

ABBOTTS ANN PARISH COUNCIL NEWSLETTER, JANUARY 2010

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

A strange transformation has overtaken one of our village icons - no, not the telephone box, which could do with some transformation - but the signpost at the Jubilee Tree Junction. Just before Christmas, our indefatigable Neighbourhood Watchman, Mike Butt, noticed that it had lost all its "fingers". Well, Parish Clerks are touchingly trusted to know everything from the contents of the Domesday Book to the Health and Safety implications of chewing-gum deposits on pavements, so Mr. Butt's first call was to the Clerk. When neither he nor anyone else could explain how this truncation appeared to have occurred overnight, Mr. B's next call was to the Hampshire Constabulary; although they thought it unlikely that the scrap value of the metal fingers was worth the risk of wielding a hacksaw in such a public place, they took careful notes and duly issued a Crime Number. Unfortunately Inspector Wexford was snowed in in Kings Somborne, and Miss Marple was busy with a triple murder on BBC 4, so there the signpost stood forlornly over Christmas, a bare white column pointing nowhere.

It would be nice at this time of year to introduce a Pantomime Fairy, but in the end we had to settle for a sober-suited official at Beech Hurst. Our Chairman was contacting him about something quite else, like prosaic pot-holes or dreary drains, but asked him, by the way, whether he knew about the signpost, and indeed, he knew a man who did. So the story ends with rather a damp squib, because after all, it was Hampshire Highways who had taken the fingers away for refurbishment, together with the little polo-mint thing on top. The Police are no longer looking for highwaymen.

English Heritage take signposts very seriously, and their Planning and Development Director (South) says *Fingerposts are not only attractive in their own right but have become icons that are important to national as well as rural identity. They enrich the countryside wherever they are found and enhance local character which is so important to local communities. Traditional direction signs are an integral part of the character of the English Countryside and suburbs (English Heritage concerned about suburbs?). They are part of the world-famous image of England that so many visitors come to see and enjoy. Many still survive, but are in urgent need of repair and restoration.* The Countryside Agency says *The Local Heritage Initiative* (No, I didn't know about this either) *value community involvement in caring for our local heritage and features such as fingerposts can contribute to a sense of place and local identity, which in turn promotes community well-being.* In a similarly breathless hand-out, CPRE canters in on their sturdy hobby-horse, declaring *Although individual road signs may appear unobtrusive on their own, the cumulative impact of inappropriately designed road signs on the character of the countryside can be immense. Locally distinctive signs, such as fingerposts, can play an important role in helping to reduce the number of signposts needed and preserving local character. Local authorities should do all they can to ensure these valued features are retained, restored and reintroduced wherever possible.* With all these busy bees buzzing around them, no wonder Hampshire Highways are Doing Something About It. But do I hear a whisper that we would rather see our credit crunched money spent on fewer pot-holes than a gleaming white finger-post?

Actually, as with so many other features of English life, Government involvement came relatively late in the day, and anyway, no signposts date back very far; the oldest known finger-post, in the Cotswolds, dates from 1699, while it wasn't until 1773 that the General Turnpike Act required Trustees to erect signs informing travellers of the distance to the nearest town and often to London; the only survivors of this legislation seem to be milestones. The signs with which we are familiar are almost all less than a century old, the earliest ones being erected by cycle clubs, followed by the AA and RAC. The Government stepped in in 1903, when the Motor Car Act

passed responsibility for all traffic signs to local authorities, and in 1921 the Ministry of Transport provided a model design, with standard 2.5 inch black upper case lettering and a requirement that the name of the local authority should be incorporated - hence the crowning lollipops, pyramids and globes arising from the doodles on Borough Engineers' blotters.

Observant drivers around the UK will have noticed several oddities, and might have been surprised to see fingers pointing, for instance, to New Zealand in Derbyshire, Ugley in Essex, and Nasty in Herts; you could find yourself asking the way at Lost in Aberdeenshire. Your Satnav could direct you to no less than three places claiming to be World's End; not far from one of these is a sign indicating Secret Nuclear Bunker (any connection?) It would have been nice to conclude with some samples of amusing ones, but apart from one or two (like the sign in Spain pointing to La Verruca Beach, or the rather grim one indicating CEMETERY ROAD - NO EXIT), most of those turned up by research are too rude for a Parish Magazine. Lots of them are very funny, though.

PARISH COUNCIL MEETING, 7TH JANUARY 2010

The Rolling English Road

The solution to the great signpost mystery provided some light relief in a meeting otherwise concerned with rather weightier matters, many of which concerned roads and their users. We are getting increasingly fed up with media references to "motorists"; this was a name invented in Edwardian times for those who indulged in the new and expensive hobby of automobile driving. It still seems to carry overtones of people in goggles and dust-veils careering about for fun, moustachioed chaps driving giggling girl-friends down to the Riviera in brutal Bentleys or muscular MGs, or family picnic parties crammed into Austin 7s and Morris Minors. OK "Road Users" is pretty boring, but at least, in removing any romantic notions, it carries a certain gritty realism.

Sleeping Lorry-drivers? In the meeting's first reference to road users it was noted that the "STOP" organisation was still very much alive and was kicking away at the Planning service about the Airfield development, with particular reference to the possibility of lorry-drivers parking up all over the place outside the site.

Darkness falls on Burghclere Down. Another highway problem arose in Burghclere Down, where a number of street-lights needed new bulbs; it was proving difficult to get anything done by the developers (Bovis), who were still responsible for looking after the unadopted streets, but clearly had bigger business in hand, such as building the odd eco-town in green countryside. Fortunately the area is in the process of being adopted, so the problem will be passed to the Borough Council whose offices are just round the corner.

Counting the cars. Then there was the result of the traffic-survey to think about. In mid-December, Hampshire Highways had installed some black boxes on poles at St. John's Cross and by Criswick Close; these recorded numbers and speeds of vehicles at these points, and produced eight dense spread-sheets of figures. Those of us for whom the simplest Sudoku causes instant withdrawal symptoms were much relieved to agree that this should be treated as providing a base-line for future assessments of traffic behaviour (a) after the new school opens and (b) after the Co-op starts operating its midi-shed. It does appear, however, that most drivers were observing the 50 mph limit on the A343 except in the small hours, but that an awful lot of cars passed the new school site at 40 mph or more.

A road by any other name. And then there was a lively half-hour devoted to the re-naming of Red Rice Road, which had brought 7 interested members of the public to the Jubilee Room. It transpired at an early stage that the Chairman and Clerk were at something of a disadvantage; since they had not seen copies of letters or surveys on the subject, they knew less about the proceedings so far than did the visitors. When everyone ran out of steam, it wasn't quite

certain that all the knots had been unravelled, but, to save readers from ploughing through the full Minutes, this is how the Clerk, with the agreement of the Chairman, summarised it all, including:

i. Indications that a clear consensus was emerging that the whole stretch of road from St. John's Cross to the junction with Cattle Lane should be named Duck Street.

ii. Acknowledgement that all concerned were doing their best to follow the correct procedures despite a variety of previous experiences, and appreciation of the efforts of the residents and TVBC Councillors to achieve a satisfactory result.

iii. Confirmation that in accordance with the required procedures, the Parish Council had informed TVBC that it was in favour of the change of name and that regarding the choice of name it would support the wishes, once clearly established through the Borough's procedures, of a majority of those affected by the change.

iv. Confirmation that Mrs. Irwin had been duly authorised by the Parish Council to ascertain the views of affected residents.

v. A request that all relevant correspondence and surveys (and the results of these) should be copied to the Clerk.

vi. That Cllr Arthur Peters and the Clerk should press the TVBC Officer for full information on action taken so far.

Later in the meeting, Cllr Graham Stallard reported that, among other credit-crunch induced measures, future road-name changes would incur a charge of £400 (up from £0). Fortunately this is not retrospective.

Disappearing Number Plates. Neighbourhood Watch had noted that some number-plates had been stolen on Salisbury Road. Apparently one of the thieves' ploys is to stick them on to their cars before entering the London Congestion Zone. Mean.

Disappearing Snow. The snow-clearing efforts of Paul and Anne Kelly on The Drove and of Cllr Alleway on Church Path were commended. However, there had been requests for the provision of official grit-boxes on various steep and slippery slopes. Longer-serving members of the Council remembered this arising some years ago, when it was decided that problems of legal liability made it possible that the Council, or helpful residents, could find themselves at the wrong end of litigation if, in spite of their efforts, let alone because of them, an accident happened on their patch. Since then the situation has been made far more complicated by the dreaded HealthnSafety rules, so that Councils and individuals are now strongly advised by the legal eagles to do absolutely nothing about snow on public property. Was it Mr. Bumble who said "The law is a ass?"

Disappearing bus-routes. The Council was dismayed to hear that the local buses no longer go to the Railway Station. A protest is on its way to the Powers that Be, but don't hold your breath.

You can find details of other, off-road, topics in the Minutes. The next meeting will be on 4th February twenty-ten (or is it two thousand and ten?)

Adrian Stokes, Clerk

STOP PRESS.

It is with great regret that I have to report that Cllr Arthur Peters has decided to resign from the Borough Council. He has been indefatigable in his defence of the interests of this Parish, not to mention those of the other communities in Anna Ward. His contributions to Parish Council meetings were always extremely well-informed and could be relied upon to give us much food for thought and pointers to action. He leaves a huge gap which will not be easy to fill.