



Buildings and Estates of Purley on Thames

Purley Memorial Hall

Introduction

Purley Memorial Hall is located in Glebe Road on a parcel of land originally forming part of the yard of John Purvey and Sons. It is of brick construction and consists of a main hall with a small extension to the east, a kitchen in the south east corner, toilets in the south west corner, a dressing room on the west side, a store room on the northeast side and a basement room to the north. Within the same complex are a number of outside store rooms for users of the hall and a building to house the Horticultural Society shop.

The car park can accommodate about thirty cars and there is about an acre of grass,

The Hall was built by voluntary effort in the early 1950's and has been managed as a Charitable Trust.

The early history is recounted in 1970 by Denys Hutchings who was very much involved in the Hall's affairs, was a Parish Councillor and his wife Jo was Secretary to the Hall Committee for many years.



Building the Memorial Hall in 1951

Getting the Project off the Ground

Our village hall was a thought which developed into work and started by about 1000 inhabitants paying 1d per week. Beetle drives, Concerts etc were held to raise funds. In October 1947 a plot of land was found with a nice view of the Chilterns and was purchased for £120. The next year was taken up with filling forms and getting licences, while gradually money was coming in for materials.

In the village at the time was living an architect Mr L Travers and he designed the hall and was available for consultation.. A Management Committee was formed; Mr Bert Nicholls was approached and gladly took over the building operations. A volunteer building committee was set up and in November 1948, with £1100 to start, the foundations were laid. With a Ministry of Education grant there was still £710 in hand. Mr Theobald, Chairman of the Hall Committee said a further £1500 had to be raised. The target was to get the hall finished by the 1953 Coronation.

A lot of effort was put in by the Committee, the Building Committee, the builders and individuals collecting in the village. The women also helped by cleaning and painting metal work, making tea etc. At this time building materials were very difficult to get which often held things up. A total of 40,000 bricks were laid by Mr Nicholls, and general work was carried out by Mr F Rawlins and Mr R Winters. Mr Harris was in charge of the electrical installations, with the help of others too numerous to mention. The then secretary was the late Mrs Goodwin, who was untiring in her efforts. The hall was completed by Coronation year, an achievement of which the Parish can be proud.

The Opening

After seven long years of hard work and money raising events, the day drew near to the official opening of the hall. It had been arranged that Dame Florence Horsbrugh from the Ministry of Education was to open the hall, but owing to a family bereavement she was unable to be there.

At short notice however, Mr Anthony Hurd MP for Newbury was able to open 'Purley Memorial Hall' on Wednesday 14th October 1953. The hall was packed to capacity with Humphrey Legge (Chief Constable of Berkshire), Mrs Hurd, Miss M McCullough (HM Inspector of schools for Berkshire and Oxfordshire)

A vote of thanks to Mr Hurd was proposed by Miss Scott-Stokes OBE Vice chairman of the Parish Council and seconded by Mr J Emerson of the National Council of Social Services. Mr Hurd said in his speech " *The village will find fuller enjoyment in life by having its own social centre, it is a good thing to keep alive and foster the community spirit*"

Mr Theobald, Chairman of the Hall Management Committee read a letter from Miss Florence Horsbrugh saying " *I know something of the splendid effort made by so many people to construct this hall which will, I am sure, prove so valuable to the village. It is a remarkable achievement, and the committee have shown great initiative in carrying it through*" These speeches were reported with pictures in the national press and local papers, in which they said " *The finest village hall built by voluntary effort since the war* " It was a memorable occasion.

The Early Years

After the opening in 1953 the hall became the place where people could meet for the first time. The villagers had now to work to keep it clean, such as polish the floor on their hands and knees, as funds had to be raised for furnishings such as chairs, polisher etc. The hall was now run by a management Committee who put on events and ran them - this included things like the whist drives, dances, jumble sales etc. The Women's Institute choir who bought the piano for the hall, is now a separate organisation known as the Thames Vale Singers. The Purley Sports Club organized many events, among them the very successful dances. Up to this time these were some of the most reliable bookings and the hall existed from income this way.

It was not all plain sailing as the financial side did not cover the cost of running the hall, for in about



The Memorial Hall from the South East in the 1980s

1957 the plight was becoming serious and it was found necessary to form a 'Friends of the Hall' (people who were willing to give 6d a week to keep the hall going) This was a time when people were afraid of losing the hall and collectors soon tired of begging. Drastic changes had to come First came the installation of central heating. This created a new lease of life and made the hall a nice comfortable place to visit; many more bookings were made and a new era this was not completely successful, the Purley Tennis Club was formed from this and was a going concern for ten years with a twice weekly booking which brought in money so urgently needed.

During this time also the hall was let for three hours daily to the Collegiate School for two terms. This enabled the hall to spend money on the building which was badly needed at this time, brickwork, repointing, painting inside and out and a garage store room. This was the turning point in the history of the hall.

Adding facilities

After the hall had central heating installed it became more comfortable, but at this time television had come which kept people at home. Despite this however lettings increased. Bingo was a weekly attraction and the Thames Vale Singers, Tennis Club, Youth Club, Welfare, Library, occasional whist drives, twenty-first parties and wedding receptions kept the hall going.

The parking of cars became a problem. There was a large mound of earth in front of the hall main entrance allowing only eight cars to park. It was decided to have this removed and have hogging rolled in to increase the parking by twenty. This was done but no sooner completed when after so

many years of waiting the sewerage scheme was finally approved and was at last to come to Purley. Yes! this main pipe-line would come right through the new hall car park to a depth of 15 feet!. During the excavations the main water pipe was broken and the hall flooded causing a lot of damage to the parquet floor.

Also the main gates were broken down. Eventually everything was put to rights and the hall connected to the mains. The old soakaway was filled in, the grounds bulldozed flat and grass sown. This made the grounds more attractive although we still have a problem getting the grass cut each year.

Things were getting worn at this time. The toilets had to be replaced with more modern suites and redecorated. Also an outside door and porch was built for the use of people using the annexe.

The hall was gathering momentum and more money was coming in, but storage now became a problem. The committee decided to start a plan to build three store rooms. The Thames Vale Singers donated 100 towards the cost of a room for their use and the Westwood Farm Pre-school Play Group also helped towards the cost of theirs. These people have sole use of the rooms to store their room for store room /workshop. This work was completed in 1969 - two years and not three as at first anticipated.

After the three new storerooms had been built, the dressing rooms on each side of the stage could be emptied.

The kitchen was the next item for attention - everything has been taken out, even the tiling on the walls. A new stainless steel double bowl, double drainer sink unit has been installed with concealed internal trap under the floor. A three cupboard unit with working surfaces in formica and wall cupboards to match in blue and white have been installed. A new window has been put in and nearly all the wall has been re-tiled. In the near future it is hoped to have the old gas stove replaced with an electric cooker.

The Purley Memorial Hall Management Committee have put in many days of work on this project alone, this work will match in with the new extension of the kitchen and main hall which has been planned. If and when these plans are passed it is hope to commence this work this year and finish in 1971.

The Memorial Hall is almost fully booked and in one normal week some 440 men, women and children use the hall regularly. The figure of 4-500 persons using the hall each week indicates that it is the most focal point in Purley's social life, as was intended when it was built.

The Purley Memorial Hall Management Committee have many details to attend to - meeting hirers' requests, general maintenance, new additions, storage and expenses to do with heating, lighting, insurance, licences etc, all of which are dealt with at their meetings. Here I would like to say that all officers and committee members do all their work voluntarily and give up many hours to help in maintenance and re-decorating. The hall would not run so smoothly if we did not have the co-operation of the hirers who clean up the hall after they use it in readiness for the next hirer. The committee do employ a cleaner who does the general cleaning.

Postscript

After telling the short history of the hall, I would like to say what the plans are for its future. The Committee and many other organisations agree that the hall is too small for many of its activities. Plans have been passed to have an extension built on the east side of the hall and this will enlarge its capacity by some 450 sq. feet. At the same time the kitchen will be enlarged with an additional entrance to the hall. Some problems have arisen but these have been overcome by the architect who drew up the plans.

As well as the above extension it is planned at a later date to lengthen the hall making a wider raised stage and a large room beneath of some 30 x 50 ft. This should be possible by 1975.

The extension to the east was built as planned and named the Nicholls Room' to mark the immense amount of work done by Bert Nicholls.

The Horticultural Society operated out of the storehouse formerly used by the Westwood Farm Pre-school Playgroup after they had split up with the majority moving to the Westwood Farm Community Centre. The new society soon outgrew these facilities and built a new sales building in the east end of the car park This has gradually been extended. Additional store sheds have been built and play equipment installed in the grounds for the use of the residual playgroup.