



12 • The Village Hall

The first village hall, called the Parish Room, was built by voluntary public subscription prior to 1914. It was the corrugated iron lean-to at the rear of the Little (or North) School (now the Environmental Studies Centre). It was under the jurisdiction of the Church Authorities and was where the Parish Council met.

There was also at one time (during the late 19th Century and early 20th Century) a “Village Club” in New Road that may have served as a meeting place before the first Village Hall was built.

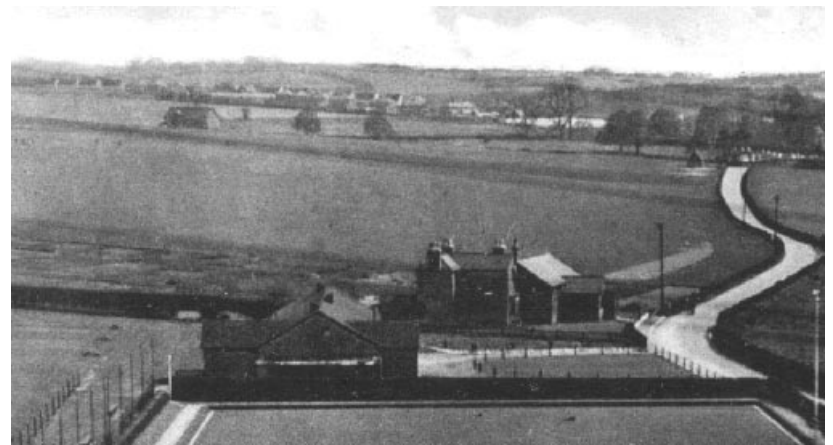
The second village hall, known as the Horton Kirby Institute, was an old canteen building that had been used by the Services in the Great War and is situated where the Village Hall stands today. This corrugated iron building with matchboarding interior, given free of charge, had been re-erected on the present village hall site on land purchased by A E Reed & Co from Mr Cresy. Again voluntary contributions after the War paid for this to be a Memorial to those killed. The playing fields behind the hall were also given for public use but after a time reverted to the Paper Mill as Reeds felt that insufficient use was being made of them.

Both village halls were in use when, in December 1927, came the first indications that change was on the way. The Parish Council Minute revealingly says:

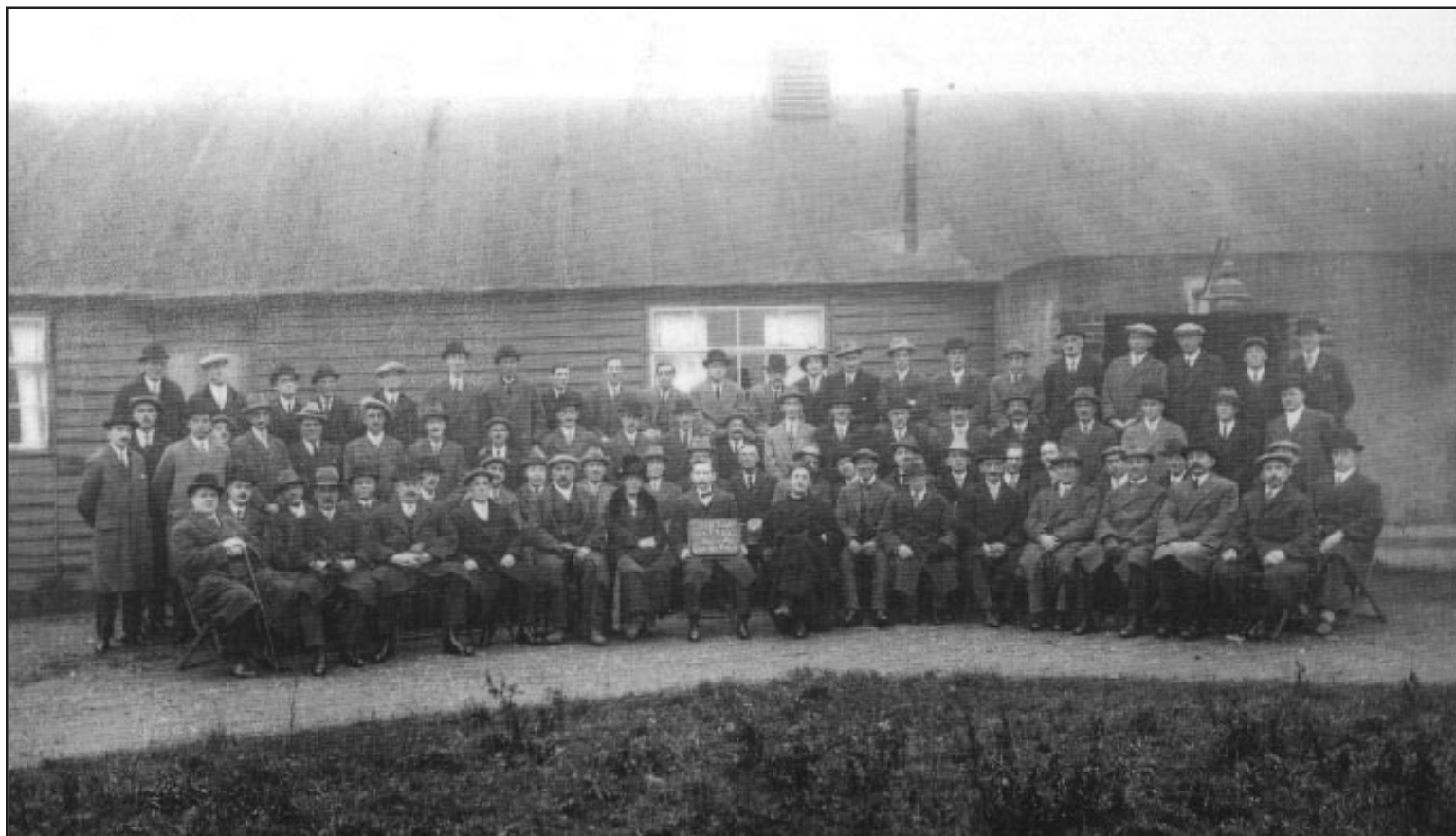
“The Chairman complained of the discomfort and bad accommodation provided at the Parish Room and declined to remain for the meeting. The Vice-Chairman who conducted the (remaining) business of the meeting concurred and he

proposed that enquiries should be made of the Secretary to the Horton Kirby Institute (W G W Toombs) as to terms and vacant dates available.”

This was carried unanimously and the Parish Council were quickly ensconced in the Institute. Soon began the process of taking it over from the management committee who, it would appear, were quite happy to be relieved of the duty. And despite many dealings with the Charity Commissioners, change came quickly. By July 1928 a public meeting agreed to the take-over of the Institute and by September 1929 the building and the land were the property of the Parish Council and renamed. The Horton Kirby Village Hall had arrived.



*Village hall in the 1930s
Postcard courtesy of Malcolm Scott*



Gathering on 11th November 1927 in front of the old village hall.

Photograph courtesy of Tom and Joan Ludlow in memory of the Ludlows of South Darent and the Beans of Horton Kirby (TK Biddle photograph)

Mrs Ada Darling who had been the caretaker at the Institute carried on and was to do so for a further 32 years. In 1953 she was presented with an armchair in recognition of 25 years of loyal service.

With many references during the following years to leaks and faults, it was not surprising that the idea soon came for the need for a more permanent structure with "modern conveniences and appurtenances" to replace the dilapidated First World War cast-off. This was first minuted in February 1936 and by April a scheme costing some £1400 was proposed and submitted to the Parish. Weight was given to the argument for a new building because two heavy expenses had been incurred in repairs to the structure causing an average deficit per annum since 1929 of £49 8s 11¹/₄d".

By February 1937 the tender from P Miller and Sons in the sum of £1664 was accepted and the new brick-built Village Hall was officially opened by Sir Waldren Smithers JP MP on 23rd July 1937. Mr Sidney Harrison who now plays short mat bowls in the hall was an apprentice carpenter with the firm and helped to build the Village Hall. As seems to have been usual at this time, gifts were forthcoming and included a grand piano from Mr Fooks, the then Chairman of the Parish Council, 160 yards of linoleum from Morris Wheeler of Franks Hall and even 10 shillings from a Miss Maddocks of Sutton-at-Hone towards furnishings.

Many references were made in the Minutes to hire charges and a sample list from 1934 is shown. One thing is certain, the Parish Council did not want their income to fall below expenditure. The Minute books reveal that many tried to get concessionary rates but few were successful as the Parish Council were determined to balance their books. Their general policy can be seen in the following extract from 1937:

"... Mr Jarvis advocated the Council being responsible for its catering as he knows that previous to the hall being administered by the Council, the profits from catering contributed a large proportion to the revenue".

However, in this case it would seem that the interests of individual parishioners and groups came first for the reply from Mr Cronk that *"the system of catering being in the hands of the caretaker was not popular*

with the patrons of the hall" prevailed.

Today's Parish Council, in running the hall, takes a very different view and gives favourable hiring rates to many village groups, appreciating the service provided to the social life and well-being of its residents.

Parish Council of Horton Kirby.

VILLAGE HALL

REVISED SCALE OF CHARGES.

HALL where charge is made for Admission

Hours.	Wednesdays and Saturdays.	Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays.
6-10.30 p.m.	Parishioners . . . £1-0-0	Parishioners . . . £0-15-0
7-11.30 p.m.	Non-Parishioners £1-5-0	Non-Parishioners £1-0-0

2/- per hour or part thereof after the above stated times.

HALL where NO charge is made for Admission—

Up to 6 p.m.	On all days.
	Parishioners 5/- for 2 hours or less. 2/6 per hour after.
	Non-Parishioners 8/- for 2 hours or less. 4/- per hour after.
After 6 p.m.	On all days.
	Parishioners 7/- for 2 hours or less. 3/6 per hour after.
	Non-Parishioners 10/- for 2 hours or less. 5/- per hour after.

COMMITTEE ROOM only—

On all days.
2/- for a period not exceeding 2 hours.

PIANO	2/6 per day
CROCKERY	2/6 per day (All breakages to be replaced)
CHAIRS	1½d. each per day .
FORMS	3d. each per day
TABLES	3d. each per day (Whist Drive and Long Tables)

Special Arrangements for series of Meetings and Functions.

Applications for Hiring should be made to the Clerk, "Pycroft," Lanes End, Dartford (Telephone -Dartford 812) or to the Caretaker, Village Hall, South Darenth.

BY ORDER OF THE PARISH COUNCIL,
15th October, 1934.



*Teatime 6th August 1952. Mrs Darling (in the patterned dress) can be seen standing by the hatch
Photo courtesy of Fox Photo Limited, London (Kindly loaned by James Salmon.)*



This photo shows Glad Colman (nee Curtis) in the centre, with the former Parish Room in the background.

Photograph courtesy of The School Scholastic Company, Bispham, Blackpool

BACK ROW LEFT TO RIGHT

Will Harris, Arthur Giles, Alf Harris, Eric Skey, Stanley Reeves, Dick Middleton, Will Chambers, Alfred Day, David Crowhurst

SECOND ROW LEFT TO RIGHT

Evelyn Bunnet, Cynthia Bugden, Margaret Bloyce, Joyce Potter, Irene French, Gladys Curtis, Sheila Crowhurst, Beatrice Middleton, Betty Bugden, Sylvia Skey, Olive Napper, Phyllis French, Miss Flint (Teacher)

THIRD ROW LEFT TO RIGHT

Doreen Potter, Elsie Day, Eileen Boyce, Clement Roberts, Freda Cronk, Freda Crowhurst.

FOURTH ROW SITTING LEFT TO RIGHT

Dorothy Turner, Winnie Dimond, Olive Elcombe, Eva Cumberland.

Users of the hall over the years would be surprised to find no mention of Glad Colman in this brief history of the building for she was caretaker from 1966-85. Her dedication to the job was well-known to all who used the hall during those years.

The building has of course been extended with a flat-roofed addition on three sides. This occurred in 1969 when the weatherboard cladding was also replaced by hanging clay tiles. A loan of £2,250 was required for this extension.

In 1972 installation of the new heating system meant the removal for safety reasons of the obsolete concrete bases of the old gas fires. The positions of these could be clearly seen in the previous teak woodblock floor which, according to Eric Ovenden, had been one of the last exports from Rhodesia in 1965 before sanctions were imposed on UDI.

Much more recently a major re-fitting and upgrading was completed in 1991, to general approval and acclaim, bringing the hall up to modern standards. The fact that the photo of the hall in 1952 looks exactly like the hall in 1989 bears witness to the necessity of the refurbishing works. £62,000 was contributed by Sevenoaks District Council to the total cost of £77,000 for these works.

The kitchen also greatly benefited from modernisation although the large old gas cooker was retained as it was felt that a new one of similar size would be extremely expensive. This is presumably the same cooker referred to in the Parish Council Minutes in December 1972 which was purchased together with a stainless steel warming cabinet from the Horton Kirby Paper Mill for £22.

The Village Hall is as much in demand today as it ever was, so much so that a further extension is needed to accommodate new groups and activities. This will probably be the next stage for the hall as the centre of our village life.

*This photograph of early Riverside Kindergarten staff shows the much lower stage before it was raised by the Valley Players in the early 1980s
Photograph courtesy of Cecilia Reynolds*



*The Village Hall is a focal point and meeting place for the two villages as was proved during the fight against British Rail in 1989.
Photograph courtesy of John Bunce.*