

CLERK'S COLUMN

December 2012

Looking Back

2012 has certainly been a year to remember, what with the Jubilee, the Olympics and the Summer that Never Was. Everyone will have their own impressions, and once again I do urge you to *write them down*, or print them out, for the sake of future generations. It's quite worrying that old-fashioned diaries and photograph albums are endangered species. Twittering tweets don't look like a permanent record, and it's all very well for photos to be proudly displayed on the screen of a laptop, but it would be a shame if local and family history gets stuck on a hard drive, never sees the light of day and remains inaccessible to future generations, not to mention archivists. These specialists are still delighted to receive hard copy or photographic prints, and these will last almost for ever as long as they don't get damp. We can still read 4,000-year-old Egyptian papyruses. I doubt if we'll be able to read a CD in AD 6012.

The popular TV series *Who do you think you are?* shows how much it means to us to see how we connect with the past. One local family is intrigued by the BBC's current plugging of the anniversary of Napoleon's retreat from Moscow in 1812. If their family had not kept one old letter, they might have enjoyed listening to Tchaikovsky on Classic FM while picturing images of frostbitten soldiers straggling through snowdrifts. But they wouldn't have known that their great-grandmother was descended from a member of Napoleon's army who managed not only to escape across the icy plains and frozen rivers but to bring his mistress, their 6-year old son, and his violin, with him. This is the sort of thing that puts flesh on the bare bones of history. So please don't keep your memories under your hat or in My Documents.

People of the Queen's generation will have done quite a lot of looking back in 2012. We were bombarded with images of Her Majesty's earlier years at the time of the Jubilee, and our own celebrations in Abbots Ann provided many reminders of those years. And even the Olympics started off with an opening ceremony that harked back to the times of the Queen's great-great grandmother. There have also been lots of references to the splendidly amateurish 1948 London Games, where the athletes had to bring their own food – we were still some five years away from the end of rationing – and no-one dreamt of constructing an Olympic village. Luckily the old Wembley stadium had escaped the Blitz. The opening ceremony consisted of little more than speeches, the release of 2,500 pigeons, a 21-gun salute and the entrance of the flame, carried round the track made from the cinders of the domestic fireplaces of Leicester.

One of the odd things about memory is that events from a half-century ago are often clearer than those from a couple of years back. The other day someone was asking what the Station Hotel and Railway Tavern were doing in the Weyhill Road nowhere near the railway. Whoops! I've just noticed an email from the Editor wanting copy in by the day after tomorrow, so the answer will have to wait... So will news of anything earth-shaking happening at the Parish Council meeting on 6th December.

LOOKING AHEAD

The Precept.

The Localism Act was trumpeted as bringing in a new age in which parishes would be endowed with exciting Powers, allowing them to do almost anything legal. But at the moment it feels more like gingerly negotiating a minefield with a map that's been dropped in the mud. A mine that's just exploded too close for comfort is the result of a Government consultation on *Localising support for Council Tax*. We're learning the hard way that the mention of *Localising* means more work for local (i.e. Parish and Town) Councils.

We have always been told to fix next year's Council Tax Precept by this year's Christmas, which we duly resolved to do at the November meeting. But now the Powers that Be have told us not to rush into a decision yet because from 2013 "Council Tax support to certain groups will take the form of a locally-determined reduction scheme within the council tax system." So "Local Councils [us] will need to engage with the billing authority [Test Valley] as they will receive through the business rates retention system [whatever] funding corresponding to the parish/town share of the overall funding allocated to local authorities." If you get your head round that, you are kindly informed that Local Councils [us] will be able to refer, as part of their negotiations with billing authorities [them] to the table in the Government consultation response which provides the indicative funding [i.e. money?] to billing authorities [them] for local councils [us]." It's pretty clear that the Government doesn't know how this is all going to work as this is described as "only a starting point for discussions." Precisely how much money [where from?] is passed down [to whom?] depends on the nature of the local scheme, the number of claimants and other factors, which vary year on year.

Help! Now the compass has been blown into the mud. Maybe you won't notice the difference.

2013 and Beyond

Nothing daunted, your Council has already embarked on a number of projects aimed at making Abbots Ann an even better place to live in. These include:

1. Considering organising a Community Consultation, which would seek to find out what you all think about (a) what the parish is doing, (b) ways of doing it better, (c) what if anything the Parish is doing wrong, (d) what the Parish isn't doing but should be.

2. Considering putting together a Neighbourhood Plan, some bits of which would depend on 1 above, but would be particularly concerned with producing a blueprint showing the way the shape, size and general structure of the village should develop. This has to fit in with what the Borough and the County want, but can legally bind them not to do what we don't want.

3. The Council is doing all it can to make sure that the Manor Close playing field stays green.

4. The Council is backing the War Memorial Hall Committee's plans for improving the interior layout.

5. 2013 should see some exciting developments in the Recreation Ground.

6. The Sports Field and the Pavilion are by no means forgotten either.

7. And don't forget the First Aid course on 12th January.

Next Meeting.

The first meeting in the New Year will be on 3rd January. Meanwhile, the Chairman and Councillors send you all their best wishes for a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. So does the Clerk.

Adrian Stokes, Clerk