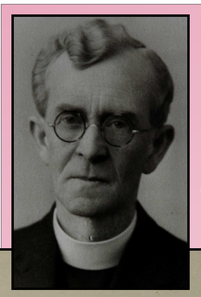
After the Great War...

BLEASDALE MEMORIAL PARISH HALL

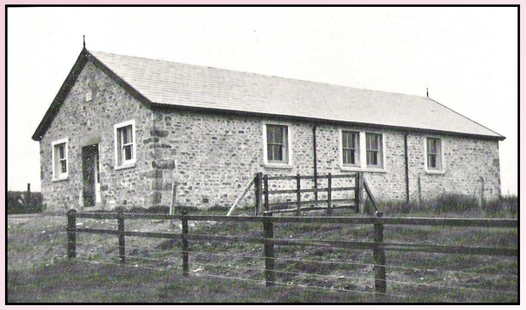
'On Tuesday 5th July 1927 a public meeting was held in Bleasdale School to consider the question of erecting a Parish Hall'

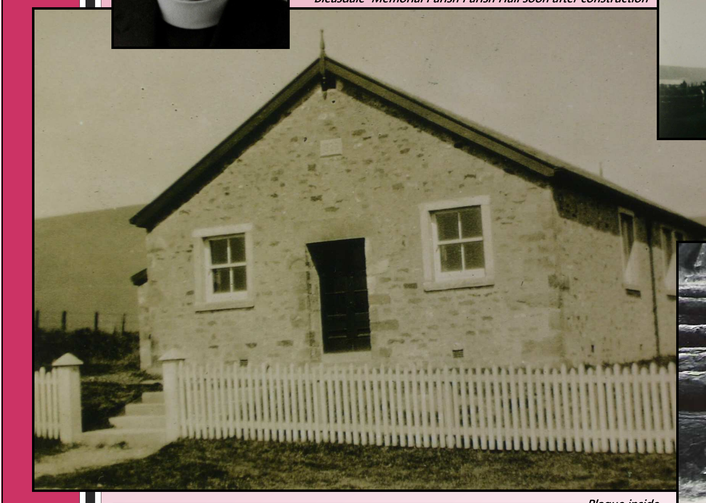
From BLEASDALE MEMORIAL PARISH HALL MINUTE BOOK



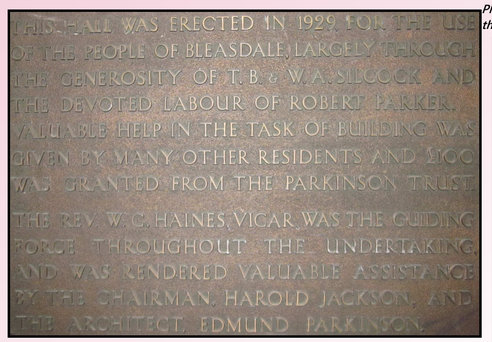
Rev. Haines was instrumental in planning a purpose-built hall, for the activities of the Recreation Room and Parish social events, as there was too little space in school for either. The Silcock family at Bleasdale Tower contributed the land and building stone whilst much of the work was carried out by Robert Parker and his son, together with the help of many residents including Leo Lord with his motor lorry. Building continued throughout 1928 and on 19th October 1929, at a large, enthusiastic and representative gathering the hall was formally opened by the Silcock brothers of Bleasdale Tower with Harold Jackson acting as chairman.

Bleasdale Memorial Parish Parish Hall soon after construction





Robert Parker's son, also called Robert, in the 1970s.



Plaque inside the Parish Hall

A wedding group poses for a photograph outside the Hall, around 1950

A social gathering of all ages in the Hall in the late 1960s.

Bleasdale Memorial Parish Hall, built, as so many in the 1920s, to remember the fallen and injured of the Great War, became a focus for the surrounding area and remains one to this day. It was extensively renovated in 2006.

An Hour to Spare—No. 5

Country Folk Enjoy a Whist Drive

By SYLVIA HEATH

"WE have some good 'do's at Bleasdale," said Mrs. R. Parker, junr., as she handed me a cup of tea in the little kitchen at the Parish Hall and, as I listened to the hum of voices and occasional laughter, coming from the main room I knew her words were true.

I decided when I started this series about leisure-time activities that some time in December I would include one of those enjoyable events k n o w n familiarly in the country as "the fur and feather," but which are quite a mystery to many townsfolk.

Maybe in your city reader does not know what the words stand for; they refer, of course, to the rabbit and poultry prizes given at special whist drives held during the three weeks before Christmas.

I could take my pick of a dozen such whist drives last week, but I decided to attend one which was being held right in the heart of some of the most beautiful country in the North-West, Bleasdale, that lovely dale which is hidden in the summer, but which is a lovely place out of season.

A walk over Bleasdale Fells on a warm summer's day is one proposition. A night visit in the middle of December is another, but I shall not readily forget the beauty of Fairnsnape looming up, magnified in the darkness, with lights twinkling on its slopes, the bare trees silhouetted against a moonlit sky, and the absolute stillness, broken only by the occasional rustle of cattle and the sound of running brooks.

The row of lights from the Parish Hall shone like a beacon across the rough ground, and many smaller lights pierced the darkness, like unsteady glow worms. They were the torches of people who had walked, some through nothing of walking two, three, four miles over fields, down rough tracks, so they could attend the annual fur and feather whist drive.

Inside the hall I was to find folk from Longridge, Goosnargh, Chipping and Calder Vale, only a few of whom had come by car. Bicycles or their own two feet were the favourite modes of travel.

I should be very fond of whist in these parts," I thought, as I picked my way up to the hall. Not, of course, once inside I realised that the affair had a social element.

There were a hundred players when the M.C. called out the first "Hearts are trumps!" Their seats, at long trestle tables, gave everyone an opportunity to chat with their neighbours and relations who had come from miles around.

In addition, there were several children having a wonderful time running up and down the room—a little girl in a tartan kilt and a Fair Isle jersey was particularly interested in our camera.

On a board near the stage was the list of prizes—a mouth-watering affair beginning with two geese, two pheasants, three fowls and ending with two cock chickens, two pairs of rabbits and a bottle of wine. No wonder you could have heard a penny drop as the 24 hands of whist were played.

Busy

Members of the Entertainments Committee of the Bleasdale Parish Hall would be the first to agree with me when I say that even in such an isolated spot as Bleasdale days are not long enough. Mrs. Parker and Christance Smith, secretary of the committee, and village schoolmistress, w h o gave me a warm welcome, told me how well used the hall has been this winter. "We have whist drives every fortnight and dances for the young ones. Potato pie suppers are popular—we bring our own and they are heated up in the kitchen. We have a good deal of other activities and I don't know how many Christmas parties between here and Calder Vale," broke in the vicar the Rev. J. A. Keith Nye, who confessed he had hardly a free night before Christmas. "The Calder Vale Drama Group are giving us a play, based on 'Pride and Prejudice.' We have a good cinema and many a splendid social evening with games."

Miss Smith, who presided over the room as the whist players—some of them men that I was to see later in the evening, males playing as "lady" at whist drives where women have to play as partners.

Builders

The buzz of conversation had a cheerful sound between the bands of whist and placed up a bit more informal—but scores were in smart demand.

The Parish Hall was mainly built by the hands of Bleasdale folk on land given by the late Mr. W. A. Silcock and Mr. T. B. Silcock. Those who use it often know well of the many hours spent on the masonry of Mr. Robert Parker Senior, now 80 years old, whose "devoted labour" is commemorated on the plaque which hangs on the wall.

He worked in all weathers. "It was a bad winter in 1929," said his daughter-in-law, who lives in one of the few cottages in the district, constructed out of the old Reformatory.

The hall still stands sturdily against the cold fell winds, and is a cheerful room, with its chintz curtains, blue beams and wooden roof, lit by Calor gas because electricity has not yet come so far.

I met a good many of the committee including Mr. L. Lord, the secretary of the Parish Hall.

Local people who are responsible for it nowadays are Miss Smith, Mr. and Mrs. L. Lord, Mr. and Mrs. R. Parker, Mrs. Wilkins, Mr. A. Benn, Miss E. Benn, Mr. T. Harrison, Mr. J. Wilkins, Mrs. E. Shaw, Mrs. P. Edwards, Mr. P. Lord and the vicar.

The evening wore on. I learned a little more about Miss Smith—how she had been born in India, the daughter of a missionary, and how an American guest had enjoyed a party that night, and how the village children had some splendid treats each year, including a field day, a days trip to the sea, and a wonderful Christmas party with gifts.

Nobody in Bleasdale would let a visitor depart without a cup of tea, so I had a cosy little talk with Mrs. Parker in the kitchen as the water boiled in the big gas boiler and food was prepared by the light of a lamp.

"It's a good life," she said satisfactorily as she surveyed the array of home-made cakes.

I heard later that she was another typical countrywoman who found days too short for all her duties which, in Mrs. Parker's case, included walking two miles a day to cope with school dinners which are served in the hall.

The last hand was played, scores totted up, and the much-sought-after prizes were distributed amid much laughter and chatter. Some left a chicken bird in a sack, others left other prizes to be delivered in time for Christmas.

Mrs. G. Bamber, Mrs. R. Richardson, Mrs. L. Procter, Mrs. D. Leece and Messrs. E. Pye, W. Douglas, W. Wilkins, E. Alston and J. Harrison, and E. Bamber were the lucky winners. Special prizes for which I chose the numbers went to Mrs. F. Fetlinson and Mr. W. Simms and the consolation prizes to Miss A. Walker and Mr. E. Shaw.

The moon was high as the long homeward walks or cycle rides began, and no one would grumble if the way was long and rough. Christmas was near and seemed nearer because good will and companionship had been found in a village hall that night.

Your nearest neighbour might live a mile away but you'll probably meet him at the "fur and feather."

Sixteen or 20 whist players to a table — that's the country style. You must concentrate if you want to take a pheasant or duck home as a prize.

The advertised starting time is 7-30 p.m. but nobody minds if the first 20 minutes is spent chatting with friends. Above, left to right, are Mr. and Mrs. L. Lord, Miss C. Smith, Mrs. E. Wilkins, and Mr. R. Parker, junr., waiting for late-comers. Below: There are often more men than women at Bleasdale "do's." Mr. A. Benn (left) takes the money at the door.

In the 1940s, journalist Sylvia Heath, in a report in the Preston Guardian, commented on the hall, which she was told was in regular use for 'whist drives, dances, potato pie suppers, parties and amateur dramatics'. She added...

'The Hall stands sturdily against the cold fell winds, and is a cheerful room, with its chintz curtains blue beams and wooden roof, lit by Calor gas because electricity has not yet come so far.'

Photographs taken in 2006

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...the legacy for Bleasdale