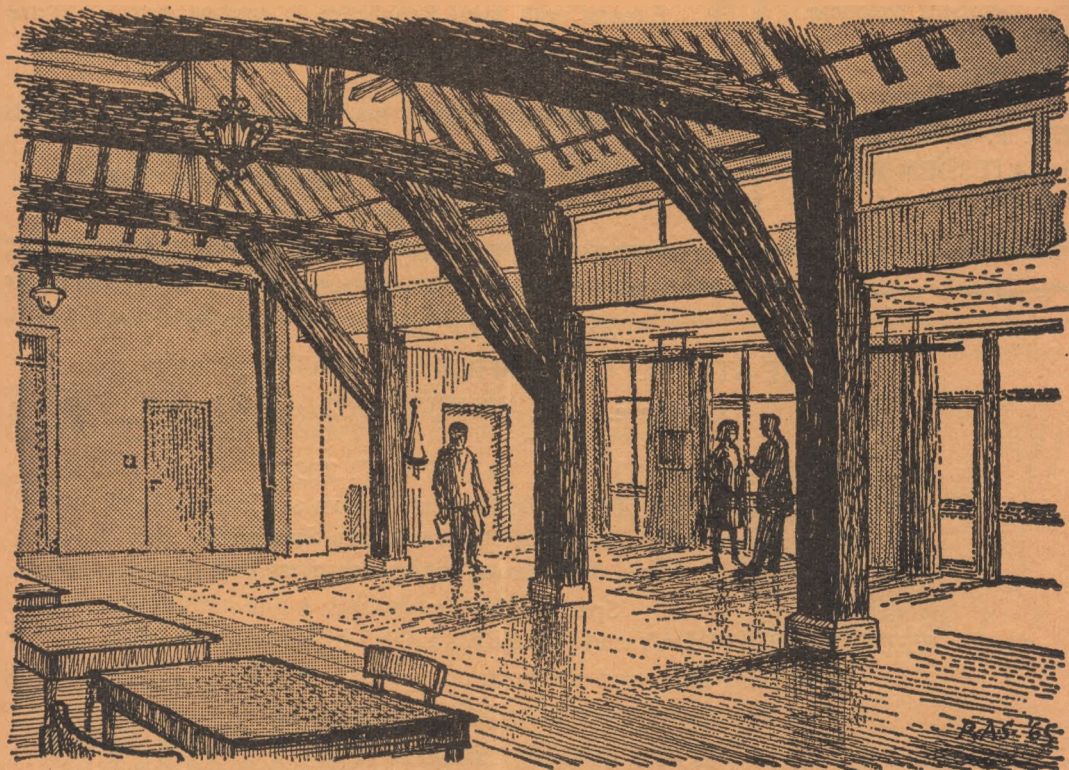


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The Bookhams Bulletin

Quarterly Journal of the Bookham Community Association



No. 142

APRIL, 1970

36th Year

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The Bookhams Bulletin

Quarterly Journal of the Bookham Community Association

No. 142

APRIL, 1970

36th Year

EDITORIAL

This issue of the Bulletin is dedicated to members of the Community Association whose memories go back to the early days and whom we hope will be happy to relive their recollections. It is also, by special request, addressed to those who have come to live in the village recently and would like to know more about us. We would emphasise that we should not be confused with the Residents' Association, which frequently happens. Our constitution, our objects and our methods are quite different.

It has been a difficult story to write because so much has had to be left out. Only a play, or a novel, could recapture the flavour of what has been a long and, we hope, a successful exercise in teamwork. We offer our apologies to those devoted workers whose names are not in the record. We do, however, know that whether we are members of the Association's clubs, or whether we are just freelance volunteers in general activities, none of us are looking for personal honour. The Hall, the Grounds, our neighbourhood work in the village, the strengthening of our links

with the old, with youth, with the schools, with other educational and welfare bodies, is ample reward for us all.

We would all be encouraged if our membership were larger. Why not join us?

THE BOOKHAM COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION 1948-1970

How it Began

The Bookham Community Association is officially 22 years old, but its origins go back to the war years when, at a meeting of the Bookham and Effingham Youth Council (now extinct), a proposition was put for a youth centre in Bookham. A counter-suggestion was made that a better plan would be for a community centre to include separate facilities for youth. Mr. C. V. Brayne, Miss E. Micholls and Mrs. E. Harrison were deputed to inquire from the National Council of Social Service about experiments in different parts of Britain on these lines and also to examine the Bookham proposition in the light of the Cambridgeshire Scheme for Village Colleges.

The population of the Bookhams at this time was low. We have no exact figure but Kelly's

Directory of 1925 gives the figure for Little Bookham as 372 and Great Bookham 1,566 and, prior to the War, building development was slow. The influx of refugees altered the situation. Many more people became aware that Bookham was a pleasant place and it became apparent that the neighbourhood would grow. War-time experience also showed that, where residents could be brought together to meet emergencies, a neighbourly spirit was generated that overcame the restrictions of blackout, rationing, air-raid alerts, etc., and brought together socially the lonely as well as the gregarious.

It was not therefore surprising that still another group should get together to discuss how this spirit of neighbourliness could be preserved in a district where the number of residents was likely to grow rapidly. Composed of Councillor A. E. Murrells, Dr. N. E. Waterfield, Mr. C. V. Brayne, Mr. G. Brion, Mr. Trevor Newman and Mrs. E. Harrison, it set itself the task of devising what it considered a model community centre. The Education Act of 1944 gave a fillip to public thinking on this matter

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by enabling the Minister of Education to encourage local authorities to explore the possibilities of providing community centres as part of their educational provisions.

Action at Last?

The time now seemed ripe for our village enthusiasts to take action. A public meeting was called in the Barn Hall on 28th October, 1946 when Councillor Murrells, on behalf of the Leatherhead Urban District Council, offered to the village the Mansion of Bookham Grove for the development of a community centre. Naturally not everyone was in agreement with what then seemed a rather 'way-out' idea, but there was enough enthusiasm for the formation of yet one more exploratory committee. By the end of the year, with Mr. R. Bishop as secretary, plans had been made for a centre comprising indoor facilities with separate youth provision. It was visualised that outdoors the rifle range would continue and that tennis courts, a children's paddling pool, a play area, a quiet garden for the older people, etc., could be provided. The centre could be linked with the sports clubs using the adjacent Dorking Road Recreation Ground and offer them much needed amenities. Twenty-two local organisations were represented on this planning body. On March 1st, 1947, the Grove was open to public inspection. It was a lovely spring-like day, all the

village seemed to have turned out, there was great admiration for the spacious rooms, the lofty ornamented ceilings, the decorative balustrades and imposing entrance hall. To some of those present the dream of a civic centre in what was then a quiet rural spot had already taken shape.

Alas for human hopes! On 30th April, the fateful public meeting was held. As so often happens at meetings of this kind, the supporters had not thought it necessary to turn up but the critics were there in force. The vote was indecisive and the scheme to take over the Grove had to be abandoned.

Action is really taken

At this same meeting Councillor Murrells, on behalf of the L.U.D.C., then offered the Barn Hall as an alternative site for a community centre. This was accepted as a working proposition.

The original steering committee continued its work under Councillor C. V. Brayne, as Chairman, who consistently pressed the cause of community centres as a worthwhile project at the Urban District Council. Mr. G. Goodwin took over the secretaryship from Mr. R. Bishop in June.

The Community Association an official body

Public acceptance of the Community Association as an official body was finally recognised at the first meeting of its Council on 2nd March, 1948,

when Dr. N. E. Waterfield was elected Chairman, Mrs. E. Harrison Vice-Chairman, Mr. G. West Hon. Sec., and Mr. S. E. D. Fortescue Hon. Treasurer. These officers formed the Executive, together with Miss E. Micholls, Rev. Eastman, and Messrs. Goodwin, Oldershaw, Beddous and Brion. The optimism which has always been the keynote of the Community Association can be noticed in these first-ever minutes which record a debit balance of £7 8s. 8½d., but, at the same time, ambitiously suggest as activities for the near future: "Drama Society, Table Tennis, All indoor sports, games and recreations, Hockey, Netball, Evening Handicraft classes, Brains Trusts, a Pageant featuring Polesden Lacey, a Show with Goat Club and/or Horticultural Society, Whist Drives, Dances."

By the next Council meeting in June the finances were in good order, there being a balance in hand of £23 11s. 10d., two whist drives and a Brains Trust had taken place; other social events were in the pipeline. Also, at this, its second meeting, the B.C.A. put on record its conviction that pleasure grounds and recreation space in the district were inadequate and asked the Leatherhead U.D.C. to allocate part of the Grove for this purpose. That was 20 years ago. No action was taken. It is true that since then the Lower Road Recreation Ground has been acquired, but Gilmais has gone,

despite the massive campaign spread out over two years that we mounted for its retention. Consequently in 1970, with a population that has trebled, the Community Association is still pressing the local authorities for more sites for playing fields.

Trustees of Village Hall a democratic body

Much negotiation, chiefly legal, went into the taking over of the Barn Hall, and the officers of the L.U.D.C. participated fully. The climax came when Mrs. E. Harrison and Mr. S. E. D. Fortescue representing the Community Association, accompanied by Mr. Henwood Jones, Deputy Clerk of the L.U.D.C., went to the Headquarters of the Charity Commissioners in London. It was, in its own way, a historic meeting and memories of the occasion have a

history book flavour. The exterior of the building had all the dinginess of war-time London. Inside, a dark and gloomy corridor led to a small room with dreary shelving and equally dreary-looking files. The representative of the Commissioners, who met the party, had all the courtesy of a Court official and agreed that their suggestion of a body of trustees for the Barn Hall composed of the Executive Committee of the Community Association was a viable proposition. A completely impracticable dream had become a firm proposal. A faint smell of cobwebs still seemed to hang about the deputation until it emerged into the street and the light of day and realized that it had achieved for the Barn Hall the distinction of being a truly democratic village hall whose

trustees could, through the constitution of a community association, be elected annually at the A.G.M. by a representative meeting.

People, not Bricks, make a Community Association

The purpose of a community association is twofold — (1) to maintain a centre for the activities of its members and the locality. (2) to bring together the organisations of the district, the local authorities and members of the public in enterprises for the benefit of the neighbourhood, to try, by self help, to direct attention to and fill gaps existing in local amenities, and in all possible ways to work for a friendly community spirit in the area.

Despite premises that were far from adequate, and despite some very vocal, if limited opposition

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in its early days, the Bookham Community Association claims to have set a standard which others have followed. It has worked consistently for the purposes listed above, and is still vigorously doing so. It must be recognised, however, that the real credit for this rests on the service given by dedicated, determined and patient people. Though time has taken its toll of these, incoming volunteers of ability have joined the team.

Teamwork is the Keyword of Association

The B.C.A., while quick to acknowledge help from organisations and public bodies, has always set its face against public praise of its own members, for two reasons. The first is that its responsibilities are very wide and varied—some of these are spectacular, some behind the scenes—but all are equally necessary and it would be invidious to single out anyone for special congratulation. The second is that little groups of helpers have combined for years to do a job on a team basis, very often unknown to the wider membership, but each has contributed his special talents in his own time. It has come to be accepted, in the light of experience, that to turn the limelight on some leaves others in the shadows, and this would be against the spirit of the Association. One way of acknowledging the contribution of individuals has been to elect as Vice-Presidents those who have rendered long and outstanding

service to the Association. This list falls far short of the number of members who have given and are still giving sterling service but, although it is not comprehensive, we feel that our readers would like to know the record. Past Presidents — Miss E. Micholls, Mr. V. L. Austin. President — Mrs. E. Harrison. Vice-Presidents — Messrs. C. Beddous, S. E. D. Fortescue, W. Bell, G. Everett, R. Marshall, A. Marson, B. Stockwell, A. Harrison. Mesdames. B. Oldershaw, D. Cuddeford, M. Longhurst. Hon. Life Member — Mr. R. Saunders.

Association Highlights

In December, 1949, the Community Association took over the production of the Bookham Bulletin when it was on the point of collapse. For the first time it was distributed free to all houses in Bookham and the credit for organising this must go to the late Mr. R. H. J. Kepple.

It has had its crises when advertisement managers have resigned, editors have given up and distribution managers have retired. Nevertheless it is still growing in bulk and in numbers. Although it is subsidized by the Community Association tribute should be paid to the advertisers in its pages without whose support it would not be possible to carry on. We need more of them.

A most important achievement of the Association is its link with the National Trust

Open Air Theatre. This chapter in its history opened on June 18th, 1949, when a pageant performance of 'Merrie England' was sponsored by the B.C.A. in the Grounds of Polesden Lacey—a bold venture for a small organisation, a leap in the dark and at the same time an act of faith which was justified because it broke even. Close on 3,000 people attended but their line of vision proved to be very restricted. Accordingly it was decided, by permission of the Trust, to construct a stage. Space does not allow a description of the difficulties which had to be overcome nor the determination which kept the volunteers pressing on. The Stage was completed and handed over to the Trust on June 30th, 1951, Festival of Britain Year. The Association sponsored the original 'Midsummer Night's Dream' production, using local ballet, dance and drama groups, and the Surrey Philharmonic Orchestra. 'As you Like it' followed, then 'The Tempest', and finally 'Hamlet'. By this time the B.C.A. realized that the enterprise had grown too big for their responsibility and, by mutual agreement with the Trust, it was decided to set up a National Trust Open Air Theatre Advisory Committee on which members of the Association would serve and would continue so to do while their services were required in what had become an outstanding annual occasion. There is something almost prophetic in the following quotation from the

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1955 Programme: "The Bookham Community Association is proud to have built up a reputation for fine productions but we feel that it should now pass to a wider organisation in which the whole County may participate and that it may eventually become an established Festival which will draw crowds from far and wide."

The business administration, control and stewarding of the auditorium and adjacent areas, and press publicity are still done by members of the B.C.A. Special mention should be given to the work of the Box Office, which opens in May, and is organised by Mrs. B. Oldershaw. She took it over after the death of her husband who had so successfully managed it from the beginning of the Theatre.

A new era

Up till now we have been describing the establishment and building of an organisation on a

firm basis. We now come to the more immediate past. The Construction of the Extension which was officially opened by Miss E. Micholls on November 28th, 1964 marks a new era. Visitors from all parts of the country envy our attractive and unusual Hall, and we are indebted to our architect, Mr. W. E. Larkin, for the elegant and imaginative way in which he has combined the old with the new. The appreciation of the village was shown by the presentation of the wrought iron entrance lamps by the Gt. Bookham Afternoon and Gt. Bookham Evening W.I.'s to mark the national Golden Jubilee of the Women's Institutes, and this was followed by the gift of the large Notice Board by the Evening W.I.

A Working Party under Mr. A. Harrison undertook to clear the Grounds around, which was a massive job. Ancient tree stumps were removed, the ground was

cleared of brambles, brushwood and nettles. Rubbish which had accumulated over 50 years was buried. The whole area was then levelled and turved. With the help of the L.U.D.C., the enclave adjacent to the road was cleared and paved and a seat placed there which is much used by passers by. Quite a number of organisations donated shrubs for the border, which was their way of associating themselves in perpetuity with the village centre. The maintenance of all this as a worthy setting for the Hall can be ensured if our volunteers can be encouraged by the co-operation of the general public. The Leatherhead Council has now leased the Grounds to the Community Association for a period of 99 years.

Meanwhile another Working Party for the Hall, chaired originally by Mr. R. Marshall, and now by Mr. R. Catt, has worked wonders in keeping the premises in good order—a task that never ceases. Liaison between this sub-committee and the caretaker is through Mr. H. Cuddeford. No praise is too high for this small band who give so much of their spare time to the upkeep of a much-used Hall. Without them the rents would have to be much higher. Their labours could be lightened if more handymen would give an occasional helping hand. The chairman would be glad to hear from any.

The erection of the Extension was the first phase of an overall plan for which the necessary permissions have been given. What is to follow is the construction of a stage, so much

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Application has been forwarded to the Ministry of Education for financial assistance. We hope in due course to receive this, and we then rely on generous donations from all residents of Bookham to complete this project which is essential if the ancient Hall is to be preserved. It is also necessary to make it adequate for the increasing demands that are made on it.

A Tour of Inspection

In the past members, or groups of members, have wished to mark the memory of friends who have died by presenting a permanent gift to the Association.

To preserve the record in these pages let us take a short tour of inspection.

We look first at the Siberian Spruce recognising the notable contribution made by Mr. E. E. Oldershaw whose 5 years as secretary saw the laying of the new floor, the replacement of the chairs, the Polesden Lacey Stage and participation in the Coronation celebrations.

It was to mark the Coronation in 1953 that the Cedar of Lebanon was planted.

On the far side of this shapely tree are the mass of daffodils in memory of Mrs. N. Cox who was chairman of the Women's Committee which was the first group to be established by the

Association, with Mrs. B. Oldershaw as secretary, and it was responsible for a very full social programme. Through this group Mrs. Cox formed, about 20 years ago, the Over Sixties Club, which still serves a real need. Her experience with this enabled her to be the first secretary of the Leatherhead and District Old People's Welfare Committee, and her links with the B.C.A. enabled her to establish the Day Centre, with Mrs. M. Longhurst as its first cook, at the Barn Hall some 14 years ago.

Magnolia Trees were donated by neighbours and planted near the enclave in memory of Miss Freeman, an old member of the Association and a founder of the Over Sixties Club. They did not flourish in our soil but they have been replaced by shrubs. On the far side, under the Oak Tree, are snowdrops for the late Mr. A. Longhurst whose house and nursery, overlooking the Barn Hall Grounds, is now demolished. He was quite a character, and his son and daughter-in-law were very helpful caretakers of the Hall.

The small meeting room at the side of the Hall was erected by voluntary labour and named the Waterfield Room in memory of our first President who died in 1960.

Who knows the 'chairman's chair'? It is an unassuming green leather chair in which those of us who remember F. P. Street are proud to sit because it bears a plaque with his name and the date of his death in 1957. He was one of our

pioneers who, not only dreamed of, but worked hard for the Extensions which he did not live to see.

Very few know the story behind the Channing Notice Board in the entrance hall. It marks the short-lived Naturalists' Group which did high-level work under the enthusiastic guidance of this young man. When he died, tragically young, the Group collapsed. It was a shock to all our active members who had admired his persistence and courage. The notice board was intended as a tribute to him and also as a token of the Association's policy to encourage, where there is a keen leader, activities of an educational or social nature which can be of value to the community.

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(continued p.18)

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HISTORY OF THE OLD BARN HALL

The history of the Old Barn Hall and site up to 1906 is that of Sole Farm (now Sole Farm House) of which it was a part. Sole is first recorded in 1294 when Thomas atte Sole was living there. The name is derived from an Anglo-Saxon word 'sol', meaning muddy pool, and old villagers remember this pond near what is now the Barn Hall until it was filled in on the conversion of the building.

From 1294 Sole Farm had various owners and tenants till 1836 when it passed to Joseph Bonsor junior, the owner of Polesden, who rented it to Stephen Wood.

The first description of the Property is in Thomas Clay's Survey of Bookham in 1614—"a Customarie Temement with a Barne, Stable, Orchard, etc." A larger and clearer plan, of 1797, shows definitely the house and a number of outbuildings, one of the largest being behind the house and now demolished, the other sizeable one in the position of the Barn Hall. It is thus reasonably certain that the present Barn Hall is the one

mentioned in the 1614 Survey and this conclusion is reinforced by an examination of the timber framing by experts who conclude that it is probably of the 16th century.

Some 14 years ago, when the rotting boards were removed and Mr. Oldershaw supervised their replacement with the present excellent 'gurjun' floor, a solid base was found with runnels for water.

The Barn Hall became a village hall in 1906. The Little Guide to Surrey, 1910 reported "a fine old 15th century barn, grandly timbered, has recently been turned into a village hall"; while Black's Guide to Surrey stated that in the village "a grand old barn is now used as a village Institute."

A plaque on the inner wall bears the inscription that on Empire Day, 1906, this Hall was conveyed to the people of Bookham by Arthur Bird, Esquire. It was an exciting event for the little community of those days. From their descriptions we know how a small barn at the entrance was moved on rollers to the Moorings (now Braithwaites). This ingenious feat hit the national headlines and was photographed in The Bystander. The late Mr. E. H. Cummins, the builder, whom some of us have met, came from Dorking, so there are local connections.

It is on record that his bricklayer was George Ranger, member of an old Bookham family whose daughter still lives in Southend cottages.

Observant passers-by may have noticed that the wall fronting the site, which has been fairly recently repaired as originally constructed by Mr. R. Wales, is divided by iron stanchions, manufactured at Dorking.

One of our treasures is an estimate from Maples of May 23rd, 1906, which shows that the Hall was lavishly furnished: "4 stained long tables, 150 Austrian bentwood chairs, 6 walnut circular tables and 8 Douglas armchairs." There were open fireplaces in the Hall, the lower walls were panelled, there were small gas brackets as well as hanging lamps. The windows were curtained at the expense of the donor who also presented a cheque of £50 for initial expenses.

Mr. Bird, who lived at the Grange (now the School of Stitchery and Lace) told the Trustees that he hoped the Hall "will be of benefit and help to the inhabitants both rich and poor," adding, what we today would echo, "there is a point on which I have a strong opinion, and that is, that there should be some pecuniary subscription from members of any of the Clubs which may use the Hall."

The Trustees were the Rev. G. S. Bird, Chairman, and Rector of St. Nicolas Church for 19 years, Messrs. R. H. Lindam, Secretary, W. J. Proctor, T. Pickering Pick, S. C. Bristow, Miss Hilda Bird, and Mr. W. Keswick, M.P. for the Epsom Division. Incidentally, we were pleased to have with us at the

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opening of our Extension the Rev. A. L. Bird, grandson of the donor and formerly Vicar of Stanstead.

The Minute Book of the Trustees (1906-1912) gives a graphic picture of those early days. With all the optimism generated by a new venture the Committee decided to employ a caretaker at 5/- a week plus the perquisites on the refreshments, and a cleaner, also at 5/- a week for the winter months and 2/6 for the summer. The caretaker, however, was never appointed and, presumably in the interests of economy, one appointment was made to cover all duties. The post was offered to Mrs. Amey, whom many of us remember, and whose daughter still lives in Bookham. For a wage of 5/- a week in the winter and 2/6 in the summer, later compounded to a weekly wage of 4/6, she kept the Hall clean and looked after the interests of the hirers. Included in the work was the lighting, cleaning and carrying of coal for three fires—two in the Hall and one in the annexe. And this she did for 28 years.

An interesting sidelight on the climate of local opinion in the Bookhams of that time is given in a minute of February, 1910 which records the letting of the Hall to Miss M. Keswick, daughter of the M.P. for the Division, for an Anti-Women's Suffrage Meeting. There was, however, a Working Men's Club, which must have been well supported because it was agreed in 1911 to convert an annexe

(now the storeroom) for their use. A subscription list, which bears the name of the Hon. Mrs. R. Greville, of Polesden Lacey, was opened to defray the cost which was £39 12s.

On June 17th, 1912, the minutes record a decision to plant ivy, or some other creeper, to cover the walls of the Hall. We shall never know if this was done, or whether a man was secured to look after the grounds at 10/- per quarter, for these minutes are not signed. We can only presume that formal meetings of the Trustees ceased. We know that some of the original Trustees had died, some had left the district, and during the 1914-18 War the supervision of the Hall fell on the Rev. G. S. Bird until he, too, departed in 1926. Some time between this date and 1931, when he died, he was obliged to transfer the management to the Parish Council.

Under the Surrey Review Order of 1933 the Parish Council ceased to function and its duties, including the management of the Barn Hall, passed to the Leatherhead Urban District Council. The L.U.D.C. had its difficulties for, after the retirement of Mrs. Amey, a succession of caretakers followed. But, with the outbreak of the Second World War, the Hall met a vital need. In 1938 it became an evacuation centre and served meals for between 400 and 500 children under the control of the late Mrs. Bowen, representing the W.V.S. The Canadian soldiers stationed in

Bookham also used it in the evening for socials. In 1945 the evacuees returned home, the L.C.C. gave up its responsibilities and the Surrey County Council took over the Hall for the school meals service, with Miss Amey as cook-in-charge. When the Community Association obtained the Hall in 1948 the school canteen was still there, as well as the clinic and the local library, and it was some years before the library moved to the Grove, the canteen to the new Infants' School and the clinic to Church House.

When the Community Association inherited the Barn Hall it was not so beautiful as it now is, but from the beginning voluntary labour was never lacking to improve it. Money was always short but, looking back, one can appreciate that enthusiasm overcame obstacles that might have seemed insurmountable. The building of the Extension was a courageous decision and an act of faith in the future. It is up to Bookham to see that the further Extensions are completed, and that our heritage from the past is both preserved and made adequate for the larger population it now serves.

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