

ABBOTTS ANN PARISH COUNCIL

Newsletter: August 2009

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The Clerk's eccentric filing system contains a very fat file called "Sagas". This is backed up on the clerical computer, which the Clerk's grandsons consider to be almost mediaeval, as it is almost five years old. The purpose of the file is to preserve the records of any items of Parish business which go on a bit and which future Clerks, Councillors or historians may find significant or useful. This Clerk inherited, for instance, a 2.5-inch thick wodge of paper about the *Jubilee Tree Junction Pavement Palaver*; current Sagas range from the *Great Megashed Menace* to the *Tangled Tale of the Telephone Kiosk*. A couple of months ago, when the correct street-name signs for Little Ann Road at last appeared at the Poplar Farm junction, the Clerk thought he could safely close the "Clatford Road" *Conundrum* File after a four-year run.

No such luck, for an eyebrow or two were raised at the opinion expressed in last month's Newsletter about the near-impossibility of changing the name of a road. Wrong words perhaps, but the fact remains that the "Clatford Road" experience was extremely tedious and time-consuming; and it still is, for some Little Ann householders, on whom the Powers that Be had the last laugh by changing their post-codes, including those of the Chairman and the Clerk. From this arose all manner of problems, ranging from being told they don't exist to being threatened with a £3,000 fine for having the wrong post-code on a driving licence, not to mention the notification of scores of friends, relatives, banks and even the tax-man. Hence a certain reluctance to go through it all again; but if it is the Will of the People, the Council will have another go - see below. After all, Lower Clatford was laid to rest and elevated to Goodworth, and someone must have worked hard to get the D**g Cart out of Dunkirt Lane.

Meanwhile there have been tears, tantrums and resignations on the Parish Council of Kenardington in Kent, where a Parish Councillor living on Church Road managed, single-handedly, to get the name changed by the Borough Council to Church Lane, who obligingly put up street-name signs to prove it. She claimed to be fed up with redirecting mail to Church Road in Kennington, but this is 11 miles away, and surely they have post-codes even in darkest Kent. Other parishioners suspected a murkier motive, because estate agents, among others, apparently think that a country lane is more up-market than a mere road. The landlord of the local pub, The World's Wonder, is bemused by the row, commenting that "This is really a very quiet bit of the world. The only noise is the occasional sheep and the rustling of the corn..." This saga has lasted three years so far, so that Parish Clerk will soon need a new filing cabinet; the Chairman won't let him close the file until the street signs are changed back.

WHAT'S IN AN ENVELOPE?

The Chairman and Clerk recently ventured out to the rather palatial Village Hall at Weyhill for a seminar on Village Envelopes, where, school-like, we sat two by two at tables and were invited to draw lines on a map around areas of the village where we (a) didn't want any new buildings and (b) didn't mind having one or two. We cried "Pass!" and took the maps home for further consideration, because it looked as if we would need four or five envelopes if we are to consider such outposts as Foundry Road, Clatford Lodge and Burghclere Down; the latter belies its rustic name and really consists of a densely built-up part of Andover behind the Hexagon shop and cut off from the rest of the historic parish by the A 303. Cattle Lane, too, is a special case, because its northern side counts as open countryside except for the sites of the old Land Settlement bungalows. The good news is that the government-imposed target for new buildings in Northern Test Valley can be accommodated within Andover's boundaries, without imposing any targets on surrounding villages, so the village map-makers don't need to worry about allowing for big developments, unless they want them.

WHAT'S IN IT FOR US?

An awful lot of legislation seems to be subject to the over-riding Law of the Unexpected Results. For instance, back in the 50s the activities of rapacious landlords, called Rachmanism after the worst offender, prompted the introduction of a Rent Act; however, this granted such a high level of security to tenants that landlords, whether honest or crooked, didn't dare to let their premises at all for fear of never again getting possession of their own property. So it became impossible to rent anything. One must admit that some others were wholly successful, like the Clean Air Act, which abolished London Smog. Another Act which has worked pretty well was the 1972 Local Government Act which contains sensible rules for running Parish Councils. For some unknown reason the Government has inserted into the ponderously-named Local Government Involvement in Health Act 2007 a Section 72 which has nothing to do with health, apart from the likelihood of causing apoplexy among local Councillors.

It is now proposed that we are to have the power to *appoint* Councillors; there is a subtle difference between this and *co-opting* members, which we are assured is explained somewhere in the small print, though we have never suffered from an overwhelming desire to do any appointing. Co-option, of course, happens if there are not enough candidates at an election to fill all the seats, or if a member resigns between elections. More worrying is the rule that every council must have a minimum of five *elected* councillors to be (horrid word) *quorate*, which seems to mean that unless five elected Councillors can turn up your meeting is a non-starter. This could be paralysing for a Council with only seven members, some of whom may be co-opted. Let's hope that the Secretary of State for Whatever will use his/her power to delay this imposition.

STING IN THE TAIL

It's a great year for wasps, who are particularly fond of nesting in thatched roofs, where amateur efforts to remove them tend to be unsuccessful. The professionals provided by the benevolence of Beech Hurst are splendid, but, as one thatched resident has just discovered, they charge £39 for one nest and £10.10 for each additional nest. So the recipient of four simultaneous waspish visitations was badly stung.

PARISH COUNCIL MEETING, 6TH AUGUST

We never used to have meetings in August, and some parishes still manage without, but nowadays there seems to be far too much business to postpone to September. This time we had to dig out extra chairs as we welcomed our new County Councillor, Andrew Gibson, plus Graham Stallard, one of our regular Borough Councillors, and no less than five members of the public. Typically, topics discussed ranged from the global to the minutely local.

War Memorial Hall

Our hall, though smallish, is a great asset to the village, and its hard-working committee is always up to something. By the end of August there will be a new heating system which will only heat the hall itself rather than the surrounding countryside. The Parish Council is still working on the replacement of the dilapidated fence and a recent Health and Safety inspection showed that the play equipment is kept in good repair - the only problem reported was that someone had decided to swing not on the swings but on the little gate, as noted in last month's Newsletter.

Planning

It was a quiet month for planning applications, but larger-scale issues came up for discussion. Things may seem to have gone pretty quiet on the old airfield, but that dog is sleeping very lightly. The tireless Dr. John Moon has been in touch with the Local Government Ombudsman with a complaint. These have to be made by individual citizens rather than by councils, and he is pointing out that the Planning Service, to all intents and purposes, ignored the expert evidence put forward by himself and Professor Fahy about noise pollution. The

Ombudsman has also been approached about issues of light pollution and landscape impact. It would be very unwise to close the Megashed Saga file.

The Council assures all residents that it is beavering away quietly to keep the Manor Close Playing Field green; “quietly” is the word at the moment, but we can say that, so far, contacts with the County Council have not been discouraging.

There is also a big consultation afoot, involving the effects on us of Test Valley’s plans to be incorporated in their revised Core Strategy (see above under “Envelopes”). It is important to get this right, as it will affect planning policy for years ahead, so the Council decided to set up a separate meeting on 1st September with the aim of producing a definitive map of our envelope(s). Pencil sharpeners will be provided.

Byways.

Dogs will be dogs, but it is very depressing that some owners continue to let them foul our paths, particularly our much-used Church Path. This is also where we keep on hearing about walkers getting the fright of their lives when cyclists swish past, having ignored (or destroyed?) the notices stating clearly that the path is for walkers only. A new, more robust, notice will soon appear. It would be nice if it, and the path, could be treated with more respect by people controlling four legs or two wheels. The same respect is also due to our very elegant village signs, politely requesting careful driving, which are not provided as whiteboards for posting amorous messages. A recent one has been removed from the sign in Red Post Lane, using a secret formula only known to the Clerk and Alan Jenkins, who erased it in a wink.

Highways

We are determined to stop the village road surfaces from degenerating into third world condition, and the Clerk, who is happy to declare a personal interest because of his long-suffering bicycle, will continue to nag, encouraged by the fact that we now have both a cycling MP and a cycling County Councillor, Andrew Gibson, who successfully survived his first visit to the Jubilee Room. Fortunately he struck a welcome chord with our Councillors and visitors, because, among other interests, he expressed particular keenness to see improvements in the maintenance of roads and footpaths; indeed, without prompting, he introduced the subject of a roundabout at St. John’s Cross, where, like all of us, he had had some alarming experiences. This Council has been asking for this for ages, and Mrs. Christine Forrester had come along, with supporters, expressly to call attention to the need for something to be done to minimise the dangers of the Salisbury Road, especially for its residents, while the Council emphasised the inevitable increase in the use of the cross-roads when the new school opens. He promised to support the project, and encouraged Mrs. Forrester to go ahead with a petition. So keep an eye out for this, and please add your signature.

Another delegation to the Jubilee Room was led by Mrs. Cherry Irwin. With her neighbours, she was very concerned about a repetition of a near-disaster arising from the emergency services confusing Red Rice Road, Abbots Ann, with Red Rice Road, Upper Clatford. Luckily she was not discouraged by the “Clatford Road” Saga, and Cllr Graham Stallard had dragged himself away from Test Valley business in time to assure us that the procedure for changing the name of a road is quite simple and effective, with the Borough Council happily taking on nearly all the donkey-work. So Mrs. Irwin was encouraged to contact the residents of Red Rice Road (Abbots Ann), first to obtain a consensus on the need for change and then to agree on a name which couldn’t possibly be confused with anywhere else. The Chairman and Clerk could not forbear from warning them against a post-code change if they wish to keep their marbles intact, their friendships in repair and their driving licences unblemished.

Much else was discussed, of which details are recorded in the Minutes. The next meeting is scheduled for 3rd September at 6.30 p.m. in the Jubilee Room.

Adrian Stokes, Clerk