

Reynoldston Vestry Hall, Church Hall and Village Hall **1887..1923..2013**

A History by Hugh Jones

The Vestry Hall



The Vestry Hall was built in 1887 on land opposite St. George's Church. Most churches in the 1800s had a vestry within the main building but not at St. George's. It was through the perseverance of the Rev. JE Jones (Rector 1875 – 1890) that the Vestry Hall was built. The construction consisted of timber framing with exterior horizontal clapboard overlapping (one side thicker than the other, also called bevel-siding, lap-siding or weather board), with a corrugated galvanised roof. There was oak flooring, probably not tongue and grooved, although it was used for dancing in the latter years of the Hall's existence.

Events at the Vestry Hall (or Institute)

The main purpose of the Vestry Hall was to act as an "Institute", a place to be used for meetings and as a Reading Room. The Easter Vestry Meeting (up until the 19th century this was the forerunner of the Parish Council and Parochial Church Council) was attended by the church congregation and held annually to elect or re-elect the wardens, sidesmen, vergers, and officers of the church lay committee, in support of the vicar. The vicar or in his absence, a churchwarden, chaired the meeting.

The Gower Church Magazine of the time is full of references to events at the Vestry Hall or Institute...Sunday School; concerts (one was held in 1915 to entertain troops briefly billeted at Stouthall, The King Arthur Hotel and Ty Bryn); inter - village draughts matches; fund-raising events, particularly during the Boer War and the 1914-1918 War; talks and lectures including lantern slides. November 1900 saw this entry in the *Gower Church Magazine* ...*Reynoldston Continuation School. The Night-School will have recommenced before this Magazine is in the hands of our readers. The Rector (Rev.RH Talbot 1890 - 1911) hopes to meet all old members, as well as others who are now leaving or who have left the Day-School. The hour is now changed to a quarter past seven to suit some scholars, especially those who come from a distance. Will not old scholars bring their friends as there are surely many who have not yet taken advantage of this school. "The more the merrier". Every man and boy in the village will be welcome. The teaching, as in previous years, will be from time to time suspended for Lantern Lectures, and the Rector has secured some excellent slides of the Boer War (sixty in number) for Tuesday Nov 6th, when old and young, for "tuppence" may see Paul hammered without fear of shot or shell".*

This first Lantern Entertainment at the Vestry Hall.....was a great success. Perhaps it was the subject, "The Boer War" that secured a "good house". The slides were exceptionally good, but of course the most popular of all were the

portraits of Lord Roberts and General Baden Powell. The second Lantern Lecture will be given on Tuesday ,Dec.4th on "China and the Chinese".

In January 1904 the Gower Church Magazine contained the following:
MAGIC LANTERN ENTERTAINMENT – Our new acetylene gas was used for the first time on Nov 27 for a magic lantern lecture on the King's visit to India when Prince of Wales. The slides, which were remarkably good ones, were lent by Mr G Walker of Swansea and the new light made all the difference in the world. The audience subscribed, including the pence for admission, 12/- towards the expense of the new generator, which was £2.

SOCIAL EVENING – On Monday Dec14, an entertainment was given in the Vestry Hall at 7.30. The school children charmed everyone with their action song. Two glees by the choir and songs by Dr Jones, Mr and the Misses Steele and Miss Alice Williams, helped to make a very pleasant evening, but with many, of course, the dancing which followed was the most popular.*

In May 1906 it was reported: "DRAUGHTS MATCHES: The Reynoldston team have played two more matches with Porteynon and have been fortunate to secure the cup for the present season. The Rector desires to offer his heartiest congratulations to the team and their captain, Mr. George Hoskin, on this result. The competition has given a great stimulus to the playing of draughts in the Institute this winter, bagatelle and all other games being neglected for the time.

** Of Box Farm*

*Later that year the Gower Church Magazine noted....Concert At The Vestry – A most delightful and successful concert was given on Tuesday 26th April at the Vestry Hall. The only objection was that the room was scarcely large enough for the audience and we are afraid that the back of the room was inconveniently crowded. That Mrs. Helme was singing was of course the great attraction, and the great number present were by no means disappointed, but had a great treat. The "Coronation Song" was a fine piece of music, but the appreciation of the people was gained by the refined humour of "Little Mary". The duets, by Mrs.Helme and *Mr. E.Helme were rapturously encored, as also, it is needless to say, were Mr.E.Helme's most amusing songs. Miss James of Llandewi sang with great effect "Love was once a little boy". Nor must we omit to mention the action song "Little Mothers", sung most charmingly by nine of the younger members of the choir. Indeed, we can scarcely now let pass unchallenged the claim in last month's magazine that the best concert in the peninsula was at Porteynon on 14th April. A short dialogue by the Misses Steele, Miss Williams and Mr. F.Steele brought a most enjoyable programme to a close. After the room was cleared, many of the audience remained for dancing. The proceeds amounted to £6 16s 2d;and with our expenses not so large as usual we have a good sum towards defraying the expenses of taking the choir to Llangenydd in August.*

*(*Ernest Helme of Hillend, Llangennith was an accomplished musician and his whistling solos were famous. In the years before the First World War he used to accompany Dame Adelina Patti in charity concerts. When the great singer had finished her performance, she would introduce Ernest Helme to whistle one of her favourite arias from Mozart or Puccini. Note by Robert Lucas)*

Night School - Classes are held at the Vestry Hall on Tuesday and Friday evenings at 7.30, when instruction is given in Writing and Composition, Mensuration, Arithmetic and Vocal Music. A few more students who will join the classes and do their best to attend punctually and regularly will be most heartily welcomed. The class in Vocal Music, which is held on Fridays, is open to girls and women as well as to boys and men.(Gower Church Magazine 1906)

A lecture in May 1910 was entitled "The Conquest of the Air" – a most entertaining and instructive lecture on the above subject was given in the Vestry Hall by Mr. G. Gordon-Lenox, who showed models and pictures of aeroplanes and balloons and gave a most complete and interesting description of the advance of science during recent years. He prophesied that aeroplanes would be, in a short time, as familiar objects in the country as motor cars are now.

Daisy Fisher Recalls (2011)

The Vestry Hall she remembers was opposite the church entrance where we now park our cars. Quite a lot of events took place there including lantern slides and whist drives. Miss Violet Howells was a good pianist and put on show nights with dances. Alan and Louise Pinniger attended the dances and apparently were good dancers. Boxing classes took place in the Hall. Frank and Gordon Davies, Trevor Clement, Leslie and Brynley Arnold participated. Boxing matches took place at the Harvest Fair, in a boxing booth out side the King Arthur Hotel. Locals flexed their muscles against the fair ground travellers.

The Vestry was added to the main Church building in 1906. The masons working on the Vestry were Francis Davies and P.Tucker. Francis Davies, apart from being a stonemason, was a small-holder, keeping sheep and ponies at Hills Green. As a skilled stonemason and banker – hand, he worked on the construction of Knelston School, Parkmill School and, alongside the Vestry, he built the West Window and the archway over the pulpit in the Church. (Colin Davies, the current Reynoldston undertaker and pony breeder is a descendant).



The Church Vestry



Mary and Francis Davies

The Demise of the Vestry Hall

"The Gower Church Magazine" of October 1922 details the demise of the Vestry Hall: *At an enthusiastic and well attended meeting under the presidency of Mr. Price of Stouthall, it was unanimously decided to give up the idea of enlarging the present iron room and to set out instead to build a new Church Hall to take its place. A most suitable site, in close proximity to the church, has been most generously given to us and is being conveyed to the Diocesan Trustees in trust for the parish. The Vestry Hall has been for the past 36 years a valuable asset but, besides being too small, it is by no means "a thing of beauty" and its disappearance in this regard will not be regretted. It is hoped to erect a Hall worthy of its beautiful surroundings and capable of meeting not only our own parochial needs but those of Reynoldston as the natural centre of the peninsula. After the Building Committee has decided on plans an appeal will be made for subscriptions which we venture to hope will meet with a generous response from outside as well as within the parish.*