

TIMELINE OF THE HISTORY OF CRAWLEY VILLAGE HALL

1900 - The buildings on the site where the Village Hall now stands were barns and sheds for the Home Farm.

Ernst Otto Philippi purchased Crawley Court Estate in 1900 from Mr Adam Kennard who had owned and run the estate for the previous 26 years. Mr Philippi had been the very successful long term CEO of J & P Coats Ltd, an industrial conglomerate manufacturing cotton thread in Paisley (Scotland) and worldwide. On advice from his doctors he moved his family from Largs, on the Ayrshire coast, down to Crawley to enjoy the more clement weather. Recognising his unique contribution to the business, the Coats family persuaded Philippi to continue as CEO and control operations remotely from his new domestic location.

Ernest Philippi was a generous and philanthropic person who wished to improve the living conditions of the community. In order to do this he set about purchasing most of the properties in the village, employing a team of craftsmen to make improvements, and creating a place where people could meet and enjoy their leisure was one of these projects.

Early 1900's - The Village Hall is built on the site of the farm buildings.

At this time the Main Building of the stables was turned into an entertainment centre for the villagers, many of whom worked for the Crawley Court Estate. Inside there was a Reading Room, Concert Hall with a stage and dressing room, 3 Billiard Tables, a kitchen, gents toilets, and Elsan toilet for the ladies.

Outside there was a Bowling Green where the garden now is, and a covered Roller Skating Rink where Crawley Cottages are now situated. Sadly this was burnt down on the 30th December 1930 ("the coldest night for 28 years"), along with 3 Cottages. At this time the buildings were known as 'The Club'.

1917 - Ernest Philippi died just a few months after his wife.

His older son, Alex followed him into J&P Coats, and his younger son George took over Crawley Court and the Estate. Both boys had served in the Army in WW1.

Early 1930's - the family was hit badly by the Depression.

George Philippi started selling off cottages in the village at this time. In 1933 the Estate was sold, and in 1934 the Village Hall was bought by a Mrs Elisabeth Mason, and sold for £325 to 3 trustees - Godfrey Christopher Firbank (Army - retired) of the Dower House, Rev. William Rawlings Leslie Palmer of The Rectory, Crawley, and Joseph John Woolford of The Post Office, Crawley (Postmaster) - for the benefit of the whole Parish.

The 'Object' of the Trust was set out as follows:

"The said land with the buildings thereon... shall be held upon trust for the purposes of a Village Hall for the inhabitants of the Parish of Crawley without distinction of sex or political, religious or

other opinions and in particular for use for meetings, lectures and classes and for other forms of recreation and leisure time occupation, with the object of improving the conditions of life of the said inhabitants."

These are still the objects of today's Trust.

1934 - Land at the back of the Hall sold to a Housing Society

These houses were for rent, and were later acquired by Winchester City Council.

The area owned by the Village Hall Trust was reduced at this time to what it owns today.

1939 - 1945 - The Village Hall was used for events to raise money for the War Effort

The Village Hall was used for Charity events to raise money for the 'comfort' of the Troops, and became a NAAFI canteen. Dances and entertainment for soldiers were held, particularly when Crawley became part of the holding area for Troops destined to take part in the D-Day invasion of Europe.

Post 1945 - Toilet block added, and lots of Activities

After the War a modest toilet block was added off the Main Hall.

At this time the Village Hall was very much the centre of activities for the villagers.

- Village School PT classes
- Brownie and Guide Packs - some camping in the Hall
- Parish WI
- Amateur Dramatics and Pantomimes
- Snooker Club
- Crawley Rifle Club - with its own firing range which stretched from the stage to the back wall of, what is now, the Wren Hall.

1953 - George Philippi dies.

George Philippi was buried in the cemetery in Crawley, and not long after the rest of the Philippi family left Crawley.

1956 - The Village Hall Trust comes under the Charity Commissioners.

By this time the 3 original Trustees had died. After some while the Charity Commissioners said they were prepared to appoint the Parish Council as Trustees "for the benefit of the inhabitants of the village", but first the Lord Chancellor had to grant a certificate of authority. Trustees were then elected or nominated from organisations using the Hall to oversee the running of the Hall.

1969 - Danger signals!

The minutes of the Parish Council record, "It was....agreed that the Village Hall Committee should be asked to consider a suggestion that the Rural District Council (RDC) be asked to buy the Village hall for conversion to old people's bungalows, and that a new combined village hall and pavilion be built at the recreation ground."

The Village Hall Trust replied they were ready to consider any reasonable proposals from the RDC. It seems nothing came of this approach. (Quote from 'A Century of Minutes', Crawley and its Parish Council 1894-1994)

This same year saw the closure of The Post Office in Crawley.

Late 1960's early 1970's - Village Life is changing.

The nature of the Village was changing as more farm related jobs were disappearing, and more inhabitants worked elsewhere. Crawley became a favoured place for retiring ex-Services personnel, and many now had cars so were able to travel further afield for shopping and entertainment. The main impact on the Village Hall was that organisations like Guides, Brownies, Women's Institute and the British Legion were no longer meeting in the Hall, so funding was increasingly an issue. New activities included dances and showcase events to display the many arts and craft activities people were doing at home.

The Trustees had to ask the Parish Council for help to pay for roof repairs.

The Village Shop closed in 1973.

1977 The Queen comes to Crawley to open IBA

The ill-fated Crawley Court had fallen into disrepair and was demolished to make way for the Headquarters of the Independent Broadcasting Authority.

1982 Celebrations for the Royal Wedding of Charles and Diana.

The Village came together at the Hall to celebrate the occasion with many stalls, games such as Tug of War, and a Go Cart Race down the main road with the finish line at the pond (but not in it!)

1983 - Village School closes

The Village School had been a useful source of revenue as they held all their PT classes in the Hall, so when it closed that meant even less income. At about the same time Peggy Keeley and Dorothy Finch started a Youth Club for the younger members of the community.

1985 - What does the future hold?

"At the beginning of 1985, the Parish Council again discussed the future of the hall, expressing its unwillingness to assume unlimited financial responsibility for it, and decided that the Trustees should canvas residents views on the subject." (Quote from 'A Century of Minutes')

The answer came back loud and clear - the residents wanted to keep the hall as it was. A major refurbishment ensued with a quarter of the funding coming from the Parish Council. They also paid for the equipment for the Carpet Bowls Club. Things improved financially due to the carpet bowls being a success, along with a revitalised Rifle Club and other activities. Sadly though the Youth Club folded in 1989.

1995 - Disability Discrimination Act comes into being.

The challenges posed by this government act of requiring all public buildings to provide access and facilities for those with disabilities caused some consternation and heart searching for the Trustees, as it would require a major reconstruction of the Hall. Again the view that this would mean selling the hall for housing and rebuilding the hall elsewhere in the Village was raised, but again this was met with great resistance from residents.

2001 - New Trustees, New Ideas

New Trustees were elected who pledged to keep the hall where it was, and set about planning and rebuilding the hall as we see it today. This entailed taking out the old stage, providing wheelchair access, building a new toilet area, and extending the kitchen. In the plans at this time was a 'Garden Room' extension to the Main Hall to make it a wider, more useful space, but for some reason that didn't happen was there not enough money?

2004 - Major Fundraising commenced

Under the Chairmanship of Nick Guiton, with Ken Wren as his Treasurer, a Restoration Appeal was started to help fund the major changes needed to bring the Hall up to the standards required by the Disability Discrimination Act and to bring the facilities into the 21st Century. The removal of the stage was done early on as this then allowed wheelchair access to the Hall.

Essential repair work, and the construction of a new kitchen and lavatories then followed. Unfortunately enough funding wasn't achieved to allow the building of a Garden Room as an extension of the Main Hall, as was in the original proposals.

2007 - Completion of upgrade

2010 - Formation of Youth Club

The need for a meeting place and activities for the increasing number of youngsters in the Village was identified, and a group of parents got together and organised the refurbishment of the room at the far end of the Hall.

Along with other activities organised by the volunteers (i.e. parents) for the young people, Patrick Hendra supported the youngsters in the completion of various engineering projects, including making a remote-controlled plane, and a remote-controlled boat which was successfully tested out on the pond!

2011 - Refurbishment of Games Room

The Youth Club was so successful they required more room for an increased range of activities. It was also decided after consultation with Villagers that the provision of a Sports and Games Room would be an added bonus for the families in Crawley, so the room next to the Youth Club would be upgraded. The financing of this was shared between the Village Hall Trust, the Parish Council and Fieldfare which, in conjunction with Defra provided funding for rural community projects.

The toilet was added to the Sports and Games Room at this time, and the project was finished in Nov that year.

2016 - The Tavern comes into being.

The cohort of youngsters who had enjoyed the Youth Club had grown up and moved onto other things leaving the room at the end of the Hall complex redundant. This coincided with The Fox and Hounds pub closing, so a group of Villagers headed by Tim Anderson decided to open The Tavern as a place where folk could come together to socialise and have a drink, and sometimes food as well. This successful project continues today.

June 2022 - Queen Elisabeth's Platinum Jubilee

To celebrate this great occasion a Village Afternoon Tea was organised using the Village Hall as the focus with the road closed and tables and chairs laid out in the street. Scones, strawberries and cream, cakes and a bar were laid, games for the children and a very merry afternoon was enjoyed by all.

May 2023 - King Charles Coronation

Villagers once more congregated at the Village Hall to mark the accession to the throne of King Charles.

Over the years the Village Hall has evolved but still remains the heart of the Village of Crawley. Some activities remain the same - birthday parties, family celebrations and Weddings, and

others have changed with the fashions of the time. Today the hall hosts several different yoga classes, Teas when there are NGS garden openings, quiz nights, jazz evenings and the very popular Pantomimes put on broadly every 2 years by the Crawley Players. Perhaps there are some ideas from the past we could revive or more radical 21st Century activities we could embrace, but central to all of this is that we serve the people of this community.