



Chinnor Village Hall

Chinnor Village Hall was part of the creation of village halls during the interwar years and their concept was formed by a number of issues.

One was to provide an alternative to the controlled and sponsored social life in relation to the Reading Room and the allotment movement by the local clergy and gentry in keeping with the reforming zeal of the Victorian era and the desire to keep residents out of the local pubs and to provide them with improving occupation and activities.

The men and women returning from the First World War were found to be less inclined to return to their old, more subservient places in society, particularly in rural areas resulting in the problem of retaining workers on the land.

This resulted in the Oxford Rural Community Council, (ORCC) the rural department of the National Council of Social Service, (NCSS) to forge a coherent social policy for rural areas to engender a community spirit by creating village halls, independent of the local clergy and owned and administered by a committee of residents to help to regenerate the lost sense of community which had been disrupted by the First World War.

The committee found that there was a lack of a suitable independent venues for meetings were available. For example, in Chinnor, the school building of the British School was appropriated on a regular basis for the Dorcas Society (a local group of people under the auspices of the Congregational Church whose mission was to provide clothing for the poor) clothing sale and the Widows Tea Meeting. These premises were unsuitable for adult use, furniture being child sized for example but, as day time meetings interfered with the children's education the Committee sort an independent location.

Negotiations for its costing was started in 1935. Initial discussion with NCSS involved the name and they insisted the word 'village' was included in the title and not as initially suggested the WI hall in keeping with its independent status.

A loan was required before building works could commence and correspondence from the NCSS to Mr. Cuthbert, chairman of the village hall committee and local head teacher, regarding the loan application stated that the requirements for the loan was that:

- The hall was to be held in trust for the whole village
- Half the total cost of the building and land to be raised locally and they will not forward funding until the money is raised.

Correspondence over the next few years indicated a division within the village which involved a very small section of the residents wanting an extension of the Reading Room instead of a new hall. This request was vetoed by the NCSS. However, the majority of Chinnor residents wanted a new hall although some members of the Parish Council were against it.

Other issues addressed in the correspondence included:

1. costs,
2. materials used and the
3. installation of water closets for which the committee was confident that mains water would be available within the next two years. In fact this did not happen ie mains water until the 1950's

The plans were drawn up by Dr. Leverkus's sister who was an architect and according to a local resident Mable Howlett, did not charge for her services, however, her fees did appear on the funding application form in accordance with the Royal Institute of British Architect's rules.

To raise money for the hall a model was made of the design by Mr. Arnold a carpenter and was paraded around the village. It also appeared at concerts and flower shows where money was collected. After the hall was built it needed 'sprucing up' and a jumble sale was held to raise money for this. Men from the village painted the hall and ladies made curtains. The foundation stone was laid in July 1939. During the war the hall served as an Air Raid Precaution first aid post and was the local headquarters of the Red Cross. In 1940 it was hired by Oxfordshire Education Committee as an extension to the village school enabling the education of 400 children from London.