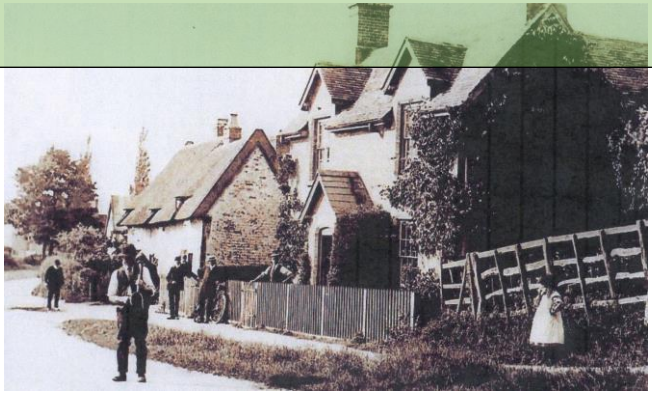
# From Reading Room to Village Hall



Alan Roe

Windows on Bubbenhall History

"*I'm luckier than my grandfather, who didn't move more than five miles from the village in which he was born*" - *David Attenborough*

*There's nothing nicer than coming back to your village, where people like my mum's friends take the mick out of me. I prefer that to the craziness of Hollywood. - Jeremy Irvine*

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Jan is the first to acknowledge that much of his web - site historical material originates from Vicky Airey. She is the leading historian of Bubbenhall and the author of the extremely informative book - entitled *Bubbenhall Church and its People* published in 1979 – now long overdue for a reprint. Although resident now in Sweden where she continues her historical research, Vicky has been most generous with her time and has helped me with several written notes, conversations and numerous comments on earlier drafts of this book that have helped me, hopefully, to remain reasonable faithful to the truth of what actually happened especially in the earlier years of my story.

As well as drawing information from these two sources, this present book would not have been possible without the benefit of the materials assembled back in 1994 by the late R.S. (Dicky) Friend. For several years in the 1970s Dicky was the Clerk to the Bubbenhall Parish Council, but also Town Clerk to Warwick District Council. In 1994 he meticulously assembled and had typed-up the Minutes of all Parish Meetings from the inception of such meetings in 1894 and for the next 100 years. These were published in the booklet entitled *One Hundred Years of the Parish of Bubbenhall* : *Meetings of the Parish Assembly from April 1894 to April 1994.* I have drawn unashamedly on this source of materials in my own

work. This too is overdue for a reprint before the last remaining copies disappear!

The final and less well-known local source that has been most useful is Kay Morrison's detailed study entitled *A Local Study of Bubbenhall School.* Kay was a former resident of the school house and wrote her study in 1975. This impressive work should also be published in some form before the remaining one or two extant copies disappear.

Thanks are also due to Lynn Brown for her most informative explanations of some of the later history of the Reading Room around the time of its sale to her and her husband in 1986 and for lending me some very useful photographs; to Rosemary King (nee Paget) for her own recollections of the Reading Room and for digging out some valuable C19th documents; to Chris Wilkins for some additional Church documents from the C19th and her own explanations of the history of her own cottage – now named Sweet Briars – but previously one of the Rectory Cottages built in the late C19th; to Nigel and Nan Liney and Dorothy (Dot) Sibley for sharing their reminiscences and some evocative old documents and photographs of life in the village before the new housing developments of the 1960s and 1970s; and to several other present and past residents of the village for their most evocative reminiscences of the old Reading Room.

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# From Reading Room to Village Hall
# Windows on Bubbenhall History

## *Preface*

The Village Hall in Bubbenhall is now thirty four years old and is arguably the most actively used of any of the various social facilities in the village: the others being the Church and the two pubs: one now temporarily closed  The story of how the Hall (henceforward BVH)  came into being in 1986 is still well known by quite a few present day residents of the village but most of these have more grey hairs than they would like to own up to, and unfortunately they are declining in numbers. Even rarer are those remaining residents in the village who have any memories at all of the Bubbenhall Reading Room: the building that for more than a century before 1986 was where villagers met socially, consulted a doctor, collected ration cards (during and after WW2), changed for football, studied and conducted various other social activities. I am lucky to be one among that rare breed having being actively engaged with Reading Room and BVH activities for almost 50 years.

Five recent deaths have prompted me to begin putting on paper those memories that I still have before these are expunged by my own declining brain power or by something even more final!  The first death was that of Pete Wilkins – well known to many as the village bee & honey man. Peter had lived many of his 70 plus years in Bubbenhall and so had memories of events here that go back much further than do my own. He and I had talked often about developing an oral history project for Bubbenhall but sadly we left it too late to take advantage of his own treasure trove of memories.

The second death was the tragically early passing of Graham Johnson whose building firm namely Johnson Bros. of Coventry won the contract to build

BVH in 1985 and who provided us with a robust structure that has easily dealt with more than three decades of intensive use and some occasional abuse. The village should be truly grateful to Graham. After the completion of the Hall in 1986 he took on the voluntary role as its maintenance guru, managed several of the significant extensions that the Hall has seen – the most recent being the new (2019) patio doors in the main hall - and committed untold hours of his own time and unknown amounts of money to the routine repairs and upkeep that any intensively used structure requires.

The third was that of my long-time friend Mike Wareham – latterly residing in Moreton in Marsh - who was for many years the mainstay of the 100 Club that was established in the early years of the Hall to provide a crucial source of backup finance for that Hall to augment its normal revenues. The fourth death also in early November 2019 was that of Geoff Glover- another very life-long resident of the village well-known by the modern generation for his immaculate garden facing the Three Horseshoes pub. But earlier from the late 1960s to the end of the 1970s he was a prominent member of the Parish Council and so actively involved in discussions about the Village Hall. The fifth death was that of Dorothy Elliott who had been a neighbour and good servant of the Reading Room for many years until its sale in 1986.

The book is about the long, and I think intriguing, history of Bubbenhall. I have used the Reading Room and BVH – mere bricks and mortar - as windows into those parts of the village history that they witnessed. The history of how the Reading Room came into being in 1878 and 108 years later was superseded by the present Village Hall is a fascinating one that involves a story-line embracing much about the changing nature of the social arrangements of this village and its people. It also involves many colourful characters such as Pete, Graham, Mike, Geoff and Dorothy and many others long-ago deceased who we are in danger of forgetting. The story that follows will hopefully help to recall significant memories for some, and introduce other present day readers to a few characters as well as incidents from a much earlier era of which most probably have little knowledge.

# 1.Bubbenhall before the Reading Room

When I began my own research for this short book I was quickly struck by the prominent role played by the Church in Bubbenhall's history generally and in the history of the Reading Room and the local school in particular. Today, the local Church as an institution seems to be of relevance to only a minority of our 650 residents: except perhaps when a family member or friend gets married, buried or christened. But it was not always so! In the latter part of the C19th the Church was the driving force of much of what happened in Bubbenhall and the local rector at the time of the establishment of the Reading Room - Edward H. Harrison - was the undoubted mover and shaker who got the significant social changes associated with that new institution up and running (more of that later).

Similarly, when the Parish Meeting (a precursor of the Parish Council[1]) was first established in April 1894, it was the Rector – then the elaborately named Rev.Vincent Knottesford-Fortescue - who was elected unanimously as its first Chairman. The unwritten convention whereby the local rector acted as Chairman of the Parish Meeting continued for many years thereafter: in fact until 1920/21 when the then-Chair – Archdeacon Hardy – being ill, gave way to a secular Chairman - initially the landowner Mr Henry Grimes - incidentally also one of the two Church wardens!

Given this key role played by the UK's religious arrangements please bear with me as I elaborate a little further on how the role of the church in Bubbenhall gradually evolved over many years. The Reading Room enters the story at the end of this digression.

That intimate connection between Village and Church has very early origins dating back to the arrangements of English society beginning in *Saxon* times but firming up under the feudal land-ownership system after



*Figure 1: Leaving Sunday Church – circa 1920*

the *Norman* invasion of 1066 (See Box 1 for more a bit more detail). Initially after 1066 the rights ("fiefs") - superintended by the Lord of the Manor - to Bubenhalle[2] lands were granted to the family of the Earl of Stafford.[3]

### *Box 1: British Feudal Society in Brief*

The feudal system that dominated the British Middle Ages had origins in the later Saxon period in the C9th and C10th - remember your school history of Aelthered and his brother Alfred the Great from 871 AD who unified the Saxon peoples around Wessex, and established a *modus vivendi* with the Viking invaders who at that time dominated the North and East of the country. Saxon cultivation was based on an open fields system with strips allocated to individual peasant families but with priority accorded to the Lord of the Manor who was able to demand that the peasants also worked his own land in lieu of rent. The feudal system that held sway for almost seven centuries after the Norman conquest of 1066 extended these arrangements. This involved a hierarchical allocation of agricultural lands – in those days the main source of

income and wealth. At the top of the hierarchy was the King who nominally owned all land. He in turn assigned/leased land (sometimes referred to as a "fee" of "fiefs)" to *Barons* in return for their loyalty, service in battle and other favours – they were commonly referred to as *Lords of the Manor.* Barons in turn allocated some of their lands to *Knights* in return for their military service when needed. The knights in turn allowed some usage of land by so-called *Villeins* (serfs) who were required to provide their knight with free labour, food and service whenever it was demanded. They had few if any rights.

The Manorial "fiefs" were then passed down through families and sometimes split (for reasons not always known). So by 1243, for example we know that two thirds of the Robert de Stafford fief at Bubenhalle was held by the Earl of Warwick. By 1297 in the reign of Edward 1st (Edward Longshanks), the tenant of the fief was John Fitzwith, a male descendant of the Countess of Warwick, and from there it passed to the last male line of that family namely Robert Fitzwith whose daughter Joan was born in the village in 1352[4]. By the middle of the C13th in the reign of Henry III, the Church also got into the act of land-owning in Bubenhalle through what was known as the *Prebendal* system. The village church (St Giles) that had been established as a chapel sometime before 1150 (exact date not known) was by then part of a *"prebend"*[5] belong to the Cathedral of Lichfield[6]. This powerful cathedral and its Bishop was able to appoint, in effect, a set of deputies (prebendaries and later curates) to take responsibility for the performance of ecclesiastical duties in designated parishes such as Bubenhalle. This apparently humble-sounding assignment was in fact anything but. On the contrary it granted the prebendary a significant slice of the village's agricultural acreage and so the rights, income and often considerable wealth that went with it. He in turn (they were always men) could lease part of these prebendary lands to a parish priest/farmer who in turn was expected to take care of the sowing and harvesting of crops and the general maintenance of the prebend's agricultural lands.

In short in the C13th and C14th the prebendaries – such as the one in Bubenhalle - were powerful high ranking ecclesiastical landowners (some were aristocrats) who generally lived away from their prebendal estates although they had nominal duties in those areas[7]. Any parish priests to whom the prebendaries leased land were more like tenant farmers than our modern idea of a parish priest. Research by Vicky Airey suggests that in the later years of the prebendary system (e.g. by the C17th)[8], it would seem that the prebendary leasing arrangements were being carried out with less involvement of any parish priest[9]. She also notes that since there was no resident vicar in the village, the system by then also used an arrangement of perpetual curates, who were mostly neighbouring clergy from nearby parishes, paid a small sum of money to take local services. But what is quite clear through this extended period of many years is that the Church remained a very significant landowner. At the time of the Enclosure Act of 1726 the prebendary held just over 111 acres of land in the village and so was the second largest landowner after the Lord of the Manor who by then was the Right Honourable Sir William Bromley of Baginton Hall, Speaker of the House of Commons who held 591 acres.(Box 2)[10].

The Enclosure Acts starting in the early 1700s marked a momentous watershed in British economic and social arrangements. These acts for which the landed aristocracy lobbied hard, led to a significant increase in agricultural productivity. Agricultural land became now more consolidated in fewer owners/tenants who could employ much improved methods of farming[11]. That in turn was one of the factors that forced many people off the land but also opened the way for the Industrial Revolution with its voracious demands for new forms of factory labour.

## *Box 2: Sir William Bromley, Coat of Arms and Baginton Hall*







Sir William Bromley (1663 – 1732) was born at his family seat in Baginton – Baginton Hall - in 1663. He was an English Tory politician who sat in the English and British House of Commons between 1690 and 1732. He was Speaker of the House of Commons of Great Britain from 1710 to 1713 and Secretary of State for the Northern Department from 1713 to 1714. He was descended from Sir Walter Bromley who was a knight at the time of King John - he of Magna Carta fame 1215. In 1689 he was the chosen knight for Warwickshire in the Parliament that met at Westminster, but in 1696 he left being one of the ninety-two members who declined to recognise William III. He returned to Parliament in 1701 holding the high Tory constituency of Oxford University. However, the death of Queen Anne in 1714 caused the fall of the Tory government, and he never again held office. Baginton Hall was erected to replace the Baginton Castle that was destroyed by fire in 1706. The Hall itself was irreparably burned in 1889.

In Bubbenhall – as elsewhere in Britain - there seems to have been a significant consolidation of agricultural land at this time with some previously large tenants being displaced. This is clear from the fact that in 1682 there were fourteen significant farmers (as well as many other smaller tenants) in addition to the prebendary and the lord of the manor, but by 1726 there were just four[12]. In particular Sir William Bromley assumed the lease of the prebendary lands but not the obligations of the prebendary to maintain the church. That continued for many more years thereafter: leaseholders of the prebendal lands still had to agree to maintain and uphold the chancel of the church.

Land consolidation moved on apace in the next century – with control moving increasingly away from the old manorial owners (landed gentry) towards the newer group of yeoman farmers: still tenant leaseholders of the Lord of the Manor. Records from 1840 show a total village area of 1,300 acres – a number that remained relatively steady for the next 120 years. But information from successive Censuses of Population show the steady accumulation of a large part of this total in the hands of the Grimes family. In the Census of 1851 Joseph Grimes (1780-1852) is recorded as farming 300 acres and employing 12-15 labourers. In the Census of 1861 his son William Howlett Grimes (1825-1898) is recorded as farming 500 acres and employing 13 men and 4 boys. Ten years later the same W.H. Grimes is recorded as farming 800 acres and employing 20 men, 8 boys and 6 women. I estimate that this was no less than 62% of the total village acreage and 14% of its total population! His son Henry Grimes (1861-1938) further advanced this process when he purchased several lots in the land sale held in 1918: this sale largely dismantling the prior dominance of the Bromley-Davenport estate.

# 2. The Victorian Age of Social Reform

So on to the more modern period. Significantly in 1863 the benefice of Bubbenhall became a Rectory, and in 1864 by an order in Council, the old prebendal lands, now known as the glebe, were handed over to a Rector: a change confirmed in 1866. Specifically, Bubbenhall was declared a Rectory now under the patronage of the Bishop of Worcester. Thomas Stanley Bowstead, appointed in 1842 seems to have been the last prebend. From the time of the last active prebends and their final 21-year leases to Bubbenhall tenants (1835-1856), the previously named "prebendal estates" were referred to as glebe land (e.g. in land tax records). The first appointed rectors of Bubbenhall under the new arrangements, were Arthur Fanshawe 1863-77, Edward H. Harrison 1878-84, Vincent Knottesford Fortescue 1885-1906.

Significantly, the end of the prebendal system led to a distinct change in the role of the clergy – initially the new rectors - in the local life of communities such as Bubbenhall. As Victoria Airey puts it…. " *It is easy to see that the clergy of Bubbenhall had little chance, before they actually had somewhere to live in the parish, to do any significant social or educational work.*" and …*In 1833, when Frederick Dennison Maurice was curate (one of the last under the old system) there was no parsonage house."* But steps to provide such housing had began some years before the ending of the prebendal system: specifically due to the efforts of the Rev Charles Penny who also served as the perpetual curate for the parish of Hunningham in the period beginning in 1842[13]. The parsonage/ rectory was built as a result of his efforts in 1844 by George Taylor of Coventry.

Then, some 30 years later in 1878, the second of the new Rectors - the Rev. Edward Henry Harrison[14] – purchased some additional land to extend

significantly the garden of the Rectory. This was obtained from the area previously owned by the Malt Shovel. It would appear from the available correspondance that the Rev Harrison had expansion plans even larger than those that he eventually achieved[15].

It is helpful at this juncture to digress further to remind ourselves about the social reforming context of the Victorian period – a period aptly referred to as the *Age of Reform*. As shown in Box 3, the contributors to various aspects of what was a truly huge reform agenda included many extremely distingushed men and women including notably a former curate of Bubbenhall namely Frederick.D Maurice (See Box 4). Significantly the late 1900s also saw the first glimmers of female emancipation. For example, after some 800 years, the two ancient Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, finally admitted women students: Girton College, Cambridge from 1869 and Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford from 1878. The year 1872 saw the struggle for women's suffrage becoming a national movement with the formation of the National Society for Women's Suffrage and later the more influential National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS).

It is a wholly plausible proposition that the first rectors of Bubbenhall namely the Reverends Fanshawe, Harrison, and Fortescue were influenced by the new social mores manifest in the work of the great Victorian reformers, and that both the village school (built in 1864) and then the Reading Room were manifestations of those emerging attitudes. The Rev Harrison's highly negative opinions about the Malt Shovel pub (see footnote 15) were arguably also symptomatic of those attitudes.

### *Box 3: Well-Known Victorian Reformers*

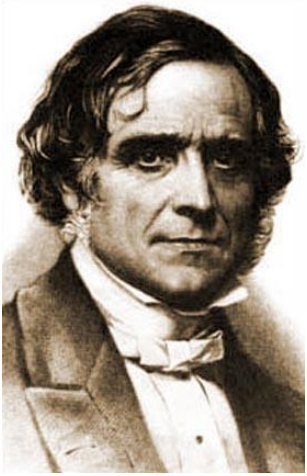
The list of the distinguished personagges who contributed to the Victorian Age of Reform is a very long one. That list includes but is by no means confined to the following:

- William Wilberforce (1759-1833 - abolitionist)
- Florence Nightingale (1820–1910 – pioneer in raising standards of nursing care)
- Robert Owen (1771-1858 – social reformer and pioneer of the cooperative movement)
- William Booth (1829-1912 – Founder - Salvation Army)
- Millicent Fawcett (1847–1929- suffragist)
- Elizabeth Fry (1780–1845 – Quaker prison reformer)
- Sir Titus Salt (1803–1876 – Campaigner for worker's rights and builder of model worker villages)
- Annie Besant (1847–1933 - Political campaigner for working class)
- Charles Dickens (1812–1870 – Novelist and inciteful social critic)
- John Stuart Mill (1806–1873 - Utilitarian philosopher and supporter of radical/liberal politics)
- Joseph Rowntree (1836-1925) chocolatier but also a Quaker philanthropist and champion of social reform)

But back to our story. The church's housing arrangements in Bubbenhall managed initially by the Rev Penny and then by the Rev Harrison involved the purchase of a large tract of land encompassing the present Old Rectory on the Leamington Road (A445). The land involved the site adjacent to and below the Rectory covering a substantial part of what became the Bryants housing estate – labelled *The Farthings*[16] (dating from 1971) - and running down to the back of the Malt Shovel pub. The cost of the initial Rectory building erected in 1844 was several hundred pounds to which the prebend himself contributed £100 and Queen Anne's Bounty provided

£400, whilst the incumbent curate himself paid £200 from his own pocket. The later land purchase in 1878 involved a further sum of around £400 (nearly £60,000 in today's money), partly financed by a loan from the

***Box 4: Frederick Maurice: Curate of Bubbenhall (1833-35)***[17]



F.D. Maurice was an extremely distinguished Victorian. When at Cambridge University, Maurice was one of the founders of the very special and highly selective debating society, the Apostles. A well-known and prolific author on subjects such as philosophy and social reform, after his time at Bubbenhall(1833-35) he became Chaplain to Guys Hospital (1836) and in 1840 was elected Professor of English Literature and later also Theology at Kings College, London. There is now an F. D. Maurice Professorship in Moral and Social Philosophy at Kings. Twelve years later in collaboration with other professors he founded Queens College, London, and in 1854 also founded the Working Men's College in Red Lion Square, Bloomsbury with Charles Kingsley – he of Water Babies fame. Maurice is also well known for his leadership of the Christian Socialist movement and he played an important part in pioneering education among the working classes. But sadly he was a very poor teacher – a paradox explained by one of his biographers as follows; "*He had a mind of the rarest insight and subtlety … but his mental home was amongst spiritual principles, and he was accustomed to address himself to what he took to be in the minds of his hearers or readers". What Maurice took to be in his students' minds may have been very different from what was actually there. The mature students whom he taught in the evenings would have come nearer to meeting his expectations." Source:* Davies, Reverend J. Llewelyn, ed. *The Working Men's College 1854-1904: Records of Its History and Its Work for Fifty Years, By Members of the College*. London: Macmillan, 1904.

Bishop and eventually repaid in 1903.[18] The area of land included a small section next to the Malt Shovel that was used to construct two cottages known originally as the Rectory Cottages initially for coachmen.

Church House which is still standing in Church Road had a different function. According to the history of Frances Twigger, prior to the Reformation, the nave of the Church itself was used for various non-religious activities. However abuses crept in and in the C15th Century the Government forbade feasting and banquets and "Church Ales" in the church. But the local priests still felt the need to provide shelter for those attending church from longer distances and so a house was provided for their shelter and refreshment. By her account it was "*a poor place which would bear very little resemblance to our Church House today*". A picture of Church House as it appeared in 1964 before the more extensive development of Church Road is shown as Figure 2.



*Figure 2: Church House in 1964 - view from the Church Tower*

But back to the new Rectory. This gave the Revs. Fanshawe, Harrison and their successors a firm and permanent base in the village: something that had not been available to the clergy of the prebendal system.

Once established here the clergy seem to have lived in some style. The Census of 1881 reveals that the household of Rev Harrison comprised no less than eleven persons of whom four were servants. This put him in much the same league as near-neighbour William Howlett Grimes (by then the village's largest tenant farmer) who had a household of nine person of whom five were servants. By the time of the Census of 1891, the two separate Grimes's households in two adjacent houses on Ryton Road (then referred to as numbers 1 and 2 Ryton Road[19]) had expanded enormously to a total of sixteen persons with four servants and several visitors. However, Rev. Harrison's succesor Vincent Knottesford- Fortescue (then aged 41) was also still maintaining an impressively large household in the Old Rectory now comprising eight persons - his wife Elizabeth, a much younger brother Adrian and no less than five servants (2 manservants namely a coachman and a footman and 3 women)!

Present day residents of Bubbenhall may also be interested to know that in 1836 the land purchased for the Old Rectory had been owned by John Orton who was a large local miller but was incidentally also the owner of the Malt Shovel pub: described in 1801 as the "newly erected malthouse". But by 1866 that land had been sold to William Howlett Grimes who sold it on later to Rev Harrison. The Orton family itself had a long history in Bubbenhall. As documented by Vicky Airey (1979), William Orton – a family member - moved to Bubbenhall in 1702 when he was granted a 21 year lease of a local mill by the estate of Lord Bromley[20]. Milling remained as the traditional occupation of the Orton family for many years thereafter operating from the site by the River Avon that we now more easily recognise as the Riverside Apartments. Further evidence of the very close

links between the Bubbenhall church and the respected lay members of the village is the fact that John Orton managed to combine his ownership of the pub with his role as a church warden. Orton's sons John and Thomas were also church wardens for a time[21]. This is one Bubbenhall tradition – the publican helping to run the church – that no longer persists.

# 3. The Reading Room Opens

As was noted above, it is a plausible proposition that the first rectors of Bubbenhall namely the Reverends Fanshawe, Harrison, and Fortescue were much influenced by the new social mores manifest in the work of the great Victorian reformers. The village school established by the church and opened in the era of the Rev Fanshawe in 1864[22] was one obvious manifestation of this: it was built on the land then known as Lower Furlong on the Glebe Lands and was adjacent to three cottages/hovels on the Rugby-Leamington Road which had previously served as the village poor house and that were pulled down in 1865[23]. In spite of the school's shaky start (see Box 5), it is clear from Church magazines that it soon came to play an important part in the life of the village. By virtue of its management, it was always tightly interlinked with Church activities. But it was also very active as a centre for secular meetings, for library activities, for meetings addressed by outside speakers and for other social gatherings. In many of these respects it occupied the roles later assumed by the Reading Room – and it continued to offer an alternative location for these for some years after the Reading Room itself opened.

### *Box 5: The Origins of Bubbenhall School*

The school was built in 1864 at a cost of between £900 and £1,000 with the money raised mostly by public subscription from the local population. It was soundly constructed of red brick and was well lighted – suitable for about 50 children. The house for the master or mistress was located next door.

The school's establishment was directly linked to Bubbenhall's new status as an ecclesiastical parish in its own right. From the outset it was a church school: most of the early teachers being religiously trained and with great loyalty to the church. The school was opened two years after the MP Robert Lowe had

introduced the *Revised Code* for national education in the UK in 1862: a system of payments-by-results under which school managers were paid depending on the levels of pupil enrolment and examination results as checked by periodic school inspections. That same Code also provided for government grants to schools. However, according to Kay Morrison, Bubbenhall being quite rurally isolated in those days, did not benefit from these[24] [25] .

The early years of the school appear to have been somewhat chaotic. The second Rector – Edward Harrison – as the manager of the school - initiated a school Log Book: the first of these being written in 1877. Those logs show that by October 1877, the teacher – Miss Frances Jones - had resigned with the result that the Rev. Harrison himself was left conducting many of the lessons assisted by his wife, churchwardens and parish officers. Kay Morrison also records that "*lady members of the Grimes family were frequently in school to assist with the needlework"* (Morrison pg. 12). In the first two years there were no less than five different mistresses appointed. Morrison attributes that rapid turnover partly to the poor and subordinate social status of teachers as well as to their need to work "*out of a sense of vocation rather than for monetary reward";* partly to occasional tensions with the Rector and partly to the then-isolated location of the village. "*Forlorn indeed is the lot of the young mistresses in some of these outlying rural nooks"* [26].

School closures also occurred quite often due to sustained periods of illness such as scarlet fever and whooping cough and lessons were also interrupted from time to time by quasi-economic activities such as otter hunting, hay making, bird scaring and potato picking[27]! But these various problems were largely overcome and the school moved ahead to enjoy an improved future – not least under the long serving head-teacher namely Mary Ruck who took up the post in 1898.

The Reading Room was another important manifestation of the reforming zeal of the day. Specifically, in 1876 a private house had been built on the site of the present day Reading Room. It was located next to the Village Pound that in those days was used to impound stray animals. The land used

for this new house was close to but not part of the local portfolio of the Pisford's Charity (Ford's Hospital): part of that charity's much larger endowment centred on Coventry[28]. It was actually purchased from Sarah Butcher (via William Collet - see Box 6) who according to the record held in the Coventry Archives inherited various land leases including the cottages adjacent to the Reading Room from her father Thomas Walton (later of Wolston) who is understood to have been the victualler of the Three Horseshoes pub, as well as a significant Coventry property owner[29]. A few further details are in Box 6 below.

### *Box 6: Reading Room - Complex Ownership before 1878*

Information from the Warwick Record Office compiled by Vicky Airey suggests a sale (August 5th 1876) from Sarah Butcher (then of Wolston where her father Thomas Walton by then also resided) to William Green the owner of some of the adjoining premises for a "fee simple" of £205. Significantly Green certified this sale by making his mark (i.e. he was unable to sign). This transaction was followed by an almost immediate transfer of the "*messuage*[30] *and premises*" to a Mr William Collett (August 21st 1976). William Green is described as a labourer and William Collett as a bootmaker originally from Stretton on Dunsmore, but by then of Bubbenhall.

The same records make it clear that the property that was sold was bounded at the rear by land "belonging to W H Grimes[31]" and on one side by the village Pound. They also state that the "said messuage" was erected by Sarah Butcher on the site of an older messuage formerly occupied by Ann Elliott who is described as a widow. And "*to support his claim*" William Collett produced an indenture dated April 1859 between William Elliott, son of the late Charles Elliott (presumably the husband of widow Ann) and Sarah Butcher: the equivalent of today's solicitor searches to avoid any false claims in the background. That document seems to have evidenced an earlier sale in the year 1859 "*of messuages,* & *the gardens privy*" from Elliott to Sarah Butcher for £65. So this may have been about the time when the Reading Room was actually built.

Then in 1882, four years after the Reading Room was opened for village use, there is a record of William Collett raising a mortgage on properties in Bubbenhall to secure *"£83* & *interest",* and again in 1883 to secure "*£37* & *interest"*. Both mortgages were from James Powles of Coventry, an accountant. I presume that the properties mortgaged may have been some Collett properties other than the Reading Room?

This new house became available for village use quite quickly (probably because the Green/ Collet purchase had been intended as in investment for on-letting to tenants) and was then purchased by public subscription with a significant part of the cost (£40) paid personally by the same Rev. Harrison and some of the rest raised by local fund-raising activities such as a bazaar. In a later Church notice of October 1885 Harrison's successor the Rev Knottesford-Fortescue wrote "*The school will open the first week in November. I am very glad to understand that there is every hope of your being able to pay off the existing debt of £40, due to Mr. Harrison for the Reading Room*".

It is commonly stated that the Reading Room began life in 1882/83. However, a copy of the Church "Notices for the Month" written by Rev Edward Harrison and dated Nov.1st 1878 indicates that the opening date was in fact 31st October of that same year. This notice is reproduced as Figure 3 below.

The ambiguity about the opening date may be due to the fact that the initial village use of the Room from October 1878 was based on a loan of some kind: a fact that may explain the reference to the kindness of Mr Murcott – probably the custodian of the Hannah Murcott Charity – as mentioned in the notice reproduced as Figure 3 below. The Church Newsletter of May 1882 notes … "It *has long been the wish of the Rector to provide a suitable and permanent Reading Room in Bubbenhall, in place of the one which has been so kindly lent for the purpose".* Subsequently a bazaar and other fund-raising activities were organised to raise money for the "new" Reading Room. The Church Newsletter of October 1882 notes that "*The Bazaar held on the 11th and 12th of last month, in aid of the new Reading Room, proved very successful. The amount realized is £169"* [32].

It can be seen from the text of the notice that the Reading Room was set up to be used for a variety of games such as draughts, backgammon, dominoes and bagatelle. It was also set up to be a place where villagers could read the newspapers. The opening hours were set from 6pm until 9 pm (apparently seven days a week) and as such the Room was probably intended to encourage at least some villagers to forego alcoholic drink at the all-too-nearby pubs: alcoholism being a significant social problem[33] and temperance being a very necessary feature of Victorian reforming zeal! Vicky Airey commenting on a later period notes that…. "*Since the only indoor public spaces in the village, apart from the pubs (out of bounds to children) and the church, were the Reading Room and the hall behind the Three Horse Shoes, which belonged to the pub. Both these places were well used".* It is also interesting to note that back in 1878 the village already ran a cricket club (see also Box 7 on pg. 31) !

At this time there seems to have been an almost seamless interconnection as between the activities of the Church, the village school, life at the Old Rectory and the uses made of the new Reading Room. For example, the Penny Bank that had been opened sometime before 1880 seems to have used both the Rectory and the Reading Room: the Rectory providing a Penny Bank service for children every Monday at 12 noon. Further, the Rev Fortescue seems to have been the main agent in managing the funds: in one church newsletter he reminds parishioners that since he travels to Coventry weekly he can always carry monies to bank them there. Similarly in the newsletters of that period there is sometimes a separate reference to the Reading Room and the Library suggesting that library facilities for the village were partly delivered via the Rectory and at the school, rather than being based fully in the Reading Room. At the time of the Rev Fortescue the Church certainly seems to have had a hand in everything from setting rents on village allotments, arranging meetings of local masons – the village had a lodge of so-called "Odd-Fellows"[34]; handling the payments in the Coal Club, reporting on the results of the matches of the Bubbenhall cricket team; communicating the results of school inspections[35]; arranging regular flower and other competitions, and being central in the work of local charities notably the Hannah Murcott charity (begun in 1775) and the Mary Turner charity (begun in 1607). In this context the

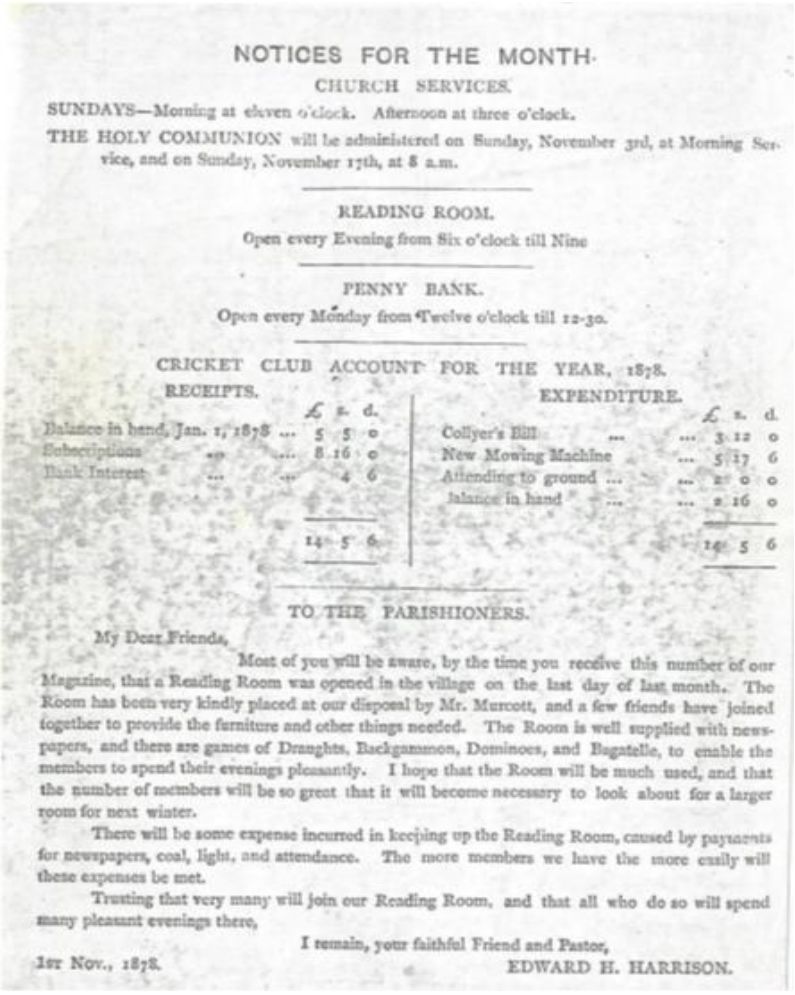
Reading Room in its early days might be thought of as adding merely another component to the Church's already rich set of delivery mechanisms!

## Management of the Room

Details about the management of the Reading Room at that time are incomplete and so too is the history of its precise ownership and that of the neighbouring Pound.[36] But some aspects of this are clear. In particular, Land Tax records show that from the latter part of the C19th and the first part of the C20th the tax on the Reading Room was paid by "Trustees". So the Reading Room was community-owned and managed by these Trustees under the umbrella of the Charity Commission that had been established in 1853. For example in 1878 the land was valued at £15 and the Trustees paid 7/6d in tax. The Trustees also paid the land tax in the years 1901, 1906, 1910, and 1925[37].

Regrettably there are few early references in the Minutes of Parish Meetings from 1894 about the specific Trustee arrangements then in place, or who the Trustees actually were. The first reference I have found to *Trustees* as such is in the Minutes of the Parish Meeting of 30th March 1925 which confirms unambiguously that a body of Trustees was by then still in place. At that meeting, Mr.Ralph Twigger (the brother of the Miss Twigger who authored the short history now on the village web site) asked for the appointment of a new Trustee to replace his late father. The Minutes of that same meeting also noted that "*the Chairman (then Henry Grimes) as the only remaining resident Trustee was asked to write to the rector for the Deeds so that the matter could be gone into at a later meeting.*"

Significantly by 1933 (March 13) there is a record of a "*new Trust Deed for the Reading Room*" and a new set of four Trustees was also appointed including the then-rector (T.H Davenport). The *body of Trustees* as such is first referred to at that March 1933 meeting where the need for that body is linked to the introduction of a "new Trust Deed for the Reading Room" – I have yet to find a copy of this!



NOTICES FOR THE MONTH.

CHURCH SERVICES.

SUNDAYS—Morning at eleven o'clock. Afternoon at three o'clock.

THE HOLY COMMUNION will be administered on Sunday, November 3rd, at Morning Service, and on Sunday, November 17th, at 8 a.m.

READING ROOM.

Open every Evening from Six o'clock till Nine

PENNY BANK.

Open every Monday from Twelve o'clock till 12-30.

CRICKET CLUB ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR, 1878.

| RECEIPTS. | £ | s. | d. | EXPENDITURE. | £ | s. | d. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Balance in hand, Jan. 1, 1878 ... | 5 | 5 | 0 | Collyer's Bill ... ... | 3 | 12 | 0 |
| Subscriptions ... ... | 8 | 16 | 0 | New Mowing Machine ... | 5 | 17 | 6 |
| Bank Interest ... ... | | 4 | 6 | Attending to ground ... ... | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| | | | | Balance in hand ... ... | 2 | 16 | 0 |
| | 14 | 5 | 6 | | 14 | 5 | 6 |

TO THE PARISHIONERS.

My Dear Friends,

Most of you will be aware, by the time you receive this number of our Magazine, that a Reading Room was opened in the village on the last day of last month. The Room has been very kindly placed at our disposal by Mr. Murcott, and a few friends have joined together to provide the furniture and other things needed. The Room is well supplied with newspapers, and there are games of Draughts, Backgammon, Dominoes, and Bagatelle, to enable the members to spend their evenings pleasantly. I hope that the Room will be much used, and that the number of members will be so great that it will become necessary to look about for a larger room for next winter.

There will be some expense incurred in keeping up the Reading Room, caused by payments for newspapers, coal, light, and attendance. The more members we have the more easily will these expenses be met.

Trusting that very many will join our Reading Room, and that all who do so will spend many pleasant evenings there,

I remain, your faithful Friend and Pastor,

1st Nov., 1878. EDWARD H. HARRISON.

*Figure 3: The Opening of the Reading Room -1878*

I had at first thought that the ownership of the Reading Room had formally passed to Henry Grimes as part of the Bromley-Davenport estate auction of 1918. But that notion was wrong since the Bromley-estate certainly did

not own the property at that time. Nor is there any record of the Reading Room in the documents detailing the 1918 auction lots. However, later documents do indicate that by 1933 Henry Grimes had somehow acquired the formal ownership of the Reading Room and the Pound. Specifically, in a formal legal declaration made by his daughter Kathleen Grimes to Wright Hassall – the local solicitors - in July 1978 in connection with a large restoration of the Reading Room (discussed in a later section of this book), she refers to a conveyance dated 23rd of May 1933 between "*my late father Henry Grimes and my uncle William Howlett Grimes*[38] *of the one part and the then Trustees of the Reading Room of the other part".* She further testifies that the adjoining land (the Pound) had "*always been maintained as garden ground by the tenants from time to time residing at the Club premises."*

In short this neighbouring Pound land had always been an integral part of the Reading Room facility albeit not owned and controlled in the same way as the Reading Room itself. Several confirmations of this differential arrangement for the Pound and the Reading Room can be found in the Minutes of various Parish meetings of that period. First, a meeting held in 1898 requested the District Council to "*have the Village Pound mown and kept tidy as the neighbours complain of the seed being blown into their gardens*" . But the response of the Council was to the effect that they had no responsibility over the Pound land as this came under the Lord of the Manor. Clearly the Pound was at that time part of the Bromley-Davenport estate. Second, in 1909 it was reported that Mr. Eaton (by then the caretaker of the Room – see below) had asked for permission from the Parish to rent the land known as the Parish Pound but that he had received no response (not surprising given that the land was still owned by the Bromley estate). Third, in 1918 Mr Henry Grimes was granted permission by the Parish Meeting to ask the Lord of the Manor for permission to use the Village Pound land in the interest of the Reading Room. This was

probably a request made in his capacity as one of the two Overseers of the Poor.

We also know a few other important facts. Information compiled by Vicky Airey tells us that from a relatively early stage, a Mr Alfred Eaton moved in to be the caretaker of the facility. The Census of 1891 names Alfred Eaton as living in Church Road – he served among other things as a sexton at the church - but according to the Land Tax Assessment for 1897, he was by then at the Reading Room House. The Census Schedule for 1901 names Alfred Eaton as "carpenter & caretaker of Village Club" [39]. Indeed for some years he was also the village carpenter making such items as wheelbarrows, 3-legged stools and most important, coffins[40]! Vicky Airey reports that he used to send his wife into Coventry on foot to get brass handles etc. for the coffins since they could not afford to keep a supply[41]. That journey at that time could not have been easy although it was at the time fairly commonplace for villagers to walk such distances for both business and social reasons (see below).

Eaton's daughter Daisy who was born in 1898 took over as caretaker when her father died in the 1940s (his grave is to be found in the Church yard). When married as Mrs Summerton, she and her husband lived at the back of the Reading Room in the upstairs part. From a relatively early age and for some years she was also the organist at St Giles Church earning the princely annual sums in 1921, 1923 and 1925 of £6-0-0d. I understand but have not yet confirmed that she also had some role at the local school. Mr Harry Summerton outlived his wife and was still a sitting tenant in the Reading Room through 1977 when the buiding was forced by health and safety concerns to end its use as a dwelling (see below for more details about this).

I have not managed to find any C19th photograph of the Reading Room but some impression of its appearance at the time of its establishment can

be obtained from two pictures taken in around 1910 and then in 1917 respectively as shown in Figure 4[42]. The Reading Room is the taller building with two large chimneys in the centre of the first picture and on the right in the second picture.

In the 1950s, the three cottages seen to the left of the Reading Room were condemned as unfit for human habitation and were knocked down after the death of their then-owner, "Lady Carter"[43]. The small area to the right of the Reading Room is the erstwhile Village Pound. It was only from the mid-1960s when the village sewerage system was finally completed that modern houses further to the left of the pictures (and not visible on them) such as the present day Malpas and Ashgrove were built to replace the remaining old cottages, and later the infill that is now Spring Court.



*Figure 4a- The Reading Room in about 1917*



*Figure 4b: The Reading Room in about1910*

## Technical Education

Initial ambitions for the new Reading Room in 1878 were quite quickly extended. For example, we know that Harrison's successor the Rev Knottesford-Fortescue sought to establish a night school – mainly for adult education of various forms. For example, in the Church Newsletter of October 1885 he wrote…. "…*I shall be prepared to open a night school, for those who wish to avail themselves of it, provided that I have enough candidates. I shall be glad to receive names of those who wish to attend it, on or before October 20th. The school will open the first week in November. I am very glad to understand that there is every hope of your being able to pay off the existing debt of £40, due to Mr. Harrison for the Reading Room, before November 1st."*[44]. Then in the November 1985 Newsletter he wrote "*The Night Schoool will open on Monday, November 9th, when any may attend who have left the Day School."* and in the December 1885 Newsletter we see the following entry.

*"Dec. 2. Wednesday. Night School at 7p.m.*

*" 7. Monday. Night School at 7p.m.*

- *9. Wednesday. Night School at 7p.m.*
- *14. Monday. Coal Club at Rectory at 10, and at School at 12. Night School at 7p.m."*

*"I am glad to find so good a response has been made to my invitation to all who wish to attend the Night School."*

From 1894 onwards we have much more complete records of village activity based on the detailed Minutes of Parish Meetings[45] beginning with the meeting held on April 9th 1894.[46] The Reading Room's support to (adult) education initiated by Rev Knottesford-Fortescue in 1885, was continued as evidenced by the early establishment by the new Parish Meeting of a large *Technical Education Committee* comprising initially no less than *seven* persons (by decision of Parish Meeting of March 1895). The meeting of March 1898 recommended classes in carpentry and ambulance work. That of March 1901 recommended classes in poultry-keeping, carpentry, dressmaking, laundry work and shoe making. That of March 1902 added home nursing. That of 1902 added dairy work. That of 1905 added scientific dressmaking and sick nursing.

Overall it would seem that for at least 25 years, various forms of practical technical education were fairly central to the work of the Parish Meeting (via its *Technical Education Committee*) and that the Reading Room was central to the delivery of that education. The last mention we see of the *Technical Education Committee* is in the Minutes of the Parish Meeting held on March 10th 1910 by which time the committee had been reduced to a membership of just four persons. I surmise that the need for this local education service gradually dwindled as formal education became more generally available[47] and that the pressures of WW1 finally killed off the village's commitment to the service.

## Quality of Life

The Minutes of the early C20th meetings of the Parish Meeting also gives us some idea of the *quality of life* of our predecessors as residents of Bubbenhall. This was certainly a far cry from what we are familiar with today. Although there was an emerging but romanticised middle-class myth of the "*idyll of rural life*" popularised above all by the well-known romantic poets such as Wordsworth and Shelley (a contrast to the gloom and drudgery of the expanding industrial cities), the reality for many in the countryside was still grim[48]. Despite increasing mechanisation, agricultural work was still hard and poorly regulated. Rural labourers who then dominated the Bubbenhall male and female populations worked longer hours for less pay than most other workers. Mary Ruck, the school mistress from 1898 onwards reports that a farm worker's pay was never more than 15/- per week. The enlightened national welfare legislation passed between 1900 and 1914 either did not apply to, or was ignored by the agricultural sector.

Family sizes were still large with 5 to 6 children being not uncommon and the cottages that housed many of these families were sub-standard when first built relative to most urban housing. These houses certainly did not benefit from any electric power until very much later[49] and water and sanitary arrangements were also primitive with mains water arriving for some at least only in about 1960[50]. Poverty would appear to have been rife and it is significant that from the third Bubbenhall Parish Meeting (held in December 1894) there is reference to "Overseers of the Poor"[51] as prominent officials of the village (the first two named being Messrs J. Sparrow and G. Moore). (The position of village Overseer remains in the Parish records until at least 1926 although the reference to the "poor" in the title gradually disappears). Both the two main village charities mentioned earlier had "help to the local poor" as their main objective. Mary

Ruck headmistress of the local school from 1898 notes as follows. *"… at a time when a farm worker's pay was never more than 15/- per week, and there was no school medical or meals service it is not surprising that the head teacher was frequently called upon to provide medical and dental treatment, also food, and clothes (at his/her own expense out of that £50 per year) salary) for the needy."* But the poor of the village were not always well-treated. Morrison (1975) notes in particular that capital punishment for even trivial school offences was commonplace[52]. Even in the late 1940s the then-Rector had complaints raised against him for the alleged physical maltreatment of children – one injury to a child's nose being caused it was said by the Rector's walking stick! The combination of work, life-style and social attitudes as well as the still limited state of medical knowledge meant that life expectancy at the turn of the century was only 45 years for men and a little over 50 years for women!

Our predecessors also lived their lives with little or no benefit from cars. Transport both for social and business purposes at the turn of the century was still mainly by horse drawn cart or carriage, on foot with bicycles gradually entering the picture, and of course by rail for journeys starting away from the village[53]. Mary Ruck notes as follows " *….our family had cycles at the end of the last century but very few other people in the village had".* Figure 5 – a photograph of the village centre taken in the early 1900s - indicates one of the other types of local transport then commonly in use.

A tiny number of the more well-to do such as the Rev Knottesford Fortescue had carriages and coachmen but most did not. So most people did not travel too far or too often! The first recorded outing for the local school children was in 1895 – a visit paid for by the Rector to the "Barrum and Bailey Show" in distant Leamington Spa[54]! Even as late as the 1950s one of the Airey-family neighbours in Church Road (Mrs Ruck – the mother of the village butcher- Dennis) had never been to London !

Travelling to London was certainly not easy at the turn of the century but even moving around the village after dark at that time must have been a challenge - but maybe also a pleasure that today's Bubbenhall residents can never experience[55]. Street lighting only started to be discussed in July 1945 and it was two years after that (at the Parish Meeting held on May 7th 1947) that a proposal was made to "*approach Warwick Rural District Council for street lighting*".



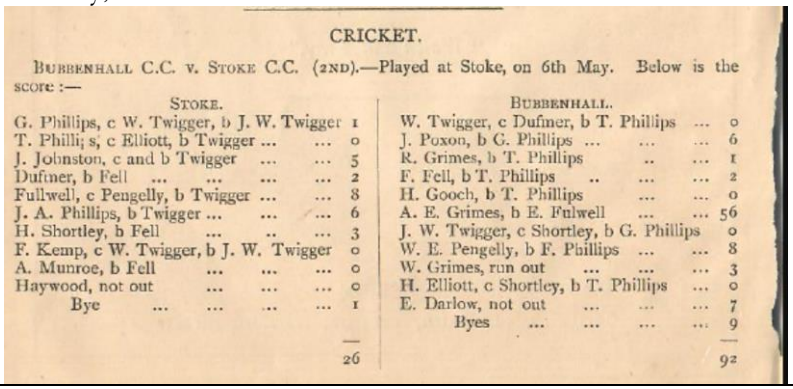
*Figure 5: The Village in early 1900s*[56]

## *Box 7: Cricket in Bubbenhall*

Cricket was evidently played in the village from an early date. The scores of matches in the 1880s are routinely reported in the Parish Magazines – always by the rector: this apparently being one of his many tasks. In the absence of today's Playing Field it is not clear where the home matches might have been played but a location on a farmer's field along Paget's Lane seems most likely: possibly the land near the corner of Paget's Lane that was farmed by Henry Grimes? It is a fascinating thought that the Bubbenhall teams were playing at the same time as W.G. Grace was enlivening English cricket in a manner more familiar to current generations through the feats of Ben Stokes! In the 1880s Grace and his two brothers all played in the same English team ! A letter from the mistress of Bubbenhall school notes that from the early C20th, the school itself also "had a keen mixed cricket team".

A scorecard from October 1880 is shown below. Note two things. First the extremely low scores – something that seemed common in those days, and second the large numbers of Grimes and Twiggers (the residents in The Cottage) in the Bubbenhall team!

Later we know from records provided by Dorothy (Dot) Sibley, that there was definitely an active Bubbenhall cricket team in the 1930s. Play resumed after a gap due to the war and in February 1946 the grand sum of 5/3d is recorded as having been transferred to the post-war team from the 1939 Cricket Club. Team members at the time included some Bubbenhall names that will be familiar to some including Geoff Austin, G.Elliott, A.Hancox, S.Ruck, Stan M. Sibley, and M.Summerton.



CRICKET.

BUBBENHALL C.C. v. STOKE C.C. (2ND).—Played at Stoke, on 6th May. Below is the score :—

| STOKE. | | BUBBENHALL. | |
|---|---|---|---|
| G. Phillips, c W. Twigger, b J. W. Twigger | 1 | W. Twigger, c Dufner, b T. Phillips ... | 0 |
| T. Phillips, c Elliott, b Twigger ... ... | 0 | J. Poxon, b G. Phillips ... ... ... | 6 |
| J. Johnston, c and b Twigger ... ... | 5 | R. Grimes, b T. Phillips .. ... | 1 |
| Dufner, b Fell ... ... ... ... | 2 | F. Fell, b T. Phillips .. ... ... | 2 |
| Fullwell, c Pengelly, b Twigger ... ... | 8 | H. Gooch, b T. Phillips ... ... | 0 |
| J. A. Phillips, b Twigger ... ... ... | 6 | A. E. Grimes, b E. Fulwell ... ... | 56 |
| H. Shortley, b Fell ... .. ... | 3 | J. W. Twigger, c Shortley, b G. Phillips | 0 |
| F. Kemp, c W. Twigger, b J. W. Twigger | 0 | W. E. Pengelly, b F. Phillips ... ... | 8 |
| A. Munroe, b Fell ... ... ... | 0 | W. Grimes, run out ... ... ... | 3 |
| Haywood, not out ... ... ... | 0 | H. Elliott, c Shortley, b T. Phillips ... | 0 |
| Bye ... ... ... ... | 1 | E. Darlow, not out ... ... ... | 7 |
| | | Byes ... ... ... ... | 9 |
| | 26 | | 92 |

In this general context the Reading Room must have offered a most valuable sanctuary for many in the village residents at this time – it was at least heated by a coal boiler from the outset – and offered a wide range of services and facilities  But the conditions offered by that Room itself were for most of its life far from ideal and even as late as 1972 the Parish Council recorded that Dr Freeman (then the senior partner of the Clarendon Medical Practice) expressed serious dissatisfaction with the sanitary arrangements in the Room that might cause him to withdraw his services if not corrected[57].  Heating was based on solid fuel stove (or stoves) with the inadequacy of these becoming a regular topic for comment at the Parish Meetings over the years. Mains water and electric power were of course luxuries that would only arrive much later.

# 4. Bubbenhall Village Hall: 50 Years of False Starts.

Important as the Reading Room undoubtedly was to the life of Bubbenhall residents in the first part of the C20th, it was not long before a sentiment grew that it was of itself inadequate as the social centre of the village. Space limitation was a point hinted at even by Rev Harrison in his initial notice about the Reading Room in 1878 (Figure 3 above) . Talk of restoration and improvement of the Reading Room first seem to have surfaced in March 1924[58]. It is not clear what sort of restoration was needed at that time but presumably after 46 years of possibly intensive use there would have been substantial wear and tear. This was even more true post-WW2

A Village Hall seems first to have been discussed in the 1940s and a *Village Hall (Victory[59]) Fund* was created at an early stage but I am not clear about the exact date. The first reference I have found is in the post-War Minutes of the Parish Meeting of 27th May 1946 which notes a motion proposed by a Mr F. N Crabtree "*That any profits accruing from the Victory Celebrations should be given to the Village Hall Fund".* This motion however was overturned since the meeting instead approved the amendment tabled by a Mr Blunt *"That the profits be given towards a playing field".* This was the start of a sequence of events in which the Village Hall and the Playing Field seem to have been regarded as competing projects.

Although the Village Hall idea lost out at the 1946 meeting, it did get support from the Parish Meeting held in May 1947 for the idea that the Parish Council (formed only in 1946) should …"*go forward with the Village Hall project*." It is not clear what that project consisted of at that

time but it is clear that nothing substantive actually happened at that stage or indeed for many more years thereafter [60].

## *The Playing Field is acquired and opened*

By November 1949 the Village Hall Fund stood at £350 and a parallel Playing Field Fund stood at £43; the equivalent of £12,260 and £1,500 in today's money respectively. A Parish Meeting held in that same month decided that these two funds should *not* be amalgamated: so the competitive attitude towards these two village projects continued. That same Meeting further hazarded that £100 (£3,500 in today's money) would be needed to proceed with the proposed Playing Field. The purchase price eventually needed was significantly more than this (see Figure 7 pg. 38).

Thereafter the matter seems to have proceeded with a good deal of rancour. The Parish Meeting held on 24th August 1950 approved the motion that the money still needed for the Playing Field should be precepted from the Warwick Rural District Council and so be chargeable to the rates[61]. At the end of that meeting Mr T. E. Dalton, the then Chair of the still-new Parish Council (a resident of Stoneleigh Road opposite the old Bubbenhall Mill) and angered perhaps by other agenda items (see footnote)) resigned saying that "*in future the village should try to run its affairs in a more friendly manner.*" At the subsequent Parish Meeting held in November 1950 there was much discussion – and again some strong differences of opinion - as to whether the Parish Council might be authorised to raise a loan to make up the difference as between any grant that might be received and the total cost of acquiring the land for the Playing Field[62].

The detailed proceedings thereafter are not entirely clear. But the idea of a loan seems to have been shelved with the emphasis placed instead on the

*grant-funding* that eventually emerged. We do know from the Agreement that was eventually signed that the land for the present day Playing Field was authorised for purchase by the Parish Council on February 12th 1952 – the date of signature of that Agreement. This Agreement is reproduced as Figure 7 pg.38. It commits the two relevant local authorities (the Warwickshire County Council and the Rural District Council of Warwick) to each contribute specified sums of grant-funding to the Bubbenhall Parish Council for the purchase of the necessary lands. The Parish Council in turn accepted certain restrictive covenants on the land (see Clause 3 in the Figure 7 document).

The land that was purchased as shown in the Map attached to the said Agreement is the set of agricultural land originally known by the field names of Little Ludgate, Clay Butts and Ten Hills. These three fields were among those purchased by Henry Grimes in the Bromley-Davenport Estate Auction Sale, which took place on October 11th, 1918[63]. They were part of Lot 47 which was referred to in the Auction as "*Home Farm – Comfortable Farm House with Compact Home Farm Buildings*". The fields are shown on the partial map of fields that is reproduced as Figure 6 below[64] outlined in green. Henry Grimes died in October 1938 and so the fields in question would have been sold to the Parish Council by the Grimes family who at the time had some complex financial arrangements imposed on them by the terms of Henry's will[65].

The Parish Meeting held on 23rd June 1952 formally resolved to officially open the Playing Field on the day of the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth which was of course June 2nd 1953. I have not managed to find a record of the actual opening but it is a reasonable presumption that it did take place on that appointed date. However, Vicky Airey has cast some doubt on this presumption stating that …"*Everyone was given a holiday and took time off to concentrate on the Coronation, which was the first really splendid*

*event of grey, dismal, bomb-damaged post-war Britain. It's very unlikely anyone would be interested in turning up for the opening of the playing field on such a day!"*

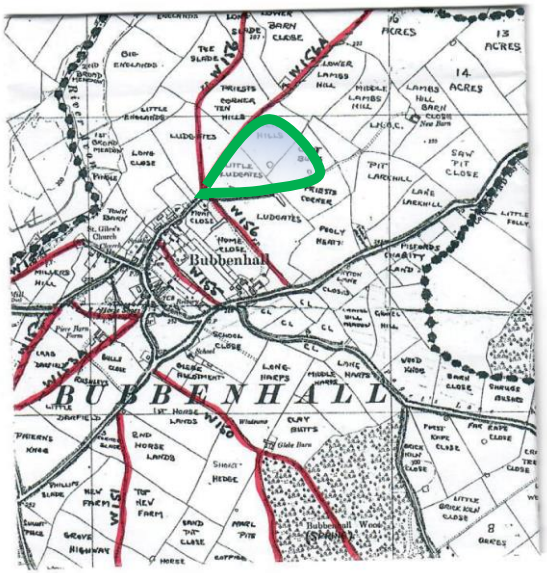



*Figure 6: A Partial Map of Bubbenhall's Traditional Field System*

## Village Hall versus Reading Room Refurbishment

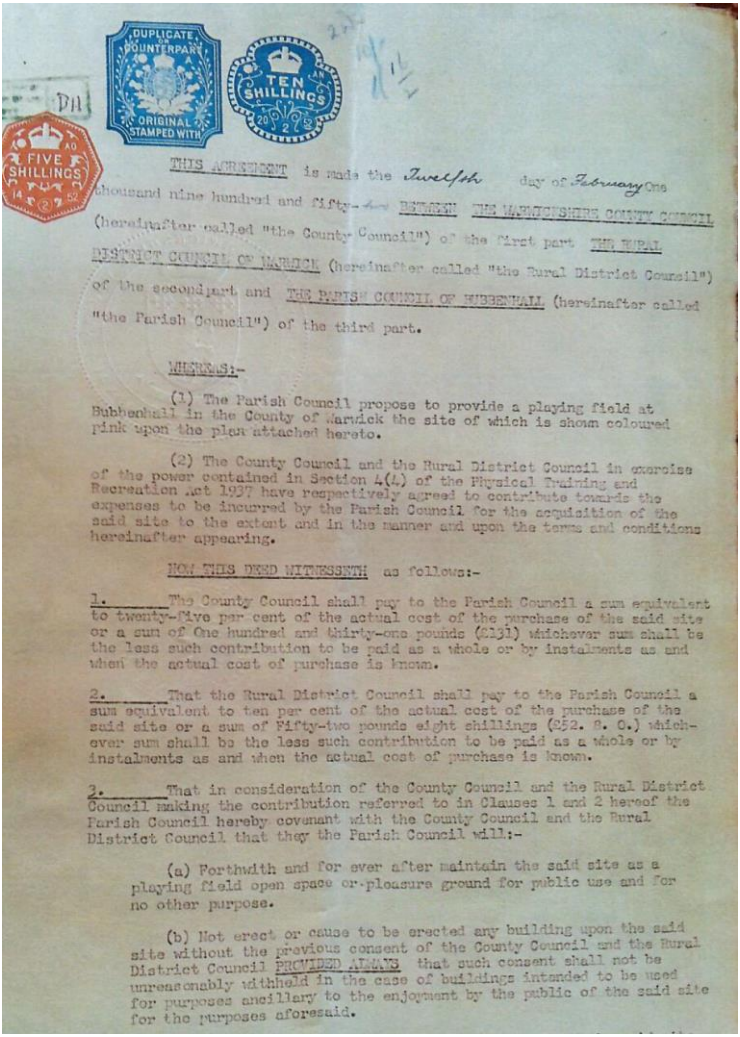
It might have been thought that once a proper Playing Field was available to the village from 1953, it would only be a matter of time before progress could be made in establishing the Village Hall itself. But this was a false hope and for perhaps three main reasons that each played a part over the next 25 years. First, the cost of constructing a completely new building was considerable in the period 1950-1975 relative to the funds that the village communities then had available ( from the small annual balance of incomes over expenditures and in the Village Hall Fund) or thought that they could realistically raise.

Second, the record shows a fascinating oscillation of local opinion as to whether a substantial refurbishment of the Reading Room (by now nearly 80 years old) might just make it suitable as a modern village hall. Third, there was a strange reluctance especially in the Parish Council to make Playing Field land available for the building of a village hall. The next few paragraphs trace the history of these ideas and conflicting tensions through to the late-1970s.

The Parish Meeting held on March 25th 1951 decided to revive the work in connection with a possible Village Hall and a five-person Committee was formed to advance this idea. But there is little evidence of any early progress by this Committee – so much so that by the time of the Parish Council Meeting three years later (March 1st 1954) a proposal was made by a Mr Henstone that "*as the Village Hall Fund seemed to be lying stagnant it should be put to some other use such as equipping the Playing Field*" . However, at a Parish Meeting just a few weeks later the Parish rejected this idea but also decided that one of its members should "*inspect some hostel buildings that were for sale*" (for their possible use as the village hall). I have no idea which buildings they had in mind and, in any event this idea seems to have died a rapid death!

By the Parish Meeting of November 1954 the issue of the village hall had become tangled up with the perceived need to erect a village Bus Shelter. Canon George Bennett later became an advocate of this. It was argued that the children of the village in particular certainly needed the shelter and eventually they did get one: Canon Bennett himself had school age children. Some enquiries were nonetheless reported about the cost of building a brand new village hall the lowest cost being £950 *"for just the hut"*. But the Clerk to the Parish Council then pointed out that a certain

minimum standard of build would be required – i.e. a basic "hut" would not do - and, given the likely total cost would probably have to "*be erected*



DUPLICATE OR COUNTERPART ORIGINAL STAMPED WITH

TEN SHILLINGS

FIVE SHILLINGS

THIS AGREEMENT is made the Twelfth day of February One thousand nine hundred and fifty-two BETWEEN THE WARWICKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL (hereinafter called "the County Council") of the first part THE RURAL DISTRICT COUNCIL OF WARWICK (hereinafter called "the Rural District Council") of the second part and THE PARISH COUNCIL OF BUBBENHALL (hereinafter called "the Parish Council") of the third part.

WHEREAS:-

(1) The Parish Council propose to provide a playing field at Bubbenhall in the County of Warwick the site of which is shown coloured pink upon the plan attached hereto.

(2) The County Council and the Rural District Council in exercise of the power contained in Section 4(4) of the Physical Training and Recreation Act 1937 have respectively agreed to contribute towards the expenses to be incurred by the Parish Council for the acquisition of the said site to the extent and in the manner and upon the terms and conditions hereinafter appearing.

NOW THIS DEED WITNESSETH as follows:-

1. The County Council shall pay to the Parish Council a sum equivalent to twenty-five per cent of the actual cost of the purchase of the said site or a sum of One hundred and thirty-one pounds (£131) whichever sum shall be the less such contribution to be paid as a whole or by instalments as and when the actual cost of purchase is known.

2. That the Rural District Council shall pay to the Parish Council a sum equivalent to ten per cent of the actual cost of the purchase of the said site or a sum of Fifty-two pounds eight shillings (£52. 8. 0.) whichever sum shall be the less such contribution to be paid as a whole or by instalments as and when the actual cost of purchase is known.

3. That in consideration of the County Council and the Rural District Council making the contribution referred to in Clauses 1 and 2 hereof the Parish Council hereby covenant with the County Council and the Rural District Council that they the Parish Council will:-

(a) Forthwith and for ever after maintain the said site as a playing field open space or pleasure ground for public use and for no other purpose.

(b) Not erect or cause to be erected any building upon the said site without the previous consent of the County Council and the Rural District Council PROVIDED ALWAYS that such consent shall not be unreasonably withheld in the case of buildings intended to be used for purposes ancillary to the enjoyment by the public of the said site for the purposes aforesaid.

*Figure 7: Playing Field Agreement of February 1952*

*by voluntary labour"*. That meeting concluded by calling another meeting to consider the possible transfer of some of the Village Hall Fund to help finance the Bus Shelter. This idea was rejected, but the Parish Council meeting in February 1955 suggested (to the Parish) that the Village Hall project be held over "*until such time that money was available to purchase a permanent building."*

Yet another distraction from what had seemed to be the village hall objective arose in June 1955 when Cannon George Bennett (rector 1954 - 1958) reported on meetings he had held with the Three Horseshoes pub. This followed an abortive attempt by the Parish Council to follow up on an advertisement for "*a disused hut at £175 which turned out to useless*". Canon Bennett's idea was to the effect that given the then-planned updating of the said pub's own assembly room, the Bubbenhall Parish Council would be well advised to negotiate the temporary use of this[66] and then wait until sufficient funds were available to build a dedicated permanent Village Hall (the funds then available being only £357-6-7d). This was a sound idea since many community activities already took place in the hall behind the pub and it was of a good size. However this idea too seems to have received short shrift and I can find little or no further mention of it thereafter. In the short term the proposed Bus Shelter seemed to be commanding the greater interest[67].

At this stage from the mid-1950s and for more than 15 years thereafter to the end of the 1960s the idea of a Village Hall seems largely to have been abandoned in favour of the alternative of a major refurbishment of the Reading Room. The Parish Council in November 1956 noted that "the *village was not able, because of its (poor) general condition, to enjoy the use of the premises (the Reading Room) as was intended"* (still no mains water and sewage !). What is reasonably clear by reading between the lines is that the level of usage of the Reading Room had declined as its physical

condition had deteriorated and as a consequence such revenues as might otherwise have been available had dwindled making the financing of any restoration even more difficult (note also some of the personal memories recorded in Annex 1). In spite of this and by February 1957 a surveyor had been contracted to help with plans for necessary alterations to the Room. At the Special Parish Meeting held in May 1958 Kathleen Grimes presented two estimates for building work. One estimate that included two new stoves from the aptly named Mr Damp (no I did not make this up!) was accepted although it was also noted that it went nowhere near to providing the comprehensive repairs and decoration that previous meetings had resolved to be necessary. Nonetheless that meeting did agree that up to £100 be withdrawn from the Village Hall Fund to help meet the costs. Mr Damp's bill - presumably including the cost of the two new stoves - eventually came in at £96.17.7d and Mrs Syrett (a long-serving Reading Room Trustee) agreed to purchase curtain materials with the balance of £3.3.5d.

Incomplete as Mr Damp's improvements may have been they seem to have been sufficient to keep the Reading Room, still limping along but patched up sufficiently, to keep it (and the Village Hall) off the radar of Parish Meetings for the next 10 years.

## *New Hope from 1967*

Those issues reappear with much intensified activity from the date of a Special Parish Meeting held on October 19th 1967. That meeting still had the power under the 1933 Trust Deed for the Reading Room to elect the Trustees and it elected four new Trustees on that day namely Mr A Crawford, Mrs Margaret Naylor, Mrs H. Corson (who lived at Abbey's house with her husband, Major Corson), and Mrs D.J Cadden.[68] For the first time this group of Trustees had a majority *female* membership and, whether or not this was a coincidence, the pace of progress seemed to

accelerate quite rapidly from then on. By early in 1968 Mrs Margaret Naylor[69] who was the Chair, had arranged for architectural plans for two alternative projects namely:

- To convert the upstairs accommodation into a self-contained flat, and
- To make one large room on the ground floor instead of two as previously, with the addition of modern toilet, cloakroom and toilet facilities. This was presented as being a "small village hall".

But the financial constraint on progress was still severe with only £284.1.11d being available as the Reading Room working balance albeit with a further £523 being available in the Village Hall Fund[70].

In May 1968 another Special Parish Meeting approved the suggestion that the whole of the Village (Victory) Hall Fund be transferred to help finance the proposed Reading Room alterations provided that the scheme would be accepted by the Warwickshire Rural Community Council and also that grants could be made available by the Department of Education and Science.[71] The Parish Council by then chaired by Mr Dick Smith – a local stone mason who lived at Shrubs Lodge (at the end of Pagets Lane) - gave its support to this.

Regrettably a variety of further delays followed this meeting. The work of the architects in drawing up detailed plans for the two possible projects was still going forward. But work was distracted somewhat by the parallel legal work being conducted by solicitors to ensure the closer compliance of the Trust Deed of the Reading Room with the new *Model Trust Deed of the Council of Social Science* as published in 1968[72]. The Rural Community Council raised the additional new problem of inadequate car parking space with the development of the Spout Garden being initially mentioned as a

possible solution. Indeed, the meeting of the Parish Council held on May 9th 1969 received a report from Mrs Naylor that stated "*that the County Council had now passed the plans for the Spout Garden as a car park".* But this too seems to have been a false trail. In the 100 years of its existence the Reading Room never actually had a proper car park although some limited parking did take place on the Pound Land for a short time. The other components of the possible new developments proposed by the Naylor Committee were killed off by the Special Parish Meeting held on April 14 1970 [73].

## Change of Tack from 1970

That April 1970 meeting was indeed crucial in that it heard from the Reading Room Committee that the cost estimates for the proposed project had come out well in excess of £3,000 versus the earlier expected figure of around £2,000. This estimate (actually £3,956) had been discussed at an earlier Parish Council Meeting where the Minutes state that "*it was not thought that the sum as estimated would receive a recommendation for a grant by the Rural Community Council."* In fact this rejection by the Council had been confirmed in a letter from that Council to Mrs Naylor dated 1st October 1969 that also recorded that the architect was now strongly advising *against* the idea of enhancing the Reading Room (no chance of getting real value for money he seems to have said). Further, and to add insult to injury, the same April 1970 public meeting also reported that the Parish Council had informed the Reading Room Trustees that "*it was not the wish of the Parish Council that the playing field should be used for the erection of a village hall,"* and … " *that the field was not to be used for any other purpose than that for which it was originally purchased"* [74]. Both Mrs Naylor and Mr. Crawford (for reasons of poor health) submitted their resignations as Trustees! Mr H.Y Williams[75] (resident at "The Hollies") and Dr.T.Williams were then selected to replace them.

Another year passed at which point (Parish Meeting of March 31st 1971) Mr Williams announced that "*they had had to start from scratch and make fresh plans suitable for the new approach to the project*". A further year after that he announced (Parish Council of 1st August 1972) the receipt of a small grant from the Rural Community Council for £864 against a project cost of £1,728)[76] and that planning permission had also been granted to install mains water and sewage: the absence of which had made life very difficult both for the doctor (then Dr Freeman) and the sitting tenant/caretaker[77]. A second stage proposal was at this time also documented involving "*Construction of an outside staircase and transfer of the kitchen to the rear bedroom, also blocking the internal staircase*"[78]. This was something like Mrs Naylor's earlier idea for a self-contained upstairs flat but it still had a few more years to wait before it became a reality. What happened? For reasons that are not entirely clear even the first stage proposal stuttered. It seems, based on later correspondence that piped water and flush toilets were still *not* in place as late as May 1972 (letter from R.S (Dicky) Friend, Clerk to the Parish Council to Mr E.B Wilson[79] dated 13th May 1977).

## New Blood from 1972

At this point "the cavalry reinforcements rode down the hillside" so to speak. The *Farthings* housing development (Bubbenhall's largest ever housing expansion) received its first new residents towards the end of 1971. This significantly increased the village's population and its rateable value. Specifically, the population more than doubled to over 600 versus 294 in the Census of 1961. But this development also brought to the village a significant number of new, mostly young, professional men and woman some of whom quickly showed themselves willing to engage in village affairs. By the time of the Parish Meeting held on 27th March 1973 one of these new residents – Mike Wilkinson - now resident in newly-built

Coopers Walk – was the Chair of the Trustees of the Reading Room[80]. It was he who then proposed the idea of re-assessing the various issues associated with either developing the Reading Room or building a new Village Hall. A so-called "*Feasibility Committee*" was established and instructed to report back in three months' time. Its composition was Messrs David Jones and Graham Davis (both new residents in Coopers Walk), a Mr. Maxfield of Moat Close and Mrs Elsie Peake of Lower End: i.e. a mix of old and new Bubbenhall!

By the time of the next Parish Meeting (26th March 1974), Mike Wilkinson was already able to report the completion of some self-help improvements including redecoration and some new furniture. These had been achieved mainly through volunteer labour. Mike Wilkinson tells me that this was in part provided by teenagers from the youth club led by David Jones and another new resident, David Oldfield that met in the Reading Room. A scout group based in Ryton had recruited some Bubbenhall boys and these too are thought to have assisted. However, the improvements such as they were had at least enabled the Room to enjoy greater use (and a modest but much needed increase in revenues) including at this stage from the newly formed youth club and the assured continuation of the doctor's surgery. The *Feasibility Committee* in the person of David Jones then gave a very polished presentation about the possible plans for an ambitious high spec. new Village Hall costing an estimated £40,000– the first time that such plans had been prepared in the long history of village ambitions for such a hall[81]. The plans provided for a dedicated doctor's surgery, a suite of committee rooms, a large hall for communal use, toilets and a changing room with showers for the football teams. Wow !!!

But practical realism once again intervened to put a damper on the lofty ambitions just described. In the subsequent annual Parish Meeting (25th March 1975), Mike Wilkinson reported that in the previous financial year

the Reading Room had realised a loss of £44.18 which had depleted its already meagre balance of less than £200. He argued that realism now required the village to eschew the idea of a new Village Hall in favour of yet another attempt to make the Reading Room into a viable community centre. That point of view was strongly supported by the emerging realisation that the Trustees had responsibility for a sitting tenant "*in a property that was now considered unsuitable for human habitation by the District Council's Health Department who were requiring that the lack of a piped water supply and flush toilets be put right at a very early date*" (letter from Dicky Friend as cited above). In these circumstances the 1975 Parish Meeting had little choice and it "*agreed that the present conditions (of the Reading Room) did not lend themselves to the furtherance of the scheme proposed in the past by the Feasibility Committee*" [82]

This was of course a setback but the new energetic Trustees (now augmented by the appointment of David Jones to replace Mr. H Williams), were not too disheartened. Indeed, they moved quickly to develop much more detailed plans to regenerate the Reading Room. The Parish Meeting held on 7th April 1976 approved a set of tentative plans and the estimates of cost that were also presented[83]. Interestingly, that same meeting also appointed a new Trustee namely Wendy Amos – a newly arrived resident living on Coopers Walk but also the daughter of the long-time local butcher Dennis Ruck from Church Road.

It is worth digressing at this point to note that this was a period of unusually high levels of civic "togetherness" in the village. The new *Farthings* families had settled in, often with one or two young children most of whom attended the local village school. So there were often after-school get-togethers; various baby-sitting-circle-type arrangements; numerous parties and other festivities; a regular New Year's day football match always in fancy dress (several matches being spearheaded by Larry Lloyd who lived

in Waggoners Close and who had won the UEFA Cup and the League double with Liverpool in 1973 before joining Coventry FC). In 1976 the American bicentennial coincided with a most awful summer drought but the presence of some temporary residents from the USA was the excuse for a very large street party held in Waggoners Close that was completely (but illegally) barricaded off for the day. This was also the era of the OPEC oil crisis that raised petrol prices by 400% overnight (1974); the three-day working week; frequent power cuts and even government restrictions on the hours of TV broadcasting. Bad as this complex of national events was, it certainly led to a high level of mutual cooperation in the village with the two pubs, for example, being the commonly-sought refuge from a cold house with no electric power !



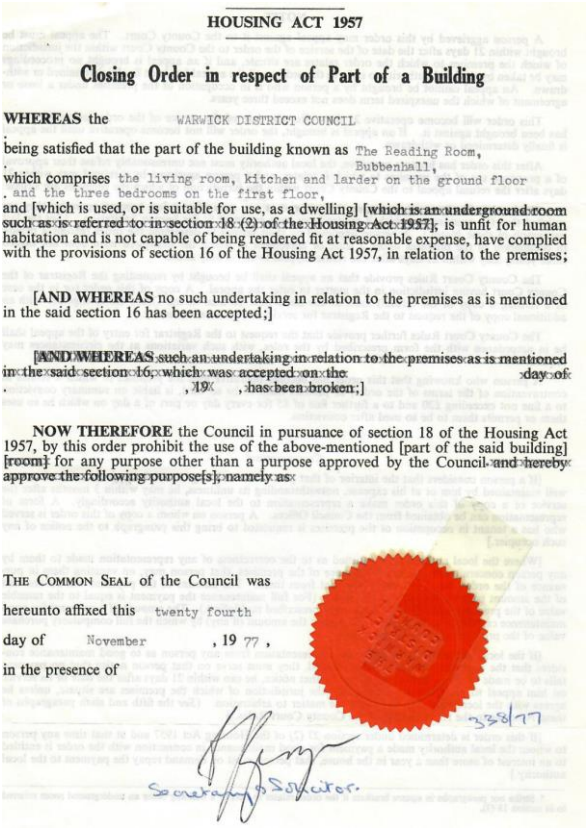
*Figure 8: New Year's Day Football – circa 1975. The man in the front row with a big black wig is Larry Lloyd, the "gentleman" to his left in pearls is Mike Wilkinson – Chair of the Reading Room Committee*

## *Looming Disaster from 1976*

But to return to the story, by 1976 and 1977 the Reading Room finances were in a parlous state and Mike Wilkinson needed to write to Dick Smith Chairman of the Parish Council (10th March 1977) asking for the Council's help even for recurrent funding to the tune of £200: such funding having been tentatively budgeted in 1976/77. The activities of the Trustees were then put under even more pressure by the fact that an official Closing Order was raised on a part of the Reading Room on 24th November 1977 (under the authority of the Housing Act 1957 – see Figure 9).

It is ironic that almost exactly 100 years since the opening of the Reading Room in 1878 it was now close to being condemned!

Although the Trustees had some confidence that they could raise sufficient funds to deal with some improvement of the Room's social facilities, their letter to the District Council of 10th September 1977 openly admitted that they could not see any way to extend funding to cope adequately with the reasonable needs of the sitting tenant (still Mr Harry Summerton)[84]. The response from the District Council dated 22nd September 1977 was to the effect that the Closing Order would apply only to the living accommodation *"thereby releasing the property for a more viable project"*. But it was clearly understood at this stage that significant work would be needed to save the Reading Room as a whole – not merely a superficial cosmetic job!



HOUSING ACT 1957

**Closing Order in respect of Part of a Building**

**WHEREAS** the WARWICK DISTRICT COUNCIL

being satisfied that the part of the building known as The Reading Room, Bubbenhall,

which comprises the living room, kitchen and larder on the ground floor and the three bedrooms on the first floor,

and [which is used, or is suitable for use, as a dwelling] [~~which is an underground room such as is referred to in section 18 (2) of the Housing Act 1957~~], is unfit for human habitation and is not capable of being rendered fit at reasonable expense, have complied with the provisions of section 16 of the Housing Act 1957, in relation to the premises;

[**AND WHEREAS** no such undertaking in relation to the premises as is mentioned in the said section 16 has been accepted;]

[~~**AND WHEREAS** such an undertaking in relation to the premises as is mentioned in the said section 16, which was accepted on the day of , 19 , has been broken;~~]

**NOW THEREFORE** the Council in pursuance of section 18 of the Housing Act 1957, by this order prohibit the use of the above-mentioned [part of the said building] [room] for any purpose other than a purpose approved by the Council ~~and hereby approve the following purpose[s], namely as~~

THE COMMON SEAL of the Council was hereunto affixed this twenty fourth day of November , 19 77 , in the presence of

338/77

Secretary & Solicitor.

*Figure 9: The Closing Order of February 1977*

## Significant Progress from 1978

The Parish Clerk's (Dicky Friend's) letter of 13th May 1977 to E. B Wilson clarified the type of improvements and the associated costs that the Trustees had in mind[85]. These cost amounted to somewhere in excess of £9,500. These ideas were duly fleshed out and planning permission was granted in June 1978. At the Parish Meeting held on 4th April 1979, Mike Wilkinson was able to report that the Parish Council had provided a grant

of £1,050 by raising the parish rate for the one year from 0.7p to 1.7p; and that grants had also been obtained from the Warwickshire County Council and the Department of Education and Science. Dicky Friend in his letter of 13th May noted that the village now held some £800 in the Village Hall (Victory) Fund and "*some other amount held on trust as raised in the village some years ago*". He formally asked Mr Wilson – Chair of the sub-committee of the Parish Council that controlled these funds - to release these monies (a total as it turned out of £863.72) to help complete the funding for the proposed improvements. Miss Kathleen Grimes kindly provided a loan of £1,000 and some targeted fund raising was almost sufficient to fill the financing gap.

After a tender process the contract for the works was given to Tom Leivers a builder based in Leamington Spa[86]. The financing was stated as follows in Table 1 below.

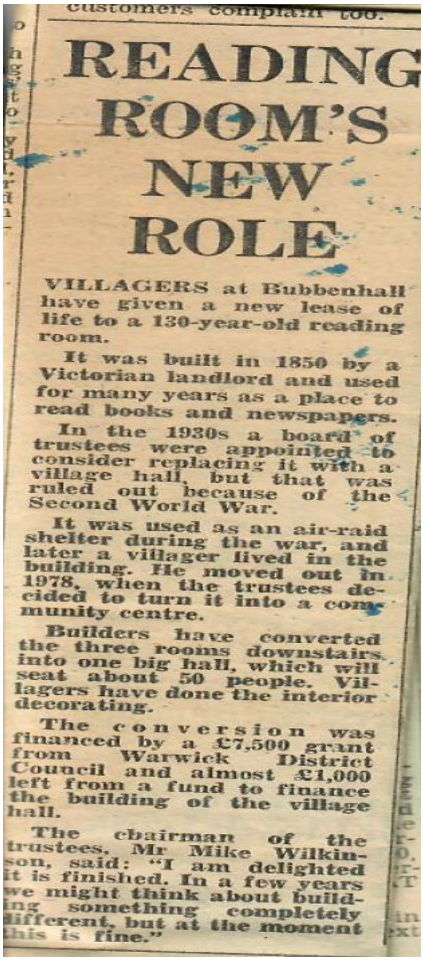
*Table 1: The Reading Room Renovation of 1979*

| Costs: | | Financing: | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |
| T. Leivers – conversions costs | £9,558.0 | Grant - Parish Council | £1,050.0 |
| Planning fee | £159.84 | Grant - WDC | £2,200.0 |
| | | Grant – Dept. of Education and Science | £3,500.0 |
| Total | £9,717.84 | Loan – Miss K Grimes | £1,000.0 |
| | | Donkey Derby | £983.68 |
| | | Village Hall Fund | £863.72 |
| | | | |
| Total | £9,717.84 | Total | £9,597.40 |

The specifications for the work are shown in some detail in four project completion certificates provided by Mr Leivers dated 19th February, 19th March, 27th April and 3rd June 1979 respectively. The work in its totality was quite extensive but its basis was the conversion of three downstairs rooms into one larger (assembly) room capable, it was said at the time, of seating some 50 persons: a somewhat inflated number in practice! In brief it included demolition of rear outbuildings; removal of various internal walls and adding blockwork for a new ground floor toilet, installation of new windows, building new foul drains and connecting these to the mains sewer, making good the chimney stack, fixing electrical lighting and power systems, supplying and fixing a new WC to the first floor changing rooms, laying new flooring to the whole of the ground floor assembly room, supplying and fixing new flush doors, and breaking out a serving hatch to kitchen.

By October 10th 1979 the work was sufficiently complete for the Trustees to invite the whole village to an Open Evening to inspect the much-improved facilities. The notice announcing this event also put out an appeal for more volunteers to "*help decorate and equip the centre*". Apparently, there had already been a good response in this regard. The notice stated that…"*Peter Thompson has already offered the use of his JCB and George Elliot has volunteered to drive it, Graham Wakefield has stepped up to do the kitchen and the Football Club has also indicated that they will help"*[87]. The notice also indicated the greatly increased ambition for groups and activities in the Reading Room *"which have not been practical before, e.g. Playgroups, Scouts*[88]*, Guides, Cubs, Brownies, Youth Club, Bingo, Whist, Arts, Discos, W.I etc."* Not all of these materialised but many did. So together with the long-running junior and later senior football club, it meant that by the time a dedicated Village Hall was in place seven years later, the village already had a strong core of viable social activities in place.

The availability of the newly refurbished Reading Room was reported in the Coventry Evening Telegraph of June 25th 1980 See Figure 10.



customers complain too.

# READING ROOM'S NEW ROLE

VILLAGERS at Bubbenhall have given a new lease of life to a 130-year-old reading room.

It was built in 1850 by a Victorian landlord and used for many years as a place to read books and newspapers.

In the 1930s a board of trustees were appointed to consider replacing it with a village hall, but that was ruled out because of the Second World War.

It was used as an air-raid shelter during the war, and later a villager lived in the building. He moved out in 1978, when the trustees decided to turn it into a community centre.

Builders have converted the three rooms downstairs into one big hall, which will seat about 50 people. Villagers have done the interior decorating.

The conversion was financed by a £7,500 grant from Warwick District Council and almost £1,000 left from a fund to finance the building of the village hall.

The chairman of the trustees, Mr Mike Wilkinson, said: "I am delighted it is finished. In a few years we might think about building something completely different, but at the moment this is fine."

*Figure 10: The Coventry Telegraph Report of June 25th 1980*

# 5. A Village Hall at Last

The refurbishments achieved at the end of the 1970s represented a major and welcome upgrade of the facilities that had preceded them. In particular the single larger "assembly room" was a major step forward in terms of functionality compared to the three smaller rooms that had been there before. But it was still far from being suitable as a major social centre for a now much larger village. It was certainly not suitable for the occasional wedding celebration and the large children's parties that we see in the present day Village Hall. The limitations on usage in turn had a knock on effect on revenues. Based on some hand written notes from early 1984 the total rental income for a typical year in the early 1980s was of the order of just £375 mainly from the doctor, the Bubbenhall Football Club, a Coventry Scout Group, the Mother &Toddler group started by Margaret Robinson, the Garter Group that started up to replace the erstwhile Townswomen's Guild, and the Bubbenhall Church and Parish Councils. With electricity costs alone amounting to over £200 the economic basis of the newly refurbished Reading Room remained highly marginal especially as the reliable £6.75 per quarter previously paid by Harry Summerton had now been lost: it still depended on regular subventions from the Parish Council. The bank balance as at January 1st 1985 when I took on the role of Treasurer was just £194.01.

Consequently the perceived imperative to build a dedicated Village Hall remained very much on the agenda of the village.

By the time of the Parish Meeting held on12th April 1983, the late Robert (Bob) Beale had taken over as Chair of the Trustees and John Kenney had been appointed Treasurer. That meeting resolved to undertake another feasibility study regarding a possible dedicated Village Hall with a report

back to the Parish Council. The Parish Meeting of the subsequent year (7th March 1984) heard a proposal from the Trustees to sell the Reading Room and erect a new village hall on the playing fields. This proposal was accepted by the meeting after hearing that the Parish Council "*had approved in principle the allocation of an area of land on the playing field on a long lease subject to the annual Parish Meeting endorsing that decision.*" - a reversal of the contrary decision made in April 1970.

But a few months after this there was what, as an observer at the time, I regard as a critical development. At a New Year's Eve party on December 31st 1984 – as I recall in the house of Mike and Sue Wareham – there was an entirely informal understanding reached that the management of the Reading Room should be passed to a new Management Committee chaired by a recently arrived new resident in Orchard Way namely Major Alan Gibson.

This end-of-year discussion - the New Year of 1985 - really was the point when things finally got moving.

Alan Gibson, once installed brought a new military decisiveness and discipline to the work of the Committee. Box 8 below provides a small insight into his remarkable life. He requested the Committee members - old and new- to assemble in the Reading Room for an emergency meeting on the cold winters day that was January 3rd 1985. That meeting formalised the previous informal – and no doubt drink-fuelled - arrangement from December 31st and the incumbent Committee members submitted their resignations. Once Bob Beale saw that there was someone who could take over from him as Chairman he willingly handed over the reins. Alan Gibson then made it absolutely clear to his new team that the Village Hall would be built within two years (*no more false starts!).* Boris Johnson-like he asked the new Committee to confirm their commitment to creating a new Village Hall! We all gave that commitment.

### *Box 8: Alan Rowland Gibson (Burma Star) - 1923 to 2001*

A bronze plaque installed in the lobby of Bubbenhall Village Hall appropriately commemorates Alan's unique contribution to Bubbenhall. Without in any way downplaying the good foundations laid by his predecessors he did in some real sense *make the Village Hall happen*.

In Alan's army service he attained the rank of Colonel in the Royal Horse Artillery but from 1942 he was posted to Burma where he joined the special Chindits volunteer force to fight behind enemy lines. He once said that his training equipped him well for the *"perils of village politics"*. He was captured at the age of just 20 years by the Japanese; interred under dreadful Burma railway-type conditions for three years. His natural weight of more than 12 stone was reduced to just 6 stone by this ordeal. The death rate was huge and when the camp was eventually relieved by the Black Watch, Alan being the most senior surviving officer had the task of accepting the Japanese camp surrender-symbolised by the handing over of the commander's samurai sword.

Prior to the War he studied at Imperial College London and played rugby for Harlequins with the occasional game also for the Barbarians. He was also a good and life-long golfer. His fastidious attention to detail and ability to build teams was evident in his thirty or more years of senior management in industry. These skills were used to wonderfully good effect in finally getting the BVH up and running.

The eulogy at his memorial service in Bubbenhall Church in 2001 aptly noted that…"*Alan was greatly respected in both his professional and his community life as a natural leader, the man who would always go the extra mile for family, colleagues and friends even when he himself was busy. He was an inspiration to anyone who wanted to get things done".*

But notwithstanding these efforts, the problems at the Reading Room persisted. The Minutes of the January 3rd meeting record that before his resignation, the Treasurer John Kenney reported that funds were so low that it was unlikely that the small payments to Mrs Dorothy Elliott for cleaning and other support (12/6d per week in 1970[89] but hopefully somewhat larger than that by 1985) could continue for much longer. Leaks were still being reported and some professional plumbing assistance had to be called in urgently to address these. In the light of these various problems, a second meeting held on January 12th authorised Alan Gibson to write to the Parish Council asking for further financial support *"to keep the Reading Room in reasonable condition until the Management Committee are in a position to sell it and build an alternative building"* (letter dated January 15th 1985). A payment of £200 was quickly granted. However, the financial projections which I - as the newly appointed Treasurer - made to support that letter indicated an anticipated deficit for 1985 of just over £300 [90]. This included an allowance for the cost of a survey of the Reading Room that we already knew was required by the Charity Commission before any sale could go ahead, and also the fees needed for planning permissions. Alan indicated in his letter that he expected the new Hall to be ready to go by 1986/87 at which point *"there would be no burden on the Parish Council".*

A flurry of further activities continued after this already hectic beginning. These activities – all in 1985 - included:

- Alan Gibson began a dialogue with the Charity Commissioners regarding the sale of the Reading Room. They gave general approval for the sale subject to certain conditions.
- The Committee engaged Shipways – a local estate agency - to provide a formal valuation of the Reading Room. They came back with an estimate in the range £27,500 to £30,000 assuming that

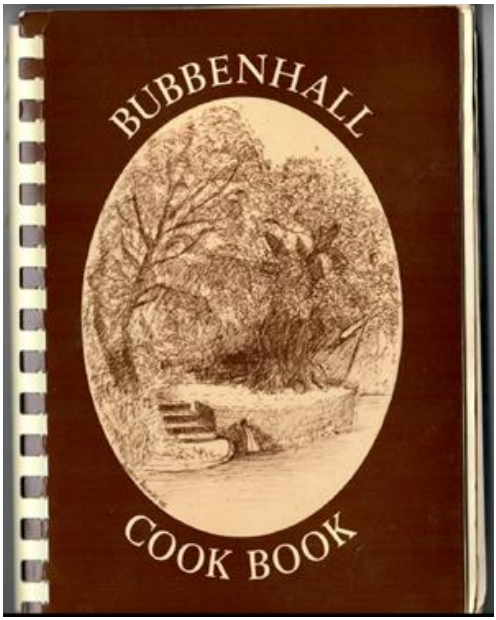
the prospective buyer would be using the building either as a dwelling or for *commercial* purposes – the latter raising serious doubts from the Parish Council because of the Conservation Area-location of the Reading Room (letter from the Council to Alan Gibson dated April 13th 1985).

- Alan Roe contacted Warwick District Council to enquire about the availability of various grants. On the basis of the information received, the Committee decided to apply for a grant from that source of £5,000[91].
- Alan Gibson developed a rough site plan prior to the engagement of an architect as the basis for some preliminary quotations for the building of the Hall: £20,000 from Hallam & Co.; £27,000 from Wernicks - a builder of modular constructions - (but without foundations); and £30,000 from local builder Alan Keith – still resident in Cooper Walk - for a brick building[92]. Another local builder Graham Johnson asserted that he could build a good brick structure at a similar cost to that of a prefabricated one.
- Alan Roe contacted the Warwick Rural Community Council (a Mr John Wrake) who questioned whether the Parish Council would be able to provide a long lease on the necessary playing field site. We quickly established that this was possible.
- Anne Trentham, Sue Wareham and Caroline Grey orchestrated the production of a fund-raising *Bubbenhall Cook Book* – a fantastic creation of 145 pages containing over 200 different recipes(for soups, main courses, supper dishes, vegetarian meals, puddings, cakes and odds and ends). These were all provided by village residents. The book is still in use today. Its cover page is shown in Box 9 below.
- A variety of other fund-raising activities were suggested and most quickly organised including a series of Jumble Sales, a new Christmas Fair and some other social activities.

By the time of the annual Parish Meeting held on 22nd May 1985 – just five months after taking over – Alan Gibson was able to report that detailed plans were already being prepared for the new Village Hall. In fact these became available by October of that same year. But there were still hurdles to be overcome. That same Parish Meeting - attended by 26 people - received a proposal from a resident of Lower End … "*that the decision taken at the 1984 Annual Parish Meeting with regard to the sale of the Reading Room and playing fields be rescinded"* [93]. Fortunately this was countered by an amendment (moved by John Kenney)[94]. This counter proposal was approved by a vote of 12 to 2. Agreement was quickly reached with the Parish Council requiring the Village Hall to pay a peppercorn rent of £50 per annum for the land on which the hall was to be erected[95]. But the Council also agreed to make an annual grant of £45 "*towards the upkeep and maintenance of the Village Hall* " (letter from Dicky Friend to Alan Roe dated 20th January 1988). So the playing field versus the village hall controversy of the 1960s was finally laid to rest.

The detailed architectural plans were drawn up by the Harper Fairley Partnership of Granville Street, Birmingham. I conjecture that this must have been handled by Alan Gibson through the company for which he still worked[96]? The idea of a possible modular construction for the Village Hall had been abandoned as early as May 1985 in favour of a more substantial brick building of the type eventually built. The working drawings are shown in Figures 11 and 12 below.

### ***Box 9: The Bubbenhall Cook Book of 1985*** [1]




The drawing of the Spout in the cover of the Cook Book was the work of Sanna Alexander who still lives at Springhurst on the Ryton Road. The printing was handled by Clive Trentham at his Industrial Press in Coventry. Clive's secretary kindly typed all the recipes and Clive had them printed (at no cost to the village). Binding was done on the floors of various houses in Coopers Walk.

The funds achieved by this Cook Book were extremely impressive. The accounts for 1985 show gross sales of £1, 015 and those for 1986 show sales of £387. So in a little over a year the Committee raised no less than £1,400 from this source. This alone was a multiple of the meagre balances that the Reading Room had previously had to work with.




*Figure 11: The BVH – Architectural Drawings – North West Elevation*

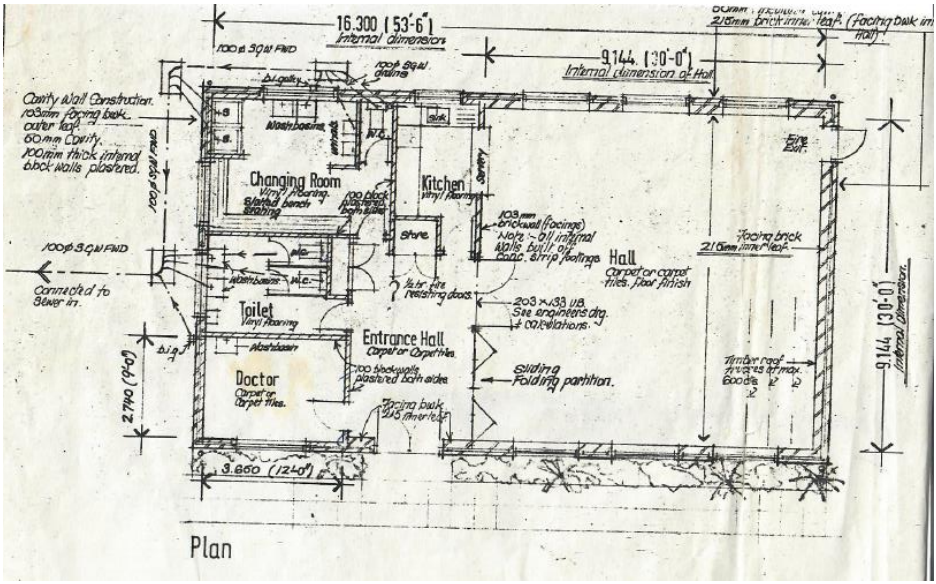



*Figure 12: BVH – Architectural Drawings – Plan*

Present day users of the Hall will certainly recognise the general shape of the building from these drawings. However, a number of elements are missing notably the significant extension added to the right of the building in 1999 that provided for the present-day larger kitchen and a significant storage space as well as a bigger main hall; and the covered veranda that today runs along the whole of the frontage of the building. More of these additions later.

## *Elements of Good Fortune*

From the flying start in early-1985, the new Committee thereafter certainly enjoyed some good fortune as to timing and other matters. It went out on a limb by authorising the commencement of building work in early 1986 several months before the sale of the Reading Room was assured. The first good fortune was that the village "togetherness" established in the difficult economic times of the 1970s persisted even more strongly in the somewhat more settled 1980s. One consequence of this was that the necessary fund-raising for the new Village Hall was very widely supported and much more successful than could ever have been hoped. As Sue Wareham notes in a recent communication…. "*Our dances, discos etc were a great fundraiser and tickets were at a premium - it was worth all the hard work of organising these just to be able to see the village coming together*"…. and *"Margaret Robinson was the expert jumble sale organiser and people queued from all over the area to get in to buy: Bubbenhall was known to have good jumble!"*

My own Treasurer records on this are summarised for the period 1985 through 1989 in Table 2 below. In that short period the village raised over £6,500 through its own voluntary efforts to which many contributed. This compares with the TOTAL revenue from the Reading Room in its last days of circa £375 per annum and the £864 accumulated in the Village Hall (Victory) fund over almost 40 years! Through its energetic fund-raising

and in other ways the village demonstrated that it really did want a proper Village Hall.

*Table 2: Fund-Raising Revenues 1985 to 1989*[97]

| | 1985 | 1986 | 1987 | 1988 | 1989 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cook book | 1,015 | 387 | | | |
| Dances | 359 | | 326 | 597 | 863 |
| Barbecue | 177 | | | | |
| Jumble Sales | 163 | 179 | | | |
| Gala Day | | 62 | 94 | 325 | 494 |
| Flower Show | | | 119 | | |
| 100 Club | | | | 382 | 620 |
| | | | | | |
| TOTAL | £1,714 | £628 | £539 | £1,304 | £1,977 |

Second, the Committee received very considerable practical and financial support especially from the Parish Council and also the Warwick District Council. A few years earlier that support had not been so obviously forthcoming. For example, as late as August 1984 a polite approach about grant funds from the then-Chair, Bob Beale for a possible village hall had met the response from Warwick County Council that stated "*There is no reason why your project should not be considered for a grant but I think the members' working party would want to have more information about its justification, bearing in mind that you received a grant under the Department of Education and Science scheme that operated at that time*"[98]. It was after all only a few years earlier that the village had received £3,500 from this source for the conversion of the Reading Room. But by early in 1986 the new Committee had successfully applied for and received a grant of £4,285 from the WDC. Although this was somewhat less than the amount requested, the further items of serendipity described below more than made up for the shortfall.

Third, the new Committee quickly received the backing of the Clarendon Medical practice in the person of its senior partner Dr Peter Freeman. This was important because at the beginning, the rental paid by his practice was the single most important source of revenue: for example, the £225 paid in 1985 was about one third of all Reading Room income. I received a letter from Peter Freeman in January 1987 stating that he had just recommenced his twice weekly surgeries in Bubbenhall by now in the new Village Hall and "*that everyone was most impressed by the new premises*". He agreed in that same letter to a substantial increase in his rent to £375 per annum which he thought was fair given the vastly improved facilities at the Hall compared to those at the Reading Room. This subsequently rose to £415 by 1992. Dr Freeman also committed to sending two doctors per week to Bubbenhall (Dr. Campbell on Thursdays and himself on Mondays). But he did insist on having the Doctors Room for his exclusive use with the room being locked at all times when not in use: a condition to which the Committee readily agreed. This unique service for the village continued with only modest changes until 2015.

Finally, and the most important piece of serendipity, was that the auction of the Reading Room held on 7th August 1986 was a great success. As noted above the guide price for this sale had been set by Shipways estate agents at £27,500 to £30,000. But the timing of the auction coincided quite fortuitously with a period of great buoyancy in the volatile UK housing market. Following the economic reforms initiated by Margaret Thatcher, average house prices in some years in the mid-1980s rose by between 16% and 25% per annum: by 1990 prices were double the level seen just five years earlier. This was definitely a great time to sell and not surprisingly the Reading Room auction attracted a great deal of interest. More than 30 people were in attendance at the auction on August 7th and several attendees needed to watch through the hatch of the kitchen as the main hall was full to capacity and overflowing.

After some active bidding the hammer finally fell at £55,500. This represented a mark-up of no less than 85 percent over even the higher of the two Shipway estimates ! This outcome surprised all of us. It was explained in part by the fact that one bidder (eventually an unsuccessful one) was the agent for the then-owner of the neighbouring house namely Longfield. It was a credible rumour that his intention was to acquire but then demolish the Reading Room so that a more substantial housing development (a much larger version of what we now know as Spring Court) could be constructed. But this agent's bidding stopped at about £55,000 and as a consequence the Committee were happy to accept the eventual and slightly higher successful bid from Bill and Lynn Brown. It was our further good fortune that the late Bill Brown was a highly competent architect who not only saw the potential but proved more than able to accept the challenge of bringing the ancient Victorian structure up to scratch as a modern, indeed very attractive dwelling. Part of his own drawings for the building after the sale are shown in Figure 13 below. The Village remains grateful to him and of course also to Lynn Brown who still resides there.

Thanks to these various pieces of good fortune and some hard work, by Autumn 1986 the members of the Bubbenhall Reading Room Committee could finally relax a little and get ready to re-label themselves as the Bubbenhall Village Hall Committee.

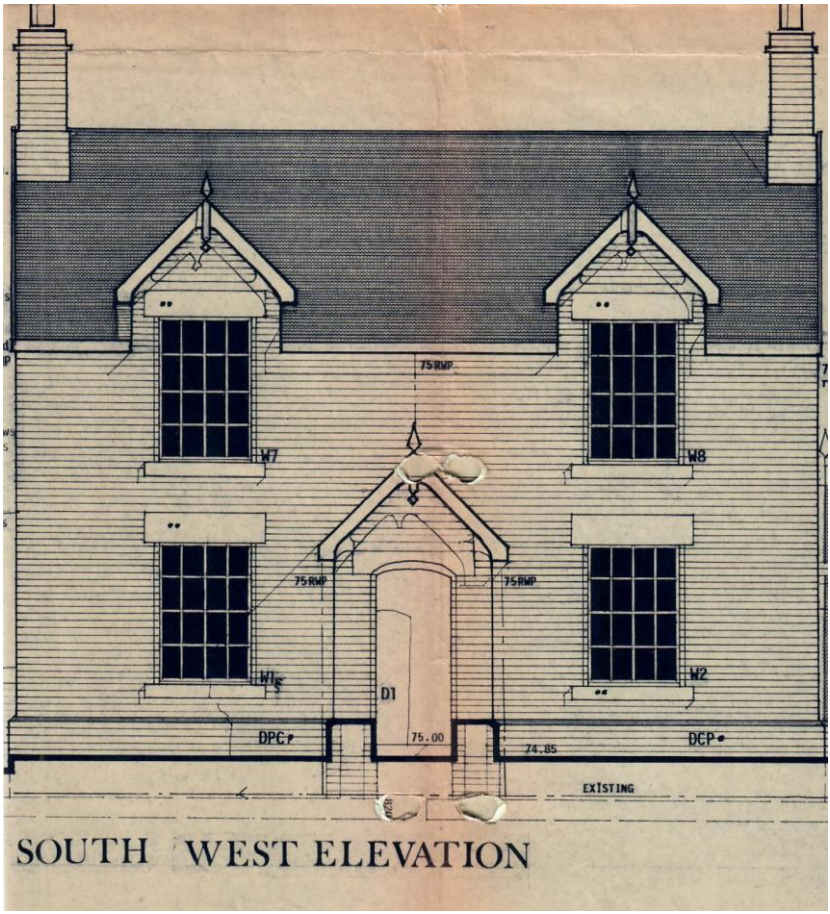



*Figure 13: The Reading Room after 1986*[99]

## The New Village Hall

But notwithstanding this success in financial terms, the Committee were still committed to the strategy for the building that had already been agreed when funds seemed likely to be very much tighter. This strategy essentially involved building a solid but *modest* brick structure (not the earlier-

proposed modular one); keeping the refinements in terms of internal fittings down to a minimum initially (refinements could come later if the finances allowed this); and ensuring the use of low maintenance designs and materials wherever possible. One important manifestation of this was the decision to use an attractive textured brick finish for all the main internal walls and not have these plastered[100]. It led to the choice of storage heaters as the main heat source instead of any more sophisticated heating system. It also led to the decision not to engage in any serious landscaping of the exterior of the building including the car park. These and other considerations enabled the initial cost of the basic build to be kept close to the figure of £43,000 (as in the quotation accepted) which was consistent with the initially expected available funds of some £41 to £46K[101]. (I note that this was only slightly more than the £40,000 cost of the David Jones proposal back in 1974).

After a competitive process the contract to build the Hall was awarded to Johnson Bros. Ltd. of Cromwell Lane, Coventry. One of their two main Directors namely the late Graham Johnson was conveniently now a resident in Bubbenhall (Orchard Way). The firm began work early in 1986 and by December of that same year the basic structure of the building had been substantially completed. Figures 14 and 15 below show a few photographs of the early stage work on the building and Figure 16 shows its appearance as it neared completion by end-1986[102].

However, one very positive consequence of the better-than-expected auction outcome was that after August 7th the Committee was quickly able to authorise Graham Johnson to include some of the refinements that had previously been thought to be unaffordable. The most significant of these was the installation of a maple-strip wooden floor surface instead of the much cheaper plastic tiling. Others were the early installation of a disabled toilet; improved quality sanitary and electric fittings in the toilets and

doctors room; and some external lighting. As a consequence the *total* cost of the build came out at £53,307.87. Table 3 below summarises how this was financed.

*Table 3: Building Costs and Financing*

| Costs | | | Finance | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |
| Builder | £53,307.87 | | Sale of Reading Room | £55,500.00 |
| Planning Fees | £340.00 | | less Selling Costs | |
| Architects Fees | £250.00 | | Estate Agent | *-£1337.18* |
| Building Inspection | £303.60 | | Legal | *-£ 633.90* |
| Opening Ceremony | £143.00 | | Sale Proceeds – Net | £53,528.92 |
| | | | | |
| | | | Grants | £4,285.00 |
| | | | Fund Raising | £6,500.00 |
| | | | Bank Interest | £1,080.80 |
| TOTAL | £54,344.47 | | TOTAL | £65,394.72 |



*Figure 14: Building Work Stage One - 1986*

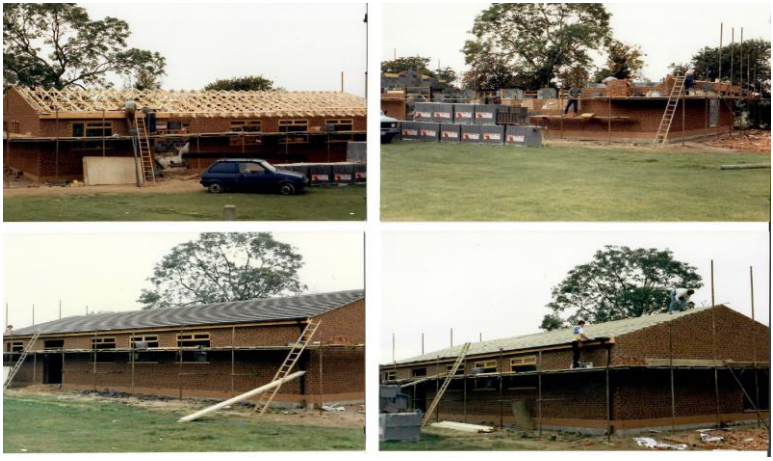


*Figure 15: Building Work Stage Two – 1986*



*Figure 16: Nearing Completion*

One or two further but necessary enhancements quickly followed the completion of the building. In particular, the records show that in 1987 the Committee was able to spend some £3,000 on equipping the Hall – with furniture, carpeting for the lobby area, curtains, crockery and cutlery. It was also able to finance some tree planting and provide a basic hard surface for the main car park[103]. But this still left a positive healthy balance in the bank account by the end of that year – something that has been sustained until the present day: financial dependence on the Parish Council had ended just as Alan Gibson had promised it would.

## The Opening

The official opening of the new Village Hall took place on Sunday 30th November 1986. This was almost exactly 108 years after the Reading Room was opened for villagers use in Bubbenhall by the Rev Harrison.

The opening and the cutting of the ribbon was performed by the late Charles Haynes who at the time was the Chairman of the Parish Council. A foundation stone had been carved by local stone mason – Dick Smith who in the past had himself been a long-serving Chair of the Parish Council and the Parish Meeting (1962 to 1979 on my reckoning). The stone was ceremoniously laid in place by Kathleen Grimes whose father had been such an important figure in the earlier history of the Village and the Reading Room. She too had given long service on the Parish Council. The event was attended by a very large number of village residents and by several representatives of local authorities and neighbouring village halls. One manifestation of the improved financial health of the facility was the fact that the Committee was able to offer wine and light refreshments to all those who attended. A copy of the report in the Coventry Evening Telegraph is shown as Figure 17.



Kathleen Grimes lays the stone watched by parish council chairman, Councillor Charles Haynes, and villagers

# Hall is nearly ready

CROWDS watched a commemorative stone laid at Bubbenhall's new village hall which will open next month.

The £64,000 cost of the new building has been met through the sale of the old village hall, known as the Reading Room.

And Kathleen Grimes, daughter of Henry Grimes who gave the Reading Room to the village in 1905, laid the commemorative stone on Saturday.

The new hall, at the village playing fields, will have meeting rooms, a kitchen, servery, sports changing rooms, and a doctor's surgery.

It will be used for various activities including weddings, youth club nights and parish council meetings.

Alan Gibson, village hall committee chairman, said: "We are delighted with it. It will help cement the village into one happy community."

*Figure 17:*

*Photograph shows Charles Haynes and Kathleen Grimes at the front and Graham Johnson (Builder), Anne Trentham (Vice-Chairperson) and Alan Roe (Treasurer) just behind them.*

After the opening, the basic set of user groups established in the last days of the Reading Room was developed further. The Annual Report for 1987 shows revenue streams from five village user groups namely the long-standing Football Club, the Toddlers Group, Brownies, the Garter Group, and an Aerobics Class. In the next few years, a Youth Club, the Friendly Club (for senior citizens ) were also established, and later still a very active set of Dance Classes operated with great commitment by Sarah Cooke[104]. Some of these activities were relatively short-lived (e.g. Aerobics) but most continued for several years thereby ensuring a sustained high rate of utilisation of the Hall's facilities and more than justifying the decision to move on from the Reading Room. Revenues responded accordingly. Figure 18 shows the gradual improvement of the current income (from booking fees mainly) in the first ten years from 1985 through 1995 and the gradual erosion of the *relative* importance of the doctor in terms of revenues generated. Ten more years later - by 2006 - the total current income had grown to just over £8,000 with the doctor now contributing only 6% of this total as against over 40% back in 1986!

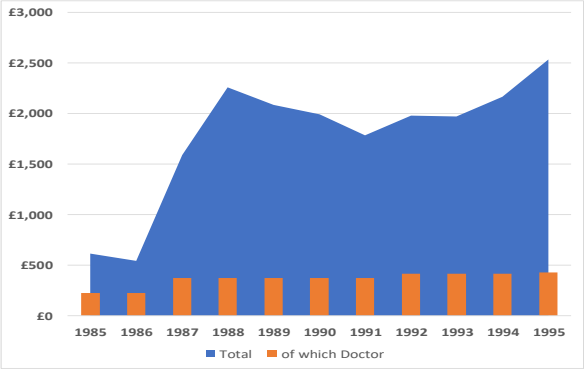



*Figure 18: BVH Current Revenues 1985 through 1995*

## 6. Enhancements Galore – Thanks to Gravel!

So the availability of the new modern hall clearly had a very positive and pretty much immediate beneficial impact in enhancing those village social activities that had already started up in the old Reading Room. It also encouraged the Parish Council to turn its attention to some much needed upgrades for the Playing Field. The first of these in 1987 related to the initial upgrade of the very limited and primitive children's play equipment on the site. The Parish Meeting of that year recorded that *"the Council had deliberately refrained from dealing with the obvious shortage of children's play equipment pending the erection of the new Village Hall."* A Committee under the chairmanship of Councillor Caroline Grey was convened. This quickly came up with a scheme for several new pieces of equipment and also raised £5,000 from Warwick District Council's Amenities Committee to pay for these. The equipment was installed soon afterwards.

To understand many of the subsequent developments in and around the Hall we return briefly to the historical context. Specifically, *gravel extraction* had for several centuries been an important element in the economic life of Bubbenhall[105]. This is evidenced by the Enclosures Act of January 1726[106] that includes the following fascinating passage. "*To George Paget and Mary his wife for their respective shares and interests in the common fields and for the commons thereto belonging is allotted and assigned one piece(of land) lying on Gravel Heath*[107]*.....and it is directed and appointed that the inhabitants of Bubnell shall have liberty to get and carry away gravel from the said piece as they shall have occasion for it...."* In short even after the enclosures that effectively "privatised" much of the Bubbenhall land, the gravel-rich lands to the east and south of the village were still deemed to be available for the common good!

By the second part of the C20th extensive commercial gravel workings (involving sand and gravel extraction and land-fill) were taking place mainly north of Pagets Lane (on the land we now know as the Ryton Pools Country Park) and later (from the 1980s) south of Pagets Land and towards Weston Lane[108]. In spite of the fact that these gravel workings were by this time fully commercial, the village community continued to draw significant benefit from them indirectly via the financing that gravel has provided to Village Hall activities: an indirect and somewhat ironic continuation of the common rights to gravel that were granted by the Enclosures Acts of 1726!

## *The Major Extension of 1999*

Those new benefits began in 1998. By this time the Hall had been working to good effect for twelve years but the increasing usage and the expanding size of some events had created a pressure to extend its scope in a number of ways. To respond to this the BVH Committee commissioned plans from the architectural firm Richard S. Baily of Dormer Place Leamington Spa for the following enhancements:

- a 30% extension of the length of the building making the main hall area itself larger by that same percentage amount[109]
- the construction at the far end of the new section of (i) a sizeable storage area and (ii) a new and much larger kitchen area including an opening stable door/servery to the playing fields to cater better for external summer events notably the June Gala Day.

The cost of these extensions and enhancement - including the building works and the associated fittings - came in at just over £40,000. But this work was able to go ahead surprisingly quickly thanks to a generous and large grant from Smith's Concrete – ably negotiated by Alan Gibson - and paid to the village in 1998. The extension was completed in 1999 with

Johnson Bros again winning the contract for the work, and Lottery Funding helping to cover the balance of the funding required.

This work largely completed the footprint of the Village Hall as one observes it today.

The support of gravel to the Village Hall that was manifest first of all in the generosity of Smith's Concrete had been formalised one year earlier in 1997. In that year the government of the day (the Prime Minister at the time being the newly elected Tony Blair) established a new Foundation - WREN (Waste Recycling Environmental) – that was charged with using some of the taxes imposed on land-fill/gravel pits to provide grants to local communities. The communities eligible for such grants under the Landfill Tax Regulations were defined as any "*within 10 miles of a Waste Recycling Group landfill site.*" Bubbenhall easily met this criterion. The WREN-funded projects were required "*to provide, maintain or improve a public park or other public amenity.*" Much of what the Village Hall needed to do by way of improvement after 1997 was clearly covered by this definition. So serendipity came to the village's aid once more! The records suggest that the first funds came directly from Smith's Concrete but were provided under the auspices of the newly established ENTRUST – the regulator under the Landfill Tax Scheme.

I cannot do full justice to the detail of all the further enhancements that the Hall has seen since 1999 but the main elements of these are described in the next few paragraphs. It would be wrong to suggest that all of these were financed using sources of funding linked to the extraction of gravel and land-fill but such sources undoubtedly comprised the main component.

## Playground Upgrade – 2002

This project was made possible by the first major grant that the BVH Committee received from WREN. It financed the partial replacement and a really major augmentation of the playground equipment previously installed by the sub-Committee headed by Caroline Grey in 1987 as referred to above. On this occasion Jenny Kendray then a resident of Lower End superintended the grant applications. This upgrade produced the set of equipment and the safe rubberised surface area that we still see on the Playing Field today. The cost came in at £35,341 and we were able to obtain a grant of £30,000 from WREN towards this cost, with the Rural Initiatives of Warwick District providing additional funding.

## Satellite Post-Office – 2005

In the early part of 2004 it had been necessary to close the dedicated village Post-Office that had been operated for many years by Florence Sayers and later by Gill Green as part of her village store located on Lower End - opened in September 1998. After some extensive consultations with the Post Office and the Charity Commission, on January 19th 2005 the Village Hall was granted a license by the Post Office to operate a satellite P.O service for a few hours each week. To do this it was necessary to make adjustments to the smaller of the Hall's two kitchens to accommodate the necessary equipment and to arrange the associated telecoms systems. An agreement was also struck with the licensee of the Post Office in Ryton-on Dunsmore to act as the hub for our satellite. Gill Green agreed to man the service for a few hours each week.

This limited service was provided for a number of years and was much appreciated by those people who made use of it. Regrettably in 2011 the combination of the by-then limited use and the imminent closure of the

Ryton Post Office forced the closure of the Bubbenhall service. Efforts to revitalise this based on the Post Office in Baginton proved to be unsuccessful.

## *External Veranda and Lighting System – 2006*

After the closure of the Bubbenhall school in 1999, many village children needed to be bussed to their new school in Ryton and the bus that collected and returned them began to use the car park of the Village Hall. On days when the Hall was not open, the parents of these children had uncomfortable waits often in wet and cold weather. Hence the BVH Committee began to receive requests to erect a covered area – some sort of veranda - outside the Hall. Such a cover could of course also have wider benefits during, for example, events held outside the Hall.

The Committee responded to this request in 2006 by developing a project that also encompassed the installation of much improved ceiling lighting and a suspended ceiling grid in the main hall area and elsewhere. This project was costed out at £29,140 with WREN being requested to provide £24,000 towards this total. WREN eventually agreed to provide the smaller sum of £10,000 but the Committee was able to raise an additional £5,000 from a second grant-giving body namely *Awards for All* (Lottery-funded) and so proceed with the substance of this multi-facetted project. The Committee used its own funds to replace some external doors and windows and to incorporate improved glazing and security. The addition of the new veranda added further to the profile and footprint of the Hall and has proven to be a most valuable addition. See Figure 19 below that shows the large crowd who attended the opening.



*Figure 19: Celebrating the New Facilities - 2006*

## Car Park Resurfacing – 2009

Thanks to the efforts of the late Mike Wareham, in 2009 the BVH Committee was able to obtain a grant of £5,498 from Defra/COMMA (The Community Aggregates Fund of Action for Communities in Rural England) to meet much of the total cost of £10,998 for providing outside lighting to the Hall and the resurfacing of the car park areas. This work finally made good the primitive initial surfacing that had been installed in 1986. The money came from Defra's *Aggregate Levy Sustainability Fund* and so once again there was a link to the village's rich endowment of gravel.

## Ladies Toilet and Kitchen Upgrade – 2010

24 years after the Hall was opened both main toilets had begun to show their age and also to attract no small number of complaints! So, projects

were developed to provide major upgrades to these but also to the smaller of the two kitchens in the Hall. Grant funding was initially sought from WREN (for £10,634); Rural Initiatives of WDC (for £10,621) and Awards for All (for £3,915) to combine all three of these components into one larger project with an estimated total cost of £27,667: that cost rose on completion to over £33,000. Eventually the work had to be split with the work on the male toilets being delayed for a further 3-4 years. The main component namely the refit of the lady's toilet involved the gutting of the old facilities, new cubicle units, the fitting of modern floor-mounted WC units, wall-mounted hot air driers, new wall tiling and safety flooring and diffused lighting under a suspended celling. The work on the smaller kitchen involved the fitting of new cabinets and worktops, the installation of an under-the-counter fridge, a new cooker, new wall tiling and a heavy duty floor covering.

## *Main Kitchen Upgrade - 2011*

As noted above the major extension of the Hall as carried out in 1999 created the second but much larger kitchen with which today's users are familiar. But some 12 years after that extension, the Committee of BVH felt that we should embark on a major upgrade of the equipment, the flooring and the décor of that room. This upgrade was achieved starting with design and quotation in 2010. Work was completed by our contractors – Modern Homes of Leamington Spa in 2011 at a total cost of some £12,230 and it produced the high quality package of appliances, working surfaces etc. that we see today. These facilities in turn have made the Hall far more attractive for major functions such as weddings and larger parties. Once again considerable financial help was forthcoming from WREN.

## *Male Toilet and Showers - 2012*

This work was finally possible in 2012 at a total cost of £14,748. The project comprised the complete stripping out of the existing gent's toilet and changing facilities; the installation of new flooring, new urinals and basins; the relocation of hand driers and mirrors; the building of new toilet closets; improvement of drainage via installation of a new gully; the installation of new interior wall and benching and modification of the electrics – including the fitting of sensors to urinals to improve water usage volumes. The work made a big difference in that it completely renewed an old (25 years) facility that was increasingly unsightly and unsanitary (especially odours). The slight redesign of the interior structure also made for somewhat more usable space enabling larger numbers of people to use the changing facilities at the same time. The contract for this work was won by another well-known local builder namely Macham Contractors headed by Moat Close resident Steve Kingham.

Financial support to the tune of £3,000 was obtained from the Warwick District Council's – Rural and Urban Capital Improvement Grants, but once again WREN was the main source of financing contributing £8,500.



*Figure 20: New Male Changing Room and Showers*

## Later Improvements

This 26 years of pretty frantic activity upgrading, enhancing and modernising the 1986 Hall had ensured that by 2012 it was in very good shape to meet the needs and expectations of the modern generation of villagers – most would no doubt be appalled if they still had to make do with the cramped, cold, damp, and unsanitary alternative of the old Reading Room! But enhancements have continued and I list below just a few of the more recent ones of which I am aware.

- When the Clarendon Practice ceased its local Bubbenhall surgery in 2015, the Committee of BVH raised funds to re-fit the former surgery into a more general purpose meeting room. Today this room also houses files for both the BVH and the Parish Council.

- At about the same time, the entrance lobby was redecorated and the, by now disgusting, woollen carpet was replaced by modern functional floor-tiling.
- In 2019, as literally his last act for the Hall, the late-Graham Johnson installed new windows and patio doors on the side of the main hall facing the Playing Field: this was to permit a much easier flows as between the Hall and fields for some summer events.
- By the time of my completing this short history, users should also see a set of new chairs in the Hall replacing the upholstered chairs that some 15 years ago had been obtained free of charge from the Ryton Police College that was undergoing its own refurbishment.
- Finally and inevitably older electrical and other installations and appliances either wear out or fall foul of more modern regulations. So in 2019 it was necessary to spend several thousand pounds on upgrades - largely invisible to users – and especially on the electrical wiring that by then was 34 years old.

Note should also be taken here of the important work that has gone on in more recent years in parallel to developments in and around the Village Hall itself. Mention should be made in particular of the work spearheaded by Steve Haynes under the general heading of *Youth Space*. Specifically back in 2012, Steve initiated a focus group of young people from the village to develop new facilities and activities targeted mainly at teenagers. In 2013, that group embarked on a 3-year phased project to provide such activities – e.g. the tennis court resurfacing to allow for games other than tennis to be played (whilst retaining tennis facilities); the new skate board runs; the facilities for dri-play soccer and basketball. The project was realised much as envisaged again with significant financial

help from both the WDC and WREN. Kelly Sibley the International Table Tennis player – herself brought up in Bubbenhall - and Tom Morrison (aged 12) also from Bubbenhall officially declared this new and exciting facility open in September 2013.

As a result young people from Bubbenhall and the surrounding villages are now free to take part in football, tennis, basketball and cricket at the new facility as well as try out their skills at skateboarding completely free of charge and without the need for any prior booking.

Although the Village Hall was not involved directly with the development of this project, it is reasonable to assume that without the Hall's existence it may not have happened!

# 8. Final Words

Having been involved with both the Reading Room and the Village Hall in one way or another for over 35 years, it is with much pleasure that I present one final picture. Figure 21 shows the crowd at the very well-attended Carol Service held in the extended main hall in December 2019 (an event seen there in all recent years). This provides an indication in just one photograph of both the large number of people who now enjoy the use of the Hall, and of course of the lingering legacy of Church-related activities that still go on there: the Rev. Harrison would no doubt be pleased to see this!

The village of Bubbenhall has had a long and fascinating history from its appearance in the Doomsday Book – William the Conqueror's great survey of the Nation in 1086 - until this second decade of the 21st millennium. For the vast majority of that period - almost 1,000 years - the village was essentially a community of agriculturalist dominated by a limited number of landowners and tenant farmers; most of its population dependent for their livelihoods on farm or farm-related activities; and with very little mobility either geographically or socially. For most people low incomes, poor quality housing and very low expectations would have been the norm. Social arrangements at least until the latter part of the C19th century would have been essentially hierarchical with living standards generally low and certainly very unequal. Worse still, as statements from prominent village figures of the time evidence very clearly, it was expected that the prevailing social order was at that time cast in stone. For example, the shocking statement quoted earlier that one main purpose of teaching the village children was *"that the poor should accept their inferior position in life as part of the Divine plan".*



*Figure 21: Christmas Carol Concert December 2019*

In this short book the telephoto lens has been placed on the period from 1878 when the Reading Room first opened for the use of villagers until the present day. (Some historical perspective is seen by noting that this period starts just a few years after Abraham Lincoln had delivered his Gettysburg Address). Although that period of 142 years constitutes only a fraction of the village's total history, it is an incredibly significant period in that it has seen the economic and social circumstances of the people of Bubbenhall transformed in a manner that previously could not have been imagined let alone realised. The village community today comprises not only a much larger total population than before but also one characterised by a much greater diversity of skills, occupations and ethnic origin. Agriculture has long faded in significance as the main source of livelihoods. For some years

from the 1950s onwards, manufacturing industry was perhaps the dominant replacement. But today the service industries – many related to the new IT and communication technologies as well as the traditional services such as teaching, medicine, banking and the law – now figure much more prominently in the careers of the Bubbenhall population as indeed they do in the Nation as a whole. These structural changes have been associated with previously unimaginable improvements in average incomes and wealth as well as in much greater social equality and inclusiveness.

I like to think that the gradual evolution of the Reading Room – both in terms of the functions which from time-to time it supported, as well as its physical condition – and its painfully slow morphing into today's modern Village Hall, provides a story-line that communicates much about the see - change in the Bubbenhall communities that these bricks and mortar were put together to serve. The reader will judge whether this is a reasonable analogy or a mere flight of fancy! But quite obviously, a history constructed around just two village buildings, is necessarily incomplete. So I finish by expressing the hope that the few insights that I have been able to provide may encourage others to delve into other aspects of the village's fascinating historical experiences and spell these out more fully than this small book is able to do.

Alan R Roe

June 2020

# Annex 1: Memories of the Reading Room after 1945

## *The 1940s onwards*

Vicky Airey notes that the entrance to the Reading Room comprised double doors painted light brown. Usually Mrs. Summerton would bustle out from somewhere at the back of the house, always quiet but smiling and in her pinny. The actual Reading Room area at the front of the house, looking out over the road and the hedge round the Green, seemed always rather cold and spartan. As far as I remember it had a tiled floor. The main room was on the right as one went into the house. On the wall backing onto the entrance hall was a framed grey image of a First World War soldier in attacking posture with fixed bayonet – possibly used originally as a recruitment or propaganda poster. On the wall by the window was a large-scale map of Bubbenhall from the Baginton Estate Sale of October 11th, 1918, with all the field names on it.

The hall behind the Three Horse Shoes had larger premises than the Reading Room, so children's Christmas parties took place there – I remember the first one I went to very well, since there was jelly! Mrs. Jarvis, the farmer's wife from Yew Tree Farm was very kind and loved children, and she played an important part in bringing about that party soon after the War. The Reading Room, on the other hand, was on the whole used for smaller gatherings. The doctor's surgery was held there, I think twice a week, when Dr. Kearney and/or his partners from the Clarendon Street practice in Leamington came out to the village. The Women's Institute also met there.



Mary Long MBE has probably lived longer in Bubbenhall than any other living person having been born here in 1932. For over 30 years Mary delivered the post around the village supported in the later years by her husband John. She was awarded the MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List of 1998 for her services to the Post-Office and her charitable work for the community of Bubbenhall. She remembers the regular whist drives at the Reading Room as well as the visits to the Doctor.

Nan Liney recalls the rather cold conditions experienced when visiting the upstairs floor of the Reading Room to consult with the doctor. She also has vivid memories of not wanting to venture out on a typical Monday: this being when the carts came round to collect the night soils from the various privies in the village. The smell she recalls was atrocious!

Cyril Hancock has lived in the village on-and-off since 1943 – for many years in Moat Close. He well remembers the large motorbike ridden by Harry Summerton distinguished,he recalls, because of its shaft drive. He also remembers visiting the doctors surgeery but says that he himself never made much use of the Room beyond that.

Rosemary King (Wendy Paget) remembers going down to the Reading Room sitting on the carrier on the back of her mother's bike. "My old grid" she called it. They free-wheeled down Pit Hill from Glebe Farm, where they lived. We collected our ration books there - I think mine was green

when I was tiny, then, when I was five, I got a blue one- a big milestone. I think our identity cards were also issued in the Reading Room- buff for an adult, green for a child. My ID number was QMMB15- we had to memorise this in case of an invasion. We went down every week to collect bottles of cod liver oil and concentrated orange juice. All children received these to keep us healthy. I hated the cod liver oil, but the orange juice was just lovely. You diluted it with water for a delicious drink, but it was at its most delectable eaten undiluted on pancakes.




My impression of the building was unpleasant- cold, dark, brown lino floors, unwelcoming. I didn't want to stay there any longer than necessary. Never really understood why it was called the "Reading Room"; I was an only child on an isolated farm, and my hunger for books to read was unrelenting. Yet I don't remember there being any books to borrow at the Reading Room at that time - perhaps other residents can put me right here- was there any sort of a library?

## *The 1970s and 1980s*

Dorothy (Dot) Sibley . We moved into the village in the late 1960s – among the first residents of the new houses in Moat Close. I recall the poster of the First World War soldier in the entance hall and also a map of land allocations at the end of that War. I have memories of regular jumble sales and meetings of the Parish Council. But there was also an old organ there – pale green from memory – this was sometimes played by Mrs Sharp's mother while we waited for the Doctor. I myself started a junior football club partly to give some of my sons another activity. It revived a game that had been played by a village team certainly in the 1920s when

Jack Sibley – my father-in-law - was the team coach. The junior team had no proper kit and lost quite a few of its games. But later I was approached to see if the name Bubbenhall FC could be adopted by a new senior team. I agreed on condition that the new team would provide the juniors with some proper kit. The senior team went on to be quite succesful with at least one of its players beings scouted by major league clubs.

Sue Wareham. Our move to Bubbenhall from Kenilworth in 1978 was a strange but happy experience for our family. I still maintain that we made more friends in Bubbenhall in ten months, than we made in Kenilworth in 10 years! We were one of the first families to move into the second phase of Bryants Farthings Estate and my daughter Hannah was the first of 10 babies born in 1979. We arrived at about the time of the big refurbishment of the Reading Room. I remember leaving my husband Michael to babysit on an extremely cold and snowy Saturday while I joined the decorating team. But despite all our efforts, the Reading Room remained a cold inhospitable place and it was easy to find excuses not to go to meetings there. In complete contrast the new Hall when we built it was somewhere we all wanted to be, we were all very proud of it and wanted it to do well. I well remember the auction sale in 1986. I was in the kitchen with Anne (Trentham) and Caroline (Grey) , leaning through the hatch as there were so many people there we couldn't get into the main room. As the bidding went higher and higher we were holding our breath and as soon as the hammer went down we clapped and were literally jumping up and down! It was fun getting the new Hall up and running, sorting out the curtains and bits and bobs which were needed. I still think of the Village Hall when I see the green 'Beryl' china we chose.

It was such a privilege to be guided by Alan Gibson. He would encourage all of us to get on with any job which was needed, but he was always in the thick of it himself.

Lynn Brown moved into the Reading Room with her husband Bill in early September 1986. They bought it at the auction held in August that year – their intention being to convert it into a lovely family home. This was a difficult task she recalls. The whole house was covered in practical, but very ugly, very dark, lino. The cast iron fireplace to the left was boarded up and there was a huge colourful mural of very large butterflies and bees on the wall above. The lean to kitchen, to the left of the central stairs beyond this front room, was tiny and had woodlice crawling up the walls. To the right of the stairs, the original room had been divided to form a narrow hallway leading straight to the back door, with two small areas leading off this and each containing toilet and wash hand basin. Upstairs were three rooms, the front one to the left still housed the doctor's pedestal desk with a drawer containing syringes. The room to the right had many holes in the plaster and lath ceiling. This had been a waiting room and youth club area. Both of these rooms had their original cast iron fireplaces. A third room at the back had been divided up to provide a communal shower, two toilets and two washbasins. The loft floor was completely covered in old black straw, which had been used as make-do insulation. Outside the house, the gravelled area was full of nettles, brambles and rogue hawthorn. A red telephone kiosk stood to the left at the front of the house.

# Annex 2: Main Timelines

1086 Doomsday Book records "Bubenhalle" as a "five hide vill"

1243 The fief of Bubenhalle largely held by Earl of Warwick

1248 St Giles Bubbenhall given to the joint diocese of Lichfield and Coventry

1515 Sale of the Manor of Bubbenhall to Sir Edward Greville

1570s Manor passes to Wootton family

1717 Manor conveyed to William Bromley by the Earl of Chesterfield

1726 Enclosures Acts consolidating farm land in BUBNELL alias Bubbenhall

1833 Frederick D. Maurice becomes a curate for Bubbenhall

1844 (Old) Rectory built by Rev. Charles J. Penny

1835-1856 Final years of the prebendary system

1864 Bubbenhall declared a Rectory under the Bishop of Worcester

1864 Arthur Fanshaw became the first Rector

1864 Bubbenhall School built and opened

1876 The house that became the Reading Room was established

1878 Edward H. Harrison became the second Rector

1878 The Reading Room opened for village use

1894 The first of regular Parish Meetings held

| | |
|---|---|
| 1895 | Night School in Reading Room begins |
| 1918 | Auction sale of large Bromley-Davenport holdings in the area |
| 1933 | New Trust Deed for the Reading Room |
| 1933 | Conveyance of Reading Room to Henry and W.H. Grimes |
| 1940s | First discussions of need for a Village Hall |
| 1946 | Village Hall (Victory) Fund established |
| 1952 | Playing Field Agreement |
| 1953 | Playing Field opened |
| 1971 | Decision to defer Village Hall and improve the Reading Room |
| 1972 | New Farthings Housing development extended village population |
| 1977 | Closure Order issued against the Reading Room |
| 1979 | Major new Reading Room renovation completed |
| 1985 | New Reading Room Committee formed under Major Alan Gibson |
| 1986 | Reading Room sold at auction for £55,500 |
| 1986 | Bubbenhall Village Hall built and opened |
| 1999 | Major Village Hall Extension |
| 2006 | External Veranda completes the external profile of the Village Hall |
| 2009 | Major Car Park improvements and extension |

2011 New Main Kitchen Upgrade to modern standards

2019 Graham Johnson completes his last major work on the Hall.

## NOTES

[1] The first village meeting was held on April 9th 1894 but was adjourned and the decision to establish a regular Parish Meeting rather than a Parish Council was taken at the later meeting held on 16th May 1894.

[2] This was the Norman name for the village. The Saxon name had been *Bobenhull* and was one of several in the estates of Edward the Confessor (b. 1003) - the penultimate Saxon King of England. Bobenhull is the spelling that can still be seen on the prebendal stall (or seat) in Lichfield Cathedral.

[3] In the Doomsday record of 1086 it is recorded as the "five hide vill of Bubbenhalle*".* In earlier Saxon times the village comprised *"five hides whereof the woods were two furlongs in length and two in breadth"* Source: Frances E, Twigger, *The History of Bubbenhall*, 1969.

[4] It is thought that she was born in the ancient Manor House – the site of the ancient Saxon Hall - and still present today in much modernised form.

[5] The word prebend comes from the Latin word "*praebenda*" which means allowance.

[6] In 1248 St Giles Bubbehalle was given to the joint diocese of Lichfield and Coventry by the Prior of Coventry in exchange for St. Michael's Church, Coventry: then a monastery but later the cathedral.

[7] However, the prebendal estates and their history was not standard in any way. For example, during the Commonwealth period under Oliver Cromwell (1649-1660) Roger Fleetwood, became prebend of "Boobenhull" in 1640, but was deprived of his office in 1642. Roger Fleetwood deserted his cure (he was also Vicar of Hanbury, Staffs) and joined the Royalist Army some time before 1646.

[8] It is understood that "firmars", or farmers of the tythes, ran the prebendal lands by written agreement with the prebend from the early seventeenth century onwards. By the late seventeenth century they were known as "leaseholders"

[9] Victoria Airey, *Bubbenhall Church and its People*, 1979. She documents in some detail the physical assets and land of the prebend at least in the C17th. This is based in large part on her careful scrutiny of the so-called "glebe terriers" which are documents compiled by Church of England clergymen from 1571 onwards (according to *www.buildinghistory.org/buildings/parsonages.shtm*). However, the earliest terrier for Bubbenhall was that of 1682. These documents detail the lands and property in the parish owned by the Church of England and held by a clergyman as part of his endowment (the glebe) which provided the means by which the incumbent (rector, vicar or perpetual curate) could support himself and his church. Typically, but not universally, the glebe would comprise the vicarage or rectory, fields and the church building itself, its contents and its graveyard. The word "terrier" is derived from the Latin *terra*, "or earth".

[10] Frances Twigger's history reports that from the C14th, the Manor passed through the female heirs of Joan (Fitzwith) until a sale in 1515 to Sir Edward Greville, and then to Sir Edward Belknap, and then by descent to the Danetts, Sir Anthony Cook, and eventually during the reign of Elizabeth 1st to the Wootton family (an ancient British family but with their early origins in Kent). It then went by marriage into the family of Sir John Tufton and finally in 1717 was conveyed to William Bromley by the Earl of Chesterfield and remained there with what later become the Bromley-Davenports (an ancient family with large estates throughout the UK but based mainly in Cheshire) until the estate sale of 1918.

[11] Information from Warwick District Council notes that the "*Parliamentary enclosure of the old open fields - Grove Field and the Harps to the south east, Ludgate Field to the north east and Cloud Field to the west took place in 1726 (which was the second earliest in Warwickshire). The land was divided among the different manorial tenants and two major new farms were built with surrounding blocks of land belonging to them. These were Wood Farm, built some time before 1809, and Waverley Wood Farm, probably in embryonic form in 1809. Otherwise the old centrally situated farm buildings were still in operation, but now had rationally organised blocks of land belonging to them; eg Yew Tree Farm, belonging to William Paget, had land in Paget's Lane.*" Source: https://warwickdc.oc2.uk/readdoc/66/6

[12] Airey, pg 3.

[13] Vicky Airey in a recent entry for the Bubbenhall web site notes the following. "*In seeking to establish a Rectory house in the parish, the Rev. Charles Joseph Penny (1841-62) had no significant regular income, and had to rely on asking for funding (or "augmentation") from the Church Commissioners and from the Queen Anne's Bounty. The prebend in fact contributed £100 and Queen Anne's Bounty £400 to the building of the Rectory, whilst the incumbent himself paid £200 from his own pocket. Even then the Rev. Penny seems to have had personally to bear the expense of drainage for the house, which appears to have been built c. 1844."* NB The Queen Anne's Bounty was established by various Acts of Parliament during the reign of Queen Anne (1665-1714) to augment the incomes of the poorer clergy of the Church of England.

[14] There is a memorial plaque to Rev. Harrison in St Giles church and the five exquisite stained glass windows still to be seen in the chancel were placed there in his memory by his sisters.

[15] This comment is based on a letter shown to me by Vicky Airey. It was written in November 1878 by the Rev Harrison to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners requesting the purchase of land and property totalling one and three quarter acres below the Rectory. That land included the public house – the Malt Shovel. As well as looking for a much extended garden area for the benefice, his letter refers to several perceived negatives of the pub that its purchase and closure would, the writer claims remove. His complaints about the pub included the following: the footpath used by frequenters of the public-house undermines the privacy of the Rectory gardens; the bowling/skittle alley overlooking the gardens is sometimes a cause of much annoyance; and so too are the games and other amusements indulged in by large summer parties from Coventry! Fortunately, the good reverend failed to achieve the full parcel of land and property that he was requesting and the Malt Shovel continues to prosper some 140 years later with the modern-day clergy having a much more tolerant attitude.

[16] I think I may be the only resident on the "new" Bryant estate to still receive some mail with *The Farthings* as part of the address: a consequence of giving out my "new" address to a few relatives back in 1972.

[17] The photograph is courtesy of Frenchay Village Museum, South Gloucestershire. (Maurice spent much of his childhood in Frenchay after his father was appointed minister of the Frenchay Unitarian Chapel). Scanned image and text are by Jacqueline Banerjee.

[18] Vicky Airey spells out the details as follows: "*In July 1866 the Rev. Harrison had bought the land from Mr William Howlett Grimes who had some thirty years previously bought the land from Mr John Orton, miller and owner of the Malt Shovel who in turn bought it in 1801 from Thomas Jeacock."* (Airey 197,9 pg. 3.)

[19] They are now known as Springhurst and Top House respectively. Henry Murcott Grimes headed the second of these households and his apparently very independent elder sister Elizabeth headed the first of them living there with sister Mabel.

[20] Frances Twigger's history indicates that there was already a mill in Bubbenhall at the time of the Doomsday survey and probably in the same location as the Orton mill.

[21] Vicky Airey notes that *"churchwardens were among the most respectable members of the village community along with the village constables. Their regular paid assistant, the parish clerk, was often the man who fulfilled the old office of Headborough or assistant to the Constable of the village. ……His main duties were cleaning the church, washing surplices, chiming the bell and winding the clock."*

[22] In the 18th century charity schools had been established at both Stoneleigh and Cubbington, with some places for Bubbenhall children. In Kay Morrison's 1975 study she suggests that money from the Hannah Murcott charity (established in 1775 with £100 mainly for the purpose of educating poorer children) may have been used to provide some form of charity education in the village itself. She

notes also the common view of that time that such schools had the aim of …"*the reformation of the manners of the poorer classes, the reduction of crime through the teaching of religion and the teaching that the poor should accept their inferior position in life as part of the Divine plan"*!!! In the early 19th century the school which by then was established at Baginton also took some Bubbenhall children. However, less than half of the 70 to 80 school age children of Bubbenhall were able to go to school in the 1860s. This changed only in 1864 when the Rector managed to establish the village school in Bubbenhall, which continued until it was closed down in the face of much local opposition in 1999.

[23] Source: Airey 1979 pg. 12

[24] Morrison 1975 pg. 8.

[25]Eight years later in 1870, the Education Act was introduced. "*This Elementary Act was the most workable piece of compromise legislation in English nineteenth century history. It did not introduce free or compulsory education but it made both possible. It brought the state into education as never before*" . Source: Lawson J. and H. Silver, *A Social History of Education in England*, Methuen, London 1973, pg. 314

[26] Source: quoted in Lowndes, G.A.N, *A Silent Revolution*, Oxford University Press, 1970, pg 24.

[27] Morrison 1975

[28] The Pisford Charity was founded by William Ford in 1509 (initially providing the almshouses known as Ford's Hospital in Greyfriars Lane, Coventry) and soon afterwards was extended by William Pisford who was a grocer, and also Mayor of Coventry in the year 1500. In 1528 the charity purchased five cottages and land in Bubbenhall as a form of endowment for the almshouses. The Bubbenhall village web site records that these five cottages were located next to and included the Three Horse Shoes and continued down that side of the road as far as and including The Cottage. They belonged to Ford's Hospital until the late 19th century. That

same charity was also endowed with lands in Coventry, Foleshill, Keresley and Weston under Wetherley.

[29] According to the draft will of Thomas Walton, of April 1850, held by Coventry Archives. …."*a Bubbenhall house occupied by the testator's son-in-law William Butcher will be held by trustees for the lifetime of the testator's daughter Sarah Butcher with the remainder to her husband".* This would seem to be the site of the house later to become the Reading Room. But it seems likely that there were originally two dwellings – those of William Elliott and Ann Elliott – which were then demolished and replaced by one new dwelling, which eventually became the Reading Room (note from Vicky Airey).

[30] Understood to mean houses with land and adjacent buildings.

[31] This would have been W H Grimes the father of Henry.

[32] It must have been a somewhat grand event since it was opened by William Bromley the Lord of the Manor.

[33] *"The results of strong drink were patent in disgusting forms at the appropriate times in most of the streets and market places of Britain (in Victorian England). In the background there was always present the degradation, the cruelty, particularly to the weak and defenceless, which resulted from drunkenness. The cause of its prevalence was no doubt an unfortunate historical tendency made much worse by intolerable living conditions. In many cases indeed the terms on which life was offered is a complete explanation of any drunkenness*". — J. Kitson Clark, *The Making of Victorian England.* In the Bubbenhall Church Newsletter of November 1885 the Rev Fortescue writes …*" I have been very anxious ever since my residence amongst you, to bring before you the subject of Temperance".* That same month he announced special sermons to be preached on the subject as well as a special follow-up meeting to discuss a paper on the topic that he circulated to all village households. He even begs people to attend the meetings *"as a great personal favour to myself".* In an earlier Church Newsletter there is a recipe for a refreshing summer drink but the added words …. "*Not beer, for beer makes a man much hotter, and gives him no strength. It gives him a spurt, but the*

*spurt quickly goes off, and lessens the working power. Beer also runs away with a good deal of money, which could be much better spent. Many men spend as much as sixpence a day in beer or spirits. And sixpence a day laid by for 20 years, comes with interest to £257, which would buy a Freehold House and Garden."*

[34] In the Church Newsletter of September 1892, the Rev Fortescue announces a special service and in doing so he makes the following (by today's standards) somewhat peculiar statement… *"I very much hope that as many Odd Fellows as possible will show their true spirit of Odd Fellowship by attending the service at 11.30 am".*

[35] What would today's Ofsted make of this report on the school from the Church Newsletter of June 1880. "*The infants, in many instances, answered brightly and well, and repeated their prayers reverently and accurately. Division I was weak in the Catechism, both in text and illustration. The slate work of Division II was well done and an excellent knowledge of the Christian Year was shown*".

[36]Miss Twigger's history merely notes that "*It is held under the control of the Charity Commissioners by a small group of trustees who administer its economic affairs.*"

[37] I am grateful to Vicky Airey for drawing my attention to these records.

[38] This is the son of the other William Howlett Grimes referred to earlier.

[39] The Eaton family first appear in the Bubbenhall records in the Census Schedule of 1851 where John Eaton (originally from Buckinghamshire) the father of Alfred is shown as a carpenter. He moved here some time before 1851 in part because he married a girl from the village

[40] There are also several mentions of Alfred Eaton in the accounts of various Churchwardens. The earliest was in 1880: "*A. Eaton for work at clock case 5/6d*", and the latest from 1940: "*A. Eaton parish clerk".* In 1914 Alfred Eaton also received a year's salary as sexton etc. £7-6-0.

[41] This information derives from an interview that Vicky conducted with a Mr. Bert Timms in the 1950s

[42] The earlier picture has been provided by Lynn Brown and it is my juxtaposition of two photographs taken from two different positions. The second is from the collection of Vicky Airey.

[43] The Bubbenhall Village web site also records the sad fact that Corporal Arthur James Mills of the 8th West Yorkshire Regiment, was killed in action near Cambrai on Friday, September 27th, 1918. He had lived in one of these cottages with his widowed mother, four brothers and one sister. Before going to war he was a farm labourer as indeed were his brothers. He died aged 21 years.

[44] We can note also that he acknowledges the payment of £40 by his predecessor as a loan although there is no other evidence that the Rev. Harrison ever saw it as such. But his confidence in being able to find the £40 (nearly £5,000 in today's money) suggests that there was an effective charging system for the evening classes and other uses of the Room.

[45] These Minutes were compiled in 1994 by R S (Dicky) Friend who at the time was the Clerk to the Parish Council. They were printed and published *pro bono* by Clive Trentham – a local Coventry-based printer (Industrial Press): Clive still resides in Church Road, Bubbenhall. See *One Hundred Years of the Parish of Bubbenhall*: *Meetings of the Parish Assembly from April 1894 to April 1994.* Private publication, August 1994.

[46] Following the passing of the Parish Council Act early in 1894, village residents in Bubbenhall decided to meet in order to ascertain what were the wishes of parishioners as regards the Act. The second such meeting held on 16th May 1894 resolved …. "*that a Parish Meeting suffice for this Parish, the Parish Council being considered unnecessary".* It was a *full fifty years* later that a Parish Council such as the one we have today was finally established. In the interim, the periodic Parish Meetings to which all were invited was the main vehicle of local decision-making. It was not until the Parish Meeting held on 26th March 1946 that that Meeting

decided to "*write to the Warwickshire County Council for permission for a Parish Council to be formed."*

[47] As regards technical education, mention should be made here of the combined influence of the *Technical Institutes Act* of 1889 that enabled local authorities to levy a small tax to support technical and manual instruction; from April 1900 the government recognition and funding of higher elementary schools that provided education from the age of 10 to 15; and the Conservative *Balfour Act* of 1902 that among other things led to a rapid growth of secondary schools, with over 1,000 opening by 1914, including 349 for girls.

[48] The "romantic" poetry movement of that time frequently emphasised the tranquillity of the pastoral over the urban. The most notable exponents were William Wordsworth and Percy Bysshe Shelley

[49] The Minutes of the Parish meeting held on 30th March 1932 noted that "*Mr Bourne and the Chairman were appointed to try to get electric power into the Parish as soon as possible. Mr T.R Twigger promised to canvas the Parish for more consumers."* But the subsequent meeting held in March 27th 1933, noted that …"*A representative of the Leicestershire and Warwickshire Electric Power Company attended the meeting but he was unable to give any definitive information except that the power would be available to consumers before next winter."* Vicky Airey reports that even a few years later in 1937 the Rev William Sneath, applied unsuccessfully to the church authorities for installation of electricity at Glebe Farm (where Rosemary King, née Paget, grew up). Electricity only initially arrived there more than 20 years later!

[50] The Minutes of the Parish meeting held on24th March 1960 noted that… "*With regard to the piped water supply, it was reported that the work on mains laying was due to commence in April. The work to the road drain had been completed satisfactorily."* In fact that work did begin in 1960 with the laying of the first pipes for mains water. This meant that people no longer had to rely on the spring ("the Spout") or the water tapped from there to standpipes outside the Cottage, Yew Tree Farm, and the Council houses – previously only those people who had a well in their garden were able to avoid the daily duty of going with buckets to collect

water. Another essential facility, the sewage scheme, was completed in 1965. Before this the night soil lorry used to come round weekly to empty the privies.

[51] The position of 'Overseer of the Poor' was created originally by England's (old) Poor Laws initially in 1598 (by the *Act for the Relief of the Poor*). This and successor laws required that each parish elect two "overseers". They were responsible for administering to the needs of the poor. This included managing a budget by collecting the poor tax from parish members and later, following the reforms of 1795 the distribution of 'outdoor' relief: a supplement to a poor rural labourer's wage with a top-up paid from the poor rates based on the price of bread and the number of children. Notionally the *Poor Law Reform Act* of 1834 (new Poor Law) abolished the post of overseer of the poor, but it seems from Bubbenhall's own Parish records that residues of that role still remained in play at the turn of the C20th.

[52] Citing Lowndes 1970 she notes that *"in boys' schools every sum wrong, every spelling mistake, every blot, every question which could not be answered as the fateful day of examinations drew near, was liable to be visited by the stroke of the cane"* pg20. But her account also shows that while Miss Mary Ruck was the mistress of Bubbenhall School from 1898 to 1921, the cane was never needed; Ms Ruck's mere presence being enough to keep discipline.

[53] It was only in 1896 that the restrictions (imposed by the Locomotive Acts) on using mechanical vehicles on highways was lifted and only in 1900 that the first four wheel British car was produced. Although, UK car production reached 14,000 units by 1910, production virtually stopped with the war of 1914. The transport problem was compounded by the poor state of many local roads. For example the Parish Meeting of 15th April 1919 noted that … "*the roadway there (at the lower end of the village where cesspools were located) was always in a very dirty state and, at times, unusable, and the road to Ryton especially near Mr Grimes house was in bad state of repair."*

[54] Morrison -1975 pg 42

[55] Vicky Airey notes as follows…."*I did it myself! Always hated the street*

*lighting when it came. Your eyes got used to the dark, you were used to not having electrically-lit roads, and you could see the stars and the Milky Way! There were not many car owners at that time, so it wasn't dangerous!"*

[56] Image from Warwickshire County Records.

[57] There was certainly no mains water or sewage to the Room prior to the mid-1970s. It was almost unbelievable (to me at least) to learn that the Parish meeting of 14th August 1973 notes that… "*The Chairman said that it was hoped to provide a basin, jug and towels for the use of the doctor"* indicating that the necessary water and sewage works had still not been carried out even by that late date.

[58] There was a proposal at that meeting … "*to consider how to use the money left from the Memorial Fund for the purpose of restoring the Reading Room.*" It is thought that this refers to the monies left over from monies raised to install the Memorial plaque on the north wall of the nave in the Church, commemorating in the first instance the Fallen of the First World War.

[59] The word "*Victory*" in this title comes and goes in the Minutes of the various Parish Meetings. It is thought that this refers to the victory in WWII.

[60] However, apparently for the first time in March 1948 the Parish Meeting decided to hold a Flower Show and Fete with any proceeds from the day being donated to the Village Hall Fund. That generosity is recorded as being repeated in 1950. Vicky Airey recalls that there were one or two Flower Shows and Fetes (held outdoors), as opposed to Church Bazaars (held indoors), usually at the Hall behind the Three Horse Shoes.

[61] It also debated the issue of the charges that the Reading Room was then levying for its use by the Parish Council (2/- per meeting). The Parish Meeting argued that the use of the Room should be free to them and proposed that payment not be paid. But the riposte from a Trustee for the Reading Room was to the effect that if payment was not made, then "*the doors would be locked*".

[62] By all accounts Parish Meeting were often robust/rude affairs. Vicky Airey notes that .. "*Parish Council meetings were noisy, bad tempered affairs where the councillors and the public might well shout and swear at each other. Bubbenhall was a rough old place in those days!"* She observes also that her own father, who was on the Parish Council for a short while in the 1940s, gave up because … *"one just made enemies the whole time with other people in the village."*

[63] In the late 19th and early 20th centuries several sales of land and property by auction took place - the most notable being the Bromley-Davenport sale of 1918 - and several farms and units of land changed hands. This was an opportunity for tenant farmers such as Henry Grimes to become owners of land and farmhouses. With the breaking up of the large Baginton Estate in 1918, people were also able to buy these houses and cottages for the first time. At the same time the stability of the leaseholds which had often passed from generation to generation in the old village families ended. Source: https://warwickdc.oc2.uk/readdoc/66/6

[64] These names derive in part from the re-organisations associated with the Enclosures of the 1700s – see discussion above. Previously there was an open-fields system. However, similar names do also occur pre-Enclosure, e.g. in a glebe terrier of 1694. Examples are "Ludyat furlong" and "Clay Butts". However, in 1694 Ten Hills was probably called "Staniells". One of the three open fields was called Ludgate Field, the others being Grove Field and Cloud Field. There was also the church land, The Harps.

[65] My admittedly incomplete understanding is that his will was designed in part to safeguard Kathleen financially and as a consequence little money actually transferred to her until after the death of his wife in the 1960s. The probate record for Henry's wife shows a surprisingly small estate.

[66] This followed his meeting with the MD of the Hunt, Edmunds Brewery that at the time owned the Three Horseshoes. The Edmunds name is clearly visible on the photograph reproduced above as Figure 5.

[67] In July 1956 for example, the idea of transferring some of the Village Hall Funds to help pay for a Bus Shelter was once again proposed but again rejected.

[68] This followed the resignations of three previous Trustees namely Mr Dennis Ruck – the local butcher, Miss Kathleen Grimes – whose family had sold the Playing Field land to the Parish Council and a Mr Arthur E. Stidworthy, who at that time farmed Waverley Wood Farm off Weston Lane. His daughter, Megan, is remembered as having a milk round.

[69] Mrs Naylor was the wife of Richard Naylor who gained fame in 1957 by winning the BBC's first "*Be Your Own Boss*" competition (a precursor of today's Dragon's Den). Richard Naylor and his business partner Eddy Marlow both from GEC won £3,500 and the Naylors moved to Bubbenhall House shortly thereafter. The winning product was a high quality metal plating/finishing process that was of growing significance to the burgeoning electronics industries that increasingly required high quality precious metal finishes. The BBC prize enabled Naylor and Marlow to start the company Precious Metals Deposits (PMD Ltd.) and later PMD Chemicals Ltd. PMD which grew into a set of large and successful companies with engagements in telecommunications, computing, and the aerospace industries: including providing the finish on components involved in the outer skins of UK satellites. Today the PMD Group has a number of operating subsidiaries in the local area as well as one in India.

[70] Meetings at this time refer regularly to the first of these balances but not much to the second. So there is a slight confusion in my own mind as to the total funds available to the village for the various projects.

[71] Although the Parish's interlocutor for this was the Warwickshire Rural Community Council, the actual grants for this sort of purpose were at that time made by the Department of Education and Science.

[72] Minutes of Parish Meeting of May 1968

[73] But before that there had been some enthusiastic fund raising. By July 1969 Councillor Geoff. Glover was able to report that some £600 had been raised in

recent months thereby boosting the funds for the Reading Room project to about £900. Possibly buoyed by this improved financial position, meetings at this time began to once again hear voices in favour of developing a brand new hall on the Playing Fields and this was certainly discussed at several Parish Council meetings around this time.

[74] Apparently the Council had not read or properly understood the Playing Field Agreement shown as Figure 7 above (see clause 3c).

[75] Although christened "Horace", H.Y Williams was always known as "Bob". He worked at Rolls-Royce at Ansty. Prior to 1971 his wife Betty had run the village Post Office from their home at the Hollies before this relocated to the premises of Mrs Sayers near the Playing Fields. Bob and Betty later moved to Australia where in the course of a vacation travelling with the Wilkinsons (see next section), they were both tragically killed in a car accident. Their ashes are buried in Bubbenhall.

[76] Letter from WDC to H.Y Williams dated 26th August 1971

[77] Much was made in this new application to the Council of the fact that *"the present caretaker is elderly, and it is not considered reasonable to expect him to live entirely upstairs, with the burden if carrying fuel, ashes, groceries et, up and down the stairs".* Mr. Summerton also lacked piped water which was obviously a problem for him! However, as Vicky Airey pointed out to me… "*Harry Summerton would be quite used to the lack of piped water – a condition of life for all his generation in the village who did not have their own well. And the Spout was only just across the road!*" It is also the case as I understand it from Lynn Brown that he would have used a "night soil toilet" bucket and then possibly buried the product in the Pound.

[78] Both quotations are from the letter of HY Williams to the Rural District Council undated but probably July 1970.

[79] Mr E.B. Wilson lived at The Manor House and was Chair of the Bubbenhall Activities Committee. I have no firm knowledge of what this Committee was or did but deduce that it must have been a sub-Committee of the Parish Council.

[80] Mike was then a local dentist with a well-established practice in Leamington Spa. He treated many Bubbenhall residents over the next 10-20 years including myself and my family.

[81] David Jones was a personable individual– with the verbal skills of a very successful salesman. At the time he worked at a senior level for Proctor and Gamble. His presentation to the village had all the professionalism of a management consultant. Having myself been in attendance at that meeting I can testify to how persuasive were his ideas. He eventually left Bubbenhall to become the CEO of Courage Breweries in the Americas and the Caribbean basing himself for this purpose in Boca Raton, Florida. Our families enjoyed a most memorable holiday including a trip to Disneyworld in Orlando during his time in Florida.

[82] As a small historical curiosity the same meeting discussed the naming of streets in the village with there apparently being some problem about the street running from Lower End past the Three Horseshoes to the main road. The suggestion was made that this street be labelled "*Spout Hill*". I am told that the then-residents somewhat objected to this and asked instead for the alternative and slightly posher-sounding name of *Spring Hill*? The residents of Pit Hill being less numerous and perhaps less vociferous were left with *Pit Hill!*

[83] Before that on 12th August 1975, David Jones was able to write to Mr W.V Went – a Property Maintenance man of Moat Close - to authorise £328 of expenditure to carry out essential structural repairs to the roof, guttering and down-pipes.

[84] Letter dated 10th September 1977 from Mike Wilkinson to the Environmental Health Officer at Warwick District Council. That same letter stated that Mr Summerton was fully apprised of the situation. Mike Wilkinson commented later … "*Mr Summerton certainly was apprised, he foul-mouthed me in ripe Anglo-*

*Saxon at every encounter. But I understand that he was well pleased with his relocation later to Moat Close."*

[85] As well as being Clerk to the Parish Council, Dicky Friend was also Town Clerk to Warwick District Council which gave him a wide range of contacts in the Council whose staff, as a consequence were fully apprised of the situation of the Reading Room and its tenant. Mike Wilkinson records that … "*they helped me through the relevant planning, building and tenancy regulations over a period of several years culminating in the property being subject to the Closing Order and Mr Summerton being re-housed in a council bungalow in Moat Close."*

[86] Tom Leivers was an architect – but also a dental patient of Mike Wilkinson - who practised from the archway courtyard between 27 and 29 Clarendon Avenue, Leamington and who later bought and developed the small businesses courtyard at 27 Park St. Leamington that is still in use. Mike comments that… "*It was entirely due to his skill and knowledge that so much renovation was achieved at so low a cost. One of his advanced solutions was the application of a liquid rubber screed over the existing Victorian flagstones which had been laid directly onto the earth without any underlying damp-proofing."* One of the downsides of his installation of large amounts of necessary new underground pipework was that the Victorian building, having no substantial foundations began to subside at one side. The new owners from 1986 had to install some very deep concrete foundations to correct for this.

[87] A hand-written document found in the records also indicates a large number of personal contributions of equipment. These included kitchen units (Graham Wakefield); a cooker (Ray Morrison); dustbins (Bob Beale); a hoover (Barbara Willard); curtains (Lynn Tabner, Bill Willard, Pam Pollitt, Hilary Wiltshire, and Sue Wareham).

[88] Although a scout group had been using the Reading Room for some time – from the early 1970s at least.

[89] Source: Treasurer's receipts and payment book for the period December 1970 to October 1977.

[90] The opening cash balance as at January 1985 was £234; the projected rental income for the year was £595 (including £250 from Dr Freeman that remained under threat, and £125 from the Football Club) ; current expenditures were likely to be £636 and essential repairs would be at least £200.

[91] Minutes of meeting held on 5th March 1985.

[92] The files also included detailed drawings provided by Leofric Broadspan Buildings Ltd (LBBL) and dated 6th December 1983. These would have been commissioned by the previous Management Committee but seem to have received little subsequent attention.

[93] I am not aware of what lay behind this blocking proposal: presumably concern about noise and other disruptions to near-by residents.

[94] To the effect that the previous 1984 decision be upheld.

[95] This followed a request from the Parish Council to see a pegged out profile of the new Village Hall to clarify its size and location. Letter from Dicky Friend to Alan Gibson dated 9th May 1985.

[96] This was Laughton's and Sons - an old-established Birmingham metal-wares company. Alan was the Works Manager from 1962 until his retirement in 1988.

[97] It is noted that towards the end of this period some of the now regular events notably the Fruit and Flower Show, the Gala Day and the 100 Club had been hived off to separate management teams, and especially to what we now know as Bubbenhall Village Events (BVE). Hence the amounts that these activities raised are not shown in the Village Hall accounts. It is noted also that this was a period that predates the proliferation of the charity shops that we now see on all UK high streets. But there were still many needy people in the area and the Committee was always surprised at the large numbers of people that turned up for our several Jumble Sales to buy second hand clothes for a few pennies per item. I well

remember having to bank the proceeds often comprising plastic banking bags full of 1 and 2 penny coins.

[98] Letter from Warwick County Council to Bob Beale dated August 8th 1984.

[99] Reproduced by kind permission of Lynn Brown.

[100] This decision created some problems a few years later when an NHS safety audit of the Hall noted that the abrasive finish on the walls might be a risk to patients attending the doctor's surgery who were visually impaired. Fortunately they did not insist on any changes to the surfaces!

[101] £30,000 from the Reading Room sale, £6,000 from Fund Raising and around £5,000 from grants).

[102] The build was planned, delivered and paid for in four main stages.

[103] Graham Miles – a long-time resident in the village - was at the time the Highway Engineer for the County Council. He managed to obtain at low cost a large load of tarmac scrapings from a local road that was undergoing repair. These scrapings were then spread and bedded down to form an initial hard standing for the car park by a team of village residents directed by Graham Johnson.

[104] It was an early decision of the Management Committee to set lower (subsidised) charges for the regular village user groups – these being the main target of the Village Hall – relative to the charges for outside users.

[105] An educational placard now displayed on the Ryton Country park explains that the Bubbenhall gravel is technically referred to as the "*Baginton Sands and Gravel*". It was deposited during a period of warming in the Ice Age (500,000 years ago) by a powerful river namely the Bytham River that flowed from here to Baginton and on into the North Sea. A later cooling period deposited a large ice sheet over the area but when this too melted it left a deposit of very heavy clay that made the land very difficult to farm using medieval methods.

[106] The full reference is…. "BY THE COMMISSIONERS for putting in execution an Act of Parliament made in the twelfth year of His Majesty's (George 1st) reign entitled "AN ACT FOR INCLOSING SEVERAL COMMON FIELDS IN THE PARISH OF BUBNELL alias Bubbenhall IN THE COUNTY OF WARWICKSHIRE".

[107] I think (but am not sure) that this is the same set of fields shown on the map in Figure 6 above but there referred to as "Gravel Hill", "Gravel Meadows" and "Wood Knob/Farm".

[108] The modern-day local commercial gravel workings were always highly controversial and were actively contested/objected to by village lobbies at all stages.

[109] The initial idea of the architects to install sliding doors to separate the new part of the main hall from the original part was eventually abandoned to leave the final result of a large open space that present-day users of the Hall now enjoy.

## About the Author

Alan Roe moved to Bubbenhall with his family in March 1972 and, apart from two extended periods at the World Bank in Washington DC has lived here ever since. He has been on the Management Committee of the Reading Room and later the Village Hall since 1985 and was its Chairman for ten years. Alan is a professional economist with many years' experience as an academic economist and policy adviser. He began his career at the University of Wales, and later occupied positions at the University of Dar-es-Salaam and the University of Cambridge. Later he was a Visiting Professor of Economics at Washington University in the USA. He then taught economics for many years at the University of Warwick where he was also for a period the Chairman of Department. In 1994 he was appointed Principal Economist at the World Bank where he worked mainly on the economies of the Former Soviet Union. After leaving the World Bank in 2000, he returned part-time to Warwick University but also joined Oxford Policy Management (OPM) as Principal Economist and a Board Director. He continues in retirement to write extensively on topics of economic policy in the third world but also to provide ongoing support to the Management Committee of the Bubbenhall Village Hall.

