

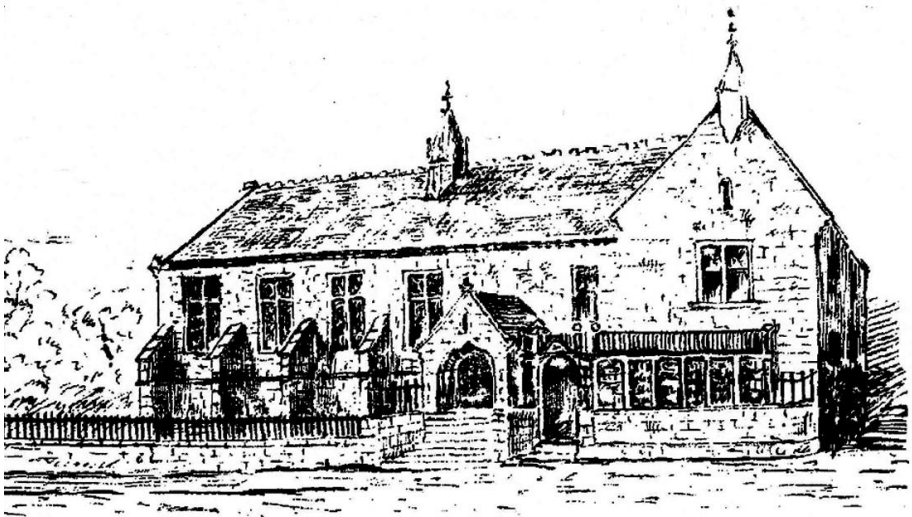
JUBILEE HALL,

ROTHBURY.



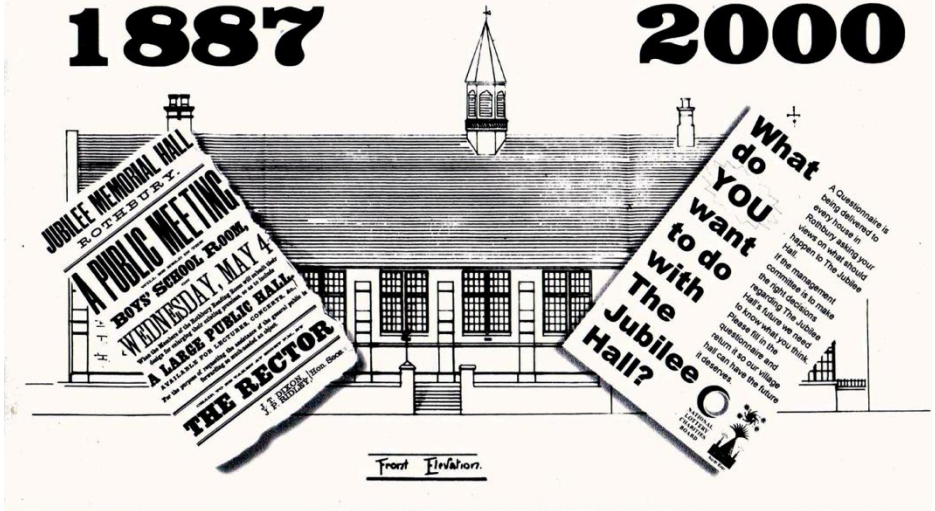
OPENING CEREMONY.

September 7th, 1888.



J. T. DIXON.

The Jubilee Hall 1887 2000



THE JUBILEE HALL ROTHBURY.

To speak of the Jubilee Hall, Rothbury, as a single entity is to a certain extent misleading, since the dominant building which is now situated at the junction of Bridge Street and Front Street has seen several reincarnations.

A small library was established at the East end of the long room in what was, in 1850, the Black Bull Pub.

In 1864 a new library was situated at the north end of Dovecote Yard (Dove Cot Close). Provision was also made for the storage of the local hearse and the Rothbury Fire-engine on the ground floor. The influx of workers into the locality prompted by the development of Cragside by Lord Armstrong, the arrival of the North British Railway line and the consolidation of Rothbury as a rural market town led to the addition of a Reading Room to what was more accurately termed "The Mechanics Institute".

It is the purpose of this illustrated booklet to trace the early developments and show how the commemorative lecture hall and recreation room combined with the existing library/reading room to form the Jubilee Hall of 1887.

Paralleled by today's zeal over Millennium issues the Jubilee (50 years) of Queen Victoria's reign provided further impetus for public expressions of loyalty and devotion. However, whilst the Queen's Jubilee provided the stimulus for the initial development, the structure was enlarged and modified in 1897 and 1909.

The building we see today is largely an extension and re-build following the disastrous fire in July 1939 and the reconstitution of the pitched roof between c.1962 and 1989.

The inhabitants of Rothbury are currently being asked to help determine the future of this building. It is my hope that by humanising the history of the Jubilee Hall, those same people will appreciate more fully their heritage.

The Jubilee Hall - origins.

The history of Jubilee Hall encapsulates the social history of the local community.

The Mechanics Institute and Library was established in 1850 by the Reverend C.G.V.Harcourt, the Rector of Rothbury, who provided an initial stock of 295 volumes intended to facilitate "the acquirement of useful knowledge".

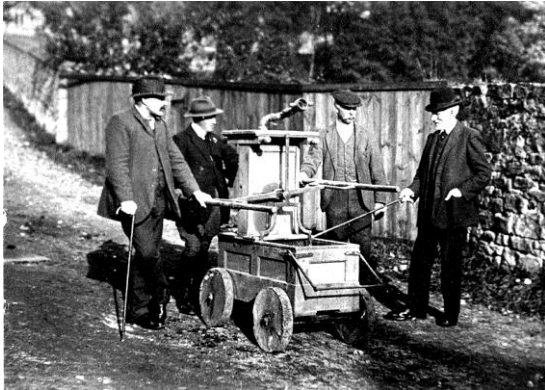
During the year of the Queen's Jubilee (1887) it was proposed to erect a lecture hall and a recreation room as a permanent commemoration. A committee, with the Reverend A.C. Medd as President, was formed to develop the project.

The Duke of Northumberland charged an annual rent of 1/- (5p). The first management committee and the list of benefactors contains many familiar names:

George Storey - Robert Farrage - William Davy - James Howey-Thomas Carmichael-George Milburn - Robson Dores - Thomas Henderson - Robert Carr.

The Institute and Library was open every weekday from 10.00 am to 10.00pm to all those subscribing 6/- (30p) per annum - visitors were charged 6d (2.5p) per week. By 1913 charges had remained the same but opening hours included Sundays 1 pm to 6pm and then 8pm to 10pm.

Whilst the first floor of the Library - until recently part of the caretaker's accommodation - was occupied by books, an old relic was stored on the ground floor i.e. the Rothbury Fire Engine (1788). In the 18th century most of Rothbury's houses were covered in thatch and fires were commonplace. During the night of December 11th 1738 a fire destroyed property and merchandise and a further blaze on October 10th 1781 consumed 16 houses and a brewery. Prompted by these events Mr.



George Farquhar (1788)

"presented to the town and parish of Rothbury, a fine engine, under the care and control of the Rector and Church Wardens".

Whilst the Fire Engine) survived and is stored in Alwick, there is no trace of the Hearse after c.1880.

By 1873 the library committee added a reading room to the existing lending library.

In addition to the Reverend A .Medd, the Duke of Northumberland made a gift of land to the south of the then existing Library / Reading Room, (the Mechanics Institute) and Lord Armstrong provided the bulk of the initial finance.

The ensuing communications and speed of response contrasts to the 21st century practice. Whilst assuming that initial discussions had taken place in early 1887 it is still remarkable to note the calendar of events i.e. April 14th 1887 - a letter from Jos Snowball, the Duke's Agent, to Reverend A.Medd confirms the Duke's approval of the stipulation that any additional buildings adjacent the Reading Room Library attract a nominal rent of 1/- (5p) per year and that the sum of £2 per annum be paid to provide a Children's Playground.

May 4th 1887 a public meeting was held in the Boys' School Room "when members of the Rothbury Reading Room will submit their design for enlarging the existing premises".

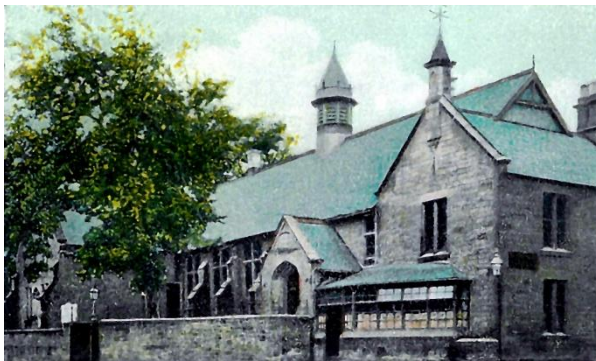
October 1887 Reverend A.Medd sends a telegram to Mr Jos Snowball requesting a contract to prepare the foundation.

October 1887 Snowball replies by telegram (11 minutes transmission time - what price E-mail!)

"The Committee may commence the foundations whenever you like, the agreement can be signed afterwards. Snowball" September 7th 1888 Official Opening Ceremony featuring addresses by Thomas Hodgkin, Colonel Watson, The Reverend A. Medd, Lady Armstrong and a concert involving "local talent". February 8th 1889 a Recreation Room was opened beneath the library room, presumably the hearse had gone elsewhere!

By 1890, the Jubilee Hall was the pride of Rothbury and its management committee had an equally notable Membership List President Reverend. A. Medd Rector Vice-President Lord Armstrong Lady Armstrong ~ Earl Percy ~ Sir W.B.Riddell-Bart - Sir G.O.Trevelyan-Bart M.P. ~ Mr.W. Orde ~ Reverend W.S.Wrenford ~ R.Farrage ~ Edward Cummings - Reverend R. Burdon ~ DrJack J.W.B. Riddell ~ W.A. Watson-Armstrong ~ Dr. Richardson Elected Committee

Reverend Price Smith ~ Reverend A. Scott ~ Mr George Grey ~ Mr. J.C. Mitcheson ~



Mr. Robert Hunter ~ Mr. Charles Mitcheson ~ Mr. William Bertram ~ Mr. George Wintrip ~ Mr.R. Ainslie ~ Mr. J.Gallon ~ Dr. Barrow ~ Mr.D. McIntyre

Secretaries Messrs. I.T.Dixon I.P.Ridley and Mr. L.C.Davy

The constitution of the

Jubilee Hall did not prevent the people of Rothbury celebrating the Queen's Jubilee.

The Newcastle Courant announced a comprehensive programme of events for June 20th.

"The arrangements of Rothbury for the celebration of the Queen's Jubilee are nearly completed, and it appears to be the unanimous wish of the inhabitants of the little Border town of Rothbury to testify their loyalty in a hearty manner. On Monday evening, June

20, a public dinner will be held at the County Hotel with Mr. Medd, the popular rector of the parish, in the chair, and Mr. J.D. Wealleans J.P. of Flotterton House, and Mr. R. Donkin, Haw Hill House, Rothbury, as vice-chairman, and an interesting musical toast list, a pleasant and enjoyable evening may be anticipated.

During the afternoon of Tuesday, June 21st, there will be thanks giving services in the Parish Church and in the Congregational Church. Sir W.G.Armstrong C.B., Cragside, with his characteristic kindness has granted holiday to the whole of his workmen in the district, and further to all of them who wish to go he will give a railway pass to Newcastle, a ticket of admission to the Exhibition and allowance for refreshments. No doubt the majority will avail themselves of this liberal offer and to many it will be a very great treat indeed.

The Athletes Sports Committee, with Mr. R.B.Rushfirth Hon.Sec. displays a good bill and offer liberal money prizes, Competitors must be resident in the parish. At 3 0' clock the children and aged people will be entertained to tea within Messrs. Donkins' Auction Mart. After tea the children will proceed to Crag side grounds where there will be games and races and other competitions for prizes; and each child will be presented with an attractive book by Lady Armstrong as a souvenir of the Queen's Jubilee. The joyful proceedings of the day will conclude with a ball to be held in the County Hotel. Mr. R.Donkinjunior and Mr. J.W. Schofield will be M.Cs. Dancing to commence at half past nine".

The Jubilee Hall, approximately 2/3 area of what we know today, quickly became the centre for a variety of social activities. What follows is a selection of information from a mixture of sources e.g. Rothbury Parish Magazines, local Directories and Newspaper and the Committee Minute Books.

By 1895 the Library was well established and had issued 1423 books. The librarian's wage was £10 per annum - the caretaker received £14. The Reading Room had a good selection of local and national journals and was a popular venue for residents and visitors. The Recreation Room seems to have had a rather chequered history from the start. In 1890 it was closed between 1 p.m. - 8 p.m. on Sundays due to the bad behaviour of some youthful members. Whilst no details exist as to what constituted bad behaviour expulsion was not uncommon. Card playing was banned and smoking frowned upon.

Religious services were occasionally held in the Hall and a charge of 2/6d was levied which did not include the cost of gas and on the understanding that there was no collection. This religious usage was extended in July 1893 when the Hall was used by the Congregational Church whilst their new building was being erected.

Fund raising events in the Jubilee Hall have a long tradition: a notable three day bazaar in October 1895 raised £208 (approx. £10,000 at current value) toward the restoration of the Parish Church roof. It was reported that, "The Hall was crowded with tastefully arranged stalls, laden with countless useful and fancy articles. From the first there was a very large company and the brisk business which soon opened was maintained throughout. Mr. Watson-Armstrong, who presided over a tobacconists dept. was kept very busy". Other attractions included penny dips; fortune telling; a Black and White Minstrel show and an exhibition of waxworks by the children.

By 1895 it was very apparent that the structure needed expansion

The Committee had recently obtained a "Dramatic Licence" charging 1 d per seat. A caretaker's cottage adjacent to the main building had been constructed and the plan of 1896 shows additions at the South end. The Library and Reading Room continue to flourish as did expulsions for bad behaviour. The appearance of a billiard table was matched by the decision to set an age requirement of 18 years for membership (reduced to 16 years in 1944). In keeping with many other local and national festivities in 1902 the Jubilee Hall was the venue for a very successful Coronation Dance to mark the accession of Edward VII. (Mr. Donkin recognised the event in an impressive "3 globed" street lamp, recently restored in 1999). The original intention of providing a suitable place for the "acquisition of knowledge" was further reinforced when the Hall was used by the Northumberland County Council Technical Education Committee. Lectures and Classes were held in Natural History and Botany under the direction of Professor Miall of the Yorkshire College, Leeds and with the clientele were attracted by the "Mutual Improvement Society" who cheerful and informed guidance of D.Dixon". Whilst most of the audiences at these sessions were practising teachers, a wider clientele were attracted by the "Mutual Improvement Society" who regularly had groups of over 100. Subjects ranged from an appreciation of Mendelssohn to literature and local history.

In July of 1898 the latest, and by no means the last military presence, used the Jubilee Hall. Having camped at Knocklaw, a detachment of the 3rd Battalion

Northumberland Fusiliers, 200 in total, were entertained to a supper and concert. Following a church service and a memorable sermon by the Rector the troops marched to Hexham and some, eventually, to their deaths in South Africa.

The Jubilee Hall featured in the national recruiting campaign at the beginning of the First World War and provision was made for drilling new entrants. A temporary rifle-range on two nights per week was permitted on the condition that any damage was paid for! - one assumes they used blanks. The presence of troops in the area, including Canadians, was paralleled by interesting developments in the Hall e.g. The Cinema Co. ran a show on Saturday nights (1916); the billiard table was repaired at a cost of £28.15d. The piano was not repaired ("until after the war was over") but could be hired for 15/- for Dances, 10/- for Concerts, 5/- for Religious Services.

In 1917 the availability of papers and periodicals was reviewed. It was decided the following should be withdrawn: Morpeth Herald - Weekly Chronicle - Evening Chronicle - Punch - Amateur Gardener - Farm, Field and Fireside.

To be kept were: The Newcastle Daily Journal+- London Daily News - Alnwick and County Gazette - Illustrated London News.

(This distribution was constantly under review by the Committee).

Whilst the victory in 1918 was celebrated in the Jubilee Hall there is no meeting of the Committee recorded in November 1918 and the main item of business is the ongoing debate about repairing/buying a piano! (a replacement was formally obtained in late 1919).



The post First World War period saw the fortunes of the Jubilee Hall rise to fresh peaks and as a contrast plumb new depths. Public expectations and tastes changed' and these were reflected in varied activities and differing priorities. Despite the provision of easy chairs, the

Reading Room proved to be progressively less popular and the issue of books showed a steady decline. In 1934 the complete closure of the Reading Room/Library was mooted and only prevented by the lack of clarity as to when the

Northumberland County Council Rural Library would appear. This same year, 1934, recorded the lowest number of bookings ever and the annual account showed a £40 9s. 10d. deficit. The situation was best summed up by the Committee minute which stated, "The Hall had not been so well let owing no doubt to the hard times we are passing through" (even the Cinema was not paying).

By contrast, the Billiard Room on the ground floor, which had in fact been closed throughout 1925/26, was reopened in 1928. Pressure from Rothbury Football Club, the local teenage population and a desire to "clear our pavements of loitering youths" combined to have this particular room enhanced by the provision of a repaired billiard table, electric light and improved heating. The room was sublet to a management committee at an annual charge of £5. The Billiard Room continued to make a positive contribution to both alleviating boredom and providing income until well after 1945.

In terms of audience appeal and sheer numbers the Cinema in the main hall was clearly the most popular service to the local community. Originating from a silent/lantern show in 1902 the peak period of 1937/50 saw three separate programmes e.g. Monday and Tuesday: Wednesday and Thursday: Two showings on a Saturday evening and an occasional matinee on Saturdays. (Precedent was sometimes given to Saturday night dances).

The Cinema Projection Box was constructed in 1925 and completed at a cost of £ 13 .5s Od. However, it was not always smooth sailing for Mr. Redhead of Coquet Cinemas and his colleague Mr. Stoddard. An application to hold a film performance on Christmas night 1926 was rejected and, as previously stated, the year 1934

marked a low point in the cinema history.



Whit Carnivals were a popular annual event and the photograph c.1930 shows Lord Armstrong accompanied by his wife and Dr. Hedley crowning Mr. Willy Bell as King and Bobby Green as a rather mature Queen. The proceeds (£200) from this particular Carnival were donated to the Royal Victoria

Infirmery in Newcastle.

I understand that the popularity of these film shows encouraged younger members of the audience to form queues immediately after school!

The popularity of the Cinema was characterised by the momentous events when Hollywood came to Rothbury. The M.G.M. Picture Company filmed most of the screenplay of their production entitled "Moonlight Sonata" in Craggside and in 1936 held a farewell dance in the Jubilee Hall to thank the local population for their co-operation and interest. Present day residents of Rothbury may recognise themselves and/or relatives in the photograph



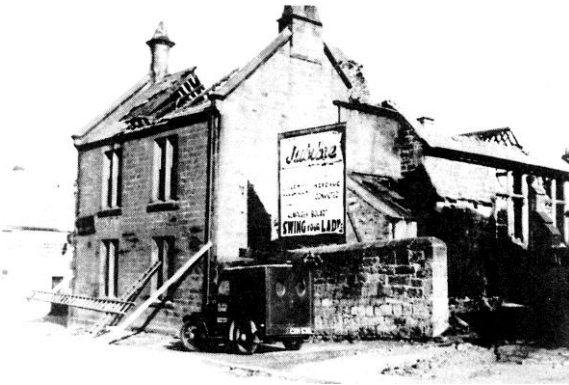
Whilst it cannot be proved, the Cinema's presence led indirectly to the biggest disaster encountered by the Jubilee Hall whereby the remains of a cigarette led to a fire on Sunday July 9th 1939.

According to the North Mail and Newcastle Journal smoke was seen coming out of the building at 2.30am. The Police were soon on the scene and attempts were made to get fire brigades from Morpeth, Ashington and Alnwick. By 4pm. the building at 2.30am.

The Police were soon on the scene and attempts were made to get fire brigades from Morpeth, Ashington and Alnwick. By 4pm. The Morpeth volunteer force arrived to find the building blazing furiously and threatening the adjacent Post Office.

It was reported that the Postmaster's wife remained at her switchboard throughout the fire. The brigade ran their hoses from the river whilst villagers tried to stem the blaze with their totally inadequate equipment, namely a hose and hydrant. Mr. Goldsworthy of the Queen's Head Hotel took his fire extinguisher to the scene but remarked,

"There was nothing I could do. The fire was inside the building at that time and we could not get into it. We are in the middle of Coquetdale and yet there seems to be no fire protection at all for us here".



It was ironic that the population who had access to one of the first ever "fire engines" (1788) should be so bereft of this facility. By the evening the Jubilee Hall was seriously damaged with most of the roof and interior burnt out. Certainly

the film "Swing your Lady" starring Humphrey Bogart was not shown that night!

Hall Committee meetings now took place in Martins Bank (currently Barclays').

Surveys and architects fees totalled £50 17s 4d. and Mr. Stoddard's offer to pay £4.10s as Cinema rental was accepted. The Hall was back in use by January 1941.

The opportunity was taken to redraft the Constitution and redefine administration.

The committee - 10th January 1941 was attended by: Lord Armstrong ~ Cannon H. Harris ~ Rev. A. Nelson ~ James Clark ~ David Milne ~ William Pyke ~ John Tait ~ J.B. Laidler ~ Arthur Gregory ~ William Soulsby ~ Luke Wanless.

The main outcome was that in future the property should have a Management Committee (which featured a large proportion of local clergy) accountable to four Trustees. Significantly the Trustees had the power: "To veto any activity or entertainment which in their judgement is not in the best interests of the community". It therefore followed that; "No gambling shall be permitted on the premises nor shall intoxicating liquor be sold or consumed therein". In keeping with the times tenders for blackout curtains were invited.

The Jubilee Hall provided its own war effort. War Bonds and National Savings groups met; regular dances were supported by the locals and the increasing number of military personnel who were stationed in the area. The 1st Battalion Herts Regimental Band gave a concert and the local Home Guard established its H.Q. in

what is now the Over 60's Club room. Dances had to finish by 12.30am and lights out in compliance with War Measures Act (1944).

During the War ladies from the Rothbury Mothers' Union and Women's Institute provided an almost never ending supply of "tea and buns" in the Hall's dining room to the welcome relief of many service personnel training in the Rothbury area.

The war years in the Jubilee Hall also produced several anomalies: the Committee did not support a function in aid of the Red Cross but said "yes" to the free use of the Hall during "Salute the Soldiers Week" (1944).

The Plymouth Brethren hired the Committee Room at 15/- per Sunday, but Captain Metcalfe's application for a whist drive was rejected. Sunday lets were not allowed unless from H.M.Government.

The Jubilee Hall seemed to take the ensuing peace of 1945 in its stride, the Committee deciding that any incomes from lets associated with VE and VJ day celebrations be donated to the Home Coming Fund. (There certainly was a need for such a fund not least of all for those men from Rothbury who had survived the rigours of the War including those who had been imprisoned by the Japanese).

In the period after 1945 the Jubilee Hall re-established itself as the main community centre in Rothbury and Coquetdale. Two events typify the use of the Hall in this period. Whist Drives had been very popular for many years but 1949 saw the biggest ever. Players from all over Coquetdale filled every room in the Jubilee Hall and 120 tables were required to meet the demand to win the £20 first prize.

In 1962 the B.B.C. Quiz Show "Have a Go" chaired by Wilfred Pickles was broadcast to the nation from the Jubilee Hall, Jack Phillips (the news agent), Gladys Huish and Mrs. Kirkup "were given the money" in front of a packed Jubilee Hall audience.

The associated events are within the memory of many people living in the area today. Consequently, I would prefer to invite their comments and recollections as a potential sequel to this publication. Sufficient to say that the original intent' of providing a Reading Room/Library had, by now, been overtaken by dances, cinema, jumble sales and whist drives. New groups availed themselves of the services provided by the Jubilee Hall e.g. The British Legion Flower Show ~ The Badminton Club ~ The Dramatic Society and more recently: The Rothbury and Coquetdale History Society and the very popular Over 60's Club. However, it was not all plain

sailing, Tombola was banned in 1959 until declared acceptable by the Police some months later.

The story of the Jubilee Hall is very positive and the structure has provided a focus for a host of successful community activities which have made the Hall an integral part of Rothbury life. However one issue occurs with almost painful regularity since 1890 i.e, the challenge of heating such a large stone building. Successive Committees provided gas heaters, oil stoves and even a stove previously used in Dr. Sharp's School, all to no avail! It would be inappropriate to finish this commentary on a negative note and readers are invited to look at the following "Snippets".

1901

Queen Victoria died on January 22nd. "Her greatness was second only to her goodness". Special services were held throughout the British Empire. The Hall Committee recorded its sadness and gratitude for such a magnificent reign.

1920

Heavy engine traffic in the road(s) adjacent to the Hall caused vibrations which resulted in several pictures, including a large portrait of Lord Armstrong, to fall to the floor.

1927

Friction between the Jubilee Hall Committee and the Parish Council because the latter had apparently exceeded the letting conditions.

1927

The Caretaker complained that she had not received the full bonus i.e. £2. The Committee felt that they "had been generous and had done the best they could".

1928

Rothbury Urban Council paid £1 per week for use of the Ladies Toilet Room and the Back Urinals and agreed to provide supervision and make good any damage.

1944

Some of the most successful dramatic activities in the Jubilee Hall were those associated with the British Legion Dramatic Club and its co-operation with that well known N.E. playwright Esther McCracken. Some readers may still remember productions e.g. "Cry Liberty", "Quiet Weekend" and "Quiet Wedding".

1946

Agreed that £5 be donated to the Duke of Northumberland presentation by his tenants on the event of his marriage

1948

Mr. Wanless, Manager of Martins Bank (known as Davey's Bank) left after 13 years as Treasurer to the Jubilee Hall and was replaced by Mr. Wedderburn.

1958

Recent users were the Forestry Commission and the Over 60's Club. The latter were invited to use the "old" Billiard Room.

1959

The Chairman, Mr William Pyke died on April 27th aged 87. Mr.Pyke had been a member of the original Mechanics Institute and was the last survivor of that founding group.

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Northumberland Estates

Original Booklet Compiled

by

Alan Fendley

&

Published

by

D.W.Elson

