

Chairman's Report AGM 2010

At the end of my Chairman's Report last year I highlighted the urgent need to recruit further trustees to ensure the continued efficient management of the Village Hall. I am delighted to report that we have now four new volunteers who were co-opted as members of the management committee in January and April. In alphabetical order these are Godfrey Burley, Keith Carpenter, Pamela Gray and Martin Peel. We are really pleased to welcome them as trustees.

Myself, the Treasurer and the Secretary had made it clear to the Parish Council that we were looking for successors to our official posts in the not too distant future, and this remains our position. All three of us would like to have successors in place before the end of 2011. The main challenge over the next twelve months will be to re-allocate the administrative tasks of running the Hall.

Activity at the Hall has continued at the same high level as before with gains and losses of bookings. The number of short term bookings for this year up to the present is 105 compared with 99 for last year but the average earnings per visit has gone down from approx £73 to approx £67. As for long term bookings: since the last AGM we have gained Tiny Talk and a Yoga Class, and Swanland Art Group have returned to the fold. A U3A New Beginners Bridge Group started up but folded after short time. The U3A also ran a computer course for a few weeks and there is a chance that they may run more classes if we can provide a wireless broadband connection. In September "Make and Do", a pre-school Arts/Crafts activity, will start. We seem to have reached a plateau in bookings, which, although at a high level, we must try to maintain, if not raise.

We have not raised our hire charges since January 2008, but we intend increasing these by an average of 5% from January 1st 2011.

We have continued to try to maintain a very high standard of service and amenity and to attract as broad a range of activity for a wide age range. To these ends we put out a questionnaire to every household in the village asking people their opinions of the Hall, what sort of activity they would like to see at the Hall and asking people to put their names forward if they were prepared to run courses. Perhaps as a result of the carrot of returned questionnaires being put into a prize draw, we had a high number of respondents. Comments on the standards of booking, caretaking and cleanliness were almost entirely good or excellent. Any negative comment (there were only three!) or positive suggestion was followed up wherever possible, although it has always to be stressed that the committee is not in a position to put on courses itself. This has to be left to others.

Still on the subject of improving the amenities at the Hall, with the help of grants and money from the 100 Club as well as our own resources, we have purchased a sack barrow for moving gym mats, a lapel microphone, a new notice directing cars to the appropriate car parks and automated blackout blinds for the Velux windows in the Main Hall.

We applied for and were granted by BT a laptop plus £170 towards the cost of one year's broadband connection. We are now deciding whether to go ahead with a wifi connection, how it is to be done technically and how to finance it.

We have continued to up-date our policy statements and conditions of hire. Thanks to our treasurer's superb eye and mind for detail, I am sure that our documentation in these areas is as good as those in any Village Hall. As part of this process the committee has this year approved our new Statement of Financial Policy.

In a building such as ours which incorporated a former Victorian school, and where cost restraints in the fitting out of the new building meant that in some cases the materials used were of a not sufficiently robust standard, maintenance continues to be a major expense. New flooring has been fitted in the kitchen, the men's toilet and the stairs. Old roof slates have had to be refixed or replaced, and new flashing and much pointing has had to be carried out over and around the "Gothic" entrance to the library – an area that was not touched when the building was converted.

Leaks through the roof over the ladies' toilet, which were at their worst in last winter's snow, have been attributed to poor workmanship in the original build, and the Parish Council are taking on the responsibility for these repairs.

My thanks to all our trustees who see to minutes, fire drills, the "100" Club, service checks, extra caretaking, publicity, maintenance, ordering supplies, marketing, etc., etc., etc., but particularly to John White and John McKain, who literally day-in and day-out and (judging by the times on some e-mails I receive) night-time too, work away unremittingly at keeping the whole venture going at the fantastically successful level at which it is now.

Also my thanks to Andrew Short, our caretaker, and Sam Larter, our cleaner, for their commitment. We hope that the Village Hall continues to provide a pleasant and congenial atmosphere in which to work.

Finally, looking to the future, work will continue to maintain the building to a high standard. In August the greater part of the inside of the building will be redecorated. We are looking into ways of refurbishing the old floor in the Meeting Hall, and to putting up a rail round the Main Hall so that hirers can hang pictures, use drapes, exhibit placards, etc. without damaging the walls. As electricity becomes more expensive and the world runs out of fossil fuels, we are looking into the possibility of installing photo-voltaic cells on the hidden slopes of the roof to produce our own electricity.

Towards the end of 2010 we hope to enter for a Hallmark 2 award. We are already well prepared.

Paul Priestley-Leach, Chairman Swanland Village Hall
Wednesday 21st July 2010