

British Legion Hall history by Alan Wigley

WINSLOW ROYAL BRITISH LEGION HALL

Reference to Ernie Byford by Charles Beane, when he relinquished his Branch Presidency on 12th December 1991, have prompted me to place on record the background history of the building of which I have a unique knowledge.

Ernie Byford, who served in destroyers during the 1914-1918 War, was a founder member of the Winslow British Legion Branch, following that war. After the 1939-1945 War, Ernie Byford, with help from a few other ex-service personnel, set about re-establishing the Branch, with a headquarters. Various fund raising efforts provided sufficient money to purchase a redundant 36ft. x 18ft. pre-fabricated concrete building from the airfield (by then closed) at Great Horwood. This was erected by Legion members on part of the site of the demolished Chandos Arms Public House fronting the High Street, next to No. 76. The original British Legion tablet (now on the side of the new hall) was made and donated by Heritage & Sons, the undertakers. This was built into the brick front. Regular functions continued to raise money to furnish and equip the building which, however, was of a limited life design.

Brigadier N. McCorquodale, whose main estate was in Scotland, but who lived from time to time at 26 High Street, Winslow, instructed me to sell the Winslow Hall Estate which comprised the Home Farm and a number of houses and cottages. After numerous negotiations, I obtained a price from MRCE Ltd., a development company, which was acceptable to the Brigadier. MRCE Ltd. applied for consent to develop the Home Farm as a residential estate (now Elmfields). This was approved subject to the provision of an access from the High Street. There were several permutations to provide the necessary width of access, between No. 76 and No. 100 (Cantells). This frontage included the British Legion H.Q., Lowes the Chemist, a pet food shop, TV shop, 2 houses and a space built on as recently as 1987 [?1967].

At this time, I was President of the Legion Branch, Chairman of the Parish (now Town) Council and Chairman of the Sports Ground Committee. An access involved not only High Street frontage, but also a strip of the sports ground area running alongside the North boundary of the Winslow Hall gardens. Negotiations were complex, but I knew I had a very strong hand as without the access there was no possibility of building development. The outcome was acceptable to all concerned. A new hall for the Legion, together with parking space; three new replacement shops with living accommodation; the combining of the two sports fields into one with complete land drainage and the boundary fencing; the provision of a sports pavilion, and finally, the moving from a rough area adjoining the public hall and provision of basic units for the children's play area, all without cost to the Legion or the Town.

The Royal British Legion H.Q. was built by Gibbard and Ingram Ltd. of Winslow and the site foreman was Bill Stokes, a Legion member and Dunkirk Veteran. The building is on the site of four cottages in Monkey Alley which were all destroyed by the crash of a Wellington bomber returning to Wing Airfield with the loss of the lives of 4 of the 5 aircrew and 13 civilians. I thought it appropriate to include a memorial plaque on the front wall of the new building and this was made for me by Heritage & Sons who themselves gave the new Royal British Legion plaque.

A feature of the unusual design, on the lines of cruck construction, is the laminated wood main frames, manufactured by a well known Southampton firm of boat builders.

The building was officially opened on 12th May 1973 by H.M. Lord Lieutenant of the County of Bucks.