

A Brief History of Barrasford Village Hall

Back in 1924 a few of the villagers got together and floated the idea of erecting a village hall and reading room. They launched a public subscription which raised about half the cost, the remainder being made up by a bank loan.

The actual building of the hall commenced in the summer of 1926 and the total cost was £491/9/1 which included £6/3/4 for the installation of paraffin lamp lighting. The land on which the hall was built was rented from the Duke of Northumberland at a cost of 5/- a year.

The hall was opened in August 1927 by Her Grace The Duchess of Northumberland and a sale held on the opening day realised £153/19/3 which was quite a considerable sum in those days. Initially part of the hall was used as a Reading Room and Billiard Room and the villagers paid an annual membership fee which entitled them to study the daily Evening Chronicle and the weekly Hexham Courant. It is interesting to note that in the 1920's the bill for newspapers for a three month period was £2/3/-

The initial bank loan of some £240 was cleared in 1929 but despite this the hall continued to operate with a slight yearly overdraft right up to the 1970's.

In the early days dances were held almost weekly in the winter months and whist drives were very popular. The hall was also used for the WRI meetings and of course wedding receptions. Browsing through an old treasurer's book the names of some of the old families crop up - the Simpson, Elliot, Coulson, Robb, Rutter, Milburn, Welton, Hepworth, Campbell and Irving families - names still held by decendants who live in the village at the present time.

In the 1930's Saturday night dances were held weekly, mostly run by the local leek club and the football club and the cost of the hire of the hall was then 7/6. But for some unknown reason the hire of the hall for a political meeting realised the sum of 12/6 although the local Woman's Institute managed to get it for only 2/6a.

Electric lighting was installed in September 1932 at a total cost of £7/10/0 of which the N.E.E.B charged £1/10/0 for a connection charge.

The early 1940's saw the hall being used for ARP lectures and for meetings of the Home Guard and mention is also made of a dance being held for the "Spitfire Fund" and also for Soldier's Comforts.

The hall was taken over by the Ministry of Works and Buildings in October 1941 for use as a sugar store and it was used throughout the war for this purpose.

The first function held after the hall was restored to the villagers after the war was a children's party held in January 1946. The hall still flourished being used for: dances, whist drives, the travelling cinema and of course the usual wedding receptions of the village lads and lasses.

The dances started to diminish in frequency in the 1960's as the lure of Hexham and Newcastle attracted the youngsters. But despite this a supper room was added to the hall in 1971 and in 1973 the land was purchased from the Duke of Northumberland so that the hall belonged in total to the village.

As a result of the interest in the hall decreasing, a public meeting was held in October 1980 about the possible closure of the hall. But the villagers decided to carry on despite mounting costs of maintenance etc. A point was reached two years ago (1984) when it was found that the hall needed a major face lift and urgent repair of windows and roof. The local committee under the chairmanship of Mr Les Thomas, Secretary Ivan Campbell and Treasurer Eric Legras got to work and an approach was made to the Manpower Services to get the Community Task Force to provide the labour for the renovation of the fabric. The committee was assisted by grants and donations amounting to approximately £535, the principal benefactors being the Northumberland Education Committee, Tynedale District Council and Tarmac Roadstone. In addition the committee set their sights on raising the cash required and through sponsored walks and local

lads taking part in the Great North Run and various functions held in the hall, they managed to raise the £2,000 needed for materials paint etc., quite an achievement for a small village like Barrasford.

The Community Task Force started work on the renovation of the hall towards the end of June of this year (1986) and spent some 17 weeks repairing the fabric, including the re-roofing of the supper room and the complete re-decoration of the hall both externally and internally. They also repaired some of the furniture and re-paved the entrance passageways. Despite the efforts of the local committee in raising cash, they could not have afforded the labour costs and the villagers will be eternally grateful to the Community Task Force for the work they have done.

New and live interest in the hall is apparent and it is to be re-opened by County Councillor Euan Robson on 1st November (1986) and this will be followed by the annual Bring and Buy Sale. Bookings for the hall have been coming in for this year and next and it is hoped to get the use of the village hall back to that which flourished in its early years. The local committee now have a credit balance in the bank so are starting off heading for the next century with a clean balance sheet.

The above was written in October 1986 as the hall was preparing to reopen

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In 1991 plans were prepared to replace the old kitchen and toilets with a new build and a great effort was made to raise funds and obtain grants. In 1994 the work was started, this coincided with the need to move the Playgroup from the school, which needed the extra classroom, to the village hall; so plans were adapted to accommodate the Playgroup in the supper room.

In 2002 the land next to the village hall, which had been used for parking was redeveloped to provide new housing for the village. Around the same time the condition of the original hall was giving cause for concern so plans were prepared to replace the original building with a large part of the cost being covered by a Lottery grant with support from Northern Rock. Unfortunately these the banking crisis of 2008 meant that this funding was no longer available and scheme had to be shelved.



The condition of the old hall continued to be of concern with rot in the much of the wooden framework and an abundance of asbestos. Rather than total replacement it was decided to repair in stages a little each year (starting 2011), applying for grant aid for each section: new electrics, front wall, porch, other walls, roof, kitchen refitted, disabled toilet & access, etc. This continued up to 2020 when the CoVid pandemic meant the hall, along with most of the country, had to shut. Fortunately government financial support ensured bills were paid and basic maintenance could continue.

The hall reopened in late 2021 and normal activities slowly resumed: Scouts & Beavers, Exercise Classes, Craft Groups, Dances, Children's Parties, Bingo, Social Nights, Folk Club, Christenings, Funeral Teas, etc.

In 2023, GigaBit broadband arrived and the hall became the first in the village to get connected.