



FEBRUARY UPDATE FROM THE TRUSTEES OF THE LEIGH AND BRANSFORD MEMORIAL HALL

A New Quarter Century Begins – and with it another New Era for the Hall

Exactly 106 years ago, on the 20th of January 1920, the Leigh and Bransford Memorial Hall opened its doors for the very first time. In our Hall archives, one of the original trustees, **Mr. H. A Yarnold**, briefly recorded the event as follows: *"The official opening was on January 20th, 1920 when the Hall was filled to capacity, after which refreshments were served and dancing was enjoyed until the small hours of the morning. The dance was opened by Mr. F. P. Norbury."*

Mr. Frederick Paget Norbury himself, a local landowner, was not only another of the founding trustees, but also the generous benefactor who gifted to the Parish and its Community the large parcel of land, (adjacent to the Sherridge Road), on which the Hall was built and still stands. The large, gifted plot also allowed for a one-acre recreational field, looking across to the Malvern Hills. A truly picturesque setting.

But here's the thing – a few years ago it transpired that the original deeds transferring ownership of the land to the community went missing. The trustees knew – or thought they knew – from a minute of a meeting in November 1968 that they had been deposited in the vault at Lloyds Bank in Worcester. The year – 1968 – is significant because in May that year the deeds would have been used as proof of title when the Hall was first registered with the Charity Commission.

Fast forward to 2025. The trustees realised they should formally register ownership of the land and property with HM Land Registry to ensure, for future generations, the rightful ownership through a secure, public record. And, as part of that process, the trustees needed to produce the original deeds. Lloyds Bank were contacted but after a thorough search of their storage vaults, the deeds could not be found. Further searches of our own archives were equally fruitless, but the search did turn up another minute from a meeting in October 1983 which recorded the fact that *the deeds had "gone missing"*.

As you might expect, there are other ways in which, as trustees, we can work with the Land Registry to evidence proof of title, and we have been engaging with that process on the community's behalf for the last three months. Which brings me back to the Norbury family, who still live and operate their businesses in the parish and beyond.

Through the good offices of the Reverend Anne, who also serves as a trustee of the Hall, we were put in touch with **Julian Norbury**, the great-grandson of Frederick Paget Norbury. He and his family knew of the gift of land and Julian was more than willing to write a letter confirming this. In his letter he writes:

"It is my understanding, based on family records and oral history passed down with the Norbury family, that shortly after the end of the

First World War, circa 1918-19, land owned by Frederick Paget Norbury in the parish of Leigh and Bransford, was given, without monetary consideration, for the purpose of establishing a memorial hall and recreation ground to serve the local community and commemorate those who served and fell in the war. Frederick Paget Norbury was continuing in the family tradition of his father who gave land for the former school at Leigh Sinton."

Many families over the intervening decades have given and continue selflessly to give their time, money and other gifts to help keep the Hall the thriving centre it is today, and we are truly grateful for everyone's contribution. But, as a community we also have so much to be grateful to the Norbury family for – as benefactors, their forward thinking and gifts of land, meant that since the late 1860's Leigh Sinton has had a school – and remember this was over 10 years before the Education Act of 1880 made school attendance compulsory for all children aged from 5 -10; and a Memorial Hall open for all to enjoy and built at a time when banks refused to lend money for such community enterprises. Theirs, truly, is a lasting legacy which we should never forget. The trustees are sincerely grateful for the family's continuing support.



One of the events that took place at the Hall since our last update was our annual **Carols Round the Tree**. Organised by another of our trustees, **Pauline Harcombe**, she writes: *"We had a lovely gathering of familiar families and some new ones coming together on a crisp winter's evening to sing Christmas Carols. Our community building has, for over 105 years now, provided a safe space for people to come together to share celebrations and this was no exception. With Stanley, our lonely soldier in the background, joyful voices rang out a range of carols with the children leading us into Away in a Manger."*

*"Warm Mulled Wine and Mince Pies were handed out inside the hall afterwards, while excited children collected a treat from Santa. Our collection this year was in aid of Men's **Mind Matter – The Weight We Carry.** **Bradley Heron**, who is from Rushwick, was aiming to walk from John O'Groats to Land's End during November but due to injury was unable to complete it. While in recovery he came to our Carols event and told us his story. People gave generously and we were able to send £200 to his cause. If you would like to contribute, please type his name into **Just Giving.***

"Carols Round the Tree has established itself as a regular part of Christmas here and we look forward to welcoming you all on the last Saturday before Christmas 2026!"

Yet again space curtails what I can include in this present update, so a few more event highlights of the past year will be included next time. But for now, as we look forward to a new era in the Hall's history, the trustees have exiting plans for the Hall over the coming months more of that next time too!

Jon Gamble, Chair of Trustees