

## **THE CLERK'S COLUMN**

June 2013

### **Scents of Summer**

"Stuff happens" was more elegantly put by Harold Macmillan as "Events, dear boy," when asked what could spoil his plans as Prime Minister. Quite a lot of stuff is going on here, as you will see from the Parish Council Minutes if you really want to know, but the Editor's deadline is too close to go on about it now. Events have certainly conspired to spoil the Clerk's plans to switch off the computer, abandon attempts to persuade the printer to unjam itself, and emerge, blinking, into the little bit of Hampshire which he tries to keep neat and tidy. Glancing longingly away from his desk-top at the green world outside the window, he occasionally reflects on such deep questions as: "Why does another email come in with a sound like a cuckoo with hiccups, just when the sun comes out?" "What, come to that, happened to all the cuckoos who are meant to sing all day in May?" "Is it OK to keep this column short if otherwise the grass will get unmowably long?" "Why does starting the mower, washing the car, or even putting on a straw hat, bring on one of these scattered showers?" "How do theologians explain the inclusion in the creation of the universe such items as Ground Elder, Bindweed, Cleavers, Nettle or Slugs?" Mediaeval scholars blamed it all on Adam, and he, of course, blamed Eve.

Nowadays it seems that even theologians are beginning to accept that Darwin might have got a few things right as they talk about an evolving universe. Well, it's easy to accept the idea of the survival of the fittest when you find how successfully Bindweed and Ground Elder resist all attempts to eliminate them from the universe; cover them with black plastic and they crawl along to the edges; wage chemical warfare and they disappear for a month or two and then pop up again. I remember one of the experts in "Gardener's Question Time" saying that the only way to deal with Ground Elder was to move house. Still, we must be grateful that, long before Darwin, clever folk were harnessing the forces of nature by selectively breeding the Wisterias, Azaleas and Roses whose heady scent is wafting around our desktops.

One of the most successful examples of selective breeding had been in the area of domestic animals, particularly dogs; it's estimated that it's at least 15,000 years since dogs diverged from the ancestral wolf and humans began manipulating the breeding processes. Even that length of time seems a bit short for turning a wolf into a chihuahua. Perhaps someone knows how many of the world's 600 million canines live in Abbots Ann; many of us feel strongly that a walk without a dog is worse than rhubarb crumble without custard. So many dozens of dogs take their owners out for walks around the village, and most of them also want to get off their leads and rush around for a bit in an open space. Humans, too, especially children, want to do the same, and in the same spaces. But dogs do leave their squishy, smelly and potentially disease-bearing droppings any old where. So this is where the Council have asked me to ask you to take something seriously.

The Parish Council is very, very tired of receiving complaints about the failure of dog-walkers to pick up these messes. Would you want to leave them on your own garden path or on the grass where the children play at home? So why leave them on paths and grassy areas where other people walk, other children play and adults use for recreation? The cost of poo-bags is minimal compared to the overall cost of keeping a dog. Failure to clear up is actually an offence in law, with fines of up to £1,000; though enforcement is difficult, at least this underlines the fact that this is to be taken seriously. If things don't improve, the Parish Council will reluctantly consider Imposing restrictions. Nobody wants the irresponsible minority to spoil everything for the majority of sensible owners and their dogs.

All this is a rather unwelcome distraction from the many other items on the Council's Agenda, including *another Megashed*, this time very close to Red Post Lane; working with Monxton Parish Council about flooding and traffic to the works at Manor Farm; gaining control of the field at Manor Close; going ahead with the Recreation Ground project; backing up the noble volunteers working on the Community Consultation; thanking the Little Ann folk who have transformed the surface of Donkey Path; trying to get something done about

roadside drains and pavements; reminding people with hedges that it's their responsibility to trim them to avoid obstructing footpaths and pavements. Which reminds me - where are those secateurs?

*Adrian Stokes, Clerk*