

Dolton & Dowland Village Hall - Some Fond Memories

Mr Norman Lock served on the Village Hall committee for 52 years from 1946 to 1998 and as Treasurer for many years. In this short interview, we asked him to recount some of his memories....

“The new village hall cost around £12,000 to build and the committee of the day had to try to come up with inventive ways to raise what was then a huge sum. Just under £6000 had been obtained through grants but the rest of the money was borrowed with each member of the committee taking on a personal risk as guarantors for this loan.

John Prance was landlord at the Rams Head at the time and he put up the money to purchase a brand new Vauxhall Viva to be raffled at various events around the county; it was found that there were rules about this and you couldn't just give away a prize of this value just on a lucky ticket, but you could if it was a competition, so buying a raffle ticket allowed you to enter the competition to guess how many people would attend the 1967 Devon County Show. Brinley Andrews and Larry Bissett knocked up a car transporter out of an old fire engine and various members of the committee made their way to fairs, races and shows at Bideford, Tavistock, Bampton and of course Barnstaple fair, as well as many other events selling tickets for this car. When the final draw took place it turned out that 3 people had guessed the correct answer so Arthur Pickard of Owlacombe Farm agreed to buy the car and the money split between the 3 winners.

As mentioned in Jack Mardon's article, another money raising scheme was to buy sheep. Charlie Fishleigh would put up the money and Norman Lock then went to market to buy between 50 and 60 sheep at a time, he then took small groups of these to be run with various farmers own flocks, which then in the spring had to be gathered back together to be sold again. This did raise money for the hall but turned out to be much more work than was anticipated.

All this carried on while the hall was being built, but once completed it was possible to hold dances for fund raising. Sometimes there would be a 'posh' dance on a Friday night and a 'beat' dance on the Saturday, with the hall full on both nights. Dolton became the place to go on a weekend with top-notch bands playing including:

The Hot Spots from Witheridge.

The Blue Ribbon Band from Torrington.

The Torridge Band also from Torrington.

B&M from Winkleigh (Charlie Bissett & Mr Meluish along with Albert Warren on sax.)

Roy and his Blue Stars came from Barnstaple.

There were others of course and they even had the Royal Marine Band on a couple of occasions.

Later on as live bands went out of fashion and discos became the thing, Dolton still remained the place to be on a Saturday night, but as the years passed it became a victim of its own success with the hall getting overcrowded and trouble arising if you tried to prevent any more people from entering the hall, so after the hall had paid off all its debts the enthusiasm of those who turned out every week to help man the door and police the crowds diminished. What's more discos became less popular and it was eventually decided to stop them altogether.”