

## History of the Men's Club



Monday 12th March, 2012 marked the end of the Men's Club and its long association with the village when it voted not to oppose the relocation of the village shop to the snooker room. It was a very difficult decision for its 17 members. However, given that the shop was to discontinue trading in The George Inn as it has done since 2008, they recognised that it was an important asset to the community and there was no viable alternative location.

Although called the Men's Club, it was actually a snooker club that was open to ladies to join (it once had three lady members) and so relied on the availability of a snooker room to exist. It's not clear when the club started but it may well have originated when the snooker table was located in what is now the skittle alley in The George. In the 1920s, a wooden extension to the village hall was built by Mr Bullivant of Baronsdown, who was a major benefactor to the village, specifically to house the snooker table. Eight supporting pillars were built under the floor to support the table's legs. In a letter, dated 1950, it was made clear that the table belonged to Mr Bullivant and that it had been loaned to the Men's Club 'for as long as it exists'. Since that time, the table has been, and still is, regarded as being under the guardianship of the Men's Club.

Records of the Club from 1953 show that club nights were held on Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays with Fridays used as practice nights for those wanting to learn to play. It seems that billiards and snooker were equally popular at that time. As early as 1955, a proposal was made to make it into a mixed club by encouraging ladies to join. There was a lull in membership for two years (1957/8) but it was restarted in 1959 and became very active in the 60's with up to 19 members and yearly snooker and billiards tournaments.

On 12th October 1975, a sponsored walk took place to raise funds to replace the table's green baize. Ten people participated in the walk from the village to Bury, Frogwell Cross, Upton and back to the village, a distance of 13 miles. A total of £186.71p was raised to cover the cost of the replacement cloth.

On 10th June 1978, the table was moved from the wooden extension into what was then the village hall as part of an agreement with the Village Hall Committee to swap locations. This was to facilitate replacing the wooden extension with a permanent extension to the village hall which was being planned at the time. The old village hall then became known as the new Men's Club Room. The club members redecorated and rewired their new home and offered to pay £74/annum for the hire of the new Club Room as their contribution to the running costs of the village hall. Funds for the Club were raised by holding dances at Wheddon Cross and in the village hall.

In 1983, the wooden extension was replaced by the more permanent structure that incorporates the main hall that we have today. While it was being built, the snooker room was used to store village hall chairs and tables.

In 2003, the Club paid for a major refurbishment of the snooker table and, from 2008, carried out major improvements to the snooker room with a complete redecoration of the room and installation of new blinds, new meters and new heaters. The club also ran annual skittles evenings and a quiz evening to raise funds for these improvements and for the benefit of the village hall and the Millennium Green and, this year (2013), for the Church Organ Restoration Fund.

To make way for the shop, the snooker table was dismantled and stored in the village hall until a new home could be found. At this time the future of the Club was very uncertain given the amount of space the table occupied. Proposals to build a separate Club Room were investigated but found to be expensive. Fortunately, Charles and Kirsty Stewart-Smith of the Old Vicarage came to the Club's rescue by agreeing to install the snooker table in one of their out-buildings in return for a joint agreement on its usage by both parties.

The future of the Club is now secure for the foreseeable future and allows the snooker table, a village asset, to remain in the village and continue to be used and appreciated by its members and by the Stewart-Smith family.

Keith Routledge