

GREAT WHITTINGTON VILLAGE HALL PHOTOGRAPHS

Following the major refurbishment of the village hall in 2023 the photographs in the hall were restored and remounted by Michele McKenzie. They were taken as part of a photography project in 1996/97 led by Gill Jones and involving local children. Gill was a keen photographer, had been chair of the village hall and a member of the parish council. She lived in Stonecroft with her husband Brian. These notes attempt to describe the photos, their relevance, give some details of the people involved and give some information about the village and the hall.

As you come in the porch door on the right the first frame holds two photos showing the road sign. The top one is of Alf Moon repainting the Great Whittington Village sign. The original one had been damaged and a replacement would not be in the old style and made from much cheaper material so it was riveted by Scott's the local engineering company and repainted before being put back up. Alf lived in Meadow View with Mary, a house built for them by their son, before moving to Yorkshire to look after their other son who had Multiple Sclerosis. The bottom one shows the sign, remounted, at the bottom of the village. Unfortunately we can't identify the child.

Moving to the right hand side the first two photos are on the chimney breast of the original school room. Originally the only heat for the school was provided by a single pot bellied stove here so in winter the schoolroom was not very warm. It was replaced by night storage heaters which worked quite well in the school as the heat input overnight was used during the day. This was kept when the hall conversion took place in 1971/72 but was not satisfactory as it's heat was mainly lost during the day and most use of the hall was in the evenings. This was replaced first by wall mounted gas fires which worked well but were not suitable from a safety point of view when a playgroup was formed so replaced by panel electric heaters. Now with solar panels and a heat pump for the first time since conversion a satisfactory heating system is in place. First is a group of four photos taken showing members of the photography group being filmed, we believe, by Tyne Tees Television which was broadcast locally. Shown are two MacBride children and Katy Taylor. The second one is of children from both the village and the surrounding area in front of the playbus which was run by Tynedale District Council. At least three of the adults can be identified as from the village, Avril Newton, Julia Longstaff and Ann Shearer.

Further along that wall in the area of the hall which was formed out of the school house sitting room are three photos representing the agricultural heritage of the parish. The first one shows combining at Grinstone Law with Martin Harrison on the motor bike. The second one is of a tractor towing a trailer of bales down the village past The Gin Gan. For those who don't know a gin gan is a horse mill used to provide the power to thresh corn. There were more in the North East than anywhere else in the country and there is a restored one at Beamish Museum. There were three in the village, all now converted into houses one as part of West Farm, one Town Farm and the third East Farm. You can see these circular structures quite clearly on the 1899 map of the village. The third one is a view of the countryside and farmland around the village and is from near Whittington Mill looking towards the north with the Whittington to Matfen road shown by the line of trees.

Then on the second chimney breast a single photo showing a couple sitting in the hall garden with others in the background. The couple are Ross Taylor and his wife whose name we don't know. They are jazz fans who lived in Stocksfield and are enjoying one of the celebrated Jazz Picnics hosted by the hall in the late 90's early 00's. They were started by Ray Shenton and Eileen who lived in East Farm Cottage for the celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of VE Day. The original one was held in the paddock behind the house and villagers dressed in appropriate wartime clothing. The picnics then moved to the hall gardens in following years. Ray started his musical career with the formation of The Harmonica Hoodlums before they founded the famous North East jazz band The River City Jazz Men which was mainly family members. They reformed for the first occasion returning from around the country calling themselves The Victory V's for the anniversary and continued on an annual basis until age finally took its toll. Ray was also a talented artist and the sketch of the hall at the heading of this document and used on the hall letterhead is one of his works.

There is currently space on the wall between the chimney breast and the door for another frame where we hope to put a photo of the Victory V's. Unfortunately all the negatives taken by the photography group were lost in floods after Gill moved to Bywell and the Tyne burst its banks so we are looking for a suitable one.

Going through the door to the small room which was also part of the school house backing on to the main hall. The three photos in this room record the services available in the village at that time. The first one is two shots of the mobile shop run by Longstaffs which came into the village after the local shop closed thirty five years ago. The lower one includes Bob Sinclair who lived in East View. He lived there all his life. The second one is also two shots, this time of Hughie who was the postman serving the village for many years. He was such a helpful postie that on his retirement a presentation was made to him in the village hall by residents of the village. The third frame has four photos, the bin collection with old metal bins, the bus service to Hexham and Newcastle now operated by Stagecoach not Northern, the mobile library service still run by NCC although two book exchanges are run in the village, one by The Queens Head and one in the hall and the fourth one is of the Parish Councils grass cutting. Services in the village have changed considerably with apart from the shop closing so has the post office, the butchers, the chapel and the bus company. Finally in that room a much more recent collage of photos taken at the seventieth jubilee celebration of Queen Elizabeth Second. It was compiled by Michele McKenzie and includes snaps of many residents.

Coming back into the main hall on the south front facing part two photos next to each other representing gardening and the history of shows. In the days these photos were taken residents of most houses in the village kept vegetable gardens and the hall held a show each autumn which included classes for flowers and baking as well as vegetables. One of the most fought after prizes was the WI award for the member with most points in all classes of baking. The first shows great friends but fierce show rivals Les Hopkinson and Jim Robson. Les and Lillian lived in Southlands and Jim and Stella were just up the road in Mill View. The second frame has two photos of residents preparing leeks for show. It will either be for the one in the hall or the specific leek show held by The Black Bull in Matfen. Stan Gomulka who lived with Jane in Holmcroft to the right and Alfie Wood on the left who with Margaret live in Cherry Cottage. Together they run Scotts of Whittington an engineering company founded by Margaret's grandfather and are by far the longest established family in the village. This family business celebrates its hundredth anniversary this year having started in 1923.

To the right of the large window another shot of the photography group on an away day to Kilhope Mine. It was so they could expand their skills but most seem to be just enjoying the experience.

Finally to the left of the large window a shot of the centre of the village with the closed shop and a couple of riders. The shop was owned by the Scott Family and run by Gwen and Pauline two family members.

The notes on these photos have been prepared by Phil Hinchcliffe with input and corrections by several people who were also resident at the time they were taken and recorded now before memories dim further in the mists of time. Every attempt has been made to ensure accuracy but any errors are mine alone.