

by voluntary contributions, was 551 pounds, two shillings and sixpence. By the mid 1960s the old school building was no longer large enough to serve the needs of the villages of Mepal and Witcham and a new school, Mepal and Witcham Primary School, was built in Brangehill Lane. By the end of 1966 the inhabitants of Mepal had raised sufficient money to buy the old school building for the purpose of transforming it into a meeting place and social centre for the residents of the village and on 16th February 1967 Mepal Village Hall was officially opened. The wheels of our legal system ground exceedingly slowly and it was not until October 1968 that transfer of ownership from the Church authorities was finally completed.

Use of the Hall

The Hall is used regularly by local organisations such as the Youth Club, the Good Companions, the Gardening Club, the Line Dancing Club and the Bridge Club, and by the East Cambs On-Line computer access point. There are annual events such as the Produce and Craft Show, and the Hall is the local polling station for parliamentary, European and local elections. The Hall is also let for private parties. The Committee itself organises events such as tombola evenings, auction sales and from time to time gala days or street parties, especially on days of national celebration. In particular the Committee, with the help of ADeC (Arts Development in East Cambridgeshire) and Arts in Cambs on Tour, has been developing the use of the Hall for arts events, both amateur and professional, including professional drama and music performances that have become a regular feature and Film Shows suitable for the whole family. In organising events the Committee aims both to provide for the enjoyment and edification of the local community at an affordable price and where possible to raise funds for the improvement of the Hall.

Constitution and Purposes

Mepal Village Hall is administered by a charitable trust on behalf of the whole local community. This trust was set up in 1968 when the Hall, formerly the village school, was bought from the Church authorities by public subscription. The trust deed mentions particularly "use for meetings, lectures and classes and . . . other forms of recreation and leisure-time occupation with the object of improving the conditions of life for the . . . inhabitants".

The Village Hall Committee

The Hall is run by a management committee appointed in April each year at an Annual General Meeting open to all adult residents. The Annual General Meeting has to be publicised by fixing a notice to the building. In practice, in addition to this, the meeting is publicised in other ways including the delivery of a notice to individual households. Some of the Committee members, up to a maximum of nine, are elected at the Annual General Meeting. The rest are appointed by local organisations. Some of these organisations were named in the original trust deed in 1968, and others can be, and from time to time have been, added to the list. Members can also be co-opted to fill vacancies during the year. Once appointed, the Committee elects a Chairman and other officers for the year. The Committee is required to hold two ordinary meetings each year, but in practice it meets about every six weeks.

Before taking office each year, members are required to sign a declaration in the Committee's minute book, accepting that they are willing to act as trustees under the 1968 deed. This means in effect that they are to look after the property as carefully as if it were their own and they are personally responsible if they fail to do so. Irrespective of who elected or appointed them, they must administer the Hall in the interests of the whole local community.

The Parish Council

The Parish Council is "custodian trustee". This means that it has to sign formal documents to do with the property when asked to do so by the Committee but it does not have any responsibility for running the Hall. However, the Committee has been very grateful for the Parish Council's support, for example in making an annual grant towards upkeep and in giving its formal backing to various plans the Committee has proposed.

The Future

It became clear some years ago that the Hall was in dire need of refurbishment and improvement to meet the higher material standards and changing needs of our greatly expanded village. Following extensive debate in the village about the development of local social and sports facilities, an architect was commissioned to design a scheme which would greatly extend the useable space for all types of public and private events, and would enable this to be used either as a single space or as separate partitioned rooms for simultaneous events. These improvements are being carried out in stages as money becomes available. So far, the heating system has been upgraded and changed from oil to gas, enabling a new toilet block and entrance lobby to be built on the space formerly occupied by the oil tank. Thanks must go to WREN (Waste Recycling Environmental Limited), Leader Plus, Mondegreen (LANDFILL Communities Fund), East Cambridgeshire District Council, COMMA (Community Aggregates Fund) administered by ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England), The Town and Country Planning Act Section 106 Agreement money from the developers of St. Mary's Close and last, but not least, Mepal Parish Council, all of whom have generously contributed funds. The next major phase will be to relocate the kitchen, but this will be costly and meanwhile the

existing kitchen is to be re-equipped. Generous contributions to the cost have been made available by East Cambridgeshire District Council's pooled Section 106 fund and Waitrose Ely's green disk scheme in support of local causes.

Footnote

These notes are only a very brief summary. For fuller information on any of these matters, contact the Secretary of the Committee, David Stazicker, at The Willows, Low Bank, Mepal, Ely, Cambridgeshire CB6 2AU, phone 01353 778129, e-mail david.stazicker@gmail.com.

Mepal Village Hall Management Committee
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