

EASTCOMBE'S LARGER BUILDINGS

Berwick House, formerly Jubilee House

Sir John Dorington of Lypiatt Park had his stonemason – William Backhouse – build himself a big and handsome stone house at the crossroads on Dr Crouch's Road opposite what is now St Augustine's Church. This house commemorated Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897, and its purpose was benevolent. As well as being a home for the Backhouses the building had 'to include a large room, heated, with billiard table, piano, cards and newspapers for public use.' I do not know how much use the Reading Room had. It is indeed a large and lofty room, and the intention was excellent, but Sir John died in 1911, his heir fell to a sniper's bullet at the outset of the First World War, and Jubilee House like all other Lypiatt estate property was sold in the 1919 auction.

The sale catalogue advertised 'A Superior Modern Stone-Built Residence' which contained three bedrooms, a hall, sitting room, Village Reading Room, kitchen, scullery, etc. It had a garden with 'piggery' and had about 2 roods and 16 perches (or rods and poles???) of land – presumably sold much later for building the two modern houses next to it. Mr W H Backhouse apparently paid £5 per annum rent. I hope he was able to stay, but I do not know – and surely the Reading Room cannot have remained open. In 1901 Mr and Mrs Backhouse had their 20-year-old daughter Edith with them, and her brothers Henry (18) and Frederick (9). There was also Mrs Backhouse's mother, Elizabeth Fisher. The Fishers came from Painswick – probably Sheepscombe – but William and his children were all born in Bisley – that is, in Bisley parish. In 1861 at least William was in Bisley village with his parents. By 1891 he and his wife and four children were at Hawkley, or in other words already working on the Dorington estate. In the 1911 census only the 65-year-old married couple and 84-year-old Mrs Fisher were left in Jubilee House. I wonder what happened to them in 1919...

Elsewhere on this website a Second World War evacuee describes how she and her brother and mother were housed in the old Reading Room when Mr and Mrs Thurman lived in the house. By then Jubilee House had been divided into two – as it remains – but I do not know when before the war the name was changed to 'Berwick House.' There is now another Jubilee House in the village, next to Falkland House by The Lamb Inn. I suppose both these houses were built around 1977, when Queen Elizabeth II's Silver Jubilee was celebrated.

Eastcombe Baptist Church

At the junction of Dr Crouch's Road and The Green there has been a chapel in one form or another since 1800. After John Wesley had been in the vicinity of Stroud, and George Whitefield of Gloucester among others preached locally to huge congregations in the open air, small but increasingly large numbers of the working population of these valleys and hills began to meet together (for example in the hay loft of what is now 'Two Pillars' on the corner of The Green) in order to pray and worship together and gather strength from mutual support. It is pleasing and

intriguing to note that – perhaps inevitably – five of the original members of the new Baptist Church were women. They always have a livelier sense of sin...

In his books Dr Malcolm Lambert tells us a lot of detail about the individual qualities of successive ministers, the painful slowness with which funds were amassed, the fervour with which services were attended, the sincere devotion with which people gave money and time to the project of building a fine and commodious chapel. [In February 2018 a link was added to this website to material put up by Ron Downing in 1998, giving a detailed history of the Chapel in the nineteenth century. He also published transcripts of the records of births and deaths.] The original 1800 building was soon increased in size, and today's Chapel must look pretty much as it did more than 150 years ago. It can and did accommodate hundreds. The stonework reflects the craft skills of the congregation, but the iron pillars show that the local population was well versed in the 'modern' techniques of the Victorian age.

Back in the 1980s I was stunned into silence when a dearly loved elderly visitor, a sophisticated Jewish upper-middle-class Londoner, looked at the chapel and said 'Isn't it remarkable that nonconformist buildings are always so ugly?' For me a chapel is a chapel is a chapel and I had up till then just admired the building as a great blast from the past – it must have been so incongruous in its rural setting when it was built, and even now it is a hulking great statement when one sees it from Lypiatt, or from the Bisley-Stroud road. One can not distinguish any subtle architectural charms – it does not flow through different periods of building fashion. It simply *is*.

In its time it was the hub of village life. It absorbed people's leisure time on Sundays, it provided a venue to record births and deaths, baptisms and marriages and burials, it gave an excuse for dressing well and going on processions and celebrations and outings and picnics – people came to Eastcombe from very many miles around. The records are there to be read. Unlikely though it may now seem, the Chapel brought social life and music and friendship and comfort to people who previously had only the beauty of their surroundings to distract them from the looming threat of ending in the workhouse.

A fine Manse is attached, still occupied by an incumbent pastor, wife and family. The graveyards are still used. A meeting room at the rear (originally formed for a schoolroom but rejected by the Victorian functionaries who enforced national regulations for the dimensions of premises for the education of children) is still available for community use. From 2000 to 2016 it was used for Friday Club meetings, when elderly people could spend a few hours together eating and drinking and chatting and singing and playing games. (The club then moved to the Scout Hut.) In the 1930s, I was told, unemployed men used to read their newspapers by the coke stove in that room. 'Men's Fellowship!' Reg Fawkes exclaimed, when he first arrived at the Friday Club for elderly people...

The Victorian Baptists were made of stern stuff, and turned from their intended integral school to build the substantial premises next door. Was Baptist Cottage next to the primary school originally used as the schoolmaster's house? I do not know... The current occupier says that the school was built in the garden, as it were, of Baptist Cottage (which is a much older building that probably started life as a barn). These four surviving properties – Baptist Cottage, the Primary School, the Manse and

the Chapel – despite their different occupiers remained legally connected till very recently. The Chapel and the Manse were the original project, and the graveyard was added around 1870 when it had become possible to enclose part of Bisley Common.

Eastcombe County Primary School

The foundation stone of Eastcombe Primary School was laid in 1878 by Sir Morton Peto. This must have been quite a coup. Dr Lambert in *The Unknown Cotswold Village* described him as 'a famous building contractor and Liberal MP, who constructed Bloomsbury Baptist Chapel, Nelson's Column, and miles of railway track.' He lived at Somerleyton Hall near Lowestoft, but crossed the country to support Eastcombe's endeavour. In his address he urged nonconformists to unite to 'stem the torrent of Ritualism and unbelief' – a swipe at fashionable Oxford Movement ideas emanating from Bisley vicarage.

Ten years earlier the vicar of Bisley – Thomas Keble – had brought elementary education to Eastcombe in the purpose-built school that is now St Augustine's Church. The children of nonconformist families went there as well as Anglicans, but the Baptist community was offended by the discrimination shown against their children, uncongenial religious teaching, and finally and meanly in 1876 a decision that only baptised children would be admitted (in the Baptist Church people make a decision about baptism when adult). So to this National School was added a non-denominational British School just a couple of hundred yards away – a stupid situation that was only resolved by the circumstances of the First World War. Sadly the spirit of our time is now so different and divisive that in the last few years a complete schism has occurred between the primary school and chapel...

The famous Attenborough brothers' maternal grandfather, Alexander Clegg, was a long-serving, strict, memorable, effective head teacher, and it was he who came out of retirement to teach the combined schools' population around the time of the First World War. There have been many head teachers since, obviously, and two or three of them were spoken of with affection, gratitude and admiration. Up until the end of the Second World War a village school, where pupils stayed until they went to work at 14, provided the total of their formal education.

In the nineteenth century what the Baptists provided for children of completely uneducated people (and hundreds since) was a solid stone building in a neo-Gothic style, built by the local Henry Hook who asked no profit. His estimate was for £843, and that provided two porches and classrooms, with kitchen and a 'heating chamber.' There have been extensions and alterations since, but a Victorian child time-travelling to school any day now would easily recognize the place. In the 30-odd years that I have known it, in its tiny schoolyard and with few facilities, it has continued to turn out literate and numerate happy children. There are three classrooms to contain about 60 children aged four to eleven – and that is a formula that seems to work very well.

The Laurels

When Henry Hook died he left £3214, a sign of extreme affluence in a modest village. The youngest son of a village baker, he quickly established himself as a stonemason who at 24 formed a partnership, Wall & Hook, that went on to have great

success from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. Dependable locally for everything from barge repairs to undertaking, they nevertheless achieved modest fame and fortune nationally with the repair and building of churches. Near his family home (now called The Old Bakehouse) in the village, Henry Hook built The Laurels in The Street – a house that typified Victorian love of comfort combined with love of decoration. The neo-Gothic features and carved stone heads are an echo of the church-building experience, and are thought perhaps to be the work of Henry's partner, George Wall.

At some point in the twentieth century The Laurels was divided into two, and it remains that way, the premises having been large enough to provide two good dwellings which have rooms retaining the elegant proportions of a 'gent's res' in contrast to most of the village houses.

Henry Hook was part of the Eastcombe faction – thought to be a clear majority – who were nonconformist in religion and Liberal in politics (in contrast to Conservative Anglican Bisley in the nineteenth century). Dr Lambert liked to point out marks next to the garage door of No 1 The Laurels, commemorating an old Liberal triumph in a parliamentary election. Interestingly, when we (Brookes) arrived in the village in 1986, No.1 The Laurels was occupied by Lord and Lady McNair who were very active in the Liberal interest, and there were many other supporters in the village at that time. Sadly for all, Lord McNair died not long afterwards as the result of a car accident. His widow stayed in the village for an appreciable time, and was part of a group of slightly formidable (mainly female) friends and neighbours of that era, educated and articulate, politically active, significant in the community, and only dispersed in death.

St Mary's is a nice-looking house behind a high hedge on a bend in the main road near Thomas Keble School. The Victorian façade was added to an older fairly large house. It was certainly already in place when the tithe map was published in 1842. At that time it was a public house called The Bear Inn, and in 1848 its landlord, Thomas Ridler, died of 'd.t.s and intoxication'. By 1869 it was run by a Mr Hazle of Bisley, and John Dorington in his role as magistrate reprimanded him for in fact *not* running it. 'An inn must be kept open.' Mr Hazle explained that a bad tenant had just gone away and then Dorington said 'I think it better shut up.' Mr Hazle said he would put in a servant to run it and keep it open. (A public house classified as an inn has a duty to serve travellers in need of refreshment.) In the 1871 census a Worcestershire man named George Hence was running the pub with his Minchinhampton wife and three daughters, but by 1881 45-year-old Elizabeth Hazle, 'Brewer's Wife', was there with three daughters and a son.

The Clegg family remembered that the teetotal schoolteacher Alexander Clegg, who arrived in Eastcombe in the next decade, was 'tickled to live in a failed pub.' Mr Clegg is recalled elsewhere on this website, not only as an outstanding educationist and long-serving headteacher but also as the grandfather of Richard and David Attenborough. Possibly it was he who renamed it The Firs (magnificent old conifers are the dominant landscape feature of several Victorian gardens on the hilltop, and the village will be the poorer when they go). There is mention somewhere that the

orphanage started out as 'St Mary's', but it soon became 'St Elizabeth's' and perhaps that is when The Firs became St Mary's. Obviously it had a succession of twentieth-century occupants, but the one who stands out is Mrs Cowper who lived there with her husband. She was a devoted primary school head teacher, gratefully remembered by parents who saw the care and responsibility she felt for their children. Apparently Miss Masters, the orphan who graduated to be matron at the orphanage, had a flat or room in St Mary's. She was remembered for leading the Guides. The Cowpers are long dead, but their nephew Frank lived in the house till his death in May 2018. Since first writing this entry a redevelopment of the house and garden has begun, permitted by the planning department of Stroud District Council – and some of the notable trees have gone already.

Manor Farm

I know very little about Manor Farm, but in short can say that the house was newly built for the Dorington (Lypiatt Park) estate at the time Bisley Common was enclosed at the end of the 1860s, and it came up for sale when the estate was broken up at auction in 1919. At that time it was let to a Mr H Freeman, and was already 50 years old. I still feel it was a little cheeky to call it Manor Farm, given its distance from Sir John's house, and its lack of historical authenticity. It was built on the very fringe of the village of Eastcombe where the land was a cultivable plateau above the cottages that tumble down the hillside. A good gabled stone building, the house can be glimpsed from the main road near where the Ridgeway leads in to the modern housing estate of Bussage.

Sir John's craftsmen built the house at a respectable pace around 1869, and it cost him less than £600. The 1919 sale details list an attic, box room, four bedrooms, sitting room, kitchen, back kitchen, larder, pantry, cellar and coal store, and a 'capital Garden' – a fine desirable modern house, in other words. There were outbuildings for pigs, calves, cattle, horses, cows, carthorses and all their accoutrements of waggons, harness, feed, etc. I want to know what a hovel was (the farm had two – animal shelters, I suppose)!

There were more than 45 acres of arable land, about 30 of grassland, and some woodland. Local people remember fields bursting with wildflowers, skylarks, adders – you name it – so when the land was sold off (in the '50s, I believe) and the building of what became the huge 'estate' started 15-20 years later, there was naturally a lot of opposition which became more and more bitter as the years went by. That too is an old story now.

As far as I know, the house called Manor Farm has been in private hands for over a century now. In a way its position is secluded despite its proximity to many other houses and the secondary school, so it is half-forgotten – but it is nevertheless one of Eastcombe's larger buildings.

Manor School, now Thomas Keble School

The largest establishment in the village is the secondary school that was built on former farm fields, next to the pleasure ground. I need someone to tell me the history of the Manor School. On the internet I see that it is given the dates 1922-82,

but of course the buildings with which we are familiar are all post-war so I am not sure about the school's origin. Elementary education in the primary school finished at 14 before the 1944 Education Act... Manor School was administered by Gloucestershire County Council, taught boys and girls aged 11 to 16, and I think most people growing up in the village went there if they did not go to the grammar schools in town. When we arrived in Eastcombe in the late 1980s the school was in the doldrums as it was under threat of closure. Numbers were down to a very few hundred. In Gloucester, however, the decision was taken to close Nailsworth's school instead, and Eastcombe's comprehensive school was given a new lease of life with pupils coming from some distance. Pretty soon the school was renamed Thomas Keble School (those enduringly influential Victorian vicars of Bisley), and its reputation and popularity rocketed. There was an injection of money leading to better facilities – though sadly some playing fields were sold off – and gradually what we see now was achieved. Central Government's education policy has changed again and again, leading to arcane (to me) alterations in management and status – all of which can be read up on the internet. I have the impression that in 2018 the school is not quite as accessible to the community as it was in more relaxed times – there was local fund-raising for an outdoor swimming pool, for example, that was used by local people who were not pleased by its closure and subsequent disuse and then filling-in – but it is nevertheless a great asset in the village. It has a very good reputation.

Rodways

When the 'town' of Bisley was the principal settlement of this area, with several manor houses and a mediaeval church, the farmhouses and barns were also concentrated in the village centre. Eastcombe, however, originated as a satellite of Bisley, and its farms – buildings surrounded by their fields – predated the concentration of squatters' cottages that clung together on the slopes of the common plateau. The oldest known surviving farmhouse is Rodways, which contains hints of a fifteenth-century beginning (that is, it was basically a hall built before chimneys as we know them were invented). With its attendant stone barns the gabled house stands in a prime position on the slopes of the Toadsmoor Valley, with panoramic views, over the woods and fields, towards the Lypiatt ridge. It was known as Daniels Farm for a long time, but in the mid-twentieth century villagers began to call it Rodways after the farmer, and later his widow, who owned it.

St Augustine's: the church that started as a school

This entry is based on a short essay supplied by Dr Malcolm Lambert in November 2017.

A Church of England School evolved to become the church of St Augustine of Canterbury. [It stands at the crossroads on Dr Crouch's Road.] The present building consisted of an Infant Room (now the vestry), and the main School Room. It had as a twin [another good stone building] a schoolmaster's house [facing on to Dr Crouch's Road and now called Church House].

The school was intended to be an Anglican presence in a desperately poor

village that had been blighted by the failure of the Gloucestershire textile industry, and dominated by the Baptists, with their handsome chapel and graveyard. [The impetus came from the Reverend Thomas Keble – the Kebles, father and son, were vicars of Bisley for much of the nineteenth century, and they brought reforming energy to their vast and sprawling parish. Anglicans had to walk to Bisley to attend church, and it was this connection that led to the fondly remembered tradition of Eastcombe's Anglican children being taken in farm carts to Bisley on Ascension Day to join in the procession to the wells, and the greatly appreciated treat of a tea afterwards.]

For services in Eastcombe, the tiny congregation would sit on the school benches. Wooden doors at the east end enclosed the altar together with a font. The font was portable and trundled out to a position at the west end. Clergy came over from Bisley. Thomas Keble not only set about building churches and schools, he also attracted Anglican priests and teachers who were willing to work in harsh surroundings. [Temporarily a 'tin church' existed next to the school in Eastcombe, and this later transmuted into the village hall.]

A first schoolmaster had an unexpected success. He came from a South Wales farm, and began his working life assisting his mother after the early death of his father, an experience which gave him unusual insight into the needs of agricultural labourers. Inspectors praised him for his care for his little school, which he ran with the assistance of a paid monitor. Another notable was W G Apperley, a fine athlete and footballer.

Through the First World War the rivalry between the church and chapel schools faded, Mr Apperley went off to fight [he survived], and the popular and successful Alexander Clegg, head of the British School (the Baptists) who had retired in 1914, returned to work. Teaching all the local children in one building became the accepted way of doing things, and it was so successful that it was continued post-war.

The way was open for the Anglican building to become a full-time church. A last stage of development was to replace its plain, frosted windows at the east end with stained glass recalling the two great evangelists of England, St Augustine for the Roman tradition and St Aidan for the Celtic church. These were donated by one of the village's success stories of recent times, a child of The Lamb Inn who went to the USA, became an IBM manager, and was ordained in the Episcopalian Church, and also by the Reverend John Stevens, vicar of St Michael and All Angels, Bussage, to which St Augustine's was at that time attached.

[Always well loved by the village but for good reason not well attended for a sad number of years, St Augustine's was been given fresh life very recently and returned to being a much valued asset of the village. In 2021 it has been threatened with closure.

St Elizabeth's: former orphanage

Elsewhere on this website is a history of Eastcombe's orphanage, in many details an unexpected story. At some point after its demise in 1945 when the convent owning it felt obliged to sell the property, the house (built in the 1870s) was divided into two – both now quite commodious residences – and its extensive land was sold off for

building. Eastcombe's council estate (originally), Bracelands, occupies orphanage land. And so do the bungalows and houses between Bracelands and the chapel graveyard. The Victorian building can be glimpsed behind these, at the end of its long private drive (private it is, please note). It never looked conventionally institutional, being just a solid, fairly functional but quite handsome house. It has no special architectural merit though at one time it must have been the village's largest building; and tucked away as it now is, many people living in Eastcombe do not even know of its existence and special history.

The Triangle

The Triangle is the name of a large Victorian house lying between the main road through Eastcombe, and Dr Crouch's Road – its land used to stretch from an apex at the crossroads where the modern Manor Farm housing estate begins, to a base created (roughly speaking) on the north by the road outside Eastcombe Village Hall. This triangle of land bore the house with its stabling and coach house, which are now separate properties, and a new house was built about 40 years ago in the point of the garden. Eastcombe never had a seigneurial upper class exerting a patriarchal influence over the village, but twentieth-century occupants of The Triangle were hospitable in the way they opened their large garden for community celebrations and fund-raising events, echoing previous activities at St Elizabeth's Orphanage.

'Dr Crouchs Road' is what the road signs say, conveniently following modern signwriting practice, but I would like to argue for Dr Crouches'. The naming honoured Dr Hubert Crouch's retirement, I believe, but he and his wife Elizabeth Crouch were in practice here together, and were joined and followed by their son Tim (now also retired). The surgery of blessed memory was in the outbuildings now named Hubert's Cottage and Bessie's Cottage, and earlier Dr Munden must have practised and dispensed from home as well. Eastcombe was truly fortunate through those years...

The Triangle, then, referred to the piece of land that became available for building after the enclosure of Bisley Common at the very late date of 1869. This fundamental change to the area was, of course, contentious locally, but it was driven by Sir John Dorington and he, as principal landowner, was principal beneficiary. Nevertheless, the Common Commissioners had of course employed a surveyor (John Bravender of Cirencester) to parcel out the common. Each property-owner with common rights was awarded a piece in proportion to the value of his property. For example, from the allotment crossroads to the quarry on the Bisley Road, crossing Brockley Acres (obviously not built then), the land was divided into five or six allocations. Mr Arthur Johnson used to be able to recite the names of the owners. So perhaps this triangle went with the land where Sir John built his Manor Farm. One way or another, it became the property of Isaac Fawkes. What is known about the Fawkes family will be listed elsewhere on this website, but Isaac was the one who was a notable man in his own time. Born in September 1814, the younger son of a sawyer, Isaac left home when quite young and went to seek his fortune in London. Records show him variously as a woollen draper, and as a warehouseman. He made enough money to be able to return to Gloucestershire as a successful businessman.

He had married Ann Mary Hook in Eastcombe Baptist Church in 1843. She was the daughter of Henry Hook, an Eastcombe baker, and the sister of Henry Hook who was a partner in a very successful building business and builder of The Laurels.

Some people have suggested, however, that The Triangle was built not by a Hook but by Henry Edward Restall of Chalford, as it is considered that the building reflects idiosyncrasies of his work that can be similarly identified in a good number of Chalford Hill houses known to have been built by him. 'Fern Cott' was the site of his early workshop, later made into his residence, where he died – and he was buried at France Congregational Church 'whose pews he had made many years before.'

Umm. I am depending here on notes included among Dr Lambert's papers, written in a hand I recognize but cannot immediately identify (not Dr L's). I am bowing to local knowledge – but I cannot find this Henry Edward Restall in the censuses. There are plenty of Henrys and plenty of Edwards, all with local connections (but no mention of Chalford) – and they got about over the decades – but their trades were always to do with wood: 'sawyer', 'carpenter', 'cabinet-maker'. The Bisley Restalls' workshop is still there, and the family still is in Bisley – though the most famous twentieth-century member was an epic landlord of The Stirrup Cup rather than a builder or woodworker... Aha! I see there was a Nathaniel Restall in Chalford whose occupation was given as mason. His family seems to have moved to the Midlands later, but at least one son was a builder. Oh well. This is for later research.

Whoever built The Triangle, he did a fine job and made a handsome house for Isaac and his family. Dr Lambert's notes say '1919 auctioned to Freeman of Manor Farm', and this may be so – but not as part of the 1919 break-up of the Dorington estate as it was surely still independently owned. 'Soon to Dr Munden, who practised for nearly 33 years.' And then in 1952 the Crouches arrived – and are still there.

The Village Hall

On the Lypiatt Park auctioneer's plan of the parish and Sir John Dorington's holdings, one can easily spot The Triangle. It had nothing to do with the auction, and nor did a large area to the north-east of it bounded by what are now Dr Crouch's Road, The Green, the Chalford road, the Bisley road (past the pleasure ground), and the little road linking down to Dr Crouch's Road again. Within this large area in 1919, heading clockwise again from The Triangle, were the building marked 'School', a little square next to it representing the headmaster's house (now called Church House), a triangle of land showing the upper graveyard of the chapel, the 'Orphanage' with its outbuildings, and then right round on the main road (nearly back to The Triangle), a square block in a roughly triangular plot which was The Firs (now St Mary's). All the rest of that enclosed area belonged to St Elizabeth's, the orphanage – and as far as I know it was not until the 1950s that the council houses, bungalows, and road which form the D-shaped 'Bracelands' were built. And to the south of that area was the new Manor Farm on the old Bisley common. How different the approach to the village must have looked 100 years ago.

There was, however, one other building inked in on the big plot, just to the south-east of the school – long and thin and set on a diagonal within its own small boundary. This was the 'tin church' erected by the Victorian vicar of Bisley to serve,

with this church school, the Anglican portion of the local population. I do not know its exact date (1901, perhaps?), but I can think of at least two other prefab churches in corrugated iron around here, one at Thrupp on the main road into Stroud and one near the maypole at Paganhill: at the time they were a thoroughly modern and practical solution to building on a shoestring budget...

The auctioneer's plan, however, went out of date exactly when it was published, with everyone conceding that the sensible way forward after the First World War was to amalgamate the primary school population into one school (the British School by the Baptist church). As told elsewhere, this released the church school building to become St Augustine's, and the tin church became the parish room. By the Second World War it had fallen into such disrepair that one could enter it without bothering to use a door, but it was nevertheless useful as a public space. There were many groups in the village – sports clubs and scouts and guides and the Women's Institute and the British Legion (and the Home Guard) and so on. Public space is always sought, and the semi-derelict old building was used – for 'hops' in wartime, for example – as was an old chicken shed on a grassy slope down The Street (the 'Legion'), and the WI 'hut' in the garden of Woodview.

In 1962, however, there was a dramatic fire that finished off the tin church, and the village got together to erect the hall now on this site. It is far from beautiful, but the days of paternalistic rich landowners giving fine stone buildings are long past and a community provides what it can afford. In the 1980s a sprung dance floor was laid at great expense, and using the hall became very popular. Little rubber covers were supplied to ladies with stiletto heels, and care and maintenance of the hall has remained at a high standard ever since, thanks to a vigilant committee. It is available for hire for a good variety of events, but regrettably the WI no longer puts on the highly regarded dramatic productions which packed their old hut to capacity.

Until very recently people from St Augustine's church were able to use the hall as an extension to their premises – meaning they had a key to get in to use the loos – but perhaps the situation has changed now. The Baptists similarly retained right of access to the primary school premises, but have had to yield to the need for greater security in the past few years.