

# DOWN MEMORY LANE

*Continuing our series looking at Stewkley past and present*

## North of the Village Hall

Stewkley Village Hall was built mainly through the interest and generosity of Robert Courtneidge, the British theatre manager-producer and playwright, who was then living in Stewkley. It opened at Christmas 1925, with the Earl of Orkney and Robert Courtneidge playing the first game on the new billiard table, the origin of the name of the secondary space in the hall, the Billiard Room.

The 1926 image indicates that the newly built Village Hall had more extensive grounds than today. They extended in the direction of High Street North, with its entrance at the north end. In 1928, Buckinghamshire County Council proposed a road improvement scheme for the B4032. This was to widen the High Street and improve road visibility by straightening out the blind bend outside the Village Hall. The County Surveyor's tender specification dated 20 September 1928 required most of the Village Hall land to the west to be excavated and lowered and a concrete retaining wall constructed to enable the carriageway to be widened. The tender was won, and the work undertaken by local builder William Clarke.

The tree planting that took place on the Village Hall embankment behind the former pond is now a mixed group of mature silver birch and mountain ash trees.

To the north of the Village Hall, a terrace of red-brick cottages sits prominently on the outer edge of a gradual left-hand curve. In the 1920s Barclays Bank opened twice a week in a room in No 40, High Street North. The bank sign is emblazoned above the cottage front door in the old image. Today No 40 pays homage to its former life with its address as 'Bank House'.



Robert Courtneidge



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