

ROUNABOUT VERWOOD

PAST and PRESENT

Verwood Memorial Hall Golden Jubilee

50
years



During construction 1959.

Saturday 9th May 2009 will be exactly 50 years since the official opening of Verwood Memorial Hall. Through publicity and word of mouth, Historical Society member, Pam Reeks, has been able to trace some people who were there at the time, or their descendants, including some past Committee Officers. Along with the current Committee, they will meet for coffee on 9th May, see a presentation including speeches made at the inauguration in 1959, have a tour of the hall to show them the many improvements, plus a preview of the Exhibition in the Balfour-Browne hall, followed by lunch at the Heritage Centre.

The programme of the inaugural day in 1959 reports the event as "A Great Achievement". A Parish Meeting was convened in 1936 when it was unanimously agreed to set up an ad hoc committee to explore the possibilities of a new village hall. Funds were raised by whist drives, concerts, fetes and "talking picture shows" and the £354 raised by the outbreak of war in 1939 was invested in 3% War Loan. The Committee re-convened in October 1945 and in 1946 the annual Carnival raised a record sum of £361.13s. 9d (£361, 13 shillings and 9 pence = £361. 65 today!). By 1955 the working group had reached the stage when a formal Committee of Trustees could be set up and the "New Hall Fund Committee" was renamed the "Memorial Hall Committee of Management".

With the Recreation Ground being a memorial to those who fell in the

first World War, it was agreed that the new hall should be constructed there and that it would be a "Reema" building. Reema Construction Ltd. were based at Salisbury; their halls were erected all over the south and still survive locally at Fordingbridge, West Parley, Broadstone and Coombe Bissett. The Verwood Memorial Hall has been well used over the years. The Parish Council met there for more than 30 years and there were regular dances, whist drives and bingo sessions, as well as plays, pantomimes, concerts, bazaars, jumble sales and the welfare and baby clinic. Until 1999 the Carnival was held on the Recreation Ground and refreshments were served from the hall. The hall floor was marked out as a badminton court and thus served as a social and sporting venue until the Leisure Centre was built in 1981.

The Memorial Hall was extended during the Queen's Silver Jubilee year (1977), so the new hall was called the "Elizabeth Room"; a small front extension has provided an access corridor to this hall since 2008. The hall has been under threat at different times over the years.

In 1988 East Dorset District Council put forward a proposal to build a community hall behind the Reema building which would then be demolished to allow for parking for 143 cars there and on the Recreation Ground. This proposal met with local opposition and did not materialise. In 1999 the Town Council supported a proposal to build a Day Centre and a Community Centre on the Recreation Ground,

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"With such a team we were bound to succeed!"

said Mr T E Cox, the Chairman of the Management Committee at the 1959 opening ceremony

but the Memorial Hall had to be demolished first, leaving Verwood without a hall at all. The Day Centre slipped from the plan and a new community centre location was proposed on the other side of the Recreation Ground, alongside Vicarage Road, with the proviso that the Memorial Hall would be demolished on completion of the community centre. Again, residents had other ideas and the Memorial Hall and Memorial Recreation Ground remain intact.



The official 'Opening the front door' in 1959

Once the wrangling was over, new people joined the Memorial Hall Committee and have worked tirelessly to raise funds and offer their services as volunteers to upgrade the facilities. With additional support from the three tiers of local government and grants from Awards for All and Dorset Community Action, vast improvements have been made to the hall. Since 2004 there has been a new heating system and ceiling fans, electrics and plumbing have been upgraded, a toilet for the disabled installed, new corridor and kitchen, servery, doors, windows, blinds and curtains; new fascias, soffits, guttering, downpipes and front tiling, cctv, new chairs, trolleys and committee office. Improvements are still ongoing and the plan for the new front porch will be on display at the Jubilee Exhibition.

The official opening of the Exhibition at 2pm will be carried out by Gordon Thorne, son of the late Horace Thorne J.P. who was one of

the officials at the opening in 1959. Gordon is a former Parish Council Chairman and was the first Mayor of Verwood when Verwood took on the mantle of a town. Gordon will be accompanied by Verwood's current Mayor, Cllr Mrs Lucy Clark and other descendants of the officials who were there on 9th May 1959. Verwood Concert Brass will provide a fanfare, replicating what took place at the Opening.

Some of the current hirers of the Memorial Hall will be promoting their activities including music and dance activities on the stage. There will be photos from the past of activities that have taken place in the hall, plus a "powerpoint" presentation of the opening ceremony of the hall accompanied by photos from the period in the Elizabeth Room. Refreshments will be available and there will be the opportunity to give a donation to hall improvement funds.

In the evening there will be a Jubilee Organ Concert by Darrell Harvey from Bournemouth. Tickets are £4, available from Peter Hancy (828352) or Angela Daymond (822549); any unsold tickets will be available on the door.

Verwood Memorial Hall continues to be well used for club activities, markets, craft, horticultural and flower arranging events, playgroups, fundraisers and private parties. Anyone wishing to hire the hall can call (01202) 828943 and leave a message on the answer phone – a Booking Officer will contact you.



Newly refurbished in April 2009