

History of the Riverside Hall Bampton

The Riverside Hall in Bridge Terrace Bampton EX16 9LT is one of three “village halls” in Bampton (the others being the Community Hall and the LARC). Its early history is very much tied up with the presence of the Army in various guises. It was originally built in 1903 as a drill hall for volunteers in the days when England had only a very small Regular Army and most of the militia was provided by volunteers organised by local worthies.

A volunteer regiment, the 11th of Foot, existed in Bampton in the 17th century. It was raised in the counties of Devon, Somerset, and Dorset to resist Monmouth’s rebellion. Being Protestants, they fought with the Prince of Orange at the Battle of the Boyne in 1688. The 11th of Foot (Fig 1 shows a soldier of the 11th Foot in 1742, the red coat displaying the regiment's green facings). It became the North Devon Regiment in 1782. The documents of the Duke of Somerset mention a Muster of Troops, Mr. Henry Ashford’s Company, at Bampton in April 1613. By the 18th century this had become the 1st Devon Militia. In the 1720’s there were 428 men in the Hundred of Bampton liable for service in the militia. The North Devon Yeomanry was formed in 1794. The Yeomanry wore clothes made of cloth, whilst the militia men wore rough serge. An Order in the 1760’s required 500 private men to be raised in the Northern regiment, 39 of whom were to come from the Bampton Hundred. In 1758 the parish bought a “chiest for ye Malitia mens’ cloaths” for £1.5.0., and “a locke for the chiest” for 1s.2d. It was sold 9 years later for 6s.3d. Another “chiest” was bought in 1758 for the Militia mens’ Arms.



Fig 1: Soldier of the 11th Foot

By the middle of the 19th century, Bampton was part of the 3rd Volunteer Battalion, Devonshire Regiment. On 22nd December 1859, a public meeting was held in the Assembly Rooms at The White Horse Hotel with a view to establishing a Rifle Corps for the area. The idea was carried, and the “Bampton and North Exe Vale Volunteer Rifle Corps” was born. On 28th February 1860 they became the 11th Devon Rifle Volunteers, ‘C’ Company. In March 1908, Major Acland Troyte (from Huntsham House, killed in action in 1918 with memorials in Huntsham and Bampton churches) gathered a full muster of the Rifle Volunteer Company in the new Drill Hall and explained the idea of a Territorial Army, to which the whole company then transferred. By the late 1930’s, Bampton housed 1½ platoons of ‘D’ Company, which by 1939 had become the 4th Battalion Devon Regiment of ‘C’ Company of the Territorial Army.

The Devonshire Regiment continued on until 1958 when it amalgamated with the Dorset Regiment. After amalgamation, the D and D Regiment fielded a Regular Army battalion, the 1st Battalion, and initially, two Territorial Army battalions. In 2007, the D and D Regiment was amalgamated with a number of other regiments to form a new large one, The Rifles, which continues today.



Fig 2: Memorial to the Devon & Dorset Regiment, National Memorial Arboretum

In 1903 the Colonel and Officer Commanding His Majesty's 3rd Volunteer Battalion Devonshire Regiment, Charles Marwood Tucker, had made the following agreement to build a Drill Hall in Bampton with John Cottrell, a Bampton builder whose descendants are still building in Bampton to this day.

"The said John Cottrell will on or before the first day of August at his own expense and at an outlay of £300 at the least in a good substantial and workmanlike manner of the best materials in all respects and to the satisfaction of the Surveyor of the said Charles Marwood Tucker erect build and completely finish fit for habitation and use on land belonging to him situate and adjoining Batherum [sic] Bridge in the Town of Bampton in the County of Devon a good and substantial stone brick and slate messuage Drill Hall and premises and also will alter and repair the present Cottage now standing and being on the said land to serve as an Armoury Store and Orderly Room"

"When ... the said Drill Hall Armoury and Premises ... shall have been erected and completed by the said John Cottrell to the satisfaction of the said Charles Marwood Tucker and of his Surveyor the said John Cottrell will by a good and sufficient lease to the premises at the joint expense of the parties demise unto the said Charles Marwood Tucker First all that piece and parcel of land situate near to and adjoining the Batherum [sic] Bridge at Bampton aforesaid together with the Cottage and Premises now standing thereon and the Drill Hall and Premises to be erected thereon and which premises are coloured green on the said plan and Secondly all that dwellinghouse messuage and premises with about 25 perches of garden land adjoining and belonging situate and adjoining the said premises firstly hereinbefore described which dwellinghouse and garden are now in the occupation of Sergeant Instructor Jones and are coloured red on the said Plan for the term of 25 years At the yearly rent of £27 for the premises firstly hereinbefore described and of £12 for the premises secondly herein described payable on the usual quarter days."

This kind of build-and-lease-back arrangement was unusual for the time.

A drill hall was a purpose built facility for training the Army's volunteer forces, built from 1859 onwards following the formation of the Royal Volunteer Rifles. Drill Halls varied in design but always had a large open hall for drilling, plus administrative offices and often accommodation for a caretaker or drill instructor as well as an indoor rifle range (as the Riverside hall still has today).



Fig 3: Badge of the 4th Battalion Devonshire Regiment

Bampton's hall was the Drill Hall and Armoury of the 4th Battalion Devonshire Regiment - see left for its badge

In 1921 the British Legion was formed, and by 1923 it had an active branch in Bampton. The first Hon. Secretary was Henry Jones, a Bampton man who had served with the 1st Devonshires in The Great War and was discharged medically unfit. He was the custodian of the Drill Hall, Poor Rate collector, and assistant Overseer of the Poor. He had been a Colour Sergeant before the war, acting as

Drill Instructor for the 3rd Battalion Volunteers at the hall. He left the army as Sergeant Major. The British Legion remained in Bampton until the mid 1960's.

The National Friendly Deposit Society (1868), earlier known as the National Deposit Club, was based in the Drill Hall in the early 20th century. Local people still recall being sent along as children to pay in their money.

At some point after WW2, the soldiers built a side extension to act as their ablutions block. It was not well built and was a lean-to consisting mainly of corrugated asbestos with no insulation. It is still standing as a multi function space which houses the store and the bar, and also doubles as changing rooms for any performers using the hall, eg the Bampton Players. With no insulation or heating it is

freezing cold and not fit for purpose. The Riverside Committee has plans to rebuild it on two storeys with an internal staircase to give access to the committee rooms in the existing two storey entrance section at the front without having to go outside.

After the Second World War most drill halls closed following a reduction in the size of the Territorial Army. Many were demolished whilst others were sold and converted to other uses. Even during their TA lifetime they had encouraged other community uses, eg the regular dances which many people in Bampton still fondly remember.

By the 1950s, the hall had passed into the hands of Mrs Lucy Emily Stevenson of Taunton (how it came to be hers is not known). In 1954 she sold it to Bampton Town Council for £1,000 to be a community facility run by a committee representing local organisations. At that time it was known as the "Public Hall". The conveyance plan shows the building had two parts – the drill hall towards the rear whilst the front section was the drill sergeant's cottage (the "missing" No.3 Bridge Terrace - Riverside Hall's own address is No.4)- see marked in Fig 4 right.



Fig 4: Hall with old cottages at extreme right

Later in the 1960s these old front cottages were remodelled at a cost of £1500 to provide a two-storey entrance space with kitchen, WCs and small committee rooms – see photo right. The only access is by a slippery outside staircase. It was built with a flat roof which disastrously failed in late 2016 and had to have replacement covering installed, thanks to the generosity of people who responded to the roof appeal.

From 1954 the Hall was run as a "village hall" firstly by a Committee of Management (Trustees) which became an unincorporated registered charity (reg. no. 300753) on 28 September 1962. Up to twenty-two organisations in Bampton were each entitled to nominate one Trustee. Over the years many organisations disappeared, others no longer exercised their rights to nominate a member, and by 2016 it had become clear that the existing constitution was not fit for purpose. Also being "unincorporated" the charity could not hold land in its own name and instead Bampton Town Council held it as custodial trustee. This led to a difficult and sometimes fractious relationship.

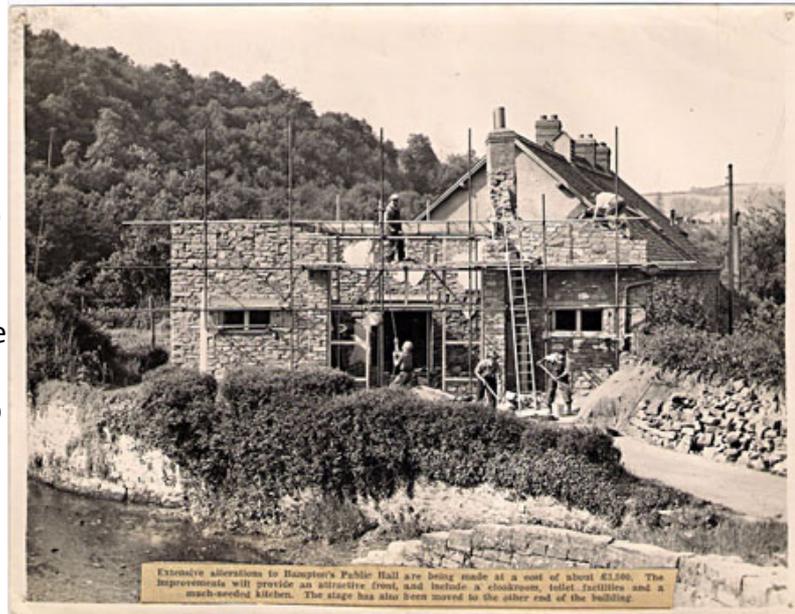


Fig 5: Building the new front entrance after demolition of old cottages

In November 2016 the charity converted to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (reg. no. 1164615) with a completely new constitution and, to the great relief of BTC, title vested in the CIO.

Riverside Hall Car Park

The curtilage of the hall is the same as its footprint and it has no parking space associated with the building itself. In 1964, some land across Brook Street was sold by Percival John Davey, an agricultural engineer of Newton Square, to Bampton Town Council for £400 to hold on behalf of the hall. The land had previously been occupied by five cottages, nos 51-59 Brook Street also known as Great House Court – see Fig 6 below extract from 1904 map of Bampton - showing Drill Hall as built and cottages on Great House Court. These cottages were at river level – see marked in Fig 7 below - ie at the same level as the present Riverside Walk and were constantly being flooded which is presumably why they were demolished. There are still people in Bampton who remember visiting relatives in these cottages.

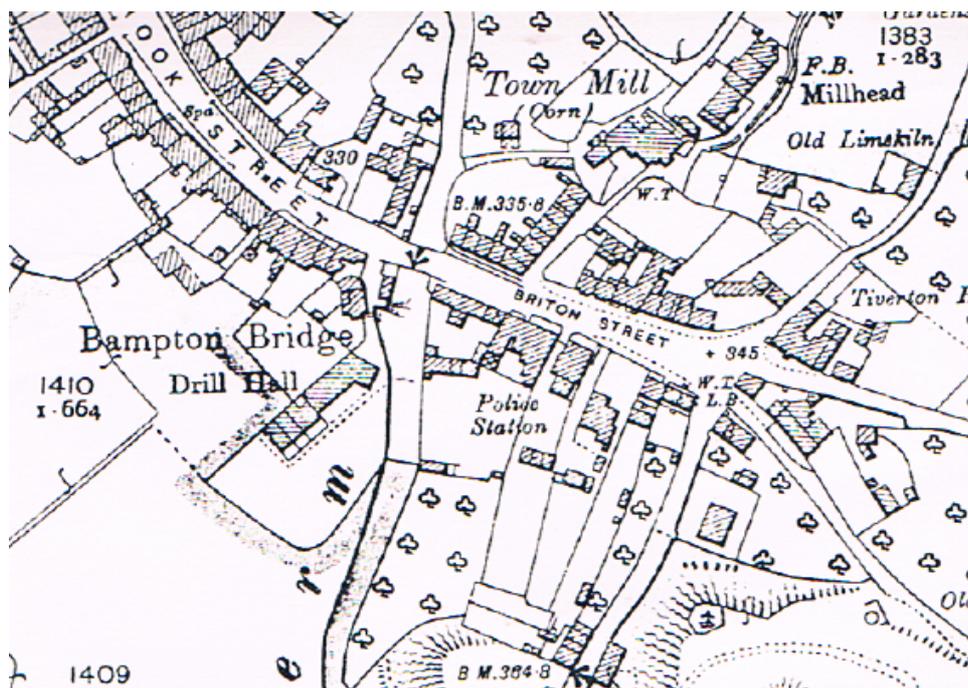


Fig 6: Extract from 1904 Bampton Map showing old cottages (previously Great Court nos 51-59 Brook St) on present car park site

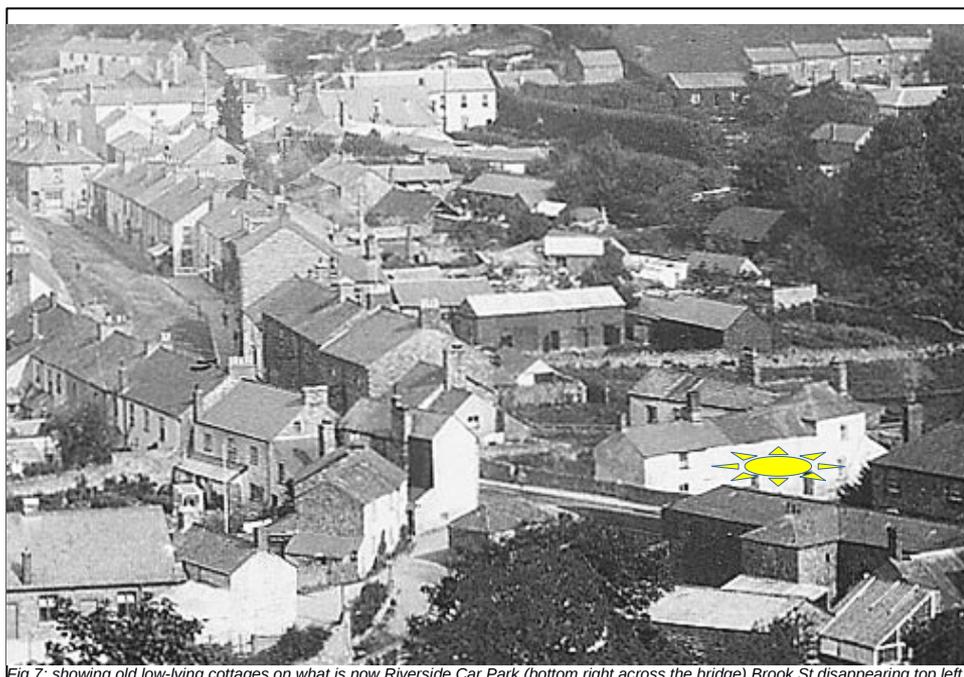


Fig 7: showing old low-lying cottages on what is now Riverside Car Park (bottom right across the bridge) Brook St disappearing top left

The Future

Trying to maintain Riverside Hall fit for purpose in the 21st century is an uphill battle. The temptation is to give up and abandon it to the Bampton floods and the whim of the planners. But the Riverside Trustees believe that for now it must be kept as a community asset because of the unique facilities it offers to this and surrounding parishes. Though there are two other venues in Bampton which provide community meeting spaces, only Riverside has the size and height which allow large scale events to take place, ie the cinema, pantomime, dramas and big private functions.

Ideally there should only be one community venue in a place the size of Bampton – over the years at least three committees have tried to find a solution to this issue but have failed and stood down.

So the Riverside Committee will do all it can to maintain and upgrade the hall for as long as it can. We do have ambitious plans which only lack the wherewithal to carry them out. We will tell you about these in our regular newsletters.

The Riverside Trustees

Acknowledgments to Tom McManamon for permission to use his material on drill halls in Bampton and for Figs 4 and 7.
