

1921 and 1922.

President: F. Baring-Gould.

Vice-Presidents: C. S. Baring-Gould and P. Keith Lang, C.B.E.

Trustees: F. Burchatt, F. H. J. Beeny and F. Gould.

Managing Committee:

Chairman: P. Keith Lang. Vice-Chairman: H. Pleass.

Hon. Treasurer: A. G. Tunnell.

Assistant Hon. Treasurer: P. R. Wicks.

Hon. Secretary: H. G. Brown.

F. Amey, F. W. Burchatt, F. Gibbs, H. Hopkins, T. J. T. Parker, A. E. Stanley, and C. T. Terry.

Hon. Auditors: W. H. Tunnell and A. W. Swayne.

Stewards: Mr. and Mrs. Watkins.

1946.

President: P Keith Lang, C.B.E.

Vice-Presidents:

C. S. Baring-Gould (deceased) and

Sir Claude de la Fosse, C.I.E. (retired).

Sir James Stirling Ross, K.C.B., C.B.E., elected 1946.

Trustees: F. S. Billimore, F. W. Burchatt, and A. G. Martin.

Managing Committee:

Chairman: P. Keith Lang. Vice-Chairman: A. E. Stanley.

Hon. Treasurer: G. R. Nichols.

Hon. Secretary: F. G. Hammond.

A. Baker, A. Blake, H. E. Boxall, K. M. Brooks, G. E. Gardner, L. J. Whitbourn, L. C. Poyser. (P. Oldland, unable to act.)

Auditors: A. D. Bevan & Co.

Stewards: Mr. and Mrs. Bysh.

Greenkeeper: Mr. J. Norris.

MERROW VILLAGE CLUB AND HALL.

Semi-Jubilee, 1921-1946.



In 1921 a proposal by local Ex-Service Men to utilize a grant and form a Club for themselves, in an Army Hut, broadened into a scheme for a Club to benefit all the Men of Merrow. Mr. P. Keith Lang interested the Donor of the Hall, the late Mr. Francis Baring-Gould, in the project; and during the preliminary talks very useful assistance was rendered by the late Lieut. J. Savage on the part of the Ex-Service Men and by Mr. A. E. Stanley; and also by the late Mr. F. Burchatt and Mr. Arthur Tunnell in furtherance of the scheme.

Since its completion in 1909 the Hall had been in use for twelve years but had never paid its way. The public had vouchsafed neither interest nor financial support, and the Donor had to bear the brunt of recurring deficits.

A handsome Billiard-room had been added to the building by the Donor and enjoyed by a small group of 20-30 men, with limited privileges, who formed a little nucleus for a larger venture.

A scheme for a Club that would undertake the burden of the Hall, in return for the facilities of site and foundation, was indeed daring; but it has proved very successful; and the community should realize how much they owe to the Club for relieving them not only of the onus of management but also of the well nigh insuperable task of raising money to meet the considerable annual deficits and ever recurring outlay.

The scheme took shape and eventually legal arrangements resulted in the Property of the Hall being vested in "Donor's Trustees" (the late C. S. Baring-Gould, P. Keith Lang, and Major H. F. Browell) for the benefit of the community; and they granted a lease to the Club for 25 years, under which the Club undertook the upkeep and management of the Hall. This lease was extended in 1938, on the same terms as before, fixing tenure up to the year 1964.

The Club was opened on the 1st October, 1921, and the composition of the first Committee—the pilots of the enterprise—is shown on another page together with the names of the present Committee, from which it will be seen that of the original body there remain as still functioning only Mr. P. Keith Lang and Mr. A. E. Stanley, with Mr. F. W. Burchatt as one of the Club's Trustees. Mr. Lang has been Chairman throughout, and Mr. Stanley as Vice-Chairman since 1929 has been to the front with sound advice and practical assistance.

The all important Executive during the 25 years has always been in good hands. The Secretariat was well started by H. G. Brown for a year; was most efficiently directed by Percy R. Wicks for seven years; for twelve years by the late Hugh Pleass (who did much for the Club), and since 1942 by our present able Hon. Secretary, F. G. Hammond. The duties of the Hon. Treasurer were most efficiently carried out for the long period of 21 years by A. G. Tunnell, the success of whose work calls for emphasis and whose resignation owing to pressure on his time was much regretted by all. He was succeeded in 1942 by G. R. Nichols, who took over all the accountancy with expert proficiency, having previously served for twenty years as Hon. Co-Auditor. Grateful mention must be made of the late W. H. Tunnell, who was the other Co-Auditor from the beginning. On his retirement in 1942 the Audit was placed in professional hands.

In 1942 Messrs. T. J. T. Parker and J. C. Edwin retired after having acted as the Club's Trustees for seven years, and the Committee recorded their appreciation of the help given by both. Mr. Parker had been their colleague during 22 years of signal devotion to the interests of the Club; and Mr. Edwin's value in counsel included expert advice regarding insurances. They were succeeded in 1944 by F. S. Billimore and A. G. Martin—each a pillar of the Club—the other Trustee being F. W. Burchatt, a prominent member from the start, who was elected in 1943 in place of his Father—an esteemed original Trustee.

The start and the first extension of premises were financed by loans: £550 from the late Mr. F. Baring-Gould and £264 from members in sums from £2 upwards; all parties showing such confidence in the future that they accepted the Treasurer's receipt as their sole security. This indebtedness was gradually repaid by 1930; and the cost of the first building (£695/16/0) was also written off in full by 1929.

During the years 1931-41 considerable additions and improvements were made to the Club premises, including in 1934 the new Office, Committee or quiet room and an up-to-date lavatory; and in 1938 the improved Bar, the re-building of the Card-room and a new store. Added to these were other improvements such as electrical equipment and a bicycle shed, as well as heavy outlay on the Hall required by the County Council, renovations, etc. This expenditure totalled £1,760 5s. 6d., of which £1,473 6s. 2d. has been written off to date.

For the whole period of twenty-five years the total sum written off amounts to £3,601 14s. 2d., made up thus: Buildings and Premises Improvements, £2,336 6s. 3d.; Furniture, Billiard Table and Fittings, etc., £571 16s. 2d.; Electrical Equipment, £296 17s. 0d.; and Land and Bowling Green, £396 14s. 9d. These figures leave out of account much non-routine outlay charged to revenue.

In 1926 the land behind the premises—about 1½ acres—was bought for £400, as it was deemed imperative that the amenities of the Club should be secured, and the Bowling Green was constructed at a cost of £200 2s. 0d. Of this cost of £600 2s. 0d. there has been written off the sum of £499 16s. 9d. (£103 2s. 0d. charged to revenue and £396 14s. 9d. in depreciation). The property, owned by the Club, thus stands in the accounts at the low figure of £100 5s. 3d.

For three years previously members had played bowls, as a Bowls Section, on private lawns kindly lent to them, and the popularity of the game was greatly enhanced by the Club having their own Green, which for twenty years has given much enjoyable recreation to members, their friends and many visiting Clubs; nine summers being classed as favourable in weather, eight as poor and three not recorded. Credit must be given to J. Norris for his good care of the Green since 1929, and also to the members who volunteered to do the work of experts not now available. The ground beyond the Green has been put to good use since 1939 for allotments benefiting members.

The number of members who started the Club was 51. In a year this was increased to 168, and the membership has steadily mounted up to the present impressive figure of 372. The bad years of the 1930's and of the war period failed to

arrest progress. Owing to critical times improvements in the Club premises in 1938 could not be made to include the greatly needed addition to the Billiard Rooms; and although funds are now in hand it will perforce be a year or two before this extension can be realized. Another good Billiard Table with accessories, the gift of the President, awaits this addition.

Members who have assisted in promoting the interests of the Club are too numerous for mention here, but the name of Mr. Hugh Pleass may be singled out for his devoted work, in which he never spared himself; and reference may also be made to Mr. J. Chandler, who for fifteen years was a hard working and successful Games Secretary for both Bowls and indoor games until his death in 1940; Mr. S. F. Bonner, who proved an energetic successor in the Bowls Section for five years until he left the neighbourhood; and Mr. A. G. Martin, who took over the management of the indoor games since 1940, involving troublesome work, and by his zeal has invigorated all the Club Competitions.

Life in the Club and the varied attention required by the use of the Hall, and the proper keeping of all the interiors, claim exacting work from the Stewards. Mr. and Mrs. Bysh, who succeeded Mr. and Mrs. Watkins in 1936, maintain a high level of good service in all respects. During Mr. Bysh's absence in the Army for four years two members—A. Baker and A. Blake—filled the gap at the Bar in their spare time, and this rescue service was much appreciated. They were assisted by Mr. Bysh, senior, and on occasions by two other members, A. G. Martin and L. Arthur.

The Village Hall has been carefully maintained and managed throughout the years, in periodical consultation with a Hall Committee, including representatives of Public interests such as the Women's Institute, Sports Clubs, and the Parish Council until it ceased.

In 1930 the heating was judged inadequate, and under expert advice a new up-to-date system was installed to the advantage of all, the cost of which, £197 3s. 6d., was written off by 1940.

In 1928 a much needed kitchen was added to the Hall, to the cost of which the Women's Institute provided £290 (profiting by gifts of £200 from the late Mr. F. Baring-Gould and of £50 from the late Mr. Charles Baring-Gould), and the Club contributed the balance and subsequent replenishing.

The Hall Lettings for the eighteen normal years before the war averaged £119 18s. 4d. per annum, leaving an average annual deficit on expenditure which may be estimated at about £100 on a pre-war basis, but this does not allow for the heavy outlay repeatedly imposed by the County Council and other extra-ordinary items.

The Hall was requisitioned by the Authorities in 1940 until September 1945 for various purposes, including a "British Restaurant." The allowance made for rent was meagre; but the ultimate compensation for very considerable dilapidations was satisfactory, and this will enable the Club to re-condition the Hall premises and precincts when it may be possible to effect repairs and restoration.

This sketch of the history of the Club and Hall may well take as its final note a tribute to the late Mr. Francis Baring-Gould, without whose support the Club could never have existed. In their Report for 1927 the Managing Committee wrote: "The Hall stands as a permanent memorial of his benefaction to Merrow, but members of our Club who recollect the stir of our beginning will always cherish a special and grateful memory of our first President." Present members will surely echo this tribute.

Mr. P. Keith Lang succeeded him in 1928 as President. Sir Claude de la Fosse, who was Vice-President from 1928 until 1946, when he relinquished public activity, presided over several Annual General Meetings. The Club has welcomed Sir James Stirling Ross as his successor; and they regret that the long standing connection with Mr. Charles Baring-Gould, the son of the Donor of the Hall, has been severed by his recent death.

The Club has established the reputation of being a model in the County and its aim is to maintain the highest standard of conduct, activity, and well-being of members.

