

Kingsclere's Albert Hall story

Chris Watkins 2021

In 1896 John Porter, racehorse trainer at Park House Stables, wrote "I believe the original idea of building a hall came from my wife"¹. It was decided to set up a limited liability company. In 1886 The Kingsclere Albert Hall Company was formed to raise money via subscription for the construction of a Village Hall. John Porter was chairman. "So enthusiastic was the reception the idea met with that a company was at once formed. The capital asked for was £760. It was immediately subscribed. It was then increased to £1000"² (500 Shares, £2 each).



Why "Albert"? Queen Victoria of the United Kingdom married Prince Albert on 10 February 1840. On 2 May 1859 Prince Albert opened Brunel's Royal Albert Bridge. On 14 December 1861 Prince Albert died and in 1867 in London Queen Victoria changed the name of the Central Hall of Arts and Sciences to the Royal Albert Hall of Arts and Sciences upon laying the Hall's foundation stone, in memory of her husband.



The specification for the building included "Cost of Bunting on Opening Ceremony"³.

It was designed by Mr. Peter Doller (1847-1943 - yes 96!!), architect, mainly working in London. It is designed in the Queen Anne (revived) style much favoured in the late 1880s, of red brick with stone dressings. He was paid £21⁴



Monkenhurst, London by Peter Doller

¹ John Porter (1896) *Kingsclere*, London, Chatto and Windus. Page 296

² *ibid.* Page 296

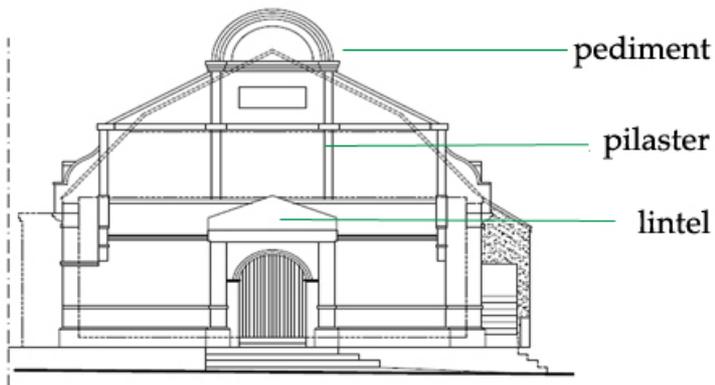
³ "Specifications for work done in the construction of the hall and cost of construction" (Hampshire Archives 106M81/11)

⁴ 1886 Annual Report for the Albert Hall Company (Hampshire Archives 106M81/1)



1910 earliest known photograph

The hall has a central entrance within lean-to single storey structure at front, with stone pilastered surround, arch with keystone, lintel with carved rinceau detail, pediment rebuilt in brick.



lintel

Central decorative stone panel dated 1886.



The tender to build the Albert Hall was accepted from W and C Garrett for £800 and the Duke of Wellington contributed £20 of this⁵. “W. & C. Garrett have completed the building at a cost of £885 3s. 11d.”⁶ In today’s currency that would be £110,802.



it was built into the hill

On June 14, 1886 (Monday) the foundation stone was laid by Miss Beach, of Oakley Hall in the presence of a large company including Dr Maples, hon. secretary of the company, and a number of the shareholders and others.

On Nov. 9, 1886 the Hall was opened by Mrs. Maples.

Originally there was a reading-room with reference library and coffee-room ⁷. When used for concerts, the seatplan showed 9 rows of 20⁸.



interior more recently

⁵ Margaret Ingram (1987) *Kingsclere, Place and its People*

⁶ 1886 Annual Report for the Albert Hall Company (Hampshire Archives 106M81/1)

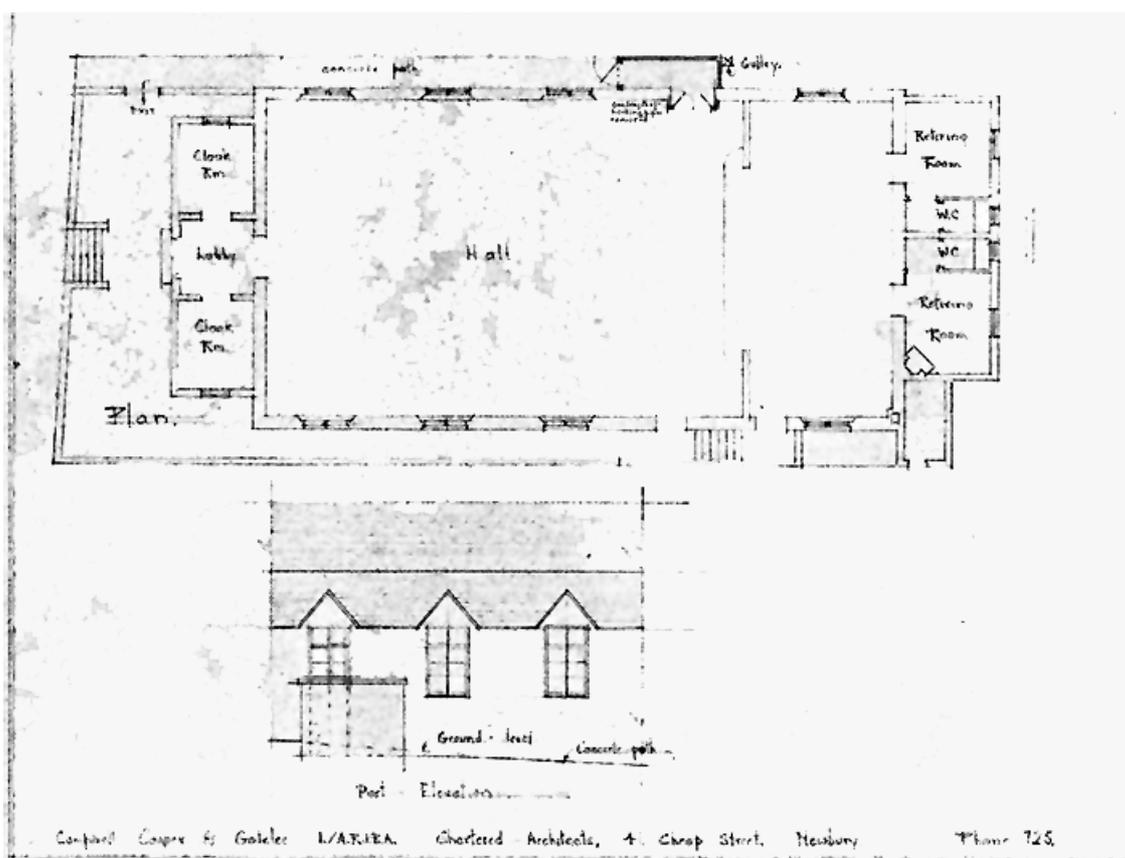
⁷ Kelly's Directory of Hampshire & Isle of Wight, 1898, p. 209

⁸ Seatplan - undated (Hampshire Archives 106M81/12)

In 1900 (4 September) at a crowded meeting chaired by W W B Beach MP and supported by the Mayors of Basingstoke and Newbury and other local worthies, there was unanimous support for a light railway connecting Kingsclere with Basingstoke and Newbury. The meeting appointed a committee to take this forward. Despite the initial enthusiasm, the committee was unable to obtain sufficient funds to make an application to the Light Railway Commissioners. Basingstoke Council could not legally make a contribution and there was a lack of enthusiasm from Newbury as they feared that it would lose the Kingsclere trade to Basingstoke⁹. (Postcards around 1910 labelled Newbury Road “Station Road”)

In 1927 (Sep-Oct) there was a protest over its use for evening dances. A petition was initiated by members of the Mothers Union, proposing: “That it is only let out for dances under the following conditions: That none under the age of sixteen be admitted (there could, of course be children's dances ending at 9 p.m.). That re-admission money is charged for those leaving the Hall during the dancing, and that the dances should close at mid-night except on special occasions”¹⁰. Then a respondent wrote “I know the pit-falls of towns, and unhesitatingly assert that the young people of Kingsclere had far better dance in the Albert Hall, where everyone knows everyone, till 2 a.m., than make a practice of going to a neighbouring town, where real temptations exist”.

In 1947 (July) Messrs Albert Hall Co Ltd applied for and received permission for a new exit on the North side plus a concrete path to the road.



In late 1950s, when Kingsclere Secondary School was overcrowded it was used as a classroom and Assembly Hall.

⁹ Bob Clarke and Bob Applin (2020) Victoria County History Newsletter No. 15 Spring

¹⁰ Hants and Berks Gazette, 1 Oct 1927. Hampshire Archives 106MB/14

In 1961 Kingsclere Football Club held a season of dances, including "Tramps Dances" with costume prizes

TRAMPS' DANCE

THE KINGSLERE FOOTBALL CLUB

is holding its

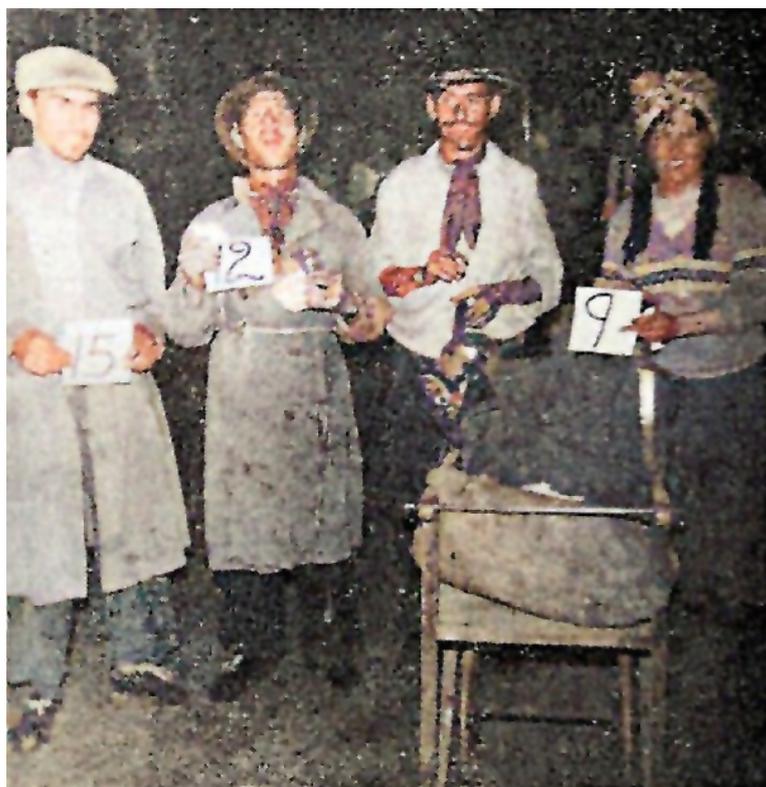
OPENING DANCE OF THE SEASON 1961/2

at the **ALBERT HALL, KINGSLERE**, on **FRIDAY, 8th SEPT.**,
from **9 p.m. to 1 a.m.**

This will be a "Tramps" Dance and prizes (£3, £2 and £1) will be given for the most realistic costumes. There will also be 'spot' prizes and many others.

TICKETS, 5/- each, can be obtained from the Hon. Secretary, Mrs. W. Brown, 11, Penny's Hatch, Kingsclere, or at the door.

As a first class band has been engaged and there will be a bar on the premises, an enjoyable evening for everyone is assured.



The winning "Tramps"

At a similar time there were "Players Balls" and the interior changed

KINGSCLERE PLAYERS' BALL

Friday, 27th October, 1961.

Albert Hall.

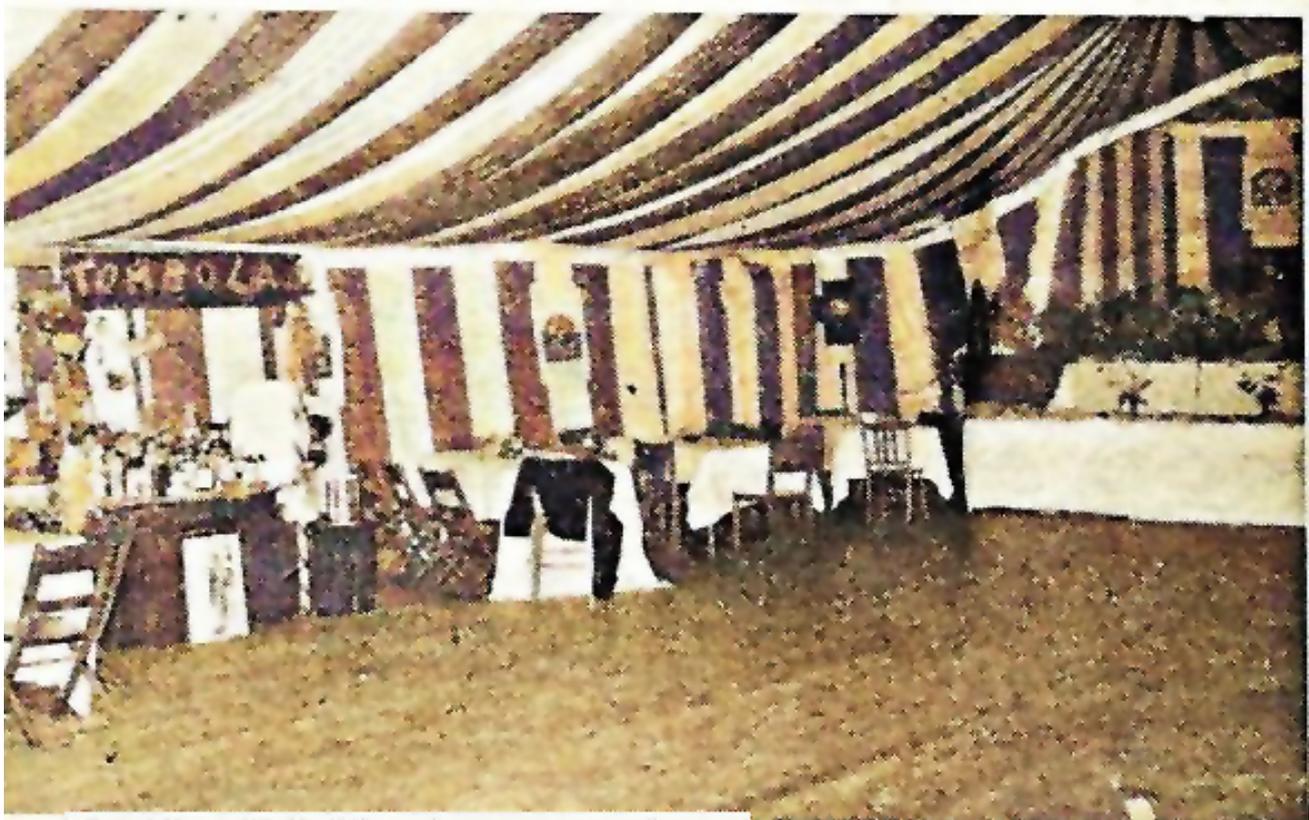
9.30 p.m.—2.30 a.m. A limited number of tickets (30/- inc. buffet) may be obtained from Chance's Stores or The Crown Hotel, Kingsclere.

The Band of the 11th Royal Hussars (by kind permission of the Officer Commanding, Lt.-Col. Ward-Harrison, M.C.)

On New Year's Day, Monday, 1st January, 1962, A DANCE will be held at The Albert Hall, from 9.30 p.m.—1.30 a.m. (tickets 5/-).

Further particulars will be announced later.

The Kingsclere Players have vacancies for a limited number of acting members; their next production takes place on Friday, 29th December, and Saturday, 30th December.



The Albert Hall, Kingsclere, was transformed for the Kingsclere Players' Ball on the 27th October. Children will not recognise this view of the hall before the dance as their schoolroom.

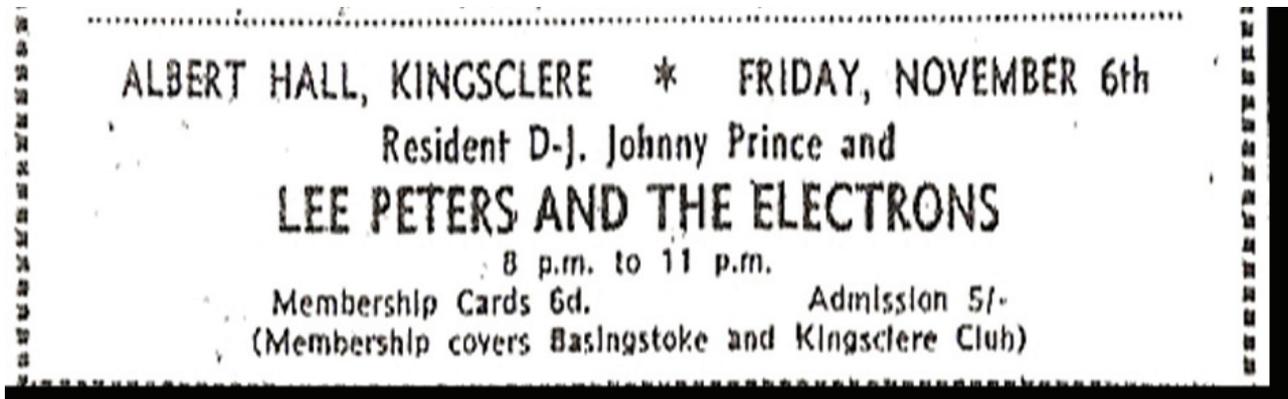
In 1964 Albert Hall reflected the popularity of live music groups in the 1960s. Basingstoke's Ticky-Rick Club (not Reading's Ricky-Tick Club who threatened legal action) held four events at Albert Hall in 1964

Fri. Nov. 6th Lee Peters & The Electrons

Fri. Nov. 13th The Beatmakers

Fri. Nov. 20th The Men Friday

Fri. Nov. 27th The Nomads



In 1966-8 there was a proposed purchase, as a community centre, of the Albert Hall by the Parish or District Council from the Kingsclere Albert Hall Company Ltd, (not proceeded with). There were architectural drawings (floor plan) by A J Campbell-Cooper of the existing layout of the Albert Hall and proposed extensions and alterations¹¹.



1950 context of Swan Street

¹¹ <https://calm.hants.gov.uk/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=76019%2f13%2f74&pos=1>

But by the late 1960s “having become a white elephant to its shareholders was sold to the Catholics”¹²

In 1969 (22 August) the Albert Hall was acquired by the Diocese and converted for use as a church. The conveyance specified £6,000. In 1967 there was reported to be about eighty Catholics in and around Kingsclere. Since the early 1950s Mass had been said in the stables of Park House, but when they ceased to be available a disused Anglican school was borrowed.¹³ The Roman Catholic Church of St. Peter & Paul was signified by a crucifix above the front door.



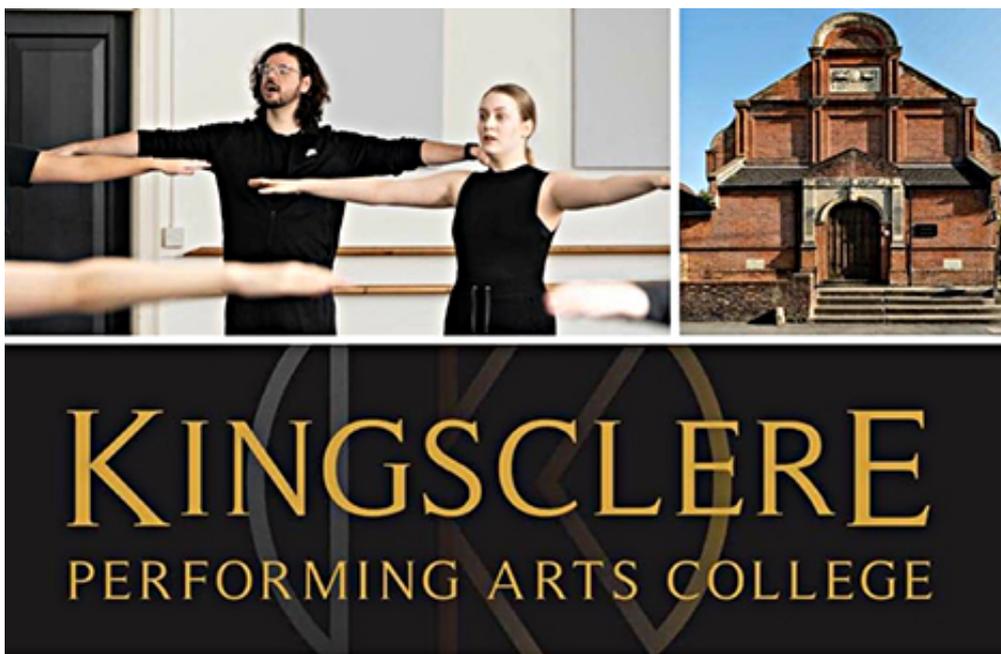
1969-2015 St Peter and St Paul’s Roman Catholic Church

¹² Margaret Ingram M. (1987) “Kingsclere: Place and its People”

¹³ <https://taking-stock.org.uk/building/tadley-ss-peter-and-paul/>



In 2015 sold again and became Kingsclere Performing Arts College



With thanks to Hampshire Archives, and to Rev. Robert Richard Legge, then vicar of Kingsclere, who deposited the collection in 1981.