

The Alice Marshall Hall Founded 1888

The following account was written by Audrey Martin at the time of the centenary of the Alice Marshall Hall in 1988.

Founding

The Hall was built as a Church Mission and Temperance Hall and it is this name, with the date 1888, which is inscribed on the wall. The site, at the crossroads in the centre of the village was carefully chosen to be at the boundary between Steeple Barton and Westcote Barton, so that it could serve both parishes.

Records of that time show that a branch of the Church of England Temperance Society was set up in the Bartons in 1876. The Society arranged a variety of worthwhile activities to counter the attraction of the Public Houses but lacked a suitable hall. Plans were made in the mid 1880s for the construction of a building and some energetic fundraising followed. This was mainly promoted by Miss Alice Marshall, daughter of the Rev Jenner Marshall, a landowner living in Westcote Barton Manor House. Miss Marshall secured donations, ran sales of work and managed to raise sufficient money for the building which was begun in 1888 and cost £739-12-3d. She continued to raise money and was the leading trustee until her death in 1951 at the age of 92, though she had moved from the Bartons some years earlier.

Activities

At first the hall, known as the Mission Hall, was used mainly for religious and other meetings. Later on a wider range of activities took place there, including a Lending Library, Reading Room and Penny Bank. After the first world war, the hall accommodated village dances, film shows, concerts and evening classes. Meetings continued and among the organisations were the Women's Institute and the Scouts.

During the second world war, the hall was requisitioned by the Army as a Mess room for soldiers who were billeted in the Bartons. The soldiers were not expected to submit to a teetotal regime and a relaxing of the rules was allowed – but just for soldiers! The villagers had to wait for another 20 years!

The hall was used during the war, by arrangement with the military authorities, for village activities. Entertainments and war time fund raising efforts were held and the big range installed for feeding the troops was used for the Fruit Preservation Scheme. Large quantities of jam and chutney were made, fruit was canned and the products sold to local shops. The hall was also used on Sundays for evacuee children to give their foster parents a break, but no games were allowed, just quiet occupations such as reading.

Fund raising

Frequent fundraising efforts were necessary to meet the cost of maintenance, caretaking and repairs. In the early days, money was raised by such means as collecting waste paper, the sale of jewellery and aprons (4125 aprons are recorded as having been sold.)

The rental paid by the village clubs and societies and other hirings are not sufficient to meet all the costs in spite of generous donations from Major and Mrs P Fleming of Barton Abbey, their family and other supporters. Present day repairs and improvements have made a further village effort necessary. The Committee of Management, who are now the trustees, are grateful for all the support being provided and hope for a substantial response to this centenary appeal.

Management of the Hall

Alice Marshall's death in 1951 led to the decision to hand over the management to trustees representing the organisations using the hall and this scheme was approved by the Charity Commissioners in 1968. At this time it seemed fitting to name the hall the Alice Marshall Hall after the person who had provided so much of the original initiative and done so much of the fundraising.

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Memories of the Mission and Temperance Hall

Written by 'Bubbles' Pratley in 1988

In the mid 1920s, the hall was the focal point of the social life of the villagers of Middle Barton, with paraffin lamps, no water supply, coke stove with white stone hearth, one outside very small vault lavatory and last but not least a lady living in South Street, Mrs Kerrison was caretaker. She always wore black, a long cloak and a Victorian-type hat tied under the chin with ribbon. She would arrive absolutely on time to lock up, carrying her candle-lit lantern looking most formidable. She would stand perfectly still, keys in hand and GET GOING was the very effective message.

The serving hatch at the end of the hall was lined with bookshelves, this being the lending library. The pig club held meetings, also the WI. There were many concerts (children's and adult), choral singing practice, whist drives (as many as 20 tables) film shows, parties and receptions. Wedding receptions took place without an alcoholic toast as the 'temperance' was strictly adhered to and it was usual for the guests to gather afterwards at the house of the bride for 'the toast.'

War came and the army took over the hall as a cookhouse and the barrels of beer rolled through the hall door! After the troops moved on, the 'temperance' ban was, illegally, gradually ignored. After the war the hall was used as a doctors' surgery and baby welfare clinic.

Sometimes a small travelling circus came to town. The performing lion was wedged and locked into the small outdoor lavatory and left behind a terrible, if not inappropriate mess! The circus fled and did not pay for hire and never returned again!

In the 1920s food was pretty much the same, one imagines from hearsay, as it was at the time when the hall was being built 100 years ago. The diet was mostly based on the pig which was reared for home use in practically every cottage garden. Almost everything was edible and could be stored in various ways. Two delicious dishes come to mind, one from the pig and one from the cow.

Pig faggots

1lb pig's liver
4oz breadcrumbs
3oz suet (or melted lard)
2 or 3 onions
2 or 3 teaspoons chopped sage
1 or 2 teaspoons chopped thyme (dried may be used)
2 teaspoons salt
Ground black pepper to taste

Mince liver and onions, mix in breadcrumbs, suet (or melted lard) salt, herbs and pepper. Place mixture in a roasting tin, bake at 375F for about 30-40minutes. Serve hot or it is delicious cold. A dish I call pâté ahead of its time!

Cherry Curds (usually absolutely free of charge)

Cherry curds were collected in the tin or enamel milk can from cows in the village – it was the first milk given by the cow after giving birth. This was poured into a greased enamel pie dish with sugar to taste, a few currants and baked slowly. A delicious junket type of custard was the end result, served hot or cold. What has happened to Cherry Curds?

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Trust deed of 1888

‘The building shall be used for no other purpose than that of a Church of England Mission and Temperance Hall for holding therein both Secular and Religious meetings. No Sectarian or Political Meetings or the consumption of any kind of intoxication liquor or spirit shall on any account whatever be allowed to take place therein.’

In 1937 a new door was built and there was a ceremonial opening by Miss Alice Marshall. Improvements during the previous 15 years included a stage, curtain, spot lights etc provided by the Barton Scouts, electric light, shelves for books of the village and county library, a stone cycle shed and much new equipment. The stage was made up of moveable sections, and by all accounts was not very secure.

In 1965 an extension was built for a new kitchen and cloakrooms. The earlier kitchen – the room by the side of the stage – had doubled as kitchen and dressing room. The earlier lavatories had been outside at the end of the building. A permanent stage was built which did not have to be put up and dismantled every time it was used.

A baby clinic was started in the hall in 1949. Members of the WI weighed the babies and dispensed the food. Doctors held surgeries in the Hall from 1966. The clinic and surgeries moved to Deddington in 1974.

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ALICE MARSHALL HALL

Original cost

	£	s	d
Main building	452	10	6
Kitchen	55	0	0
Coal house, walls etc	97	0	0
Stove, lamps, tables etc	38	12	0
Pathways	3	9	9
Land	40	0	0
Furniture	80	0	0

Hiring charges in the early days

Itinerant entertainers (prepayment absolutely essential)	10	6
Any good objects, people from outside (religious or philanthropic)	5	0
Good objects, local people	2	6
Reading room per month	10	3
Band practices each time		6

The caretaker was paid a quarterly salary of £1, with an extra 15/- for the reading room and 2d a time for band practices. Caretaking then of course included the tortoise or ‘slow but sure’ stove.

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