

# Honingham Village Hall

## The Reading Room

What is sometimes known as the old village hall was originally a Men's Reading Room provided by Lord Ailwyn for the men of the village to have somewhere to spend their evenings other than The Buck Inn. It was situated on land opposite The Buck Inn car-park, now occupied by 44 Dereham Road. There are very few records of the Reading Room but there is a reference to it in the White's Directory of Norfolk from 1890, it simply states, 'A Reading-Room was established in 1889 and has 35 members'. It can also be seen marked on historical Ordnance Survey Maps dated from 1900's. The Parish Council began using the Reading Room upon its formation, holding its first meeting there on 15<sup>th</sup> December 1894.

It is believed that the hall was enlarged in the early 1900's to enable social evenings to be held. In 1926 Lady Ailwyn had an extension built to accommodate the newly formed Honingham Women's Institute, unfortunately in doing so she commandeered a part of the Men's room and so instigated a "feud" which lasted for some years. Although the hall was actually one undivided "T" shaped building, a partition was made to divide it. The Men's room had one secretary and caretaker and the WI room had its own secretary and caretaker. If anyone else in the village wished to hire the whole room, for example for a dance or whist drive, they were forced to approach both secretaries separately before any plans could be made.

This was partly settled on the sale of the Estate in 1935 and the new owner Mr Crundall gifting the hall to the overall care of the Parish Council. Old arguments began to be forgotten, old adversaries died, the partition gave way to a curtain and it was seen to be sensible to only have one caretaker, secretary and committee. The then Village Hall was overseen by a committee made up of 3 representatives of the Women's Institute and 3 from the Men's Club as was laid out in the deeds when the building was given to the Parish Council.

In 1935 the heating was by tall cast iron coke stoves, there was a kitchen but of course no water, a bucket had to be brought from the village pump to make the tea and no one had thought of an inside toilet.

Horningham  
 Village Hall,

Mr Smith brought forward the  
 question of the Village Hall,  
 Mr Rowbottom explained that Mr  
 Horner informed him that the  
 Committee of the Mens Club and  
 Village Institute would become  
 the owners,

Mr Crundall  
 left,

Village Hall  
 how the property  
 of Horningham  
 Parish Council,

But by the Eastern Daily Press  
 it was thus stated that Mr Crundall  
 had presented the Village Hall to  
 Horningham Parish Council,  
 when it was unanimously agreed  
 that the Village Hall should become  
 the property of the Horningham  
 Parish Council,

It was felt that in the future  
 there probably may be many  
 changes in the Parish, when should  
 the Mens Club or Village Womens  
 institute be broken up would  
 cause much trouble in having  
 two bodies as owners of the same  
 property.

Extract from Parish Council minutes from December 19<sup>th</sup> 1935

In 1938 a new committee was formed to oversee the management of the village hall, as detailed in the conveyance when the Parish Council took ownership of what was the Reading Rooms.

Members of mens club & Institute

The Chairman then brought forward the matter of committee of the Parish Hall as by the conveyance 3 members of the mens club and 3 members of the Womens Institute should be added to the management of the Village Hall as stated in Mrs Constance Giff's Gift of Hall, Lady Milnes had always undertaken to get members from the Institute, the Chairman of the mens club to be asked to appoint three,

Extract from Parish Council minutes from 14<sup>th</sup> February 1938

During World War II use of the Village Hall by the Men's Club dwindled.

the year.

The Clerk then mentioned that he had paid the Rates 10/8<sup>d</sup> for the Mens Club as the mens club was not use now only by the Womens Institute.

The Chairman then mentioned that the Womens Institute should be asked to pay the Rates for Duration of War. out of the Funds raised by Dances & Christmas. It was Proposed By J. Wright & Seconded by J. Dachs.

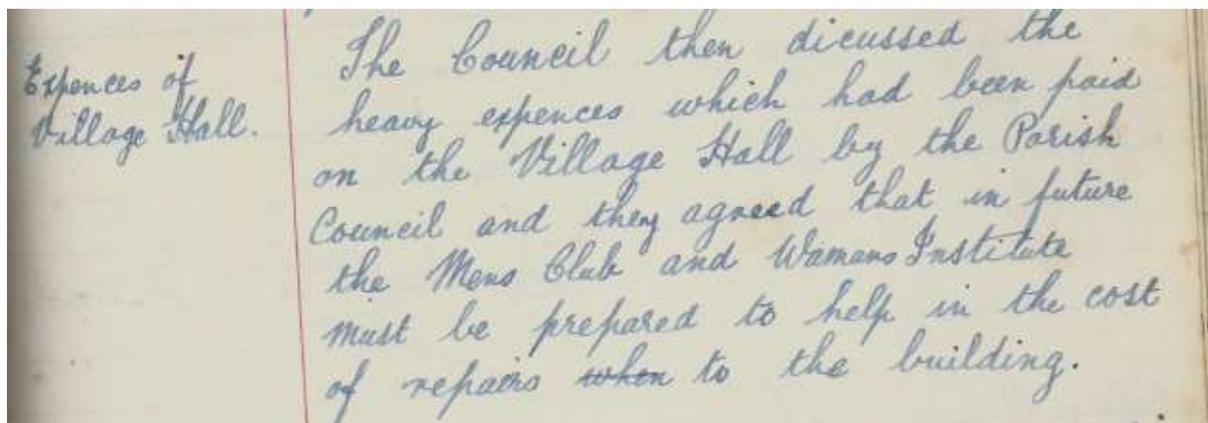
The Clerk then said that he had mentioned it to the Womens Institute & they agreed to do so.

The Chairman then mentioned about some one representing the Parish on the Board It was Proposed that Lady Richman should be asked to take Sir Eric's place time he was abroad

Extract from Parish Council minutes from 9<sup>th</sup> March 1942

The hall was slowly updated over the years, the coke stoves gave way to oil central heating, water came to the kitchen sink and an inside flushing toilet for the ladies. References in the Parish Council minutes demonstrate how much money was spent on the village hall.

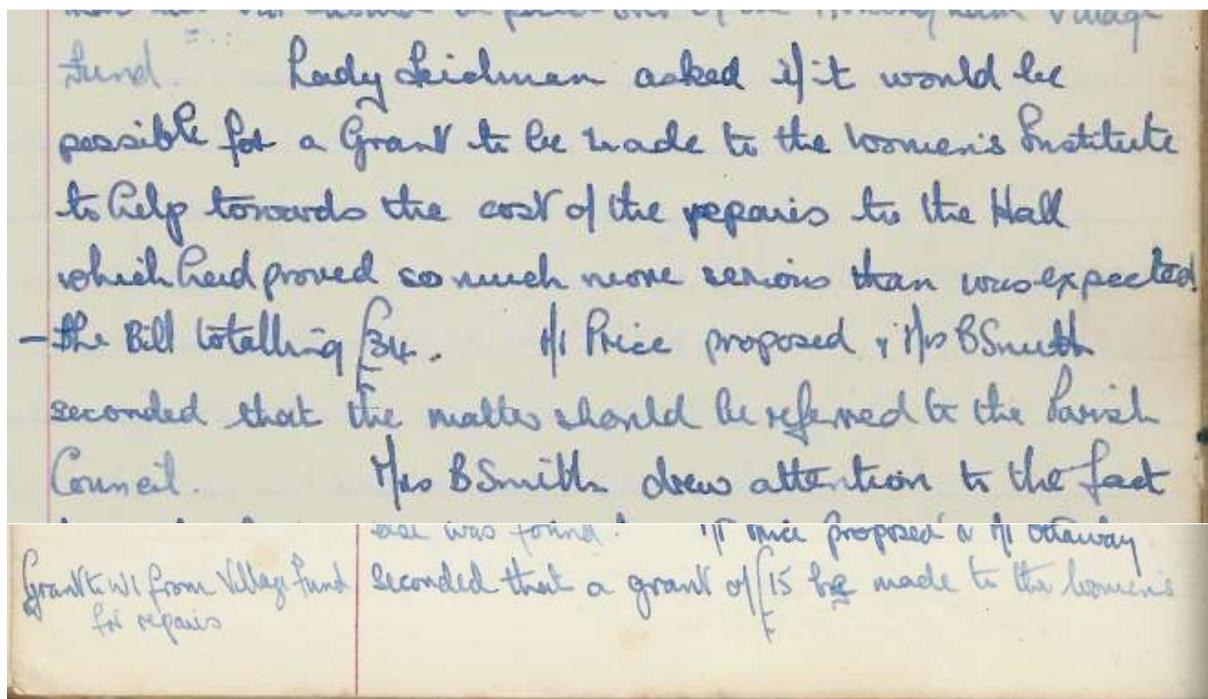
8<sup>th</sup> April 1946                £5.4.7  
 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1946            £36.12.0



Extract from Parish Council minutes from 16<sup>th</sup> March 1948

On 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1953 the village hall was used to hold a dance in the evening as part of the village celebrations for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.

In 1954 further repairs were needed and the Women’s Institute approached the Parish Council for a grant to help with the cost of these. The costs were £34 and the Parish Council agreed to award £15.



Constitute from the Village Fund towards the bill for 3/3d  
for repairs to the Hall. Mr Morris proposed - 2/10

Extract from Parish Council minutes from 29<sup>th</sup> March 1954

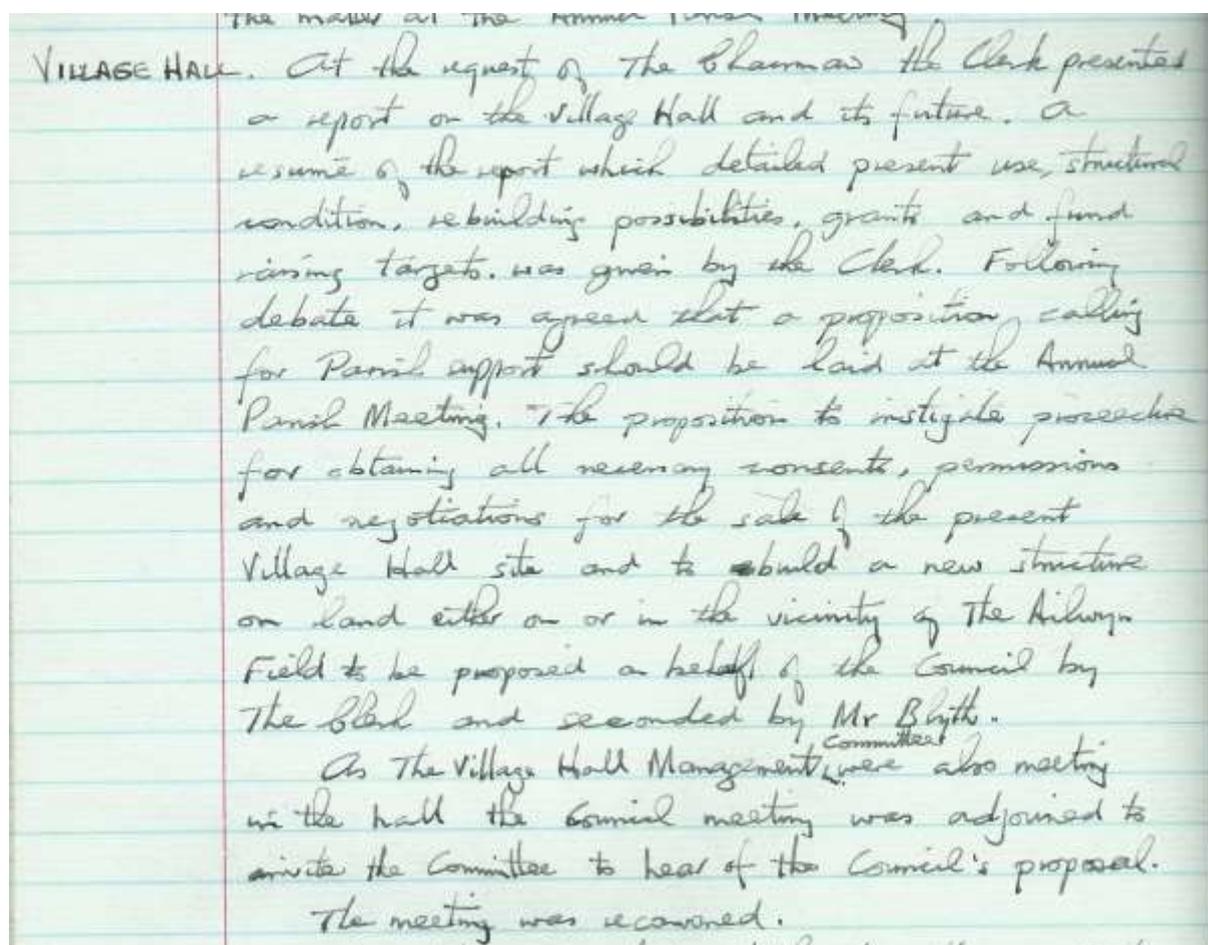
It took till 1963 before an official village hall management committee was formed under directions from Norfolk County Council and the Charity's Commission. The Village Hall Management Committee was officially registered as a charity and the first meeting of the new committee took place on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1963. The first task they set about to complete was to raise enough money to get mains water connected to the hall to provide washing and toilet facilities. At this time most of the village was still not connected to mains water, an issue which had been ongoing since the mid 1950's, and was not completed in the village until 1964.

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Village Hall Before the Parish Council meeting began the first meeting of the new Committee of Management of the Village Hall was held. Those present in addition to those already mentioned - Mrs. M. B. Robinson, Mrs. H. A. Small, Mrs. Stens and Mrs. Grant. The Clerk reported that since the last meeting, the Charity Commissioners had formally agreed the new scheme and this would take effect from the current meeting. He suggested amendment to Clause 23 had not been confirmed by the Charity Commissioners but the meeting agreed that no further action should be taken regarding it. Mr. Coddard, Mrs. Robinson and Mrs. H. A. Small were elected the first three elected members and Mrs. H. B. Rice was elected Chairman and Mrs. Robinson, the Secretary of the new Committee of Management. A short discussion then took place on the need for water to be connected to the Hall to provide proper washing and toilet facilities and it was agreed that money raising schemes being for this would have to be given consideration.

Extract from Parish Council minutes from 6<sup>th</sup> December 1963

The Parish Council continued to make yearly grants to the Village Hall Management Committee Improvement Appeal for their fundraising to refurbish/maintain the village hall. The grant remained at £15 per year from 1954 until 1970 when it rose to £30. Electric fires were installed during the 1960's. A new heating system was required by the 1970's and was installed in 1973. The committee room was redecorated in 1977. However by 1978 the hall was past its best and would have needed a lot of money to keep it going,

as somebody remarked "The only thing keeping this thing standing are the woodworm linking arms". A report was submitted to the Parish Council by the Village Hall Management Committee in 1978 and it was agreed to start the process of trying to build a new village hall.



VILLAGE HALL. At the request of the Chairman the Clerk presented a report on the Village Hall and its future. A resume of the report which detailed present use, structural condition, rebuilding possibilities, grants and fund raising targets, was given by the Clerk. Following debate it was agreed that a proposition calling for Parish support should be laid at the Annual Parish Meeting. The proposition to instigate proceedings for obtaining all necessary consents, permissions and negotiations for the sale of the present Village Hall site and to build a new structure on land either on or in the vicinity of The Ailwyn Field to be proposed on behalf of the Council by The Clerk and seconded by Mr Blyth.

As The Village Hall Management <sup>Committee</sup> were also meeting in the hall the Council meeting was adjourned to invite the Committee to hear of the Council's proposal.

The meeting was reconvened.

Extract from Parish Council minutes from January 6<sup>th</sup> 1978

In March 1978 a committee, the New Village Hall Project Committee, was formed to work on the project for a new village hall and consisted of 2 members of the Parish Council, 2 from the Village Hall Management Committee and 3 members of the public. However the formation of this committee did not get off to a smooth start and it took another year before the committee was finally able to start work on the project.

By December 1979 the committee had raised £3000, however identifying land on which to build the new village hall was proving harder due to Charity Commission rules. Negotiations took place between the committee and a local land owner in the hope of finding a solution. On 9<sup>th</sup> April 1980 it was minuted that a gift of 0.6 acre of land had been given to the Parish Council by a local land owner for the benefit of the village. This land was to be used to build the new village hall on and was situated next to the Ailwyn Field, off Hall Drive.

In 1981 architect drawings of the new village hall were commissioned and the new Village Hall Management Committee charity came into being. By this time £10,000 had been raised towards the costs of building. By

January 1982 the committee had also secured a £5000 grant from Broadland District Council towards the build. In June 1982 quotes for the costs of building the new village hall were being considered. Local builders H. Smith and Sons submitted a quote for £29,000. This quote was at a substantially lower rate than expected due to H. Smith and Sons being a Honingham firm and wishing to support the local community. The quote was gratefully accepted with an indication that the hall could be completed as early as the end of 1982.



*The new village hall bathed in sunlight in 2018.*

The first documented Parish Council meeting in the new village hall took place on 11<sup>th</sup> March 1983. It wasn't until May 1984 that the old village hall began to be demolished, after nearly one hundred years of being part of Honingham village life.