

THE HISTORY OF TATSFIELD VILLAGE HALL

The recorded story of the village hall goes back to Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897. Mr Weldon T.J. Broughton, who lived at Colegates Farm and chaired the first Parish Meeting in 1894, offered to provide land for a public hall to mark the Jubilee. A gospel hall had been built in 1888, but Tatsfield's growing population - it rose from 168 to 607 between 1881 and 1901 - needed something better.

By September 1908 a church hall committee had been set up. The Lord of the Manor, Granville Charles Leveson Gower, provided the land. The South London Church Fund made a grant of £100 and further grants and fund-raising in the village produced the £650 needed for the project. Villagers also provided the funds for chairs - at two shillings each.

Mr A. Hitchcock won the contract to build the hall. In May 1909, Mrs Leveson Gower laid the foundation stone. In a deed dated 15 July 1909, her husband sold the land to the Church for ten shillings to permit "buildings to be erected thereon to be used by the incumbent and churchwardens for the time being of the Parish of Tatsfield". The Bishop of Southwark formally opened the Parish Hall on 9 September 1909.

Alternate Sunday Evensongs were held in the hall in winter because the Church was so remote from the village. During the First World War the hall was used by the YWCA - one account says it was handed over to that organisation. In 1918 the Parish Council minutes reported "*the dilapidated appearance of the Parish Hall suggesting that a fund might be raised in connection therewith*". It was agreed to talk to the rector about assistance in the hall's management.

By 1939 the Parish Council began to consider building a separate village hall because of hiring restrictions at the church hall. However, the Second World War intervened and nothing further was recorded in the Parish Council minutes.

In 1950, a curious controversy arose as to the ownership of the hall. Old copies of the Sevenoaks Chronicle were referred to in which Mr Leveson Gower is expressly quoted as saying that he offered the land on condition church services be held there when desired.

In 1951 it was concluded that "*after exhaustive and comprehensive study of the question of ownership of the Church Hall, hoping that it may not again become the subject of dispute, confident that it may be freely used for the pursuit of ordinary village activities, the Tatsfield Parish Council as at present constituted places on record its view that the hall is correctly entitled 'Church Hall' and that it belongs to and therefore must be controlled by, the Church Authorities*".

In 1961, the Parish Council was considering buying the hall and extending it for the use of the Youth Club. When the price of £2,500 was mentioned there were complaints that people were being asked to pay twice for the hall, since the bulk of the original cost had been raised by public subscription.

In 1964 the Parish Council began to lease the hall and in 1966 took up the option of buying it from the Church outright - for £3,000.

In the early 1970s, the hall was extended. The Parish Council added a kitchen and store rooms and built new toilets. Tentative enquiries were made about purchasing land behind the hall for further extension.

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It was not until 1982 that an opportunity to do this arose. At the November meeting of the Parish Council, Mrs Aileen McHugo proposed buying part of Park Farm when it changed hands. It was agreed to spend up to £3,750 on the purchase, which was completed in September 1983. A sub-committee met for the first time in May 1984 to discuss a proposal for a surgery and committee room behind the Hall.

That was the start of the scheme we see today. This provided for a free-standing surgery and parish room and an extension to the rear of the hall. Planning permission was given in 1988 and the scheme was started. Because of financial restraints, grant assistance from the District and County councils was not available when it was needed. The building of the extension to the hall was postponed, but the Surgery and Parish Room, together with new access and parking arrangements for the hall, were opened in 1990. The total cost of that scheme was £200,000, funded largely by a loan which will have been repaid by 2005 using income from the surgery.

By the time that District and County grants finally became available, the Parish Council was re-assessing the project. It decided a more ambitious scheme was needed. New plans were drawn up as it became clear that Tatsfield might qualify for National Lottery money. The Millennium Commission had given Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) £10m for the development of village halls in England. Planning permission was granted in 1996 and an application for Lottery funds made at the beginning of 1997 in support of a £235,000 scheme. This application failed.

In April a scaled-down £164,000 scheme was drawn up and a new application made for Lottery money. This bid was also unsuccessful, so a third application was made at the end of 1997. This asked for £125,000 of Lottery money in support of a £269,000 scheme to build an extension, widen and refurbish the main hall and re-vamp the stage and drama facilities. News came in May 1998 that we had been successful. We appointed Brian Drury of Brian Drury Associates as our architect. He had been responsible for the surgery and parish room project. Southern Builders Croydon Ltd started work in July 1998.

In addition to the £125,000 from ACRE's 21st Century Halls for England Fund, Surrey County Council has contributed £26,700 and Tandridge District Council has made a grant of £25,000. The Village Hall Management Committee drained its funds to provide a further £5,600, leaving £87,000 to be funded from the Parish Council reserves built up during the past few years and from a loan facility.

Owned by the Parish Council but under the day-to-day control of the Village Hall Management Committee, the hall is the centre of community life and is in great demand all the year round from village groups such as the Badminton, Bowls, Table Tennis and Youth Clubs. A pre-school uses the hall every weekday and it is rented for parties, dinners and other social functions by organisations and private individuals.

Many of the facilities, especially the kitchen and the toilets, deteriorated over the years and were below an acceptable standard. The new building puts this right. Its design uses best modern practices, it is energy-efficient and provides for people with disabilities. It includes up-to-date facilities for all and should meet the needs of the village well into the new century.