

A HISTORY OF
DIPTFORD PARISH
HALL

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2004

FOREWORD

This history of Diptford Parish Hall is limited by the primary sources available within the Parish for its compilation. In particular, no Hall Committee minutes for the years 1920-1941, or for 1971- 1979 have been located. It has been suggested that the Devon Record Office may hold the relevant documents, but this avenue has not been explored.

Despite these limitations it is hoped the history will provide a valuable historical archive for the Parish Hall Management Committee and a useful secondary source of reference for future authors.

The original Hall, built in 1920, was replaced in 1992. This history does not extend beyond the opening of the 'new' Hall. The documentary and pictorial record of the 'new' Hall is rich, and can be readily available to anyone wishing to take the history beyond 1992.

A Redfern
5 November 2004

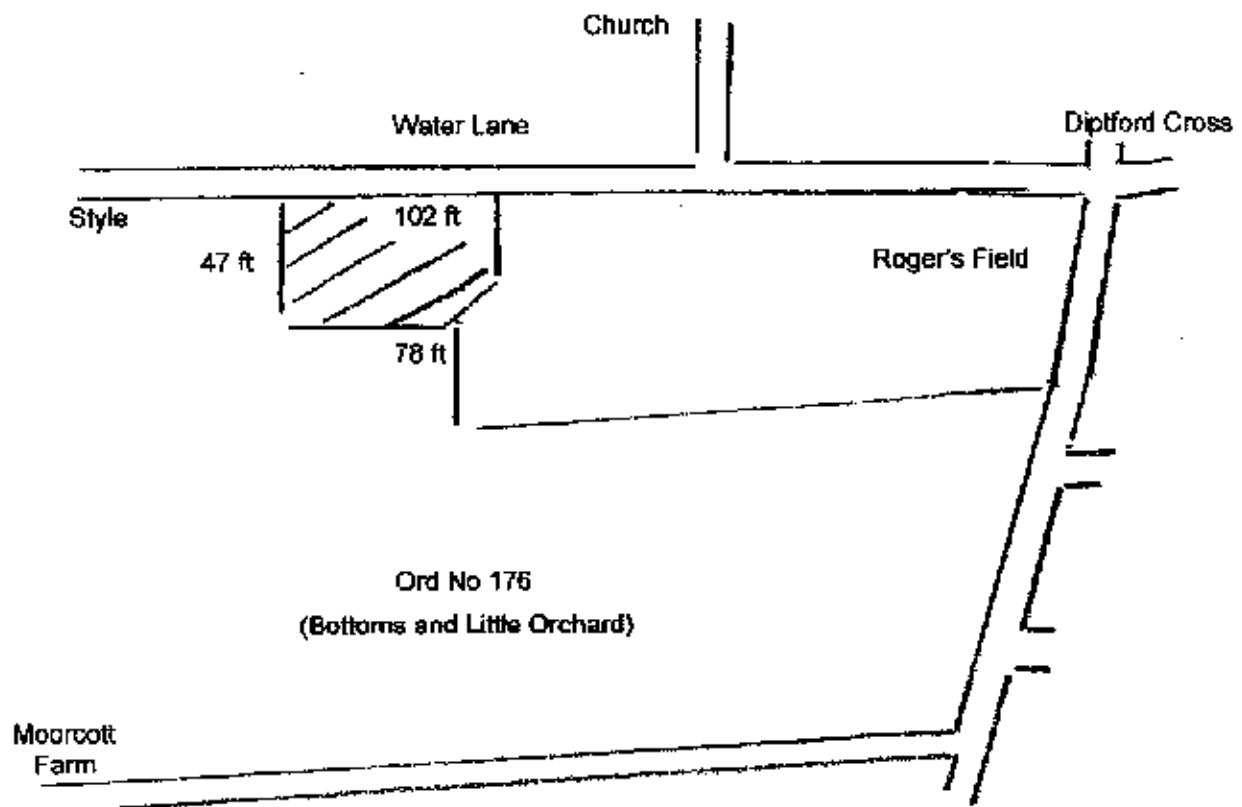
DIPTFORD PARISH HALL

The Hall's Foundation

This Indenture made the thirteenth day of October One Thousand nine hundred and twenty Between George Augustus Northey of the Manor House Diptford in the County of Devon Auctioneer on the one part and Thomas Parry of the Rectory in the Parish of Diptford aforesaid Clerk in Holy Orders Ernest Newman of Creber Farm in the Parish of Diptford aforesaid Farmer and the said George Augustus Northey on the other part Witnesseth as follows that is to say:- (1)

so it began; the nineteen clauses that follow in the handwritten document make interesting reading.

The deed conveyed to the Trustees, free of any consideration a parcel of land being part of a field or close of land called Bottoms and Little Orchard bounded on the north by a lane called Water Lane, on the south and west by parts of the said field, and on the east by a field known as Roger's Field, together with the Hall and Institute lately erected thereon.(2) This indicates that the original hall was built by George Northey, on his own land, prior to October 1920, and then passed over in trust to the village. A hand-drawn sketch delineating the limits of the parcel of land formed part of the deed, and is reproduced below.



The deed went on to stipulate that, in perpetuity, the building was to be named The Diptford Parish Hall.(3) It was to be used as an Institute and Reading Room for the residents of the Parish of Diptford or living within a distance of one mile from the Parish Church.(4) The one mile radius just reaches North Huish church and Bickham to the west of the Avon, while to the east of the river the only dwellings encompassed by the 'one mile rule' would have been those just over the Parish boundary at Beneknowle. Thus significant parts of North Huish were outside the limits of entitled Hall usage. There were other limitations. The deed makes it quite clear that the Hall was intended to be a Reading Room and Institute for the use of all men of the age of sixteen years or upwards, resident in the Parish or within the 'one mile' limit, who, in the opinion of the committee' were sober, industrious and of good character, but without regard to their political or religious opinions.(5)

The clear exclusion of women from those having entitlement to use the hall was not then uncommon. Britain had just passed through four years of war. It had been a soldiers' not a citizens' war, and many men had witnessed horrors in France, Belgium and elsewhere, that were quite unknown to the wives and families they had left behind in Britain. The shared experience set returning soldiers apart; men only reading rooms were often established to provide havens for them on their journey back to the normality of civilian life. The deed recognized wider needs than those solitude and time for reflection by stating "provided there is no major conflict with the primary function of the Hall, the Committee may permit the Hall to be used for entertainment, meetings and recreation of men aged sixteen years and upwards", and this could be further extended to their wives, children and friends, to charitable and to other public purposes connected with the Parish. (6)

There was one proviso to all activities, in that the Hall could only be used on Sundays for religious meetings or services, and then only with the Rector's consent. The 'rector for the time being' had further authority in that he had sole power to appoint new trustees when necessary. (7)

The management of the trust premises was vested in a committee comprising the three original trustees; George Northey, Thomas Parry and Ernest Newman, with in addition

three elective committee men who were to be rate payers living in the Parish of Diptford, their election taking place at an annual public meeting.(8) While the trustees were, for all intents and purposes, permanent members of the management committee, there was provision for rotation of committee men; the normal period of office being three years. By explicitly using the term 'committee men' it is clear that women were not intended to take any part in the management of the Hall. How different things were to become in later years as we shall see below.

The Trust Deed also required a minute book to be kept to record all the proceedings of the committee,(9) while committee meetings had to be held not less frequently than once in every three months.(10)

In the years immediately after the Great War many halls, similar to that in Diptford, sprang up all over the country. They came into being in memory of those who had suffered or given their lives during the conflict. They were a way of saying 'thank you' both to the survivors and to those who did not come home. Money to fund the new halls was raised locally, and to mark the respect and gratitude of the wider public the name 'Memorial Hall' was often applied to such developments.

On occasion Diptford's hall has been referred to as a memorial hall. Most notable when, in 1988, it was thought necessary to vary the Trust Deed discussions with the Charity Commission were initiated. In the opening correspondence it is stated "the Hall was erected as a 'semi-permanent' building to serve as a War Memorial for the Parish following the 1914-18 war". (11) But the Trust Deed does not support this interpretation. While the timing of provision and the intended restricted use of the Hall provide parallels with memorial halls elsewhere, there are also marked differences. Perhaps most important is the building and the land on which it was erected was the gift of one man, George Augustus Northey, and not that of a wider public. And by stipulating that the hall be named, in perpetuity, 'The Diptford Parish Hall' any link to memorial was implicitly excluded by George Northey. The memorial to those of the Parish who died in the Great War, which lies in the Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin, carries no Northey name suggesting that the 'benefactor's' generosity was not inspired by a personal family loss.

The Following Years

The documents used in researching much of this history include no Hall minutes prior to November 1941; yet, in accordance with the Trust Deed, no less than 88 committee meetings would already have been held by then. What a fascinating story those missing minutes could tell. A story on how the use and management of the Hall had developed over its first twenty years.

The War and Post-War Years

Certainly, from reading the available minute books, some changes are immediately clear. However, due to the constraints imposed by the trust deed the management of the Hall remained very much a 'closed procedure'. There were the three trustees, and the three committee men, but the Chairman was firmly of the opinion that the parishioners at large had no direct role in the Hall's management. While one of the three committee men stood down each year on rotation, they were immediately available for re-election at the open meeting; and there is no indication that nominations for membership of the committee came from anywhere but from within the committee itself. If this was really the case there would have been little sense of 'ownership' amongst the parishioners.

A battered minute book, covering the period 1941 to 1970 provides a window through which we can view to operation of the Hall over the War and Post War period. Dated extracts from those minutes, with comment where appropriate, are reproduced below.

On 22 August 1941, at a Parish Hall Committee meeting, attended by only three of the six strong committee, the Rector stated '*£15 had been received (from the Educational Department) for last year's rent and said the Department were prepared to do outside as well as inside repairs. This was considered satisfactory.*' At this time the Hall was being used as an evacuees' school room, but social functions were also taking place. The minutes go on to record – '*The question of breakages at functions was then discussed. It was understood that when the Hall was hired for various purposes no breakages were paid for. At a recent event damage to the value of 30/- was incurred, and this amount had been paid from the proceeds. It was resolved that this rule should be observed in future.*' Although not totally clear this seems to place responsibility for breakages on the hirer. But this was wartime Britain. Replacement crockery, cutlery

and household linen was in short supply and controls were in place. The Utility Symbol was about to be introduced, indicating that the item conformed to the restrictions imposed on the manufacture of household items, and indeed other items such as clothing. Replacement of the breakages would often have to be through the second hand trade.

The Annual Meeting of the Parish Hall and Ratepayers, held on the 10th November 1941, appears to have been attended only by the Rector, two committee members, and Miss Ciapp as the secretary. But as the only item on the agenda was to elect one member to the Hall Committee the public lack of interest is unsurprising. In the event Mr Bate, who was on active service, was re-elected on to the committee. Both committee meetings during 1942 were poorly attended, perhaps active service being the reason, and at the Annual Meeting on 19 November 1942 a Mrs Horrell was elected as 'committeeman'. The male bastion had been breached.

Comment is merited at this point, as there are parallels. Through the War the compiler of this history was attending a boys' school. As with the Parish Hall Committee, the school had lost staff members to the forces and, reluctantly, was forced to take on a few female teachers. This was obviously against the grain for the establishment, and we were required to address any female teacher as 'Sir'.

An interesting point appears in the minutes for 19th June 1943. The Rector referred to – *'The Performing Rights Licence which had been taken out, under compulsion, and explained this should impose a fee of 5/- on every musical entertainment held in the Hall'*. And later in the same minutes – *'the Secretary reported that £1 had been paid for hire of the Hall for a Whist Drive and Dance due to a misunderstanding regarding the use of the piano. The Rector asked that it might be clearly understood the fee for hire of Hall for a long night was £1-7s-6d no deduction being allowed in view of the piano or any other furniture not being used.'* Whether use of the piano for a dance constituted 'musical entertainment' would perhaps depend on the quality of the rendition!

Recalling this was a period of wartime shortages the minutes continue *'Mr Newman said he had been requested to make an enquiry as to the lack of equipment at the Hall such as tea cloths, tea pots, trays etc. The Rector replied this equipment should be provided*

by the organisers or promoters of any entertainment held at the Hall'. Clearly a matter of 'bring your own'.

The next meeting was ten months later, on 5th February 1945, when it was recorded that Mrs Horrell had died. The breach of the male bastion proved short and un-sustained. The minute book takes us to 9th December 1970 without further female membership of the committee.

By June 1945 the War in Europe was over, and from the start of the new school year the Hall was no longer required as a classroom. The County Education Committee still wished to use the Hall for the School Meals Service. Few, if any, of the children attending school would not have had school lunch. Food rationing was to continue for many years; indeed it would become more severe as bread was rationed for the first time in 1946, a year after cessation of hostilities. Packed lunches were hardly an option. The Education Committee sought a reduction in rent, but this was rejected; it remained £15 a year with the County still being responsible for repair of the building. This was sensible. It was not only food that was in short supply, and although little maintenance was being carried out the Local Authority stood more chance of obtaining materials than the Hall Committee. An estimate for essential repairs had been given but the minutes (19 Jul 45) record "*costs had increased out of all proportion since estimate was given*". And a year later "*nothing had been with regard to the work which was the liability of the Education Department.....the Hall was deteriorating for want of attention*" (30 Apr 46). Progress was indeed slow as indicated by "*with reference to repairs to the Hall.....the County Architect would make an inspection in the near future to see what could be done*" (26 Sep 46).

The difficulties of every day life in the immediate post war period are further revealed by the minute "*the possibility of some heating arrangements at the Hall for evening functions.....was discussed. It was thought one of the stoves in the Hall could be utilized....if the necessary fuel could be obtained*" (26 Sep 46). Application would subsequently be made to the Fuel Office, but there is no indication whether or not this was successful.

The tale of 'shortages' continues. At the Annual Meeting on 10th November 1947 the rector reported "*the caretaker Mrs Stone.....wished to resign...owing to a lack of*

equipment...and an inadequate salary'. There were clear cost implications and it is recorded *"if Mrs Stone consented to continue...the Hall Committee would have to provide more equipment and revise the scale of payment...this would necessitate higher charges for letting the Hall...charges had not been revised since 1940"*.

This Annual Meeting of Parish Hall Committee and Ratepayers was well attended, and the minutes extend to three pages in the minute book. The objects for which the Hall was built 'as an Institute and Reading Room for the use of all men of the age of sixteen years or upwards' were discussed, and there is a sense that a far wider use was being sought. Certainly the use of the Hall as a school room and for the school meals service extended way beyond the original primary objects. Changes had been made; more would have to be accepted. At the same meeting it was minuted, in response to an inquiry – from the floor - *'the Balance in Hand was £119-3s-11d'* but *this would have been less than £5 if 'all expenditure and cost of repairs had been the liability of the Hall Committee'*. Clearly the County Education Committee had done something at last.

About this time the minutes become far more detailed than previously, providing a fascinating window through which to view Parish life at the time. The Hall Committee minutes for 12th January 1948 covered not only the caretaker's terms of reference and revised letting charges but also the state of the Hall's equipment. A decision was made to *'obtain one hundred cups and saucers, one hundred small plates and three dozen packs of playing cards'*. There were broken chairs and table which Mr Stone, doubtless husband of the caretaker, had offered to repair. Mr Stone *'suggested that the old piano at the back of the Hall might be utilised for the repair work'*, but *'the Committee agreed it would be advisable to at first decide if the instrument was of any use before it was destroyed'*. Mr Stone had also asked if he could use the 'waste land outside the Hall' for poultry keeping, but this request was turned down.

At the next Hall Committee meeting, on 26th July 1948, it was reported *'that the tables, chairs and the piano had been repaired at a cost of £10'*. To put that into context, £10 in 1948 was the equivalent of about £500 in today's money (2004).

The next Annual Meeting took place on 18th November 1948. A change of attitude was apparent. Whereas at earlier Annual Meetings it had been made quite clear to the

Ratepayers that the only purpose of the meeting was to elect the Hall Committee, on this occasion the minutes show that the Rector took the opportunity to *'place various matters before the meeting'*. These related to the wider use of the Hall and to the improvements that had been made with regard to the Hall's equipment. The Rector then *'proceeded to speak about an injurious statement brought to his notice regarding the disposal of a billiard table at the Hall. He referred to the minutes of the meeting in which the Committee agreed to advertise the billiard table as it had deteriorated and seemed to be of little or no use at the Hall'*. The minutes then go on to state *'In a later meeting it was seen that the Committee agreed the table should be sold for the sum of £8, this amount being traced in the current account. The Rector assured the Committee all these statements were correct and during the time he had been Treasurer all money received had been conscientiously devoted to the different objects for which it had been intended'*. The minutes show that *'the Committee supported this remark and expressed regret that such libellous statements without cause had been made'*. Unfortunately the minutes are quite silent about any Committee discussion relating to a billiard table.

The Rector, Reverend Sutton, had been chairman of the Hall Committee for 23 years, and the next meeting, on 19th January 1949, was his last before retirement. The Rector pointed out *'a few items that would need attention in the near future. With reference to the Electric Light Engine a new pulley band would shortly be required; also the poles carrying the cable through the churchyard required adjusting. The question of getting someone responsible to start the engine would also have to be considered'*. This matter was considered shortly after, at a meeting of the Hall Committee on 17th February 1949. The minutes record *'Service for the Electric Light Engine was then discussed and the problem of getting someone responsible was debated.....some trouble had arisen over the manipulation of the engine at a W Drive and Dance (these two functions may not seem mutually compatible today, clearly 1949 was different) the previous week with the result that an account of 12s-10d had to be met by the Church and Hall to repair the damage'*. The minutes go on to record discussion regarding sharing costs with the Church Council for running and maintaining the engine, and *'it was agreed that the three Church Councillors present, namely Mr Perraton, Mr Hodge and Mr Marten be empowered to act on behalf of the Hall Committee'*. This is an interesting insight into how the Hall was run. Miss Clapp would have been secretary to both the Parochial Church Council and the Parish Hall Committee, and only two members of the Hall

Committee were not also on the Church Council. The Hall was thus firmly in the grip of the Church. Whether this suited all or even the majority of the Ratepayers is a matter of speculation.

What seems clear is that the outgoing rector imposed rather a dead hand on the Hall Committee. He chaired his last brief meeting on 19th January 1949 and in the next four months the Hall Committee met four times with Mr Newman in the chair. Whereas the earlier minutes show little action by the Committee, those without benefit of clergy spread to ten foolscap pages and are brimming with activity. All then goes quite until the Annual Meeting of Ratepayers and Parish Hall in November under the new rector. We may assume the interregnum was over sometime in May or June.

Not only had the Hall Committee met frequently, much business was completed. There was the Electric Light Engine, already mentioned above. A proposal to start adult education classes through the Devon Education Committee was progressed. Improvements and repairs to the Hall were put in hand; these included forward planning to 'do something about the roof', which was in a poor state of repair. The Hall was used for the issue of Ration Books; this had previously taken place at the Rectory, and also for the collection of rates for the Parish of Diptford.

The Hall Committee next met on 3rd November 1949, immediately after the Annual meeting with the ratepayers. Estimates for re-roofing the Hall had been received as follows: *'Heavy gauge corrugated iron - £112, Cedar wood shingles £130, Blue Asbestos slate £140. Builders comments as follows: 1. Iron is inclined to be noisy during stormy weather and would need painting periodically. 2. Shingles - owing to the close proximity of the Rectory trees moss and vegetation would accumulate and this would tend to shorten the life of the shingle. 3. Blue Asbestos slate are used in considerable quantities for dwellings and buildings being very light they would not impose any stress on the walls. This was recommended by the builder'* (sic) The Committee accepted the estimate for blue asbestos. How different from today, with blue asbestos known to pose a health hazard.

Noting that the Hall had accepted the most expensive estimate for roof works it is appropriate to look at the state of the Hall's finances. It was recorded, in the minutes of

the Annual Meeting, that the current account balance in hand was £131-7s-10d, a little short of the approved expense. But there was an undisclosed sum in the National Fixed Interest Trust. Unfortunately this was still in the name of the previous treasurer, the former Rector, Rev Sutton, and the Committee seemed uncertain how to 'get their hands' on it. A year later, at the next Annual Meeting, it was recorded that *'the National Fixed Interest Trust...was an investment...consisted of 50 certificates ...worth....£83-3s-9d.* So, with redemption of these assets, the Hall had enough money for the new roof.

The Hall Committee Minutes of 3rd November 1949 record discussion on *'the Devon County Education Committee's responsibility for repairs to the Hall'* but *'no correspondence other than minutes were available'* and resolved *'to purchase a container for the use of documents and correspondence in connection with the Hall'*. The intent to seek a contribution from Devon County is clear from the minutes.

Quite separately, the question of ownership of the strip of road in front of the church is obliquely mentioned in the same minutes; *'arrangements were being made to repair the road outside the Church. A load of tarmac had been ordered for the purpose...any surplus ...could be used for the road by the Hall'*. But it was considered this was a matter for the Parish and District Councils to take up.

The close relationship between Church and Hall is further revealed in the minutes of a Hall Committee meeting on 15th April 1950. The minutes record *'Devon County Education Committee could accept no responsibility in this matter (Hall roof)'*. And arrangements were in hand for a Whist Drive and Dance in aid of the Bell Fund, but as the Hall was in need of funds the Hall should take precedence. This was to be the last recorded Committee meeting for three years. In July 1953 the new rector, the Reverend Mousley, was to hold his second Hall Committee meeting. It was also his last for he told the Committee it would be the last time he would preside as he was about to leave the Parish. It was the unsafe condition of the wiring in both Church and Hall, and the urgent need for rewiring, that necessitated the meeting. The minutes indicate the insulation had perished in several places and there was no connection of the Hall system to earth. Three months later a tender, from Cousins Brothers, to rewire the Hall and Church supplies was approved at a joint meeting of the Church Council and Hall Committee.

All then goes quiet for a further three years, when on 23rd May 1956 Reverend Britton chaired the Committee for the first time *'since his advent to the Parish'*. The minutes of the last meeting were read confirmed and signed. It is a remarkable feat of memory that members could recall what had been said three years previously. The accounts for 1953, 1954, 1955 and 1956 were presented and accepted. The requirement in the Trust Deed to hold committee meetings not less frequently than once every three months was being ignored.

Interestingly the same minutes record *'the rates on the Hall seemed excessive in view of the fact that nothing was done to the road leading to the Hall which was still in a bad condition'*. Also *'the County Engineer had recently looked at the drain in the field and informed..... that Diptford was fourth in the list for the sewerage scheme'*. Further improvements to the facilities in Diptford were on the horizon, for the minutes also record: *'with reference to electricity coming to the village the Rector said, anticipating the wishes of the Committee, the papers concerning the agreement had been signed by him...the rent was 15/- per quarter plus the cost of units consumed....it was agreed...mains electricity would not cost as much as the Lighting Plant, petrol and other costs involved....the Rector's action was approved'*. Earlier it has been observed that the Hall Committee may not have been fully representative of Parish opinion. Here it is seen that the situation was in fact far less democratic. Not only had the Committee been effectively suspended for three years, when it did finally meet it was to sanction measures taken, by the Rector, without formal approval.

On 1st April 1957 there was a joint meeting of the Hall Committee and the School Managers. The main items for discussion were the condition of the road – it still had received no maintenance – and the Hall caretaker whose wages were paid by both the Hall and the Devon Education Authority separately for the services they each received. The problem was the caretaker had reached the age of sixty, and the Education Authority wished to retire her. How the problem was resolved is not a matter for this history, but it is worth reflecting that the Rector was possibly chairman of both the School Managers and the Hall Committee. This reflection is reinforced by the minute *'Mr Perraton said as this was probably the last meeting for the Chairman Rev Britton before leaving the Parish he wished to express gratitude to him for all the help and cooperation he had given while*

at *Diptford*'. The School Managers then retired and the meeting continued as a Hall Management Committee.

It was 28th November 1957 before the new Rector. Rev Ford chaired a meeting of the Parish Hall Committee. By this time the Hall was on mains electricity. The main item on the agenda was an application to the Carnegie Trust for a grant to buy equipment. It later became clear that grants required matched funding but the Hall had no significant reserves. Over the next four months the Committee met four times. It is noted that over the previous four years the Committee had met only four times. Perhaps the change of incumbent was a factor. The outcome of this 'rash of meetings' was organization of a farm sale to raise funding for equipment. But it was no longer 'matching' funding that was required; the application had run into difficulties.

In the minutes of a Committee meeting held on 21st July 1958 it is revealed that a letter had been received from the National Council for Social Service. The letter recommended that the Trustees should apply to the Charity Commission for a scheme to be made settling the property on a suitable trust for a Village Hall. Unless the Hall become a charitable trust there neither Carnegie nor any other grant aiding body would be able to make a grant for equipment or improvements to the Hall. Such a scheme was finally drawn up thirty years later in 1988. It is hard to determine why it took so long for the advice from the National Council for Social Service to be followed, but it has to be recognized that once the Hall became a registered charity 'ownership' was vested in the civil parish and management became democratic. Until that time notional 'ownership' was vested in the Rector and management was very much in the hands of church parish. We have already seen signs that some rectors preferred the original autocracy.

Without grants the Hall had to fund itself, and that was the purpose of the farm sale. A list of promises, in the minutes, shows that despite the autocracy already suggested above, the Civil Parishioners were more than willing to help the Hall out; more willing indeed than some of the Committee for the list of donors shows surprising omissions. Amongst the items offered were geese, a lamb, a pig, cockerels, bantams, a duck, a churn of milk, bags of potatoes, and 'loads' of barley, straw, hay and logs, plus much non farming sale items such as furniture, a ladies bicycle and a bottle of whisky. The venture

deserved success, and the minutes of a General Meeting on 22nd October 1958 show that £258-3s-9d was raised.

In the same minutes it was confirmed that no grants would be forthcoming unless the Hall had a constitution appropriate to a Village Hall. One member of the Committee said *'it would be better to keep the affairs of the Hall independent'*. 'Independent of what' is not revealed. The Rector was not quite so dismissive and *'it was finally decided that the Secretary should reply (to the National Council of Social Service) to the effect that the Committee would be prepared to consider the suggestion, but before any decisions were made request that a scheme be drawn up for their consideration'*. Such a lukewarm approach would be unlikely to generate feverish activity amongst those trying to help the Village. Thirty years on, in more enlightened times, the Hall did become a charity. The management of the Hall at last became representative of the users of the Hall and of the 'villagers'. But at least the Hall had started to move a little in the right direction. There were other moves as well. Originally at Annual meetings, Rectors had made it quite clear that the only role of the 'villagers' was in electing a member to the Committee, and often it was a matter of re-election; now at General meetings suggestions on a range of subjects came from the floor.

The minutes of a Hall Committee meeting on 13th November 1959 indicate that a Model Trust Deed had been received from the National Council of Social Service. It was dismissed out of hand. A proposal that *'no further negotiations should be made, in view of the legal complications'* was carried. Four lines in the minutes wipe away all the assistance the Hall had been offered. It is unclear what the 'legal complications' were, but plainly the time to transfer 'ownership and management' of the Hall to parishioners would have to await more enlightened counsel.

Enlightenment was however sought. The Carnegie Trust had written expressing regret that the Hall Committee had withdrawn their application for a grant, but left the door open for the time being. This led the Committee, at a meeting of the Hall Committee on 7th April 1960, to revisit the 'legal complications'. The problem lay in a conflict in between the wording of the original Trust Deed and that proposed by the National Council for Social Service. Following discussion the secretary was authorized *'to interview a*

Solicitor Messrs Kellock and Cornish Bowden to know if the Trustees and Committee were legally in order in continuing to abide with the original Trust Deed'.

The minutes of the Annual Meeting held on 25th November 1960 show that attendance at Committee meetings over the year had been *'depleted as one Trustee and one Committee member lived some distance from the Parish'*. In later years, under the Trust Deed agreed with the Charity Commission, living in the Parish became a condition of election onto the Hall's Management Committee. Times do change.

A Committee meeting was held following the 1960 Annual Meeting. The minutes record *'the Rector said....the present Trust had been examined by Messrs Kellock and Johnson who had stated there seemed to be no reason for the new deed of management if the Trustees did not wish to proceed with the application to the Carnegie trust grant. At the same time the model trust deed which the solicitor wished to examine seemed fairly reasonable in their opinion. The Rector said as the Committee felt there were many complications in the Carnegie Trust Proposals necessitating a new Deed of Management it had been decided to proceed no further'*. The 'complications' remain un-stated. For the time being, a more inclusive form of democratic management was rejected in favour of one of oligarchy, verging at times on autocracy, as provided by the Trust Deed of 1920.

This observation in no way infers that the Management Committee did not have the best interests of the Hall's users at heart. Over a period of two years much was done in improving the fabric, appearance and equipment of the building. Repairs effected included *'jacking up and supporting sunken portions of the building; fitting extra supporting beams and joist'*. (Annual Report 1961) But such measures could only have short term effect, and eventually, as it proved, the building would have to be replaced. Indeed a year later *'it was observed that the floor of the Hall was very poor in place but nothing could be done....as renewal...would be a very expensive item'* (Committee minutes 22 Nov 62).

It had become practice for the Committee to meet only once a year, immediately after the Annual Meeting. The minutes are routine, the major concern seems to have been difficulty in getting a caretaker, though the condition of the floor was becoming a worry. The 1965 meeting minutes show it was decided to consult local builders regarding floor

repairs and *'the Contractors selected were Messrs A Blake and Son, Diptford; Messrs C & W Hallett, Moreleigh; Staverton Builders'* . Estimates for repair, received from the 'selected contractors', were discussed at a committee meeting on 22nd July 1966, when it was also decided to seek tenders from Messrs C J Blake, Totnes and Messrs Blight and Scoble, Buckfastleigh. When it came to the question of how to pay for the work the treasurer said *'he could not say definitely what sum would be available'*. It was finally agreed that *'the Chairman should write (to the County)....and request that a grant be made'*. The request was later rejected by the County but an increase in rent was offered, and accepted, instead.

Through early 1967 there was a flurry of activity, with Committee Meetings being held on 27th January, 27th February, 16th March and, 28th April. The minutes tell a convoluted story which may be summarized as follows. The estimate from Mr A Blake for renewal of the floor was favoured, and a contract was eventually signed. But Mr Blake also recommended repairs to the structure of the Hall where it was deteriorating. The planned floor repair was scaled down to allow for the structural repairs, now considered to be urgent. Mr Blake had been right to identify the need for structural repairs for the 27th February 1967 Committee minutes reveal *'during the day the heavy wind and rain storm had caused additional havoc at the Hall.....a window had been blown out and the end wall had been loosened. Mr Blake had been summoned to block the window and prop the end wall in order that the school children could have their meal there'*.

By co-incidence a Committee meeting had been arranged for the day of the storm, not to consider the new damage but letters received from the County concerning decoration of the kitchen. In view of the increase in rent the County wished the Hall Committee to contribute towards work on the kitchen. The coin had been turned. Totally responsible for the proposed work on the kitchen or not, the day before Mr Padden (County) had apparently asked Mr Blake (Hall's contractor for the floor) *'to lag all the pipes in the kitchen, enclose them in hardboard and give an estimate for the walls to be painted with a coat of emulsion'*.(minutes for 27 Feb 67). Some disquiet was expressed that *'the County was presuming on the rights of the Committee'*.

In a way the storm damage was a Godsend. A claim was made against the Ecclesiastical Insurance Company, who subsequently made a contribution of £80 towards

the cost of building repairs (minutes 28 Apr 67). The reduced work on the floor was carried out later in the year. The Hall Committee made no contribution towards the work on the kitchen. An eventful year ended with a report that the Hall roof was leaking (minutes 6 Dec 67).

There was one Committee meeting in 1968, but no Annual meeting, and 'normal service was resumed at the Annual meeting on 10th November 1969, the first attended by the new Rector, Rev Peter Willis. The last entry in the minute book is for the Annual meeting in December 1970.

The minutes for the next nine years have not been located. This takes the history on to 1979, when there were still three trustees, namely: Reverend Peter Willis, Henry Perraton and Ivor Crocker; the three committee men were Norman Preston, Stan Wall and Mrs Mary Priddey.(12) The secretary to the Committee was still Miss Clapp. While Miss Clapp had been ever present as Secretary for sixty years, until the appointment of Mary Priddey to the committee, Mrs Horrell's brief wartime service apart, the Hall had remained essentially a male preserve. But the Hall was no longer an institute and reading room for men. Times had changed.

To illustrate this point, the March 1979 minutes record a report from Mr Smale, Head Teacher of Diptford Primary School. Apparently for the next two years the combined Junior School classes would be 49 and 50 pupils respectively. This represented a bulge for the school, progressing through from a growing Infant Department. Mr Smale sought to make the Hall a permanent classroom, for seven terms, starting immediately. While this may seem to indicate some lack of forward planning we are not party to any discussions that may already have taken place between Mr Smale and the local education authority. He could have been looking for a solution for sometime, and the precedence of using the Hall as a classroom had already been set during the war. Certainly the school received portable buildings a few years later.

The records show that at this time the finances of the Hall were barely on an even keel; in fact the Hall was some £90 in debt, and was being kept afloat through loans made by one of the trustees. The Trust Deed required all money received from rent and lettings to be applied in maintaining, repairing and improving the Hall, to paying expenses and to

providing books, periodicals and other things that may be required for the purposes of the Hall. (13) At least £300 was spent on materials for work on the Hall in 1979 and a further £172 the following year. These were considerable sums when compared against the Hall's annual income. The cost of maintaining and repairing the Hall had left no scope for any improvements. At the time the temporary income boost arising through the School's use of the Hall must have been seen as a welcome windfall, and by the following year the Hall was indeed just back in the black. And so it remained, just in the black, as the following evidence shows.

In 1981, the response to a request from the Women's' Institute was, "The Hall funds would not permit the purchase of stacking chairs...Parish Council should be asked for a grant towards the chairs".(14) And two years later "The Hall Committee was not in a position to help financially towards minor kitchen improvements".(15) The School was using the kitchen to prepare school meals, and there is frequent mention in the minutes of negotiations between the Hall Committee and Devon County Council regarding kitchen equipment and maintenance. The County had installed a chip fryer and, whether there was concern at possible fire risk or not, the insurers were invited to visit and make an insurance valuation on the Hall. To many who can remember the condition of the 'old hall' in 1983 it will come as a surprise that a valuation of £50,000 was agreed.(16) Was it a case of 'being worth more dead than alive'? Possibly for at a committee meeting later in the year the Rector said "he had sent a reply (to Devon County Council) stating that the Hall was not in a position to find £250, or a substantial part, to redecorate the kitchen". (17) But at the same committee meeting the receipt of a donation of £100 from the Diptford Horticultural Society is noted. Indeed by 1985 the reserves were rising steadily, and it seemed as if the Hall had turned the corner, so much so that extension to the Hall was being discussed. (18)

Apart from finance it is clear that, during the early eighties, heating the hall had become a major matter of concern for the Management Committee. The overhead radiant heaters were inadequate and Calor gas heaters were introduced to provide an 'instant boost when needed. The minutes make little mention of who were the users of the Hall, but there is one clue. About this time a Youth Club was started, in the Hall, by a Mr Cooper from Curtisknowledge. Meeting one evening a week there was no conflict, apparently with either the Playgroup or the Brownies, both of whom met earlier on the same day, but Senior

Badminton declined to change their usual slot. How this was resolved is not recorded. It is also clear that the school was still using the Hall for lunches, and the Women's Institute were also both Hall users and benefactors. Doubtless there were other regular and occasional users. Developing local needs had, over time, greatly changed the function of the Hall from those detailed in the original Trust Deed.

Seventy Years on -- the New Hall is Conceived

Any question of ownership had become irrelevant by 23 November 1967 when a well attended open meeting was held to discuss the future of the Hall. The immediate outcome was election of a sub-committee, chaired by Vic Holloway and comprising: Peter Stewart, Les Tolliday, Mrs Elizabeth Hallett, Mrs Janet Bew, Bill Vincent, Mrs Harris and Mrs Palmer. The sub-committee was given specific terms of reference namely:

- 1 To carry out a survey of the Hall,
- 2 To determine what repairs were required to the structure of the Hall,
- 3 To consider possible extension to the Hall,
- 4 To assess whether such extension/repairs were worthwhile, and
- 5 To report on whether a new hall should be built.(19)

The sub-committee worked with commendable speed and in a preliminary report, dated 11 February 1988, (20) advised the Hall Committee that "the sub-committee believed that the time was ripe to consider the provision of a new hall". The sub-committee further stated they thought the cost of a new hall would be between £60,000 and £80,000, and that taking account of grants that may be available some £30,000 would need to be raised locally. At the time the Hall's accounts show that it had a reserve of some £2000, so there would be a long way to go in raising the necessary funding. A need to change the constitution of the Hall was also recognized.

Given this advice the Hall Committee responded immediately. The following day Bryan Ostler, acting on behalf of the Committee, made initial written contact with the Charity Commission setting out the problem and seeking the Commission's guidance. (21)

A further public meeting, attended by 34 parishioners, was held on 8 March 1988 (22) when a proposal to build a new hall was passed by a majority vote of 33 to 1. Also

agreed was a proposal to go ahead with constitutional change, and a finance committee was elected to spearhead fund raising activities. Those initially on the finance committee were: Mrs Val Haddy, Mrs Gwynyth Welford, Mrs Claire Williamson, Mrs Harris, Mrs Janet Bew, Mrs Margaret Colwill and Mrs Ring; Mrs Pam King later joining as interim secretary. It should be noted that, as originally formed, this was an all women committee; indicative of how far the Hall had developed over the past seventy years, and confirming the need for constitutional change.

A number of those elected to the finance committee could also be taken to represent organizations using the Hall, including; the Parochial Church Council, the Women's Institute and the History Society. But it was recognized that some users were not represented. These, listed as; the Playgroup, Friends of Diptford School, the Tennis Association (Amenity Trust), the Horticultural Society and the Cricket Club, would be invited to nominate representatives to serve on this committee.

With the existing Hall Management Committee still in place, and others co-opted to progress fund raising, development planning and constitutional change it was a matter of 'all hands to the pumps'. The Parish, or at least most of it for there were still detractors of the proposals, was galvanized into action. It was recognized that the restrictive nature of the original trust deed created an obstacle that would have to be removed if there was to be any hope of a successful application for grant aid. Without substantial grant aid there would be little prospect of Diptford ever getting the new hall that was so widely desired.

A New Constitution

In the initial approach to the Charity Commission the hope was expressed that "the Commissioners will be able to make a scheme to modernise the Trust on the lines of a normal Village Hall Charitable Trust.".(23) The Commissioners had clearly been this way before and progress was quick. Draft schemes passed to and fro as minor modifications were incorporated to marry the particular needs of Diptford with the general form of such trusts. It had been proposed by the Hall Management Committee that there should be eight elected members of the new management committee alongside seven members representing the Hall's main user organizations, but the Commissioners pointed out "it is usually a requirement of local authorities giving grant aid that the

Committee of the Hall in question should have at least as many members representing local user organizations as it has elected (and co-opted) members".(24) Seven elected and seven representatives was agreed upon, though interestingly the number of elected members was reduced to six by a Supplemental Order in 1994 at Diptford's request.

The scheme also states "the land with the building thereonis vested in the Official Custodian for Charities for all the estate.....belonging to....the Charity".(23) This was a provision that required the approval of a majority of the existing committee. There was no dissent as all six gave their approval.

By October 1988 the scheme had been finalized, and all that was left to be done was to provide proper publicity to the proposal. This was achieved through notice being published in the Western Morning News and being exhibited for at least 21 days on suitable public notice boards in the Parish. Those chosen were in the Church Porch and the Parish Notice Board, with the scheme being available for inspection.

The schedule, forming the final part of the scheme as approved on 14 November 1988, first describes the land and property comprising the Diptford Parish Hall, and then records the Hall's financial assets on 1 November 1988 as being £1439.05 cash on deposit account and £808.11 cash on current account. The task of raising the necessary funding for a new hall was going to be formidable.

From first approach regarding a new constitution, on 12 February 1988, to completion on 14 November 1988 is a remarkably short time in which to achieve so much, and is a credit to all concerned. Of course, a new constitution would have been appropriate, at this time, even without a new hall, but it was the identified need for a new hall that had been the catalyst.

Planning a New Hall

In March 1988 there were 407 names on the electoral roll for the Parish of Diptford, but only 34 persons had attended the public meeting held on the eighth of that month. If a new hall was to be built then widespread support throughout the Parish would be essential. One way to spread the 'facts', as seen by those in favour of the project, was

'sports field' as this area was already in community use. But he doubted whether the County Engineer would approve vehicular access. Looking even further ahead, the Planning Officer interestingly foresaw little objection to a temporary building, for use as a hall during any rebuild, being erected either in the car park in front of the Church, or in the Old Rectory garden adjacent to Water Lane, subject to the landowner's permission being obtained.

It later became apparent that outline planning permission would not be required if a replacement hall was built on the existing site. This more or less confirms the view that the Hall is in the best available position within the existing village envelope. Such considerations perhaps did not exist in 1919 when the first hall was erected. The following comment by Peter Willis, Rector, and therefore Trustee and Hall Committee Chairman in 1988, is worth noting:

In comparison with the Mark I version, there seems to have been less falling out over the Mark II version...I know I will not convince everyone but I am going to try. All I know is that the village and community way back in 1918-1919 were completely divided and in fact it was the minority that won. Ours is not the ideal site we know but if things had gone right in 1918, the Parish Hall would have been built next to the Old Bakery in Diptford's Square. But that was a minor problem, for the quarrel became 'a stone hall in a few years when we have raised the money, or something cheaper now'. The stone was offered free, delivered to site; tradesmen offered their labour free; but to no avail. 'We want a hall now' won the day – and it has never been forgotten. (27)

We will return to this article later in the history.

Fund Raising

It had been noted in the first Parish Hall Fund Newsletter that "some 24 Devon villages have built halls in recent years using Grant Schemes."(28) This clearly established the way ahead. In broad terms grants could be available totalling 70% of the cost of a new build hall, but with a maximum grant of £70,000. With a new hall costing 'as little as £100,000' some £30,000 would have to be raised locally. Advice was sought from those villages that had recently gone through a similar fund raising process. One such village was Membury where, in addition to varied fund raising activities about 60 to 70 donations were made, mostly in the form of deposited covenants. Diptford, by comparison, was a very small parish and provided a different situation. In 1988, when fund raising commenced, there were only 407 names on the electoral roll, and just over 180 dwellings

in the parish. There could be little expectation that deposited covenants would form the major element of fund raising in Diptford. Indeed it later became apparent that a number of parishioners, amongst those who may have been in a position to make deposited covenants, were opposed to building a new hall. In a way the general lack of covenants was good as it forced the majority, those interested in a new hall, to pull together in other ways.

It is not possible in this account to detail all fund raising activities that followed before the new hall was built, but the second Parish Hall Newsletter appeared in the next Parish Magazine. (29) It revealed that the finance committee was no longer an all female affair; two committee meetings had taken place and Tony Redfern was leading the Appeal Team, while Ian Clayden had undertaken to operate a 'fund raising barometer', to be located in the 'square' outside the Rising Sun. Unfortunately Ian became unwell and was unable to fulfil this undertaking. Les Tolliday took up the task, constructing a thermometer rather than a barometer. It was encouraging to see the thermometer's red alcohol rise steadily over the coming months. The first fund raising activity had already taken place; a musical evening in the Hall, organized by John and Marlene Hine, had raised over £300. A 'Wine and Strawberry' evening was arranged for 11 June 1988 at Larcombe Corner - this also raised over £300. The Womens' Institute planned to run three mini-markets in the Square and two dates had been booked for a stall at the Elizabethan Market in Totnes. Other plans included Open Gardens, Silent Auction and a Fireworks Party. The ball was rolling.

Using the Parish Magazine as a source, it may be recorded that support was strong, especially from those groups that were regular users of the existing hall. Various groups such as the History Society and The Playgroup made donations from their own funds, others organized events. The Playgroup had a sponsored slide, the Combined Youth Clubs organized a hog roast, an 'It's a Knock Out' competition, and were paid by British Telecom for regular cleaning of the village telephone box. Within five months over £3000 had been raised. This progress, while encouraging, would not have been enough to finance Diptford's contribution to a new hall, but at this stage there had still been no calls for individual donations; this would not be done until the Hall had charitable status under a new constitution.

Though wide, support for the new hall was not unanimous. The 8th March 1988 General Meeting vote to go ahead with building a new hall had been passed with 33 votes for and only one against, and the Parish News carried an open letter from Mr Green, the sole objector.(30)

"Do We Need a New Hall?

- (1) As far as I am aware no structural Survey of the Hall has been provided. We therefore do not know whether there is anything wrong of such a serious nature that the existing hall should be dismantled
- (2) We are therefore surely in no position to determine whether it would be less expensive to repair the present structure and generally improve its appearance.
- (3) The estimate of £64,000 for the creation of the new building will on general experience be exceeded when the actual building work is done.
- (4) Is the present enthusiasm going to last until £20,000 has been collected? It probably means that most functions in the Village for perhaps two or three years will have to be directed to this end.
- (5) As a consequence all the charitable efforts of the Village will eventually lessen and this would be a pity.
- (6) It is my opinion that charges for the use of the new Hall will be greatly increased in order to pay for the inevitable higher maintenance. This would, I suggest, be more than the various organisations which make use of the Hall at present minimal rates could afford.
- (7) We are fortunate to have a Parish Hall taking into account the size of the Village. I have been told by a County Councillor of the village where they cannot afford the upkeep of their new hall and have to hawk it to organisations outside the village in order to make ends meet. Do we want that?
- (8) The site is not by any means ideal with the difficulty of access and – striking a personal note – the shambles at the bottom of Water Lane during construction, including the felling of numerous trees, might be acceptable in an industrial area, but not I suggest in a relatively quiet Devon village.

I do not believe I am in a minority of one in thinking that the decision in this matter has been made in haste and without due consideration of the points mentioned above."

Rather than engage in a public debate a rebuttal of the points made was made in writing direct to Mr Green.

At a well attended public meeting on 20th February 1989 the existing Parish Hall Committee and the Development Sub-Committee were dissolved, and a Hall Management Committee was formed under the new constitution. (31)

With the new constitution and charitable status in place, it was time to launch the covenant appeal. A short letter explaining the tax free attraction of covenants was written, and delivered by hand to every household in the Parish. Parishioners were invited to contact Tony Redfern, directly or through any member of the fund raising group, if they wished to find out more, or progress this opportunity to contribute towards building a new hall. It has to be said the response was no more than lukewarm. Following up one such lead Tony received both an instant refusal and an invitation to attend a supper party that weekend. It turned out that most of the other guests were of the anti-Hall faction. But far from being hung out to dry it gave the Treasurer an opportunity to hear a point of view different from that held by the majority of parishioners.

The majority of parishioners meanwhile demonstrated their support by almost falling over themselves to organize and attend fund raising functions; these included silent auctions, coffee morning, and fetes. For Tony Redfern, the first fund raising fete at Green Acre was an eye opening introduction to village life. There was none of the formal organization usually associated with such charity events. It just came together and was a success; that is the way Diptford works. In parallel with these events a monthly lottery was set up. Optimistically called the '300 Club', though it never attracted that many members, the lottery under Gwyneth Welford's management remained in being until well after the new hall was built and functioning.

The records show that over the three financial years April 1989 to April 1992 more than thirty thousand pounds was raised from within the parish.(32) To this could be added the considerable benefit of high tax free interest rates applying at the time. All concerned could congratulate themselves on an excellent effort. The same records show that some 20% of the money had been generated through covenants while fund raising activities raised 40% as did donations. The nature of the donations made merits further comment.

A recurring entry in the donations column is five pound here, ten pound there, money given by Mr and Mrs Lloyd and raised by the sale of eggs, surplus to their domestic

needs. When added up the hens produced £62. Every covenant, donation, fund raising activity was formally acknowledge in writing. It is to be hoped that the dozen or so letters of acknowledgement that winged the hen's way finished up lining the walls of their coop; allowing them to cluck over their achievement. A couple of trusts made significant donations, and particularly generous was a major contribution from the Parochial Church Council at a time when St Mary's urgently needed money for roof repairs. But the greatest donation was £5000 from the Parish Council; though very welcome this contribution could now, with the passage of time, well be viewed as parsimonious.

Of course one would not expect the Parish Council to have money of that sort resting in the coffers waiting for a good cause to present itself. The standard practice in such cases is for the parish council to borrow the money from the district council, on favourable terms, and for the loan to be paid back over a period of perhaps ten years, through the parish rate. All present and immediate future rate payers thus contribute. In Diptford's case this is particularly relevant, as the money contributed to what could be regarded as the Parish's major public asset. Those new to the Parish, and having the ability to benefit from the facility the Hall provided, would be able to feel that they too had made some small contribution. Notice, it was the council tax payers that provided the donation. The Parish Council only acted as their representatives on this matter. But everyone was feeling their way, and hopefully lessons for the future may have been learned.

The first meeting of the Parish Hall Management Committee under the new constitution took place on 20 February 1989. The committee numbered fifteen, and was fully committed to achieving the objective of building a new hall. Peter Willis was elected chairman, and other office bearers were Vic Holloway as vice chairman, Peter Stewart as secretary, Tony Redfern treasurer, Norman Preston deputy treasurer, Val Haddy bookings secretary and David Marsland as assistant secretary. Seven of the committee were representing other parish organizations, and indeed three committee members also sat on the Parish Council, including Peter Stewart who was the Parish Council Chairman and the Council's representative on the Hall Committee. The scene is thus set.

By February 1989 fund raising was well underway, and the matter of obtaining grants and external capital donations was being considered by the Hall Committee. In April the secretary reported that "discussions had lead him to believe that Devon County Council

might be encouraged to make a capital donation towards the cost of a new hall if they were interested in continuing to use the hall in conjunction with the school".(33) In the event this belief proved unfounded though, as we will see later, once the hall was built Devon County Council Education Department had a major financial role to play.

As stated grants totalling 70% of development costs up to £100,000 could be available. All the information on the likely cost of a new hall was not then to hand, but the unrealisable hope that the job could be completed within a couple of years still existed. On this basis it was essential that Diptford's contribution was raised as quickly as possible. It was recognized that the minimum £30,000 required could include donations from the Parish Council. Informal discussions amongst members of the 'Hall Executive' concluded that taking account of the success already achieved a donation of £10,000 from the Council would not be inappropriate. With the benefit of hindsight there seems no reason why the Parish Council should not have provided matched funding and made a grant of £15,000. In his capacity as Chairman of the Parish Council, and the Council's representative on the Hall Committee, Councillor Stewart broached the subject of a possible contribution at a Council meeting held on 4 April 1989.(34) The ball was in motion.

Advice was obtained from the Treasurer of South Hams District Council, and the record of the next meeting of the Parish Council shows: "It was proposed ...that this Council does something to help financially with the new Village Hall subject to satisfying themselves as to the viability of the project".(35) The proposal was carried. The record is silent on whether this was a majority or unanimous decision; in 1989 Council Minutes were not published in the Parish News. It was suggested within Council that the three members who were also members of the Parish Hall Committee may be regarded as having vested interest and should not be allowed to vote in this matter. Such a proposition was clearly untenable. The public had demonstrated overwhelming support for a new hall, and the Parish Hall Committee, all either openly elected or nominated by an organization that was a major user of the hall, was probably more representative of public opinion than the Parish Council for which no election had taken place for years. Silence continued for some months. Though it was reported to the Parish Hall Committee that "in regard to assistance from the Parish Council it is possible that a loan could be raised from the District Council...to be repaid by means of a penny rate, but that the Parish Council

wished to hold a public meeting prior to taking such action".(36) There is no record of this public meeting taking place, though at the Parish Council Meeting held on 2 October 1989 there was an open forum to discuss vandalism on the Playing Field. 37) Why not a similar open forum to discuss the Hall?

Fund raising continued through 1989, and by way of recognizing the wide spread support that had been received the Parish Hall Committee decided to fund, out of their own pockets, wine and mince pies to be served on Christmas Eve after the carol singing around the Christmas tree. (38) This set a precedent, for wine and pies on this occasion, that continues today.

Under the heading 'Towards Reality' early in the New Year the Parish News reported "...you will be pleased to learn that...we will have just over £25,000 on December 31st in the Parish Hall Account. That is very good and the top of the hill is in sight...".(39) Then in the next edition Diptford Parish Council Notes indicate "...the decision of Diptford Parish Council that they would raise a loan of £5,000 subject to grants being given by the Community Council of Devon and South Hams District Council".(40) Diptford's £30,000 was now assured. It was not to be enough.

The £5,000 donation from the Parish Council would be paid back over ten years, a repayment rate averaging less than three pounds a year per household in the Parish. From 1992, when the Hall was built, through to 1997 Council Tax remained steady, sometimes even falling, and the three pounds equated to less the half of one percent of the total tax payable. Since 1997 Council Tax has risen dramatically, up 98% by 2003, reducing the repayment of debt element to less than one quarter of one percent. It is easy to see the benefit the new hall has brought to parishioners; it is less easy to recognize benefits arising from a soaring Council Tax. When viewed in these terms the donation becomes less than generous. But perhaps the 'penny rate', mentioned earlier, had created some form of problem for the Parish Council.

Then in the Spring of 1990 good fortune struck. The Hall Committee chairman, in his capacity as Rector of Diptford, had received a telephone call from Tioxide UK Limited. The final outcome of the conversation between Peter Willis and the representative of Tioxide UK was to be a most generous donation towards the hall building funds.

Although all on the Hall Committee were aware of this development, the official committee minutes over the next few months provide no record. Instead we must turn to available correspondence for the story. In a letter to Peter Willis, Tioxide's representative writes:

"As mentioned during our telephone conversation, it is the wish of our Managing Director, Mr Peter Kerr, that you or a nominated representative receive a donation in the form of a cheque at the forthcoming Paintmakers Conference in Torquay."(41)

At the conference in June delegates received the following information:

"The paint industry in 1990 will consume in excess of 1.5 million tons of titanium dioxide pigments worldwide. It is arguably the most important single raw material used by the industry...the element titanium as an oxide was first isolated almost 200 years ago in the South West of England by the Reverend William Gregor, a Parish Priest with a passion for chemistry....At the time of this discovery Pastor Gregor lived in the rectory in the Parish of Diptford, a parish that still exists today.

It came to the notice of Tioxide that a major fund raising campaign by the residents of Diptford to build a new Parish Hall was underway, with completion of the project in 1991 the 200th anniversary of the discovery of titanium oxide.

The shortfall in funding to enable the project to go ahead is £15,000 and Tioxide have agreed to contribute this sum in recognition of Pastor Gregor's work.

The cheque and a portrait of the Pastor will be presented to the treasurer of the fundby the President at the pre-dinner cocktail party this evening."(42)

This was the first indication that the gift would be £15,000. And at the next Parish Hall Committee meeting the treasurer reported "a cheque for £15,000 had been received from Tioxide."(43) The minute goes on to record that "suggestions were made to the effect that some of this money ought to be set aside for investment, and the interest used for maintenance, furnishings etc." In retrospect these suggestions are most unrealistic. First they assume the money would still be available after the hall was built, and second the interest earned on £15,000 would provide only a modest income.

The treasurer's report to the Annual General Meeting on 24 April 1991 was upbeat. It noted "The thermometer in the square shows the alcohol bursting out of the top at £45,000", and "I am confident we are in a strong position to face the costs of rebuilding this year", but went on to warn "we still need to continue to raise money to ensure that our new hall is properly equipped, and to ensure that we retain a small but effective working capital."(44) The warning was justified.

With the end in sight some complacency had set in, not only amongst the Hall Committee but also amongst those others, outside the committee, who had been so active in fund raising. This was not helped when it was reported, at the June committee meeting, that the contract for the new hall had been signed in June, and that "building costs would be £96,000 and together with architects and engineers fees... etc...the total cost was likely to be £104,000."(45) This figure was well within the limits of funds available. The final cost of building, only a few months later, was to be £126,825; and this was without furnishings and additional fittings. The accounts show the overall cost of the new hall had escalated to £141,950. It could have been greater, as some last minute 'hard nosed' bargaining with the builder and architect had successfully reduced the final builder's/architect's account by nearly four thousand pounds; simply, the Hall did not have sufficient funds to meet the bills presented. How did this overspend arise?

There are a number of reasons. Use by the School has long generated a major source of income for the Hall. At the time the contract to build the new hall was signed the intentions of the Local Authority regarding future use of the Hall were unclear. Some clarity emerged when a meeting between Devon Direct Services, School Governors and Hall representatives took place. It was then reported "Devon Direct Services were more than happy to have a kitchen provided to their specification and rent this from the Hall at an agreed rent."(46) The Hall Committee approved the upgrading of equipment and fittings which cost about £7,000. This extra cost was later used as a bargaining chip when agreeing an annual rental with the Local Authority. As a result the Hall now benefits from a well fitted kitchen paid for by external funding.

Television programmes, such as Property Ladder and Grand Designs, on house development and building are currently popular viewing. If there is one central theme to these programmes it is the need for tight budgetary control to stop costs spiralling. The Hall's contracted building sum of £96,000 included £29,425 provisional costs; this was the area where control was necessary, but by the time the builder submitted his final account this had risen to £41,760.(47)

The final area where spending exceeded reserves was the purchase of equipment; once the building costs were met there simply were no reserves left. The treasurer felt it necessary to record his concern, as follows:

"The meeting between ourselves and the builder yesterday was depressing.....What has been known throughout is the sum of money at our disposal. It should have been apparent to those dealing directly with the work that we were grossly overspending, but I was given no indication that the final sum due to the builder would exceed....until I received the interim payment certificate late last month.....the provisional costs and extras have increased by more than 50%" at a time when inflation is 4% building costs are competitive.....Quite simply we do not have the means (to pay)....I am saddened by the lack of control that has allowed this situation to arise.

You well know that I spoke against buying new furniture for the Hall before we knew our final commitment to the builder, and we have been left, as a committee, looking very foolish. We have 'to come clean' at the AGM

I have no doubt the money will be found and in a couple of years there will be no regrets. Action is needed now to deal with our immediate financial problem. I recommend the following steps:

- a ask the Parish Council for a further grant of £5K,
- b take up short term interest free loans where possible in the Parish,
- c defer final payment to the architect,
- d review the requirement for a caretaker – we cannot afford one!
- e regenerate fund raising activities.

Proposal a should be put in hand without delay, and before the new committee is elected on 27 April, so that a positive report can be made at the AGM."(48)

^a The increase in provisional costs turned out to be 42%

What action was taken on the steps recommended by the treasurer? There was no bid for more money from the Parish Council. Interest free loans offers were made by members of the Committee. Final payments were not deliberately deferred as a matter of policy/expediency. Retention of the caretaker became part of the negotiations when setting an appropriate fee for hire of the Hall by the School. Fund raising activities and appeals were regenerated.

The money was found and the treasurer's annual report bore no reference to the difficulties that had been faced other than the comment "My forecast, made at this time last year, that we need to continue to raise money has proved correct".(49)

It was too late to take any action relating to purchase of equipment. Tables, chairs, crockery, sports equipment and curtains were already being bought. It was not too late to use the purchase of these items as the motivation for further fund raising. This had been done, as the following appeal from Peter Willis, under the heading 'And why not an Orange Box' indicates:

"Picture the scene in a modern hall, warm and well lighted. Tantalising smells coming from the kitchen and a hard wood polished floor you could eat your dinner off – and that is the point – for at the moment...you could well be in the position of drawing up an orange box and eating your meal off the floor.

What it amounts to is we are about £5,000 short of having the Hall with all the facilities one could expect. The major item is the furniture.....

.....In the meantime please keep your eyes open for orange boxes, just in case."(50)

This appeal had significant success, and further donations were received, some from people who had not previously supported the concept of a new hall. But there was still a financial gap to be filled, as the treasurer's letter four months later reveals. It would have been necessary to call in those promised interest free loans but for Devon County Council.

The Council wished to use the Hall, during term time, for school lunches and also for other activities on Wednesday mornings and afternoons. For this facility they initially offered £3,200 per annum. A meeting between the Hall 'executive' and the Council's Property Department representative was held, when it was pointed out that at the rent offered the Hall would be subsidising the Council. Negotiations were lengthy, indeed they took over three hours, but terminated with an agreement the Hall could accept. The annual rent was raised to £4,600 payable in advance.(51) This, other income earned once the new Hall was opened, and the renewed appeal had saved the day. One year later, the treasurer in his annual report noted "We have only managed to keep our heads above water by using the operating account to support capital ventures"(52).

Designing and Building the Hall

Whereas the history of the Hall given so far in this paper has clearly identifiable sources, such as official documents, filed correspondence, recorded minutes, financial accounts, and the Parish News, the sources of some of the factors taken into account when planning the new hall are less clearly referenced. These come from a bundle of papers given the title 'miscellaneous correspondence'. For nine months, while the new constitution was being drawn up, the Parish Hall Committee seemingly ceased to operate. The last minutes of the 'old' committee were on 26 May 88, while the 'new' committee

was not formed until 20 Feb 89. The development sub-committee continued to function, as did the fund raising group, and while minutes recording the actions of these two groups were taken it seems they are no longer in existence. But the miscellaneous correspondence bundle does leave some trail of the progress of development planning. By example, there is an interesting item from the Form Design Group (Architects – Planers – Landscape – Surveyors) (sic). There is no covering letter, the report is undated, and there are few clues revealing how it may have been commissioned. It is clearly the report mentioned at reference 25 above, is very informative, and is worth quoting in full.

VILLAGE HALL DIPTFORD – PRELIMINARY REPORT

Existing Building

A cursory inspection of the existing building suggests the following:

- (1) Although the building shows no signs of major defects other than a sagging roof and bulging wall (probably due to undersized structural members) it is clearly reaching the end of its economic life. It must be expected that the cost of maintaining it will escalate, and that the need for major repair could arise at any time.
- (2) Renovation of the hall to bring it up to present day standards would require a great deal of work and it is unlikely that the basic structure is of sufficient quality to warrant the necessary expenditure. Partial refurbishment would leave the village with a less than satisfactory building and a continuing (though reduced) maintenance problem.
- (3) The existing accommodation is inconvenient and inadequate for some of the use to which it is put, and replanning is needed to remedy this.

This confirms the opinion of the committee that the best option to pursue, if funds permit, is the replacement of the hall with a new building.

Provision of Accommodation during rebuilding

The retention of the existing hall during rebuilding would create some difficulties. From the approximate dimensions available, it is apparent that a hall similar in size to the existing one would occupy the whole of the site to the west of the present building and would not give adequate working space for the builder.

The acquisition of the strip of land immediately to the west would alleviate this problem, but the siting and orientation of the building would be dictated by the space available, and the building would extend some way down the slope. A

feasibility study would establish whether or not a satisfactory building could be designed within this area (perhaps on two levels).

It is inadvisable for the temporary loss of the hall to compromise the design of a new building, and the committee should therefore be prepared to consider the demolition of the existing building and provision of temporary accommodation prior to the erection of a new one.

The report then details approximate costs of £81,000 for a 1500 square foot building, excluding any costs of site acquisition, legal fees, or the provision of temporary accommodation. It also warned that the volume of building work was increasing and, as a result of reduced competition tenders were likely to rise significantly over the coming year. At this point it is noted the old hall was some 1700 square foot, and a smaller hall would hardly be a satisfactory solution. In the event the new hall is approximately 2000 square foot, and on the figures given above the estimate would have become £104,000. Remarkably this is the same figure as the tender eventually accepted some years later.

The report then went on:

Feasibility Study

We would suggest that a feasibility study should cover the following:

- (1) Establish the requirements of the various building users in the form of a functional brief.
- (2) Carry out a dimensional and level survey of the site.
- (3) Investigate various options for the siting and layout of the building, including considering the need for accommodation during rebuilding.
- (4) Develop the preferred option into a preliminary sketch design.
- (5) Provide preliminary budget costs.
- (6) Suggest a programme for the project through design, approvals and construction stages.

it is probable that this project would be eligible for a grant under the RIBA Community Projects Fund. Under this, up to £750 could be provided by the RIBA to cover half the cost of a feasibility study carried out by an architect. Funds for 1878-88 have now been used up, but the scheme will be relaunched in April of this year when arrangements have been agreed with the DOE. (53)

Mention has already been made of the speed with which Bryan Ostler had worked in pursuit of a new constitution for the Hall. The Form Design report appears to pre-date

by several months the letter of complaint appearing at reference 30, and shows that speedy progress was also being made, under Vic Holloway as Chairman of the development sub-committee, in the area of planning a new hall.

Late in 1987 Vic Holloway had produced a number of undated site plans, working on the principle of building a new hall while retaining the existing hall. These plans took account of levels, parking and access. It had become clear that land boundaries were a limiting factor and the possibility of extending the Parish Hall site was explored. Diptford may seem a backwater to some, but Mr Woolland, owner of the land sought, now lived in Knoydart, a remote part of the Highlands of Scotland accessible only by boat. The situation was explained to Mr Woolland as "one option is replacement on the present site perhaps S or W of the existing building to maintain continuous use.....this option would be greatly facilitated by the acquisition of a small amount of land from the adjacent field belonging to you..."(54)

Rapid progress was also being made with obtaining a feasibility study. One firm of architects contacted was Pearn and Proctor, with offices at Roborough. In response to a telephone enquiry they wrote "we would be very pleased to visit you and discuss the options that you have so that a feasibility study grant application can be made, on your behalf." (55)

Meanwhile response to a Round Robin letter (56), enquiring how other local parishes had recently progressed in building new halls, is recorded as notes in the bundle of miscellaneous correspondence at reference (53),revealed:

A new hall had been built at **Blackawton** in 1981. There had been no feasibility study. A shell had been built and volunteer local labour completed the job, but the chairman and others involved were in the building trade.

A new hall, costing £60,000, had been built in **Sparkwell** in 1984. There had been no feasibility study, but a local architect was on the hall committee. Two thirds of the money required was obtained by way of County and District Council grants, while half of the remaining £20,000 was funded by grants from the Parish Council and the Church. That a parish with a population of over a thousand raised only the equivalent of £10 per head seems a modest effort indeed.

Most helpful was information on work in progress at **Membury**. In particular Membury seemed in many respects to be very similar to Diptford, as can be seen from the following quote: "Membury...is a fairly scattered parish....with the village

proper (plus school, church and shop) in the middle. [at this time Diptford had a shop in the 'Old Bakery'] The electoral roll contains four hundred names with a mix of farmers, retired people and a small influx of young professionals. The hall is a corrugated iron building given as a reading room in 1910. Ten years ago we built on a committee room, kitchen and toilets, in stone with a flat roof (a mistake). We shall retain this modern bit, rebuild the old hall in stone and cover the whole with a pitched roof."

"We are fortunate in having a lively young architect living in the village....first he produced a feasibility study which included four possible schemes, and our committee chose a combination of two of them. These he then worked into a sketch study on which the committee voted to proceed.....The estimated cost of the rebuild is £62,000.....We assumed our share would be £20,000....and that the County and District Councils would put in £20,000 each. We started in April 87 with four thousand in the bank and embarked on a fund raising project timed to end in time to apply for grants at the latest date of Oct 1st (1988)"(56)

The letter then goes on to express concern on the 'obscure subject of VAT' and to describe Membury's fund raising activities with details of the anticipated state of their funds at the time of commencing building later in the year. The matter of VAT was to exercise minds at Diptford later in their planning process.. It is interesting to note Membury was expecting 75% of total funding to be met from public funds, yet it rapidly became clear to Diptford that the maximum available was 70% up to a £70,000 grant upper limit. But rules do change, and they may have been correct at the time. Other responses showed that:

At **Buckland-in-the-Moor** a new hall had been built in 1985 with Teignbridge District Council drawing the plans free of charge, while **Bratton Clovelly** also built a new hall in 1985 using voluntary and Manpower Services Agency labour.

Beaford meanwhile had built a new hall in 1980, without reference to an architect. A local builder laid the base then London Brick Company came on site to erect a steel framed structure supporting concrete block work faced with local stone and weather board lined. Vic Holloway and Tony Redfern visited Beaford to view the hall and discuss fund raising with members of the hall committee.

The experience of other parishes/villages in building new hall was to prove helpful.

20 February 1989 is a significant date; it was the day the 'Old' Hall Committee held their final meeting, a meeting to which the public had been invited. It was recorded that:

this was "the first AGM held under the scheme dated 14 November 1988. The provisions of the scheme were explained to the 40 or so persons present by Mr Bryan Ostler, who had been involved in production of the scheme. He explained that a Chairman of the meeting would be required and proposed that the Rector, the Rev P A D Willis should take the Chair. This proposal was duly seconded and

carried. The Chairman called on Mr V J Holloway, who had been chairman of the development committee, to report on its activities.

Mr Holloway reported on the committee's confirmation of the view expressed in public meetings that a new hall was required and on the steps that had been taken in this connection. Other village halls had been visited and architects approached. – (see above) - The Community Council of Devon had accepted the new scheme as a basis for grant aid. It was the view of the Development Committee that their functions should be taken over by the Committee of Management under the Scheme. The Development Committee had invited the firm of Lucas Roberts & Brown Partnership, Architects of Exeter, to advise on suitable methods of construction and introduced Mr M Willis of that firm.

Mr Willis displayed various sketch plans on an overhead projector and explained their significance. He estimated that a pre-fabricated building, which he understood the committee had in mind, might cost between £70,000 and £120,000. Questions were asked about the need for a new building, the sloping nature of the site and car parking difficulties, the possibility of having a traditional construction, the provision for the playing of badminton, and various other matters. These were answered by the architect, Mr Holloway and Rev Willis. In the replies the previously expressed public view that the existing hall was unsatisfactory was underlined, and that money would be better spent on a new hall than in renovating the old. The need to consider old people was mentioned and the possible provision for a Post Office in the hall. It was hoped that the new hall would provide greater comfort and adequate storage facilities. It was not contemplated that the new hall would be very different in size from the existing one. The possibility of a traditional building would probably be ruled out on cost.”(58)

The minutes of the GM record the names of the seven members of the new Hall Committee representative of; the Parish Council, The PCC, the Play Group, the Youth Club, the Guides and Brownies, the Women's Institute, and Friends of Diptford School. It remained to vote by secret ballot to elect seven further committee members from eleven proposed and seconded nominations received from the floor. That there were more candidates than vacancies was most unusual. Seldom in recent history can this have been the case for any committee in Diptford. It is indicative of the enthusiasm parishioners had for building a new hall.

At the first Hall Management Committee meeting under the new constitution, which followed the AGM on 20 February 1989, it was recorded that Mr and Mrs Woolland had kindly offered to make available the strip of land adjoining the site of the Hall (59), it later being declared conditional on the legal fees being paid by the Hall Committee (60).

Progress was also being made regarding a feasibility study. A cheque for £431.25, equating to 50% of the study's cost, had been received from RIBA.(61) The minutes further show that the firm of Lucas Roberts and Brown had undertaken the study. The study itself does not form part of the record available as source material supporting this history of the Hall. Michael Willis brother of Hall chairman Peter Willis was a senior partner of the firm. By this stage discussion on what shape, in the broadest sense of the word, the new hall should take were taking place at every meeting of the committee. In particular the question of whether an 'off the shelf' prefabricated building or a custom built hall was the correct option was being addressed. As fund raising still had a long way to go there was plenty of time to 'fine tune' the design process, and the decisions of the Hall Committee formed the basis of a developing brief from which the architect was able to work.

By May 1989 planning was sufficiently developed for proposed plans to be drawn up, by the architect, for application for planning consent. (62) The planning application was submitted to South Hams District Council on 15 May 1989, (63) and approved by the Council on 7 July 1989. (64)

Fine tuning the 'shape' of the new hall – in terms of space and facilities – had continued, and at a sub-committee meeting in April 1989 Vic Holloway submitted the latest of a series of drawings reflecting those discussions. It was agreed that these drawings should be considered the definitive plan, and should form the basis of the Hall Committee's requirements from which the architect could work. (65)

To get some idea of what may be possible a Performance Specification was sent by Lucas Roberts and Brown, in July 1989, to a number of system building manufacturers. with a request for provisional cost estimates. The companies included Leofric Broadspan Buildings, Devon Lady, Oakmoor, H Peel Ltd and S Wernick and Son. By October the following estimates had been received:

Oakmoor	£132,745
H Peel Ltd	£152, 558
S Wernick & Son	£191,796 (66)

Faced with these estimates the Hall Committee decided to seek a meeting between Oakmoor, the architect and members of the Committee to explore ways of reducing the

costs. At the same time estimates would be sought from conventional builders against the same performance specification. (67)

By this time conveyance for the transfer of the additional strip of land from Mr & Mrs Wooland, (see reference 54), to the Hall had been completed.

Meanwhile the threat of having to pay VAT on the building costs was being addressed on a number of fronts. Meeting the costs of building and equipping a new hall was to prove a close run thing (see Reference 52). And as it turned out VAT would have added £19,000 to the building costs (see Reference 47), money that it may not have been possible to raise, though on reflection the Parish Council contribution could well have been significantly increased. One question arising was the status of covenants. If donors specifically required their contributions to be used in building a new hall, could their covenants be cancelled and the money returned if no hall was built? That question was directed at the Inland Revenue. (68) For the 'tax man' this would be familiar territory and a simple question to answer, but the payment of VAT itself was altogether different. As the threat of VAT had arisen from the United Kingdom's membership of the European Economic Community, the advice of Lord O'Hagan, the Member of the European Parliament for Devon, was sought thus:

"If my information is correct there is currently an intention to deprive village halls of VAT zero rating for both capital and revenue purposes. I am told that it has been claimed that letting halls constitutes a 'business activity'.

I write on behalf of this small village which has literally no other amenity and which, at the present time is struggling to raise funds to rebuild a rather decrepit structure. The addition of VAT at this stage would wreck out plans.

In any case for this, and presumably most villages, such a claim is surely wrong. No profit is made. The hall is managed as a charity technically, legally and practically. I hope you will be able to help. (69)

This letter was copied to Anthony Steen, the local Member of Parliament, with the added hope that he would be able add his voice in applying pressure on the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Lord O'Hagan was prompt in responding. His reply (70) puts the problem into context and is given below:

I shall do my best to be of some help, although I am not confident that I can.

The European Court of Justice ruled last June that the British Government was applying existing European Community legislation on VAT too narrowly. We as a country are now obliged to widen the net to be cast over activities liable for VAT to include the provision of services like electricity, gas, water and new building

Nobody can tell how the British Government is going to put this ruling into effect until we see the Finance Bill after the Budget. However it is likely that Village Halls will be included for the purposes that I have mentioned, unless the Government is able to devise some method of satisfying European Community law without hitting Village Halls.

I can assure you that no-one in Brussels wants to attack Village Halls but the ruling of the Court of Justice was merely intended to ensure that the British Government was complying with legislation which had been put on our statute books (albeit not correctly) for well over a decade.

The reply was copied to Anthony Steen, who meanwhile had written to Peter Brooke, Chairman of the Conservative Party, regarding the concern. This in turn sparked a response from Peter Lilley, at the Treasury, to Anthony Steen. (71) In so much as the reply gives an insight into the workings of Whitehall, significant elements are given below.

The response starts with a very much *fait accompli* resume of the general situation regarding the effect of VAT zero rates on village halls, saying proposals were in the Finance Bill to implement the Court's ruling, that Customs had published draft clauses to give those affected an opportunity to prepare for introduction, and that "we have gone as far as we can...to minimise the burden of tax and compliance." Not much encouragement there then.

It then went on to say that the judgment enabled retention of "zero-rating for constructionfor charities for non-business purposes". Peter Lilley then wrote:

....under VAT law the definition of business activities is drawn very widely. It would include hiring out village halls to local groups and for private parties. We are therefore obliged to levy VAT on construction of new village halls.....(unless the halls owners are not engaged in the business activity of hiring them out). However, I have asked Customs to continue discussions with the Village Halls Forum to see if there are any ways in which the impact on them can be mitigated.

A long paragraph follows suggesting it might be possible for village halls to opt to charge VAT on their lettings and claim back the VAT. But reading this paragraph carefully it

rapidly becomes clear that this is not a realistic option. All is not lost, for he comes up with a further option. The further option suggested was:

...for village halls to cease to make set charges and merely invite voluntary donations from the groups who use their premises. Since this would be outside the definition of business, village halls who did this would be eligible for the general relief.....to charities for non-business purposes.

By this time I wonder if Peter Lilley read the letter before signing it. It is so badly written I want to send the letter back, covered in red ink, to whoever had drafted it. Peter Lilley concluded by saying:

I greatly sympathise with the widespread concern about the impact on village halls of the EC Court judgment. But as you know it is not the Government which has instigated these changes in VAT liabilities. The Court's ruling interprets the EC Sixth VAT Directive to which the then UK Government gave its assent in 1977. The UK is obliged to implement the Court rulings.

It is not difficult to imagine the concern this 'view from the top' caused back in Diptford. The Customs and Excise VAT Office in Exeter was contacted (72), to confirm that the advice received was correct, and to request the forms necessary to register for VAT as a business. Meanwhile Lord O'Hagan had not given up the fight; as shown in a letter written to Peter Brooke (73), and reproduced below.

There has been a great deal of anguish in Devon about the proposal to impose VAT on Village Halls.

I understand that the Government accepts that zero rating of construction, fuel and power can continue for Village Halls conducting 'non-business' purposes.

It seems that no British Finance Act defines the term business for VAT purposes; the interpretation of this important word has been left in the hands of Her Majesty's Customs who have always given it a very broad meaning.

Some other member states have a less all-embracing definition. For example, in the Netherlands, in order to conduct a 'business', an organization must be established for the purpose of taking part in 'economic life'. I am now writing to your to ask the Government to make some marginal adjustments to Her Majesty's Customs own interpretation of the word 'business', which will be perfectly possible under European Community law. After all, HM Customs have already decided that providing 'Meals on Wheels' for a charge below cost, or providing religious services for a fee, is not a 'business'.

The Government is being narrow-minded and pedantic if you insist on including Village Halls within the VAT net allegedly because of the recent ruling of the European Court of Justice. The root of the difficulty is the 1972 Finance Act, which defines business for VAT purposes, not the sixth VAT Directive or the Court judgement.

Meanwhile HM Customs and Excise in Exeter had rapidly replied to the Hall Management Committees letter. Their reply (74) was good news indeed. It stated....

".....if the 'business use' of the hall is to be less than 10% of the total use, this 'business use' may be disregarded and the hall can be regarded as entirely non-business, and provided the hall is constructed for a charity, it may be zero rated as a non-business charity building."

In essence this meant that less than 10% of the Hall's income could come from ventures such as rental from commercial companies, perhaps auctioning 'bankrupt or fire damaged stock', or selling 'oriental carpets'. To this could be added income from private functions such as wedding receptions and fund raising events where the hirer and/or the funds raised had no connection with the parish. It is highly unlikely that any more than marginal income would ever come from such sources and VAT on the construction costs was no longer a threat.

If an officer of HM Customs and Excise in Exeter knew this was the case, it seems strange that only two months earlier the Treasury was unaware of the 'ten percent rule'. But full marks to Lord O'Hagan.

First there had been the need for new constitution, then, in parallel, the detailed planning and fund raising for a new Hall. It had been a long road but at last all the blocks were falling into place.

Going Out to Tender for the New Hall

The unexpectedly high cost estimates received from system build manufacturers forced the Committee to look at the conventional build option. Six local builders were invited to submit estimates with the following outcome:

G A Williams	£88080
Perring and Son	£96370
C G Tregelles	£126000

Provisional costs for water connection, drains and professional fees amounted to a further £6.5K, and costs were estimated to increase by 12½ % over the next twelve months.(75) Fox and Downing, A & S Builders, and Westward Developments were unable to respond to the invitation.

Based on the estimate from G A Williams Grant Applications were made to South Hams District Council in May 1990, but it was known that no grant was available from the Community Council for Devon during the financial year 90/91.(76)

Discussions on the detailed specification continued through the following months, with separate sub-committees set up to consider the specifications for Hall, Kitchen and Storage.(77) This time was very well spent, and the detailed specification had been extensively refined by March 1991 when it was confirmed that funding grants of £30K from South Hams District Council, £30K from the Community Council for Devon and £10K from the Rural Development Council had been awarded.(78) The variations made to the original specification, which was dated March 1990, had added nearly £8K to the building costs, but £4365 of this was due to price increases over the year. These had been calculated as 7½% and not 12½% as had been forecast.

The contract was signed, on 5 June 1991, in the sum of £96K.(79) It provided that work may commence on 3 June 1991 and shall be complete by 1 November 1991. Damages for non-completion were rated at £350 per month. This is slightly at variance with the £100 per week damages recorded in the Committee minutes a week later.(80)

Building can seldom progress without some inconvenience to the public. The new hall was no exception. Even before the work commenced two letters had been received from Mr Green of Church House, who had always been against building the hall, complaining of the possibility of inconvenience and disturbance because of the proposed building works (81). The contractor was informed of the 'sensitivity', but the problem was not going to go away. In fairness Mr Green accepted the situation and was indeed helpful, as the following letter to Peter Stewart, written just after work commenced, shows.(82)

Dear Mr Stewart

Your contractor approached me this afternoon and asked if I would be willing to let him use my outside tap for the making of cement. As I am anxious to accommodate your Committee as far as possible I agreed to this arrangement. However I shall require a written undertaking that should the Water Board for some reason charge me anything above the normal flat rate which I now pay you and your Committee will make yourselves responsible for any such payment.

Yours faithfully

A A Green

Other concerns raised verbally were dealt with, including reducing noisy 'dumper truck' runs between the car parking space in front of the church and the building site.(83) As the work neared completion a further letter was received.(84)

Mr Stewart

The building of the new parish hall may have been a minor inconvenience to the village. It has developed into a major inconvenience to us. Will you please request the contractor to tidy up the frontage to our house (*this probably relates to the car parking space which Mr Green elsewhere described as 'reputedly belonging to the church'*) – at present it looks like a slum.

A little more orderly parking of the tradesmen's personal transport would be appreciated.

A A Green

The main building work was eventually complete, some four months late towards the end of February 1992. Recognizing the inconvenience the Greens had suffered Vic Holloway sent Joan and Bunny Green a bouquet and a bottle of gin, with apologies for the nuisance and thanks for the water supply. Joan replied –

To the Parish Hall Committee

Thank you very much for the lovely flowers, which I have arranged so that anyone passing, I hope will see them; and on Mr Green's behalf for the 'refreshment' (much needed on occasion in the past months!)

I hope the use of the new hall will be much enjoyed.

Joan Green (85)

But the sore had not completely healed, as the following letter shows.

Dear Mr Stewart

I am told by the headmaster that the school meals will not be served in the new hall before the beginning of the Summer Term. Perhaps you will be good enough to inform me in writing why the present arrangements cannot be transferred to the new hall as from the third week in February 1992 when the building will have been handed over by the builders. This would enable the Portacabin to be removed from the beginning of the half term with benefit to charge payers including myself together with the end of the chaos which occurs in this cul-de-sac every time there is a mass intrusion of vehicles.

Yours faithfully

A A Green (86)

The background to this request is that a Portacabin had been placed in the Church car park for use as a school dining room. Its use would cover the period from the old hall being taken out of commission until the facilities of the new hall were brought on line. This arrangement had been between the School and the Local Authority – nothing to do with the Hall - and so the query was passed on to South Hams District Council for reply.

The question of whether the land in question belongs to the Local Authority, or to the Church remains, but as the Hall Committee did not have to get permission from the Council to use the site, and the Rector was also Chairman of the Hall Committee, it may be possible to draw the conclusion that it is indeed Church land.

Completion

Builders frequently advertise "New Homes for Sale". There can be no such thing. Builders can only erect buildings, it is the people that live in those buildings who stamp their individuality upon them and turn them into "homes". So it was with the Hall. The builder handed it over and those finishing touches necessary to complete the fitting out and equipping the building were donated from within the local community. Peter Willis, the Chairman, wrote in the Parish News (87):

The Committee has greatly appreciated your co-operation and help and we hope you can be rightly proud of your new Hall - for it is your hall, your own Parish Hall

No doubt you will have many comments, and no doubt you will tell us! We have done our best and have tried to be very responsible on your behalf.....but very soon you will be able to judge for yourself.....The Hall will be open for your inspection on 21st and 22nd February.

On the evening of Friday 21st, and the afternoon and evening of Saturday 22nd parishioners flooded in to 'inspect' the new facilities, to enjoy a free glass of wine, and to view the exhibition of photographs and memorabilia. The comparison between old and new halls was absolute in its clarity. Had any of the small handful of opponents to the project attended they would surely have been won over.

In November 1988, when the project got under way, the assets of the Parish Hall comprised £2247.16 in the bank and an aged building that was a liability rather than a realisable asset. Just over three years later, by strange co-incidence, the Parish Hall still had £2290 in the bank (88). But in place of the potential liability the Parish now had property valued at over £163,000. This was a truly remarkable achievement when it is recognized that all but £85,000 had been raised within the Parish.

The next few months were spent on equipping and improving the Hall. A caretaker was appointed. A 'den' for the Youth Club was created in the void under the Hall. Flowers

and shrubs were planted in the grounds. Leisure equipment was acquired. But what gave greatest satisfaction was the high level of bookings for use of the Hall.

Attention was turned to planning the 'official opening' of the Hall. Help, mainly financial, in building the Hall had come from many directions. The lead funding body had been South Hams District Council, once their support had been obtained matching funding from the Community Council for Devon followed. Then there was the Rural Development Commission and Tioxide. Diptford had many people to thank, including local government officers, councillors, and the local Member of Parliament and Member of the European Parliament. The date for the opening ceremony, 27th October 1992, was determined by the availability of the Earl of Morley, who had graciously accepted the invitation to perform the official opening. Lord Morley was not only Chairman of the Community Council for Devon, but also the Lord Lieutenant of Devon so it was particularly appropriate that he was able to accept. Joining him in the ceremonies was Councillor Mrs Jeanne Thomson, Chairman of South Hams District Council, and Mr David Busby, Tioxide Company Secretary.

Press, radio and television were on the invitation list along with many parishioners representing those organizations that were principal users of the Hall, and those who had played a part in the 'New Hall Project'. A special invitation was made to Mr A A Green.

References:

- (1) Trust Deed dated 13 Oct 20, enrolled in the Central Office of the Supreme Court of Judicature on 28 Dec 20
- (2) *ibid* Clause 1
- (3) *ibid* Clause 2
- (4) *ibid* Clause 2
- (5) *ibid* Clause 10
- (6) *ibid* Clause 11
- (7) *ibid* Clause 11
- (8) *ibid* Clauses 3 and 7
- (9) *ibid* Clause 15
- (10) *ibid* Clause 13
- (11) letter Oatler/Charity Commission dated 12 Feb 88
- (12) Hall minutes dated
- (13) Reference (1) clause 12
- (14) Hall minutes dated 11 Nov 81
- (15) Hall minutes dated 28 Feb 83
- (16) Hall minutes dated 5 Sep 83
- (17) Hall minutes dated 7 Nov 83
- (18) Hall minutes dated 21 Mar 86
- (19) Hall minutes dated 23 Nov 87
- (20) Hall minutes dated 11 Feb 88
- (21) see ref 11
- (22) Hall minutes dated 8 March 88

- (23) Letter Charity Commission/Ostler dated 11 July 1988
- (24) Charity Commission scheme 333814 dated 14 November 1988
- (25) Parish Hall Fund Newsletter No 1, Diptford Parish News No 205, May 1988
- (26) Extracts from an un-referenced bundle of documents held in the Parish Hall archive.
- (27) Extract from 'The Parish News' February 1982
- (28) see ref (25)
- (29) Diptford Parish News No 206, June 1988
- (30) Diptford Parish News No 207, July 1988
- (31) Diptford Parish News No 216, April 1989
- (32) Parish Hall Annual Accounts 1989 - 1992
- (33) Parish Hall Sub-Committee minutes dated 14 April 1989
- (34) Diptford Parish News No 217, May 1989
- (35) Diptford Parish News No 219, July 1989
- (36) Minute 44 Parish Hall Minutes 25 September 1989
- (37) Diptford Parish News No 223, November 1989
- (38) Minute 60 Parish Hall Minutes 6 December 1989
- (39) Diptford Parish News No 225, January 1990
- (40) Diptford Parish News No 226, February 1990
- (41) Letter Richards (Tioxide UK Ltd) /Willis dated 9 May 1990
- (42) Letter Kerr/Delegates, Paintmaker's Conference, dated 21 Jun 1990
- (43) Minute 104 Parish Hall minutes 28 June 1990
- (44) Treasurer's Annual Report 24 April 1991
- (45) Minute 159 Parish Hall Minutes 12 June 1991
- (46) Minute 174 Parish Hall Minutes 10 July 1991
- (47) Letter Williams/M Willis dated 10 April 1992
- (48) Letter Redfern/P Willis 9 April 1992
- (49) Treasurer's Annual Report 27 Apr 92
- (50) Diptford Parish News 249, January 199(51)
- (51) Hall minutes, notes on meeting held on 25 March 1992.
- (52) Treasurer's Annual Report 1993
- (53) Undated report from Form Design in bundle marked 'miscellaneous correspondence'
- (54) Letter Holloway/Wooland dated 19 December 1987
- (55) Letter Pearn & Proctor/Holloway dated 28 January 1988
- (56) Letter Holloway/Unidentified addressees dated 26 June 1988
- (57) Letter Rear Admiral Mungo/Holloway dated 9 April 1989
- (58) Minutes of first AGM of Diptford Parish Hall, dated 20 February 1989
- (59) Minute 4 Parish Hall Minutes dated 20 February 1989
- (60) Minute 10 Parish Hall Minutes dated 20 March 1989
- (61) Minute 8 Parish Hall Minutes dated 20 March 1989
- (62) Minute 22 Parish Hall Minutes dated 12 May 1989
- (63) County of Devon Application for Permission to Develop Land No9/17/1018/89/3 dated 15 May 89
- (64) South Hams District Council Planning & Housing Department decision notice, dated 7 July 1989
- (65) Minutes of meeting held on 14 April 1989
- (66) Minute 49 Parish Hall Minutes dated 23 October 1989
- (67) see reference (64)
- (68) Letter Holloway/HM Inspector of Taxes Plymouth, dated 20 March 1988
- (69) Letter Holloway/Lord O'Hagan dated 14 February 1989
- (70) Letter Lord O'Hagan/Holloway dated 21 February 1989
- (71) Letter Peter Lilley/Anthony Steen dated 18 March 1989
- (72) Letter Stewart/HM Customs & Excise, dated 9 May 1989
- (73) Letter Lord O'Hagan/Peter Brooke dated 11 May 1989
- (74) Letter HM Customs and Excise/Stewart dated 18 May 1989
- (75) Minute 87 Parish Hall Minutes dated 8 May 1990
- (76) Minute 88 Parish Hall Minutes dated 8 May 1990
- (77) Minute 96 Parish Hall Minutes dated 28 May 1990
- (78) Minute 142 Parish Hall Minutes dated 5 March 1991
- (79) Agreement for Minor Building Works - Diptford Parish Hall Committee/G A Williams dated 5 June 1991
- (80) Minute 159 Parish Hall Minutes, dated 12 June 1991
- (81) Minute 161 Parish Hall Minutes dated 12 June 1991
- (82) Letter Green/Stewart dated 15 June 1991
- (83) Letter Stewart/Green dated 29 July 1991
- (84) Letter Green/Stewart dated 5 November 1991
- (85) Undated letter Joan Green/Hall Committee
- (86) Letter Green/Stewart dated 17 February 1992
- (87) Diptford Parish News 250, February 1992
- (88) Minute 256 Parish Hall Minutes dated 18 March 1992
- (89)