

# **THE CLERK'S COLUMN**

## **September 2013**

### **Green and Pleasant**

Like daisies in the lawn after a wet week-end, green issues keep popping up in Parish Council meetings and in the spaces in between. Here are a few of them:

### **Meadows.**

After all the surprising summer sunshine, it's easy to forget the dreary downpours of our so-called Spring, which turned many a meadow into a sea of mud, giving a new, and maybe dangerous, meaning to the phrase "brownfield sites". It was obvious that this year's quirky climate had encouraged extra growth of river weed to hold up the flow of the Pillhill Brook. This didn't worry the Chairman and Clerk even though they were aware of the unusually extensive flooding on the Little Ann meadows; they had seen it all before and were happy to see the water meadows doing their proper job. But the dismay caused by unusually squelchy meadows in Monxton led to a bulging addition to the file in the Clerk's computer and cabinet labelled "Sagas". These are long-running topics, like the Village Shop, the Megashed or the Jubilee, which are probably worth preserving for posterity for historical interest, or just as dire warnings of what not to do. A "Saga" file keeps together all sorts of stuff which would otherwise be spread among several other files, such as, Highways, Planning, Environment etc.; when the excitement dies down they should perhaps be copied to the Archivist.

Anyway, the Pillhill Brook Saga (filed under "Dambusters") has been complicated by an anomaly similar to the one which includes the urban enclave of Burghclere Down in our essentially rural parish, because the boundaries were settled before King Harold was shot in the eye at Hastings. The Upper Mill used to be driven by the brook not far from where the viaduct crosses Cattle Lane; the addresses of the properties thereabouts logically say "Monxton", although they are in Abbots Ann parish. So, as reported in July's Column, the flooding in Monxton was blamed, in a cascade of vigorously-worded emails, not on global wetting, but on the damming and bridging of the Brook by a previous parishioner of Abbots Ann and the absence of action by a variety of statutory agencies. Wisely, to enable us all to proceed to calmer waters, and, with luck, to close the overflowing file, the new owner of the banks and braes of the bonny Brook where it flows into Abbots Ann has decided to cut the Gordian Knot and rebuild the controversial bridge and weir. So no-one should end up in the Tower or the stocks on the village green.

The Gordian Knot? Well, the story goes that Gordius was King of Phrygia (in modern Turkey) and father of Midas – you know, the chap who asked the gods to make all that he touched turn to gold only to find that the golden touch included his breakfast, lunch and supper. The yoke of Gordius's wagon, kept in the Temple of Zeus, was tied to the pole with such a complicated knot that an oracle foretold that the person who untied it would become ruler of all Asia. When Alexander the Great was passing by he had the bright idea of cutting the knot with his sword. Problem solved. He then went on to conquer all of Asia.

### **Manor Close.**

The good news is that the knots came undone, and negotiations have been completed; the greenness of the old school playing field is guaranteed by the granting to the parish of a long lease from the County Council. We'll have to maintain it, but can't grumble at the rental, which is the princely sum of £1 per year if requested. There are only a few i-dots and t-crosses to deal with before the final handover; then we look forward to hearing from you, dear readers, with ideas for bringing it into use at the heart of the village.

### **Recreation Ground.**

In November 1919, Major Edward Rickards, of St. John's (now Abbots Hill House), conveyed to the Parish Council a piece of pasturage on Duck Street between the White House and Ash Cottage amounting to 2 roods (around a half-acre) in area. (Sorry! I'm no more at home with hectares than I am with millimetres). The deed, signed by John Dalton, Chairman

and Jesse Threadgill, Clerk, specified that, without benefit of punctuation, the local authority its successors or assigns will for ever hereafter support maintain and improve the piece of land and hereidaments (*sic*) conveyed as and for the purpose of a recreation ground for children... Over the 90-odd years since then this area, with the War Memorial Hall in the middle of it, has been available as a green space for children to enjoy, with the help of the modest swings and slide provided later. So we've kept up the "support" and "maintain" obligations, but the "improve" bit has stayed in the background. But change is coming, and soon, thanks particularly to the enthusiasm of Councillor Rebecca Bone.

There's a law called the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended), and there's magic in its Section 106. This entitles Planning Authorities (in our case Test Valley) to squeeze quite a lot of money from anyone undertaking a "development", such as building anything from a garage to a megashed, and applying it to the funding of useful local projects. For instance the development of the old King's Yard, now St. Catherine's Walk etc., helped to pay for the skate park, and other developments financed the build-outs on the road near the Primary School. So we put in a claim for funding for recreational facilities, and found that there was enough in the kitty to make a start on adding equipment to the Recreation Ground.

At first our hearts sank, because the prices of commercially built equipment were astronomical, with the cost of something like a very ordinary see-saw running into four figures. But there are several Councillors who know a bit about DIY, and the idea grew that by using local resources of materials and man/womanpower, we could get a full set of things to climb, swing, scramble or balance on for the price of one, if we got them made locally and installed with voluntary help. And the kitty won't be empty at the end of it. So watch that green space, and see the result of the hard work of Adam Rose and the volunteer diggers and builders, and especially of Rebecca Bone, who has been glad to incorporate suggestions from many local families.

#### Solar Power.

With things happening on the very edges of our Parish, as at Burghclere Down, Little Park and Monxton, we haven't been able to forget how much of Hampshire is included in our Parish, which, to the south-west, bumps into Middle Wallop. Another green issue has just come up along there in the form of a proposal to build a solar park at Saxley Farm. This would occupy quite a few hectares and provide power for the equivalent of 1500 homes. It would be difficult to see from anywhere except the cockpit of a helicopter, and the contractors provided assurances that it would return to green field when finally decommissioned; meanwhile the ground between the panels would be available for grazing or undersowing with bee-attracting herbage. Not wildly exciting, but seeming to tick all the green boxes.

#### Tighten your belt.

One of our biggest concerns is, of course, our own "Green Belt" – the local gap between us and Andover, most of which, we can't forget, is owned by a firm of property developers, who are people with long purses and long time-scales. Recent Government policy has eroded confidence in the safety of Green Belt land. Close to home, recent decisions of Planning Inspectors at Picket Twenty and Harewood make it look as if the inspectorate has been leant on to rule in favour of development on greenfield areas. All the affected Parish Councils, and the Borough Council, have done all they can to maintain the local gaps. But despite all the lip-service paid to "localism", we don't have the last word.

#### Festival.

Mustn't end on such an autumnal note. Wasn't the Fete an even bigger success than ever? Huge thanks to the Committee and all the volunteers involved, who won't take much time off before planning for 2014. And aren't we lucky – or wise - to have such a spacious greensward on which to celebrate our share in England's green and pleasant land?

*Adrian Stokes, Clerk*