

Bishop Monkton Village Hall & QEII Playing Field

Over 20 years ago a group in the village began working towards a new facility for the village and this has evolved into the Hall and Sports Ground that we have today. We were aware of the lack of facilities in the village right across the age range, particularly in terms of a playing fields and village hall. A long standing cricket club played on a rented small ground, there were a few kiddies swings on the far side of the church and there was a well used (wooden) WI Hall, though its age was starting to show! Fund raising started (which still continues regularly) but there was a shortage of suitable available land.

20 years ago, through the Parish Council, some land was obtained as part of a development arrangement, with outline planning permission for 7 bungalows with a safe single access road - you can see how planning has been 'manipulated' over recent years! The playing field was levelled and sown (using STRI Bingley for guidance). An extensive application for Lottery Funding in early 2001 was unsuccessful, despite a confident outcome predicted by Harrogate BC. That 'stiffened the resolve' and with the major help of two valuable assets, a new approach was taken. Significant sums were raised from the sale of the Mechanics Institute (thanks to the trustees) and from the WI Hall/plot (thanks to BM WI). This plus 20+ years of fundraising from various annual events in the Village (Hog Roast, Duck Races etc, with £45,000 raised) and the Autumn Auction, Weekly Raffle and the Bottle at the Lamb & Flag (£80,000 raised), plus donations enabled a staged development to commence.

Grass sowing of the whole area, including the Outfield, was completed in 1999 and a cricket square laid using some local approved clay/loam. After 2 years the number of stones beat us, so at a cost of over £6,000 the Cricket Club introduced a new square top (using imported Lancashire soil!). This was ready for the 2001 season when the club moved, initially for a couple of years based in two rather old caravans until the Hall/pavilion was completed! Village cricket throughout the country is in decline, including in Yorkshire and the Thakestones Nidderdale League. Our Saturday side is in Division 3 (of 8) but are in urgent need of more and younger players while our Evening side disbanded a couple of years ago. The facilities are superb, regularly winning annual Best Ground Awards and hosting occasional representative matches and finals.

A high quality Bowling Green (flat) was laid and opened for play in 2003. It's well run and maintained and has proved to be very popular, with a Club membership of about 35. There are regular club sessions as well as playing many matches in local leagues with considerable success. The tank and watering system has proved invaluable in hot dry summers.

A Football team was also formed playing in the Claro Sunday League, though the village age profile made little contribution towards its playing strength and it had to disband in 2015. Unfortunately several other Village Clubs and Organisations suffer similarly, as is the situation in many villages. A junior club (Nidd Utd) now uses the ground (and outfield) regularly for both matches and training.

The Hall structure was erected in 2003 and a small dedicated team from the village spent a year fitting it out, providing a superb and well equipped building. It's regularly used by many village organisations and individuals across a wide range of events including Shows put on by our Entertainments Group, usually a panto and a play/meal evening once a year. Speakers at the Sportsman's Dinner run for a few years by the Cricket Club a while back, included Henry Blofeld, Fred Trueman and Mike Summerbee. Demand by those outside of the village to hire the facility is high - that and regular local and club/society use is imperative to balance our finances. In the last 12 months there was something on for 330 days, often more than one activity each day and with over 800 bookings in the year. It's run by a Management Committee which includes representatives from the various 'affiliated' clubs/groups plus a number of annually co-opted members.

The Women's Institute, who have 'special status' due to their generous funding of the building (as above), meet monthly in the Hall (or Lounge) and also have a variety of speakers, presentations, demonstrations and outings.

A Croquet Club was formed in 2009, now thriving with 50+ members, with regular club afternoons as well as playing regular matches across a wide area and with great success, being one of the largest and strongest clubs in Yorkshire. The two main lawns were drained, levelled and re-laid at considerable expense, though the 2018 dry hot summer has not done the grass many favours. An extra lawn is often created on the adjacent outfield.

A new 'bright' Playground for the younger ones was added in 2010. Two Tennis Courts, incorporating a hard based games area (MUGA) followed - they are open to casual use, though the small Tennis Club doesn't play matches.

In 2011 a Table Tennis Club was formed and is now flourishing with 90+ regular players (though only about 20 villagers). There are 8 groups, of varying standards, with each playing a weekly 2 hour session, mainly during the day but also on a Sunday evening. They decided not to join a League but club play is quite competitive yet very social! The Club makes a major contribution to the Village Hall funds.

A village Youth Club was formed in 2013, initially using the Methodist Church Schoolroom. They quickly outgrew that and moved to the Hall with meetings now every Friday evening. It's been a great success with congratulations due to all of the adults and parents that are assisting as well as to the children, particularly all of those involved in the actual running of the club.

More Playing Fields drainage was undertaken in 2010 and surfacing of the (private) Car Park absorbed even more funds! A side Lounge and Store were added around then and more recently a detached equipment 'Shed'. Cricket Covers arrived in 2017 (thanks to Kebbell Homes) and plans are in hand for further enhancements, possibly including a Pavilion Balcony, Boules Courts, Cricket Nets and Irrigation Systems. A major drainage pipe and system (for surface water) has been put in by Kebbell in conjunction with their development, which we hope in a couple of years will totally blend back in. A full projector/screen was installed in 2018 and a phone line and Broadband will arrive soon, though there is little we can do about mobile coverage! One of the two village Defibrillators is located by the main Hall entrance and training courses have been held.

The surrounds are superbly maintained by dedicated volunteer helpers and they must be congratulated on their work. They face a constant battle with dog walkers and continue to request that dogs are on a lead and nothing is left behind - otherwise a total ban will be necessary. All users of the playing fields are asked to use it sensibly and if they see any misuse, are requested to inform the Hall Management Committee. The overall outlook is enhanced by many young trees now gradually maturing, including 100 saplings planted in 2012 by the village school children as part of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations. It was renamed QE II Playing Field having been granted royal status, so ensuring it remains for recreational use only.

The Hall is also regularly used by several other organisations and groups, including Keep Fit, the Bridge Club, Pilates plus outside hirers like Ripon Morris Dancers, Dance Sounds and the Ripon Community Orchestra. It's also hired for various private functions including Parties and Weddings and a major annual Charity Bike Ride.

All of the above activities in the Hall and Playing Fields as well as others in the village and with full contact details, can be found on our super village web site (www.BishopMonktonToday.btck.co.uk). It's updated daily with all of the local news and events. It also has a link to Hiring the Hall and to the Bookings Calendar which details its use and when it might be available.

Life here is not sedate, there is always something new happening or being planned!