

FROM CHAPEL TO MEMORIAL HALL AND BEYOND

Barby Local History Group

2024



NON-CONFORMITY IN BARBY

The county of Northamptonshire has had strong Non-Conformist or Puritan leanings since the reign of Elizabeth I (1558-1603).

The story in Barby began at the time of the Civil War and the Commonwealth under Oliver Cromwell, when Parliamentary soldiers marching between Dunchurch and Long Buckby seized the then Rector, William Thompson, who had Royalist leanings, and carried him off with them. He was replaced in 1649 by Richard Thorp(e) (Rector 1649-1662) who was more in sympathy with the Puritans. After the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660, the Act of Uniformity was passed in 1662, whereby local clergy had to swear an oath of allegiance to the newly restored monarch Charles II and the Church of England. This did not sit comfortably with those clergymen who had Non-Conformist leanings such as Thorp, who was dismissed from his living as he would not comply with the Act. The same fate also befell Mr Worth, Vicar of Kilsby, and Mr Stephen Fowler, Rector of Crick, so there was already a strong following locally away from the established Church of England.

These three Dissenters (as they were first called) were instrumental in generating Non-Conformist groups in the area. Meetings were first held in people's houses; in fact Richard Thorp was allowed after his ejection to preach in his own house every Thursday "without molestation". It was not until the accession of William and Mary in 1689 that the Act of Toleration was passed which gave Dissenters freedom of worship, and permission to build churches or chapels, which had to be registered in the Quarter Sessions records. Meeting House licences were later granted in Barby to Andrew Wood in 1748, Josiah Denny in 1749 and William Simmonds in 1763.

In Kilsby, house groups developed into an Independent Church and the present building, now functioning as a United Reformed Church, was opened in 1763. It is evident from the membership rolls that quite a few families from Barby attended Kilsby Chapel over the years.¹

CONGREGATIONAL CHAPEL, BARBY

The plain brick building on The Green started life as an Independent or Congregational Chapel. It was built in the late 1840s by members of Kilsby Independent Chapel, many of whom lived in Barby. It cost £200 to build, a sum which was cleared by subscription within twelve months, although a further £13 was needed within a year to repair the roof!

¹ The information provided here concerning local Non-Conformism and the founding of the chapels in Kilsby and Barby was researched by Jim Kilby (1937-2011), a former member of Barby Local History Group, using the deeds of Kilsby Chapel.



The Chapel c 1920 on extreme right with Chapel Row beside it, leading down to Rectory Lane (BLHG P02/092)

The 1851 Ecclesiastical Census records that it was “a separate and entire building used exclusively for worship, with room for 120 standing”. The average morning attendance was 100. The return was signed by the Minister at Kilsby, James Rhys Jones.

A later Minister was Rev Horatio Ault who died in 1868, and whose tombstone is to be found in front of Kilsby Chapel. Throughout its history, Barby Chapel was serviced from Kilsby. In the Village Directory of 1895, published in *The Rugby Gazette Almanac*, it was stated that services were held at 2.30 pm and 6.00 pm on alternate Sundays. The Chapel Keeper at the time was John Vincent, a grocer who lived in the house to the rear of the Chapel (now No 4 The Green).

Rev Ault was succeeded by Rev William Edwards whose pastorate extended until 1900, and who seems to have had the most impact on Barby Chapel. For many years a row of cottages beside the chapel was called Chapel Row; they can be seen in the photograph above; they were demolished in the late 1940s and replaced by a small factory building, which in turn was replaced by two houses in 2021.

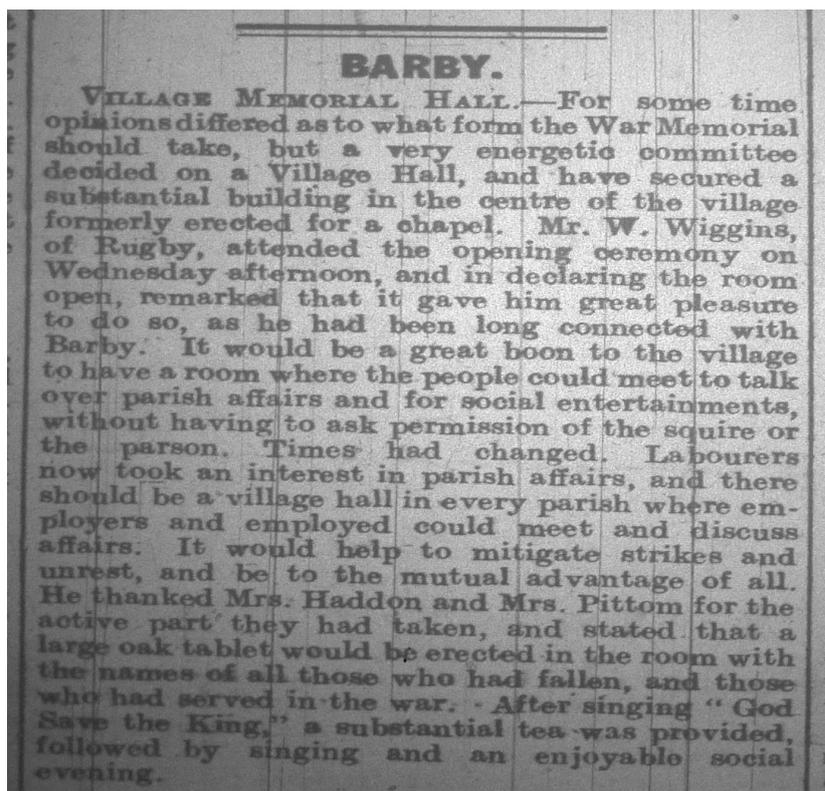
THE MEMORIAL HALL

The Chapel became the parish Memorial Hall, as a plaque on the front declares.



A Conveyance of 7 February 1920 survives from the transfer of the Chapel to the Trustees of the Memorial Hall. It was signed, as Vendors, by the survivors of the Chapel Trustees appointed in 1904, and states there had been no services there since June 1915, and that Joseph Foster, one of the signatories, formerly of Barby now of Hillmorton, was the only subscriber then living as far as was known.

The Rugby Advertiser gives an account of the opening of the new hall in February 1920.



[Transcription

Barby – Village Memorial Hall

For some time opinions differed as to what form the War Memorial should take, but a very energetic committee decided on a Village Hall, and have secured a substantial building in the centre of the village, formerly erected for a chapel. Mr W Wiggins of Rugby attended the opening ceremony on Wednesday afternoon, and in declaring the room open, remarked that it gave him great pleasure to do so, as he had been long connected with Barby. It would be a great boon to the village to have a room where people could meet to talk over parish affairs and for social entertainments without having to ask permission of the squire or parson. Times had changed. Labourers now took an interest in parish affairs, and there should be a village hall in every parish where employers and employed could meet and discuss affairs. It would help to mitigate strikes and unrest, and to be to the mutual advantage of all. He thanked Mrs Haddon and Mrs Pittom for the active part they had taken, and stated that a large oak tablet would be erected in the room with the names of all those who had fallen, and those who had served in the war. After singing "God Save the King" a substantial tea was provided, followed by singing and an enjoyable social evening.]

It is known that Mrs Pittom (Hylde, wife of Thomas and mother of Beth, Audrey and Gill) was a member of the Kilsby Chapel and must have been instrumental in securing the old Barby chapel as a hall.

It tended to be used for meetings and dances instead of the schoolroom, which was under the control of the Rector. The remarks by Mr Wiggins at the opening show how attitudes had changed from before the war. Sadly the oak tablet and its list of combatants does not appear to have survived, if it was ever made. Reports of several local political meetings and other gatherings appear in the newspaper over the next couple of decades.

It is uncertain when it ceased even this function as a hall, although an old resident said that the floor became unsafe. It was used for many years after the Second World War as a store for timber and other building materials by Bill Cockerill, a local builder. Following his death it remained empty and uncared for as can be seen in the picture overleaf, taken in 1999 (BLHG P04/31B).²

² This picture was taken as part of the History Group's Millennium photo project when members recorded places, buildings and quirky things to be found at that time in Barby village.



The Chapel was bought by an architect in 2005. While remaining true to the Chapel's original external appearance, the crumbling brickwork was replaced after the rear wall collapsed while new footings were being put in. An extension was built to the side on part of the adjacent factory site which the new owner acquired.



The Old Chapel as a private dwelling in 2007 (BLHG P13/117)

The property was sold to its present owners in 2015, and the interior of the main building was completed by them. They named the building *Poppy Hall* in recognition of its previous use as a Memorial Hall.

The interior of the original building has been skilfully modernised while still keeping its character. There is a large kitchen/diner on the ground floor with access to the new part of the house which has a living room, bedrooms and a recreation area. An entrance hall reaches the full height of the house, and a staircase gives access to the bedrooms and amenities on the second floor. There are also two additional bedrooms in the roof space lit by velux windows, and a seating area on the landing which, through the floor to ceiling windows, overlooks the view down Rectory Lane and beyond to open country. Behind the property is an enclosed sheltered patio area with walls on all sides and pots of flowers and small trees.

The building in its prominent position in the centre of the village is now an asset instead of an eyesore.



Remembrance Sunday 2018, commemorating the Centenary of the signing of the 1918 Armistice.

(BLHG 2018.2/226)