

# The tangled tale of a hall

Talk given by Edith Willey

Tyttenhanger Green today is a very small village without a shop or church and the story of our hall begins years ago.

We travel to Somerset to a farm in East Lydeard where Charles Morris was born in 1855. He trained as an Engineer and went to India where he became Managing Director of his company. He apparently wanted to be a landowner in England and having purchased the farm he was born in, he then became interested in a property advertised in 1899 as Highfield Stud Farm with the house known as Highfield Hall. The property was in Tyttenhanger Green. As an interest point, he won a prize at an Agricultural Show with a Devon Red named Highfield Ringleader in 1925.

There is a photograph of Charles Morris on horseback, maybe going round the village or farm. An ex-resident relates how he went through the village talking to the children, he seemed to have a fixation about teeth, and if he found any child whose teeth needed attention, he would send them to the dentist and pay all the costs. Parties were held at Highfield Hall Coach House and Christmas presents given to all. In 1921 he gave a Deed of Gift of land for the purpose of allotments to the village. In 1926 Charles Morris died.



In 1930 the piece of land the present hall was erected on was conveyed by his nephew to the Colney Heath Parish Council. In the original bequest it stated "that the land be used for pleasure, recreation or playing grounds" and the conveyance allowed a shelter or pavilion to be erected. In later years this clause was most important. The field was not opened for five years.

In 1950 the villagers asked for a hall to be built with the first idea being of brick and asbestos for a cost of £1500. It was finally agreed to have a building of precast concrete at a cost £2000 which would have to be paid for out of the rates. Fortunately for the Council there was a government ban on this type of expenditure and in 1954 the ban was lifted. By 1955 the cost had risen to £3000 and since it was not likely to attract grants was not pursued by the Council. The question of allotments then arose and the Parish Council looked at ways to use the land as allotments were not being used much at that time.



During 1953 the land was offered to R.D.C. for a housing site, this was abandoned. However, R.D.C. investigated whether or not planning permission could be obtained and this was obtained in 1955. The land value then rose.

No further action was taken until 1964 when negotiations began and in August of that year the price of £11,000 was agreed. Legal complications then ensued,



as it was the Council's opinion that the Deed of Gift in 1921 had created a Charitable Trust and the allotments sale would be a Charity Commissioner Scheme.

By 1967 they were permitted to sell, the price having risen to 15,000 and at the end of 1968 villagers were asked if they still wanted a village hall. The villagers certainly did still want a hall. Planning permission was granted in 1972 and the new tenders with fittings and equipment came to £13,440. Grants were available but hard to obtain. Patience was still needed. The village still had the old tin Chapel and the provisional hall committee met there with a brief to prepare plans for the future. At the meetings discussions were prominent as to finances required and potential income and the realisation was that there must be set aside an endowment so that there would be an annual interest income. The Trustees approved this point and £5,000 from the Allotment Trust was invested for this purpose. With a population of only 150 people this represents a successful outcome after a lot of hard work.

A reassessment of costs in 1973/74 was £31,500 and by now the hall was second highest priority in the county list. The first tender fell by the wayside and a new tender was accepted at £24,000. St. Albans District Council promised £500 in 1974 and in January 1975 the great news that the Council maximum grant of £2,500 had been granted and the Dept. of Education and Science would double this. The contract was signed in January 1975 and the first sod was cut by Parish Chairman Councillor A.G. Cutmore.

The hall was completed in September 1975 just 25 years after the first request for a village hall. The opening tape was cut by Mr. Herbert Mansell whose family had lived in the village.

Equipment was chosen, a portable stage, chairs, 12 padded for the committee room and so the hall was ready to be used for weddings and parties, weekly activities for the village and others. With the Chapel being too old and dangerous to use the hall now became the meeting place for the monthly meetings. As the activities grew and the committee realised a store room was greatly needed the Trustees of the Allotment Trust agreed and this was added. In the car park the two centre flower beds were in the original plans. The surrounding bricks have been a problem but has now been solved.

The Committee which is elected annually by the village, have during the years kept a close watch on necessary repairs and the car park and gardens have involved a lot of maintenance. Perseverance with weeds has shown good results in the car park. A recent addition has been a second hatch which is a great help when bar facilities and refreshments are served. Gas heated boilers are installed and the prize money won in the Community Council competition for the Best Managed Village Hall will be spent on a Randall Electronics heat and water control unit.

It would appear that not only perseverance with weeds has paid off in Tyttenhanger Green. Well done.

