submitted, facilitating the creation of new records and enhancement of existing records. Local parish history books have also proven to be a valuable source of information, with many communities publishing books in 2000, in celebration of the new Millennium.

The development of the Village Hall

Rural and urban community buildings can trace their origins to the pre-modern period, in the guildhalls and moot halls of late medieval and early modern England. These buildings were always designed to be flexible structures, and after the Reformation most were converted to domestic, charitable or domestic functions. Some of the earliest Village Halls were established, from the mid-19th century, as Parish Rooms, Mission Halls (or Rooms), Church Halls, Reading Rooms or Educational Institutes. As these were funded by the established church, landlords and benefactors, the activities within them were constrained to those of officially endorsed or 'rational recreation' which drove menfolk to the pub and had the further consequence of excluding women and children (Burchardt 1999, 193–4). The great increase in numbers of Nonconformist (particularly Methodist) chapels from the late 18th century, countered from the 1830s by the Anglican Revival, added significantly to the space put aside for education and community meetings as well as for worship. Of particular importance is the way that Nonconformist chapels, in particular, could be funded through subscription by members of the local community, resulting in a huge diversity of architectural (including vernacular) styles and the use of adapted premises or prefabricated corrugated iron where resources were lacking.²

Reading Rooms and Institutes offer some of the most striking examples of how 'roots up' demand became manifest in distinct building types. Reading Rooms, where workers – predominantly male – could access information and benefit from self-improvement through education, also became increasingly prevalent from the mid-19th century, as demand for better educational and social opportunities in the countryside grew. At the same time, the extension of working-class political rights led to the establishment of the Club and Institute Union – founded by the Rev. Henry Solly, in 1862 – and the parallel development of Working Men's Clubs and Educational Institutes.

The Church Institute in Claines, north of Worcester, dates to 1891. Opposite the Church of St. John the Baptist and constructed of orange/red brick with 'mock-timber' gables and stone transomed and mullioned windows, the building was designed by local architect Lewis Sheppard of Worcester and is typical of the late 19th-century Arts and Crafts Movement.



Claines Church Institute

² An issue summarised in the context of historic landscapes and communities by Lake, Herring and Berry 2011.

No. 9, East Street in Worcester, which is now divided into flats, is a former Railway Mission Hall. Erected in 1896, the hall was funded by the Building Committee of the Railway Mission in Worcester; a branch of the British Railway Mission founded in 1881 to communicate the Christian Gospel to the people working in the railway and associated industries. Built with a large meeting room for lectures and services, a class room, committee room, kitchen and toilets, the hall was designed by Worcester architects Yeates and Jones and was the first permanent brick building in the city built as a non-denominational Mission Hall, those before typically being built of corrugated iron.



Railway Mission, Worcester

Beoley Village Hall opened in 1905, after funds for the erection of a Reading Room were donated to Kings Norton and Northfield Urban District Council by Andrew Carnegie. Land was donated by T.E. Field of Redditch.³ Carnegie, a Scottish-American industrialist and philanthropist devoted the latter years of his life, and much of his self-made fortune, to philanthropic endeavours to extend equality of opportunity through learning, including through adult education, across the United Kingdom, and her colonies, the United States, Ireland and Canada. The Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, which was founded in 1913, remains an operating charitable trust today, with the purpose of improving the educational opportunities and wellbeing of people, especially those most vulnerable, throughout Great Britain and Ireland.⁴ The management of Beoley Reading Room was taken over by the Parish Council in 1933 and by the 1950s trusteeship was transferred to a newly formed Village Hall Management Committee.

Like Beoley Village Hall, the Parish Hall in Lindridge was originally built in 1910, in the same materials as nearby estate cottages, as a Reading Room for the Eardiston Farming Company. Set up by the Wallace family, the Eardiston Farming Company was a successful hop, fruit and arable producer and a major employer in the Teme Valley area. In 1939 the Wallace family donated the land and building to the Parish Council, together with a reserve of £300. The money came with the strict caveat that,

³ 'Beoley Village Hall'. <http://www.beoley.org.uk/history.html> (Accessed 2019).

⁴ 'Carnegie UK Trust' <https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/our-2016-2020-strategy/> Accessed 2019).

except in special circumstances, no intoxicating liquor could be sold or gambling allowed on the premises. In 1948, a Men's Social Club, without restrictions, was erected at the rear of the hall.



Lindridge Village Hall

Throughout rural Worcestershire, the construction of most pre-WWI Village Halls appears to have been driven by the individual philanthropy of landed elites or new-money industrialists, who donated money and/or land; additional fundraising through public subscription is also evident across parts of the county, most notably – and significantly when bearing in mind the relative strength of Nonconformity and communal self-determination in these landscapes – in those areas with greater levels of dispersed settlement. Whether as a consequence of individual religious, or quasi-religious, moral duty and a desire to liberate the deserving poor and sanitise leisure; of fashion or merely of enlightened self-interest, there's little doubt that individual philanthropy played a significant part in the Village Hall movement across the county – as across England. Whether this was purely driven by philanthropic desire, or tempered and guided by a desire by landlords to exert a controlling influence over rural communities agitating for political reform (or a mixture of both), it was not enough to meet a rising demand – coming to a head after the First World War – for communities to have facilities where they could interact on their own terms. Village Halls, of this date, in landscapes dominated by large, landed estates, often share a 'distinctive' historicist estate style or expression of deep-rooted paternalism. In particular, Village Hall architecture of this period is influenced by the nationally fashionable Domestic Revival styles and the Arts and Crafts movement, the result being a mixture of local materials and vernacular detailing (Hathaway and Lake, 2017, 67).

The Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service holds a draft copy, dated 6th January 1914, *for the Conveyance by The Honourable Mrs Britten, of Kenswick Manor, of the Dwellinghouse land and hereditaments situate at Broadheath in the County of Worcestershire to be used as a Parish Room for the Ecclesiastical Parish of Broadheath, in memory of her late husband, Rear Admiral Richard Frederick Britten* (Ref. 850: BA10801/4 (ii) 3). Built in 1910 and originally called the 'Church Hall', ownership of the building and the adjoining caretaker's cottage (funds for which had been donated by Mrs Lea, a close personal friend of Mrs Britten) was transferred to its trustees with instructions that it would be for *'exclusive use of the church and kindred functions, including Religious, Recreational, Social, Educational and Philanthropic proposes as the Managing Committee deem proper'*. It was not to be used for political meetings or any other political purpose. Along with the church, vicarage and green,

the Village Hall and cottage is part of a locally important 20th-century religious and communal landscape, expressing the benevolent paternalism of both the landowner and the Anglican church.



Lower Broadheath Church and Village Hall with caretaker's cottage (forefront)

Tardebigge Village Hall, now The Tardebigge Pub, was commissioned by the Earl and Countess of Plymouth in memory of their son, the Hon. Other Robert Windsor-Clive, who had died, in 1908, in Agra, India, whilst serving as Assistant District Commissioner to Lord Minto, the Viceroy of India. Built in 1901–1911, by Messrs J. & A. Brazier of Bromsgrove, to the designs of architect Francis Bayliss of Redditch, and under the personal instructions of the Earl, the hall served the inhabitants of the Hewell Grange Estate as well as those of the wider ecclesiastical parish of Tardebigge. Subscription was 2^d per month for women and boys aged 14 to 18 and 4^d per month for men. As at many Village Halls, there were strict rules concerning the consumption of intoxicating liquor, betting, gambling, bad language and disorderly conduct. The hall was built of red bricks, made in the brickyard of Mrs Anne Frisby, of the Hewell Estate, and incorporated a great hall, with high barrelled ceiling and removable stage, a courtyard, billiard room, men's reading room, women's room, male and female toilets, a men's bathroom, kitchen, caretaker accommodation, hot water central heating and electric light. Inter-war additions included detached studios for glass making and weaving and a bowling green. Following WWII, the hall, along with the rest of the Hewell Grange Estate, was put up for sale and despite being offered, at the valuation price, to the parish, went on to be purchased by private enterprise (The Revd A White, 2011, 88–98).



The Tardebigge public house, formerly the Village Hall

The architecture of Pensax Parish Hall expresses a very different interplay of landownership, non-landed wealth and community. It was formally opened by Mrs St George of Pensax Court on Wednesday 27th December 1911. Mr Stanley Baldwin, local MP and later Prime Minister of Britain, was in attendance. Constructed of corrugated iron, with a red brick plinth and boarded interior, the hall was built by Messrs Alexander and Duncan of Leominster, under the supervision of Mr Thomas. It was built to the designs and plans of Mr Samson Yarnold of Hollins' Colliery, who was one of the main driving forces behind its conception (Farmer 2000, 173–175). Although the cost of the hall itself, over £400, was funded by public subscription, it became, by law, the property of the landlord, Mr Arthur Jones of Abberley Hall. In 1978, the estate agreed to sell the hall back to the local community, at a cost of £1,250. By way of celebration the villagers re-enacted the original opening ceremony, with the local drama group and school performing a pageant 'Five Thousand Bricks', telling the history of the hall (Farmer 2000, 173).



Pensax Parish Hall.

Re-purposing existing buildings as Village Halls

Rather than fund the construction of a new build, some communities adapted an existing building for use as their Village Hall. This is the case for several Village Halls in the county of Worcestershire, a good example being Belbroughton Church Hall, which prior to its conversion to a hall in 1912–5 was a rectory barn. Timber-framed and dating to the 17th century, this Grade II listed building was in a dilapidated condition when, in 1911, the Rector, Revd Selwyn Cook, applied to the Patrons of the Living (St John's College, Oxford) for permission to demolish it. Despite permission being granted the barn was eventually restored and conserved, under the watchful eye of William Weir, a caseworker for the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) – an interesting case study in its own right of how the desire for historicist styles that had underpinned the design of many Village Halls also drove the conservation of local and national heritage.



Church Hall, Belbroughton

Like Belbroughton Church Hall, Childswickham Memorial Hall was originally a timber-framed and thatched barn, possibly associated with the adjacent 14th-century cruck-framed Atkinson House (NHLE ref. 1215973). Purchased from Mr. C Barnett, by the National Council of Social Service in 1927 (which also became a permanent trustee until 1971), the hall was primarily used for social activities and was modernised in 1965, at a cost of £4,500.⁵



Childswickham Memorial Hall

The late Victorian Village Hall at Bredon's Norton, with its steep gabled roof and large cross-mullioned windows, was originally the village school room,⁶ whereas Rous Lench Village Hall, again late Victorian in date, was originally built by Sir Charles Rouse-Boughton, of the Rous dynasty, as a public house, on the site of an earlier one. It was closed, as a public house, by another local landowner Dr William Kyle Westwood Chafy, following its sale, who enlarged and re-opened it, in 1882, as a parish room and workmen's club, known as Chafecote.⁷ The building and land was gifted to the community in 1947 by the then owner Mr Tom George Burn, the original by-laws, as published

⁵ 'Childswickham Memorial Hall' www.childswickham.org.uk/index.html (Accessed 2019).

⁶ Wychavon District Council. 'Bredons Norton Conservation Area'. <https://www.wychavon.gov.uk/planning/heritage-and-conservation/conservation-areas>. Adopted 2006 (Accessed 2019).

⁷ University of London. 'British History Online. Parishes: Rous Lench'. www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/worcs/vol3/pp497-500. (Accessed 2019).

on The Lenches Website stating that 'the hall is to be used for the purpose of physical and mental training and recreation, and social, moral and intellectual development and entertainments or otherwise as may be found expedient for the benefit of the inhabitants without distinction of sex or of political, religious or other opinions.'⁸



Bredon's Norton Village Hall



Rous Lench Village Hall

Suckley Village Hall was built with a dual purpose, as a Working Men's Club and Parish Room, between 1906 and 1908, and paid for by E H 'Squire' Hill of Broadwas Court. The hall was designed to incorporate a main hall, with parquet floor, committee room, kitchen and outside toilets, as well as an adjacent caretaker's house, with rooms for the village nurse. The hall, all its contents and money for its upkeep, as well as for wages, was bequeathed to the community by Squire Hill upon his death. Members had to be over 17 years of age and were expected to pay an entrance fee of 6^d, with 1^d to be paid in advance every Monday. Run by a committee there were strict rules regarding alcohol consumption – members were allowed no more than one bottle of beer an evening – fighting, gambling and swearing (Davies 2006, 61–63).

⁸ 'The Lenches and Nearby Villages'. www.thelenches.org.uk/ (Accessed 2019).



Suckley Village Hall

A late example of adaptation is Wolverley Church Hall, originally the sanatorium for Seabright Public School. Taken over by the church after its closure in 1971, it is believed to date to the early 20th century. Built of corrugated iron, the main room is lined with painted boarding.



Wolverley Church Hall

Celebration, Commemoration and Democratisation

Buildings and landscapes have long been designed as expressions of individual or collective celebration, commemoration or grief. Kemerton Village or 'Victoria' Hall, for example, was built as a permanent memorial to Queen Victoria. Land was given by resident landlords, the Hopton family (previously the Parsons)⁹ and after several years of local fundraising the hall opened in 1903.¹⁰

⁹ University of London. 'British History Online. Parishes: Kemerton. www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/glos/vol8/pp209-220 (Accessed 2019).

¹⁰ D & D Manns. 'Kemerton Village Hall' <http://kemerton.org.uk/index.php> (Accessed 2019).



Kemerton Village Hall

During the inter-war years the number of Village Halls in England increased substantially, as highlighted by the higher percentage of halls of this date which are recorded in both the 2014 National Survey of Village Halls and the Worcestershire HER. Although outwardly built as permanent symbols of collective grief and sacrifice and financed by local benefactors and a wide range of trusts and organisations,¹¹ the impetus towards the building of Memorial Halls appears to have originated with ordinary villagers rather than the landed gentry (Burchardt 1999, 208). Memorial Halls and Village Halls offered ‘common, and equal, ground’ (as stated by Lawrence Weaver, the agricultural journalist and promoter of Village Halls and the ‘vernacular aesthetic’, quoted in Grieves 1999, 173) for all members of the community – particularly women and children – to take part in a wide range of activities, from political meetings to music, theatre and dance. The sale of land and assets by the landed gentry, necessitated, amongst other things by loss of heirs, crippling death duties and declining rent rolls, also stimulated the sale or transfer of pre-war Village Halls to trustees including village trusts and Rural Community Councils or for private enterprise.

Upon its formation, the rural department of the National Council for Social Service (NCSS) – now the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) – and the Rural Community Councils also actively supported the construction of new Village Halls, or the adaptation of existing buildings into Village Halls, managed by voluntary management committees representative of the communities within which they served. A Village Hall Loans Fund, initially limited to those villages situated in counties with Rural Community Councils but then extended to those without, was introduced in 1926; from 1930 grants provided by the Carnegie United Kingdom Trustees were being offered for the construction of new halls (Burchardt 1999, 200) that would harmonise with the existing vernacular through their use of materials and design (Hunns and Hunns unpublished, 16). A condition of funding was that land should be freehold, so many villages approached local land owners who often donated land, albeit often on the edge of settlement rather than at its centre. National guidance, including a Model Trust Deed modelled on those developed for Methodist chapels, was also introduced by the NCSS to support planning and management (Hunns and Hunns unpublished, 15).

¹¹ For example, the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust; National Federation of Women's Institutes; Young Men's Christian Association; Royal British Legion; Workers Educational Association and Village Clubs Association.

Village Halls dating to the inter-war period are highly diverse in their character, size and use of materials. Generally simplistic in their design, and without frivolous ornament, many were built in a vernacular style, using local building materials, while others continued to be constructed from pre-fabricated materials; some smaller settlements, with limited funds for new builds, repurposed ex-army huts. Increasingly, halls were designed with adjacent 'communal' green space, for recreation, sporting activities and leisure.

Wichenford Memorial Hall was founded in 1921 in memory of the men who gave their lives in the Great War. Land was donated by the Hon. Mrs Blanche Britten, widow of Rear Admiral Richard Britten, and her son Charles, who later became Brigadier Britten. Funds were raised through public subscription (Wichenford Local Heritage Group 2000, 62).



Wichenford Memorial Hall

Far Forest Village Hall was founded in 1932. Plans for the erection of a Village Hall can be dated back to 1928, when six members of the local Working Men's Club were elected to form the Village Hall Building Committee; membership of the committee eventually extended to all of its associates on the consideration that one section of the hall was to be made available for a Men's Club. Land for the project was provided by Mr A K Betts and in 1930 the Village Hall Committee amalgamated with the Far Forest and District Flower Show Committee for their joint benefit. The hall was constructed by G Thomas & Sons, Kidderminster, at a cost of £1,049 (Rock 2000, 47).



Far Forest Village Hall

Requisition during National Emergency

During WWI and WWII Village Halls, like many other public and private buildings, were crucial to the war effort and were requisitioned for a wide range of uses, including, among other things, as first aid points, first aid posts, temporary accommodation, schools, convalescence hospitals and home guard headquarters. Tardebigge Village Hall, for example was requisitioned in 1914 for use as a VAD (Voluntary Aid Detachment) Red Cross hospital for the treatment and care of up to 40 wounded soldiers (White 2011, 92), while, during the Second World War, Heightington Village Hall was used as a school for evacuees and Shrawley Village Hall as temporary accommodation for local residents affected by bombing.

It [a bomb] landed by the Council houses on Worcester Road on the side nearest to Holt. The inrush of air which filled the vacuum left by the explosion, took the tiles off the roofs on the side nearest Worcester. The local postman Len Dixon, lived there, and he and the other occupants had to stay in the Village Hall (Memories of Mr and Mrs Fred Harris and Bill Walker).¹²



Shrawley Village Hall

Overbury Village Hall, like Overbury Court and other estate properties belonging to the Holland-Martin family, was requisitioned for use by the Bank of England from 1940 until 1942. Leased from 1st July 1940 at £50 p.a. plus rates, the hall was used as a typing school for women housed at Northwood. An 'Unpublished History of the Bank of England (1939–45)' records that £1,553 was spent on central heating and that, at one point, in January 1941, 30 women were based at the hall.¹³

¹² Memories of the war http://www.shrawley.org.uk/uploads/2/3/1/1/23114340/war_mems_2.pdf (Accessed 2020).

¹³ Bank of England. 'The Bank of England 1939-45 (Unpublished War History). www.bankofengland.co.uk/archive/bank-of-england-1939-45-ww2. 2019. Bank of England (Accessed 2019).



Overbury Village Hall

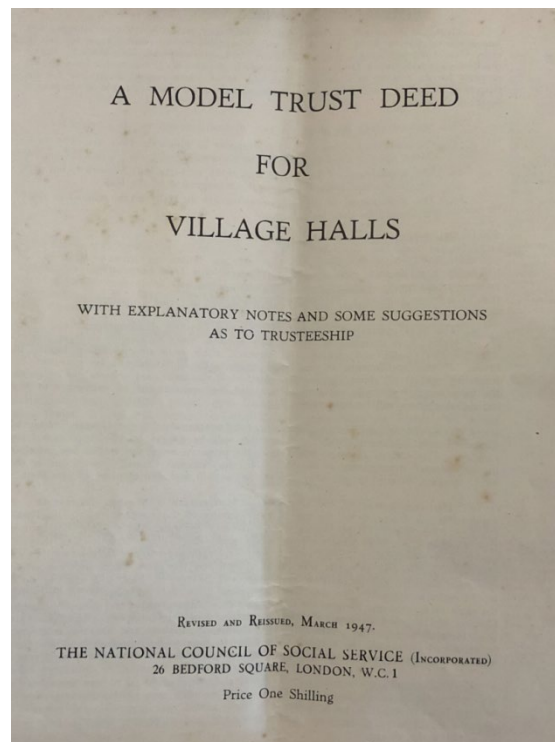
Abberley Lives¹⁴ records that the earliest Village Hall in Abberley was a tin hut, erected in 1923 at a cost of £130. The building was largely funded by the WI and the cricket club with Lord and Lady Brooke, who owned the Elms Hotel, also donating money, bricks and cement (for the hall's foundations). The cricket club also provided much of the voluntary labour needed for its construction. The committee, chaired by Sir Richard Brooke, first met in June 1923; to draw up a set of rules for the halls letting, which included a ban of political meetings, as well as intoxicating drink. The 'Hut' was replaced in 1937, with a new brick build, following ongoing issues with its maintenance, as well as the lease of the land upon which it stood. Funded from public subscription St George's Hall had a sprung floor for dancing which unfortunately experienced extensive water damage during WWII, when the hall was requisitioned for munitions production. By the late 1980s talk of a replacement hall was again mooted and, with the council providing some funding for newly built halls, the decision was taken to build a more modern facility. The current Village Hall was constructed in 1994 through a combination of grants and funds raised through the sale of the St George's Hall land.

Village Halls and Community Halls post-WWII

After World War II, guidance from the NCSS emphasised sustainable design, strength and stability and encouraged communities to better assess and make provision for their own individual needs – thus supporting the desire for self-determination that had emerged as a powerful theme in the inter-war period. The promotion of enhanced facilities and services to support the needs of a local community, including their educational and physical health and well-being, supported increased provision of recreation grounds or playing fields, kitchens, local libraries, health clinics including ante-natal classes, playgroups and car parks. With building materials, labour and funds – including reliable grants – in short supply, many villages held back on construction or continued to make use of non-traditional materials and methods. Many also looked to volunteers to support new builds; the two World Wars having provided a stimulus for voluntarism, based on the principal of mutual aid and co-operation. The reform of state education, following the 1944 Education Act, also stimulated the development of

¹⁴ Abberley Lives: Our Village Community Heritage Projects. abberleylives.wordpress.com/2013/04/08/where-we-used-to-meet-the-hut-1923-1937/ (Accessed 2019).

new schools, outmoded Victorian schools often undergoing adaptation for use as Village Halls. Community Centres and communal green space, designed to engender a stronger sense of community identity and responsibility, were also an integral part of developing post-war semi-urban and urban housing estates and New Towns.



The revised and re-issued Model Trust Deed for Village Halls, dated March 1947 by the National Council of Social Service (850: BA10801/4 (ii) 3)

The Village Hall in Hanley Broadheath, near Tenbury Wells, is believed to date to 1956 and was reputedly built over 5–6 years by village volunteers. Built of precast reinforced concrete, with red painted doors and metal windows, the hall appears to retain its original notice above the door, which states that the hall was ‘Licensed in pursuance of the Public Health Act 1936 for Music, Singing and Dancing’.



Village Hall in Hanley Broadheath

In 1950, a fund was started by villagers in Bentley, to support the development of a Village Hall. Shortly after however, the village school, upon its closure, was donated ('sold' for a legal token of £1) by Lt Col Gray-Cheape of Bentley Manor, with the resolution that it should be maintained and managed as a Village Hall. Funds already raised were used to extend and modernise the building which was officially opened by its donor on 3rd November 1962 (The Revd A White 2011, 49).



Bentley Village Hall



Clows Top Victory Hall



Oakenshaw Community Centre

Repair or re-build

By the 1960s and 1970s the expense of maintaining and heating many older halls was becoming increasingly untenable, particularly for those halls under the trusteeship of individuals or groups of individuals, rather than local councils. For example, in the 1960s, the Trustees of Lower Broadheath Village Hall agreed that in order to make best use of the hall it should be offered to the Parish Council as a charity, making it eligible for certain Local Authority grants.

Despite a brief surge in the expansion and refurbishment of existing halls in time to celebrate the Silver Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II in 1977, falling grant aid in the later 1970s and 1980s impeded the development or re-development of many buildings. By the 1990s communities were increasingly looking to provide more up-to-date facilities to meet the needs of expanding rural populations and legislative standards. Many older halls were again adapted and extended; others were demolished and replaced with new builds. In the run-up to the new Millennium, many communities benefited from funding from the BIG Lottery's 21st-century *Halls for England* Project and were able to replace older buildings with new, technologically smarter halls with an emphasis on environmental sustainability and multi-functionality. At present many communities, particularly those living in small and/or isolated rural settlements, continue to struggle to maintain, run and insure older halls. A declining and ageing population across rural landscapes, as well as an ageing workforce, is also having a detrimental impact on the availability of volunteers willing to take on the challenge of managing and maintaining these community assets. As of the Autumn 2018 budget, to mark the centenary of the Armistice, the Government announced further grant funding to support improvement projects for Village Halls. Managed by ACRE on behalf of Defra, grant funding aims to help fund the updating and refurbishment of Village Halls so that they are 'fit for purpose' for the 21st century.

Cofton Hackett Village Hall opened in 1971 following fundraising over the course of two years by residents. The land upon which it stands was gifted to the Parish Council by a local resident.¹⁵



Cofton Hackett Village Hall

¹⁵ 'Welcome to Cofton Hackett Village Hall' <http://www.ch-villagehall.org/> (Accessed 2019).

The original Heightington Village Hall was an ex-Army Hut, with corrugated tin roof and three large anterooms. Officially opened in 1923 by Oliver Baldwin, son of local MP and the then Chancellor of the Exchequer Stanley Baldwin, the building was paid for by 92 subscribers who between them donated £242. Land was provided by George Frederick Pratt of Chapel Farm.

There are no written records which tell us where the Army Hut originated, but older residents of our hamlet remember that it was transported by lorry from 'somewhere on the Ombersley side of Worcester' where it had housed army personnel during the First World War.¹⁶

Despite more limited amenities than many halls of the period, Heightington Village Hall remained in active use for 68 years, with the villagers finding innovative ways to 'make do' including by initially 'supplying electricity by a generator worked by an old Fordson tractor specially adapted by a local farmer'. The hall was eventually replaced in 1991 with a more 'permanent' brick structure, funded by a combination of charitable and County Council grants, individual donations and local fundraising.¹⁷



Heightington Village Hall

The late 20th-century Village Hall in Astley and Dunley replaced an earlier wooden hall, built in approximately 1919. Funding for the new hall was secured through a loan, taken out with the Public Works Loan Board, a grant from the Sports Council and sale of the land upon which the earlier hall stood.

¹⁶ 'Heightington Village Hall'. <https://www.heightingtonvillagehall.co.uk/about-1> WiX. (Accessed 2019).

¹⁷ 'Heightington Village Hall'. <https://www.heightingtonvillagehall.co.uk/about-1> WiX. (Accessed 2019).



Astley and Dunley Village Hall

Cookley's 21st-century Village Hall replaced an earlier and supposed temporary hall, erected in 1931. Construction of the new hall was supported by Heritage Lottery funding, proceeds from the sale of the old Parish Hall and other grants and fund-raising. L-shaped in plan, the hall incorporates a large sport and social club, function rooms and a multi-use main hall with a fixed performance stage area, as well as a playing field and bowls green. With sustainability an important factor in its design, this timber-framed hall incorporates modern insulation for floor, walls, windows and roof and a ground source heat pump for heating.



Cookley Village Hall

Conclusion

The history of a community and its Village Hall are inextricably entwined. They are an integral part of how landscapes and settlements experienced intense change over the 20th century, in much the same way that the building of Methodist and other chapels expressed new senses of community from the late 18th century (Lake, Herring and Berry 2011). As Jeremy Burchardt has stated, Village Halls were 'agents of both preserving and of modernising the identity of the village community' (Burchardt 1999, 213). As vital community assets, Village Halls and their derivatives are cultural memories, symbolic of how a local area has developed and reflecting the collective mood and aspirations of a community in times of war and peace, affluence and austerity. Despite changing demographics in rural areas, and

the decline of many other rural services, including the village shop and post office, the majority of Village Halls, and their associated communal green spaces, continue to function as multi-functional and highly valued communal spaces. They play a key role in the provision of local amenities, complementing the role of the public house and the facilities offered by churches and chapels and their increased emphasis on adapting space for communal use.

Generally modest in both scale and design, although diverse in their use of materials and architectural detailing, many Village Halls have undergone adaptation and extension to meet both changing legislative requirements and the growing needs and expectations of the communities which they serve. Others have been demolished, without record, or left vulnerable to neglect and deterioration, as new, larger and more multi-functional and environmentally sustainable halls have been developed.

With a multitude of 'drivers for change' undesigned Village Halls will continue to be under pressure from adaptation and/or re-development and it is therefore vital that there is wider recognition, both by professionals and communities, of the evidential and historic value, beyond the communal, of these modest, yet locally significant and well-loved buildings, as well as of the communal 'green' landscapes within which they are a significant component.

While recognition of Village Halls in Historic Environment Records and Local Lists is limited, many undesigned halls are documented as 'assets' of local significance in adopted and emerging Neighbourhood Plans. Many communities recognise, however, that in order to meet the current needs and expectations of expanding settlements there may be a need to relocate halls, in support of wider local strategies to secure future active, healthy and integrated communities.

While it is essential that communities have a significant say in the preservation, adaptation or re-development of their Village Hall there remains a need for both local communities and planning authorities to give greater consideration to these modest, yet remarkable, local heritage assets. It is important to stress that this must be a 'community-led' and not a purely 'conservation-led' approach, applying a rounded understanding of how Village Halls have developed in order to inform local initiatives for both recording and adaptation. Such an approach can also be informed by, and include collaboration with, academics such as Jeremy Burchardt of the University of Reading who have developed research agendas that would benefit from local case studies (see Burchardt 1999, 206–212).

A significant first step would be ensuring that the HER contains a database of Village Halls, and one that is capable also of interrogation in relationship to entries on churches, chapels, Reading Rooms, Mission Halls and other types of community buildings. It was noted in the Terre de Rocher report how, at a national level, there are inconsistencies in the way that data has been entered for Village Halls and other community buildings, making it difficult to disentangle one from the other. The fact that only around 6% of Village Halls are listed buildings¹⁸ makes it all the more important that this

¹⁸ Many of these have been listed as examples of older buildings such as barns, and some as repurposed Reading Rooms and Parish Rooms whose architectural elaboration expresses the benevolence of their donors. More are of course located in Conservation Areas, but by the very nature of rural settlement patterns, many will not be located in villages where designations are concentrated.

significant resource is mapped and that collaborative work with local communities is piloted and developed, taking advantage of web-based developments such as the British Newspaper Archive.

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Photographs

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