

ABBOTTS ANN PARISH COUNCIL

Newsletter: February 2009

Beardmen

No, this does not refer to any of our Councillors, but to a type of jug produced in the Rhineland in the 16th-18th centuries. They were made of cheap stoneware and rather roughly glazed and used for importing all sorts of liquids from mainland Europe, particularly from Holland; then, just as we may re-use jam jars or biscuit tins, they were often kept at home to store a quart of ale or scrumpy. The neck of these pot-bellied jars was decorated, if that's the right word, with the face of a grim-looking bearded man, and some bright (Protestant) spark started calling them "Bellarmines", because they resembled one Cardinal Bellarmine, who lived from 1542 to 1621. The Cardinal was portly and bearded and a vigorous opponent of the Protestant Reformation; so he was hardly a popular figure in Northern Europe, and in those days incitement to religious hatred was positively encouraged by governments. Ever since the 17th century the name has stuck, despite the efforts of the Vatican to compensate him by adding the prefix "Saint" to his name in 1930.

These jugs keep turning up, particularly when people start digging up the sites of old cottages, because they were eventually down-graded to use as "witch-bottles". Since witches were thought to park their broomsticks on rooftops and get into your house via the chimney, the bottles, filled with nasty things like frogs' legs, bent pins, written curses and unspeakable fluids, were often buried under fireplaces as a witch-deterrant. In 1977 the owner of "Longthatch" found one when lowering the floor. Later, when the foundations of the telephone exchange were being excavated, four more, only one of which was broken, were found, and are now in the Andover Museum.

Now a member of the Longthatch owner's family has a problem. He still has the jug, but it has been exiled to his garage, because his wife is not keen to have it in the house, and he telephoned the Clerk out of the blue to ask if the Parish would like to have it on loan to display somewhere, as the Museum reckoned that their three and a half jugs were quite enough. Despite much stroking of chins, Councillors have not been able to come up with ideas for a safe and suitable home for it, so we are left with a bit of a non-event. And anyway, we would rather be famous for our Maidens' Garlands than for hideous, and not particularly rare, reminders of religious dissension.

Fame.

Villages do like to be famous for something; George Formby used to remind us that "*If you want to get your photo in the Press, you must be different some kind of way.*" Like us, some villages already have a historic claim, such as Dunmow with its Flitch, or Tichborne with its Dole. Others put a lot of effort into inventing new claims to fame. Woolacombe in Devon musters 10,000 spectators for its National Sandcastle Competition; Witcham in Cambridgeshire has run the World Pea-shooting Championship, attracting competitors from America and Australia. Another village runs the World Worm-charming Championships, where the record was set in 1980 by one Tom Shufflebotham who whistled up 511 worms in 30 minutes. If he is still around, he would have been useful to us in the Churchyard; since moles have to consume their weight in worms every day to survive, a reduction in the worm-count would perhaps have solved the problem there. No-one suggested inviting a worm-charmer along, though the Clerk was offered other ideas including lying in wait with a catapult, burying Coca-cola bottles or pouring Jeyes Fluid down the runs. The Clerk contacted the nearest professional mole-catcher from Dorset, who stunned the Council with his estimate of £45 per mole caught. In the end the Chairman applied his boyhood training in country crafts and dealt with the main culprit in a very personal way by trapping it on the site of his own reserved burial plot. He should have had his photo in the Press.

PARISH COUNCIL MEETING; 5th February 2009

Telephone Kiosk

The Clerk had tried to telephone a Mr. McDonald, the person at BT in charge of the disposal of telephone boxes, but found himself stuck in a queue listening to an endless loop of one of his least favourite pieces of “music” punctuated by apologies and assurances of the importance of the call. Giving up after what seemed like half an hour, he had just decided to try snail-mail when the phone rang; Mr. McDonald, for it was he, had somehow decided it was time we had a chat. Telepathy seems to have worked rather better than telephony. However the message for the Council was that there was no way that BT would keep our kiosk going at a loss, though they would continue to run it, with no undertaking to give it so much as a coat of paint, if we paid BT £500 a year; the alternatives were that they would take it away for nothing or that they would remove its innards and sell it to us for £10. So the Council decided to become the proud owners of a historic landmark, and, inspired by the splendidly refurbished example in private ownership a little further up Red Rice Road, plans to restore it to its former glory.

Planning.

The Council had a look at plans for no less than three new houses, all of which were considered to be a good idea, especially as they were on existing plots. In Red Post Lane, one of the old bungalows - or rather the semi-detached half of one - will be replaced by a house whose design conforms to the Council’s criteria for Little Park. In Old Salisbury Road, the sadly derelict cedar bungalow, imaginatively named Dunromin, will be replaced, temporarily, by two static caravans while the owners set about building two new houses there.

The Megashed issue may seem to have gone quiet, but our Borough Councillor, Graham Stallard, is keeping a close watch on the progress of the negotiations between the Test Valley officials and the developers, to ensure that the legally-binding conditions on traffic control etc do not get watered down. Meanwhile we have lodged a complaint, drafted by the indefatigable Dr. John Moon, about the conduct of the meeting of the Planning Control Committee on December 1st and the failure to take into account many of the detailed representations he and others had made. Similar complaints are being made by other Parishes, though if these were to be referred to the Local Government Ombudsman they would apparently have to come from a private individual and not from a body representing hundreds of individuals.

Councillors were also alerted to another issue with long-term implications for the village. Although legal procedures have caused some delays, we were assured by Cllr Paul Stanton that the building of the new school would start soon. Since its plans include its own playing field, there is now a question mark hovering over the field at Manor Close, and “watch this space” has a rather more literal meaning than usual.

Neighbourhood Watch.

Abbotts Ann has been remarkably free of serious crime for a long time, but we have just had a sharp reminder that we must all remain vigilant and take sensible precautions. A house in Dunkirt Lane was burgled while the owners were away, so we have no guaranteed immunity from that pest.

Archives.

Our newly volunteered Archivist was welcomed to the meeting. Mr. Tim Tayler outlined his plans, which include encouraging people to contribute items such as personal memories, photographs and historical material (but please not Bellarmine jugs). His ideas have the enthusiastic support of our webmaster Mr. Keith Saunders, whose quiet beavering away at the website is greatly appreciated by the Council. The main difficulty is storage, a problem familiar to Clerks all over the country.

Highways and Byways.

Yes, the footpaths are rather muddy here and there, but the Council regrets that there is not much they can do about it - as this is rather built into the climate at this time of year - except nag the County Council who are responsible for footpath surfaces. So don't hold your breath. Where highways are concerned we have a more direct line to the County via their website; there is a special link for reporting pot-holes, and the Clerk used this to report the massive example at the entrance to the Church car park. It will be interesting to see how long it stays there.

We have got rather tired of reporting blocked roadside drains by snail mail, so we are trying to see whether the County website produces results in this department, too. You don't have to leave it to the Clerk to tell the Highway people, and actually their website makes for interesting browsing.

Street names, however, are the responsibility of the Borough, and we were rather taken aback by the sudden appearance of new "Little Ann Road" nameplates. The Clerk politely drew attention to the fact that not only were they lettered in black, not green, but they were also mounted on *plastic* posts instead of oak. The apologetic reply said that these were wrongly ordered in the urban specification and would be replaced in (wait for it) due course. The same email promised an inspection of the curious and shabby collection of signs at the entrance to Abbotts Hill.

As usual, full minutes are available in the Village Shop and on the Website. The next Council meeting is scheduled for 5th March; and don't forget the Annual Assembly on 27th March, which is your opportunity to see, hear and question your Borough and Parish Councillors and those hard-working volunteers who run the many organisations and activities which make the Parish such a great place to live in.

Adrian Stokes, Clerk