

# THE YEW TREE HALL PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE



## IN THIS HANDOUT

### Past

Find out the history of Lorton's village hall. Who built it and how it became what it is today.

### Present

How the hall is funded and managed today. What activities go on inside.

### Future

Our ambition for the generations to come.

## Past

### Malt & Brew

The Jennings family are well known for playing a prominent role in the industrial development of Lorton. It was William Jennings the Maltster who established malt kilns on the side of the Whitbeck in Lorton, selling his malt from Corner House to locals to enable them to make their own beer.

His son John Jennings (Senior) trained as a maltster and a brewer. After his wife inherited Scales farm in 1828, he raised enough money to build a bigger malting barn, now the Yew Tree Hall. As working men became better paid after the end of the Napoleonic wars and Industrial England grew in population, he expanded the family business to include brewed beer, developing the buildings next to the Whitbeck. The Jennings reputation for malting now became one for brewed beer too and the legendary Jennings pint was established.

In the 1840's the entrepreneurial family expanded, taking on the Tenters flax mill for son Wilkinson and High Swinside farm to expand their brewery. In 1874 they bought the brewery in Cockermouth moving operations from Lorton.

# Lorton Village Hall

Original research by Walter Head of Lorton & Derwent Fells Local History Society

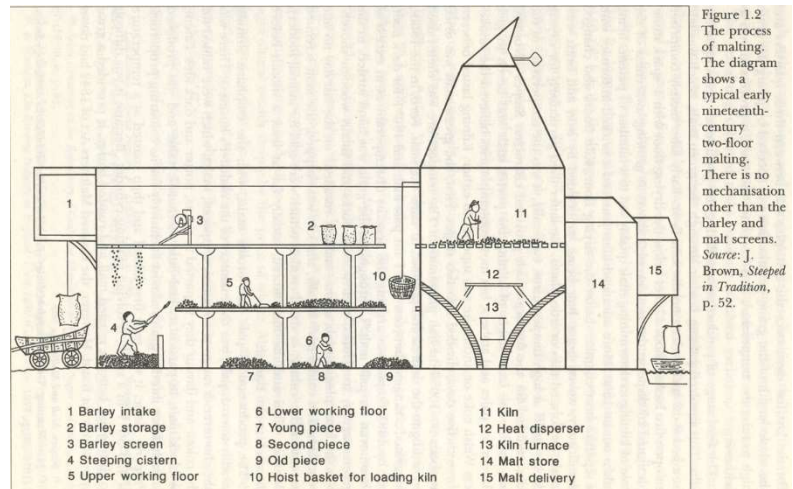
Of all the historic brewery buildings in Lorton, the old malting barn (now the Yew Tree Hall) is the most imposing. Sitting at the end of the pre-war village, at 100ft long and 20ft wide and originally three storeys high it dominates the village.

As a malting barn it consisted of a central kiln that circulated warm air under two raised floors. Barley would be steeped in water from the Whitbeck to begin germination. When ready it would be cooked in the kiln to make the malt.

By 1908, Jennings were looking for an alternative use for the building. A group of prominent villagers held a meeting chaired by Mr CL Burrows at his house, Broomlands. The seven individuals agreed that Lorton was 'in need of a hall as a place of recreation and amusement'. Between them they agreed to open negotiations with Jennings. A rent of £3-10-0 pa was agreed. Jennings would make the building weather tight and remove the second floor. A new 'Management Committee' would underwrite the costs taking out a five year lease.

The name was changed from the Malt Kiln to the Yew Tree Hall. The walls were limewashed and colour washed and 100 chairs purchased. The formal opening was on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1909 with a concert, followed by a Ball. 100 people attended despite atrocious weather. The West Cumberland Times reported that 'the night was dark and wet and the roads...almost impassable by reason of floods.

Regular Balls would go on until dawn until complaints provoked the Committee to introduce a new finishing time of 3.00am.



## Understanding the process of malting

Picture courtesy of J Brown – *Steeped in Tradition* – Reading University

## Mr C L Burrows

At the end of the First World War, Burrows had entered into negotiation with the Brewery to buy the building outright. The primary object was as a village war memorial. However, there was public opposition to this idea. Burrows and his committee recognised that it would be a missed opportunity if the village didn't secure the building. He personally entered into a contact with Jennings to buy the building for £150.

The Committee persevered in their efforts to find a formula whereby the village could own the Hall. An option for the building and contents to be vested in the Parish Council ran in to legal difficulties. Burrows then conveyed the property into the charitable trust that we have today. Five Trustees were appointed in December 1920.

Improvements were made to the hall. A stove in the supper room stopped the grand piano getting damp. A kitchen and ladies cloakroom with lavatory basin were fitted and the window sizes were increased by cutting out below the cills. Electricity came from a water turbine in the Whitbeck.

## A 'Fancy Fair'

While the Hall had been secured by Burrows, the Committee set about raising money for its purchase and running costs. A 'Fancy Fair' was held on Broom Field on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1920 comprising a marquee, the Lorton brass band and a variety of stalls selling farming equipment, toys, sweets and cakes, pottery, flowers and fruit. Side shows were hoopla, fortune telling and a bran tub.

This and a subsequent event raised a profit of £484. The Fair was the culmination of a great deal of effort by the Village to provide a public meeting place. Prior to the Yew Tree Hall, the Village relied on the Reading Room next to the Packhorse Pub in Low Lorton (now Packhorse Cottage).

Since then the Hall has played a prominent part in village activities. It has been the home and indoor firing range of the Border Regiment after WW1. It was the home of the Hunt Ball and has hosted a succession of meetings for clubs and societies throughout the years as well as sporting activities such as darts, pool, bowls and table tennis.

Established as a Trust when purchased, it was transferred to the Charities Commission in 1950 and remains there today operating under the original Trust deed. In 1986 it was given a Grade 2 listing by Historic England.

The hall has undergone continuous improvement over the years with the installation of stove heating in the 1920's, kitchen and toilet facilities and most notably a wooden floor in 1992 that covered over the original concrete. The floor was strengthened in the 1970's through the installation of railway track girders as the original floor used to bounce and flex with 100 villagers dancing all night!

*Historical research undertaken and first published in 1999 by local historian Walter Head.*



**A Yew Tree Hall Dance from the 1950's.**

Picture courtesy of the Lorton & Derwent Fells Local History Society Archive

# Present

## Committee & Governance

The ownership of the hall is held in a declaration of trust dated February 1921. This trust document sets out the terms under which the Hall should be managed, the organisation of the committee of management and includes provision for its sale and how any proceeds should be used.

The constitution requires six Elected Members who include the Chair, Secretary and Treasurer. There are then an additional ten Representative Members. Currently they are Lorton PC; Buttermere PC; Blindbothe PC; The Parochial Church Council of Lorton; Film Club; Table Tennis Club; Garden Society; History Society; Melbreak Communities; Friends of Lorton School. Additional members can be co-opted for specific activities. All members are charitable trustees.

The wide range of Representative members allows the Committee to reflect all the different aspects of village activities and interests. Previous Representatives have included the Women's Institute, Tennis Club, Hunt and Social Club. The hall charges for its use to help meet its running costs but is reliant on government and local authority grants for maintenance and improvements.

## Development Options

### Yew Tree Hall Improvement

Continuing 100 years of constant improvement, this involves a more radical refurbishment of the building. Challenges include developing a listed building that has a road on one side and a river on the other.

### Moving next to the school

Many villages are building new halls. The parish & tennis area next to the school offers attractive potential for improved facilities for the village and the children. Reorganising the space without losing the public amenity will be challenging.

### Greenfield New Build

A third option would be to build on a field within the village, subject to gaining planning permission. We are actively researching sites and talking to landowners. While the building has the potential to be simpler, there is a likely higher cost of acquiring the land.

### Evaluation Process

How do we decide which is the best option? We investigate each scheme to understand the costs, planning and land issues. What benefits does each scheme provide to the village.

### Committee Members

*Catherine Armstrong; Adam Baker; Peter Deeks; Rachael Edmunds; Eleanor Gardiner; Steve Irlam; Richard Johnson; Fiona Lambrick; James Lusher; Polly Lusher; Derek Poate; Clare Round; Caroline Searson; Christine Warmsley.*

If you would like to get in touch, please contact Committee Secretary Clare Round 07956 500927 [clareroundlorton@gmail.com](mailto:clareroundlorton@gmail.com).

*Handout compiled by James Lusher with assistance from Yew Tree Hall committee members.*

# Future

## The next 100 years

CL Burrows and his fellow Trustees were forward thinking in acquiring the Malting barn in 1919. Their insight and determination has underpinned the social fabric of Lorton. But what of the next Century?

Our society is changing at speed and our facilities need to ensure that we can keep pace. Technology is playing a greater role in everyone's lives with video streaming commonplace. Accessibility for the old and young has a larger priority. Hybrid working is enabling young professionals to return to rural communities.

All these new challenges need to be teamed with traditional needs: A warm and pleasant environment for 100 people to meet; sports facilities; and room for a great party!

Our approach is to put the need of the village before the building. We will do this through extensive consultation and research with the whole village. We want your ideas and opinions. We will look at other village halls and see how they operate – are there lessons we can learn?

We will involve the village through meetings, feedback sessions, questionnaires, and face to face chat. And report back on progress through leaflets, The Link and a new Village Hall website.

*Overhead map view of Lorton*

