

DONNINGTON HALL - HISTORY

The birth of Donnington Hall

In 1924 Mrs Lilian Gilchrist Thompson made a Deed of Gift to the Village of the Working Men's Club House and the land behind, and a body of Trustees, the White House Property Trust, was appointed to administer it.

On June 30th 1926 a fete was held in the grounds of Broughton House, the home of the Wreford family, to raise money for the building of a "recreation hall" in Dunton Green. The fete was a significant local event - 3,000 people visited it between 2pm and midnight.

That same year the Trustees of the White House Property Trust, acting as individuals, accepted the sum raised of £2,760 and a new and separate Trust, White House Village Hall Estates was created.

On 2nd January 1927 it was agreed that the plot of ground in Barretts Road be purchased from Mr Meyerstein for the nominal sum of £100.

Miss Thompson deputised for her mother, Mrs Lilian Gilchrist Thompson, in the laying of the commemoration stone on 26th February 1927. Mrs Thompson was unable to attend owing to illness. Mr Dawkins, the architect, presented a miniature silver trowel to Miss Thompson for her mother. Representing the Fete Committee, Mrs Wreford presented to Mr E W Meyerstein, through his son, a silver plaque subscribed for by the Committee as a memento of his wonderful efforts in organising the means by which the money for building the hall was raised.

On 18th July 1927 it was agreed the new hall be called "Donnington Hall".

Donnington Hall was opened on 3rd September 1927.

Trustees administer the Hall

The sale to the Trustees of the plot of ground in Barretts Road by Mr Meyerstein together with Donnington Hall was formalised in a Conveyance dated 5th June 1931. The Trustees were Lilian Gilchrist Thompson, William George Lusted, Owen John Breething, William Philip Banks, the Reverend John Christopher Kinnear and Sydney Harry Wormleighton.

In the Deed the Trustees were bound to permit the use of Donnington Hall in perpetuity "for all purposes associated with the village of Dunton Green and for the benefit of the inhabitants thereof and of other residents in the district surrounding and for all such other purposes as the Trustees may consider expedient."

The powers of the Trustees were far reaching, as can be seen from the following précis:

- The management and control of the building and land is vested in the Trustees who shall not allow the Hall to be used exclusively by any one particular church, denomination, sect or political party.
- The Trustees are not responsible for the maintenance, repair or insurance of the premises or for the payment of any charges thereon.
- The Trustees may repair, enlarge, alter, demolish, rebuild if they think fit to improve the premises, or they may allow additional buildings on the site.
- If the Hall fails to pay, the Trustees are empowered to sell the Hall and put the money to charitable use. They may also nominate the charity to which the money goes.
- The buyer, in such event, need not even inquire as to the necessity for sale, nor need concern himself with the regularity of the appointment of the Trustees.
- The Trustees can hire or let the Hall in any way they think fit and can even let it without charge. They shall apply all monies to repairs of the Hall, improvements, furnishings, insurance, rates, taxes and in executing the Trust as they deem fit. They may invest surplus monies if they wish.
- The Trustees have absolute power to alter or rescind the laws governing themselves or the Hall. They may by variation of the Deed appoint or discharge a Trustee. Their numbers may be not less than three or more than five. Any Trustee shall cease to be a Trustee if he becomes bankrupt or remain out of the country for more than a year.

For some years the same body of Trustees administered both the White House Property Trust and the White House Village Hall Estates Trust, now known as the Donnington Hall Trust.

Trustees appoint Committee of Management

On 28th July 1936 the then Trustees approved the formation of a Committee of Management to deal with the day-to-day running of Donnington Hall.

There is no record of the Trustees meeting during the war but the Committee of Management was still active, dealing with such matters as a request from a local platoon of the Home Guard to store rifles in the Hall (but not ammunition!), negotiating with the Military seeking use of the Hall for sleeping accommodation for troops, and so on. At least one meeting had to be adjourned because of an air raid.

Trustees define powers and limitations of Committee of Management

On 15th October 1947 the Trustees laid down the powers and limitations of the Committee of Management as follows:

- The Committee is to consist nominally of 8 members but not exceeding 10 to be approved by the Trustees. The Committee shall elect their own officers from their number. Any vacancy shall be filled by the remaining members. (The Trustees reserve to themselves the right to attend any or all the Committee meetings but will not vote.)
- The Trustees must reserve power to limit expenditure but the Committee shall be empowered to incur expenses for minor repairs and replacements. Any item exceeding £10 in cost is to be referred to the Trustees for approval.
- The Committee shall not have power to make any structural alterations to the premises.
- All accounts payable are to be rendered to the Hon. Treasurer to Trustees with a reference to the minute authorising the expenditure.
- The normal control of lettings of the Hall shall be in the hands of the Committee.
- The cleaning and heating of the Hall shall be under the control of the Committee. (The appointment and remuneration of the Caretaker to remain in the hands of the Trustees.)
- The Trustees reserve to themselves the right of resumption of any or all powers conferred on the Committee at any time should occasion arise.

Powers and limitations of Committee of Management revised

In October 1966 the Trustees accepted the view expressed by the Committee that the present constitution of the Committee was unsatisfactory and to some degree frustrating, and that some of the powers delegated to them had become outdated. Resulting from this the powers and limitations of the Committee were amended by the Trustees on 30th November 1966, effective from 1st January 1967 as follows:

- The Committee shall consist of the Hiring Secretary and three members appointed by the Trustees which three members would hold office for two years.
- The Committee shall not incur expenditure over the sum of £20 without reference to the Hon. Treasurer to Trustees.
- The Committee shall not have power to make any structural alterations to the premises.
- All accounts payable are to be rendered to the Hon. Treasurer to Trustees.
- The Hiring Secretary shall be responsible for the letting of the Hall.
- The cleaning and heating of the hall shall be under the control of the Committee but the appointment and remuneration of the Caretaker to remain in the hands of the Trustees.
- The Trustees reserve to themselves the right of resumption of any or all powers conferred on the Committee at any time should occasion arise.

Donnington Hall registered as a Charity

Donnington Hall was first registered as a Charity with the Charity Commission on 3rd September 1969 - no 231478.

On 8th August 1971, the Hon. Secretary of Dunton Green Working Men's Club (now known as Dunton Green Social Club) wrote to the Trustees requesting consideration of a separate body of Trustees to administer the White House Trust. The Trustees took legal advice on the exact status of the White House Trust and the lawyers consulted the Charity Commissioners who ruled that Donnington Hall was registered with the Commissioners but the Social Club could not be accepted as a Charity.

After careful consideration, the then Trustees, who were Mr Robert Cook (Chairman), Miss M Taylor, Mrs M Glyn Davies, Mr G Creek and Mr E. Bowen, decided that they did not wish to continue as Trustees of a Trust which was no longer a Charity. The Social Club of the White House Trust was informed of this decision and, through their lawyers, proceeded to appoint new Trustees.

Sevenoaks District Council order works to be carried out

Following a routine inspection of Donnington Hall in September 1985 by the Environmental Health Officer of Sevenoaks District Council, the premises were generally found to be in good order, but certain works needed to be carried out. The cost of these and other works to renovate the premises was estimated to be at least £3000, which the Hall could not afford. Mr Donald Armstrong, a recently appointed Trustee, volunteered to get in touch with those institutions he thought might be able and prepared to offer financial assistance towards the carrying out of these works. Resulting from this was a donation of £650 from Dunton Green Parish Council.

Administration outmoded

In 1986 the Trustees decided that the present structure of the Donnington Hall Trust and its administration was outmoded and that steps be taken to appoint "Holding Trustees" and a Committee of Management formed of "Charity Trustees" as set out in the publication "Model Documents for Village Halls".

The "Holding Trustees" would not be responsible for day-to-day administration and management. This would be the responsibility of the Committee of Management. This Committee might comprise members to be elected at an annual general meeting; members representing organisations, e.g. the Parish Council and also co-opted members.

The Trustees decided that they would prefer to have, as first choice, the Parish Council as "Holding Trustees". They agreed that the future usefulness of Donnington Hall to the community could best be guaranteed by some formal involvement of the Parish Council as an institution. The arrangement recommended here could ensure that at no time in the future could any possible conveyancing away of the title to this land and building be carried out without the knowledge of the electors and the knowledge and agreement of the elected representatives of this village.

New Scheme approved by Charity Commission

The new Scheme was approved by the Charity Commission and sealed on 3rd September 1987 with Dunton Green Parish Council being the Custodian Trustee of the Charity. The term "Holding Trustees" was deemed inappropriate.

Provision was made for the constitution of the Committee to be altered from time to time on application of the Committee by Order of the Charity Commissioners.

Fund Raising

As well as making progress towards the setting up of the new Committee of Management, 1987 was notable for a huge amount of activity in fund raising and renovation of Donnington Hall. With the Trustees approval an Interim Committee was set up for this purpose and a target of £6,000 was set. A Steering Committee was also appointed to deal with day to day matters.

Each Committee met 5 times that year. Resulting from their efforts donations were received from local businesses, organisations, charities and individuals. A fund called the "Donnington Hall Renovation Fund" was set up. Proceeds from many functions organised by users of the Hall added to the Fund. At one stage the Fund stood at £3,367.45, more than half of the target of £6,000. In addition, many volunteers provided their services free of charge in helping decorate the Hall.

One ingenious idea - it's not clear whether it was taken up - was to get someone to invite 5 people to a coffee morning, then get each of those 5 to invite another 4, and so on, down to 1. If each person paid 50p and if the "chain" was unbroken some £978 would be raised!

New Committee of Management set up

The new Committee of Management was appointed at the Annual General Meeting of the Donnington Hall Trust at Donnington Hall on 30th September 1987 with about 50 members of the public attending. Mrs Glyn Davies, Chairman of the Trustees, explained that the Trustees had sought the advice of the Charity Commission as ever rising costs had made it difficult to run the Hall in the way specified by the old Trust Deed. She then stated that the new Scheme, prepared by the Charity Commission for the management of the Hall would come into force at the close of this AGM. She thanked her fellow Trustees, the Secretary and Treasurer and Mr Rogers for their work for the Hall over many years. She also thanked the Interim Committee and the many volunteers from the village who had done so much work in the last six months.

The new Committee of Management would comprise 14 members, 9 appointed by Hall using organisations, and 5 elected.

The 9 appointed were:

Mr Bateman	Dunton Green Parish Council
Mr Rogers	Dunton Green Gardening Society
Mr Andrews	Sevenoaks Entertainers
Mr Lewis	South Park Badminton Club
Mr O'Callaghan	Dunton Green Badminton Club
Mr Murphy	Dunton Green Over 60s Club
Mrs Gaston	Dunton Green Playgroup
Mr Binstead	Dunton Green TocH
Mr Rushen	Dunton Green Old Time Dancing Club

The 5 elected were:

Mr Brooks
Mr Hughes-Gage
Mr Stanley
Mrs Binstead
Mrs Gordon-Smith

The first meeting of the new Committee of Management followed the AGM and the following appointments were made:

Chairman	Mr Stanley
Vice Chairman	Mr Binstead
Secretary	Mrs Gordon-Smith
Treasurer	Mrs Binstead
Lettings Secretary	Mr Brooks

Lack of interest

The Annual General Meeting 19th November 2009 was so poorly attended a committee meeting was called for 18th January 2010 to fill the vacancies on the committee. The following is an extract from the Chairman's letter exhorting attendance at that meeting:

"You may not be aware that Donnington Hall is owned by the Parish of Dunton Green and is a registered charity. It is run on a purely voluntary basis by a committee which consists of elected members of the community plus representatives of organisations that use the Hall on a regular basis. Dunton Green Parish Council is the "Custodian Trustee" of the Hall and all members of the committee are known as "Charity Trustees" or simply "Trustees".

I am writing to invite you, as a regular Hirer of Donnington Hall, to nominate one of your organisation to be a Representative Member on the Hall's Management Committee. The Committee meets three or four times a year in the Hall's Committee Room and the next meeting is on **Monday, 18th January 2010, commencing at 7.30 pm**. Please let me have your Representative Member's contact details as soon as possible.

The Representative Members attend Committee Meetings where they get to have a say in the way the Hall is run and provide feedback to their own members.

The day-to-day running of the Hall is the responsibility of the Elected Members who comprise the Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer and Lettings Secretary. It is preferable that Elected Members have no connection with the Hall, although sometimes this is unavoidable. Prior to the Annual General Meeting held recently Evelyn Divall had informed the Committee that, due to ill health and other commitments, she would be standing down as Treasurer/Secretary. Evelyn has performed both roles professionally and with dedication since 1999 and will be sorely missed. She would be happy to help the new incumbent(s) settle in. Bill Rushen, currently our Vice Chairman and who was Chairman from 1996 to 2007, has also decided to retire from the Committee. Bill's "can do" approach over the years was much appreciated by the Committee. The first task at the forthcoming Committee Meeting will be to fill these posts and I would therefore urge you to ask your members for volunteers.

In the last two years much work has been done on the Hall – the toilets refurbished, the entrance foyer retiled, outside lights and timer rewired, the main hall lights upgraded, the Hall floor stripped and varnished and, recently, the old boiler replaced. As all house owners know, there is always work to be done on their property, and the Hall, which was built in 1927, is no exception. The outside of the Hall is in need of some tender loving care. With gas and electricity costs rising as well, we must increase our Hire Charges and the new rates approved by the Committee are enclosed. Hire Charges have remained the same since 2006."

A fresh start

The Management Committee (at June 2010) elected at the meeting on 18th January consists of the following:

Donnington Hall Trustees

Chairman

Vice Chairman

Secretary/Treasurer

Lettings Secretary

Mr Julian King

Mr Ian Bayley

Mr David Field

Mrs Janet Field

Mrs Maureen Bedwell

Mrs Evelyn Divall

Also represents

Sequence Dancing

Dunton Green Parish Council

Sevenoaks Table Tennis League

Darenth Table Tennis Club

Organisation Representatives

Barretts Road Residents'
Association

Dunton Green Pre-School

Dunton Green Primary School PTA

National Karate Kick Boxing
Association (NKA)

Sevenoaks Badminton Group

Mrs Mandy Gummer

Ms Sabrina Wall

Mrs Keelie Goodwin

Mrs Hilary King

Mrs Gillian John

Others

Mrs Caroline Durbaba