

The Women's Institute and the 1928 hall

It is widely acknowledged that the Barnham WI played a considerable part in fundraising for the village hall. I have searched the Minutes for this period (WSRO Ref: Add Mss 46911-46921 Minutes from 1924) and found the following which may be of interest to future researchers:

15.5.1924 – Inaugural meeting Barnham Parish Room

11.9.1924 – President Mrs Sophie Marshall not attending due to the death of husband Mr HR Marshall

11.6.1925 – “A letter was read from Mr SS Marshall re the Barnham Nurseries Ltd offer of a piece of ground for the proposed village hall. It was agreed that this offer be accepted.” *[This may be a red herring but I have included it as the first mention of a new hall.]*

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15.5.1926 – Birthday fete: “The proceeds being for the Parish Hall Extension Fund £42 being handed over to the Treasurer of the above fund.”

8.7.1926 – “At the Parish Meeting July 7th, it was intimated that £500 would be required for the proposed extension of the Parish Room, the extension being a separate hall situated south and joining the present room. The WI having already donated £112 the President suggested that the WI make this up to £125, a quarter of the required sum, everybody agreeing.”

9.7.1927 – “Barnham WI held their July meeting in the grounds of The Cottage by kind invitation of Major and Mrs Milner. This meeting took the form of a fete in aid of the Parish Hall Extension Fund.”

11.8.1927 – “The President thanked all those who had helped with the fete and read the balance sheet which shows the amount handed to the Village Hall Extension Fund as £68.7s.7d.”

13.10.1927 – “A letter was read from Major Milner as chairman of the P.R.E.C. *[Parish Room Extension Committee]* thanking for the cheque £68.7s.7d and stating that it was proposed “that some permanent record be placed in the new building as an appreciation of the WI.” ...

Mrs Milner proposed and Mrs Messenger seconded: "That the WI make up their donation to the Parish Room Extension Fund to £200. Carried unanimously. This means a further donation of £6.12.5d."

9.2.1928 – "The President asked if members would be willing to work in any capacity at the opening. Everyone agreed to do this. It was decided that Mrs Padwick should be asked to judge the children's Fancy Dress Parade."

7.3.1928 – "Barnham WI met for the first time in the new Village Hall. A vote of thanks was passed to Mr Poullin(?) for his offer of 1 gall of milk free for the opening of the hall."

October 1928 – "A Resolution was passed that until the debt on the Parish hall was paid, the Extension Committee was to be allowed the use of the China and piano free of charge.

A Resolution was passed that any profits from the coming Jumble sale were to be sent to the P.H. Extension Committee and devoted to paying the necessary alteration to doors, etc."

8.11.1928 – "Jumble Sale realised £12.7.6 clear. This was handed to the Parish hall Debt Fund. A letter of thanks was read from Major Milner on behalf of the Committee.

Parish Hall Fund A letter was read suggesting that the WI should become guarantor for the cost of the alterations to the Hall. [Proposed, seconded and carried]

"Mrs Barnett suggested that the WI should make a mile of pennies for the P.H. Fund, this was cordially received, and some subscriptions at once followed."

Secretary's Report for 1928

"The year 1928 is notable in Barnham WI for the opening of the Village Hall, for which it has both in the present and past years worked so hard. Great efforts have been made this year both to help the Village Hall Fund and also to make the Hall a centre of general village interest."

13.12.1928 – "That a clock should be purchased by the WI and placed in the Hall. It was agreed to put the proceeds of next year's Gift Table for this purpose, and buy the clock at once."

18.1.1929 – The mile of pennies amounted to 400 - £1.13s.4d.

The fete, held on Saturday June 22nd at “The Cottage”, raised £63.13s.9d for the Village Hall Fund.

So far recorded: £200 + £12.7s.6d + £1.13s.4d + £63.13s.9d = £277.14s.7d., a considerable sum at that time.

The WI may have continued to contribute but this is as far as time allowed for the search of their records.

*A newspaper cutting from The Observer purporting to be from July 1925 states “*In aid of the recently launched scheme for the provision of a village hall at Barnham, a garden fete was held last Wednesday in the grounds of the Cottage...kindly lent by Major and Mrs Milner, who are both taking a keen interest in the project.*” The Women’s Institute organised the fete and many local people were also involved including the Village Hall Committee with Mr Hamilton-Lindsay (Headmaster at Barnham School) as Chairman, and Lieut. W Messenger as Secretary. There were sports for the children and adults, stalls, teas and competitions, with dancing to the East Dean Brass band into the evening. The amount raised is not recorded by the WI so presumably the funds were paid directly to the Village Hall Fund. This may well have happened to other funds raised in the village.

William Chandler in his scrapbook of 1949 (WSRO ref: AM361/1), writes “*The present hall was built in 1927 by public subscription at a cost of £700.*” Harry Dart in his memoir (WSRO ref: MP2347) writes “*The present hall was built by my father in 1927, thanks being due to the Women’s Institute ... for their efforts in raising much of the funds to meet the cost.*”

It is clear that the WI fundraising made a significant contribution, that donations were also made by local villagers and that a loan was needed to meet the final cost.

Mrs HR Marshall of Sunnyside, Yapton Road, the first president of Barnham WI, laid the foundation stone for the hall in 1927. The plaque commemorating this has been re-erected in the entrance lobby of the new community hall.

In June 1993 the Barnham Tapestry was unveiled. It was the idea of past WI president Joy Osborne and it was transcribed from a coloured drawing by her husband Derek Osborne. The framed tapestry hangs in the new community hall.

West Sussex Records Office hold many notebooks: Minutes, Accounts, Record books, scrapbooks, Delegates books, photograph albums, Exhibitions and Competitions and Memories dating back to 1924 when Barnham WI was formed. It was originally an afternoon group and the evening group was formed in 1965 for women who worked. Eastergate women joined in meetings in Barnham and there was never an Eastergate group. Both groups worked closely together and the scrapbooks cover both.

It was with sadness that the Barnham Women's Institute disbanded in December 2016 after 92 years. All members present received an engraved paperweight as a memento. The following poem was written by longstanding member Pat Stagg:

Have you noticed the plaque on the wall
As you enter the new village hall
It marks the start of a ninety year journey
For Barnham WI

It's not about jam and Jerusalem
Victoria sponges and tea
Nor those cheeky calendar girls
Or ladies in twinset and pearls!
But real women like you and me.
It means friendship, laughter and caring
And sharing good times and sad
Of serving the folk all around us
When the whole world seemed to go mad!

But the times they are a changing
And the years have taken their toll
So we're having a rest to regain our zest
'Til some bright spark says let's have a try
And when they do I'll be first in the queue
To join Barnham WI.

Sandra Lowton
February 2017