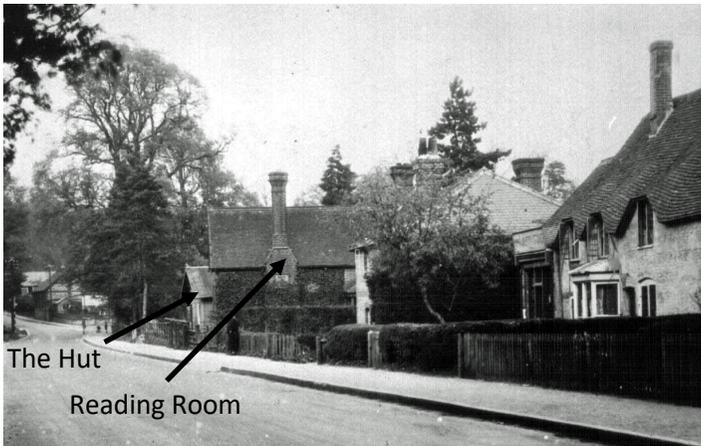


The Jubilee Hall

Nick Kearns

The Worthys Jubilee Hall was built in 1935 to commemorate the silver jubilee of King George V's coronation. Before then, the Reading Room (opposite the Cart and Horses pub) had been a meeting place since the 1880s, and an army hut had been acquired in 1919 and placed alongside the Reading Room close to the current junction with the A33.



The Parish Hut and Reading Room

The original PCC minutes record that the annual Parish and Vestry meetings were held in the Reading Room in 1918, the old schoolroom in Abbots Worthy in 1920 and, from 1921, in the Parish 'Hut' as it was affectionately known. By all accounts 'The Hut' was a bleak place, and its demise was brought about by the arrival of the Winchester bypass. The Kings Worthy Rector, Claude St Maur Williams, commented that the Hut 'must now be swept away to make room for the new road', and that while it had served its purpose wonderfully well for many years it had been 'a cheerless place at the best of times' where locals were treated to the 'refinement of discomfort.' (*Parish Magazine*, March 1935.) He was even more outspoken at the opening of the Jubilee Hall: in the old Hut he

had 'visions of leading parishioners well wrapped up in the nether part with rugs, but hands and feet frozen ... [and I do] not know how many cases of illness were brought on through the discomforts of the old Hut.'



The Parish Hut

Col and Mrs Edwards' gift

The Rector could only hope that a more substantial and comfortable building would soon be in place because there was no replacement plan. However, Col and Mrs J F Edwards had recently moved to Kings Worthy Court, and when approached they came to the rescue offering an 'extraordinarily generous' gift of land for a new building on the corner of Kings Worthy Court meadow, next to the Vulcan Ironworks and adjacent to London Road. It was estimated that this would save £100 off the cost of the new building, and £260 was received from the County Council in payment for land acquired for the bypass. A public meeting was held in the old schoolroom attended by a 'very large number of parishioners', and a building committee was elected amid an air of 'confidence and goodwill.' (*Parish Magazine*, April 1935.) Every parishioner was then sent a letter by that committee inviting them to place their names on a public subscription list for 'a generous amount' as their Jubilee thank-you offering, and this raised a further £350.

The new building

The total cost of the new building was to be £900, with the balance made up from selling the Reading Room and holding a fête the following summer. Designs were quickly produced and planning permission was granted in June 1935. The plans included two entrances, a kitchen, a stage, separate

ladies and gents toilets, a cesspool, electric lighting, and gas radiators for heating. Some items such as porches were omitted to save costs. The hall was 56 feet long and 24 feet wide with a reported seating capacity of 300, although this was clearly an over-optimistic estimate as today's limit is 120! It was situated on the boundary of the Kings Worthy and Headbourne Worthy parishes, considered important at a time when the parishes were in the process of moving closer together. Some well-known local names were involved with the building work. The foundation stone was donated by Messrs Vokes & Beck, and the main contract went to local builders Loader & Son, which no doubt contributed to the work being completed in seven months and helped with defraying some of the costs.

The opening of the hall by Lt Col The Lord Herbert Scott CMG DSO (of Shroner Wood House), on his birthday no less, was extensively reported in the *Hampshire Chronicle* of 7 December 1935. It was apparently numerously attended and a grand affair. The platform had been decorated with pot plants lent by Mrs Curry (of Kings Worthy House) and the Countess of Northbrook and arranged by their gardeners. The Rev Williams offered a hearty welcome to all present and stated that the day was an epoch-making one in the history of the two parishes. It was an event for which the parish had been waiting 600 years (and the parish of Headbourne Worthy for 1000 years!). Lord Scott said it was 'a splendid hall', and was delighted



The original Jubilee Hall

that Col Edwards had made a stipulation that whatever building was erected, it should not be an eyesore to his property. In paying tribute to the building committee he praised the energies of Rev Williams and Rev Dr T H Davies of Headbourne Worthy, both of whom were to continue to play important roles in managing the Hall into and during World War II. He also singled out Mrs Curry (Hon Treasurer) and Mr James Holdaway (Postmaster and also Hon Secretary). Mr Holdaway would remain a trustee for 37 years. The vote of thanks was proposed by Col Lunn-Rockcliffe (Headbourne Worthy), who said there were many organisations who needed the new hall: 'the Women's Institute, the Horticultural Society, political organisations, Church societies, parish meetings, social gatherings and, at intervals, indignation meetings!' This was seconded by Lt Col James Butchart, of Worthy Park, a member of the building committee and of the hall committee. Mr Chalkley's band provided music while teas were served by the WI.

The hall was established as an independent trust, with a 999-year lease agreed with Mrs Edwards from 25 December 1935 under which the yearly rent was to be one peppercorn (if demanded!). The first trustees were Col Butchart, Mr Holdaway and Rev Williams. The hall was to be used from time to time as a church room in which Divine Service could be conducted, although there's no evidence that it's ever been used as such. It was also to be used for 'social and recreational purposes for the benefit of the whole parish, such as concerts, dances, whist drives, dramatic performances or tea parties, providing that any purpose should not be harmful to the Church



Children's Christmas party

of England, or to the general welfare of the parish as a whole.’ A management committee was to include representatives from Headbourne Worthy Church, the Methodist Church, Parish Council, WI and Men’s Club, with a British Legion rep added in 1938. There was also an Entertainments Committee that raised £13.8.7 in the first winter! The initial hire charge for the hall was three shillings per hour with reduced rates for the Men’s Club and the Boy Scouts, although reduced rates were refused for the Parish Council! Mr Ted Vokes was the auditor in those early days and Mr Loader’s name pops up all over the committee minutes of the time. A typical event in the hall was the 1938 Sunday School Christmas party, at which 50 children were treated to tea, games and presents.

With the outbreak of war, the Jubilee Hall was requisitioned by the Army on 6 September 1939. The Order was signed by the CO of the 30th (Surrey) AA Bn RE and all other use of the hall ceased immediately. Despite requests from parishioners from as early as January 1940, the committee did not ask for the hall to be returned from military use as the £52 annual rent from the War Dept was considered to be a good deal. Even so, the Army agreed to give back half of the hall by September 1940 and surrendered it completely on 13 January 1941, when their furniture was removed to Kings Worthy House. The repair bill for the building came to £35.10.0 and it was soon back in use for all its social and parochial functions.

Schoolroom and air raid shelter

The hall was already being used as an over-spill daytime classroom for Kings Worthy School, for which the County Council later agreed to pay £40 per year. This continued up to the opening of the new school in 1952.

In June 1941 an air raid shelter for the school children was added to the rear of the building, a low-level brick-built structure with a flat concrete roof. David Hunt remembered being excitedly herded down the stairs into the shelter when there were daytime air raid warnings in 1944. He also remembered how they had to walk all the way up to the old school over the other side of the A33 for their lunch, and this was to continue until 1948 when the committee finally agreed to food containers being delivered to the hall. The food, by the way, was apparently “generally disgusting”! (*Worthy History* No.7, 2004.)

The rest of the war was very much a ‘Caretaker’ period – according to the minutes of the hall’s committee meetings, more time was spent

discussing the problems of finding a decent caretaker than anything else! At one stage Mr Holdaway was Secretary, Treasurer and Caretaker. Mr Gay (the schoolmaster) joined the main committee in 1944 along with two people who ran a canteen for the Forces, and a soap ration was granted for the hall. By 1945 funds had accumulated to £278.9.0, £150 of which was invested in Defence Bonds. After much badgering, the County Council erected an outside lavatory for the school children, though negotiations about paying for emptying the cesspit continued.

Throughout the war, the committee had been chaired by Rev Williams with Rev Dr Davies as his deputy, but by 1947 Alan Duckworth, of Kent's Cottage, Headbourne Worthy, had taken over as Chairman. He was to remain closely connected with the hall as Chairman and later Trustee until moving to Sussex in 1968.

The hall remembered

The late 1940s was a time when former Headbourne Worthy resident, John Pitman, could remember visiting the Jubilee Hall as a child. There were pantomimes, organised by Bill Iddeson, father of a friend of John's who lived in Lovedon Lane. John didn't think the actors were local, but he particularly remembered going to see a production of Humpty Dumpty when they had to clear three feet deep snow from their path to get home to their cottage afterwards. He also recalled social evenings for all ages where they played games. This ties in with the hall committee minutes concerning a big Social organised in January 1950 to raise money to pay for new stage curtains, for which 200 tickets and 6 posters were produced. There was dancing, games, refreshments and a raffle with prizes donated, including eggs, fruit and cakes. We can't tell how successful it was as sadly the original Jubilee Hall minutes book stops at this point.

Little is recorded of Jubilee Hall life through the 1950s and 60s, although there are occasional references to dances, whist drives and children's parties, and there were regular WI meetings. The annual PCC meetings continued there until 1956, when they moved to the new hall in Springvale.

Nigerian visitors

An unusual event took place on 1 September 1953 when a party of 18 Nigerian local government officials plus hosts visited the hall. They were on a visit arranged by the British Council, and included a member of their

House of Representatives, a headmaster, town clerks and other officials. They toured the Worthy villages by coach in the morning, visited St Mary's church, and had lunch at Morton House before going on to other parishes. They returned in the evening to attend a meeting of the Kings Worthy Parish Council in the Jubilee Hall, when they were able to study at first hand local government as practised by a typical parish council!



Nigerian visitors in 1953

Mrs Edwards died in 1960 and under the terms of her will the trustees were able to purchase the hall's freehold title for £5. The agreed Conveyance, from September 1962, continued the Trust arrangements laid out by the original lease and was used to register the hall with the Charity Commission.

Hall extension

Draft plans were produced in February 1969 for a large extension to the rear and running the full length of the building, removal of the air raid shelter and a new front porch. The stage was to be moved to the other end of the hall and the door opposite St Mary's Church blocked up. A public meeting in January 1970 recognised that the hall 'fell very short of the requirements of an ever-growing population in the villages.' A Jubilee Hall Improvement Fund was set up with Evelyn Deacon as Treasurer. Edith (Babs) Self was the

hall's secretary from 1968 until 1973 (and trustee until her death in 2014), and along with the then Chairman, Tony Pragnell, was responsible for securing grants and loans to fund the estimated cost of £7500. This included a loan of £1000 from the National Council for Social Service in 1971 for which the Kings Worthy parish council was guarantor. The effort to raise the balance was already in full swing, with WI members and their husbands at the forefront running jumble sales, auctions, and Bingo every Saturday night. A May Day fête was organised in 1971 to raise funds and was preceded by a May Queen competition, referred to in the papers as a 'Rave-In at the Jubilee Hall.' The winner went on to open the fête. The Council eventually agreed to demolish the air raid shelter in 1972 and the hall re-opened in February 1973 following two months closure for re-building. This remains the biggest renovation in the hall's history, although a further refurbishment took place in 2002 and the kitchen was replaced in 2008.

Regular use has continued with whist drives through to the end of the century and WI meetings until they moved to the Tubbs Hall in 2006. The Worthy Players were formed from WI members and families for the pantomime 'Dick Whittington' in December 1973, and Claire Goodwin's dance school has been a hall users since 1978. Today the hall is in regular use for over 50 hours each week and is available to all for further booking. Dance, singing, drama, music, dog training, baby sensory, pilates and yoga are all available to parishioners, and the trustees work to ensure that the trust's objectives continue to be met.



The Jubilee Hall in 2006