

THE CLERK' S COLUMN

January 2013

An Abbotts Ann Megashed?

Some of us can remember the days when the sun shone in summertime. It certainly did back in the '40s. I'm sure it was the same in Abbotts Ann as it was in the Clerk's earlier youth, when most of the folk who lived in country villages belonged to the farming community; and anyone whose age was in double figures turned out on those long, hot August days to help with the harvest. It's not hard to summon up the memories of Blossom and Gilbert, the two huge farm horses, plodding round and round the standing corn, towing the binder. This looked like a mobile windmill, but every ten yards it would spit out a sheaf as big as a ten-year-old boy, neatly tied round the middle with string. It was always a mystery how a machine could tie a knot.

Then came the arm-aching, skin-scratching task of stooking (OK that's what it was called in Gloucestershire) which meant stacking six or eight sheaves into what looked like a miniature thatched roof by banging the tops together and thumping the bottom ends onto the stubble. It was a matter of pride that the stooks were lined up with military precision; this made it much easier for Blossom and Gilbert when they came with their huge 4-wheeled wagons to cart them to the stack-yard or barn to wait for the arrival, a great excitement for the youngsters, of the steam traction engine towing the Threshing Machine, which seemed to dwarf the local buses.

I won't go into the threshing stage - with its flapping leather drive-belts, back-breaking half-hundredweight sacks, choking dust and revolving drums that could (and did) take a man's arm off – or I'll never get to the point. You might wonder why the sheaves weren't taken straight to the barn, or even to the threshing machine. The answer to this is that they had to stand in the (reliable) sunshine until the grain was dry; otherwise there would be a horrid, slimy sprouting mess and a smelly oozing under the barn door. Now, except for harvesting nice long straw for thatching there are only a few vintage binders around, and those double-decker-bus-sized combines do everything as they go along. Or do they? No, they don't do the drying bit.

So that's why the Parish Council found itself looking at plans at Eastover Farm for a very large shed indeed where huge volumes of air could be blown through countless tons of grain. Councillors are, of course, keen to see modern farming technology at work in the Parish. But there are associated worries. No-one has yet invented a quiet way of moving big volumes of air, quite a lot of people live well within earshot of the farm and the prevailing wind blows towards the village in general and the Primary School in particular. This would carry not only noise, but any escaping dust. Also similar plants are known to run 24/7 and for many months after harvest time. We'll make sure that the Planning Service is aware of these worries

Committees.

This Parish Council doesn't go in for sub-committees, but prefers to encourage independent committees to run their Parish organisations in a spirit of friendly co-operation. You only have to look around to see this policy working successfully. We've even got a War Memorial Hall Committee laying on its enjoyable events like the Burns Night without the benefit of a Chairman. Another example of outstanding success is the Village Shop Committee, who can now look back on ten years of award-winning performance under the professional management of Geraldine Heather. The continuing profitability and the awards won are only a part of the contribution which the shop has made to the village under Geraldine's management. We can all count blessings from its presence at the heart of the village and she has our best wishes for a quieter life. The Parish Council has passed a Vote of Thanks by Acclaim.

While the Shop Committee gets on quietly with its job as the Board of Directors, so do other bodies like the Fete Committee and the Sports Field Committee. But we mustn't forget a whole lot of other groups, rather less formally organised. Some of these are one-offs, like the citizens of Manor Close and their Village Green project, or the highly successful Jubilee Committee; others keep going, like the Players, Abbotts Ann Action, AAGA or Neighbourhood Watch; then there are individual volunteers like John Moon, our Tree Warden, Footpaths Officer Paul Kelly and Archivist Tim Tayler, or Lynda Stockings who comes to our Council meetings to ensure that we don't leave Burghclere Down out of our discussions. All these and many others make an invaluable contribution to making Abbotts Ann such a good place to live in.

There are other groups, too, currently working to see that our village stays that way. We have a Joint Working Party on the Community Consultation and Neighbourhood Plan. Here heads are being put together to consider how, or whether, to go in for a pretty massive undertaking to find out what we want the future of our Parish to be and to ensure that it will happen. This process isn't being hurried, and shouldn't be.

Ancestral Voices

Because the heart of our Parish is a 2-part village of such antiquity, we are unlikely to forget the lessons of history as we focus on the future. Our ancestors knew what they were doing, unlike the developers of so much housing that has been recently devastated by floods. This winter our water-meadows are doing just what they were meant to do, while the houses and cottages keep their feet dry; their foundations may be only a foot or two above the water-table, but that was reckoned to be enough. Likewise, any pictures of our ancestors out of doors show them with hats or parasols, and relaxing in the shade; sun-bathing is a very new pastime. We who were young when summers were sunny now remember that farm-workers knew what they were doing, too; they might just roll up their sleeves, but they always wore caps, unlike the volunteer harvesters, who never thought we needed protection against the sun then or for many years after. We are now bombarded with advice about covering up or slapping on barrier creams. Quite right too, but a bit late for some of us. Dermatologists are quite busy digging the ugly-sounding, but usually benign, bumps out of all sorts of places on the skins of older folk who got sunburnt many years ago. One such minor excavation might mean a missing Column next month.

By the way 1. Last month the question about the marooning of the Station Hotel was left in the air. The Andover Advertiser has come up with the answer on Page 22 of the issue of 4th January, with pictures of Andover Town Station – now lost without trace under the forest of traffic lights and acres of tarmac down by Sainsburys. No photos of the horrendous traffic-jams starting at the level crossing and sometimes reaching out into the country on the London Road. The jams have just moved a little further to the west at Stonehenge.

By the way 2. My personal and Parish emails have been getting increasingly tangled up with each other. So for Parish communication, we now have a more business-like address up and running, so please now use clerk.abbottsann@virginmedia.com.

By the way 3. All being well, every one of the 2013 Parish Council meetings will happen on the first Thursday of each month in the Jubilee Room at 6.30 p.m.