

The Story of Brook Hall (Ottershaw Village Hall) in World War Two

Prepared to commemorate

Victory in Europe Day

8 May 1945

on the 75th anniversary

8 May 2020

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Ottershaw Village Hall Management Committee)

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INTRODUCTION

This story has been pieced together from contemporary articles that appeared in the *Surrey Herald* (the local newspaper), accessed at Surrey History Centre and from extracts from the minutes of Christ Church Parochial Church Council (PCC) meetings, Christ Church Annual Parochial Meetings (APM), Ottershaw Church News (the parish magazine) and other contemporary documents from the archive of Christ Church, Ottershaw. Research was originally undertaken to form the basis of a display at the special May Fair on Friday 8 May 2020. The May Day holiday had been moved from Monday to Friday to coincide with the commemoration of 75 years since Victory in Europe Day in 1945. However, the spread of the coronavirus Covid-19 led to the cancellation of all public events. One more research session had been planned but the closure of Surrey History Centre because of the pandemic made this impossible. The story could be completed, however, with material from the minutes of Church meetings and from the parish magazine. Having gathered the information, but not able to use it for a display, the Ottershaw Village Hall management committee decided to publish the story electronically by email, as their contribution to the commemoration of VE Day. We hope you enjoy reading it.

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Part 1 of this e-booklet is a short synopsis of the story but for those with a little more time and interest, Part 2 provides the contemporary source material, giving a fascinating insight into the difficult years 1939 - 1945.

The information gathered tells the dramatic story of Brook Hall during the Second World War. Owned and then managed by Trustees appointed by the Church, it was the Church Hall and the village's social centre. It had opened in 1930, its construction largely funded by a bequest.

Although it has now been considerably extended and modernised, this Hall, rebuilt against considerable odds during the War, remains our (normally) much-used village hall, now known as Ottershaw Village Hall.



Brook Hall in the 1930s
(Picture courtesy of Hannah Lane)



A fete, fair or bazaar in Brook Hall, 1930s
(Picture courtesy of Hannah Lane)

Part 1

SYNOPSIS

Ottershaw Village Hall is owned by Christ Church, Ottershaw and until 2008 it was run by Trustees appointed by the Parochial Church Council (PCC). It is now a charity run by independent Trustees representing village organisations or elected at the charity's Annual General Meeting.

The Hall was originally known as Brook Hall, erected to be a Church Hall, through a benefaction to the Church by Miss M L Brook. In common with similar buildings elsewhere, rumblings of war led to an agreement that the Hall could be requisitioned for war purposes, should the need arise.

On 3 September 1939, the Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain declared that Britain was at war with Germany. The Brook Hall was formally handed over for the use of Chertsey Urban District Council during the emergency. Initially, the Hall was not to be used other than for war-time purposes but as soon as 1940, local people were permitted to use the Hall for social purposes on a limited basis. Chertsey UDC later sought permission from the Trustees to erect two garages on the Brook Hall site to house fire fighting appliances.

Fire!!

The Brook Hall was destroyed by fire between 10.00 pm and 11.00 pm on Sunday 26 April 1942. The investigation into the cause of the fire and the damage caused was the subject of detailed reporting by the local newspaper, the Surrey Herald. Liability for the fire was disputed. When the lease between the Church and Chertsey Urban District Council had been drawn up, the Church had agreed to keep the premises insured against damage by fire during the tenancy. The Council therefore refused to accept liability for the fire and its consequences.

About six months after the fire, new information made it clear that the fire had resulted from negligence on the part of one of the National Fire Service personnel. Nonetheless, it is apparent that the public bodies sought to avoid liability for the fire and consequently the responsibility of reparations, despite the fire being the result of the negligence of a public servant. The Council even apparently withheld information regarding the cause of the fire.

Despite accepting no liability, Chertsey UDC was prepared to reimburse the costs of salvage 'as a matter of grace'. The Home Office, however, did not support this offer and also refused to provide the police report on the circumstances of the fire. A temporary building was proposed, so that the Chertsey UDC would have a building to use. However, the Hall Trustees were unenthusiastic and refused to agree that the cost of such a building should fall on the Church.

The Home Office seems to have grown weary of local wrangling and withdrew from any intention to use the Brook Hall site but offered half the cost of salvage to Chertsey UDC. Nonetheless, even though it was now clearly established that the fire had been caused by an employee of the National Fire Service, the Home Office still accepted no liability – but apologised for the manner in which the investigation of the fire had been conducted. Support grew for the rebuilding of the Hall, despite wartime difficulties.

Home Office officials visited Ottershaw and became more willing to help. It was agreed that the Hall should be rebuilt, at least partly to be a fire station in the village. The Trustees were not prepared to have a temporary building and, seemingly emboldened by the change of attitude on the part of the Home Office, pressed for an enlarged kitchen to be added to any new building, as well as provision for an extension at a later date.

In the light of a subsequent decision by the Home Office to support rebuilding, the Trustees of Brook Hall were confident in stating their terms and what was acceptable to them. Estimates were obtained for construction, to include enlarging the kitchen and cloakroom facilities. Plans to rebuild took shape and there was a suggestion that the rebuilt hall might become a war memorial.

Insurance monies were insufficient. The Church made a donation to the cost of rebuilding the Hall and a loan was also sought. Building began quickly and, apart from the improvements required by the Trustees, the Hall was rebuilt to the same design as the original building. Just a year after plans had been finalised and estimates sought, the rebuilt Hall opened around the end of April 1945 and the PCC meeting of the 18 May 1945 was held in the newly opened replacement Brook Hall.

On 8 May 1945, Victory in Europe was declared (VE Day).

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In summary, the story of Brook Hall during the Second World War was one of disaster, deception and determination. In 1942, a fire due to negligence destroyed Ottershaw's village hall, which was a great loss to the village. The true cause of the disaster took a while to emerge.

The Hall was only 12 years old when it was destroyed and rebuilding must have seemed a very remote possibility in wartime. Many people must have doubted whether it would ever be rebuilt to serve the village again. However, the tenacity and determination of the Trustees meant that, remarkably, not only was the Hall re-built to an enlarged plan but the whole rebuilding project was completed in a little over a year and before the end of the war. The new Brook Hall almost certainly opened within days of VE Day.

Part 2

REQUISITION, FIRE, DECEPTION AND REBUILDING: BROOK HALL IN WORLD WAR TWO.

THE STORY FROM CONTEMPORARY DOCUMENTS

REQUISITION

In common with similar buildings elsewhere, rumblings of war led to an agreement, ahead of the declaration of war, that the Hall would be requisitioned for war purposes, should the need arise.

The following resolution was unanimously agreed by the PCC.

PCC 11 April 1939

In the event of a national emergency, the Brook Hall sub-committee is authorised to let the Hall on suitable terms to a responsible national or local authority without previously referring the matter to the PCC.

***On 3 September 1939
Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain
declared that Britain was at war with Germany.***

A month after war was declared, there was an emergency PCC meeting to discuss the formal handing over of Brook Hall for the use of Chertsey Urban District Council during the emergency. The Hall was leased to Chertsey Urban District Council for war-time use.

PCC 9 October 1939, Emergency Meeting

The Chairman read to the meeting the Tenancy Agreement between the Ottershaw PCC and the Chertsey Urban District Council for the renting of the Brook Hall to the latter body during the period of the present emergency. The discussion which followed centred chiefly on the rent charge of £2 [about £120 in 2020] per annum as proposed in the Agreement. It was felt that this sum should be increased so as to cover the liability of £7.10/- [about £460 in 2020] per annum on account of interest on a loan outstanding in respect of the Brook Hall. Eventually, it was proposed by Mrs Seccombe, seconded by Mr Reeves and resolved that the Chertsey Council be asked to pay a rent of £10 [about £610 in 2020] per annum.

It was proposed by Miss Lawrence, seconded by Miss Ottaway and resolved that the Chertsey Council be asked to make provision in the Agreement for the cleaning of the Hall during the period of the tenancy.

PCC 31 October 1939

...the Vicar stated that it had been ascertained that the Hall could not now be used for purposes other than its present war-time use.

At the Annual Parish Meeting, the Secretary summarised the wartime arrangements for Brook Hall. By now, some use by local people for social purposes had been negotiated.

APM 12 March 1940

The Secretary in his report dealt chiefly with Brook Hall affairs. The Hall had been taken over by the Chertsey Urban District Council soon after the outbreak of war under an Agreement, the terms of which include the payment by that Council of a rental sufficient to cover all outgoings, both real and potential, the handing back of the Hall at the end of the tenancy in as good condition as it was when the agreement became effective, and the cleaning of the Hall in the meantime. He stated that negotiations had since been entered into to secure the use of the hall for the purpose of holding social functions and that the result of these negotiations appeared satisfactory. The hall could be hired up to a limit of two evenings in any week, with the hirer's choice of evening, and be used up to 10.30 p.m. The music and dancing licence, which had been in abeyance since the start of the war would be revived by the Chertsey Council, and the cleaning arrangements provided for in the Agreement would stand. The main entrance would

be available for use on these occasions and the fee payable would be 6/- per evening. The letting arrangements were to be in the hands of the Chertsey Council, and a strict condition was that the hirer should secure the vacation of the premises as and when requested to do so by the Air Raid Warden in the event of hostile air attack.

Chertsey Urban District Council requested permission to erect two garages on the Brook Hall site to house fire fighting appliances.

PCC 20 May 1940

The vicar read a letter from the Chertsey Council asking permission to erect two temporary garages in the grounds of the Brook Hall for the housing of fire fighting appliances consisting of a large car and trailer. No opposition to the erection of the garages was recorded but a general feeling was expressed that an increased rental should be paid. It was...resolved that an increase of £3 per annum should be requested bringing the rental to £15 [about £800 in 2020] per annum.

In October 1940, Chertsey UDC, on behalf of Surrey County Council, asked whether the village air raid siren could be located at the Hall as its location at Botleys Park Hospital was distressing air raid victim patients at the hospital. This was agreed by the Trustees of the Hall. The letter from Chertsey UDC (below) explained the reasons for the request to relocate the village air raid siren at Brook Hall

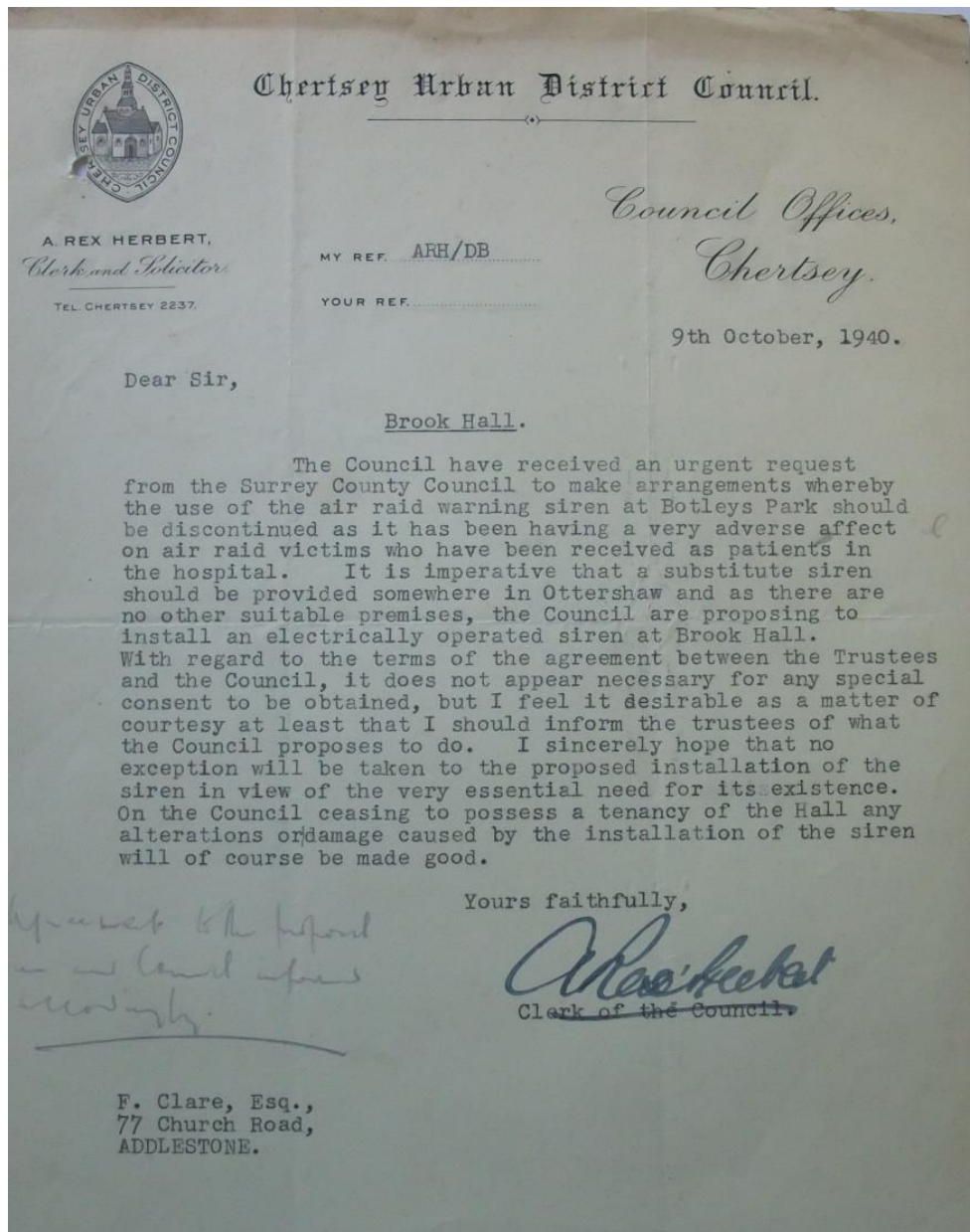


Image courtesy of Christ Church, Ottershaw

In early 1941, Ottershaw suffered its only direct strike from an air raid, sadly resulting in loss of life:

Ottershaw Church News, February 1941, Vicar's letter

...the air raid which cost the lives of three in the parish. Mr. and Mrs. Driver's infant son was killed, and Mr. and Mrs. Fred Sleet lost their only son, and eldest daughter. To all these friends in their deepest sorrow and trials we express the deepest sympathy. At the same time we do thank God that so many lives were saved. It was indeed wonderful when we saw the destruction caused.

The War Damage Act, 1941 created a new tax to help pay for war damage and, as with other properties, the Trustees of the village hall were required to pay a contribution towards war damage. The document below recorded the village hall's contribution in 1941.



WAR DAMAGE CONTRIBUTION.

INSTALMENT DUE AND PAYABLE ON 1 JULY, 1941.

To Ottershaw Village
Hall Trustees
Village Hall,
Ottershaw

An assessment of the instalment of War Damage Contribution, due on 1 July, 1941, has been made in respect of the property described herein; particulars of the assessment are shown below.

Special attention is directed to the Notes enclosed herewith.

If any further explanation in regard to the assessment is desired, application may be made to me.

The instalment of Contribution should be paid to the Collector of Taxes whose address is given on the enclosed economy label.

F. BASSOM,
WOKING DISTRICT,
COMMERCIAL HOUSE,
CHAPEL STREET, WOKING.

11-SEP-1941 Date.

Reference Numbers	*Description and Situation of Property (if not as above)	Contributory Value				INSTALMENT PAYABLE		
		Amount on which Inst. payable at 2/- in the £		Amount on which Inst. payable at 6d. in the £				
		£	s.	£	s.	£	s.	d.
23 / W.D.2443	Village Hall Ottershaw	30	.	—	—	3	.	.
Total amount payable on 1 July, 1941						3	.	.

*Where the instalment applied for relates to more than one property, see details appended.

For further directions as to payment, see overleaf.

W.D.5. 21018 Wt. 11748/9. 6487/S. 5/41. M.C. & Co. Ltd., Ldn. T51-338.

Image courtesy of Christ Church, Ottershaw

FIRE

Brook Hall was destroyed by fire between 10.00 pm and 11.00pm on Sunday 26 April 1942.

Report from the *Surrey Herald*, 1 May 1942

BROOK HALL DESTROYED BY FIRE: CIVIL DEFENCE CENTRE FOR OTTERSHAW

A disastrous fire which wrecked Brook Hall on Sunday evening, not only robbed Ottershaw of its pre-war centre of social activity, but destroyed a considerable quantity of equipment belonging to the N.F.S. [National Fire Service] local A.R.P. [Air Raid Precautions] personnel and W.V.S. [Women's Voluntary Service] who, since the outbreak of hostilities, have been using the Hall for various Civil Defence duties.

The outbreak was discovered shortly after 10 o'clock, after the firemen had returned from a grass fire at Queenwood. Despite their efforts, the Hall was soon enveloped in a mass of flames and smoke. Villagers gathered in large numbers to witness the spectacle, and it soon became obvious that the firemen were fighting a losing battle. They did not give up hope, however, and with four major pumps and two light trailers in action tried hard to save the building. At one period a neighbouring bungalow was threatened, the inhabitants temporarily evacuating themselves to a friend's house. The firemen, however, prevented the fire from spreading, and the bungalow did not suffer any damage.

As the flames died down all that remained of Brook Hall, once an attractive modern building, were four scarred walls and a charred pile of wood, slates, bricks and rubble. The air-raid siren, affixed to the front, was still intact.

Brook Hall was erected nearly 10 years ago with money from the legacy of the late Miss Brook, a daughter of a former retired clergyman. Before the war it was used extensively for social gatherings and also as a library. At the time of its destruction it was being used as a N.F.S. action station, a First Aid Post, a Warden's Post and various other matters in connection with Civil Defence. Blankets and bedding stored there for "bombed out" people are believed to be amongst the large quantity of equipment destroyed, including numerous articles loaned by local residents.

The hall was under the jurisdiction of a Committee of the Ottershaw Parochial Church Council, and for the period of the war had been leased to Chertsey Council.

The investigation into the cause of the fire and the damage caused was the subject of detailed reporting by the Surrey Herald.

Report from the Surrey Herald, 29 May 1942

THE FIRE AT BROOK HALL: FULL INVESTIGATION TO BE MADE

The report of the Sub-Controller contained in the minutes of the Civil Defence Committee presented to Chertsey Council on Tuesday stated that a serious fire occurred at this hall between 10 and 11 p.m. on April 26th, the major portion of the building being destroyed and the whole incapable of occupation. So far as he was aware, the only occupants were members of the N.F.S. and he understood they were making investigations into the cause.

The Clerk stated that as the Council were tenants of the property he had communicated with the Fire Force Commander of No.32 Fire Force Area requesting that the Council should be furnished with a full report by the N.F.S. upon the incident at the earliest possible date. Subsequently he had received a visit from the local Column Officer and the Deputy Divisional Officer of No. 32 Fire Force Area, who had informed him that the N.F.S. were holding an investigation into the cause of the fire.

After considerable discussion, during which members who were present at the fire reported upon the proceedings it was resolved: (1) that a sub-committee be appointed for the purpose of investigating the circumstances in which the fire occurred; (2) that the sub-committee be empowered to interview and interrogate such witnesses as they may deem advisable; (3) that the sub-committee consist of Messrs. Jenkins, King and Payne.

The Chairman submitted letters which he had received from Mrs. V.E. Naldrett, Centre Organiser, Chertsey District W.V.S. and Miss Otter with respect to the acquisition of premises in Ottershaw for use as a First Aid Point and after discussion it was resolved that the Clerk be authorised to make application to the County Council for their approval to the acquisition by the Council of such premises as the Medical Officer recommended should be obtained for the purpose.

Consideration was then given by the Committee to the provision of a Wardens' Post in lieu of the one formerly located at Brook Hall, and it was resolved that application be made to the appropriate authorities

for approval to the erection of a post on land belonging to the Poors Allotment Trustees adjoining Guildford Road.

The Clerk also submitted a letter from the solicitors acting for the Parochial Church Council and the Vicar and Churchwardens of Ottershaw, stating that the official report to the Regional Fire Officer indicated that the cause of the fire was the ignition of petrol vapour due to the carelessness and negligence of the auxiliary firemen, or one of them, on duty at Brook Hall at the time of the occurrence.

Church Council's Request

The solicitors pointed out that their clients had submitted a claim to their insurers in respect of the building, furniture, fittings, etc., but even if the claim was paid in full they were advised that the policy moneys would not meet the cost of rebuilding the premises nor the loss to their clients pending such rebuilding. They therefore intimated that their clients looked to the Council to reimburse them in full for any loss or damage they had sustained or might sustain.

The Clerk also reported on the correspondence which he had with Miss Otter regarding the loss of personal property which she and Mrs. Bates had sustained in the fire at Brook Hall. – It was resolved that the correspondence be referred to the sub-committee already appointed for the purpose of investigating the circumstances of the fire and that they be authorised and empowered to take such action as they might deem necessary or expedient.

Liability for the fire was disputed. When the lease between the Church and Chertsey Urban District Council had been drawn up, the Church had agreed to keep the premises insured against damage by fire during the tenancy. The Council therefore refused to accept liability for the fire and its consequences.

Report from the Surrey Herald, 26 June 1942

THE FIRE AT BROOK HALL

The Civil Defence and Fire Precautions sub-committee reported to the Chertsey Council on Tuesday that consideration had been given to (a) the official report of the Commander of No 32 Fire Force Area with respect to the fire at Brook Hall (when it was gutted on April 26); (b) the letter from the solicitors acting for the Parochial Church Council and the Vicar and Churchwardens of Ottershaw and (c) correspondence with Miss Otter. The assessor acting for the Ecclesiastical Insurance Office, the insurers of Brook Hall, intimated that in view of the circumstances of the occurrence, liability for the

damage appeared to attach to the Council, and he asked to be informed whether that responsibility was accepted.

The Clerk reported on the terms of the agreement between the Church Council and the Vicar and Churchwardens and the Council, whereby the Council held Brook Hall as quarterly tenants for certain specific purposes. With regard to the question of the use of the premises as an auxiliary fire station at the date of the agreement the Council were a "fire authority" within the meaning of the Fire Brigades Act, 1938, but that the Council's right, duties and obligations as a fire authority, and their control over the fire service and its personnel, were transferred by law to the N.F.S. from Aug. 18, 1941.

The Clerk explained that the Council agreed to yield up Brook Hall at the end of the tenancy in as good a condition as they were at the commencement provided that any damage or deterioration due inter alia to fire should be excepted. The Church Council and the Vicar and Churchwardens on their part agreed to keep the premises insured against damage by fire during the subsistence of the tenancy. This obligation had been undertaken in consideration of the payment by the Council of an increased rent. The agreement further contained the usual clause for abatement of rent in the event of damage by fire occurring.

The Clerk was directed to notify the solicitors that upon careful consideration of all the relevant factors the Council, whilst deploring the damage which had occurred at Brook Hall and sympathising with the landlords in their misfortune, were unable to discern any ground upon which they could be held answerable in the matter, and that it was therefore regretted that the Council had no alternative but to repudiate all liability for the fire and its consequences.

The Trustees of Brook Hall placed a comprehensive report of the situation in the parish magazine in October 1942.

Ottershaw Church News, October 1942.

The Trustees of the Brook Hall hoped they would have been able before now to make it known to Parishioners that the negotiations between the parties concerned regarding the responsibility for the loss of the Hall by fire on the night of the 26th April last, had been brought to a conclusion. As however they are still not in a position to do this, they think it only right that the Parishioners should be put in possession of the facts relating to the negotiations so far as they have gone at present, and which they now do.

Immediately after the fire the Trustees placed the matter in the hands of their solicitors to negotiate all claims and other matters arising from our loss. The Ecclesiastical Insurance Co. Ltd., with whom the Hall was insured, after an inspection of the ruins pronounced it as a total loss, and have paid up in full the amount which the Hall and its contents were insured for. At the same time our solicitors informed Chertsey U.D.C. to whom the Hall had been let, that we should hold them responsible for the loss we had sustained and would look to them for compensation arising therefrom.

The Chertsey U.D.C. replied denying all responsibility in the matter, saying they had sub-let the Hall to the National Fire Service who were controlled by the Government through the Home Office, and whose servants were in occupation of the Hall at the time of the fire, further that they were requesting the Home Office to hold an official enquiry as to how the fire arose and passing our claim on to them.

As the Chertsey U.D.C. received no reply from the Home Office to their letter, and after waiting some weeks, Mr. Sayle, on behalf of the Trustees called on the Home Office and in an interview with the Chief of the N.F.S., ascertained from him that the report of the Chief Regional Fire Officer on the fire, had been submitted to the Treasury Solicitor for a ruling as to whether the responsibility and liability for the fire was the Government's or not. This interview took place some weeks ago, and as the Chertsey U.D.C. were still without any communication from the Home Office, Mr. Sayle again took the matter up with the Chief of the N.F.S. on the 10th September and asked that the Treasury Solicitor's ruling be given without further delay. No reply has so far been received to this request.

In the meantime the Trustees instructed their Architect and Surveyor to report as to what salvage, if any, could be obtained from the building and the cost of re-building either now or after the war. This latter question he was unable to answer as the Government would not give a permit to re-build at the present time, apart from the difficulty in procuring the necessary materials.

With regard, however, to salvage, he was of the opinion that a fair amount could be salvaged for further use in the re-building of the Hall, and had obtained an estimate for carrying out the work which he had forwarded to the Chertsey U.D.C. with the suggestion that the cost should be borne in equal shares by the Council and the Trustees.

We understand this is still under consideration by the Council.

From the foregoing, it is hoped that Parishioners will appreciate that the Trustees have taken all steps so far as practicable to protect their interests, that the delay in settling the matter is entirely due to

the dilatoriness of the Government Department concerned, and that the question as to where the liability rests for our loss is one for the Home Office and Chertsey U.D.C. to decide between themselves. When that is done the Trustees will be in a position to state what further action they propose taking in the matter.

In conclusion we would add that the foregoing statement has been submitted to the Brook Hall Committee, comprising representatives of the various Social and other interests in the Parish who have signified their approval thereof.

Curiously, advertisements in the parish magazine for the hire of the hall, to be referred to Chertsey UDC, continued up to the edition of October 1942, even though the Hall had burned down in April!

GROSS NEGLIGENCE UNCOVERED

In November, about six months after the fire, new information came to light, making it clear that the fire had resulted from negligence on the part of one of the National Fire Service personnel.

Report from the Surrey Herald, 20 November 1942

**BROOK HALL NOT GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSIBILITY.
'GROSS NEGLIGENCE' ADMITTED.**

We have been asked by the Trustees of the Brook Hall to insert the following further statement:-

"Since the Trustees issued their report on the Brook Hall in October, Mr Sayle has had a further interview with the Home Office following a letter received from them on the 2nd October in which they stated that on the evidence before them as to the cause of the fire they were unable to accept any liability for our loss. This evidence as told to Mr Sayle by the Home Office official was to the effect that one of their National Fire Service servants had entered the Hall with a tin of petrol and proceeded to fill his cigarette lighter therefrom in such close proximity to a burning gas radiator, with the disastrous results we now know of. The Home Office admit this was an act of gross negligence on the part of their servant, but as it was not an act done in the performance of his legitimate duty as a fireman for which he

was employed by them, they were, as already stated, unable to accept liability or pay compensation for the loss we have sustained. This view as held by the Home Office, we are advised by our solicitors, is one which as the law stands we cannot contend against, and it would be useless to pursue the matter by way of taking any action in a court of law for the purpose of recovering compensation. The Trustees, however, are not content with allowing the matter to rest there and are pursuing it further in the hope that the Government may be brought to view our loss in a manner different to that which they at present adopt.

“On the question of salvage, the Home Office have offered to make a grant to the Chertsey U.D.C. of up to £50 towards salvage costs which it is estimated will amount to about £100, leaving £50 to be borne by the Trustees. As this grant of £50 to the Chertsey U.D.C. from the Home Office was secured to them through the mediation of Mr Sayle acting on behalf of the Trustees, it was suggested to the Council that the entire cost of salvage might be borne by them. It is understood the Council are unable to comply with this request. In the meantime the work of salvage and preserving the remaining structure from deterioration is in progress, and when this is completed no further action as regards permanently rebuilding can be taken until after the war, it being impossible to obtain the necessary Government permit or materials for such a purpose while the present state of emergency exists. A temporary roof over the centre portion of the structure might be feasible, and enquiries into this are now being made”.

It is apparent that the public bodies sought to avoid liability for the fire and consequently the responsibility of reparations, despite the fire being the result of the negligence of a public servant. Further, the Council refused to admit that it withheld information regarding the cause of the fire. Councillor King (in the report below) appears to be the Mr King appointed as one of the sub-committee investigating the cause of the fire.

Report from the Surrey Herald, 27 November 1942

Councillor King's questions answered

The minutes of the civil defence committee presented to the Chertsey council on Tuesday stated that the Clerk submitted a letter from the Home Office Fire service department to the effect that it was difficult to see on what grounds any legal claim can be made against the council arising from the destruction by fire of Brook Hall. The department intimated that in the event of any such claim being made

against the Council in their capacity as tenants of the hall, reasonable expenses incurred in defending or meeting the claim would be expenditure incurred in connection with the provision of a Fire Brigade and as such would be reimbursed by the Government.

A letter was submitted from the solicitors to the Brook Hall trustees to the effect that Mr Sayle, one of the Trustees, had gathered at an interview he had had at the Home Office that the department intended to authorise the council to contribute £50 towards the cost of the salvage work. Their client suggested that the Council might be disposed to pay the remainder of the cost. The surveyor reported that the salvage work had been commenced.

It was resolved to recommend 1) that the Home Office be informed that in the opinion of the Council the Government should defray the whole of the cost of the salvage works at Brook Hall. 2) that the Trustees' legal advisers be informed of the action proposed to be taken by the Council, and that without admission of liability whatsoever the Council would contribute towards the cost of the salvage works whatever sum was recognised for reimbursement by the Home Office, 3) that steps be taken to secure on behalf of the Council from the Police authority a copy of the official police report upon the fire and in the event of such report not being forthcoming from the Police the Home Office be asked to supply the Council with a copy. 4) that the Trustees be informed that should they concur in what appeared to be the general demand prevalent amongst the residents and organisations of Ottershaw for the temporary reinstatement of Brook Hall pending its post war rebuilding, the Council would be willing to use its best endeavours to secure that any necessary licences and permits were issued by the appropriate Government departments.

At the Council meeting Mr King asked the following questions of the chairman of the civil defence committee:

- 1) Did he agree that very shortly after the destruction of Brook Hall the Council received a report from the local N.F.S. officer to the effect that the fire was caused by a fireman who in pursuance of his duty carried a tin of petrol into Brook Hall to secure it from theft and the petrol vapour escape from it was ignited by an adjacent gas radiator?
- 2) Has this report been amended in any way or withdrawn?
- 3) Does the police report received in any way deny the statement made to this Council by the local N.F.S. officer?
- 4) Has the Council's request to the Home Office, made six months ago, for an enquiry to be held to fix responsibility been acceded to?

5) In view of the statement set out in the interview between an official of the Home Office and one of the Brook Hall Trustees, referred to in this minute, which contradicts the only official statement received by the Council, does the Chairman of the Civil Defence Committee agree that whilst they may have the effect of avoiding legal responsibility six months is a very long time in which to discover this new evidence?

6) Does he know of any reason why this has been withheld and is still officially withheld from the Council?

Mr Jenkins in reply to 1) said the report had not been withdrawn or amended nor had the police report denied the statement in relation to the fire itself. The Council however did not request an inquiry but asked that facility should be granted to interview persons with a view to obtaining evidence regarding the fire but the request was absolutely ignored. He did not know when the new evidence was discovered, but there was nothing to suggest that it was received recently.

Mr King said it had taken six months to ascertain the new cause of the fire, the theft of petrol to fill a lighter. The clerk remarked that that was not official.

Mr King closed the matter by saying he appreciated the answers he had been given.

In December 1942, the Trustees of Brook Hall updated the parish in the parish magazine regarding the situation with official bodies. The Home Office at last accepted that the fire was due to negligent action on the part of one of their employees. The tenacious Trustees of the Hall secured a grant from the Home Office towards salvage.

Ottershaw Church News, December 1942

Since the Trustees issued their Report on the Brook Hall in October last, Mr. Sayle has had a further interview with the Home Office following a letter received from them on 2nd October at which they stated that on the evidence before them as to the cause of the fire they were unable to accept any liability for our loss. This evidence as told to Mr. Sayle by the Home Office Official was to the effect that one of their National Fire Service servants had entered the Hall with a tin of petrol and proceeded to fill his cigarette lighter therefrom in such close proximity to a burning gas radiator with the disastrous results we now know of. The Home Office admit this was an act of gross negligence on the part of their servant but as it was not an act done in the performance of his legitimate duty as a Fireman for which he was

employed by them, they were, as already stated, unable to accept liability or pay compensation for the loss we have sustained. This view as held by the Home Office, we are advised by our Solicitors is one which as the law stands we cannot contend against, and it would be useless to pursue the matter by taking any action in a Court of Law for the purpose of recovering compensation. The Trustees, however, are not content with allowing the matter to rest there and are pursuing it further in the hopes the Government may be brought to view our loss in a manner different to that which they at present adopt.

On the question of salvage, the Home Office have offered to make a grant to the Chertsey U.D.C. of up to £50 towards the salvage costs, which is estimated will amount to about £100, leaving £50 to be borne by the Trustees. As this grant of £50 to the Chertsey U.D.C. from the Home Office was secured to them through the mediation of Mr. Sayle, acting on behalf of the Trustees, it was suggested to the Council that the entire cost of salvage might be borne by them. It is understood the Council are unable to comply with this request. In the meantime the work of salvage and preserving the remaining structure from deterioration is in progress, and when this is completed no further action as regards permanently rebuilding can be taken till after the war, it being impossible to obtain the necessary Government permit or materials for such a purpose while the present state of emergency exists. A temporary roof over the centre portion of the structure might be feasible, and enquiries into this are now being made.

THE SALVAGE OF BROOK HALL

Despite accepting no liability for the fire, Chertsey Urban District Council agreed to reimburse the costs of salvage 'as a matter of grace'. The Home Office did not support this and also refused to provide the police report on the circumstances of the fire. At the suggestion of a temporary building being erected, so that the Council would have a building to use, the Trustees of the Hall refused to agree that the cost of such a building should fall on the Church.

Report from the *Surrey Herald*, 25 December 1942

THE SALVAGE OF BROOK HALL

The minutes of the fire precautions subcommittee presented to the Chertsey Council on Tuesday stated that the clerk submitted a letter from the Home Office reminding the council that the request which was made in the first place on behalf of the trustees of Brook Hall to their architects and surveyors, was that the Council should agree to contribute say half the cost of the salvage works which they the trustees propose to undertake. After careful consideration the Secretary of State reached the conclusion that if the Council decided to comply with this request as a matter of grace while disclaiming all liability in the matter, it would not be unreasonable in all circumstances to reimburse the amount involved.

The letter further intimated that the Secretary of State was unable to agree that payment of the whole of the cost of salvage by the Council would be reasonable and that he was not prepared to reimburse expenditure exceeding the amount stated in the Home Office letter of the 16th of October, that is half of the cost of carrying out the salvage work provided that the sum to be reimbursed did not exceed £50.

It was also intimated the Secretary of State regretted that he could not comply with the Council's request to be furnished with a full copy of the police report upon the circumstances in which the fire at Brook Hall arose.

Consideration was given by the subcommittee to the letter. Reference was also made to the fact that the only official report which the Council had received (apart from extracts from the police report) relative to the fire at Brook Hall, was a copy of the report dated 3rd of May submitted by the Deputy Commander of No.32 Fire Force area to the Chief Regional Fire Officer, wherein it was stated, inter alia: the cause of the fire was the ignition of petrol vapour by flame from a gas fire. The circumstances being as follows:

It is the practice of all fire appliances to carry a 2 gallon can of petrol for emergency purposes e.g. for supplying the trailer pump and towing vehicle where the main supply is exhausted, and officers and fireman have been made responsible for its safekeeping. For this reason it appears the petrol can was taken from the towing vehicle standing in the open and brought into the hall. And it is presumed the screw top was not tight allowing petrol vapour to escape. When the gas fire was subsequently lit the vapour ignited. Fireman Warrington attempted to extinguish the fire but received burns to the hand and from this stage a petrol fire had to be dealt with. It spread with great rapidity and involved the building.

The subcommittee recommended the Council to enquire from the Home Office whether they had in their possession and had considered, a copy of the report submitted by the Deputy Commander of No.32 Fire Force Area to the Chief Regional Fire Officer dated 3rd of May and resolved that as soon as the reply was received, the Clerk should convene a meeting of the subcommittee in order that early consideration may be given to such reply.

A letter was submitted from the solicitors to the Brook Hall trustees intimating that their clients were glad to note that the Council would contribute towards the cost of the salvage works whatever sum was recognised for reimbursement by the Home Office. Their clients, whilst appreciating the offer of the Council to use their best endeavours to secure that any necessary licenses permits etc. were issued by the appropriate government departments in connection with the temporary reinstatement of Brook Hall pending its post war re-building, saw no reason why they should out of their own funds temporarily reinstate Brook Hall merely for the Council to use it for their own purposes and also charge as previously, for every time the parishioners decide to use the hall.

Their clients would however have no objection to the Council temporarily reinstating, subject to the approval of their clients architect and to the removal by the Council after the war of any temporary structure, without expense to their clients.

A letter was also submitted from the Commander of No. 32 Fire Force Area referring to the fire at Brook Hall and the reports which had appeared in the press from time to time, and intimating that he had made enquiries at Regional Headquarters as to whether he could assist the Council in any way, but that he had been informed that this matter was being dealt with by the Chief Regional Fire Officer. In the circumstances the Fire Force Commander presumed that the Council would be hearing from the Chief Regional Fire Officer at an early date if they had not already done so.

By this time, the Home Office had decided that it no longer intended to use the Brook Hall site. Also, since it was now clearly established that the fire had been caused by a wholly unauthorised act, the Home Office would accept no liability.

Report from the Surrey Herald, 26 March 1943

HOME OFFICE AND BROOK HALL FIRE

The Civil Defence subcommittee has reported to the Chertsey Council on Thursday that the Clerk had submitted a letter from the Home

Office intimating that it was not intended to use the site of Brook Hall for the erection of National Fire Service premises.

The letter further stated *inter alia* that it had been established that the presumption made in the report cited in the Clerk's letter to the Home Office of the 27th November as to the cause of the fire was incorrect and that the fire was caused not by an authorised act on the part of the member of the National Fire Service but by an act which was wholly unauthorised. The Secretary of State was advised that, in the circumstances in which the fire occurred, no legal liability would have been attached to a private employer. Accordingly it would be contrary to established practice for the Secretary of State to accept liability in the matter. It had been made clear to the Trustees of the Hall that this was the view of the law taken by the Secretary of State's legal advisors and he understood that the Trustees did not dispute that it was correct. The offer to pay 50 per cent of the cost of the salvage was therefore made entirely *ex gratia* and was not to be taken as involving an admission of liability in any sense.

While the Secretary of State appreciated that the inhabitants of Ottershaw had, as had many others in the course of the war, suffered inconvenience and loss, he could not agree to the diversion of N.F.S. labour from work essential to the prosecution of the war for the purpose of restoring the Hall. Any question whether building for non-essential war purposes could be allowed as an exception to the general restrictions was a matter for the Ministry of Works.

It appeared that the suggestion that a deputation from the Council should be received at the Home Office had been made under a misapprehension of the position in certain important respects. The matter had already been discussed at length with Mr. Sayle, as representative of the Trustees, and the Trustees were fully aware of the Secretary of State's views in the matter. If the Council were still of opinion that a useful purpose would be served by an interview, the Secretary of State would be prepared for arrangements to be made for an interview between their representatives and an Officer of his Department.

It was recommended that for the purpose of discussing the matters arrangements be made for the Council's representatives, in company with Mr. Sayle to be interviewed by an appropriate officer of the Home Office at an early date.

The Clerk reported that, as requested by the Committee, the Chairman and he had attended at the Home Office for the purpose of discussing with officers the matters arising as a consequence of the fire at Brook Hall.

REBUILDING BROOK HALL

The Home Office apologised for the manner in which the investigation of the fire had been conducted. The replacement of the Hall was now supported.

Continuation of the report from the *Surrey Herald*, 26 March 1943

REBUILDING THE HALL

The following is an epitome of the verbal reports furnished to the Committee by the Chairman and the Clerk:-

- (1) That the Home Office officials were of the opinion that the question of liability for the destruction of Brook Hall was primarily the concern of the Trustees (as owners of the hall) and the Home Office.

An apology was tendered to the Council's representative regarding the delay in dealing with the matter, which was described as unavoidable in view of the number of interests to be consulted. It was regretted that the erroneous version of the fire as contained in the report of the Deputy Fire Force Commander of 3rd May, 1942, had not been corrected to the Council, but the Department had assumed that the latter were in full possession of the facts.

- (2) Upon attention being drawn to the lack of fire fighting facilities in Ottershaw village it was explained that the policy of the N.F.S. was to conserve its strength and not to dissipate its resources. The Council were invited to consider whether the fire protection for Ottershaw afforded by whole-time fire service personnel and vehicles operating from Addlestone or Chertsey was not as efficient as could be provided by part-time personnel and vehicles which might be stationed in the village itself.

If the Council were not satisfied with the present arrangements for the fire protection of the village they should raise the matter with the Fire Force Commander who would take such action thereon as he thought expedient.

- (3) That the Council's representatives had impressed upon the Home Office officials that the loss of Brook Hall had deprived the inhabitants of Ottershaw of the centre of their civic and social activities, and the need for the replacement of such building had been strenuously urged.

The Home Office officials had pointed out that the extent to which they would be able to assist in this matter was dependent upon whether or not the Fire Force Commander considered it necessary that a fire station should be provided in Ottershaw.

It was intimated that if the N.F.S. decided that the establishment of a fire station in Ottershaw was necessary then they would explore the possibility of providing it at Brook Hall, either by way of temporary or permanent reinstatement. Any such scheme would, of course, have to be carried out in conjunction with the Trustees of the Hall.

The Committee agreed to defer consideration of the before-mentioned report until their next meeting.

Home Office officials visited Ottershaw and seemed more willing to help. It was agreed that the Hall should be rebuilt, at least partly to be a fire station in the village. The Trustees were not prepared to have a temporary building and wanted an enlarged kitchen added to any new building, as well as provision for an extension at a later date.

Report from the Surrey Herald, 9 April 1943

BROOK HALL TO BE REBUILT. HOME OFFICE OFFICIALS VISIT.

A further statement as to the negotiations with the Home Office concerning the Brook Hall in consequence of its destruction by fire was made at the Annual Parochial Meeting on Monday by Mr. R.T.Sayle on behalf of the Trustees. He said that last week a number of Home Office officials in company with the representatives of Chertsey Council and the National Fire Service visited the site and as a result had asked the Trustees to prepare a scheme for the reinstatement of the hall.

Mr Sayle said he made it perfectly clear that they would not consider any temporary building which would cost money to take down again. That plans should be drawn up by the architect appointed by the trustees and the rent should be paid to the same amount as before the Hall was destroyed. The matter now rests with the Home Office, continued Mr. Sayle, as to whether anything more is done. They are certainly more prepared to help us. The Trustees also wish to try and enlarge the kitchen quarters in any rebuilding scheme and to make provision for an extension at a later date.

The meeting approved the action taken.

In planning to rebuild the Hall, concern was voiced that women were insufficiently involved in planning the building of village halls. This letter calls on others to support waiting until after the war to rebuild Brook Hall.

Letter to the Editor, Surrey Herald 16 April 1943

Sir

An interesting suggestion was made at the recent meeting of the W.I. that women should be consulted about the building of village halls; it is no secret that Ottershaw people were very disappointed about the building and planning of the Brook Memorial Hall. Probably this was their own fault, had our various societies made known their ideas to the Trustees doubtless they would have been listened to.

It has been said that every society started by an Englishman is an excuse for a dinner; would I be wrong to say that all societies run by women end in a tea, even in war time?

If so, catering entering so largely in the use of the Hall, women's views should perhaps predominate. I am not suggesting they should become monopolists of the Hall but as the men already have a club and institute for their own special use I feel sure that they would be the first to say that if the women are satisfied they will be too.

Am I right in thinking that Ottershaw women are not pleased with the suggestion that we should rebuild the hall with the war on? If the Home Office want any accommodation for fire prevention let them put up a temporary building somewhere at their own expense.

We do well to remember the Brook Memorial Hall was intended for the spiritual and material needs of the village people: it does not belong to the Chertsey Urban District Council or the Home Office. Women would like both ends of the Hall pulled down and then when at last our chief enemy is defeated, for us to build a completely new place; a substantial spacious building of nice coloured bricks. Should the funds not be sufficient what is to prevent all our societies, the W.I., Mothers Union, British Legion and not forgetting our youngest society the O.I.R.S. setting up a big fête to provide more funds to build the hall of our dreams. Not a fantastic one because women are eminently practical, despite anything architects and builders may say.

Dances, whist drives, teas, all can wait till after the war. Let us follow Mr Churchill who is constantly saying the war comes first, let everything else wait. If Ottershaw women agree with anything I have written here I hope they will make their views known to the Trustees through their representatives.

Parishioner
Ottershaw 12th of April 1943.

It seems the women of Ottershaw were not sufficiently vocal or, more likely, the groundswell of opinion was to replace the Hall as soon as possible. In the light of the decision of the Home Office to support rebuilding, the Trustees of Brook Hall pressed ahead, confident in stating their terms and what was acceptable to them.

Report from the Surrey Herald, 24 April 1943

REBUILDING OF BROOK HALL

The Clerk reported to the annual meeting of Chertsey Council on Thursday through the minutes of the Civil Defence Committee that the Chairman and he had conferred with Mr. R.T. Sayle, a Trustee of Brook Hall to ascertain the views of the Trustees in the event of the Fire Force Commander deciding to provide a fire station at Ottershaw by the temporary or permanent reinstatement of Brook Hall. From this it was ascertained that the basis upon which the Trustees would be willing to collaborate with the government in any plans was as follows:

1. The building must be of a permanent and not temporary nature.
2. The Trustees were prepared to handover to the Government towards the cost of rebuilding should they undertake the work the remains of the insurance money calculated to be about £1400.
3. The plans to be drawn up or approved by the Trustees' architect.
4. When no longer needed by the N.F.S. the building to be handed back to the Trustees in a clean and undamaged condition.
5. The arrangement which the parishioners had for the use of the Hall to remain in force.

The Clerk also reported that the surveyor had met the head of the regional N.F.S. administration and others when the main points raised were:

1. The regional representatives were doubtful whether it would be possible to get seasoned timber for the reconstruction of the building or that the Timber Control would consider it a case for release.
2. The N.F.S. could not provide direct labour and there was a difficulty in getting work carried out by contractors.
3. The N.F.S. had an open mind on the need for a fire station at Ottershaw.

Mr. Sayle had been acquainted with the matters discussed at the interview and he had replied that the Trustees' architect was being requested to prepare a scheme of reconstruction which would be forwarded to the Council for transmission to the appropriate authorities for consideration.

In accordance with notice given Mr. W.J. King moved: That this Council request the Home Office to hold a public enquiry in order to ascertain in what circumstances the personnel of the N.F.S. stationed at Brook Hall caused its destruction by fire on April 28, 1942 and further to enquire into the circumstances governing the official contradictory reports issued and the resultant effects upon the locality and whether the N.F.S. should not be called upon to reinstate that which they have destroyed.

Mr King said the Council had not been treated properly by the appropriate authority. It was now nearly 12 months since the fire occurred and to his mind the position was more befogged than ever. He traced the sequence of events leading up to the present state of affairs, drew attention to the contradictory reports regarding the cause of the fire and referred to a deputation at the Home Office.

He felt that if a public enquiry was held they could find out whether the Fire Force Commanders report was accurate and also establish who was responsible. They were anxious to discover the truth.

Mr Seacombe said that while he was in sympathy with Mr King's motion, he wished to draw attention to the fact that as there was a faint chance of Brook Hall being rebuilt, he felt it would be wiser to demand a public enquiry and not endanger that possibility.

On being put to the vote the motion was defeated only the proposer and second it voted in favour of it.

Rent had not been paid since the fire. Estimates were obtained for construction, to include enlarging the kitchen and cloakroom facilities.

PCC meeting, 11 October 1943

The Chertsey Urban District Council had not paid any rent for the occupation of the garages or the site of the siren since the Hall was burned down. He [Mr. Sayle] suggested asking the Chertsey Council for a rental of £3 [about £135 in 2020] per annum, to which the meeting concurred.

Regarding the rebuilding of the Hall, plans which had been drawn up were now in the hands of the National Fire Service, who had appointed somebody to get estimates for the construction of the work. If the matter was not speeded up, Mr. Sayle proposed to approach the Home Office again direct.

In answer to questions, Mr. Sayle said the plans included enlarging the kitchen and cloakroom accommodation.

The perseverance of the Trustees of the Hall succeeded in securing the licence needed from the Government to rebuild the Hall. This was reported to parishioners in the parish magazine in December 1943.

Ottershaw Church News, December 1943

By the time these notes are in your hands, parishioners will have read in 'The Surrey Herald' of the 12th November the announcement by Mr. Sayle that he had been able to obtain from the Ministry of Works the necessary licence to rebuild The Brook Hall. The Architect's plans for this work have already been drawn up, and are on the same lines as the original Hall with the exception of the kitchen which is to be twice the size of that first built. It must be pointed out that although the licence to rebuild has been granted, delays may occur in procuring the necessary materials owing to the shortage prevailing in the country at the present time. The parishioners, however, may rest assured that every effort will be made for the work to be completed at the earliest date possible.

Plans to rebuild take shape. The suggestion was made that the rebuilt hall might be a war memorial. The proposed extension (a Committee room) was now to be built at the same time.

PCC meeting, 24 January 1944

Mr. Sayle reported that the licence to rebuild the Hall had now been obtained, and the previous Friday plans were placed before the Brook Hall Committee and approved. The builders' estimate for rebuilding the hall and kitchen was £1,977 and a further £200 for a proposed new Committee room to be added. With architects fees, etc., the total cost would be £2400 [about £104,000 in 2020] and it would need a further £100 to purchase the necessary furnishings. There was an amount of £1,640 in hand, leaving £800 [about £35,000 in 2020] to raise. They were waiting at the moment for an additional licence to build the extra room at the same time as general rebuilding. Mr.

Sayle said he had approached the Diocesan Finance Secretary and it was probable a grant could be obtained as well as a loan.

Mr Hayward suggested that the parish would willingly subscribe towards the £800 needed as a war memorial. The meeting felt that the money would be readily forthcoming. It was proposed to make a copy of the plans for their inspection by parishioners and Mr Hayward agreed to display it in the window of his premises.

A small item in the parish magazine in March 1944 reported the PCC's satisfaction that a permit for rebuilding had been received and plans approved.

Ottershaw Church News, March 1944

The Council [PCC] received with much satisfaction the reports of the Brook Hall Trustees (through Mr. Sayle) that a permit for rebuilding of the Brook Hall had been granted, and plans approved which will subsequently be open for parishioners' inspection. Beyond the money in hand, a sum of £800 is needed to cover the cost and refurnish the Hall, and an appeal will be issued in due course.

The Church made a donation to the cost of rebuilding the Hall.

APM Meeting, 13 March 1944

It was resolved to donate £25 [about £1000 in 2020] from the Church funds towards the cost of rebuilding the Brook Hall.

By April rebuilding work had begun and fundraising had also begun to cover the shortfall in costs.

Ottershaw Church News, April 1944

Parishioners will doubtless have already noticed that preliminary work on the Brook Hall has commenced, and the Committee are now prompted to ask all those who have the interests of the Parish at heart to assist them in raising the amount of £800 required for the cost of rebuilding by giving as generously as they are able towards this end. It is hoped the Hall will be completed by the Autumn and the Committee are anxious that as large an amount as possible of the £800 needed will by then have been collected. *[The item went on to list the first donations.]* Total to date £233 10s 6d.

In August, a temporary cessation of work was required by the Government. The decision was taken to seek a loan.

PCC Meeting, 2 August 1944

The Chairman reported that, at the request of the Government, all work on the Hall had temporarily ceased. Regarding the amount to be raised to complete the figure to rebuild Brook Hall, ie. £800, the Hon.Treasurer in his letter to the Vicar sought permission of the Council to apply to the Guildford Diocesan Board of Finance for a loan of £300, £500 having already been received as donations. It was proposed by Cmdr. Stagg and seconded by Mrs Pope that the Hon.Treasurer be empowered to make the approach.

In October, work on Hall re-started although funding for the project was not yet complete.

PCC Meeting, 23 October 1944

The Chairman, Rev Dudley Hiam [the Vicar], expressed his pleasure in that work had been re-commenced on Brook Hall. The roof was now nearing completion and he fervently hoped that no further obstacles or delay would occur to retard the completion. Mr. Sayle reported that a sum of £529.3.0 was the amount subscribed so far against the £800 necessary. Subscriptions were still coming in but it may take a long time to secure the outstanding amount of £271.

R E-OPENING OF THE HALL

The temporary cessation of work in the summer of 1944 meant that an Autumn re-opening proved impossible. However, by January, the Vicar (Chairman of the PCC) thought that the Hall could possibly open by the end of April, a little over a year after plans were finalised and estimates sought.

PCC Meeting, 29 January 1945

The Chairman reported that although many things had yet to be done to the Hall, it may be possible to re-open it within the next two or three months.

On 8 May 1945, Prime Minister Winston Churchill announced to the British people that Germany had surrendered unconditionally. Although fighting continued in the Far East for some while, this was the end of the War in Europe. Marked by huge celebrations, it was Victory in Europe Day – or VE Day.

The PCC meeting of the 18 May 1945 was held in the newly opened Brook Hall. The date of re-opening has not been found but was almost certainly just a few weeks before the meeting.

The extract below from the Church accounts of 1945 – The Brook Memorial Hall Account, 1945 – shows the expenditure for refurnishing and re-equipping the Hall ready for reopening. It is interesting to note that, tight though finances were, a piano was an essential item. At over £50 (some £2000 in 2020), this was a very substantial cost.

THE BROOK MEMORIAL HALL ACCOUNT, 1945

1945.	RECEIPTS	£ s. d.
Jan. 1.	To balance in hand at January 1, 1942 ..	70 15 5
Dec. 31.	„ Donations towards Rebuilding Fund	551 6 6
	„ Rent from Chertsey U. D. C.	.. 4 4 0
	„ Insurance claim paid	.. 1,700 0 0
	„ Interest on same	.. 110 16 0
	„ Sale of apples	.. 2 14 6
	„ Hire of chairs	.. 2 10 0
	„ Loan by the Guildford Diocesan Board of Finance	.. 225 0 0
	„ Hirings of hall from May to Dec., 1945	105 2 0
		<u>£2,772 8 5</u>

1945.	EXPENDITURE	£ s. d.
Dec. 31.	By repayment of Loan and Interest thereon	106 5 0
	„ Interest on Temporary Loan	.. 7 10 0
	„ Clearing site—half share	.. 49 6 10
	„ Chertsey Gas Co.	.. 33 4 7
	„ Architects' fees	.. 220 14 3
	„ Solicitors' fees	.. 10 10 0
	„ E. Silk—Rebuilding Hall	.. 2,179 11 2
	„ Sundries	.. 23 8 7
	„ Repairing Chairs	.. 2 8 0
	„ Printing	.. 6 2 6
	„ Cost of Piano	.. 50 8 0
	„ Electric Light	.. 4 12 1
	„ Water Rate	.. 2 5 10
	„ Insurances	.. 3 18 8
	„ Curtains and Fittings	.. 6 5 6
	„ Brooms, etc.	.. 2 15 11
	„ Licences	.. 4 0 3
	„ Caretaker's Wages	.. 12 5 0
	„ Stationery, Postages, etc.	.. 2 4 1
	„ Cheque Book	.. 4 0
	„ Balance carried forward	.. 44 8 2
		<u>£2,772 8 5</u>

Checked and found correct from Receipts, etc., submitted.
January 25, 1946.

A. V. TURNER,
Hon. Sec. and Treasurer.

RALPH REEVES.

Image courtesy of Christ Church, Ottershaw

EPILOGUE

The story of Brook Hall during the Second World War was one of disaster, deception and determination. A fire due to negligence destroyed the village hall, which was only twelve years old. It was a great loss to the village and the true cause of the fire took a while to emerge.

The disaster happening in wartime must have made rebuilding seem very unlikely and many people probably doubted whether the Hall would ever be rebuilt to serve the village again. However, the tenacity and determination among the Hall Trustees meant that, remarkably, not only was the Hall re-built to an enlarged plan but the whole rebuilding project was completed in a little over a year and before the end of the war.

The new Brook Hall almost certainly opened within days of VE Day.



The new Brook Hall. The committee room extension can be seen to the right.
Picture date unknown but probably 1950s.
(Picture courtesy of Hannah Lane)



A friendly gathering of people, a few years after VE Day
with the rebuilt Brook Hall in the background
(Picture date unknown but about 1950. Courtesy of Surrey History Centre)

As we share this story of Brook Hall during the Second World War - the Ottershaw Village Hall contribution to the commemoration of VE Day - we hope we shall soon be free of social restrictions due to coronavirus Covid-19 and able to gather again in the same way as the people in this picture.

We send warm good wishes to everyone reading the story. Keep safe in these strange times!

**Ottershaw Village Hall Management Committee
Ottershaw
8 May 2020**