

Lavant Memorial Hall Annual Report 2022

For the first time in three years events have not been dominated by Covid-19 considerations. As government regulations were relaxed to reflect the adjustment to “living with Covid”, so the trustees were able to ease restrictions on hall use gradually throughout the year. At the time of writing, we have removed all the covid-related special hire conditions and capacity restrictions in favour of continuing to encourage hirers to be mindful of vulnerable users and the demographics of their groups. We have also continued to provide sanitising and cleaning materials.

Bookings were steady throughout the year, but have yet to return to pre-pandemic levels. Most regular hirers are now back in the Hall, but one or two did not survive lockdown restrictions, or have found it necessary to reduce the scope of their activities, so we were particularly pleased to see the Lavant Players return to the Hall this autumn for a show in early 2023. Discretionary bookings for parties and weddings, in particular, have also been slow to recover. There have been new regular hires, particularly from child-focused groups, but it remains to be seen whether these will become established. The Hall was also pleased to be able to host the newly formed Lavant Ukraine Support Group.

Thanks to generous support from Chichester District Council throughout the pandemic, with a final grant in January, the financial impact has been manageable.

The prospect of better times allowed the trustees to launch the year’s major project, a full refurbishment of the hall’s sports facilities, which had been on hold. Fortuitously the project could now be undertaken alongside the laying of a new sports pitch opposite the hall as a result of the planning conditions attached to new housing development in the village. The project entailed renovation of the team and referee’s changing rooms, showers and toilets, with new fixtures and fittings and incorporating energy savings, improved ventilation and drainage. Some related minor roofing works identified in last year’s building condition survey were also included.

Smith Simmons & Partners had been engaged to specify and supervise the works and Nutbourne Construction were selected after a competitive tendering process. Work commenced in June and was substantially completed in time for Lavant CC to use the facilities for their last home game and for Lavant FC to return to the village on the new pitch this season. The project was funded by a combination of Lavant Parish Council (LPC) CIL monies arising from housing development, hall funds and a generous private donation.

Following on from last year’s extensive work on modernising the fire alarm system at the hall (to the effectiveness of which those keyholders who have been called out can attest!), further work has been undertaken to bring the complementary emergency lighting up to current standards. The Bleaches Room has also been improved by the installation of built-in cupboards to replace miscellaneous free-standing storage.

As a further spin off from the housing development, LPC have had the Hall car park extended, with a welcome increase in spaces. These works are not yet quite complete, but the car park is in use. The trustees have discussed concerns from users about the lack of lighting in the extended area and have made representation to LPC. However, the South Downs National Park Authority “dark skies” policy has so far precluded further action, short of a new planning application.

The Hall had passed its centenary in 2021, but plans to mark the occasion had been shelved because of the pandemic. Local hauliers, Bleach of Lavant, had suffered a similar fate with their own centenary. With the easing of restrictions, plans were resurrected and it was agreed to mount a joint celebration over the August bank holiday weekend, incorporating an exhibition showcasing 100 years of the Hall. Many regular users supported the event with stalls highlighting their own history.

The event became a village celebration, featuring a variety of live music and dancing, together with food and drink and a late-summer party atmosphere thanks in part to good weather. Over £3,600 was raised for Hall funds and the trustees will ensure that this money is re-invested in maintaining and improving the Hall. A small plaque has been placed in the Hall to commemorate the centenary and a photo-album added to the Hall archives. Very considerable thanks are due to the steering group who put the event together and particularly to Mick Bleach who was the inspiration behind the weekend.

It is pleasing to note that during the year individual members of the management committee took on particular tasks to good effect. Booking Secretary, Jennie Lindfield, and Caretaker, Tony Bleach, also continued to ensure that the Hall operated successfully on a day-to-day basis. Tony even found time to write a book of reminiscences, that includes interesting historical material about the Hall and his family connections to it. My thanks and appreciation are due to all of you.

The healthy state of the Hall’s finances is testament to the work of our Treasurer, Bob Mayne, whose last year this will be. He has steered us through the choppy waters of the pandemic and he leaves with our regrets, thanks and best wishes. Sheila Sims has continued to combine the roles of Secretary and “200 Club” promoter with aplomb and has been a source of sound advice, for all of which I am truly grateful.

Richard Wignall

Chair

December 2022