

Village Hall Annual Report 2021

What a year! Cast your minds back if you will to January 2020 when most was well with the world and there was talk of a virus affecting parts of Asia. Jump to the 23rd March 2020 and the prime minister announces the first lockdown ordering everyone to stay at home.

The village hall hosted a meeting of all the parishes organisations able to attend. The meeting, organised by the parish council was to consider a parish response to covid 19.

From that night on to the present time the village hall has been open every single day with the exception of Christmas Day and Boxing Day.

The trustees agreed wholeheartedly that the village hall should play whatever part it could during this pandemic. All activities came to a halt, income dried up to a trickle and we braced ourselves for what was to come. The hall became a daily sanctuary especially through the early spring and winter months enabling those needing the shop and post office to wait in the warm and dry whilst one person at a time was allowed to enter the shop, it also provided a safe space for a small amount of interaction with each other whilst queuing.

We had just had the kitchen, jubilee room, toilets and lobby areas redecorated and it was decided that whilst the hall was not available for hire it would be a good opportunity to decorate the main hall providing a fully refreshed bright and fresh village hall for use once this was all over.

Throughout the last year as and when government advice and or regulations have allowed the hall has provided a "village hall café" on Tuesdays and Saturdays. An opportunity for members of our community to come together, albeit socially distanced, to enjoy a respite from isolation and spend an hour or two in the company of others whilst also raising some funds towards the running costs of the hall itself.

It has been a place where daily papers can be collected and we also brought the food bank collection from the church to the hall. With the very generous support of ur community that little plastic box as enabled considerable amounts of food to be sent across to the food bank in Bere regis where they have been able to offer support to several families through this very challenging year.

The hall was also a central point for people to collect fabric and threads as many in our community set about embroidering a picture of life in lockdown. The finished article will in due course be on permanent display in the hall as a reminder of this time in our history. Jenny's jams have also been able to be on display raising funds some of which have been donated towards the new dishwasher the hall needed and is currently raising money to support the Joseph weld hospice. Allan Smiths honey has also been available with its monies raised being donated to the hall funds.

The trustees managed to secure the government grant of £10,000 which enabled us to continue to cover our ongoing overheads without dipping into reserves which are primarily set aside for the upkeep of our thatched roof.

The money from the grants is all but gone now and so we hope soon to be able to start to welcome back our regular hirers and start to see things get back to normal, whatever that may look like going forward.

I would like to thank all of my trustees for being open to things being done differently during this time and to each and every volunteer who has stepped up to enable the hall to offer the services it has, you have all been amazing.

We couldn't hold our annual burns night or New Year's Eve celebrations. The Christmas fayre had to be reinvented as an event over most of December providing stalls for those who would have attended the fair that people could make purchases from at leisure thereby reducing the risk of gathering large numbers of people for a short period of time.

The hall was also used as a vaccination centre as the Bere regis surgery trialled flu vaccinations in the community, a very successful event that I believe they intend repeating in the future.

The village hall café was also able to put on a socially distanced Christmas lunch, sponsored by the village shop. The sponsorship enabled us to provide a welcome drink, three course meal including wine and tea/coffee for £5 per head. We were able to sit 29 people down in the hall and provide a

further 13 meals delivered to peoples homes where they were either specifically shielding or didn't feel comfortable coming out. Once again a superb team of helpers set to and made it all possible, thank you.

Through the year the village shop has also helped us with donations towards covering the cost of keeping the cleaner on and with the provision of hand sanitizer helping us to be able to provide a covid safe facility.

Hopefully we are now seeing the beginning of the end of covid restrictions and as we move forward from here I am looking forward to some great parties and hoping that some of the ways we as a community have all come together will continue. We have some amazing volunteers in all the organisations in our community and working together is so beneficial to all of us. As in all times of adversity this year and covid has brought out the best in us.

Anyone wanting to arrange a party or event in the hall, provisional bookings from the end of June onwards are now possible and we look forward to seeing everyone make the most of this wonderful asset we have.

Stuart Chorley
Chairman of Briantspuddle Village Hall Trustees