



WEST DOWN PARISH HALL THE FIRST SIXTY YEARS

WEST DOWN PARISH HALL

Early days

The first move towards building a Parish Hall was in May 1930, advice was sought from the M.P. at that time, Sir Basil Peto as there was a possibility of borrowing from the National Council for Social Security, interest free for 5 years. There was no action taken then but the idea gained some impetus and fund raising started. £100 was raised which was quite an achievement. A profit of £4 from a dance or whist drive would have been thought as a really good result.

The £100 lay in the bank without being added to until after World War 2 in 1945. A suggestion was then made that part of the profits from a Victory celebration should go towards a Victory Hall. Mr. Arthur Weston was keen to have a recreational facility for the young people.

This post war fund raising took on a new momentum with a public meeting held in the Schoolroom on June 17th.

1946 A Committee was formed and the records show that Mr. R. West opened the meeting and the following were elected:-

Chairman - Mr. Brian Richards

Vice Chairman - Mr. T. Chugg

Treasurer - Miss R. Phillips

Secretary - Mrs. A.L. Chugg

Committee - Mr. & Mrs. A. Adams, Mr. T. Chugg, Mr. W.T. Chugg, Mr. F. Coats, Mr. & Mrs. W. Dymond, Mrs. Olive Green, Miss Vera Hookway, Mr. I.W. Hookway, Mr. George Irwin, Mr. A.L. Roach, Mr. & Mrs. R.A. Roach, Miss Nellie Robbins, Mr. & Mrs. Tom Robbins and Mr. Ron West.

A target of £500 was set to be raised by March 25th 1947. There were many events - Fete and Garden Show, Skittles, Whist Drives, Dances

and Jumble Sales. However, even after all these efforts only £368.4s.6d was raised.

Not deterred there were new ways of combining fund raising with outdoor sports to enjoy. Paper chasing on horseback raised significant amounts from collections made at the 'meets'. Doreen Wyatt was responsible for much of the organising for this.

The first Gymkhana was held in August **1948** at Trimstone Cross on a field lent by Mr. G.S. Hookway. This event raised

£97.2s. ½d. The Hall account received £75.00. The attendance figures were:-

Persons - 550, Horses - 53, Cars - 50.

The Gymkhana continued for a total of 10 years. After the Hall was built it still continued on Whit Mondays each year. Organised now by and for the local Hunt

The finding of a suitable site upon which to build a Hall was always going to be a problem but in the early 1950's three trustees were appointed as a positive step forward Messrs A.L. Roach, James Gill and Isaac Phillips.

Various changes took place within the committee, Mrs. Olive Green was for a while Secretary, Frank Filer helped with the Gymkhana and was a very popular M.C. at many social events.

In **1950** Miss Pearl Robbins (Bridgeman) joined the committee and was an active member for many years. The ways she helped the Hall and in particular the items that have arrived in the kitchen are too many to list.

1951 welcomed Tom Robbins as Treasurer and Charles Bain (Foxhunters), Gordon Tucker and Arthur Whitton to the committee together with many other helpers.

When £810.00 had been raised it was time to look at various sites.

In **1953** Mr. R.A. Roach took over from Brian Richards as Chairman

went on to serve 30 years in this capacity.

In **1954** with £1,444.15s.7d in the bank a committee to concentrate exclusively on the finding of a site and organise the building was formed. The members were:- Mrs. A.L. Chugg, G.S. Hookway, I.W. Hookway, R.A. Roach, T.A. Robbins, H.B. Richards, and M. Phillips.

At one stage, there was a possibility that the redundant Vicarage could have been purchased. There were negotiations with various authorities and an architect consulted but the idea was dropped as the cost of converting the building would be too great.

By February **1956** it was agreed to accept an offer from Mr. R.A. Roach to purchase part of his field upon which the South View Council Houses had recently been built. The cost was just £60.

The difficulties over the site now resolved, the Parish Council were approached to take over the ownership of the site to enable the Hall to be built. The land has to be owned by a perpetuating body to allow it to be grant aided. There followed long discussions to ensure the maintenance of the proposed Hall would not be the financial responsibility of the ratepayers.

Mr. Eric Nott was welcomed to the committee in February **1956**, the beginning of his involvement with the Hall. He became chairman in **1984**, a position he held until **1999** and is still continuing his work for the Hall as a committee member.

On **September 28th 1957** the village celebrated the opening of their long-awaited Parish Hall.

The proceedings were opened by the then Chairman Mr. Richard Roach. He told the assembled crowd that the village was being presented with an amenity, not a liability. The official opening was performed by Harold Richardson, Chairman of the Ilfracombe Urban District Council with a Silver Key. He told the crowd that Ilfracombe valued the close ties it holds with the village. He said, "A village hall is the greatest link between family life and citizenship".

The sum of £2,000 was raised by the efforts of the committee. They had been further helped by a grant of £1,000. The contract price for building the Hall was £2,800. The main hall is 35ft by 25ft with a stage 7ft deep. Also, a kitchen/dressing room facility back stage.

The official guests invited to the opening were:-

- Mr. & Mrs. Harold Richardson (Chairman - Ilfracombe Urban District Council).
- Mr. Gerald S. Hookway (Chairman - School Managers).
- Mr. Arthur Whitton (Chairman - West Down Parish Council) Mrs. Irene Cloke (President - West Down WI)
- Rev. Arthur Chandler (Priest in charge - Parish Church) Rev. George Gardiner (Minister - Congregational Church) Mr. H.B. Richards (Member - Rural District Council)
- Mr. J. Chugg (Member - Devon County Council) Mr. T. Friend (representing the Architects)
- Mr. R. Harris (representing the Builders)
- Mr. Beasley (representing the Devon Education Committee) Alderman George Drake (Braunton)

Following the opening of the Hall the existing Committee became The Parish Hall Management Committee and was to be comprised of representatives from all the main organisations in the village and a number of elected members.

A Caretaker was appointed and over the years there have been several hard-working holders of this position who have kept the Hall clean and welcoming for all its users.

This did not mean the end of serious fund raising, in fact there was a succession of improvements to work for over the coming years.

1962 An extension to be used as a recreation room with kitchen facilities was built with a cost of around £1,000. A Government grant was forthcoming and the remainder raised by the village organisations. A snooker table was installed. This was a new amenity for the use of the public. The kitchen space was welcomed and served us well.

1985 The Store Room was added, this removed the need to be constantly going under the stage for tables etc. and has stored equipment for various groups.

1987 The 30th birthday was celebrated with a Cake cut by Mr. & Mrs. R.A. Roach. Slides taken by Mr. E. Nott and Mr. L. Cloke were shown, these brought back memories of past events and celebrations.

1991 The entrance lobby and toilet facilities were updated to comply with Health and Safety regulations. The cost was £6,618.

1995 A complete electrical rewiring was carried out at a cost of £2,500. This had become a matter of urgency as the Licence could not be renewed until the job was completed.

The fund raising that started in 1946 has to continue, some of the events have changed but the committee are now expert at providing Cream Teas and Suppers for the wide variety of events held.

Large amounts have been raised within the parish and grants have been received for the larger projects from the Community Council of Devon and N.D.D.C. We also receive a grant from the Parish Council each year.

For some time, there had been discussions on building a committee room, the years had seen our needs for space increase further.

There were further requirements for disabled access to be complied with and the car park needed resurfacing.

Tony Hewitt put forward suggested plans and it was decided to submit a planning application.

As the deadline for the provisions for the disabled drew near the urgency had increased. We planned to carry out this plan in time for the Millennium.

1997 We celebrated 40 years with a Wine and Cheese party and Open Evening. There was a full programme of entertainment provided by various local groups and individuals.

Eric Nott spoke of his memories and his time as Chairman. Brian Richards recalled the Gymkhanas and the early years of the committee.

There was a display of memorabilia and photographs of the opening ceremony.

Tony Hewitt then announced the plans for the Millennium project which would be the building of a room for smaller functions, disabled facilities, also a separate bar area, improvements to the stage and new curtain tracking.

1998 An application to install a sound system and hearing loop was granted £2,829 from the Small Lotteries Fund in November 1998. This was installed soon after and is regularly used.

1999 When the tenders were studied for our committee room project we knew we needed much more money to enable the extension plans to be started on time. We have been helped by grants from the Community Council of Devon in the past but there were now no funds available. During the proceeding months we had, in addition to the application for the sound system, applied to the Lottery Board for a much larger amount for our building scheme. Without considerable help from an outside source it would not be possible to proceed.

We were all very excited when the telephone call came telling us that we would be awarded £43,810. It seemed too good to be true! Building then commenced in May **1999**.

The opening of The Room 2000 took place on **11th September, 1999**. This ceremony was performed by Mrs. Audrey Chugg. She was a founder member of the committee that was formed before the original building was opened 42 years before. She spoke of the early days of fund raising in the 1940's with events held in the Primary Schoolroom.

The Chairman, Eric Nott, welcomed County and District Councillors and past residents. The Hall was filled to capacity and entertainment by West Down Amateur Productions and a buffet supper followed.

1999 also saw the election of Terry King as the Chairman who would guide us into the new Millennium.

Eric Nott resigned after serving in office for 15 years. He had led us through many changes and improvements.

THE MILLIENNIUM TO THE 50TH YEAR

2000 There was a millennium celebration at the Hall and a group photograph taken outside now hangs in the Room 2000

2002 The Golden Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth was marked by a series of events, many of these were centred at the Hall. They included events to choose Princes and Princesses, a Snooker Tournament and Teas.

With the new room our lettings increased giving it a wider appeal for parties and receptions. The use of the building by organisations and individuals is the lifeblood of the Hall, both as a benefit to the community and as a source of revenue for the general upkeep of the building. The regular users, at that time, included the Karate Group, Morris Dancers, WI, Gardening Club and School together with many occasional bookings.

The West Down Amateur Productions staged their Pantomime for several years in February, in addition to the large donations from them we thank them for the large wardrobe/ cupboard in the store-room.

We were delighted with the flower tubs, bulb and tree planting by the Gardening Club which formed in 2001. This gave a welcoming touch to the approaches to the Hall.

We continued to supplement our income with a programme of fund raising events which also allowed us to keep a reserve fund for larger expenses such as repair and improvements.

The tables and chairs were renewed, following this we installed double glazed windows and new lighting in the main hall and stage area.

Perhaps the one thing which has benefited every Hall user most was the Gas Central Heating. No longer did we stay away because the Hall was cold. We received our third award of Lottery money for this.

Our next project was a complete refurbishment of the kitchen area. This was to be a major item of expenditure but in addition to the need to improve facilities for users we had to look ahead for possible health and safety legislation.

We were fortunate in having received grants from many local Charities and Trusts, some of our benefactors have already been mentioned and our thanks go to those listed below:-

- National Lottery
- Devon County Council
- North Devon District Council
- West Down Parish Council
- West Down Amateur Productions
- West Down W.I.
- West Down Village Fayre Association
- West Down Scenic Run
- Ilfracombe Rotary Club
- The Norman Family Charitable Trust
- Viscount Amory's Charitable Trust
- The Leonard Laity Stoate Charitable Trust
- The North Devon and West Somerset Relief Fund
- Northcott Devon Foundation
- The Royal Bank of Scotland
- Nat West Bank

2004 A plaque from the N.D.D.C. was presented to us marking the financial help given to the Hall. Grants from the Lottery have also been marked by plaque. Both adorn the outside of the building.

OUR 50TH TO 60TH YEARS

We started our 6th decade with plans to upgrade the kitchen and this was completed in **2008** with new stainless-steel units, a gas cooker and dishwasher. The snooker table was retained but its use had declined dramatically from the early days of the Hall. In **2010**, we decided to brighten up the outside of the building by painting all of it for the first time and we continued to make many smaller general improvements.

It was around this time that our Committee decided that we needed to increase the size of the main Hall floor space and modernise our toilet and cloakroom facilities to meet demand and to accommodate new groups and larger events. Over the next few years we put together plans and then submitted a Big Lottery grant application. Unfortunately, despite an enormous amount of effort our application fell at stage two of a three stage process. Undeterred, despite the disappointment the Committee refocused and immediately made plans to work on a smaller scheme that would be spread over three phases. It was agreed that it was best to look at using the building we have and adapt it to achieve some of our original goals.

In **2015** we had solar panels fitted to the south facing roof which was mostly paid for by a £5,000 grant from British Gas.

Phase 1 was completed in July **2017** and saw the snooker table being removed from the kitchen and the room being split into two. A modern kitchen was created in the area near to the Committee room whilst a multipurpose area of additional floor space was created in the other room. This can act as a separate room or with the folding doors back can add much needed extra room to the main Hall. We received £5,000 from Fullabrook CIC and £12,000 from West Down Parish Council (Solar Park Fund) towards the Phase 1 work.

Phase 2 will see the removal of the original stage replacing it with more floor space and this will make the main Hall even bigger.

With easy access to the store cupboard through new doors and a portable modern stage we will have a much more adaptable additional area to the Hall.

Phase 3 will see an upgrade to the toilets creating modern facilities with additional cloakrooms and an enlarged entrance area.

So, as we head into our seventh decade the Hall continues to be a vital part of our Community and is used almost daily for a wide range of activities. Please come along and support our events and if you can spare some time come and help by joining our Committee and take us forward into the next phase of the Halls development. Pictures of the refurbished kitchen and the new storage area are shown below.



FUND RAISING AND THE COMMUNITY

The Hall is the main indoor venue in West Down and is available to the whole Community and beyond. During its lifetime, it has played host to many events providing entertainment to the Community whilst raising funds for various organisations including ourselves. The Committee have in recent times enjoyed the popular Beaford Arts Theatre programme. We have organised Barn Dances, Discos, Antique evenings the ever-popular annual Village Quiz and many other events. For 22 years we have welcomed Terry Moule and his amazing Ferrets to the Hall for our Annual Ferret race. This ever-popular event always attracts a full house of all ages and has raised thousands of pounds for our funds. Over many years West Down Amateur Productions, led tirelessly by Pete and Di McGahran have used the Hall for their popular Pantomimes and plays. These entertaining events have brought out many actors and helpers from throughout the area and the Hall has benefitted from substantial donations from this group.

The Hall continues to be used for many private parties, meetings, weddings, funeral wakes and a whole list of other events.

Following the closure of The Post Office branch that was run within the Village Shop, in **2008** the Hall has hosted the Outreach Post Office Branch provided by the Bickington Postmaster on 3 days a week and this service is much appreciated by the Community.

The Hall is a member of the local Hallshare group who comprise a group of Halls from throughout North Devon. They meet 3 or 4 times of the year at different Halls, each time to share ideas and experiences in order to improve the running of Halls generally.

The Hall is there for everyone please come along, use it and support our fund-raising events.

Chairmen

1946 Mr. H.B. Richards

1953 Mr. R.A. Roach

1978 Mr. C. Dymond

1979 Mr. R.A. Roach

1984 Mr. E.J. Nott

1999 Mr. T. King

Treasurers

1946 Miss R. Phillips

1950 Mr. T. Robbins

1954 Mr. R.A. Swan

1975 Mr. T. Copp

1980 Mrs. J. Reid

1984 Mrs. C. Langston

1992 Mr. D.T. Ayre

Secretaries

1946 Mrs. A.L. Chugg

1947 Mrs. O. Green

1948 Mr. R.A. Roach

1950 Joint: Mr. R.A. Roach & Mrs. A. L. Chugg

1952 Mr. I.W. Hookway

1959 Mr. W.T. White

1969 Miss B.C. Harris

1983 Mrs. S. Hewitt

1988 Mrs. J.H. Gibbs

1995 Mrs. M. Thomas

2006 Mrs. J. Oades

2014 Vacant

2016 Mr. D Maidment

In addition to the above, there have been many who have worked long hours but not taken a main position, of special mention from the early days of the Hall are past Vice-Chairmen, the late Mr. H.W. Chugg and the late Mr. G.S. Hookway.

The job of Hall Secretary was separated so that the hall bookings part of the job was done by a Bookings Clerk in the early 1990s. Pete McGahran has for almost 20 years carried out the role bringing in many new users and groups.

THE CURRENT COMMITTEE & TRUSTEES

The current Committee members who are also Trustees are:

Andy Odell

David Ayre

David Maidment

Eric Nott

John Stainer

Keith Oades

Pat Williams

Pete McGahran

Pippa Stafford

Ronnie Maidment

Terry King

Tony Miller

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The information in this leaflet was compiled from records held by the Committee and excerpts from press reports in the past 50 years by Margaret Thomas, with updates for the last 10 years provided by David Ayre and Andy Odell.