

# «The Reading Room» at Arncliffe

The first “Cottage” Reading Room at Arncliffe opened in 1881 at Mitton Cottage. The second, the one that is still called *The Reading Room* today, was built in 1894 and inaugurated in 1895. It remained a Reading Room until 1967 when it was converted into a residential house, its current usage.



*The Reading Room at Arncliffe, 2020 (M. Leinauer)*

The texts and pictures in this paper are sourced from a range of books, internet pages and documents as well oral information from numerous local people. Without these sources and the helpful support of villagers, it would not have been possible to document the history of The Reading Room at Arncliffe in such details. A warm thank you is extended to everybody who contributed. The bibliography can be found at the end of the text.

Before looking into the history of the Reading Rooms at Arncliffe, we want to take a brief look at the history of reading rooms in England and Yorkshire as well as of lead mining and social life in the Dales of the 1800s.

## **Rise and Decline of Reading Rooms**

Reading rooms appeared in England in the 1830s and were mainly founded by the church and local landowners for benefit of the working classes and farmers. Their establishment reflected a contemporary attitude to philanthropy, recreation and self-help. They not only facilitated improvement of intellectual and social life, but also supported the temperance movement as they offered a welcome alternative to the public houses. However, nearly all of the reading rooms were non-sectarian. Although the reading rooms were originally intended for people who couldn't afford drinks and costly leisure activities, they tended to appeal more to the lower middle classes and membership was mostly restricted to males.

Reading rooms played an important part of village life and offered appreciated recreational spaces in the Dales of the mid-19th Century. They provided a heated and lit indoors, literature, lectures on worldly and religious topics, games and music (mostly a piano). They could be found in almost every village and hamlet in the Dales and were sometimes the only public building. Many of the reading rooms were built on a local initiative and their establishment involved a considerable effort for many small communities. The character and appearance of reading rooms varied. The "cottage" reading rooms occupied existing premises and therefore had no particular distinguishing features. The most common purpose-built reading rooms were single-storey halls.

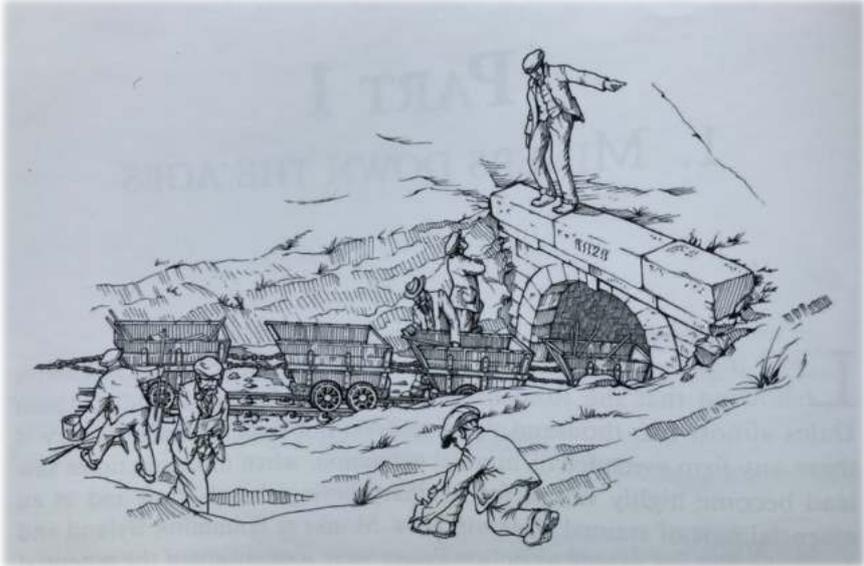
*Typical Dales Reading Room*  
([www.yorkshiredales.org.uk](http://www.yorkshiredales.org.uk))



When other diversions appeared and the countryside became more democratized, reading rooms slowly declined and turned into village halls or residential houses and by the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century they had basically ceased existing in their original function.

# Lead Mining – a Pacemaker for the Dales in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

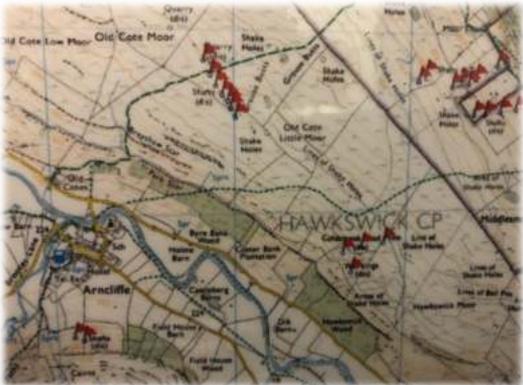
Lead mining became relevant in the Dales as early as the 14<sup>th</sup> century, when monasteries needed lead for weatherproofing church roofs and as an essential part of stained-glass windows. Monks at Fountains, Byland and Jervaulx Abbeys as well as Bolton Priory were encouraging farmers to extract the ore.



*Lead Mining in the Dales  
around 1830  
(Men of Lead)*

With the arrival of the industrial revolution of the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, most ore close to the surface had been extracted and fundamental industrial development was needed to meet the demand for lead. The metal was now needed for roofing, glazing, plumbing, munitions and paint. Mining experts, industrialists and venture capitalists from outside the Dales were attracted by the chance of making a fortune. They invested in new technologies in return for receiving a rent and royalties on all lead produced. Lead mining became an important industry in the Dales and there were cycles of sudden growth followed by severe depression, caused by wars, new trade regulations and fluctuating prices for the lead. Eventually lead mining on a meaningful scale was over by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century due to the introduction of steamships and global trading, and hence the opportunity to import cheaper lead from abroad.

*Lead Mines  
around Arncliffe  
(marked red)*



## Social Life in the Dales around 1850

The heyday in lead mining communities and the resulting wealth brought new and welcome facilities to many Dales villages in the 1850s, such as schools, libraries, reading rooms, Methodist chapels and Sunday schools. Increasing mining activities also spawned greater numbers of blacksmiths, carpenters, shoemakers, butchers and bakers, and the villages of those times became thriving communities with often much higher numbers of inhabitants than today.

Sundays were sacred, but on other days of the week the hard-working farm-men and miners wanted to make the most of what little leisure time there was and there was a growing move towards self-improvement. Particularly miners recognized the need to have an elementary knowledge of arithmetic and basic understanding of geology in order to negotiate the best deals with the owners and agents of the mines. Hence the growth in well-patronised literary institutes, libraries and reading rooms.



*The Reading Room in Grassington, an important mining village in the 1800s (David Dean Collection)*

## The “Cottage” Reading Room at Arncliffe

By 1880/90 Arncliffe had benefited from many years of stability and relative prosperity thanks to the vigorous William Boyd, Vicar in Littondale and Wharfedale and Archdeacon of Craven, who engaged himself in restructuring and enlarging the Arncliffe church, churchyard and vicarage. He also improved the lives of parishioners by giving “cottage lectures” in the Dale during the winter and helped to establish the schools at Arncliffe and Litton. Mr Boyd found time to instruct and encourage the local teachers and train young men for university and he was liberal with his own money to fund his enterprises. After almost 50 years as the Vicar of Arncliffe, valuable support arrived from Cheshire in the person of Rev. Canon W.A. Shuffrey, who became at first vicar in Halton Gill.

Soon after the arrival of W.A. Shuffrey, the “Cottage” Reading and Recreation Room at Arncliffe opened on 15<sup>th</sup> December 1881 to supply a want which had long been felt by the younger inhabitants of the village. It was located at the then vacant Mitton Cottage. The vicar of Halton Gill, Mr. Shuffrey, became Treasurer of the Committee, while Archdeacon Boyd was the President, James Hammond sen. the Vice-President and Mr. Lund the Secretary. As of then, Bible Classes were held in the Reading Room every Wednesday at 7.30 pm. The members of the Reading Room and their friends were invited to attend. Funds were still needed to meet the necessary expenses of keeping the room open and donations were very welcome. One of the highlights in winters was the Annual Ball at Arncliffe in the School Room and the Reading Room was used for laying out supper for the attendees. The Cottage Reading Room was in use until the inauguration of the new Reading Room in October 1895.



*Cottage Reading Room at Arncliffe (Littondale Life)*



## Erecting the New Reading Room at Arncliffe

Mr. James Hammond's widow and family had the new Reading Room built for the village and a memorial plaque was set into the wall in the gable above the fireplace:



*Memorial Plaque at The Reading Room (M. Leinauer)*

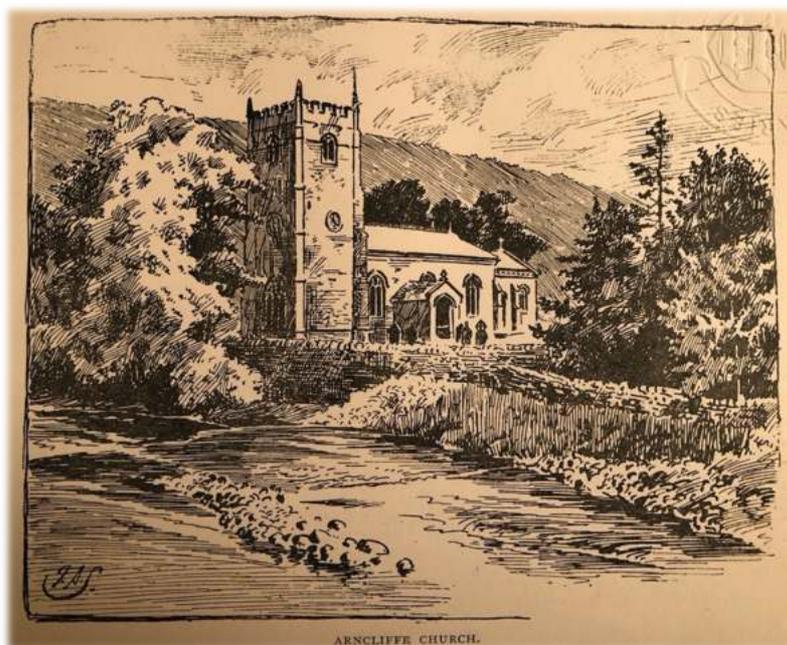
When The Reading Room was built, the population of Arncliffe had decreased from 241 people in 1801 to around 140 in 1891 and The Reading Room was – along with the Falcon Inn – an asset to improve the quality of life and making the village for the young generation a more attractive place to stay and work.



*The new Reading Room at Arncliffe built 1894, inaugurated 1895 (Littondale Life)*

The new Reading Room was of an elegant architectural style, built of local stone which came off the Shooting House Moor from a quarry. It fitted nicely into the setting with the church and school in its neighbourhood.

*Arncliffe School*  
*drawn by Helen Clegg*



*Sketch of the Church from*  
*«Littondale Past and Present»*  
*by J.W. Boyd and W.A. Shuffrey*

## Inaugurating The Reading Room

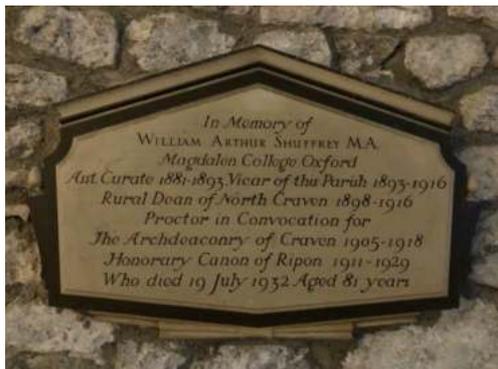
An entry in «The Arncliffe Reading Room Payment and Receipt Book» stated the members of the new Reading Room in 1895:

James Hammond jun. (President)  
James Greenwood (Treasurer)  
Henry Gill (Secretary)  
George Petty  
M. Miller  
Wm. Gill  
C.W. Robinson  
James Greenwood  
George Summers

**James Hammond jun., first President  
of The Reading Room**  
*(Yorkshire Dales Community Archives)*



For the inauguration of the new Reading Room William A. Shuffrey, who was then vicar at Arncliffe, gave James Greenwood £6 to organise a free Dance for the, exactly as they had one in the old Reading Room on New Year Eve 1894.



**Memorial Plaque of  
William A. Shuffrey  
at Arncliffe Church**  
*(M. Leinauer)*

## Financing and Managing The Reading Room

Entries in «The Arncliffe Reading Room Payment and Receipt Book» give us a vivid idea of how The Reading Room was used and managed. For the first winter of 1895-6 it was necessary to equip the new premises. Apart from the obvious such as newspapers, coal, shovel, paraffin and playing cards there were a lamp, glasses, scissors, American Cloth (waterproofed cotton for table tops) and spittoons that had to be bought.

The rent to the Hammonds for The Reading Room was 1d a year and Mary Jowett was paid £1 4s. for cleaning. Membership fees generated an income of £7. 10s. 1d, whilst a concert had brought in £2. 2s. 6d and the Annual Ball £1. 19s. In 1903 a full membership was 2s. 6d., whereas the sons of late Mr. James Hammond contributed £1. 10s. and 10s. which was a lot more than what they earned on the rent.

The newspapers that were listed in the «Payment and Receipt Book» were the *Yorkshire Post*, *Standard*, *Graphic*, *Tit-Bits* and *Farm Field and Fireside*. The newspapers had to be bought each year and in 1909 2s. 2d. is listed for cost of their “carriage”. At the end of the winter the papers seem to have been sold off to the members to increase the income.



The main expenses each year were for coal and cleaning. In addition, there were occasional renewals of playing cards and in 1908 they purchased new books for the library which cost £1. 5s. 7d.

In 1918 a billiard-table was bought for £1. 10s. Members paid a fee per hour for using the table and in 1921, fees brought in £5 18s. 5d. People living in the dale today still fondly remember having played billiards in The Reading Room, be it as adults during regular opening times or as teenagers by secretly sneaking in through the back door at night.

In the 1920s whist drives seem to have been the main money-raising events and in 1921 they could afford to have the floors covered with new linoleum which cost £30. 6s. 6d.

## A Female President for a male-only Institution

When the President, Mr. James Hammond jun., died in 1909 his sister Miss Annie A. Hammond took over his position. Presumably she and the cleaner were the only women ever entering The Reading Room, besides the school teachers when they had to take refuge with the children from the smoking school stoves!

*Miss Annie Agnes Hammond 1854 – 1940*  
([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk))



## Rules and Regulations

The rules of The Reading Room at Arncliffe could not be traced, but the rules of Halton Gill as they were written down in 1927 illustrate the way of life at the other reading room in Littondale:

1. *That the Reading Room shall be open on Weekdays and Sundays at such hours as the Committee may determine.*
2. *That men and women over the age of 14 shall be eligible for membership.*
3. *That the property of the Reading Room shall be vested in three Trustees as nominated in the Trust Deed.*
4. *That management shall be in the hands of a Committee consisting of the trustees and six elected members, three of whom shall be farmers, and three farmers' sons or hired men to be elected annually at a general meeting of members normally for three years, one of each class to retire annually and not be eligible for re-election that year. In the first three years one of each class shall retire annually in order of seniority.*
5. *That the subscription be 10 shillings for men and three shillings and 6d for women.*
6. *That a Billiard Table be provided for the use of members on such conditions as the Committee may prescribe.*
7. *That card games of all sorts be allowed on weekdays, but that gambling be strictly forbidden.*
8. *That swearing or bad language of any kind be forbidden.*
9. *That the Committee shall have power to exclude from attendance any member who disobeys these rules.*

At Arncliffe the rules were less liberal than those from Halton Gill. The premises remained closed on Sundays and women were excluded. However, besides accommodating its male-only members, The Reading Room was sometimes used by the villagers for other purposes, for example the meeting to re-launch the local Cricket Club was held there in 1931.

## Life at Arncliffe during World War II

Social life at the village was still active during the war, since leaving the dale depended on having a means of transport and the roads were barely adequate for motorised traffic. In effect, the events in the village and particularly in the Village Hall, increased due to the war: whist drives and dances were organised in aid of soldiers, the Red Cross and Skipton Hospital, West Riding held ambulance classes, The Farmers Union of Harrogate held meetings, there were children's concerts, a Labour party meeting took place and of course a Victory Dance. By August 1941 the members of The Reading Room numbered 13 and the end-of year balance of £5. 3s. 4d. was invested in War Loans.

In September 1940 Miss Annie A. Hammond, the President of The Reading Room, passed away. Her last payment was greater than usual (£8 instead of the usual £2.13s) and was possibly meant as her last bequest. At a meeting of the Committee of the Arncliffe Reading Room and the Village Hall it was proposed that Miss Nellie Hammond be appointed as the new President in place of her sister. The Committee also expressed its deep sorrow at the great loss of Miss Annie Hammond, who had been President for 31 years.



*Miss Nellie Hammond, the new President  
2<sup>nd</sup> from right as a young girl  
(Yorkshire Dales Community Archives)*

## Developments at The Reading Room post WW2

For some years after the war, The Reading Room continued to be a good place for the farm-men. It was managed together with the Village Hall and the Committee must have decided at that stage to keep minutes of their meetings which make the developments at The Reading Room traceable in more details. At the Committee meeting in September 1947, it was decided that the membership fee for The Reading Room should be 10 shillings a year, members should be over 14 years of age and that Mrs James Gill be asked to caretake at 10 shillings a week. They bought paraffin and Tilley lamps and the newspapers provided were *Yorkshire Post*, *Daily Graphic*, *Farmer and Stock-Breeder*, *Weekly Telegraph* and *Tit-Bits*. It was reported that the situation with the newspapers was not satisfactory: *Tit-Bits* was not coming regularly and other papers were disappearing before members had time to look at them.



It is also reported by ex-members that the older people sitting around the fire often complained about the young and their noise and high spirits. And worse was to come, as a minute written in 1952 stated: After an extraordinary meeting by request of the President Miss Nellie Hammond there followed a period of closure. The closure had been due to lack of members and lack of supervision which had resulted in wanton damage to fabric and contents of The Reading Room. After the villagers insisted that The Reading Room served a useful purpose and they would support the reopening in its traditional manner, it was decided to appoint Mr Marmaduke Miller as Chairman and Treasurer.

Mr Miller was the publican of the Falcon Inn and a passionate artist. He painted scenes in the dales and the village and today a number of his watercolours are still displayed at the Falcon Inn.

*The Reading Room (top left),  
seen from Bridge Ende at  
Arncliffe  
Unfinished painting by  
Marmaduke Miller  
(M. Leinauer)*



Under the new Chairman, new rules were put in place: No gambling, men only, age limit fifteen and above, open on Sundays except during church services, and no bad language. 18 new members joined and in 1953 memberships had gone up to 30s. In 1953 the age limit was put down to 14 again, but finances remained difficult. However, they improved a great deal after a house-to-house collection and a raffle was undertaken by several women. Several members re-decorated The Reading Room and in 1954 subscription went up to 15 shillings.

There was another problem reported in 1954: The presence of girls on Sunday evenings was against the rules and requests for their withdrawal had been ignored, despite the threat of calling the policeman in. The women were attracted by the billiard-table and could not understand why they were barred, especially not after they had been the ones who had collected money for the continuation of The Reading Room.

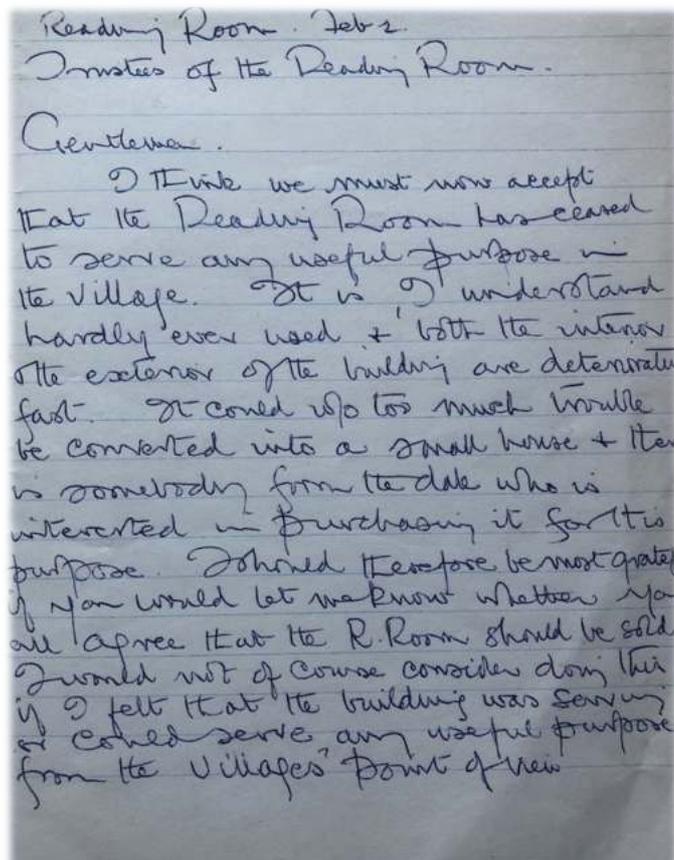
## Decline of The Reading Room

Miss Nellie Hammond died in December 1954, after having been President for 14 years. A "silent prayer and thought" was observed as a tribute to her, and Marmaduke Miller, the Chairman, wrote an appreciation for "the benefit of future Reading Room members".

The passing away of Miss Hammond as the last of her family to play an active role in The Reading Room was not the only sign of decline. The Chairman reported that billiard receipts had dwindled to almost nothing and he pointed out that the floor needed attention before they could think of installing a new full-size table. At the AGM in 1957, Mr. M. Miller asked for a heartier cooperation from the members, emphasising that The Reading Room was a wonderful asset and of particular benefit to the younger members and it was entirely up to them to put their backs into making a success of it by undertaking the official duties necessary to run the place properly.

However, more effort by the members could not save The Reading Room since times had changed the life in Littondale. There were no longer large numbers of farm-men to enjoy such a place and most of the men had cars or motor-bikes to go somewhere else in the evenings, or they had a television at home. One of the suggestions was to extend The Reading Room and turn it into a new Village Hall. There were no more minutes after 1957, but Robin Miller, the son of the Chairman Marmaduke Miller, found in his family documents a letter in which it was suggested to the Trustees of The Reading Room that it should be sold and converted into a small residential house:

**Letter to the Trustees,  
year and sender unknown  
(Robin Miller)**

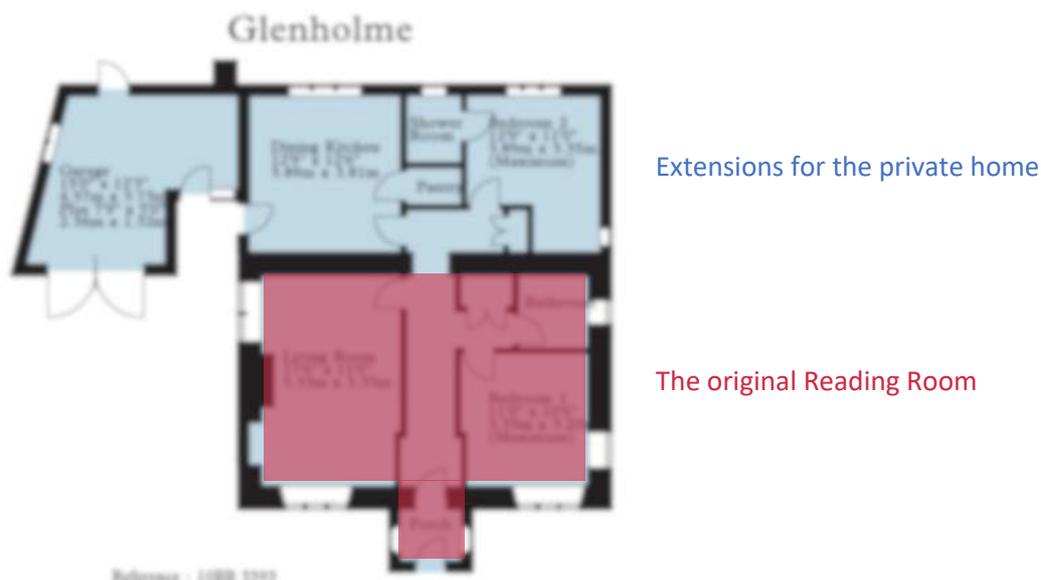


Reading Room. Feb 2.  
Trustees of the Reading Room.  
Gentlemen.  
I think we must now accept that the Reading Room has ceased to serve any useful purpose in the village. It is I understand hardly ever used & both the interior & the exterior of the building are deteriorating fast. It could do too much trouble be converted into a small house & there is somebody from the club who is interested in purchasing it for this purpose. I should therefore be most grateful if you would let me know whether you all agree that the R. Room should be sold. I would not of course consider doing this if I felt that the building was serving or could serve any useful purpose from the village's point of view.

## Conversion of The Reading Room into a Private Home

When Maurice Bramley and Eva Pullman married in the 1960s, they purchased The Reading Room from the Hammond family and converted it into their new home in 1967. The couple was from Littondale and she had been one of the raffle sellers a few years earlier.

To the back and to the left-hand side of the existing building they added an extension, knocked doors out of old walls, erected new walls in the former one-room building and turned it all into a two-bedroom house with kitchen, bath and garage. TN Cook from Skipton installed an AGA in December 1967 and the building was as of then used as a private home, whilst having its name changed to *Glenholme*.



The fifth and current owners reverted the name in 2006 back into «The Reading Room» as a tribute to the important role The Reading Room had played in the village life as a public building for more than 100 years.

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Research and compilation of texts and pictures: Marlise Leinauer, January 2020