



Newsletter

Issue No. 7 Spring 2007

Editor: Lois M Rose

AGM 2006

The AGM Minutes have been circulated but here is a reminder that John Colby-Clarke stood down as Chairman, having completed his allotted three years but happily, remains as a valued member of the Executive Committee (Exec). Tony Horry, who has been both Vice-Chair and Treasurer during his time, stood down from the Exec for family reasons but continues to support us through his local village hall, which is of course, still in membership. Other Members stood for another term and were re-elected. In addition, we welcome two new members to the Exec – Warren Rainforth of Groombridge Village Hall, East Sussex, and Richard Fogden, of Beal Village Hall, Pontefract, Yorkshire, who has also taken on the role of Treasurer. We welcome them, and look forward to their forthcoming contributions to the Forum.

Welcome to our third Patron

We are delighted to welcome, as our supporter from the Labour Party, **MP John Grogan**, of Selby.

John Grogan has been the Member of Parliament for Selby constituency since May 1997, when he was elected as the first ever Labour MP to represent the seat. Born in Halifax, he now lives in Fulford, in the north of his constituency. and is a



former fellow of St John's College, Oxford, where he read for a degree in History and Economics. As well as representing the views of his constituents in Parliament, John sits on no less than seven different Parliamentary Groups. In his spare time, he enjoys running and playing 5 a side football. He is a member of Yorkshire County Cricket Club and is a Bradford City fan. He also takes a great interest in rural communities, and is pleased to be able to support our work for village and community halls. Members of the Exec will be meeting with him in due course, and our other Patrons, to discuss how we can take forward our current concerns and campaigns.

Why Grey Sky Thinking Could be the Answer to Those Policy Dilemmas

The following is an article by Julian Dobson, editor of the New Start magazine, which appeared in its Feb 2006 edition and which I reproduce here with his kind permission. The subject touched one of my roar nerves and I thought it might well ring a bell with many village hall committee members, as they struggle to understand, not only legislation, but many a Government directive and, worse yet, grant application forms! See what you think....

One irritating buzzword that, thankfully, seems to be disappearing is 'blue sky thinking'. It used to be beloved of management gurus, seeped into the lingo of business executive, and, as is the wont of such things, ended up by a circuitous route on the lips of voluntary sector leaders who fancied themselves as avant-garde.

It came to mind a while ago when I ascended the rickety staircase at the Young Foundations offices in Bethnal Green, east London and found myself in a garret inhabited by the Launchpad. Fortunately the Launchpad does not consist of blue-sky thinkers. They won't thank me for it, but I think the Launchpad is a good example of grey sky thinking. In other words, taking the ideas of policy wonks and those who patrol the halls of Westminster and hardening them off in real life, ideally with a biting wind coming in from the north, and a steady sleet descending.

The people at the Launchpad want to make things happen and test out ideas, under the radar and away from the glare of spin and ministerial launches. Good luck to them. And good luck to anyone who wants to get on with what needs doing and isn't prepared to wait for the policy climate to be right or the necessary bit of legislation to come along.

We spend too much of our time imagining that governments and those who devise policy have the power, the responsibility or even the common sense to come up with solutions to our problems. Meanwhile, governments imagine that by shifting responsibilities from one sector (local government, for instance) to another (the voluntary sector or social enterprises) it can find new and imaginative solutions, rather than new and imaginative processes. This

week's health and social care white paper is a case in point. Lots of rearrangement of functions rather than less rearrangement of attitudes.

With the best will in the world, governments can't hope to legislate for every circumstance and conundrum in which our communities may be mired. What national and local government *can* do is to respond positively and flexibly, and that demands a generation of bureaucrats whose guiding principle is to work *with* people rather than *with regulations*.

Dangerous, I know. It's like asking your neighbour to keep an eye on your house while you're away, rather than signing a contract with a security firm. But you'd be amazed at the results.

Julian Dobson editor New Start
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News In Brief :-

Update on the Licensing Act - NVHF View

As most of you probably know, the Government responded to our concerns over the new Licensing Act by refusing to reconsider increasing the number of TENs but agreed to consider the removal of the necessity for halls to have a DPS (Designated Premises Supervisor) as it had no requirement for such in private members clubs. We realise that many of you would prefer an increase in TENS but our several discussions with ministers and ministerial departments have led us to believe that this will definitely not be happening at this time. Therefore the Exec has decided not to pursue an increase at this time. However, many hall committees have told us that they are happy with being licensed, either exactly as the law is, or some if the DPS requirement is waived; some don't want it at all! WE NEED TO KNOW YOUR VIEWS as there is to be a public consultation, which we will be involved in, and we want to be able accurately to represent you. Please let us know via our Secretary's address, or via email to any of the Exec Members listed on page 4. Remember, we are here to represent YOUR views nationally to improve the lot for village hall committees!

Campaign to reclaim VAT on Repairs to War Memorial Halls – details of which appeared in our last issue. This has been taken up by our first two Patrons, who have raised it with the relevant Minister (DCMS). However, we do need more ammunition, so please write to us, or your own MP, copying in our now THREE Parliamentary Patrons, so that we can continue to pursue it. I know it has been a while, but I'm afraid the wheels of Government do turn rather slowly, most of the time!

PRS Licence - In the last issue we claimed a

"Successful Challenge" by member Garboldisham Village Hall (Norfolk) that, as a charity, the hall should not have to pay a percentage of income, and that this resulted in a reduction to the minimum royalty of £35 a year. In reality, what happened was that as the hall's income was under £3000, it qualified for that amount anyway. The usual charge is 1% per annum, so in fact halls on this minimum charge are actually paying *more* per £1000 per annum! No doubt we will see this come up again in the future but *for the time being at least* we have reluctantly given up the challenge, which has been going on since this Forum was formed in the 1980's! (see below).

We're over 25 years old!

A colleague sent me the following reports, which date back to the very beginning of this Forum. I first encountered this Forum in 1990, when it was being run as an 'arm' of ACRE, where I had always thought we began. But no, we were started by the NCVO, together with the national Rural Community Councils (RCCs), many of whom are still in membership today. So here is the report of the first ever meeting, as it appeared in the NCVO's Newsletter, The Village, in Autumn 1982 (Volume 37 Number 3 – and priced at sixty pence!)

"The Village Halls Forum had its first meeting in autumn in 1981. The idea was to bring together at national level representative of the users of halls, Rural Community Councils, and others concerned for the welfare and development of village halls. The meeting examined some common problems, and members exchanged ideas, which highlighted areas needing attention. Since then, a number of developments have taken place. For example, with publicity in mind, articles were written for various publications, including one by Forum Chairman Mrs Lesley Pring, published in the County Councils Gazette. A successful attempt was made to change the working of legislation affecting public entertainment Licensing which was going through Parliament. An amendment introduced in the House of Lords gave village halls and other community building exemption from fees in this case. Other items being tackled by the Forum concern loans to village halls, the performing Right Society, planning fees and the reclaim of VAT in self-build projects.

This year the meeting promises to be another lively affair with a very full agenda. It takes place on Wednesday 27th October 1982 at Bedford Square, London. In order to maintain a balanced membership, attendance is by invitation only. The Secretary is willing to receive ideas and still supply further information if required.

Ian Strong
Secretary Village Halls Forum

Next Edition – Number 4 (Winter)

The Village Halls Forum faces its second year with

confidence, building on the success achieved so far – for example, tackling the problems of licensing regulations. At its meeting this October, the Forum applied itself to discussion on the problem of charitable status as it affects the developing use of village halls. VH provide a focus point for activity in the community. They are often the only available meeting place and frequently house services vital to the community's existence. Problems in interpreting charity law have long created difficulties for managements committees wishing to develop their halls for wider use. Therefore, the forum felt that there was a need for the Charity Commissioners to interpret more freely existing charity law or even for the Government to consider new legislation in order to alleviate the difficulties. The Forum will be working on this problem during the coming year.

The Forum also considered the alcohol licensing system, multiple use of village halls and the problem of committee membership. A full report of the meeting is available on request from the Rural Department of the National Council for Voluntary Organisations 26 Bedford Square, London.

Well, no change there, then! I think we can identify with every one of those issues of 25 years ago, many of which we are still fighting today!

The Need for Funding

The following article has come from Forum Member Judi, of Porthowan VH. I think we can all recognise it!

A look at a typical Village Hall meeting!

The local campsite owner left the trees he was pruning, picked up his jacket and strolled down to the Village Hall. On his way he was joined by the bricklayer who



had just pulled up after a long day's work and his next-door neighbour as she alighted from the bus back from work in Truro. At the Hall, six or seven other working folk would have left a hurried meal to attend the monthly meeting of the Hall's management committee.

The bookings secretary reported a booking for Tuesday evenings for a yoga class from 6pm until 7.30pm – an income of £12.75 a week! There was also a booking for a 21st birthday party on the 3rd of next month so she would have to ask for volunteers to man the bar from 7 -11.30pm. Members groaned and no one offered their help immediately as it would be a long and tiring night. After a plea from the Chairman (who had no choice

but to offer her services first) about the bar takings helping fund the replacement of the entrance hall carpet, two other members reluctantly agreed to help out. One of those had, a few months before, taken responsibility for ordering bar supplies and cleaning the beer lines every week – usually on his day off. He was a photographer by profession but soon learned the basics from the landlord of the local pub!

Talk turned next to the Fun Day planned for the following week. It would be a good fundraiser if the weather improved and people looked for a day out. Several members agreed to man the stalls, others offered to bake cakes for the cake stall; one offered her services doing face painting. The bouncy castle had been hired at a special rate of £30 so it was hoped enough money would be taken to cover this. Prizes for the raffle had been donated and the Chairman thanked those members who had trooped round businesses and shops asking for them.

The campsite owner was responsible for grant applications and he had spent some time getting quotes for a stair lift to the upstairs meeting rooms. A surveyor was due on Tuesday morning and someone would have to be on hand to show him round. All agreed that disabled access was very important and wondered why such a facility had not been included in the initial plans before the Hall had been built. The Chairman reminded them that money had run out and no other funding had been available. She reminded them of the continued need for every member to work at the fund-raising in order to maintain the fabric of the building as income from lettings barely covered the bills, especially with increased heating and lighting charges. Before bringing the meeting to its close, she asked if everyone would also join her on a painting weekend. "No, not the artistic kind", she said. "We really must repaint those meeting room walls!"

Thanks Judi - lets hope it brings home the message to "the powers that be" just how much energy and effort goes into running our village halls...

Subject: Thought for Today

This item was e-mailed to me by a colleague, who was sent it via the USA (where most 'punny' emails seem to emanate! Between us we decided that as it was on the web it was in the public domain – so here it is for your amusement – you may recognise the situation!

In the year 2006, the Lord came unto Noah, who was now living in England and said, "Once again, the earth has become wicked and over-populated, and I see the end of all flesh before me. Build another Ark and save 2 of every living thing along with a few good humans." He gave Noah the CAD drawings, saying, "You have 6 months to build the Ark before I will start the unending rain for 40 days and 40 nights."



Six months later, the Lord looked down and saw Noah weeping in his yard, but no Ark. "Noah!" He roared, "I'm about to start the rain! Where is the Ark?" Forgive me, Lord," begged Noah, "but things have changed. I needed Building Regulations Approval. I've been arguing with the Fire Brigade about the need for a sprinkler system. My neighbours claim that I should have obtained planning permission for building the Ark in my garden because it is development of the site even though in my view it is a temporary structure. We had to go and appeal to the Secretary of State for a decision. Then the Department of Transport demanded a bond be posted for the future costs of moving power lines and other overhead obstructions, to clear the passage for the Ark's move to the sea. I told them that the sea would be coming to us, but they would hear nothing of it. Getting the wood was another problem. All the decent trees have Tree Preservation Orders on them and we live in a Site of Special Scientific Interest, which was set up in order to protect the spotted owl. I couldn't convince the environmentalists that I needed the wood to save the owls - no go! When I started gathering the animals, the RSPCA sued me. They insisted that I was confining wild animals against their will. They argued the accommodation was too restrictive, and it was cruel and inhumane to put so many animals in a confined space. Then the County Council, the Environment Agency, and the Rivers Authority ruled that I couldn't build the Ark until they'd conducted an environmental impact study on your proposed flood. I'm still trying to resolve a complaint from the Equal Opportunities Commission on how any BMEs I'm supposed to hire for my building team. The trades unions say I can't use my sons, they insist I have to hire only CSCS (?) accredited workers with Ark-building experience. To make matters worse, Customs &



Excise claim I'm trying to leave the country illegally with endangered species and seized all my assets! So, forgive me, Lord, but it would take at least 10 years for me to finish this Ark." Suddenly the skies cleared, the sun began to shine,

and a rainbow stretched across the sky. Noah looked up in wonder and asked, "You mean you're not going to destroy the world?" "No," said the Lord. "The government beat me to it."

Why Not Join Now?

The National Village Halls Forum provides the 'Voice of Village Halls' through VH Management Committee members. Its Executive Committee is

drawn from these volunteers, from Village Halls Advisers ('VHAs' at the Rural Community Councils) and national organisations. We publish 2 newsletters a year & our AGM, held in November, invites people with influence to speak on village hall matters. We would like to encourage village hall Management Committees to join *their* voice to that of the Forum. Individual village and community hall membership is still just £10 yearly so if you would like to become a member of the National Village Halls Forum, contact us and let your voice continue to be heard. *Please see the application form below.*

Executive Committee

- Martin Clifton, Chair martin.clifton@lineone.net
- V-Chair - vacant at present
- Richard Fogden, Treasurer rkfcouncilclerk@aol.com
- Mary Mathers Secretary mary.mathers@btinternet.com
- Greg Coombes – NALC rep (no email)
- Peter Luker vluker@wact.fsnet.co.uk
- Warren Rainforth - treasurer@groombridgevillagehall.org.uk
- Lois Rose - Newsletter loismrose@ukf.net
- Mavis Wilkins VHA Rep mavisw@wrccrural.org.uk
- John Colby Clarke j.colby.clarke@amservice.com

National Village Hall Forum Membership

We wish to subscribe to the NVHF and would like to become: *(please delete as appropriate)*

Individual Village/Community halls Members at £10 pa

Parish Council Members @ £25 pa

Associate Members at £25 pa

Rural Community Councils/other county /unitary orgs working in support of/representing village halls: Full Members £150 pa

Local Authorities Associate Members £150

Name: _____

Address: _____

Please make cheques payable to NVHF and send to The Secretary, NVHF c/o Wayside Cottage, 36 West Morden, Wareham, Dorset, BH20 7DN

PASS IT ON!

Please circulate your copy of this newsletter to other members of your committee and/or do what some halls do and pin it to your hall notice board for all users to read.