

The Village Club

In December 1918 a public meeting was held in the Reading Room to consider how best to remember the men who had died in the Great War. The War Memorial outside the Parish Church and the plaques in Holy Trinity Church and St John's Chapel resulted from that meeting but it was also agreed that *a YMCA Hut should be erected*¹.



The Rev F H Salzmann, who chaired the meeting is reported to have said a YMCA Hut *'would be a great blessing to the men who were shortly coming back to their homes in Westcott.....it would be just the place for them, a place to spend their evenings instead of sitting at home, or in the public houses or walking aimlessly about the village'*.

This need had been recognised earlier in the year when St John's Sunday School Hall had been opened as a recreation room for all Naval and Military men in the District. The objective was *'to provide music, billiards, bagatelle, writing materials, daily papers and other recreation, and generally to provide a home away from home as far as possible'*.

So it was that the Red Triangle Hut came to be built in Furlong Road as a thanksgiving for the 230 men of the parish who returned safely from the First World War. It was intended as a mutual ground on which all classes in the village could meet.

Local fundraising raised sufficient money to purchase the land for £400 and to put aside £1,000 for the provision and maintenance of the club. The cost of the building was £3,000; a proportion of which was contributed by the villagers and the difference made up by the YMCA.

The main hall was 100ft by 30ft, divisible into three parts and there were separate rooms for reading, smoking, lectures and billiards. Apart from the modern design, the club also had a modern approach to its membership. It was the first Red Triangle Club in England to allow women in over the age of 16 years. The Dorking Advertiser stated *'The women will have their separate departments and the rooms set apart for their use are extremely cosy and comfortable'*. The inclusion of women in

¹ During the war the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) had provided temporary huts, in this country and in France, to provide somewhere for Servicemen to get a hot drink and food - and where they could find 'a touch of home'. Many of these huts saw further service as village halls and scout dens.

the club was also approved by Captain Barclay at the opening ceremony: In a blinding glimpse of the obvious he commented that *'Dances would be very dull in the hall if there were no ladies and therefore they will be heartily welcomed to the full benefits of the club.'* Modern materials and fittings were used throughout the building *'There is a polished floor for dancing, the culinary arrangements are entirely satisfactory, the sanitary arrangements are quite up to date, the whole building is well lit by electricity and the whole interior walls are lined with asbestos to protect from fire (!)'*.

Captain Fryer, the organising secretary of the club summed up the hopes of the club: *'We are not a church and any programme, religious or otherwise, will never be in competition. We wish the closest cooperation with all Christian bodies. I am relying absolutely upon local men and women to run the club'*.

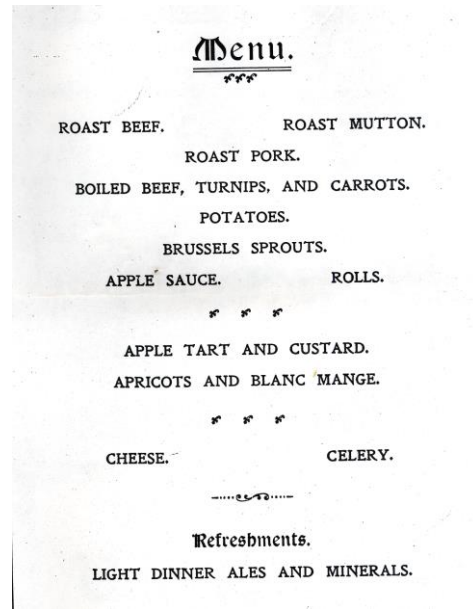
The club was officially opened on Monday 15 December 1919 by Her Highness, Princess Marie Louise, Queen Victoria's granddaughter.



She had been involved with the work of the YMCA for some time and in her speech said: *'One of the marvellous things about the YMCA was the way in which it had always marched with the times, and the way it had always been just a little ahead of all other institutions'*.

Following the opening ceremony a 'delightful concert' was given in the evening with an audience of 600 people. After the concert, a dance carried on into the early hours of the morning.

A 'We thank You' Dinner was also organised for the men of the village who returned safely from the war. Originally it had been thought that 230 fought in the war but when their names were recorded the total came to over 270, plus the 35 who did not return.



Their names were recorded on the dinner menu and can be seen in the Local History Group's Annual Report for 2006.

By January 1920 the Red Triangle Club had formed a committee with various sub-committees. The success of the club was also evident with two billiard tables in use every evening, a dramatic society and dancing, needlework and cookery classes. A start had also been made on a bowling green and tennis court.

The Club has featured in the life of the village ever since, but especially in the 1920s and 1930s before the advent of television. There may be those who can recall those days but the following examples have been retrieved from archived copies of the Dorking Advertiser.

1920 The prize-winning costumes at a Fancy Dress Ball at the Red Triangle Club were worn by Mrs Ricardo and Mr J B Geake. Mr Tarling's jazz band played excellent music whilst Mr Philpott (Dorking Electricity Supply) and friends worked the limelight with wonderful effect

1921 In May, the Comrades of the Great War (Westcott post) - later to become the Westcott Branch of the British Legion - held their AGM at their HQ, the Red Triangle Club. Lt Col R W Barclay was re-elected as Captain and Mr J B Geake Treasurer².

At the Red Triangle Club an Athletic section was started under the direction of Mr Tucker, late Royal Navy. Activities included physical culture and boxing, and also cross country running where Mr W Gadd of North Street ran a 3½ miles course in 22 minutes. The Westcott

² Mr Geake's son had been killed at the Somme and in addition to a memorial in Holy Trinity Church he was responsible for introducing the distinctive Dovecot / W-E-S-T village sign on the Village Green.

Bowling Club was formed, with a green prepared on former tennis courts adjoining the Village Club.

A series of talks at the Club included 'The Music of Arthur Sullivan', 'From Folk Song to Symphony' and 'Folk Dancing' with enthusiastic participation in morris dancing, sword dancing and country dancing.

1922 In July an Al Fresco concert was held at The Rookery to which the public generally and inhabitants of Westcott in particular were entertained by the Red Triangle Club Orchestra. And the Red Triangle Club Concert Party gave several performances during the year. Each concert comprised songs and instrumental items, recitations and sketches³.

The first season of the Red Triangle Club's tennis championships was brought to a successful conclusion in August. Mrs Tucker beat Miss Slocombe to win the Ladies Singles title and Mr Watson defeated Mr Rosier in the Gentleman's competition.

1923 In January at the 3rd Annual General Meeting of the Red Triangle Club a 'large and representative gathering assembled and considerable interest was manifested in the election of new members to serve on the General Committee. Three new members were required to take the place of three retiring members and for these places there were 11 nominations⁴.

In February the Club was the venue for a fund-raising concert for the Westcott Cricket Club.

In June a successful 'fete and fancy fair' was held at the Red House when the Red Triangle Club supplied the music. There were numerous races for boys and girls and a comic race for the firemen, who also competed with the Red Triangle Club and the British Legion in a tug of war competition.

1924. The Reading Room was not the only library in the village; a 'Club Library' was established at the Red Triangle Hut. Mr Bouquet addressed the women's section of the Red Triangle Club with 'Readings from Dickens'. The press report noted that the audience appreciated the way in which the speaker illustrated Dickens' knowledge of human nature, his humour and his intimate relationship with the foibles of the people whom he so vividly characterised. But

³ In February, for example, Mr V. Luff started off with a pianoforte solo, which was followed by a cornet solo by Mr. Mansfield. The humorous part of the vocal programme was left to Mr. E. Woodnutt and Mr. W Jeater, who received hearty encores every time. Mr. W Etheridge and Mr. F Rosier both won applause with their songs, and especially gave a very fine rendering of the duet, "Life's dream is o'er." The dramatic resources of the club were tested in the performance of two dramatic sketches, the first one, a farce entitled 'Blundering Barney' and the second a nigger farce entitled 'Lodgings to let.' The dramatis personae in the first were Messrs. W. Martin and G. Castle, and Miss Nevitt; and in the second Messrs. G. Wootton, F. Rosier, I. Burgess, E. Woodnutt, and G Tunnell.

⁴ The result of the ballot was the return of Messrs. W Smith, F J Balchin and H Aslett, the retiring members who had offered themselves for re-election.

not all the entertainment was quite so heavy. Concerts with a varied programme of musical entertainment were held throughout the year. These invariably included humorous sketches and monologues.

Fund raising for the Red Triangle Club continued during the summer with a successful fete at 'Milton Heath' which raised £80, including £17.5.6 taken at the gate.

At Christmas the Slate Club payouts were eagerly awaited by all who had been paying their 7d a week subscriptions. The payout amounted £1.5s.

1925 The women's section of the Red Triangle Club held an enjoyable '*cafe chantant*' at the Hut. There were also parties for the Scouts and Cubs including a nigger entertainment⁵. 1925 was also the year the Westcott Fellowship Cottage Trust was formed, Mrs Brooke (widow of Arthur Brooke of The Rookery, and the founder of the Brooke Bond Tea Company) gave the initial £1000 to set up the Trust when the scheme was proposed by the Vicar, the Reverend Fred Salzman, in conjunction with the flourishing Red Triangle Club.

1926 In January the Vicar arranged a 'free cinema' at the Red Triangle Hut, when the cartoon adventures of Felix the Cat proved particularly popular. And in March a concert was arranged at the Red Triangle Hut by the Dorking and Westcott Detachment of the 5th Bn the Queens Royal Regiment. The programme included mandolin solos by Mr W F Knight, a humorous duet 'The Tale of a Winkle' by J Barrett and W J Jeater and the Dorking Terriers Pierrot Troupe. In the interval Lt Col R W Barclay appealed to the young men of the village to join their local territorial detachment.

In the last game of the 1925/26 football season the Westcott Football Club became champions of the Dorking and District League when they defeated Ashted 3 - 0 but then found that at the start of the 1926 season they not only had insufficient players to field a team but were also bankrupt with debts amounting to £17. They had to withdraw from the League but all was not lost because a new 'YMCA' team was formed and 27 members quickly recruited. Mr Cory Wright again offered use of a pitch, Mr G Smith provided goal posts and Mr W Smith donated a new strip, in white with a red V sign and triangle to depict the village club's sponsorship. By the end of the year 8 out of 10 hastily arranged friendly games had been won.

⁵ In November, another Red Triangle Club concert delighted a full audience with an excellent bill of fare. Miss D Hunt was successful with the pianoforte solos while Mrs B M Hughes gave some delightful violin solo. Songs were contributed by Mr W H Etheridge, Miss Hunt and Mr T R Davies. Mr W J Jeater was very funny in his musical monologue and Mr A J James gave some excellent patter for the piano. Professor Do'em (Mr F Tucker assisted by Mr W Martin) gave a cleverly worked ventriloquist sketch.

1927 Mr H A Aslett won all three events in the Westcott Bowling Club championships for the Brooke Challenge Cup and at the Tennis Club Messrs Broyd and Jeater won the Men's Doubles and Mrs Broyd the Lady's Singles.

The trophies for these successes, and for the Billiards Challenge Cup (also Mr Aslett), were presented at the Red Triangle Hut at the end of November. Earlier in the year the Red Triangle Fete and Sports day had been held on the Belmont School playing fields (now Cradhurst) and the pupils of the school put on a production of HMS Pinafore in the Red Triangle Concert Room.

The Women's Section organised cookery competitions with entries such as the 'most nourishing dish (not exceeding 6d)'. Whist Drives were also held and it was not unusual to have 20 tables in play.

The Christmas Party for 5 to 14 year olds was attended by 220 children and all received the time honoured party present of a bun and an orange. Other gifts were financed from the Home Industries Exhibition held earlier in the year.

1928. The Home Industries Exhibition was an annual event that encouraged everybody in the village to develop and display their talents. It would appear that needlework was dominant with references to the Westcott Embroidery Class led by Mrs Brooke and to competitions with different classes. Senior girls, for example, competed for the best child's frock, petticoat and knickers. Junior girls made pinafores and tea cloths. For the boys there was carpentering.

"Mrs. A. Brooke of the Rookery, with the help of Miss Savory and Miss Berridge started an embroidery class for members of the Red Triangle about 1922. We had a class every Wednesday at the Rookery and on Monday evening at the club. We learnt the various stitches of embroidery and then did needlework for the sale of work we had in May. After allotting some of the proceeds towards a Christmas treat for the children the rest went into club funds. All the embroidery class helped to make a banner for the Leith Hill musical competition."

The main purpose of the exhibition was to benefit the funds of the Red Triangle Club and although villagers could sell their productions they were charged a penny in the shilling percentage. In 1928 the Exhibition raised £93.18s made up as follows:

Embroidery Class Stall	£68.13. 0	Mrs Cory Wright's Sweet Stall	3. 2. 0
Entrance Fees	3.13. 0	Mrs Gooch's Sweet Stall	7. 5. 0
Junior Girls Club	3. 8. 0	Entry Fees to Competitions	9.10
Bargain Stall	3. 11. 0	Commissions	16.11
Teas	1. 3. 0	Mrs Buck's? Ice Cream Stall	1. 13. 0

The main event of the year was the Annual Fete organised by the Red Triangle Club Committee and again held in the grounds of Belmont School. There was a tennis tournament on the American principle, a

netball contest, a concert and dancing besides a varied selection of stalls and competitions⁶.

At the Club's AGM a new constitution was drawn up to make the club self governing. It was also agreed that the club should be made more attractive to lady members and their sub was reduced from 5/- to 2/6.

1929 The Women's Section of the Red Triangle Club organised a Taste and See competition when competitors were required to identify various sandwich fillings.

1930 At the Annual Home Industries Exhibition the 1st Westcott Guides and Brownies each had a stall. The Brownies exhibited a doll they had made. It was dressed as a Brownie but contained a money box into which 11/- (55p) in farthings had been collected through a slot in the doll's mouth.

1931 In August it was reported that a determined effort was being made by the inhabitants of Westcott to raise funds (£475) to purchase what had become known as the Nurse's Cottage. In October a dance was held in the Red Triangle Hut for this purpose. It was organised by the Westcott Company of Girl Guides under their Captain, Miss Hindley and the music was provided by Earl Rapley and his Rhythm Boys. By December the whole of the required sum had been raised⁷. [.]

1933 The Women's Needlework and Handicraft Branch of the Red Triangle Club provided a cookery exhibition, and a variety show was presented by Mr Palmer of Rookhurst

1934 Over 220 people attended a WD & HO Wills sponsored cinematograph show in the Village Club. This included newsreels of the Oxford & Cambridge boat race, football cup final, Grand National; a musical comedy 'Harem Scarem', a study of 'The Bean' as well as a description of how woodbines are made.

The Bowling Club re-laid the two old greens and were introducing two new greens.

⁶ There was also the novelty of hearing local artistes broadcasting from the school hall into the fete grounds, and of listening to orchestral music, both made possible by a new form of amplification. Half the secret of this, we were told, was the use of a new valve (4-electrone) with which little current was necessary. The concert was picked up by a broadcasting type of microphone, and broadcast by means of loud speakers. Selections in the afternoon and music for dancing in the evening were provided by the same means of amplification, from gramophone records. The whole outfit was fitted in a car, and it was in charge of the inventor, Mr L E Coussell, who was giving it its first try out in the open air, with conspicuous success. Among the attractions at the fete were the following: White Elephant, Sweets, Jim-Jams, Pick-a-flower, Destiny, Zig-zag, Table skittles, Money fishing, Teas, Hoop-la, Darts, Skittles, Balloon 'squash-ums', Coconuts, Ringing the Bull, Crinoline Lady and a Fortune Teller. There was a big entry for the sports including inter-school events and it is noted that Florence Nightingale won the egg and spoon race. Receipts totalled £62.18s (*over £1500 in today's money*). Children were entertained to a 'Fairyland of Verse.

⁷ The proceeds from the eventual sale of the Nurses Cottage were allocated to the Westcott 'Aid in Sickness' fund, a charity that still exists today

The reports in the Dorking Advertiser provide a fascinating glimpse of village life between the wars but during this time the YMCA were reducing their local activities and in 1934 they accepted a payment of £250 from the Red Triangle Club Trustees in return for which the YMCA ceased to have any role in the running of the club although they did impose certain restrictions as to its use.

As a result it was proposed that the Club's name should be changed to the Westcott Village Memorial Club and that its object should be the promotion of a spirit of unity and brotherhood in the widest sense, and the provision of a rallying ground for all who live in the village and its surroundings for recreation, amusement and self-improvement. These aims were accepted but it was decided that the name should just be The Westcott Village Club. It was also agreed that the minimum membership fee for both sexes should be 5/- per annum as it had earlier been reported that a shortage of funds had necessitated reduced opening hours and a reduction of the steward's wages to £1 a week.

Despite these fine aspirations of the new Club membership numbers fell and there was a general lack of interest. The British Legion who had a large following transferred its headquarters to the Prince of Wales and for a time the Furlong Road premises were more or less derelict.

Things perked up in 1937 when the British Legion returned and took over the running of what then became the British Legion Club, paying the Hut Trustees initially 10/- and later £1 a week.

And during the Second World War Lady Eastham of Westcott House, and Lady Touche of Broomfield, were instrumental in opening 'The Hut' as it was increasingly known as a canteen and club for the troops stationed in Westcott and on Ranmore Common, and dances provided for the Forces were well attended.

Then in 1941 the Westcott Players produced their first show and continued to perform at the Hut for the next twenty years, significantly helping to restore the Club's financial position. The facilities were also used by other organisations including Henley's Tyre Company who took over Milton Court and Springfield Farm during the wartime years.

The Hut also features in the Dulwich Central School Evacuees Diary. In an article "The Outshift⁸ and how we have employed it" John Tilley noted how pleasant it was to go for walks in the countryside, but *What could we do on the wet days? The first step in solving this was the hiring of the British Legion Hut. Here we were able to take part in various activities. The Model Aircraft was one of the first sections to start. The*

⁸ The Outshift was the term used the time when the evacuees were unable to use the school, which they shared with the village pupils

material came from the Cloud Model Aircraft Co. in Dorking Other activities included the lino cuts with which the Diary is illustrated and drama, the outcome of which was a show held in the Hut during Christmas week in 1939

There are few newspaper mentions during the war but we have noted that:

In October 1940 following intense aircraft activity during the 'Battle of Britain' a meeting was held in the Hut to consider what could be done to make the village safer from air attack. Various suggestions were put forward, including the possibility of digging into the surrounding hillsides to create natural shelters, and a petition signed by 400 residents was presented to the ARP Committee of Dorking Urban District Council. In response it was agreed to construct additional public shelters, one had already been built in Ashley Road, and to adapt the disused pumping station at the far end of St John's Road

In April 1941 it was reported that Mrs B. of Heathcote, Main Road, Westcott was fined £2 for allowing an unscreened light to show. PC Hamilton gave evidence that he saw the light shining from the house and finding that Mrs B. was attending a concert at the British Legion Club he sent for her there and she came immediately. In the meantime, however, people living in Furlong Road became annoyed and threw stones, breaking several panes of glass. Aircraft were ahead at the time. Mrs B. told the bench that the light was showing from a spare room. The light switch in this room had become so loose that, when shutting the door with a bang, the light went on of its own accord. She was sorry for the trouble she caused.

After the war the British Legion became increasingly dissatisfied with the limitations on the use of the Club imposed by the YMCA, specifically the embargo on gambling and the sale and consumption of alcohol.

In 1948, to overcome this problem the British Legion chairman, Col Munt, obtained interest-free loans from a small number of local residents which enabled the Hut to be purchased outright by the Legion for £960 (which sum was handed over to the Trustees of the Reading Room). Things looked up again, helped by the introduction of money-making fruit machines but then in 1957 the hall was condemned as unsafe and had to be closed. By this time the Westcott Branch of the British Legion had realised that the maintenance and necessary restoration task was beyond their resources and they offered the premises to the Village for £800.

In 1959, after an appeal for funds had raised £2500 to complete the purchase and carry out the necessary repairs, The Hut was registered as a Charity with new trustees and an enthusiastic Management Committee. Ambitious plans were laid for the rebuilding of the club, committee room and kitchen and a Ministry of Education grant for £2,500 was obtained, allowing rebuilding work costing £8,000 to commence in 1962.

The new Village Club now attracted a membership of over 300 (Membership was open to anybody over 16 the cost being 4/- per year or £2.2.0-for life membership) and in subsequent years, in addition to the continued use for flower shows, an annual village Arts & Crafts Exhibition and the management of Cradhurst etc it was where many village organisations met including Old Age Pensioners, Labour Party, the Village Association etc.

In April 1984 The Hut Foundation celebrated its 25th anniversary with a week of village events concluding with a treasure hunt on the Cradhurst Recreation Ground and a Silver Jubilee Gala Dinner where Dame Anna Neagle was the Guest of Honour.

The Village Club continues to provide a focus for village entertainment and the Hut has been home to many organisations, not least to nursery schools and the Centre Stage Theatre School.

The story of the Village Club started in 1918. Before then this site was a meadow, at one stage known as Tucker's Field since it adjoined the Prince of Wales where the Tucker family were longstanding landlords. It was here that fairs were held (in addition to those held with the Lord of the Manor's permission on the Village Green).



The Ancient Order of Foresters organised an annual event but ‘Odam and Irving’s’ travelling fair was the most popular. Early in the 20th century Granny Odam died while the fair was at Westcott and it is claimed that her body was burned in her caravan with all her belongings and her horse was shot.



Westcott Fellowship Cottage Trust

1925 was the year the Westcott Fellowship Cottage Trust was formed, as noted in the following letter to the editor of The Times on the 18th September, under the heading; ‘A Housing Experiment’;

Sir,---In the village of Westcott, near Dorking, a new scheme is being tried to prevent overcrowding in the present and the existence of slums in the future. Money is being subscribed to build new cottages, and the donors ask for no return either in rent or interest. The rents are given back to the trust fund, to keep the cottages in good repair and build more, and to alter slums as the money comes in.

The hon secretary, the architect, and the builder are all doing their bit to make the scheme successful. The committee of management is selected from the Village Club, and a voluntary collector calls for the rent. Full particulars of the scheme can be sent to any of your readers who may be interested in it.

Yours faithfully

ALICE BROOKE The Rookery, Westcott, near Dorking

Although she did not declare her interest, Mrs Brooke gave the initial £1000 to set up the Trust when the scheme was proposed in 1924 by the then Vicar, the Reverend Salzman, in conjunction with the flourishing Red Triangle Club - forerunner of the Village Club.

The aims of the Trust were:

- to eliminate and abolish as far as practicable all slums in Westcott⁹.
- to erect build and improve Cottages in Westcott and to let, supervise, repair and keep in repair the same,
- to purchase or otherwise acquire any property which may appear to be necessary or convenient for any object of the said Trust.

The first houses were built in Bailey Road. Two more followed in Watson Road on land given to the Trust by Col Barclay of Bury Hill¹⁰. [In 1945 two further houses were built on land acquired in Parsonage Lane and in 1962 six new bungalows in Westcott Street replaced the original Rose Cottages that were by then well over 100 years old.]

The Hut closed in 2009 when the operation ran into financial difficulties and major electrical & safety works were urgently needed. The Trustees combined the charity with that of the Reading Room and the new joint charity are drawing up plans for a new village hall on the site of either the Reading Room or the Hut. The remaining land will be developed to help provide the necessary funding. (2024)

⁹ At that time there were several old, dilapidated cottages in the village

¹⁰ This land had been acquired by Col Barclay in 1906 for a church hall to replace the Holy Trinity ‘mission room’ at the far end of St John’s Road.