

ABBOTTS ANN PARISH COUNCIL

Newsletter May 2006

April. Geoffrey Chaucer (1340-1400), the poet from whose writings Eng. Lit. kicks off, was rather fond of April, the month whose *showres soote the droughte of March had pierced to the roote*. His weather analysis, though correct about March this year, hardly matches our current experience of April in which we seem to be among the lucky few southerners who can still use hosepipes without the threat of retribution. Talking of which, newish legislation (from the Whitehall outfit that used to be run by John Prescott when he could spare the time), enables Parish Councils to make themselves really unpopular by levying on-the-spot fines, though Chaucer, and perhaps many of today's villagers, would agree with one resident's recent suggestion of the re-introduction of stocks and pillories as suitable instruments for the punishment of litter-droppers, fly-tippers or inconsiderate dog-owners. Ducking-stools could perhaps be appropriate for illicit hosepipe use, if there were any standing water in which the miscreant could be ducked. Chaucer went on to say that when April comes, *then longen folk to goon on pilgrimages*, the nearest mediaeval equivalent to today's package holidays. All very well for him, as he was a senior civil servant and could take off for Canterbury at the drop of a quill pen, but for those at the bottom end of the civil service hierarchy, there is so much to do in April that there is no chance of gooning anywhere. OK, young know-all at the back of the classroom, we all know that one of his fellow pilgrims was a *Clerke*; he was not, however, of the Parish variety, but a Clerk in Holy Orders, or Cleric. The end-of-year accounts, tax returns, the audit, the Annual Assembly, the regular meetings, the Annual General Meeting, and loads more if it is an election year, hardly constitute light holiday reading, anyway; but then along comes a questionnaire from one official about playground equipment, with photographs, please; another wants a massive survey of the usage of footpaths; and another sets a multiple-choice paper on what we think about the audit procedure - all of which could be done at any time of year. This Clerke has alerted the Director of the Hampshire Association of Parish and Town Councils who is bigger than most officials, to let them know what we part-timers think about the timing of these extra chores.

Non-events. The pressure has been relieved by some things that have not happened. For some reason, which surely cannot be connected with our brilliant NHS, this has been the second month running with no demands on the Burial Ground; and the usual throng of prospective extenders of old houses, would-be builders of new homes, and even providers of conservatories, all seem to have gone on pilgrimages and left the Planning Officers of Beech Hurst twiddling their thumbs - unless they, too have fulfilled their own plans to be a pilgrim.

Graveyard. An impressive document emanating from the Court at Windsor Castle indicates that The Queen's Most Excellent Majesty in Council took time off from her birthday celebrations to give notice, following the representations of The Lord Chancellor (aka, boringly, The Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs), that burials in St. Mary's Churchyard, Abbotts Ann, should be discontinued forthwith, or at any rate as soon as the Privy Council can take this news of grave national importance into consideration at their meeting on May 23rd.

Highway Matters. The steady traffic of letters between the Clerk and Hampshire Highways has had mixed success. The "Unsuitable for Long Vehicles" notice at the Jubilee Oak is back in all its old intrusive glory, making it very hard for photographers to make an acceptable record of this attractive corner of the village; Church Path now looks good for another 20 years; but efforts

continue to get something done about the surface alongside Pennymarsh and the floods at Ash Barn and St.John's Cross, not to mention the lush vegetation along various verges. And the "...Long Vehicles" Notice by the sad wreckage of the Poplar Farm Inn is still at half-mast. No doubt something will happen - in due course.

Conservation Area Appraisal. Some more free copies of this beautifully-presented and fairly accurate booklet have arrived. It is uncertain whether this is a nervous reaction by the Planning Directors to the forthrightness of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman or a response to a plea of parochial poverty by the Clerk. Appreciation of the attractiveness of its depiction of our village is heavily tinged with regret that it records Test Valley's unilateral decision, in the teeth of the Parish Council's disagreement, to shrink the Conservation Area, not least by the exclusion of much of the historic Water Meadows. A copy is in the Village Shop; others may be borrowed from the Clerk or, for £15, bought at Beech Hurst.

Thatching. The Heritage Lottery Fund is providing bursaries to encourage the revival of the Norfolk Reed industry, in view of the latest statistics showing that 80% of the material currently used by English thatchers comes from Turkey and eastern Europe. Reed-cutting is not a popular occupation, since for best quality it has to be done in the depth of winter; and Norfolk winters are as hard as anywhere in Turkey. One wonders how far one can stretch words like "authentic" or "traditional"; what if The Eagle started serving Bulgarian beer or Caucasian cider?

Asbos. In contrast to our own friendly village, where the main disturbance of the peace, apart from the odd firework, is the gentle hum of the A303, the inhabitants of the Northern village of Bottomley would dearly love to have a pillory to get their own back on a lady who moved there 16 months ago and has since allegedly committed 259 offences against her neighbours, ranging from criminal damage to a *Clematis Montana*, assault by wheelbarrow, pouring a bag of compost over one person's head and slashing the tyres of another's van with a pair of shears. Her activities have so blighted the neighbourhood that people have been unable to sell their houses, while three have received medical treatment for depression, and one couple gave up having their car repeatedly re-sprayed. A favourite way of upsetting her neighbours was to play *Carmina Burana* (the words of which include references to rape, pillage and wrecking of villages) on a powerful amplifier; another ploy was to strew nails and broken glass on roadways. The good news is that it was the Borough Council that brought the case, as of course would our own TVBC; but the suffering burghers of Bottomley doubt whether the Asbo system has enough teeth to keep her quiet. That reminds me...but we have had quite enough tooth stories in previous Newsletters.

ANNUAL ASSEMBLY APRIL 21ST 2006

As before, there were more Chiefs than Indians present, with 16 Councillors, Officers or representatives and 11 members of the public. One representative muttered that it was a matter of people who know what's going on telling people who know what's going on what's going on. It is, however, a statutory obligation, and, since the required quorum is only 2, it is unlikely to be cancelled through poor attendance. Nobody seemed to mind that the Minutes were several pages shorter than in previous years, but this Clerk took his cue from *The Local Government Act 1972*, Sch 12, para 4 (1), the gist of which is that "Minutes are intended to be formal records of official acts and decisions, not reports, still less verbatim reports, of the speeches made"; so reports will be kept as appendices. So that people will not have to wait until this time next year to see the Minutes, they and the Appendices are available on the Website and in the Village Shop, close to the delicious fresh-baked bread and buns.

Most importantly, the Assembly provided the Chairman with the opportunity of recording the great debt of gratitude owed to the many Parishioners who voluntarily give up so much of their

time and energy in activities which contribute most effectively to the smooth running and happy atmosphere of Abbotts Ann.

The Chairman was to be congratulated on the closure of the meeting at 8.35 p.m., unlike Broughton's Assembly which kept going until 10.20. Perhaps the modest size of the audience was a tribute to the absence of the sorts of major discontents which seem to attract larger attendances.

PARISH COUNCIL MEETING 4TH MAY 2006

Formalities. As this was the Annual General Meeting, there were many formalities to be observed, starting with the unanimous re-election of Mr. Bernard Griffiths as Chairman and Prof. Peter Gibson as Vice-Chairman. Other formalities confirmed that there would be no change to the Council's regulations and subscriptions and that the current representatives of Village Organisations would continue in office. Financial formalities covered the approval of the Accounts for the Year 2005/6 and associated documents required by the law and the auditor. All those on the Electoral Roll have the right to inspect the Accounts, and these will be available for scrutiny between May 22nd and June 20th.

Planning. No Applications or Decisions had been received apart from the confirmation that Mr.D.CLi's project at 85 Little Ann could go ahead, on the basis of new conditions.

As Test Valley is still referring to "Clatford Road", the Clerk has established that this appellation does not feature in any of the Ordnance Survey's databases or maps, so he is in training for a further marathon correspondence on the subject.

Village Organisations.

Sports Field. Mrs. Wilkins reported that the Fun Ride had been greatly enjoyed. Although there were some 116 riders, the profits, though gratifying at about £1,100, were down to 2002 levels. The Council wished to record its appreciation of the work of Mrs. Wilkins and her helpers, not only for the fund-raising but also for the good publicity for the village. It is understood that the next Committee Meeting will take the form of a barbecue combined with a massive clear-out of the Tractor Shed.

Abbotts Ann Action. There are still concerns about creepy urban encroachment north of the village, and a close eye is being kept on the ambitions of the Powers that Be to extend a Business Park on the old Andover Airfield site towards Red Post Lane.

Fete Committee. It is confirmed the next Fete will return to the Sports Field and the Marquee has been booked for the week-end.

Please Note: This means that the Marquee will be available on the Sunday, and the Committee is asking for suggestions from individuals or groups who may wish to use/hire it for a function or exhibition.

Footpaths. Church Path. Nagging pays off, in due course.

Survey. Hampshire County Council's Heritage and Recreation Department have clearly whiled away a wet afternoon thinking up something for someone else to do, so they have asked all Parishes to conduct a Survey of Usage of Footpaths. This involves counting, classifying and questioning people using one or more of the local footpaths between 8.30 a.m. and supper-time on Sunday June 18th. The Council decided to delete "or more" from the brief and to concentrate on Dunkirt Lane. A check-point will need to be manned by teams of two in 2-hour shifts. Several

Councillors are willing to join in, and the indefatigable David Downey has agreed to co-ordinate the whole thing, **and would like to hear from any volunteers.**

Other Business

Churchyard. Not content with looking after our footpaths, David Downey has also been observed over the last few months on his knees in the Graveyard. At least one purpose of this reverent attitude has been the recording of all the graves, of which a spin-off has been the production of a masterly map. He presented a version of this to the Council, showing in particular the condition of several monuments which were worryingly unstable. This prompted a decision to convene a meeting with members of the Parochial Church Council to try to ensure a hazard-free future for the churchyard. The Council passed a unanimous Vote of Thanks by Acclaim to Mr. Downey for his work. It was noted that no kneelers were missing from the Church.

The Council decided to continue its financial contribution of £400 towards the maintenance of the churchyard and to help ensure that the Church Clock keeps going in reasonable agreement with Greenwich.

Trees. Prof. Gibson expressed concern over the protection of trees in the areas recently removed from the Conservation Area. Some Tree Preservation Orders had been imposed already, but there was need for a comprehensive review, in which the first step would be the obtaining of a definitive map. Dr. John Moon, our Hon. Tree Warden, will be working on this; he is always glad to receive any information or suggestions concerning trees in the Parish.

Buses. Notification has been received that Bus Service No 77, from 19th June 2006, will include an additional bus to Andover on the assumption that we are all bursting to go there. This will leave the Eagle at 09.18 daily.

Emergency Plan. Having had time to consider the guidelines from HCC, Councillors agreed that it was desirable that a simplified plan should be drawn up. It was suggested that a volunteer should be sought and asked to offer draft proposals, and/or possibly co-ordinate any subsequent action.

Please Note: The Chairman or the Clerk would be grateful to hear from anyone willing to dust off his/her thinking cap; they have copies of the Guidelines.

Future Meetings. There will be no change in the policy of holding Parish Council Meetings at 7 p.m. on the first Thursday of each month except August, with rare exceptions.

The next Parish Council Meeting will be on 1st June at 7 p.m. in the Jubilee Room of the War Memorial Hall. All residents are welcome to attend.

Adrian Stokes, Clerk