



Local History Collection

22 - The History of Braywood Memorial Hall

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Anyone who lives in Fifeeld or Oakley Green will have driven, walked or ridden past the staggered crossroad at the junction of the Fifeeld Road and Oakley Green Road and noticed the Braywood Memorial Hall tucked in the corner of this crossroads.



Braywood Memorial Hall

In January 1919 it was suggested that a Parish Hall should be built as a Memorial to those from Braywood who gave their lives in the First World War. The owner of Fifeeld House at that time was Sir Harold Dudley Clayton, 10th Baronet of Clayton, Marden who was the son of Sir Fitzroy Clayton, Chairman of the RNLI. He gave the land to the local community, which was indented in February 1920.

By May 1919 the Memorial Committee was formed with Sir Harold as the Chairman. A Memorial tablet was to be placed in All Saints Church Braywood (demolished in the 1960's hence relocation of the tablet to Braywood Memorial Hall) made by the Army and Navy Auxiliary Co-Operative Supply Ltd. At the same meeting it was decided to obtain estimates for a permanent brick building to be erected. I had always believed that local villagers were asked to 'buy a brick' for fundraising for the hall, which was built by public subscriptions.

By December 1919 after 200 years of the Clayton family at Fifeeld House, Sir Harold and his wife departed Fifeeld. Before they left, they were invited to a small ceremony for the laying of the foundation stone on 22nd November 1919 and Mrs Clayton laid the stone during a brief religious service conducted by Revd. Vaughan of the Fifeeld Mission.

The inscription on the foundation stone reads ...

This Hall was erected by public subscription in Memory of the Great War, 1914-1919. The site was given by Mr H Clayton and the stone was laid by Mrs Clayton on November 22nd 1919.



Memorial stones inside the Hall

On the evening of 12th February 1920 the hall was officially opened by Lady Herschel, Sir John Herschel and the previous Vicar of Bray. The Revd. E.E. Skuse (Vicar of Bray during the 1920's) commenced the opening with a prayer followed by a brief talk from Mr. W. Nicholls (Hon. Secretary) about the work on the village Hall. Captain Britten (Fifield House from December 1919) also gave a speech and introduced Lady Herschel who declared the Hall open. She was then presented with a bouquet of flowers in a silver inscribed vase. Sir John also spoke and referred to the great sacrifices the building would commemorate and to the many uses that such a building might be put.

These speeches were then followed by a concert of varied content given by the soldier patients from the Bray Court Neurasthenic Hospital which was much appreciated and each item was encored. Over £14 was raised on the night from ticket sales and programmes and the concert was repeated the following Monday evening as there were so many who could not get in and a further sum of £5 was raised.

The Braywood Memorial Hall was built by Mr C. E. Arnold who had recently moved into the area and whilst he wasn't a builder he had agreed to erect the hall to the specifications with the lowest tender. Although there was only £131 (about £8,500 in 2024 value) in the

building "pot" at the time, Mr. Arnold was willing to take the risk and as soon as the building commenced the locals became more interested and subscriptions grew.

Further concerts and whist drives (often organised by Mrs F Pottinger) and fancy head-dress balls were held in the hall. The Old Scholars Club, formed by the Braywood School Headmaster Mr. Nicholls (after he was demobbed), supplied a minstrel troupe and humorous songs, solos and jokes continued to raise funds for the outstanding debt on the hall.

There were also art sales at Fifield House as per the advert below:

A Fête & SALE OF WORK in aid of the Funds of the Braywood Memorial Hall, will be held AT FYFIELD HOUSE on THURSDAY JUNE 10th. To be opened by Lady Edward Spencer Churchill at 3 p.m.

There were over 500 people at this sale and the evening dance that followed raised over £100 for the hall building debt.

By December 1920 the Braywood Hall building fund still had a debt outstanding of £150 so the hall hosted it's 1st Boxing Competition. Capt. Britten along with 'Tich' Simmonds organised a series of Boxing matches and demonstrations, with Col. Wight, C.G., former MC of the Household Brigade Boxing Club as referee. The hall was packed and there were 7 matches fought (3, 4 and 6 rounds) as well as 1 exhibition match with all the competitors from either the army or the local area. Charlie Austin from Oakley Green lost his 3 round match as he insisted on boxing wearing his trousers and boots as opposed to his "springy" opposition!

Fifield House Cricket Ground.

(Lent by Capt. and Mrs. Forester Britten).

THE BRAYWOOD FETE,

Including

Sports and Sale of Work

(In aid of the Braywood Nursing Association and the Braywood Memorial Hall Funds).

On Saturday Next, 18th August.

LADY DE FRECE has kindly consented to open the Fete at 2.30 p.m.

The MAIDENHEAD BRANCH of the BRITISH LEGION BAND (licensed by the Performing Rights Society) will play during the Afternoon and Evening.

STALLS. SIDE SHOWS. DANCING.

Dancing in the Braywood Memorial Hall in the Evening, where a Waltzing Competition will be held for which a Special Prize will be given. (Mr. Camp's Jazz Band will play).

SPORTS (under A.A.A.), commencing at 3 p.m.

Special Tug-of-War (open to all Public House Teams within a radius of 5 miles). A Special Challenge Cup is given for this event.

100 Yards (Open). 120 Yards Hurdles (Open). High Jump (Open). Open Tug-of-War. Cross Country (Open). High Jump (open to any Boy Scout in the District). Other Events include Boat Race, Veterans' Race, Musical Chairs, Boys' Hundred Yards (Local), Girls' Hundred Yards (Local), Donkey Derby, Egg and Spoon Race, etc.

Entry Forms for the different Sports can be obtained from Mr. G. Arnold, Fifield, near Maidenhead.

SPECIAL 'BUS ARRANGEMENTS.

The 'Buses leaving Maidenhead (Bear Hotel) at 2 p.m. and 3.15 p.m. will be met by a Special 'Bus at the Fifield Turning, which will take passengers direct to the Ground.

Should the traffic warrant it Special 'Buses will be

Funds were still being raised for the Hall debt in August 1923 as this Fête advert shows. It was attended by over 1,000 people and £180 was raised. The local pub tug of war was won by The Wolf 'A' team from Dedworth. All 8 team members (total weight not to exceed 90 stone) won a silver cigarette case as well as the Silver Challenge Trophy.

A Winter Fête and Christmas Pantomime raised further funds in the Winter of 1923 followed by the 2nd Braywood Fête in June 1924 which was recorded as a "*Stupendous success, a marvel of intensive organisation that some military genius had been presiding over the plan of campaign.*" This Fête was attended by 3,500 people and again raising funds for both the Braywood Memorial Hall and the Braywood Nursing Association. Note - this year the local pub Tug of War was won by the Hare and Hounds, Fifield.

The next major event in the Hall was in November 1924 when the Ex-Servicemen's Supper and concert was held there.

Braywood, with its 700 inhabitants, had supplied over 100 men to fight in WW1 and these ex-servicemen were issued a field order (by CO Capt. Britten) to parade in their Church parade suits, greased hair and waxed moustaches, severe appetites and loose waistcoat straps. The rules were relaxed to allow their mothers or wives to attend.

After 1924 the hall hosted many varied activities such as the British Legion, Men's Supper and Smoking Club, the Conservative Association, Darts Competitions and the Braywood Dramatic Society. However, by 1937 when Capt. Britten and his wife were leaving Fifield there was still a debt outstanding on the village hall. Approximately £115, even after Capt. Britten had donated £50 (£4,200 in 2024 value) as his leaving gift. He had hoped that in 1937, the year of the King's Coronation. that the debt would be cleared.



From the 1940's the Memorial Hall was used as the Braywood School canteen and by the early 1950's the Women's Institute was using it. By 1953 funds were being raised to purchase a clock for the Memorial Hall and during the 1960s and 1970's it hosted Jumble sales, European Assembly Elections, Divorced and Separated Club, Fêtes, Teas, Auctions, Youth Clubs, Flower Shows, Wedding Receptions, Cosmetic Sales etc.

By 1972 Bray Parish Council had agreed a £3,000 grant towards the £5,000 improvements needed by the Memorial Hall to include flooring, windows, paintwork and a suspended ceiling.

This was added to in 1976 when an additional room for storage and changing was approved followed by a successful further BPC funding of £3,300 in 1979 for a new roof. The following years saw the Memorial Hall host Charity markets, Darby and Joan Club, Carpet Bowls, Play Groups and Nurseries, Diet Clubs, Cookery Demos, Indoor fitness, Quiz evenings, Bray Parish Council Meetings, OGAFCA meetings, and was used as a Polling station.

The Braywood Memorial Hall is part of the local community and is a registered Charity with Trustees and Hall Committee. The Hall Committee are responsible to the Trustees and the Community for the day to day running of the hall and all its activities and finances and welcomes any new members.

In future magazines I will be telling the stories of some of the 30 soldiers remembered on the War Memorial Plaque, so please forward any information or pictures you may have to add to their stories (via the OGAFCA website or Editor).