

# ‘A GREAT BOON TO THE PEOPLE OF DARNICK’



A History of the Smith Memorial Hall, Darnick

**BY JOHN WOOD**

*PUBLISHED BY THE SMITH MEMORIAL HALL*

# Foreword

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Since at least 1892 the Smith Memorial Hall has graced the centre of Darnick. It has provided a venue for many thousands of events for the village and surrounds. Over the intervening years many Darnick residents have both contributed to and enjoyed its use.

In 2014 a centenary tea celebrated the formal gift of the hall by Violet Smith of Darnick. Given its long history the hall trustees decided that the hall should be allowed to tell its own story of 125 years. A story that would trace the life of a Border's village hall and thereby of those who have used it. The challenge was who might research and write it.

In finding John Wood we could not have been more fortunate. A brief note over the page tells you what he brought to the task. It does not though tell you of the skill of his research or the grace of his writing. For that you will need to read on.

In these pages you will read about events as distant as the Australian gold rush and the Russian revolution, and events as local as a youth club and dances. A host of characters populate these pages. Some have their place in national life and some may be our neighbour or relative.

We hope you enjoy this short history. Knowing a little more about those who inhabited the hall before us will, we hope, add to the richness of our own use of the hall.

*Keith Smith*

*Chair of Hall Trustees*

*November 2018*

## DEDICATION

This short history is dedicated to all those who have served Darnick, on committees and many other ways, and to all those who have brought life to the Smith Memorial Hall.

## THE AUTHOR

John Wood lives in St Boswells. Born and schooled in Glasgow he is a graduate of St Andrews and Edinburgh universities and was formerly Principal teacher of Social Subjects at Jedburgh Grammar School. His original research interest was in transatlantic land reform including figures such as the American single-taxer Henry George and John Murdoch the pro-crofting editor of the *Highlander*. More recently he has concentrated on Border biography and unusual buildings in the countryside. He has written a number of biographical articles on Sir Thomas Monteath Douglas, the East India Company General whose mausoleum adorns Lilliard's Edge, Baron Robert Rutherford, Catherine the Great's Consul in the Mediterranean and the man behind the Baron's Folly on Down Law near Ancrum, and John Younger the poet, autobiographer, angler and shoemaker of St Boswells. Over the years John has given talks to a wide range of local societies and is at present researching the Earl of Buchan's vision for his Dryburgh estate.

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Since its formal opening in 1892, the Smith Memorial Hall has been a focal point socially as well as geographically for the villagers of Darnick and the surrounding area. Indeed with its 38 feet tall street side belfry, the Hall, described by the Southern Reporter at the time as “handsome and commodious”, rivalled its near neighbour Darnick Tower in prominence. While the Tower, so coveted by the house hunting Sir Walter Scott in the 1820s, has its origins in Scotland’s turbulent 15th century, the Hall, to some extent at least, owes its existence to the Australian gold rush of the 1850s.

As the inscriptions on the front indicate, the Hall was built in 1891 in memory of John Smith (1827-69; see Figure I) by his wife and cousin Violet Smith (1833-1921). The couple were scions of the Darnick building firm Thomas and John Smith – John being the third surviving child of John senior (1782-1864) and Violet the ninth and last child of Thomas (1785-1857). The Smiths of Darnick were famed for their contribution to the building of Scott’s Abbotsford as well as for a host of border country houses including Chiefswood, Gattonside House, Bowland and Benrig. John (senior) also sculpted the Wallace Statue and designed the suspension bridge at Dryburgh for the Earl of Buchan.

In 1848 the bridge building department of the firm suffered a temporary setback with the collapse during construction of the rubble span bridge at Ashiestiel. With prospects at home thus less than encouraging John Smith (junior) and his elder brother Charles (1822-62) left Darnick in April 1850 for Melbourne in the sheep rearing and land rich Australian region of Port Phillip. The move was supervised by John Smith (senior) who records in his diary how he set out with his sons to Liverpool, arranged “the necessary things for the voyage”, and “fixed on the room (cabin) they were to have.”





*Figure 1: John Smith (1827-69)*

As head of the family John (senior) seems to have viewed this emigration process as merely a way of establishing a new antipodean branch of his building concern.

John and Charles arrived in Melbourne in mid-1850 at what was to prove the most eventful epoch in the region's history. By November of that year the 14-year-old settlement was granted an Act of Separation from the penal colony of New South Wales to emerge some months later as the new colony of Victoria. "Never before or since..." the *Melbourne Herald* reported on the independence celebrations, "has there been a night of such revel." On the 6<sup>th</sup> of February 1851, 'Black Thursday,' the new colony experienced its first major bush fire "being overwhelmed with fire and smoke as if a destroying angel had winged its way through the air, scattering firebrands far and wide." Less than a week later gold was discovered at Bathurst in New South Wales. Melbourne then suffered a substantial migration of would-be prospectors to Sydney and a trade and business slump. Only five months later Victoria too struck gold, of a quality surpassing that of California and New South Wales, which in turn led to an influx of 'diggers' including 'conditional pardon' criminals into sedate Melbourne. Trade revived instantly but businesses were deprived of workers as "mechanics, servants, labourers etc. left without notice," leaving Melbourne "garrisoned only by women and girls." Nevertheless, in the space of three years from the discovery of gold, the town's population grew from some 23,143 to 150,000, and to the modest wool based exports of £1 million per annum, it could add £6 million worth of gold.

John and Charles seem to have thrived in these roller-coaster economic circumstances. Perhaps to ease the labour shortage, however, they were joined in September by their younger brothers Thomas (1831-87) and William (1833-1900). William's letters home to his mother Alison in

Darnick provide a picture of the Melbourne of the time and of the lifestyle of his older brothers. "The town of Melbourne..." William wrote betraying his builder's background, "has a strange half foreign go-a-head appearance with a great many beautiful verandah houses and cottages and one would think that every house had a different architect so varied and different are they, some of wood, some of stone, many of brick but none of them have the substantial appearance of the houses at home." Of the brother's premises situated on the fashionable Eastern Hill just south of the less desirable and overcrowded Collingwood, William wrote, "Their house is a wooden one standing in the middle of one of the yards and is two storey height, three rooms about the size of the old parlour at Darnick above and a kitchen and office below...with good tidy furniture."

The heart of the brothers' business was their 50 foot square two storey timber store selling "everything connected with the building trade." With over 3,000 doors and windows, theirs, according to William, was "the best assortment in town," no doubt partly due to the shipments sent by John Smith senior from Glasgow, Edinburgh and London, of Baltic timber, custom made steam engines, iron and 'Bulgersteine.' John and Charles also advertised widely in the papers finding that "...it pays best to be before the public." The saw mill, now operated by Tom, was kept busy loading up the ten strong bullock team drays with timber for the gold field areas up country. Charles was engaged "buying and selling and pushing about" at the Wharf, where, in addition to normal commerce, a "Rag Fair" of household items too cumbersome to make the 75 mile trek up country to the gold fields operated throughout the 1850s.

William's first impression of John in his "colonial costume – high outside top boots and broad brimmed straw hat" was of "a go-ahead pushing man of business." Unlike Charles,

always deferred to by others as “Mr Smith”, John was “just plain John” with most people. Both brothers, however, as William confided to his mother “have actually got the credit of being honest men to deal with”, an advantage in a frontier environment “where it is the custom to look on every man as a knave.” Leisure for the brothers seems to have consisted of scouring the countryside for suitable land to invest their patrimony in. Tom for example examined land at Bacchus Marsh about 40 miles into the bush where “a man isn’t worth his salt as can’t make from £1,800 to £2,000 a year from 150 acres of land.” John similarly was reported to be going “up the country” or more intriguingly “to the Diggings.” The extent of the brothers’ involvement in the gold rush, however, remains unclear. Like the bulk of Melbourne’s businessmen they seemed content to benefit indirectly. John Smith senior did, however, note cryptically in his diary for February 18<sup>th</sup> 1853, “Got the gold from Australia, 12 oz.”

John and Charles seemed quite naturally to have gravitated towards the 8,000 strong Scottish community in Melbourne. Their next-door neighbour was Walter Bell, a builder from Camptown near Jedburgh, and they kept in touch with Henry Shillinglaw from Darnick. No doubt they joined the Scotch Association founded in 1854. William’s letters also suggest that they were regular attenders at the often overcrowded Eastern Hill church of the Rev. Adam Cairns. Of a Free Church persuasion originally, Cairns brought about a union of all Presbyterian groups in Victoria – the first such comprehensive union anywhere in the world. As William wryly observed, “the people here are not considered bigoted as at home.” The Rev. Cairns was famed also for speaking out vigorously on a wide range of social issues, including temperance, and encouraged the founding of a number of benevolent institutions, particularly of an educational nature. Both in his ecumenicism and his social gospel the Smith



brothers seem to have adopted Cairns' outlook. On a business trip to Hobart in 1862, Charles Smith died at the tragically early age of 39. The following year, John, now with the responsibilities of an eldest son, found himself back home in Darnick. He seems to have immersed himself immediately in community affairs. In April he accompanied an impressive family deputation of his father, wife and sister-in-law to the annual examination of Darnick school, and the following year he provided a 'soiree' for the pupils with "an excellent tea and an abundant supply of cake and fruit...after which several hymns were sung and recitations delivered." He supported adult education too – becoming vice-president of the Popular Lecture Association, which met in Melrose's new Corn Exchange, and in various capacities contributed to the work of the Vagrant Society, the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Society and the Leaderfoot Navvy Mission.

Queen Victoria's first visit to the Borders in August 1867 provided John Smith with a unique opportunity to showcase his native village (see Figure II). From Melrose Abbey the Queen was scheduled to pass through Darnick on her way to Abbotsford. Enlisting the enthusiasm of the villagers as a whole, and the design skills of Andrew Currie the sculptor who had his workshop at that time in the grounds of Darnick Tower, Smith supervised the construction of what the *Southern Reporter* described as "one of the most tasteful and best designed triumphal arches which was seen along the route." A more lasting legacy were the 12 glass slides of Darnick village life that Smith, an enthusiastic amateur photographer, took around this time – copies of which still adorn the walls of his Memorial Hall.

John Smith died of tuberculosis on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May 1869 in Bournemouth. He was 42. His body was returned to Scotland and buried in Melrose Abbey churchyard.



**Figure II:** *Triumphal arch for Queen Victoria's visit to Darnick in August 1867.  
Note small statue on left, probably by local sculptor Andrew Currie.*

Reflecting on his death the *Kelso Chronicle* observed that “Few events have created a deeper grief among the many friends who valued his kindness and intelligence or spread a greater sorrow over the village where he lived doing good...nursing its schools and fostering its charities.” John Smith’s will records that he left personal property in Victoria, largely consisting of his share in the firm of C&J Smith. He left this in trust to Violet along with “a special legacy of four thousand pounds sterling to be used or disposed of as she sees right.” Quite possibly this special legacy underwrote the £1,700 cost of the Smith Memorial Hall.

John’s death left Violet a widow with three children aged 5 or under. Although financially secure, it is perhaps then understandable that a memorial to her late husband was not a priority at that time. On top of this she had relatively limited close sources of advice as seven male members of what William referred to as the ‘cousinhood’ were in Australia including five of John’s younger brothers and Violet’s elder brothers Adam and James. By 1890, however, her two sons Charles Melbourne and John Purves had come of age and it seems likely that either they as students in Edinburgh or Violet herself were moved to the good work of providing Darnick with a hall by the evangelical fervour of the times.

Although almost forgotten now the names of the American evangelists, Moody and Sankey, were as familiar as Gilbert and Sullivan in the late Victorian era. When they first arrived in Britain in 1873, Dwight L Moody, a non-university ex businessman, was regarded as vulgar by most of the clergy and treated with suspicion. In time, however, his homely and vivid Bible-based preaching and the emphasis he placed not on the wrath of God but on the love of Christ drew in massive crowds. His lack of affectation and his insistence on directing ‘converts’ to the existing churches soon won over the clergy of all denominations but particularly the erstwhile staunch

Calvinists of the Free Church of Scotland. Similarly Ira B Sankey's harmonium called 'a kist o' whistles' by the old guard was regarded widely at first as an abomination. Soon, however, his hymn singing proved remarkably close to the popular musical and emotional taste of the time and his *Sacred Songs and Solos* became the bestselling sheet music collection of the century.

On their 1873 tour of Britain Moody had been impressed by the charity and evangelising work of the Carrubber's Close Mission in Edinburgh's Old Town. On his second tour in 1881 he supported the mission's founder, the Rev. James Gall by raising £10,000 for a new mission building and by successfully proposing the appointment of a permanent mission secretary in the shape of a Mr William Robertson. It was Robertson by dint of preparatory evangelistic meetings across Scotland and the rehearsing of massed church choirs, who master-minded Moody and Sankey's last tour of 100 Scottish towns in 1891/2. The Border leg of the tour between February and March 1892 began in Berwick and visited every major town in the Tweed basin including Melrose. So crowded was the overall tour finale in Edinburgh that, in a symbolic ecumenical gesture, the Moderators elect of the Church of Scotland and the Free Church, "...had to share between them the president's chair."

Coming a mere week after the Moody and Sankey tour, the opening on the 8<sup>th</sup> of April 1892 of the Smith Memorial Hall was in no small part an attempt to give permanent expression in Darnick at least to the religious enthusiasm they had generated. Presiding in the absence of Violet and his elder brother Charles, John Purves Smith, by then an Edinburgh lawyer, referred to his mother's hope that the Hall "might prove to be a fitting memorial, erected as it was to the glory of God, an object which her husband had always most at heart." Apart from the local Melrose clergy Dr Herdman of the

Church of Scotland and the Rev. Sanders of the Free Church, the platform was a who's who of Scottish evangelism and all were connected to the Carrubber's Close Mission as active missionaries or prominent laymen. Lord Polwarth, famed for his Hogmanay evangelistic services at Mertoun House, had addressed overflow meetings for Moody and Sankey as had Richard Hill a Melrose based evangelist. The tour's organizer, Mr William Robertson, was also in attendance.

At the evening soiree perhaps the most charismatic performer of all, Dr David Moxey, addressed the gathering. Starting his career as a medical doctor Moxey, utilising his fine voice, had graduated to the lecture halls of Victorian Britain as a 'reader' before settling into the role of a roving evangelist. It was Dr Moxey, together with the Rev. John Smith (no relation) of Broughton Place Church, Edinburgh, who had travelled to Moody's Northfield conference in America early in 1891 to present the evangelist with a 150 foot long petition from all the Scottish churches inviting him back for his final tour. Even the Hall's architect, Mr Robert Wilson, architect to the Edinburgh School Board (the old Bonaly Primary school shares the Memorial hall's overhanging eaves and church like windows) was a vice-president of the Baptist Union of Scotland and the philanthropic director of the Free Breakfast Mission in Edinburgh.

A written declaration of the fundamentally religious intention behind the Hall's construction came only in July 1914 when Violet, having lost the last of her three children, John Purves, in the spring of that year, and "desirous of making provision for the maintenance and management (of the Hall)...after my death", had a trust deed drawn up. While the Hall was to be "held for the benefit and advantages of the inhabitants of the said village of Darnick and surrounding district" by her six appointed Trustees, it specified that it be used "primarily for the purpose of holding meetings or services of a religious



character in accordance with the uses of the Presbyterian Churches.” As one of the named Trustees was the Episcopalian, the Rev. Philip Lockton, who had since 1895 assisted with the Sunday School held in the Hall, this denominational restriction seems from the outset not to have been enforced. Indeed Episcopalian involvement from Holy Trinity Church, Melrose, continued down to Canon Dover in the 1960s and the Rev. Paul Burt in this century. The Quakers too, were permitted regular meetings in the Hall in the 1970s.

While clause two of the trust deed clearly envisaged “sunday schools, Bible classes, mothers’ meetings, sales of works and meetings for the promotion of temperance”, as the Hall’s core function, it also allowed for scientific or literary lectures and even musical performances “conducive to the instruction and elevation of the inhabitants of the said village.” It was not Violet’s wish, however, that the Hall be used for political meetings, dancing or public or private entertainment.

Given the high-minded nature of these aims it is hardly surprising that by the time of Violet’s death in 1921, they were being only partially realised. What started off as a “Sunday Scholars Soiree” in the 1890s with homilies, tea and magic lantern slides, had by the 1920s become the less formal sounding “Darnick Children’s Christmas Treat.” 1893 gave birth to a travelogue lecture series in support of the Hall’s new reading room and library started off by local Melrose dignitary James Curle holding forth on “What I saw in Russia”. Lectures, largely on geographic or foreign missionary themes, continued after this but more sporadically. Organized by Mrs E J Hill of Darnlee, a Mothers’ Union met monthly from 1916 sometimes jointly with the Darnick branch of the YWCA. Its meetings consisted of talks on improving topics such as ‘Discipline’, ‘Faith’ or the work of specialised Christian organizations such as the Police

Court Missionaries, balanced somewhat by tea and musical contributions from members. Renamed the Scottish League of Wives and Mothers, the organization continued to meet in the Hall as late as 1938.

The central religious impulse behind the Memorial Hall, seems, like the Church generally in Scottish Society to have undergone a gentle but steady decline throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Richard Hill the local evangelist attempted to maintain momentum with a course of evangelical services begun one Sunday in November 1892 and continued each evening of the following week – a pattern he continued most years until after 26 years of service he left the Borders in 1897. A Mr Bayne of the London Evangelisation Society visited briefly in 1900 to continue this work. By the 1930s, however, John McDonald, Secretary of the Waverley Hydro Co., and a Hall Trustee, was having difficulty finding clergymen to address meetings in the Hall, and by 1935 was reduced to one religious service per quarter on a weekday night. By 1937, the ‘support’ given to a Dr Coutts “was not at all encouraging”, and this led McDonald to conclude philosophically that “It is however typical of the present day attitude, and will probably swing round again under different national and social conditions.” Once monthly services were re-established in 1945 but the overall trend, despite some gospel meetings in the early 1970s was downward until clerical involvement with the Hall in recent years has become primarily Remembrance Sunday led often by Rev Alistair Bennett and the Salvation Army carol service.

As far as the agitation against alcohol was concerned Darnick appears to have been a stronghold of the Good Templars – founded in New York State in the 1850s and once the largest Temperance Society in America and Britain. Described by one commentator as “a mild form of freemasonry tempered by Methodism”, the organization was noted for its

inclusiveness (there were many women members), colourful regalia and secret handshake. As early as 1873 the Marquis of Bowmont submitted a petition from the Good Templars of Darnick to Parliament calling for “the total suppression of the intoxicating liquor traffic.” The builder responsible for the Smith Memorial Hall, Adam Milne, was a veteran temperance reformer largely credited for establishing the local ‘Abbotsford’ lodge in 1871. It was not surprising then that one of the earliest events held in the Hall in August 1892 was a ‘gathering’ of the Roxburgh District Good Templars with addresses by several Brothers’ and “a long and interesting programme of music and recitations.” At the other end of the age range Darnick sported its own Band of Hope, the children’s temperance movement, presided over by the village tailor, Richard Turnbull. By the outbreak of the First World War, the temperance ‘moment’ had largely gone but the anti-drink climate lingered on in the Hall until a fund-raising cheese and wine party in 1989 to welcome newcomers to the village gently laid the issue to rest.

In 1925 the religious inscriptions were removed from the Hall walls to be replaced only a few years later by the familiar crown and heart logo of the Scottish Women’s Rural Institutes with its chevron proclaiming “For Home and Country”. Founded in Canada in 1897, the Women’s Institutes were introduced in 1917 by the Scottish Council of Agriculture to build social bonds amongst all classes of women in often isolated rural areas during the especially demanding times of the First World War. Despite the antagonism of some men fearful of “hen conventions” the first institute was established at Longniddry in East Lothian, and within a few years ‘Rurals’ appeared throughout Scotland. After a visit from the SWRI’s South Eastern organizer a Darnick Women’s Institute with 43 members was established in January 1928.

Thus began a mutually beneficial eighty year long relationship between the Darnick WRI and the somewhat underutilised Smith Memorial Hall, with the former gaining access to a centrally located meeting place and the latter acquiring a 'suitable' tenant. Indeed, with its ban on "party politics" and almost pious aim "to consider questions of the day which affect home and community life with special reference to educational, temperance and housing reform", the WRI satisfied all but the specifically religious aspects of clause two of Violet's trust deed.

In its activities, as part of a wider organization wedded to the slogan "if you know a good thing pass it on", the Darnick WRI seems to have been fairly typical. Most meetings were a variation of the one described by the *Southern Reporter* in August 1929.

*"An interesting demonstration on loose chair covers was given by Mr Johnstone (of J Aitchison) and was much appreciated and enjoyed. After tea the roll was called, when each member responded by "sing, say or a penny pay" which caused much merriment. Mrs Burrows played very sweetly two violin solos. The singing of the National Anthem closed the evening."*

Representatives of household names such as Singer, Creamola, Cadbury and Oxo demonstrated their wares down the years. Often there were competitions, for example for the best homemade Turkish Delight or the Best Dressed Squeezy Bottle. Craft work, including the making of hospital slippers and lamp shades, was popular and reached its peak with Jo Scott's 1950s craft classes. Perhaps unbeknown to the Trustees a 'sword' and a 'folly' dance crept in during a piano fund concert in 1931 to be followed by European folk dancing demonstrations and country dancing classes. The more expressive Margaret Morris dancing was reserved for one of



*Figure III: WRI Children's Christmas Party circa late 1950s*

the many WRI garden fetes held in the grounds of Darnick Tower.

Current affairs figured prominently with clothing made for the unemployed in the early 30s, lectures delivered on the League of Nations and by the 1950s on coming to terms with the potential horrors of radioactive dust. Charitable fund raising was a constant with the Children's Christmas Party (see Figure III) and the summer village picnic fund balanced against the needs of the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary extension fund and cancer research. The warning issued in a SWRI handbook of 1951 that "Institutes should not allow themselves to be used continually as money raising bodies for other organizations" was more than relevant to Darnick WRI. By 1931 the WRI Burns' Supper (see Figure IV) had been well established with a tranche of male usually clerical speakers



invited but also including the Melrosian from 1937 onwards. Drama festivals were indulged in and craft exhibit stalls were manned at the St Boswells, Highland and Kelso shows. Starting with Bamburgh in 1928, ever more wide-ranging summer trips were organized reaching Rothesay in 1964 and including both Glasgow's Empire Exhibition of 1938 and Garden Festival half a century later in 1988.

The mixture proved spectacularly successful and by 1932 the Darnick WRI could boast a membership of 143. With a minimum age of fourteen it seems at this pre-war stage that many Darnick teenagers were happy to accompany their mothers to the Rural. The minutes of December 1932 rather smugly record that "It was decided owing to the large membership and the smallness of the Memorial Hall, it is this year impossible to admit any new members other than those resident in the Darnick area." Numbers stayed high until the



*Figure IV: WRI Burns' Supper.*

War when denied regular access to the Hall they plummeted to 45 recovering well despite the attraction of TV by the early 80s to 71 before tailing off to a mere dozen in the early years of this century. Comparing the membership lists of 1928 with 1984 there appears also to have been a remarkable continuity of families involved – several Galloways for example appearing on both lists.

Even in the late 1920s there were still many women particularly in rural areas who had never attended, let alone conducted, a public meeting in their lives. So despite equal subscriptions and committees elected by ballot it is perhaps not surprising that Darnick WRI, like many others in the Borders, opted for women of some social standing as their main office holders – choosing Mrs Barnett of Lowood as their first president and Mrs Heiton of Darnick Tower as vice-president. By 1929 and for most of the 1930s, however, the president was Lady Sybil Middleton of Lowood, a lady, according to the *Southern*, “highly esteemed for her public service and for her non-parading personal qualities.” The second daughter of the fourth Lord Grey, Sybil Grey had spent her late twenties assisting her father in his work as Governor-General of Canada. In the autumn of 1915, then aged 33, and, as the medical journals of that time complained bitterly, “with no professional qualifications” beyond the standard VAD training, she was put in charge by the Red Cross of establishing an Anglo-Russian hospital in St Petersburg for the treatment of wounded Russian soldiers (see Figure V). Despite the freezing temperatures, language difficulties and the slow arrival of medical supplies from Britain, Sybil, by virtue of her “Coolness...her imperturbable common sense...and her unselfregarding devotion to duty” succeeded in her task setting up the new hospital in the palace of the Grand Duke Dimitri Pavlovsk – one of the

plotters in the murder of Rasputin. Then, as the *Times* reported in its obituary of her,

*“In March 1917, for 10 days, Sybil watched, from the palace windows, the crowds, the shootings, the panics and the triumphs: heard the rumours read the broadsheets of the Revolution. She kept her head, flew Union Jacks, took in wounded of all parties, persuaded armed Reds to leave her in peace, and met with nothing but politeness.”*

For her heroism in Russia and her work with Tuberculosis sufferers, including the founding of the Lady Grey Society, Sybil was awarded an OBE in 1918. She married Lambert William Middleton in 1922 and sometime in the late 1920s took up residence at Lowood. Not surprisingly Lady Sybil shared her experiences of Russia with the Darnick WRI in an address in 1930, but concentrated more on the Russian



**Figure V:** Lady Sybil Grey, centre on steps, with Russian well-wishers on left and Red Cross nurses on right.

peasant's customs and religion rather than the politics of revolution and in true WRI style produced peasant carvings of birds which "were handed round for inspection."

Something of a photographic pioneer she captured the institute's winning tableaux vivant (see Figure VI) in colour as early as 1938. She opened Lowood house and gardens regularly each August for WRI meetings entertaining members with "clock golf and musical chairs." Indeed twice a year as Anna Tomlinson recalls Lowood was host to the entire village of Darnick with best dresses and bowler hats being the order of the day. During the war, with travel limited, Sybil and the vice-president Miss Low ferried members by car to Cauldshiels Loch for their summer trip and provided her 'gramophone' to enable dancing during the half-hour entertainment part of normal meetings.

While the main focus of her attention, Lady Sybil's energy spilled out beyond Darnick and its WRI. She was a filmmaker of note recording village life in Newstead and St Boswells as well as Darnick. She was president of the Melrose British Legion's women's section and vice-president of the Melrose Operatic Society while supporting the local activities of the Red Cross, WVS and VADs during the war – even accommodating the Women's Land Army at Lowood. Indeed to many Borders women, in the words of Miss Low her successor as president of the Darnick WRI, Lady Sybil had been a "guide, counsellor and friend."

While praising the "valuable" work of the Darnick WRI the *Southern Reporter* noted in September 1931 that "no organisation has existed hitherto devoted to the interests of men." It went on to reveal that the matter had been raised with the Smith Memorial Hall Trustees who had given permission for one of their number, the Australian born Colonel J S Cunningham DSO, "to consider the possibility





*Figure VI: Tattie Howkers' tableaux vivant, (circa 1960s).*

of starting a social club for men.” Cunningham’s scheme was to use the small hall, where smoking had been allowed since 1925, as a recreation room and lending library with books supplied by the Roxburgh Education Authority’s library. The small hall could be opened “two or three nights weekly between the hours of 7 and 10pm” on a sort of drop in basis and the whole Hall used for occasional lectures and concerts.

The project was “cordially received in the village” with the WRI donating £10 to the new men’s club. The club committee, the Colonel as president and Mr W Shiel as secretary, agreed to purchase some tables and chairs to “augment the furnishings of the hall” and Mr McDonald of the Waverley Hydro offered to provide daily papers. Various games including darts were also donated by well-wishers “so that the lighter forms of entertainment will be well catered for.” As a finishing touch the indefatigable Lady Sybil “tastefully decorated” the clubroom with flowers. When



Provost Curle formally opened the Darnick Men's Social Club in early October 1931 it already had a membership of 30 and he welcomed it as something "for those of the sterner sex."

Before long the Men's Club had cast off its somewhat studious early image and evolved into a vehicle of light entertainment. As early as 1930 the Colonel was requesting that the Hall platform be raised "as it is too low for the performers to be well seen from the back." By 1935 the club was holding concerts almost monthly with the long established Darnick Minstrel Troupe and jazz band performing. In January 1938 the *Southern* reported on "yet another successful entertainment promoted by the Darnick Men's Social Club", which included a concert party from Galashiels. Later the same month "a talented group of entertainers with BBC associations" performed in the Hall in front of "a large and appreciative audience" giving club funds "a good lift". By the end of the same year Lady Sybil's husband, Lambert Middleton, presided over a concert featuring the talented Macpherson family which raised £2-15s-7d for the "Memorial Hall heating installation fund." To cap it all, early in 1939, the Men's Club, under the billing "Darnick Discoveries" promoted a local talent spotting "entertainment" featuring tap dancers, singers, comedians, sketch artist and the Tomadol Quintette Band, to a packed house "wherein even all available standing room was occupied." The "sterner sex" had proved a lot of fun!

In the post-war era the emphasis in Hall use changed to the youth of Darnick (see Figure VII). A public meeting in the Hall in 1946 gave Brigadier Carpendale of Darnick Tower the go-ahead to set up a club to promote "healthy and happy activity for young men" over the winter months including the promotion of concerts dances and fund raising whist drives. After the creation of a Darnick Village Committee in 1968 a successful mixed sex youth club emerged run for a good while

by Bob Moffat and subsequently by Jock Aitken. It offered a blend of sport and community involvement. Thus in July 1970, after enjoying a hockey and football five-a-side tournament against other Borders youth clubs, the teams retired to a “discotheque” (complete the report notes with speaker and amplifier!) in the Hall. Trips to Kelso ice rink were organised and a “cine film” of the British Lions presented by Scotland rugby captain Frank Laidlaw. On the community side the Youth Club games champions Yvonne Wardhaugh and Robert Moffat laid a wreath at the Hall war memorial in November 1970 and at Christmas of the same year the Club as a whole treated some 40 of Darnick’s Senior Citizens to supper, games and carol singing.



*Figure VII: Group of Darnick boys, circa 1960.*

The Memorial Hall accounts for 1971/72 show the Youth Club at £57.50 contributing by far the largest amount of rent as compared to the relatively modest £16.60 paid by the WRI. By this time, however, the Hall, similar to today, was attracting a much wider range of organizations including a theatre group, cubs and scouts, and a Tufty Club – all for children, and a Whist Club, Horticultural Society and Handicraft group for adults.

The Smith Memorial Hall emerged from both 20<sup>th</sup> century world wars with an enhanced importance within the local community. The transition locally from peace to war in 1914 seems to have been particularly abrupt. On July 9<sup>th</sup> the annual Darnick Picnic, with 300 villagers in attendance, was held “in splendid weather” in Lowood Park. Less than a month later “war fever” had arrived with newspapers selling “like hot cakes on a winter day.” By October the Ormiston Institute in Melrose had been converted into dormitories for the use of 16 Belgian refugees. The Memorial Hall became the venue for local war related fund raising efforts with a children’s concert raising £7-10s “for supplying comforts to Darnick soldiers” and “a highly successful sale of work” realising £25 for the “Christmas Parcels Fund” for local soldiers. No doubt as a welcome distraction from war, a library containing “between 200 and 300 books of a varied nature”, was opened in the Hall in September 1916.

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*Figure VIII: The War Memorial in 1920 adorned with white roses. The poppy symbol was not adopted as the symbol of remembrance until 1921.*

A few days after the Armistice in November 1918 the *Southern Reporter* noted that “no part of Scotland has made greater sacrifices than the South”, and with the loss of 19 men including two sets of brothers from the Allen and Cruikshank families, this was certainly true of Darnick. The following year a parish wide War Memorial Committee was established under the presidency of Melrose’s Provost Hill. A Roll of Honour of the fallen was compiled and exhibited in the window of the Ormiston Institute and by June 1921 the red sandstone Greek Cross war memorial by the architect Sir Robert Lorimer was unveiled on Weirhill next to the Parish Church. Darnick participated fully in these parish wide developments holding a concert in the Hall for the War Memorial Fund in 1919.

The following year it was realised, however, that the outlying areas of Melrose parish, Newstead, Gattonside and Darnick, craved a more local reminder of their fallen relatives and the Memorial Committee granted each village £10 towards this purpose. The result, after a second flurry of fund raising, was the erection of a small Celtic Cross memorial in the grounds of the Fairfax Hall in Newstead and a similar stone cross on the Chain Bridge Road in Gattonside. As a reminder right in the heart of the village of their fallen loved ones the Darnick folk chose a fine granite tablet fastened to the roadside front of the Smith Memorial Hall (see Figure VIII).

The Hall played an even more central role in the Home Front in the Second World War being taken over by the YMCA and “run as a canteen for troops.” This arrangement must have suited the Hall Trustees well. Apart from relieving them of maintenance responsibilities at a difficult time, the YMCA, like the Hall itself was partially a product of the Moody and Sankey revivals. Added to this was their record, under the famous Red Triangle emblem, of providing canteens at the front and casualty clearing stations during the First World

War. Indeed they had been lauded at that time as “the Hindenburg Line of the Christian faith.” It is perhaps not surprising then that at the official opening of the canteen in October 1939, J R C Smith, chairman of the Hall Trustees, chose to wax lyrical by comparing the Darnick of old “when fighting was prevalent and the village possessed four defensive towers”, with its new role in providing for “the comfort and entertainment of the troops.” Before long, the canteen, run by “a committee of ladies under the presidency of Lady Sybil Middleton” was “being well patronised” and doing “much to make the life of a soldier off duty a happy one.”

The YMCA canteen tenancy seems not to have entirely excluded other activities in the Hall. WRI meetings ceased with the outbreak of war but from September 1940 onwards resumed in the Old Darnick Schoolroom and by 1942 they had regained sporadic access to the Memorial Hall. By 1940 the Children’s Christmas Party had resumed although owing to wartime conditions there was no tree, “but the tables were decorated with abundance of Xmas crackers.” Sometime in 1940 too, the metal railings (and perhaps even the bell) were removed from the outside of the Hall as raw material for armaments production. In 1941, the Public Assistance Authority designated the Hall a ‘Rest Centre’ and supplied it with the necessary equipment to provide “food and shelter for persons who may be rendered homeless from enemy action.”

Perhaps more intensively than in the previous war the Hall also became a focal point of war charity fund raising carried out largely through the medium of the whist drive. As early as the mid-1920s regular whist drives – in the Old Schoolroom at the junction of Fisher’s Lane and Tower Road – had taken place to raise money for the children’s Portobello Picnic Fund. By 1930 the Memorial Hall had become the venue for whist fund raising for the Edinburgh Royal



Infirmary. With the outbreak of war the whist mania intensified with the Red Cross and the KOSB Comfort Fund, being early beneficiaries. Under their chairman, Lieut-Col. Cunningham and his committee of Mrs W Shiel, Miss Rutherford and Mr R Lawrie, the Darnick Whist Club extended their activities even further. Different variants were tried – ‘partner’, ‘crazy’ and ‘rainbow’ whist and the drives increased to twice weekly. The Old Schoolroom was repaired and redecorated, and regular upbeat reports of the club’s efforts – “Well Done Darnick” – appeared in the press and challenges issued whenever player numbers faltered. The range of charities helped widened to include the Clydeside Air Raid Distress Fund, perhaps even specifically to support the 28 mobile canteens operated by the YMCA in that area, and British Sailors’ Comforts. In 1942 alone the club raised over £100 (nearly £5,000 in today’s terms) for war charities. Whist for the people of Darnick had become a weapon of war.

The unexpected appearance of Corporals Debski and Olligolecki at a Darnick whist drive in November 1942 signalled the arrival of the Polish 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Division, known as the Black Devils, into the central Borders. The WRI who the previous year had supported the Polish Refugee Relief Fund welcomed the newcomers warmly. At a Memorial Hall meeting on Christmas Eve cadet officer Josef treated the Rural to two Polish Highland stories while his colleagues sang Polish folk songs, “which were much enjoyed.” The evening concluded with the singing of Auld Lang Syne and the British and Polish national anthems. Polish signallers were soon organizing whist drives in the Hydro for Red Cross Funds and Polish accordionists adding to the fun at a garden fete in the grounds of Darnick Tower Cottage. Sometime in late 1943, just as suddenly as they had arrived the Poles migrated South under General Stanislaw Maczek to begin preparations for D-Day. By this stage even

the fund raising sounded more optimistic with Wings for Victory events held in the Hall. VE day on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May 1945 found Darnick “gaily beflagged” with ‘Hitler’ doing a tour of the village in a barrow before perishing on a bonfire in the children’s playground. Still the fund raising went on with a fete in Darnick Tower Cottage grounds complete with a ‘Pin-up Girl’ competition. This was supplemented by a variety show in the Hall produced by the dance teacher Miss Davidson – all in aid of the Welcome Home Fund.



**Figure IX:** WRI ‘Welcome Home’ party, June 1945.

**Back row,** left to right: Bobby Lawrie, Charlie Ness, unidentified, Joe Martin.

**Middle Row:** Peter Douglas, unidentified, Martin Flynn, unidentified, John Emond, Andrew Ness, Jimmy Stuart, Adam Frater, George Hamilton, Harry Stuart, William Baker, Mr McIntosh, Bob Barrie, Billy McIntosh.

**Front Row:** S Campbell, Nellie Smith, Isobel Burrell, Jessie Dickson, Peggy Black, Jenny Frater, Irene Weir, Betty Maxwell Scott, Patricia Maxwell Scott.

**With bouquet:** Mrs Bessie Low (WRI) and unidentified girl.

‘Welcome Home’ came in two stages with the WRI mounting a party in June 1945 “for the local ex P.O.W boys and their relatives” (see figure IX). After tea and the cutting of a Welcome Home cake, “games, songs and dancing were the order of the day and the fun waxed fast and furious and laughter the like of which had never been heard in that hall before.” Before leaving each ex-P.O.W received parcels containing “woollen comfort, cigarettes, chocolate and matches.” A further more official ‘Welcome Home’, organized by the Village Committee, was held in March 1946 “in honour of the men and women of Darnick and district who served with His Majesty’s forces during the war”, with over 100 sitting down to tea. After an address of welcome by Mrs Smith, Darnlee, the chair of the Village Committee, each serving man and woman were presented with a £5 gift token. In the concert that followed four little girls, Sheena Archibald, Joey Campbell, Jean and Millicent Ness “delighted everyone with their dances in costume.” Shortly after these happy scenes a second war memorial tablet was added to the one from the Great War on the front of the Hall.

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At the opening of the Hall in 1892, it was stated that Violet “had fully felt the inadequacy of any place for meetings in Darnick for the purposes in which her husband took a deep interest.” Since her husband’s death in 1869 this situation had deteriorated even further with the sad demise of Darnick School. In the wake of the new Education Act of 1872, Melrose School Board had been tasked with a census of the 12 schools in the parish. Darnick, with a roll of 45 and accommodation for only one more, was the smallest except for the private academies such as Glenview House. It was also the cheapest, charging fees of only 2/6 for the

‘elementary’ branches of education. After criticism from James Whitton, the master of the new Melrose Public School, of the quality of the Darnick intake, the school was inspected in 1879 and it was found that “the buildings and in particular the necessaries do not meet the requirements of the Department.” Sometime after this the school, run by a Miss Howden, closed down.

That, however, was not quite the end of the story. By 1896, perhaps a victim of its own success, the new Melrose School was suffering from over-crowding and the Board, under pressure from one of its Darnick members the tailor, Richard Turnbull, was forced to consider a new school for Darnick to teach up to the fifth standard as happened at Gattonside and Newstead. Six sites were considered including one owned by a Dr Campbell on Broomilees Road, the Skirmish Hill site to the west of the Waverley Hydro and the old school itself which was duly approved by an H M Inspector of Schools as being “sufficient to accommodate 50 children.” By 1899, however, perhaps partly due to the death of Richard Turnbull, the agitation for a new Darnick school died out.

Throughout all this period and long after the Memorial Hall itself was built the old school building, bereft of its pupils, continued to offer an alternative venue for meetings. Thus when the Earl of Dalkeith MP sought to address his Darnick constituents, prior to the election in 1929, he did so in the Old School Room. During the war it provided the WRI with back up accommodation and from the mid-20s to well into the post war era it served as a popular venue for whist and dominoes. Indeed, Jim Ness can still recall the school room’s wobbly wooden cobbled floor and lighting its open fire to keep his mother and her whist playing friends warm of a winter’s evening.

The management of the Smith Memorial Hall has evolved in fits and starts over the years in response to changing circumstances. For the first 22 years of its existence it seems to have been administered by John Purves Smith from Edinburgh with the caretaker in the Hall's tied cottage being responsible for maintenance. The 1914 Deed of Trust handed responsibility over to six Trustees under the chairmanship of Violet's nephew James Rutherford Carmichael Smith of Mowhaugh near Kelso. By the 1930s, perhaps to better reflect the needs of the villagers, representatives of the leading users, the WRI, the Men's Social Club and the newly emerging Village Committee became ex officio members – joined in 1951 in a marginal breach of the Trust Deed's no politics rule, by the Provost of Melrose.

In 1968, as a popular alternative to asking Melrose Town Council to take over, the Trustees set up a democratically elected Village Committee of Management to run the Hall. Over the years this committee mutated, operating largely at times as a Hall affairs committee presided over by Jean Anderson. By the 1990s a renewed Village Committee with Jess Rigby followed by Dr Arthur Ballantyne as president divided its efforts between a Conservation and Planning Committee concerned largely with maintaining Darnick's 'green belt', and a Social Committee to run Hall based and wider village events. About this time too, the Hall signalled its changing status by joining the Ettrick and Lauderdale Federation of Community Halls. As part of their monitoring role the Trustees applied in 1999 for a variation of the somewhat restrictive second clause of the 1914 Trust Deed. It would now be legitimate for the Hall to be used more liberally for "meetings, functions, private or public entertainment and such other purposes as the Trustees shall deem appropriate..." Following on from this the Village Committee secured a Public Entertainment Licence. In October 2013 the

Darnick Village Committee as constituted in 1968 ceased to exist and the Hall reverted automatically to the Trustees. In July 2016 the Darnick Village Development Trust stepped forward to take responsibility for running Darnick events alongside its environmental engagement.

The Village Committee in all its forms presided over an ever expanding range of activities partly or fully based in the Hall. There were large scale spectacles such as the street party for the Queen's Silver Jubilee in 1977 and the Big Jubilee Lunch in 2012. The V.E. 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration in 1995, with its 'field kitchen' food, 'mess' ration coupons and Harry Gilroy's Hall display of World War Two memorabilia, attracted over 500 people. This sense of village history was reflected too in the *Village Committee Newsletter* started by Jim Gill in 1991. It reported on a Hall video night featuring the film *Caught in Time* which showed life in Darnick, Newstead and St Boswells in the 1920s; the production of Darnick greeting cards sporting 19<sup>th</sup> century photographs of the village, and the publication by Jack Sugden of a booklet illustrated by John Martin of historic walks around Darnick. There was even a valiant attempt to recreate the spirit of the old Portobello Trip which finally succeeded with a bus load of Darnick villagers descending on the Edinburgh Tattoo.

Christmas and summer dances in the Hall to the music of the Sunbeams, became staples of Darnick's social calendar and a good source of revenue. Burns Suppers and Halloween parties were well supported along with pub and quiz nights and increasingly the Hall became a popular hire for private functions from the children's party to the retirement 'do'. A Neighbourhood Watch scheme was established in the Hall with safety talks and property marking sessions. As well as the Village Committee itself the Melrose and District Community Council met on occasions in the Hall and after something of a campaign the building acquired the status of a



Polling Station – saving the tedious trek to the Corn Exchange. Complementing the over 60s Tuesday Club a Darnick Toddlers’ group emerged in 1996 and on Wednesday nights the Hall resounded to the sound of ballroom dancing.

Under the terms of the Trust Deed of 1914, Violet endowed the Hall with £900 worth of Caledonian and other railway stock the income from which was to meet “annual expenditure” and to promote “the objects and purposes of the Trust.” Remarkably as late as 1939 the interest from this fund was still covering around 60% of the Hall’s expenditure, the rest being derived from the rent paid by Hall users. By the 1970s, due to rail nationalisation and inflation, the endowment, now in British Transport Stock, covered only 10% of expenditure.

To some extent fund raising filled this growing gap. As early as the 1930s Hall users were raising funds for specific items such as a “second hand” piano and a new heating system. In the 1960s a substantial part of the proceeds of the WRI’s annual fete in Darnick Tower gardens was gifted to the “Hall Fund”. By the 1990s, silent auctions and sponsored aerobics were just some of the one off fund raising events favoured and the following decade the Darnick 100 Club was established to encourage more regular giving within the village. There were a considerable number of bequests including £500 from WRI president Miss Low in 1968 and a further £1000 from the St John’s Bequest in 1995. To encourage this trend a bequest board was erected in the Hall in 2014. In the same year the Scottish Charity Regulator granted the Hall charitable status allowing for tax relief on all money’s raised. To stabilise finances further the Trustees availed themselves of a clause in the Trust Deed which permitted them to let out the caretaker’s cottage on the open market. The cottage rent would thus subsidise the Hall.

The costs of maintaining two Victorian Buildings in a conservation area meant over time a growing reliance on outside financial, often local government, support. As early as 1950 a grant of £182 was obtained from the Council's Social Services department, and another 'Improvement' grant secured in 1981 for work on the caretaker's cottage. At the turn of the century the Village Committee under the chairmanship of Brian Barrie surveyed village opinion before becoming immersed in the labyrinthine processes of the C21 Halls (SCVO) Lottery Programme. The committee's efforts were rewarded with a generous grant of nearly £100,000 for



**Figure X:** *Helen Macpherson Smith (1874-1951),*

*Hall benefactor*

extensive refurbishment work. A decade later in 2013 the Hall Trustees, chaired by Keith Smith, and faced with a running loss and the need for redecoration, damp-proofing and insulation work, launched a further grant campaign with a £40,000 target. They exceeded their expectations in short order raising a total of £41,847 with contributions from Darnick individuals and grants from SBC's Landfill Communities Fund (obtained through BCCE Environmental), the Central Borders Federation of Village Halls, the national Lottery Awards for All and the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust (Australia).

With this last somewhat unexpected source of funding, the Smith Memorial Hall was in some sense completing the circle and returning to its Australian origins. The story begins on this occasion with Robert Smith (1835-1904) one of John Smith's younger brothers, who, like all but one of his male siblings, emigrated to Melbourne to work in the family timber business. Over time he made a considerable fortune in land and timber as well as sugar and brewing.

Robert, then 37, met and married Jane Priscilla Macpherson from a wealthy Scottish-Australian family of pioneer landowners and graziers. The couple honeymooned in Darnick where in 1874 their only child, Helen Macpherson Smith was born (see Figure X). Aged five months Helen was taken back to Australia but returned in the 1880s for some years to attend Glenview School in Melrose, before completing her education at the Presbyterian Ladies' College in Melbourne.

In 1921 Helen married an up and coming barrister, William Schutt and while he rose to become a well-known successful judge, she led a relatively quiet life in Melbourne, showing an early interest in charities such as the Royal District Nursing Service and the RSPCA. At the age of 49 and still childless

Helen travelled to Europe and established a new life for herself in Montreux, Switzerland and later in Cannes in the South of France. While maintaining links with her extended family in Australia she seems at this time, however, to have lost touch with the Darnick branch of the family. Returning to Australia in 1933 from one of his frequent visits to Helen, William suffered a fatal fall on board ship and was buried at sea. Helen continued to live in continental Europe and although by now an extremely wealthy woman, when she died of pneumonia aged 77, suffered the temporary indignity of a pauper's grave in Marseilles. In her will Helen generously left the bulk of her considerable estate "for the benefit of Victorian charitable organizations", and since 1951 the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust (HMST) has dispensed over 4,000 grants to recipients as varied as hospitals, educational institutions, medical research bodies and more recently to Asylum Seeker Centres and the Fareshare public kitchen in Melbourne which supplies more than 300 charities with free nutritional meals.

The reunion of the two 'branches' of the Smith family was the work of Darvell Hutchison long-time chairman of the HMST. On a research visit to the Smith family graves in Melrose Abbey he called in on the late Mrs Jean Smith at Darnlee. The connection was further cemented in 2007 when Jean's son Keith, a charities consultant in the UK became a Trustee of the HMST. When given the opportunity by the Memorial Hall Trustees to commemorate Helen in the village of her birth, the HMST responded generously with £16,000 for the refurbishment programme. Thus at a Centenary Tea on Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> July 2014, celebrating 100 years since Violet gave the Hall to the village, the building was rededicated "to John Smith and now also to his niece Helen Smith an Australian philanthropist, together with an appreciation of the many residents of Darnick who have contributed to the

life of the hall over the 100 years.” In the midst of a typical Darnick medley of pipe band music, folk songs and poetry four of these residents, Murray Thom, Alan Redhead, Ross Thomson and Agnes Waldie all of the Village Committee were thanked for their contribution to the Hall’s welfare over the years (see figure XI). With not a little symbolism the HSMT in the person of Dr Philip Moors commemorated the event with a gift to the Hall of a centenary plaque made of Australian jarrah wood and in a reciprocal gesture the Trustees renamed the refurbished caretaker’s house ‘Helen Cottage’.



**Figure XI:** Alan Redhead, Agnes Waldie and Murray Thom.

Apart from the addition of the War Memorial the visible exterior of the Hall has hardly changed since 1892. Internally to judge from the Trustees annual reports from the 1930s constant refurbishment has been required over the years. Thus in 1932 the Trust secretary John McDonald reported on the “very bad state” of the lavatories – “the Porcelain being cracked and leaking on the floor.” Enlisting the help of the main users the WC was replaced with “a good modern fitting” for £7/10s. New “felt pads” were acquired for the seats in 1935 for £14 – 12s – 6d and had been “much appreciated by members of the audience.” As early as 1931 the WRI were pressing for the installation of electric lights. It took seven years for the Trustees to respond and install electric lighting at the cost of £25, a process which resulted to John McDonald’s concern in eleven days lost Hall rental. A further three years passed before the caretaker’s house received electric light.

Heating the hall effectively has proved the greatest problem down the years. The original stove, fired by gas cinders, projected out into the hall in such a way “that when the hall is well filled, persons sitting near it are almost scorched.” It presented a hazard to children and due to an accumulation of soot had been “smoking badly”. The solution at the time was a soot box and sweeping chamber accessible from the outside of the building. By 1938, unable to afford the cost of central heating the Trustees opted instead for six gas heaters “fitted up with copper piping and taps and connections perfectly tight and free from smell.” Even by 1999 heating was causing difficulties with the Darnick Toddler group complaining of “heaters that become extremely hot to touch and are an ever present danger to the children.” The hot air system installed at the turn of the century with the recent addition of thermostatic control seeks to meet the heating needs of all types of users.



In the hall users' survey of 1999 several respondents stressed the importance of a "resident" or "local" caretaker, "someone people get to know." In recent years Agnes Waldie has more than satisfied these requirements becoming in the words of the Trustees annual report "the volunteer keystone and champion of the hall." Hall records, however, provide but brief glimpses of the caretakers' position over the years. Clause four of the Trust Deed gave Trustees the power to give the caretaker the free occupation of the foresaid house adjoining said Hall and that in full or as part of his or her remuneration." The tied cottage, judging from the accounts, must have been the main attraction of the job. In 1928 the WRI as the major user was paying directly 10/- to a Miss Renwick and 5/- to a Mr Miller for their hall keeping duties. By 1938, a Mrs Richardson, received a gratuity of £1-10s from the Trustees and even by 1971 the caretaker's annual salary was a meagre £20. The job remit is nowhere specified but presumably entailed opening and shutting the hall for groups and tradesmen, taking bookings, liaison with the Trustees, cleaning and ensuring the hall was properly heated – no mean task back in the early 30s with the smoking, sooty stove previously described! Since 1914 when John Blyth was caretaker, the job, for whatever reason, changed hands frequently but mention should be made of Miss Rutherford, Mrs Cleghorn, Mrs Jennie Kay, Mrs Yawb and finally Mrs Anderson who each served the Hall faithfully for a number of years (see figure XII).

True to their motto *Semper Paratus* (always ready) the Smiths of Darnick have supported the Memorial Hall throughout its existence. To encourage Violet's venture her sons presented the new hall in May 1892 with "an American organ" – a Sankey style harmonium. From 1914 until his death in 1941 Violet's nephew J R C Smith of Mowhaugh, Kelso, served as chairman of the Trustees and helped

promote the Hall by attending many of its functions. His wife Jane became enthusiastically involved in Darnick affairs once the couple moved to Darnlee in the 30s, and as chairman of the Village Committee, organized the Welcome Home Party. Her tragic death in a car crash on Soutra in 1947 “has left a blank” the *Southern* recorded, “in the community life of Darnick and Melrose that would be difficult to fill.” The Hall Trustees in particular missed her ability to ascertain “the feelings and wishes of the local residents.”

The couple’s younger son Lewis of the KOSB and the John Lewis Partnership took up the reins as a Trustee in 1970. His appointment was welcomed in a letter by a Mrs A McDonald, the wife of a former Trustee who expressed her disappointment at the lack of any Hall centenary celebrations



**Figure XII:** Anna Tomlinson opens the new railings bequeathed by her late sister Jean Anderson.

**Left to right:** Derrick Brydon (Trustee), Elspeth Gill (Treasurer), Jim Gill (Policy and Safety Officer and 100 Club), Wendy Grant, Margaret Aitken (Trustee), Anna Tomlinson.

in 1969 (the anniversary of John's death) and hoped that Lewis's presence would "heal certain breeches of privilege which cause a little discord." Whether Lewis succeeded in this or not he proved himself a conscientious and liberal trustee balancing Violet's intentions with the needs of an expanding village – a crucial skill considering the demise of similar foundations such as the Fairfax Hall in Newstead and the Baillie Memorial Hall in Newtown St Boswells.

After Lewis's death in 1989, in what had become almost a family tradition, his wife Jean maintained a strong interest in the Hall lending Darnlee out for fetes and gifting the Hall a set of John's original photographs. In 1995 the Village Committee adopted Jean as their 'patron'. Her eldest son Keith has been since 2013 the chairman of a revived Board of Trustees and took a leading role in the centenary fund raising drive. Thus for 103 out of its 126 year history the Hall has benefited from the voluntary and very active involvement of Smith family members.

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As Darnick has changed over the years, the significance of the Smith Memorial Hall as a focus of community life seems to have grown steadily. The 1891 Census provides a convenient snapshot of Darnick at the exact time the Hall was built. With a population of 307, it was a village largely of tradesmen and labourers many of whom – such as railway surfacemen, the carrier and stone-cutters – would leave home for work, but a considerable proportion, perhaps up to a third, notably the weavers, dressmakers and tailors would ply their trade within the village confines. Jobs in agriculture were the most numerous and still revolved around the annual Hiring Fair system. Thus in 1892 the *Southern* reported that the number

of “flittings” to and from Darnick were “exceptionally numerous” – perhaps a reflection of that year’s mice plague which devastated up to 40,000 acres of land in the local area.

The census listing of three grocers, a baker, a butcher and intriguingly a ‘confectioner’ suggests the existence of possibly five local shops (see figure XIII). Two further centres of village gossip and interaction would have been the Smithy and the Post Office. Indeed, in 1895, Darnick, which had “for some time enjoyed the benefits of direct telegraphic communication” gained a “new and commodious” Post Office. The village also possessed a thriving cricket club based in the grounds of Darnlee and in the Old School a venue for social events. Although Andrew Currie was no longer around to supply them with busts of Scotland’s heroes, considerable numbers of “excursionists”, some from the Waverley Hydro, still visited the Darnick Tower ‘museum’ and the village in pursuit of the Scott connection. To the local building trade suffering its “worst season...for many years”, the arrival of the Smith Memorial Hall in 1891 might have



**Figure XIII:** Darnick Stores circa 1929

signalled salvation but to the majority of Darnick folk, many with long established church connections in Melrose, it would represent merely an interesting addition to an already bustling village scene.

All this changed as the 20<sup>th</sup> century progressed. As late as the 1930s, Darnick Tower, complete with its new 6d Guide Book, was still visited but increasingly by special interest groups such as the Berwickshire Naturalist Club. The Waverley Hydro continued to advertise walks through Darnick to Rhymer's Glen and Cauldshiels Loch but as Scott's reputation waned there were fewer takers. The closure of the railway in 1969, although probably by then not much used by locals, did mean the end for Darnick's coal merchant and its market gardeners. Gradually and more significantly throughout the period mechanisation in agriculture and better local transportation led to more villagers seeking jobs in Galashiels and the 'new town' of Tweedbank. Darnick acquired its present day dormitory status with only a core group of tradesmen still operating in the village. The increase in car ownership led to the eventual closure of Darnick's shops and Post Office leaving the Memorial Hall the last public access building in the village. Thus while Darnick Tower, as confirmed each year in the Melrose Festival, is central to the village's identity, the Hall, as the only focal point for events and functions, has become vital to its continued sense of community.

As Bridget Khursheed's Centenary poem on the Hall suggests, it is quite possible today to drive or even walk past the building without really noticing it. There's no bell in the belfry after all to demand our attention. A curious observer, however, could not fail to notice the constant to and froing of the Hall's many users often heralded in the hall's *E-What's On & Newsletter* – the toddlers excitedly dragging Mum up the entrance stairs on a Wednesday or the Walkit group

arriving for refreshment or those pursuing health and fitness hurrying to their Pilates, Zumba or Judo classes. Perhaps it is the U3A Craft group drawing people in to share their skills, the Bridge Club to challenge their grey matter or simply T'n Chat letting them catch up with the local gossip. In the evening if the new sound proofing would allow it you might hear the click-clack of the Table Tennis Club, the rat-a-tat of the Melrose Pipe and Drums Band practicing or the sound of one of the Rolling Hills Folk Club's many visiting artists in action. All this surely evidence that the Smith Memorial Hall continues to be as Violet so wished "a great boon to the people of Darnick."



**Smith Memorial Hall Centenary Poem - Bridget Khursheed, Darnick**

*Dedicated to John Smith and Helen Macpherson Smith 20<sup>th</sup> July 2014*

A quiet morning and the hall sits snug  
 in Darnick, sometimes we may not notice it all.  
 Cars file to work on commuter days,  
 do the drivers ever look at Violet's gift and wonder?  
 A weekend jogger might pad past considering  
 the well-furnished doors, a big key to fit them  
 and a tower with no bell.

And busy, some evenings the pipe band's call  
 and practice, Zumba, judo and a scurry of parents  
 dropping kids, traffic awkward; then  
 the village daytime stops for coffee and tea and  
 chat; or the best ever ceilidh, birthday, quiz,  
 Remembrance Sunday refreshments  
 to sustain and carols sung out of the rain.

As we walk past intent on jobs and messages  
 can we hear ladies in hats and gloves  
 serving at the troops' canteen? The debate? The poll?  
 Witness the brief kiss goodnight in the door's shelter  
 after the dance? The echoes still tell out:  
 let's make them loud today. Be proud  
 in our hall: we are the bell.

Poem by Darnick poet Bridget Khursheed written for the tea celebrating 100 years since the formal gifting of the hall by Violet Smith. Also by Bridget Khursheed *Roads to Yair – some Border poems*, (Twinlaw, 2015).

## **The hall**

The Smith Memorial Hall is a registered charity number SC 045313. It is dedicated to the memory of John Smith (1827-69) and Helen Macpherson Smith (1874-1951). Its front wall carries the Darnick War Memorial that honours those of Darnick who gave their lives during the First and Second World Wars.

## **This history**

This history first published in electronic form in 2018 by the Smith Memorial Hall.

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## **Hall trustees and management 2018**

Keith Smith (Chair), Alexander Inglis (Vice Chair), Elspeth Gill (Treasurer), Jim Gill (Policy and Safety Officer), Margaret Aitken, Derrick Brydon, Jim Cullen, Robin Sloan.

Hall keeper – Agnes Waldie, Organiser Darnick 100 Club – Jim Gill

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