

The History of Easton on the Hill Village Hall

The Village Hall is a typical Victorian property, built of square coursed limestone with ashlar dressings and a Collyweston Stone slate roof. It has a high roof and gothic style, stone mullioned windows that have plate tracery, cusped-head lights and roundels. One of the main features of the hall is a square bell tower with an ashlar cupola and spiralet. A partially legible panel on the towers records that it was originally built as a school from the Richard Garford endowment fund of 1670.

The tower houses a Benson clock that was installed at a cost of £65.11s. Eighty four villagers gave £5.19s between them towards the cost of the clock, giving rise to the local name of ‘The Cadger’, by which it is still affectionately known today. The clock and the tower have been extensively refurbished in recent years.

The land, on which the village hall is built, originally housed a barn and stables for the Blue Bell Inn, and was owned by the Marquis of Exeter. In 1867 the Marquis agreed to exchange this land for the old village school premises. The new school was designed by a Stamford Architect, Edward Browning, and was built by Messrs. Perkins and Sons, who were builders in the Easton on the Hill.

The total cost was of building this school was £1200 and most of the money was raised by public subscription.

New Road was constructed at this time to provide access to the school ready for its opening in 1868.

The building remained in use as an elementary school until it was deemed to be inadequate, and new premises were build in New Road in 1928. The old school continued to be used as the school infants department until 1975, after which it was sold to Easton on the Hill Village Hall Fund Committee for use as a village hall, despite some opposition from near-by residents.

Prior to this village activities were held in the Church Army hut that was situated on the land at the corner of Stamford Road and New Road.

In 1942 the original Village Hall Fund Committee was formed with the intention of raising funds to purchase a village hall for the residents of Easton on the Hill and they intended to meet annually to report on progress. Money was initially raised at the time of the Coronation and was deposited in War Bonds. Fund raising continued sporadically over the next twenty years, during which time several village properties were considered for use as a hall, but rejected.

In 1967 there was the first suggestion that the Village Infant School was to become vacant and might be available for acquisition as a village hall.

In 1972 the Village Hall Fund Committee agreed to buy school from Garford Educational Foundation, for £1750, and apply for grant aid for conversion. Unfortunately this did not happen and the sale of the school did not occur until 1974, when it was offered to the Village Hall Fund Committee for £3550 subject to limitations on use :

1. Discotheques were not to be allowed.
2. No alcohol or bar sales except for special functions.
3. No activities likely to cause annoyance to the general public.
4. No alterations to exterior to be allowed.
5. The clock to remain in the village and the maintenance thereof to be the care of the Village Hall Committee.
6. The building not to be resold without the approval of the Governors.
7. The Village Hall Committee to fence off the opening between the School House and the Hall.

Many of these restrictions still apply, although responsibility for the clock was transferred to the Easton on the Hill Parish Council in 1977.

A Village Hall Management Committee was then elected to formulate and put into effect a policy on the immediate raising of funds and to make proposals on the minimum alterations necessary for the conversion of the school for use as a Village Hall. These included:

1. Alterations to existing toilets.
2. Provision of kitchen.
3. New heating system.
4. Provision of car park.
5. Provision of fire exit.

In 1975 A grant was received for £1200 towards cost of purchase and a further £1500 from East Northamptonshire District Council for alterations. There was also an interest free loan of £400 from Lord Burghley, £100 from the Marquis of Exeter, and a Parish Council grant of £300

In 1977 the Village Hall became a registered charity and was designated as a Grade II listed building in 1988.

The current refurbishment of the Village Hall started in 2005 and cost £98,000 to complete. The clock tower and bell underwent repairs and rusted ironwork was replaced. Internally the toilets were altered and re installed to provide disabled facilities; the kitchen was replaced and more storage provided for user groups. A new central heating system replaced the old, noisy and inefficient system and the walls were insulated and repanelled. With the addition of secondary glazing the Village Hall is now a functional and comfortable building that has retained many of the original features.