



The Hundred Parishes

An introductory article about VILLAGE HALLS

There are thousands of village halls in England, owned and run by local councils, churches or independent trustees for the benefit of local communities. The Hundred Parishes has its share, with a great variety of buildings and history.

Probably the oldest is in Hunsdon, shown on the right: it dates from the 15th century and was once a house and then a school.

Barley's 16th-century Town House, below, was once a guildhall and still looks ancient, but today it serves as the village hall.



Ashdon claims to have the only local thatched village hall; that element of the building, shown below, was once a house and dates from the 17th century.



Westmill has a converted 17th-century barn, pictured below - it was previously owned by the Greg family who were major benefactors of the parish and gave several properties for the benefit of its residents.



Many purpose-built village halls appeared after the First World War, funded either by public subscription or a generous benefactor and often built as a lasting memorial to those who died in the conflict.

Ugley's hall, on the right, was opened in 1920, funded largely by the Tennant family who lived at nearby Orford House in remembrance of members of their family and the men of Ugley who died in WWI. The hall was damaged by a German bomb in 1941; after the war, Government compensation allowed it to be rebuilt and improved.



Radwinter's hall, shown on the left, was built as part of the village's redevelopment in the arts-and-crafts style after a disastrous fire in 1874.

In 1926, Samuel Courtauld of the textile family built the village hall at Blackmore End in the parish of Wethersfield.

Blackmore End's hall is pictured on the right. Wethersfield has a second village hall, opposite the green in the centre of the village. It was once the maltings of Wethersfield Brewery and was donated to the village in 1921, particularly as a meeting place for men who had served in the First World War.



Several halls have been converted from their original use: for example, Little Chesterford and Stocking Pelham have found new life for their old schools, shown below respectively on the left and right.



Stebbing and Chrishall have re-purposed former churches, respectively pictured on the left and right below.



Two of our village halls, about 15 miles apart, have a family link. In 1891 Sir Charles Gold gave land for the construction of a working men's club in Birchanger, now known as Birchanger Sports and Social Club.

A generation later, in 1925, Sir Charles's son, Major Guy Gilbey Gold, donated Shalford Village Hall and recreation ground to the residents of Shalford. Shalford Village Hall is shown on the right.



Our village halls are greatly valued and are used by all manner of community groups for meetings, sport and exercise, pre-school activities, cultural performances, quizzes, exhibitions, farmers markets and so on. Broxted Village Hall, shown below, is a typical, well-used venue.



As illustrated above, village halls come in many styles and have originated over a long period of time. Regardless of origin and design, most are lovingly maintained and managed by enthusiastic volunteers.

We continue to see new village halls appearing, financed either by far-seeing parish councils or by builders as part of a broader development. Many of these newer village halls are referred to as “community centres” but we all know what they mean!

21st-century Community Centres include those at Manuden, shown below on the left, and at Priors Green in the parish of Little Canfield, on the right.



Duxford’s Community Centre, pictured below, was opened in 2020 with multiple halls and what has soon become a popular café.



This article mentions just a sample of all our village halls.

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