

## Potted History of the Village Hall

The Curlings were a wealthy family who made their money as ship builders and owners, plying their trade between London and the Caribbean. William and Elizabeth, *nee* Green, moved to Kingsdown in the 1830s. They bought a lot of land and built a school on the now village hall, site. In 1833, the government offered grants to schools through the National Society, and they taught the 3 Rs and religion. The Schools Sites Act of 1841 allowed land-owners to sell or donate a maximum of one acre of land to charities for the provision of schooling 'poor persons'. The Curlings wanted to improve the 'lot' of the working classes by educating them. They also built the church at their expense. Under the School Grants Act of 1855, and following William's death in 1855, Elizabeth gave the premises to the church (30/7/1856).

The Diocese were then responsible for managing the school, including appointing the teachers who lived in the School House next door, and it was run by them until the 1930s. In 1944, R. A. Butler, the then Minister of Education, made an agreement with the Archbishop of Canterbury, that the church would accept some state control over its schools as a condition of receiving funding to relieve the problems with their buildings. The 'Butler' Education Act of 1944 **represented a historic compromise between church and state**, two thirds of the funding coming from the state and one third from the church. In return **the school kept the title deeds to the land**, but taught an agreed religious education syllabus.

The schools – both infant and junior – were closed on 31st December 1937. After that date, the villagers used the building as a meeting venue for local societies; it was a troop's canteen during WW2; but in 1950, it seems that the Diocese wanted to sell the building. A group of villagers got together to decide what to do, but in the meantime, the site was sold to the Parochial Church Council, (or rather to two local individuals) who purchased it with a mortgage of £250 with the intention of letting it to the village at a peppercorn rent under a 99 year lease.

However, after both legal and financial advice, and then agreement from the PCC, the land and the schools were sold to the people of the village, complete with £200 still to pay on the mortgage, and the property was invested in the Public Trustee of Charity Lands. The PCC insisted on various conditions, including the name of the hall – **St John s Village Hall Kingsdown** – and the proposed hall was to be managed by a committee and run by the village for the village. The PCC also insisted that they could use the hall on Sundays and Good Fridays – hence the clause in our Deed of Trust.

The present Trustees are the successors of those very first Trustees. The 'movers and shakers' of that time included Lt Colonels, Brigadiers, OBEs, JPs, Parish Councillors, Vicars, Churchwardens, Lady's, Drapers, Publicans, Bank Managers, Guiders and 'ordinary' people who held the village dear to their hearts. The debt – both the mortgage and the cost of alteration (the work was done by a Kingsdown builder) - was cleared by the time the building opened as a village hall in April 1952. The building and the cost of additional kitchens and cloakrooms was also cleared and completed in 1954.

Those 'movers and shakers' not only ran the hall, but helped fund a bus shelter and the playing fields; they often gave their own money, and the land the new side extension was built on. An annual fete was held every August for many years, the money divided between

the hall and the church. It was this fete which kept the village hall in the black – in fact they fell into the red if the fete was not held or not successful!

In the last 66 years, there have been a succession of local societies use the hall – including the WI, The Angling Club, Youth Club, Boys Club, Girls Club, Child Welfare Clinic (1955), Mothers Union, nursery school (1956), whist club, Parish Council, Table Tennis Club, Badminton Group, Keep Fit Group, Martial Arts, Darby and Joan, Civil Defence, Young Wives, the Parochial Church Council, Sunday School, Music Society, Dancing School, Line Dancing, Choir, Brownies, Guides, Cubs, Beavers, Garden society, Wissant Society; a playgroup established in the 1970s by Mrs Barbara Broome, has evolved into the present day PreSchool, who are now the biggest users. And there have been the occasional heated committee meetings - a past Chairman resigned over the proposed use by a playgroup at one meeting and vowed to have nothing more to do with the hall!