

Wootton Bassett Memorial Hall

The land was originally granted to the town at the turn of the century with the proposal for a permanent hall being made as far back as 1912. The old wooden building, affectionately known as 'The Hut' was built as a canteen during the 1914-18 war and given for the use of the town by the YMCA at the end of the war. The W/B Memorial Institute was set up in the hut after the war and the building was used extensively for local functions and clubs. It boasted its own snooker table and tennis courts [situated where the Pratten huts now are] and was home to the Men's Club.

The Memorial Institute and Tennis Court was used by troops at the outbreak of World War II and blackout was ordered in August 1940. It was used by troops as a canteen and even doubled as a cinema. From October 1942 to October 1944 there is record of a billiard room which was used as a school.

In October 1945 Wiltshire County Council wished to use the Hall as a dining room for children at school in what is now the Civic Centre. The charge was £1 per day – reduced to 15/- after negotiation in February 1946!

During June 1943 a group of local people gathered in the Council School to discuss providing a public hall at the end of the war. A Public Hall fund was set up, chaired by Mr H J Everleigh, a local JP. In 1946 the Memorial Institute and Public Hall Fund were amalgamated as it was felt both organisations were working towards the same end, this being the provision of a public hall and a lasting memorial to the dead of both World Wars. The Institute was run on YMCA rules and membership was 1/- per year.

They embarked on a frenzy of fund raising. The late Bert Strange [one of the instigators of the Bassett Show] organised a joint August Bank Holiday function with the Dairy in 1949 but for some reason the profits were swallowed up by the tax man! 1950 saw the deed of gift granted by the YMCA officially giving the Hut to the town. The early fifties saw the Bassett Carnival started as a fund raiser for the hall, while in 1957 a letter was sent to all the houses in Bassett asking for donations - £120 was raised. In 1958 sketch plans were drawn up and the costing in 1959 for a new hall was £8000.

1960 saw the fruition of long made plans when Mr R Parsons left the fund £7000 in his will which allowed the building to be started and the Memorial Hall was opened in 1961. Extension proposals were made in 1966 for kitchens, cloakrooms and a bar, but these were not opened until 1970. There are many people in Bassett who can remember having their lunches in the Hall, and this only ceased in 1974. The Hall was further extended with the help of Lottery funding in.... when a new front, new roofs and an upstairs room were added.