

**DRINKSTONE WAR MEMORIAL INSTITUTE**  
**AGM Monday 27<sup>th</sup> June 2011**

**Management Committee Chairman's Report**

This last year has been a very eventful one, dominated by the impact and consequences of the tragic fire, which so badly damaged the hall. The events surrounding the fire are well known: on the morning of September 1<sup>st</sup>, Cath, the Yoga teacher, turned on the electrical fires in preparation for a class. Within a few minutes, following a fault in the main fuse box, a fire started in the lobby. Cath promptly called the Fire Brigade who came very quickly but they could only dampen down the fire until EDF arrived to disconnect the main electricity supply. The fire damage was contained within the front third of the hall but nevertheless caused substantial damage to the kitchen, toilet and lobby areas. There followed a seemingly endless dialogue with three different loss adjusters, and a further series of meetings with surveyors, forensic experts, demolition firms and asbestos surveyors. As a result of these negotiations, and after considerable soul searching, the Village Hall Committee finally agreed to accept a cash settlement of £60k from the insurance company. From this sum, £8k has been paid to the demolition company for the asbestos removal and dismantling of the old hall, leaving us £52k to be used for our New Hall project. This sum will not be shown in the accounts as it will be paid to us in stages as the building work on the New Hall progresses.

Looking back it is difficult to remember what life was like before the fire! The Sale Trail 2010 had been very successful, and the numerous Clubs and Classes continued to thrive. In order to ensure that the Hall remained in a fit enough state to be used while we awaited the new build, a decision was made to spend a limited sum of money to carry out some very basic upgrading. Members of the Committee, aided and abetted by the Tuesday Club and other volunteers, spent a lot of time and effort clearing, cleaning and generally sprucing up the building. The kitchen cabinets were fitted with re-cycled doors and were also given 4 coats of paint, and we were on the verge of replacing the flooring, to freshen it up, when the fire struck!

Coming as it did so close to the planned Village Show, the consequences of the fire severely tested the mettle and resolve of the Committee. The easy decision would have been to cancel the show but we decided to go ahead with it in the hope that the village would pull together to make it happen. This most certainly was the case and an army of people, both from inside and outside the village, came forward to offer their help and support. However, the show could not have happened without the amazing help of Barry Evans, for whom nothing was too much trouble. He offered us a treasure trove of vital equipment and an answer to every logistical problem (and there were quite a few!), which we encountered. The success of the show demonstrated that there is a wonderful spirit within the village and proved just what can be achieved when everyone pulls together.

The loss of the Village Hall meant that we had lost the venue for all of our Clubs and Classes but, once again, alternative venues were very kindly offered. We must thank All Saints Church, which has provided a temporary home for the Youth Club, History Club, Film Club, Parish Council meetings and Tuesday Club. The Yoga Classes have relocated to Tostock, and the Bingo, Tai Chi and French classes to Felsham.

Sadly, our much-loved old hall has now been completely dismantled, but we are happy to report that it will now serve a new purpose at Stow Maries Aerodrome Museum near Maldon in Essex, where it will be rebuilt and used as an education centre. We have to thank Robin Sharp for this outcome. Without Robin's dedication and determination to find a new home for the hall, followed by his perseverance in negotiating with the Museum, the old hall would have been flattened to the ground completely and would simply have disappeared forever. Instead, it will continue to provide a useful service in an appropriate setting surrounded by other wartime buildings, which are also being lovingly restored by enthusiasts. The removal of the walls, floors and roof trusses to their new home was the second epic journey in the lifetime of our truly historic old building. In place of the horse and cart which brought it to Drinkstone from Great Ashfield 87 years ago, it took 8 hefty men over 7 hours to load it, section by section, onto 2 huge lorries. This event was recorded for future generations by local press, radio and television, as well as by our own village archivist.

Obviously without a hall to manage, our focus has now turned very much towards fund raising for the new build project. This year's Sale Trail, held in May, raised over £1,000, and currently plans are well advanced for this year's Village Fete and Dog Show. This will have a 'Dad's Army' theme and will take place on Ray's field next to the hall site using borrowed marquees and generators. Attractions will include a guest appearance by Ian Lavender, an inter-village Tug of War competition, a fancy dress competition, races, stalls, a brass band and a flypast by the RAF. Also, at the end of August, we will be presenting a concert by Laura Pooley, and fellow singers, from the Welsh National Opera, at All Saint's Church.

The Village Hall Committee has effectively been working as two sub-committees for the last couple of years. This structure has served us well, but, as circumstances have now changed, from this evening we will now revert back to having one committee, with one Chair. The new Chair and officers will be elected at the Management meeting to be held after this AGM.

In what has been a very difficult year, both Debbie and I owe a huge vote of thanks to our fellow Committee Members for their unwavering support and enthusiastic hard work through some extremely trying times. We have had to work very closely together in order to make some extremely difficult decisions, and the team has certainly gained in strength because of this experience. We owe Debbie a great deal for her drive, determination and strong leadership, which steered us through the dark days of last autumn.

Unfortunately, Debbie has recently decided to stand down as Chairman of the Management Committee due to family commitments. On behalf of the whole Committee I would like to thank her for all that she has achieved during her time as Chairman. I know that she wishes to continue to serve on the Committee and fully intends to give us her active support, when her family and work commitments allow her to do so.

We are very thankful to Chris Wright for the contribution that he has made to the work of the committee over a considerable number of years. His technical expertise, engineering know-how and advice on planning issues have played a huge part in ensuring that our long awaited New Village Hall will become a reality. Chris and Sue will be very sadly missed by the whole village, but we wish them well when they make their move back to Essex to be nearer their family.

Also, after many years of dedicated service to the Committee, this year marks the resignation of Sally Andrews from her office as Chairman. At some point during the next few months, Sally and David will be moving away from Drinkstone to start a new life in the Yorkshire Dales, so this is likely to be her last AGM.

Sally, Drinkstone owes you so much for all the time and commitment that you have so selflessly given to Village Hall affairs. Without your calm determination and refusal to accept defeat against all the odds, we would not be about to embark on writing a new chapter in Drinkstone's history. Our New Hall will be a tribute to **your** hard work and perseverance. We hope that Drinkstone will always have a place in your heart, as you will most definitely always have a place in ours.

On behalf of the whole committee I would like to offer you and David our very best wishes for the future.

Sally and Chris, these gifts are just a small token of our appreciation.

So, in conclusion, we look forward to an exciting and eventful year in which our wonderful New Hall **will** finally be built!!

Sue Foulsham

Acting Chairman Management Committee

Drinkstone War Memorial Institute

