

## **HISTORY OF THE VILLAGE HALL**

**by Robert Bramwell**

When my family and I moved into Coombe Bissett some forty years ago, all that was available as a Village Hall was a Nissen Hut which was run by the Old Comrades Association and situated at the bottom of the Old Blandford Road. This was used for films, plays, Parish Council meetings, plant sales and also the Women's institute. (During the War it was also used as a Canteen by the Village School children) But it was used in particular by the Youth Club, which was run at that time by George Finnis sometimes helped by the local policeman (we did have one at that time). There were also Christmas Whist Drives which were very popular and attended by many visitors not of the village population.

Initial thoughts about the replacement of the Nissen Hut by an alternative were first mentioned in 1945 by the then Hut Committee. The Chairman at that time was Brigadier Linton (who lived at Old Mill House opposite the Fox and Goose) and in 1966 he decided he wanted to retire and it was then agreed that I should succeed him. In 1967 it was thought that a sub-committee should be formed together with trustees. I had been asked to be Chairman and the committee consisted of George Finnis, Jeffery Ashenden, Walt Mussell and Rollo Batten (who had been appointed secretary of the Hut Committee earlier on). He was absolutely of the greatest value dealing with all the very detailed application forms

Much thought was given to the building of the Village Hall, in particular to the creation of two small rooms, one to serve as a dressing room for participants of stage plays and the other to be useful for a doctor or a dentist. This room could also be used for the display of photographs from the past. At this time it was also decided to move the stage back so that the Hall could be used as a Badminton Court — this meant that a Badminton Club was formed which continues in existence to this day. Eventually it was decided that REEMA should be the builders. There were many meetings at this time, sometimes they were held at the Hut and sometimes at the Old House. These meetings were attended by many people and many subjects were discussed, but the primary discussion was how to finance the major project; there were many ideas, one of which was the institution of interest free loans, which proved to be very popular.

It was also decided that a newsletter be sent out and delivered to every household, so that everyone should know what was going on. In 1967 and 1968 Village Fetes were held at the Old House, which previously were held at the Vicarage about Whitsuntide. These Fetes were preceded by the election of the Village Queen and her assistants.

At one stage, before the New Hall was built it was decided that the old Hut needed to be examined as to the fire precautions; a fireman called on me and I noticed that he was wearing a Burma Star, so, after a somewhat lengthy discussion about the Burma Campaign we decided that we ought to look at the fire precautions, but it was decided that little needed to be done.

The New Village Hall was finally opened in 1972 by the Countess of Radnor, and after the opening everyone was given tea. In the evening a grand celebration dinner was held at which the menu consisted of chicken, rice and peas followed by dessert. The evening concluded with a Dance.

Soon after the Hall was completed it was decided to extend and form the Homington Room which was instituted by George Finnis, and then in 1983 it was decided to construct the large store room and garage behind the stage. At the same time the Gullick steps were constructed for pedestrians to gain access to the Recreation Field, (although they are not known as such these days) together with a vehicular access in the corner of the field.