

THE FIRST VILLAGE HALL



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On 27 February 1950, Barby Parish Council held a Special Meeting to discuss the possibility of purchasing the Women's Land Army hostel in Ware Road, to be used as a Village Hall. The meeting was attended by eight parish councillors and more than ninety members of the general public.¹

The hostel is now remembered as being a prisoner-of-war (POW) camp. It did indeed house members of the Land Army after World War II, but for most of its existence it had housed prisoners of war (POWs), firstly Italian, then German. It had been erected in 1941 at a cost of £5000. The last POW left in 1948.



The POW Hostel

The Parish Council was now being given the opportunity to purchase the site for £1000, to include buildings, land and fittings. As recently as March 1948, the Annual Parish Meeting had voted by thirty votes to three that 'The site known as the Hop Yard, on which it is proposed to build two Council Houses, be reserved as a site for a Village Hall' and had informed Daventry Rural District Council of this resolution. By February 1950, there was £51 in a Village Hall fund.

At the meeting on 27 February, it was decided unanimously to apply to purchase the hostel. A fifty percent grant from the Ministry of Education was said to be available, with the possibility of another £100 towards the cost of repairs; other repair work would be carried out by volunteers. A collection of £4 2s 3d was made towards the fund. In addition, George Elkington, on behalf of the British Legion, made a donation of £10 and offered to loan £100.

Clearly, there had been a perceived need for a dedicated village hall, probably since the end of the War. During the War, the village school had been used for meetings and social events,

¹ The village population at the 1951 national census was 536.

perhaps because the Memorial Hall, previously used for such events, had degenerated even more than the school building. The school was the venue for parish council meetings for instance, but often social events created poor relations with the headmaster.

At the February 1950 meeting a Village Hall Committee was appointed, consisting of: Harry Burdett, William Weston, George Elkington and Mrs Barlow.

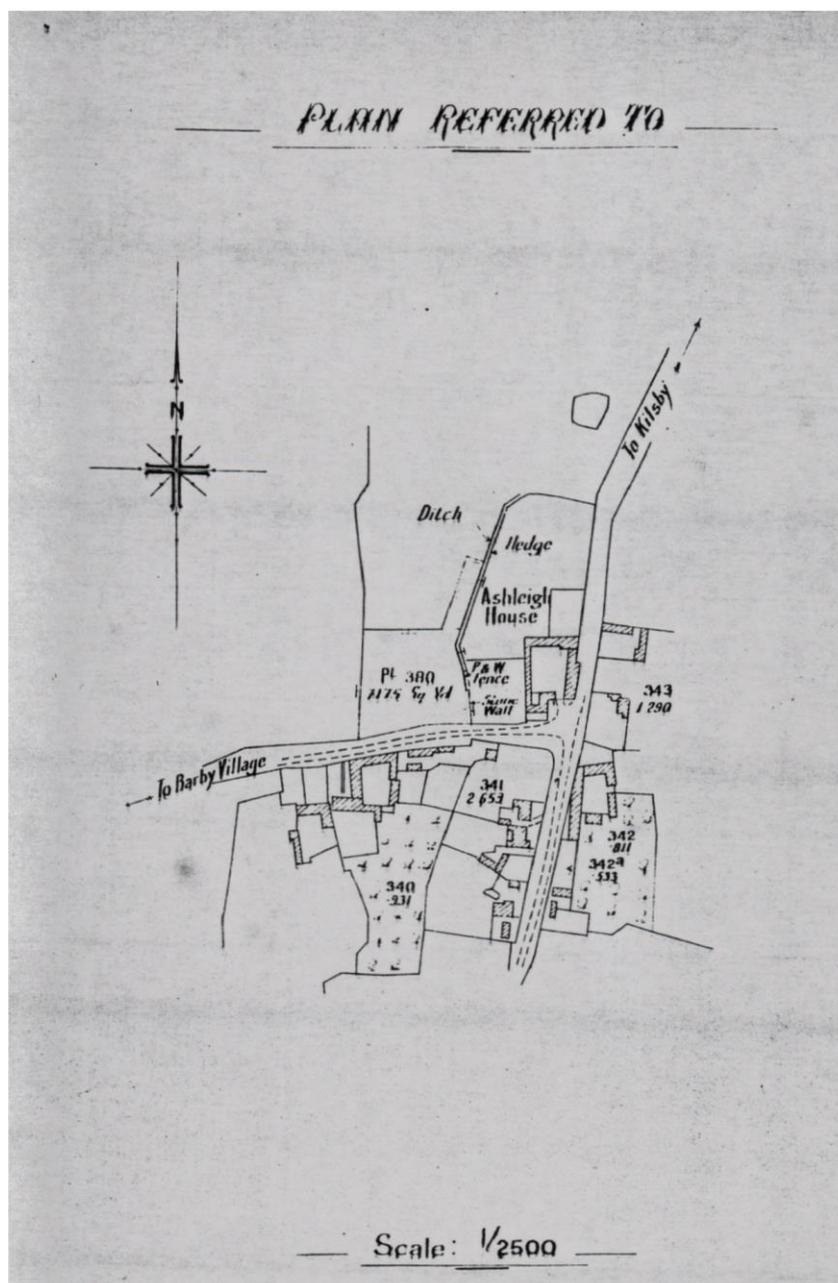
Planning permission to use the site as a village hall was granted on 30 May 1950; the Parish Council was granted trust corporation status with respect to the Village Hall Charitable Trust on 13 March 1951; and the old hostel was duly purchased by the Parish Council from the Ministry of Works on 11 January 1952. The purchase was made using voluntary donations amounting to £650 together with a grant of £350 from the Board of Education. The signatories on behalf of the Council were Sidney Thomas Pittom and Robert Nichols (two local landowners); the witness was D E Smith of Ivy House Farm, Clerk to the Parish Council.

The property hereby conveyed ... shall be held upon trust for the purposes of physical and mental training and recreation and social moral and intellectual development through the medium of reading and recreation rooms library lectures classes recreations and entertainments or otherwise as may be found expedient for the benefit of the inhabitants of the Parish of Barby in the County of Northampton and its immediate vicinity without distinction of sex or of political religious or other opinions subject to the provisions of these presents.

Sidney Pittom, as a representative of the School Managers, was specified as one of the thirteen hall users to be represented on the management committee; a further four committee members were to be co-opted as general village representatives; the committee was to hold an Annual General Meeting in April and the quorum was set at one third of the total number of members.

Representatives:

<i>Leonard Goodman, Star Cottage, Barby</i>	<i>Committee of Barby Pig Club</i>
<i>William Flavell, 3 Council Houses, Barby</i>	<i>Barby Allotment Association</i>
<i>Joyce Herbert (Miss), Grove Farm, Barby</i>	<i>Barby Tennis Club</i>
<i>John Weston, 3 Shakespeare Terrace, Barby</i>	<i>Barby Dramatic Society</i>
<i>Florence Byerley (Miss), Kilsby Road, Barby</i>	<i>Barby Choral Society</i>
<i>Robert Smith (Junior), Ivy House Farm, Barby</i>	<i>British Legion</i>
<i>Sidney Thomas Pittom, Northfield House, Barby</i>	<i>School Managers</i>
<i>John W F Boughey, The Rectory, Barby</i>	<i>Parochial Church Council</i>
<i>Albert Edward Victor Herbert, Holme Farm, Barby</i>	<i>Parish Council</i>
<i>Mrs Byerley, Kilsby Road, Barby</i>	<i>Women's Institute</i>
<i>Noel Davis (Junior), Council Houses, Barby</i>	<i>Football Club</i>
<i>Margaret Wagstaff (Miss), Council Houses, Barby</i>	<i>St John's Ambulance Brigade</i>
<i>Frederick Burdett, The Derry, Barby</i>	<i>Barby Town Land Charity</i>



The purchased plot amounted to 7175 square yards, being enclosure 380 on the Ordnance Survey map of 1925. Facilities comprised two halls which included accommodation for a caretaker, who used some of the land for a garden. Unfortunately, the land adjoined a field belonging to Mr Jennings of Ashleigh House, whose cattle tended to trespass on the vegetable garden. Although the committee were prepared to carry out many repairs and alterations, they drew the line at fencing out Mr Jennings' cattle. Some work was executed by hall users: the Barby Players, for example, rebuilt the stage which they partly funded. After a Stockton man was used to carry out decoration, there were protests and subsequent work was offered first to local businesses.²

² At a time when married women were still referred to by their husbands' names, the men did the building work while the women made the curtains. There was a separate Women's section of the Flower Show.

Fundraising was an important part of the Committee's work. During the 1950s, whist drives were popular; there were dances with live bands about once a month; regular mid-week 'hops' with a radiogram; a tote; and tombola evenings (bingo). The annual Gala Day was well patronised and Wakes were celebrated with a Wakes Queen contest. In 1960, the British Legion were still owed £50 of their loan and the first Christmas Fayre was held, with plays performed by the village schoolchildren under the direction of Mrs Brown, the headmistress of the village school, and raising more than £49. Regular income included grants from the Parish Council for upkeep of the buildings.

The Committee also made donations, regularly to fund the British Legion's Old People's Christmas Parcels, and, on one occasion, contributed five guineas to the cost of sending a 'deserving person' on a County Council-subsidised holiday.

In 1961 it was suggested that tennis courts be built on the Hall site and the following year enquiries were made about the possibility of obtaining grants towards the estimated cost of several hundred pounds. Also in 1962, there was a proposal that a new village hall might be built, either on the existing site or on the Playing Field; the value of the existing site was estimated at £2650, based on a road frontage of 220 feet.³ Then in 1964, the possibility of moving the playing fields to the village hall site was suggested; Mr Jennings was approached to see if he was amenable to selling his adjoining land for this purpose. Inquiries were made about pre-cast concrete buildings. By this time, the Committee was spending a lot of time discussing the heating and maintenance of the buildings, including the electrical system.

Meanwhile, the Hall gained new users: a Youth Club in 1963, a weekly surgery for Dr Daniels in 1965 and Young Wives the same year.

The Committee for 1965-66 included:

Mr J[im] Cox as Chairman [previously Treasurer], Mr M Raven as Treasurer, Mr R [Bob] Batt as Secretary, Mrs B Henson, Mrs E[thel] Prestidge {representing the Whist Club}, Mrs [Fay] Cox (Happy Circle), Mrs P Maynard, Mrs H [Beattie] Henson (WI), Rev Powell (PCC) and Mr [Tony] Morgan (Barby Players).

Following Jim Cox's resignation in September 1967, first Mrs David, then Mr Noble, then Mr [Alan] Mitchell filled the role of Chairman, until Gordon Brander took over in April 1969.

At the end of 1965, the Committee received a valuation for their property: £2500, but £7000 if it were to be sold for building. The problem of sports facilities was now in the hands of the Parish Council, which began a search for 4 acres of land suitable for a sports field and was generally keeping an eye open for land for a new village hall. Recognising that a new hall was not imminent, the Village Hall committee continued to maintain the old building and renew the heating system. In 1968, they installed new swings in the hall grounds.

³ The Playing Field was situated where the tennis courts stand today (2021), on land belonging to the Townlands Charity.



Children playing on the new swings

In April 1968, the Committee appointed Mr Brander and Mr Kilby to form a Building Sub-Committee. In May they reported that between £250 and £450 was needed to repair the fabric of the existing buildings. An estimate of £3000 for a new hall, partly funded by selling off two plots of land at £1000 each, had been mooted. However, in February 1969, after consultation with hall users about their needs, plans were drawn up for a hall which would cost between £12000 and £15000. The idea of purchasing a pre-cast building was abandoned in favour of a brick construction with a ceiling high enough to accommodate a badminton court and a stage at least 15 feet deep.

Meanwhile, in September 1967, a new village school had opened on the edge of the village in Daventry Road. This left the old school building in the centre of the village empty and the idea of using this site for a village hall emerged. Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) was approached about their plans for the building; Rev Powell stated that, since it had been built on Church land, it now belonged to the Church. NCC assured the Committee that if and when the school became available for sale, the Committee would be offered the chance to buy it. Rev Powell withdrew his objections and, finally, in 1970, the County Council was able to procure the building and sell it to the Committee for the sum of £1200.

The Committee responsible for pursuing the purchase and conversion of the old school into a village hall consisted of:

Gordon Brander (Chairman), Marion Haywood (Secretary), Peter Woolley (Treasurer), Jim Cox and Ken Formby.

In May 1969, G G Batchelor & Son Ltd (builders) had estimated the cost of conversion of the school to be £12500. Messrs Press & Wright (architects & surveyors) estimated the value of the existing village hall site, with outline planning permission for residential development, to be £10000. The Parish Council was asked to apply for planning permission, but there was an

embargo on planning permission in Barby (and Kilsby) until a new sewage scheme had been installed, possibly in 1970. By April 1971, all necessary planning permissions were in place.

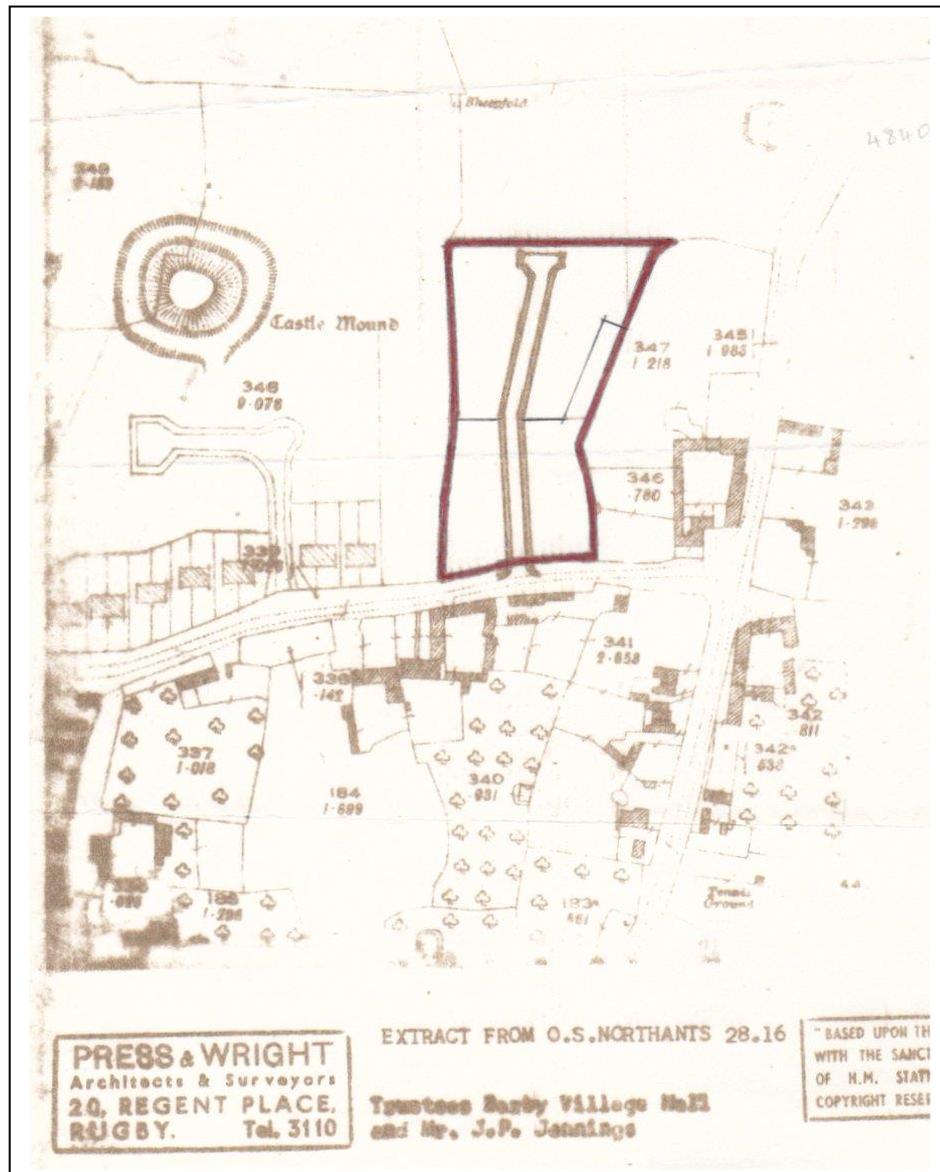
Negotiations with Press & Wright were protracted, as initial tenders were high, entailing a search for about £4000 in cuts to the original scheme, and later, there were many queries as the building work progressed. Eventually, a budget of £18232 was agreed with Messrs B & J M Hodgetts Ltd and building work commenced in January 1972, with the aim of completion in September of that year.

The Committee was very involved in the building of the hall, using their personal contacts to help speed up the work. Bricks specified by the architect were predicted to be unavailable for twelve months, so another source was found: a contractor who had already purchased bricks for a sewerage farm to be built for Coventry Corporation, but subsequently cancelled, agreed to sell his bricks (grey engineering bricks) at a reasonable rate. When the PCC objected to the planned ridge roof, steel girders were obtained to support a flat roof. The architect's planned softwood flooring was replaced by surplus hardwood from another project.

The formal opening of the new hall took place on 16 November 1972, with a *Barby Players* review the following day. The final bill was £20300, plus £1218 (6%) to Press & Wright; the final payment was made in April 1974.

Apart from the hall ceiling, which was funded by the Townlands Charity, the building of the hall was funded from the sale of the old village hall. The old hall site, with extra land belonging to Mr Jennings, had been sold on 8 December 1971 for £52000, a record-breaking amount at the time. The Village Hall Committee received £26000, which their treasurer, who worked in a bank, was able to invest at the best interest rates during the building period.

In 1972, the old POW buildings were dismantled by volunteers. Some of the material was used to build a pavilion at the new tennis court site and some was taken to the new sportsfield site on Longdown Lane to create a club house, which was not replaced until the 1990s.



Plan showing the land to be auctioned in 1971. The design for Ashleigh Close was subsequently altered.

SOURCES

Barby by Marion Haywood (Barby: the author, 1972)

Barby Parish Council Minutes (loaned by the Clerk to the Parish Council in 2015)

Barby School Log Books (copies held by Barby Local History Group)

Barby Village Hall Minutes (loaned by the 2015 Village Hall committee)

Interview with Gordon Brander by Hazel Parsons (2015)