

KINGS BROMLEY HISTORIANS

Kings Bromley Historians had a meeting in the Village Hall on Friday 27 March when Allan Howard gave a talk on "The Rev. Chilwell, Local Hero".

William Veasey Chilwell was born in 1875 and was vicar at Kings Bromley from 1912 to 1930. He trained at Lincoln Cathedral and then was curate at various churches around Birmingham, before becoming the vicar at All Saints Church, Kings Bromley. The stipend was £230 pa, which was a sizeable sum when the average yearly wage was £160, and the living, which included a house and 14 acres of ground, was in the gift of JHHV Lane, the Lord of the Manor.

Allan considered the Rev. Chilwell to be a local hero, because he gave so much to the village. He started up the Parish Magazine and arranged for many repairs to the church, which had been deteriorating over the previous years. He decided that the village needed a place for men to socialise and play billiards, rather than drink alcohol at the pub, and was instrumental in the building of the Village Institute (then called the Dean Lane Memorial Institute and now the Village Hall). The raising of funds took a great deal of time and work, but the building was opened in October 1914. The Lane family gave a loan towards the financing of this and there were public subscriptions, but the cost was not fully paid back until 1925. The total cost of the Village Hall was £1000, around £77,000 in today's money. The Rev Chilwell was very keen on billiards and a second table was purchased in 1921.

He joined the Parish Council in 1917, becoming chairman in 1921, and in 1919 was instrumental in organising the construction of a War Memorial for the 14 men from the village who died in WWI. A service was held to dedicate the memorial in 1922, with the unveiling carried out by Major General Sir Ronald Lane whose only son had died in the conflict. The Rev Chilwell was also involved, with the school headteacher Mr John Bishop, in reviving the Horticultural Society in 1919 and starting up the annual show. When Pipe Ridware church needed a vicar, the Rev Chilwell agreed to be vicar at both churches. He was also a church schools inspector and visited Richard Crosse School on a regular basis; his wife was also very involved in the life of the village and was church organist.

There was a dispute between Rev Chilwell and the Lane family as the latter felt that they had sole right to sit in the chancel; the vicar was not allowed to sit there or have his reading desk there. Allan used the oral histories recorded by Ivy and David Butcher as evidence, together with documents, letters and photos, to illustrate the nature of the dispute and the eventual resolution. In 1930 the Rev Chilwell was offered and accepted the living at Colwich but was invited back to Kings Bromley to switch on the new electric lights in All Saints Church in 1934. He died in 1941.

From the historical documents and oral histories, the Rev Chilwell (nicknamed 'Chilly' by the villagers) was obviously a very active and well-regarded vicar in the parish. Allan was thanked for his very interesting talk.