

'Sad Decline'

another village hall, goes to the wall

John Collett.

When writing the article that appeared in the June (2019) issue of the R&DN I never expected it to become a trilogy, but unfortunately it appears the die is already cast. For we now hear that the Pensax 'Thrift Shop' is to close at the end of this season which will also have serious implications for their village hall. But then I hear you say, "these articles are supposed to be about the history of Rock Parish" and you would be right, but in fact the Pensax village hall (where the thrift shop is based) is just within the boundary of the parish of Rock, and anyway this delightful little gem is in need of saving. We need this kind of facility in the local area, and for those who have not YET been, the friendly and welcoming atmosphere is great, and you might pick up a bargain or two while you are there. And if nothing else it is worth a visit just to sit in the Café area and have a chat with the cream of the parish. (that's a pun Peter, the cream is in the coffee !!).

But before you rush round there let me explain the history of 'how, why and where' Pensax Village Hall first arrived on the scene and the connection to it with the Thrift Shop. To do this we need to go back to around 1904, when Mr Samson Yarnold, owner of Hollins Colliery which at the time employed many of the local men, first voiced the idea that Pensax needed somewhere for the parishioners to gather and hold social events and meetings etc. i.e. in the form of a village hall of course. But as many of you will know it takes time to bring such plans to completion, and a lot of hard work raising funds, getting planning permission and acquiring land on which to build, however after 7 busy years the big day finally arrived with the official opening planned for the 27th of December 1911 on land rented from Mr Arthur Jones of Abberley Hall.

It was a great event attended by people from far and wide including most of the local dignitaries, to name but one, Mr Stanley Baldwin MP (later to become Prime Minister of Great Britain 3 times), was there. In fact all those who were there were mentioned a week later in the Kidderminster Times, who recorded the event in great detail, mentioning amongst other things, that Mrs St George of Pensax Court was handed a handsome gold cased key by Mr Yarnold with which she unlocked the main door of the hall declaring it now open to great applause. (So please note that fact, as we will come back to that point later, i.e. Mrs St George officially opened the new Hall in 1911 not Stanley Baldwin).

For the next 60 odd years the village hall held so many different events it is almost impossible to list them without looking back and saying 'no way' for the effort and work involved to get that kind of support would be the envy of any village hall or communal building on the planet. To list just some will give an idea of the planning that went into cover this spectrum of events including, dances, whist drives, concerts, plays, fashion shows, discos, films, clinics with Doctor and Nurse in attendance, day and evening classes, keep fit, yoga, aerobics, art, needle work, weddings, birthdays, Bingo, Harvest Suppers, Voting booths, Skittles, the list just goes on and on, but sadly the time comes when this volume of use begins to fad, and as anyone who owns property will be aware, after more than 60 years a building begins to need costly repair and maintenance, added to which society has got more complicated with health and safety and other social issues, running a building involving the public has got very complexed, and very expensive to comply with 'current' needs. So there came a time in the early 1970's when Pensax Village Hall committee found themselves with more costs than income, (a very common situation in running buildings used by the public) that needed an urgent solution, and as often said in these story's 'cometh the day cometh the man' but in Pensax's case cometh the women, in the form of Mrs Elizabeth Head, chairman of the hall at the time. In 1974 she suggested they open a shop in the hall once a week where any local person could bring any item to the hall that they wished to sell and via her trusted team they would sell said articles and the hall committee would take 10% of the sale price for the hall's funds, the owner of the item keeping the rest. Mrs Nerys Didlick was credited with giving the shop the title of the 'Thrift Shop'. The goods could be anything from clothes, bric a brac, books, plants, excess crops from the allotment, you name it they would sell it, and lo and behold the money began to role in, giving the hall committee the ability to get vital repairs and alterations done, and even an extension and a much needed car park was added. And of course enabling them to pay the rent to the Landlord, thus life got back to normal again for a while.

Then in 1978 it got even better, notwithstanding the sad death of the original Landlord sometime earlier, his estate was sold to Mr Arthur Neath, who after some time he in the natural order of things, also died, and the ownership of the estate passed to Mr Neath's son, Michael who in turn became Landlord of the hall, and he agreed to fulfil a long time wish of the hall's committee by sell the hall and its land to the parish council.

And so it was decided to put on a special event to mark the occasion. A play was devised to tell the history of the hall from it's opening day to the present time (then 1978), and because they had a photo taken of the

people who original attended the opening of the hall, showing everyone there that day in 1911, it was decided to try to simulate that event, by having a direct descendant of each of the people on the 1911 picture, if one could be found, and also dress them in the period costume of the day. Which as far as I am aware that is what happened, as can be seen from the pictures attached, with a lot of genealogical research and some very clever needlework by the ladies copying the dresses which were worn on the day of the opening. Which brings me back to the subject of who opened the hall in 1911, because if you read the Kidderminster Times article on the event in both 1972 and 1978 issues they say it was Mr Stanley Baldwin, as did the Tenbury Wells Advertiser in an article in October 1978, and yet in the original Kidderminster Times story of 1911 they even quote Mr S Baldwin as thanking Mrs St George for carrying out the opening ceremony, but I guess its a case of the well used saying 'never let the truth get in the way of a good story' because big names sell newspapers.

Other than that all was well in the world of village hall activity for another 30 or 40 years, and I feel we must also mention the fantastic amount of money that the committee raised which came to many thousands of pounds over the years, donated to a whole host of charities, such as the Red Cross, Grt Ormond St Hospital, the B'ham Children's Hospital, Acorn Children's Hospice, Air Ambulance, Mac McMillan Cancer Research and others. But here we are today in 2019 and history is repeating it's self, the village hall has very few bookings for any sort of function and the people are no longer calling at the Thrift Shop in their large enough numbers to enable the committee to raise enough money to pay the gas, electric and water bills etc. let alone fund much needed repair work on a building now well over 100 years old, and if the Thrift Shop is allowed to close then there will be insufficient funds coming in to keep the hall it's self open so **YES FOLKS IT IS DOWN TO YOU AND ME TO SUPPORT IT OR LOOSE IT** if we want to keep it going it's not somebody else's problem to save a great local facility, it is down to us, so when it's gone you and I are to blame it is no good saying you weren't warned !!! Please get in touch if you can help in any way what so ever with Pauline Briggs at the Thrift Shop in Pensax Village Hall any Wednesday morning between 9.30am and 12pm thank you.

And next month I am going to challenge you even further with the final story in this trilogy with the disaster of 'The Sinking of the Methodist chapel of Callow Hill'.



