

THE CLERK'S COLUMN

February 2013

Forces of Nature.

The ancient Romans kept the whole known world under strict and efficient control, but they were well aware of a saying, coined by one of their best-selling poets, that you can drive Nature out with a pitchfork, but she will always find a way back. In the end their own greed and laziness let in the hungry hordes of barbarians and it all went wrong. This winter has seen masses of examples of our difficulty in keeping Nature at bay when she really goes for it with the odd earthquake, bush fire, hurricane or flood making the efforts of the mightiest national governments look pretty pathetic. Here, at the bottom end of the scale of government, we too have to keep wielding our pitchforks to prevent Nature from messing up our tidy local environment.

One of the first lessons that new Clerks have to learn, and old clerks try not to forget, is *who does what*. It's not simple. If an overgrown hedge, or a fallen tree, blocks a footpath, the owner of the hedge or tree is responsible. If a pot-hole appears on the road, the County Council should fix it. If a bollard gets knocked over you ring up Beech Hurst, but if someone you don't like the look of tries to sell you something at the door you ring the police. If helicopters or mice in the attic keep you awake at night you ... well, of course, Clerks young and old will tell you that if in doubt people contact their Clerks, who, if they don't know the answer, are supposed to know someone who does.

One of the minor forces of Nature that are difficult to deal with is the family of Talpidae, who are doing their best to make a mess of our churchyard, not to mention our lawns. These formidable little miners in their black velvet waistcoats love the current wet weather, because worms like it too; and moles are said to have to eat their weight in worms very day. Trapping them is a very hit-or-miss affair, and success is rare with other devices like smoke-bombs or vibrating buzzers stuck in the ground; even if they did work, they would only send the moles into the next-door garden. How very different from the portrayal of the amiable, dreamy Mole in *The Wind in the Willows*. Come to think of it the book also misrepresents the natural characters of other talking animals – water rats erode our river-banks and badgers carry TB. Toads are perhaps more harmless, but the book projects onto Mr. Toad some of the less attractive aspects of Human Nature, with its arrogance and selfishness, not to mention its love affair with motorised transport, which is, in our village for instance, gradually destroying Cattle Lane.

We've touched on another mysterious force of nature before – I mean the Gremlin. Our insurers are aware of the need to look out for the signs of their activity in play areas. Why else would nuts and bolts apparently unscrew themselves? We have to prove our vigilance by weekly inspections of which records are kept and carefully filed.

Another megashed

The mention of Mr. Toad reminds me that we're threatened with more traffic problems under the plans for a second megashed. A recent article in the Advertiser highlighted the huge number of infringements of the rules by heavy lorries. Not too many of the big ones come our way, but we suffer from a spin-off in the form of the noticeable increase in the number of lighter vehicles using our streets. And the prospect of noise- and light-pollution for residents of Red Post Lane is dreadful. We are backing Monxton in their strong objection to the plans as submitted.

Recreation Ground. There will, before too long, be more equipment to check, though not involving too many bits of metal to come undone or go rusty. Plans are progressing for the big up-dating of the Recreation Ground in the War Memorial Hall

grounds. It may look as if it's going at a toddler's speed, but please be patient; we want to get it right and not to spend a king's ransom. And please remember that our Councillors, particularly Cllr Rebecca Bone, are volunteers and have a lot of other things to do. Come to that, the Clerk is a part-timer, and the Powers that Be seem to enjoy thinking up lots of new things for Clerks to do, especially under the Localism Act. At this end it feels as if its main aim is to get Parish Councils to do things that had either never been done before or had been done by someone else. Still, the Act does recognise that local people might want a bigger say in what happens to their locality.

Localism in Action

The word *Local* makes you think about other words like *Community* or *Neighbourhood*. OK, we know what the words mean, but when you look around your locality, do we know what they signify? As far as our *village* is concerned you could describe it as *nuclear*, i.e. compact, with relatively clear edges, as opposed, for instance, to *linear*, or stretched out along the line of a road or river. Not difficult to see the area bounded by the Salisbury Road, Cattle Lane and the built-up areas to the west of Duck Street as a self-contained neighbourhood for a community to live in. But what we have here isn't a village council but a Parish Council; our patch runs all the way from the edge of the airfield at Middle Wallop to the fringe of Andover at Floral Way. In between are scattered lots of varied settlements like Abbotts Ann Down, Little Park, Kingsmead and Clatford Lodge. Though these areas are way outside what the planners fancifully call the "Village Envelope", they could still be regarded as within the gravitational pull of the village, like so many moons. Like gravity on the Moon, the sense of *community* thereabouts may seem rather less strong, but by any reasonable definition the word *neighbourhood* would surely apply. But what about those 423 households tucked away behind the Hexagon Stores? They occupy land that was part of Abbotts Ann parish a good 1,000 years before the A 303 cut it off. With their own Community Centre, playground and defined boundaries Burghclere Down could well feel like a community of its own, but in *neighbourhood* terms it could easily be mistaken for a moon of Planet Andover. As the King of Siam said, it's a puzzlement.

With the help of some splendid volunteers, much careful deliberation is going on about the way ahead for the community, village or neighbourhood of Abbotts Ann, and you'll be hearing a lot more about their ideas later. You have to start somewhere, and, as Ray Lucas demonstrated in a masterly report presented to the Council, it's not a bad idea to kick off by defining your terms of reference. This means that there is some chance that you know what you are talking about. Perhaps some of you may remember Professor Joad in the old Radio and TV Brains Trust programmes. He was an infuriating nit-picker, but even more annoyingly was usually right. His answer to any question always started with "It all depends on what you mean by..."

Minutes and Meetings.

It was great, at the February meeting, to see the Jubilee Room packed with people who were involved, or interested, in the Council's deliberations. Please remember that members of the public are welcome at all meetings, and those who come don't have to wait for the publication of these jottings or the official Minutes to find out what is going on. As the Minutes have to be approved at the following meeting it takes a while for them to be available for publication. But this means that the full Council present them as a pretty reliable record; they should be available on the website and in the Village Shop (or from the Clerk if you don't request them too early in the morning) soon after their approval.

Adrian Stokes, Clerk