

ABBOTT'S ANN PARISH COUNCIL

Newsletter: September 2009

THE ROLLING ENGLISH ROAD

Every Council Highways Department should be frequently reminded of G.K.Chesterton's lines:

Before the Roman came to Rye, or out to Severn strode,

The rolling English drunkard made the rolling English Road.

One suspects that those who work in these departments are careful to arrange their holidays at times, or in places, that avoid the need to drive, for instance, westwards from Amesbury. No doubt our pre-historic ancestors must be chuckling as they look down at the fuming queues every summer week-end. From their elevated perspective they must wonder why all the learned earth-bound professors have missed the obvious point that Stonehenge, where several important ancient routes converge, was designed as the world's first traffic roundabout.

Roads, and roundabouts as it happens, have recently been the subject of quite a lot of attention, not just hereabouts, but at national level. The Department of Transport is finding its life made pretty uncomfortable by the admirable CPRE, which keeps a close eye on that ministry's activities - or lack of them. They spend a lot of time trying to ensure that problems arising in towns and cities don't just pass the buck to the countryside, for instance by expanding into green belt territory or wrecking scenery and habitats with intrusive by-passes. A month or two ago we heard that they were urging the government to make the car-owner responsible for litter thrown out onto the verge; they point out that there are clear precedents in the laws about detection of speeding offences and passengers who do not have their seat-belts secured.

The CPRE is also responding to a dismal document from Whitehall about rural roads called *A Safer Way* (a bureaucratic pun?) which springs from the grim statistic that almost two-thirds of road deaths occur on rural roads. The proposals include mapping accidents on A roads, but not on lesser ones. And did you know that there is already a requirement for local authorities to set their own *Casualty Targets*? Don't bother to try to imagine what these are, because they are going to abolish them anyway, and replace them with *Road Safety Targets*, though there doesn't seem to be any obligation on councils to set them up, let alone aim at them. Not everyone will agree with the details of CPRE's response, but their clear aim is to improve rural road safety and to emphasise the value of speed limit reform to reduce road noise, damage to older buildings, greenhouse gases and - one of CPRE's long-standing priorities - signage clutter (not a very melodious name, but it does say what it means). Their requests include a 50 mph "default" speed limit on single-lane rural roads while retaining the 60 mph limit on the safest ones; they also want it made easier to introduce 40 mph limits on minor roads, 30 mph limits in unlit village streets and 20 mph limits on "quiet lanes".

Worries about our own quiet (?) lanes have been eased a little by the news that Tesco seem to want to have their megashed at Fleet after all. But the fact remains that the developers have got their planning permission to develop the old airfield, and we mustn't forget the plan to turn the DLO into a massive military base with parking for something like a thousand cars. The existing level of traffic in the village is already pushing some surfaces to the point of disintegration, so minds are already boggling at the thought of another winter with the wrong kind of weather. So nag on, Mr. Clerk.

Two other worries are exercising the minds of councillors and others in the Parish: first our bit of the A343 is causing nightmares to its residents, especially if they are trying to get into their driveways from the Andover direction; the crying need for a roundabout at St.John's Cross has been evident almost since Stonehenge was built, but one can't help suspecting that there will have to be the statistically correct number of casualties there to trigger any action from the Powers that Be. Please support those who are working on this problem.

The second worry - confusion between two neighbouring Red Rice Roads - is also being vigorously worked on by Cherry Irwin and her team, who have produced a very professional survey of the residents; a number of new names have been considered, but the vast majority of respondents favour extending Duck Street right up to St. John's Cross. The Parish Council is happy to support the changing of the name, and is asking the Borough Council to make it happen.

GETTING TO THE POINT

The Borough has been commendably speedy in replacing the street-name sign at St. Mary's Meadow, and a brief check established that the apostrophe is duly inserted in the right place. Did you know that there is an Apostrophe Protection Society and that one Stefan Gatward of Tunbridge Wells was disgusted to find himself threatened with prosecution for criminal damage after painting in an apostrophe or two on some road signs? Since commenting on this, the *Sunday Telegraph* has been inundated with reports, including the news that some authorities, like Birmingham, have given up and decided not to use them at all, while others, including our own County, have issued their staff with crib-sheets on grammar and punctuation.

Others have tried to have it both ways: eagle-eyed travellers on the London Underground have noticed one entrance to a Circle Line station is marked "St. James' Park" (full stop correct, apostrophe wrong) while another gets it right with "St. James's Park"; a resident of St. Phillip's Avenue somewhere in Surrey is less concerned with the spelling of the saint's name than the fact that of four signs on that avenue, two have apostrophes and two don't. It's not all about apostrophes either, as people have spotted "Unsuitable for HGV,s", "No's 87-117" and "ROUND-A-BOUT", while electors at Kingston-upon-Thames (which sometimes has hyphens and sometimes doesn't) were baffled to get a letter saying "Your electoral registration form is inside you." until they read the next line: "Must by law complete and return this form." And we're all familiar with the so-called "Greengrocers' Plural" ("tomato's", "banana's" etc.), but another retailer took the biscuit with "pine range's, table set's, sofa's, bed's" and even "lot's more". The Apostrophe Protection Society should offer a prize for the first sighting of a publication entitled something like "*You're Apostrophe's and how to use 'em.*"

Please don't ask me why Sainsbury's has an apostrophe and Halfords doesn't, but be assured that Abbots Ann was spelt like that for about 500 years before anyone bothered to use any punctuation at all except the *point* or full stop.

A WARM FEELING

The Parish Council is glad to have contributed to the cost of replacing the heating system in the War memorial Hall. The welcome to the Hall will now be even warmer, and the Jubilee Room even cosier. The Committee is to be congratulated on getting it all done on time and under budget.

PARISH COUNCIL MEETING, 03.09.09.

Things tend to be mercifully quiet in August - even Neville Chamberlain waited until September - so the late summer meeting tends to be a bit of a tidying-up exercise and the Minutes struggle to reach Page 3. So we were quite surprised to have to rustle up extra chairs in the Jubilee Room to accommodate half a dozen parishioners in attendance. They were all interested in the issue of re-naming Red Rice Road as mentioned above, and their contributions to the discussion were much appreciated. Fortunately Our Test Valley Councillor, Arthur Peters, was able to stay long enough to explain the process and to facilitate the approach to the Borough Council. This will now be done according to the book, though Councillors couldn't resist reflecting ruefully on previous experiences, which included the sudden appearance of Clatford Road and the disappearance of Manor Road not long ago. Discussion was lively and helpful, and it would be great if more people would sit in on our meetings, which are often quite important and never boring.

VACANCY ON COUNCIL

After this, the visitors went home, leaving the Council to deal with the rest of the Agenda items. These are detailed in the Minutes, but one calls for particular mention: after many years as a highly valued member of the Council, Paul Stanton has decided to give himself more time for his other interests. For his, and of course Jackie's, sterling work for the village in helping to develop two of its major assets - the Shop and the School - we all owe a tremendous debt of gratitude, but that was not all; his contributions to Council discussions, always brief, but shrewd and to the point, will be sadly missed. Procedures for filling the vacancy are in hand.

FUTURE MEETINGS

The other major concern for this meeting was the settling of the village "envelope". After a long look at the maps prepared by the Borough it was decided to re-arrange the postponed special meeting on the subject to 6.30 on September 29th.

The next Council meeting will be on 1st October.

Adrian Stokes, Clerk