

Cossington Memorial Hall By Julie Goode



Charlie Stradling

The Old Village Hall – originally Cossington Memorial Hall – was erected in tribute to the Cossington men who fought in the 1914-1918 War. The Roll of Honour in the porch of the Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin lists their names. Henry Ronald Alford, Walter Guy Pople and Charlie Stradling laid down their lives for

their country; their names are engraved on the brass altar cross, used in services.

Charlie Stradling's elder brother Sam returned from the war and rejoined his family at Millmoot Farm. Like other members of the Stradling family, he kept a diary of everyday farming practices and local events. It would seem that village social events took place in barns, but with the return of Cossington's young men from the war something better was needed. At the end of 1919 he mentions a 'Concert and Dance in the Barn in aid of the Memorial Hall', on Tuesday December 30th, remarking on the 'Full House' and that £10.8s.0d. had been raised. A group of village people was convened, possibly prompted by the donation of the site in Middle Road, on which Squire Broderip had planted trees, following the demolition of almshouses. On January 7, 1920 Sam writes that the 'Cossington Entertainment Committee viewed the Memorial Hall of All Saints Church, Bridgwater and decided to have one similar'.

Inspired by what they had seen, the Committee arranged further fundraising events that year. A 'Whist Drive and Dance in Mr Coates's Barn' took place on the January 20th, raising a further £7 15s.0d., and a sparsely attended 'Long Night Dance in the Barn on February 10th'. According to Sam, 'a poor lot [was] there as most of the Committee were unwell'. Events continued nonetheless – another 'Concert in the Barn' on March 16th, a 'Whist Drive and Dance in the Barn' on April 13th and a 'Jumble Sale and Dance in The Grove in aid of the Memorial Hall' on July 2nd. In November Sam reported that the 'Season opened with a Dancing Class in the Barn'. The final event that year was a 'Cinderella Dance in the Barn', on December 20th. After a short hiatus, events resumed half way through 1921 when on June 10th a 'Jumble Sale and Dance in aid of the Memorial Hall' raised nearly £30.

Having built up a fund, a meeting of the Memorial Hall Committee was convened in September at which it was decided that a brick

building of the sort they had seen in Bridgwater was likely to cost over £500, and 'so out of the question'. Sam ends the entry with a memo: 'Going to get estimates for a wooden one.' On October 3 he reports:

Mr Thorpe, Messrs Squire, Warner, Meaker and myself went to No. 15 Camp Codford, Wilts by motor to see about a Hut. 70 x 20 ft. Price only £35. We decided it was suitable for a Village Memorial Hall. 110 miles. We went to Shepton Mallet and Warminster way and back Wincanton, Sparkford and Compton Dundon.



Sam Stradling

Having located something suitable, the Memorial Hall Committee set about 'digging trench and clearing site for Hut'. After two days of work, 'Bill hauled 2 load of stones for Memorial Hall'. Then on Sunday October 30th,

Messrs. J. Warner, M[etford] Bell, T. Squire, Rossiter and the Rev. Thorp and W. Squire went to Warminster (Codford) to start taking down the Hut. Messrs. J.W., W.S and Rossiter staying until finished.

A week later, Sam notes that, '2 motor lorries came back with the rest of the Hut about 10 pm but I was gone to Highbridge'. Two more entries in November 1921 contain references to 'Fred [Dunn] helping to put up the Memorial Hut'. At that point references to the Memorial Hut *cum* Hall disappear from Sam's diary, but it seems safe to assume that it was in use for some kind of annual social event that December.

Sam Stradling's diary offers us a unique, first-hand account of the origin of our village hall. Through it we can infer that Cossington village fathers looked around and then cut their cloth to suit their purse. They showed themselves to be resourceful and collaborative. Most significantly, they believed in serving their village community. It is appropriate that we should remember them now.