GALLERY: Duke of Gloucester opens Eastrea village hall which became reality after 68 years

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Eastrea Village centre, Official opening. Picture: Steve Williams. *(Image: Archant)*

By Kath Sansom

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A VILLAGE hall was opened with a grand royal celebration after nearly 70 years of fund raising to make the dream a reality.

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Thousands of cakes were baked, hundreds of fetes organised and endless cups of tea brewed to raise the thousands of pounds needed to create what organisers say is a future-proof community focal point for generations to come.

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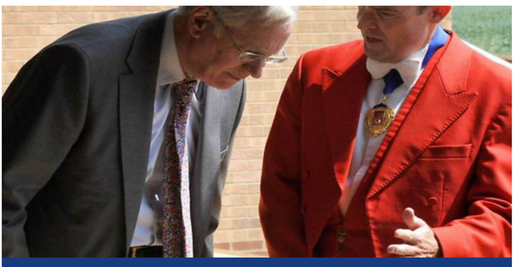
As war raged in Europe a local woman with a big dream opened a village hall savings account in January 1945 with just £1.



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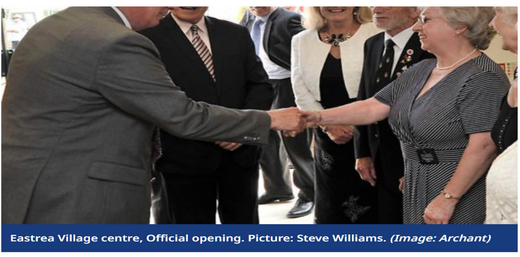
Years later and unbeknownst to the late Annie Tinkler her one pound deposit became a seven decade battle of money spinning ideas and fighting with local planners which ended in last week's prestigious opening by HRH the Duke of Gloucester.

Annie Tinkler's £1 deposit grew and shrank during the 50s and 60s and in the 70s and 80s new committee members pushed the fund raising to £35,000 with events like the infamous Its a Knock-Out challenges, bingo nights, fairs, dances and cake stalls.



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An idea to turn a local pub, the Windmill, fell by the wayside and in the 80s and 90s, repeated signs of success were dashed, said current village hall chairman scientist Brian Ford.

"Don't ever imagine that this has been a one-man campaign," he said.

"This hall is years of hard work by many people, all with the drive to see this to conclusion."

Five years ago the village hall campaign stepped up a gear when land was donated by a local farmer and developers, Rose Homes of Whittlesey, agreed to fund the hall to the tune of £250,000 in exchange for planning permission for 14 homes next door.

After intense legal wrangling with Fenland planners and scores of applications for grant money, the hall designs were approved.

Finally the build began at the end of last year.

John Craythorne, who sat on the hall committee in the 70s said: "We've wanted a community facility for so long that it's almost unbelievable to be standing here today, what an achievement."

The hall includes state of the art digital technology, gallery space, exhibition space. meeting rooms, a kitchen and bar facilities.

It is hoped to become a popular meeting place for community groups like mums and to groups and youth clubs and available for hire for weddings and family gatherings.

Whittlesey Deputy Mayor Dee Laws said today's committee had achieved the dream of many who went before them and looked forward to it becoming a popular community gathering place.