

THE CLERK'S COLUMN
NOVEMBER 2012

Captain Murphy strikes again

Murphy's Law has returned to Little Ann Road. No, it's nothing to do with the Fifth Law of Murphydynamics: *Electric Cables always tie themselves in Knots without Human Intervention*; this happens all the time all along the road wherever there's an ironing board, computer or workbench. It's more like the Seventh Law: *Electronic Gadgets have Minds of their Own*. Mind you, there is a rival theory for explaining the universal tendency for things to go wrong, and it emerged round about the same time as Murphy's Law, and was also originally applied to aircraft in the guise of the Gnawing Gremlin, which specialised in chewing through the wires that held the old biplanes together; soon, particularly in the war-time RAF, Gremlins were identified with the general genus of imps and goblins and blamed for all sorts of mechanical failures. My main experience is with two types, the Screwdrivers and the Concealers. Why else do screws and nuts come loose all on their own? And who, or what, else immediately hides the spanner, pen or spectacles that you've just put down? Or bounces off with the thing that fell on the floor *just there*?

Anyway, in response to a request for a check on the speed of vehicles passing Constantia Cottage and its neighbours, the Highway Authority attached an electronic eye to a telegraph pole to observe, in an unobtrusive sort of way, a couple of weeks' worth of passing traffic. However, when it was plugged into the Authorities' computer, it came up with a blank screen. Few people had even noticed the presence of the gadget, let alone imitated Odysseus's treatment of the Cyclops – No, I'll leave that one to Google – so it was regarded as just another IT glitch, but gremlinologists know better. They hope to try again soon.

In living memory, this sort of investigation would have been carried out by a chap under an umbrella with a wind-up stopwatch and a clipboard, but a return to this sort of low-tech method wouldn't work very well unless the chap with the clipboard could be effectively camouflaged. It could also be frustrated by the A.A., who had the most ingeniously legal method of giving warning of speed-traps. Again in living memory, A.A. patrolmen used to wear a rather militaristic khaki uniform while buzzing around on yellow motor-bikes with sidecars full of spanners and jacks. They would politely salute any passing members. But if there was a trap ahead, they would deliberately refrain from saluting. Not even Hore Belisha himself, one of the very few memorable Ministers of Transport and introducer of the flashing yellow lollipops (are they still called Belisha Beacons by anyone under 80?) could think of a way of making that illegal. So if you see someone under an umbrella by the roadside nowadays he's probably trying to sell you some carbon-soaked strawberries. And if you see a mysterious black box attached to a telegraph pole, give it a wide berth, because it might start frying your brain with microwaves.

First Aid.

Of course those courteous and helpful A.A. (and R.A.C.) patrolmen carried first-aid kits in their sidecars and many were experts in first-aid, too. But nowadays there is a shortage of people with even the most basic know-how, at a time when HealthnSafety rules, and the writers of insurance policies, may require the presence of first-aiders at gatherings like village fetes. So, at the suggestion of Cllr Stan Oram, the Parish Council has decided to lay on a one-day First Aid for Adults training course, run by the Red Cross. The date is Saturday 12th January 2013 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. The plan is for entry to be free, though voluntary contributions wouldn't be refused. For details and bookings please contact Stan Oram on 710331 or stanoram@googlemail.com

The Recreation Ground for Children.

In the archives is a typed document, looking simple enough, but couched in archaic language and given some grandeur by being enrolled under Section 6 (2) of the Mortmain and Charitable Uses Act 1882.

It is headed CONVEYANCE of a Piece of Land for the purpose of a Recreation Ground for Children, and dated 21st November 1919. It continues for a page and a half without punctuation to the effect that Major Edward Rickards of St.John's [now Abbots Hill House] is desirous of vesting a piece of land of half an acre or thereabouts in the local authority [the Parish Council] that the same may be held by them as a recreation ground for the children of Abbots Ann. The Parish Council covenants that the local authority hereby for itself its successors or assigns will forever hereafter support maintain and improve the piece of land hereby conveyed as and for the purpose of a recreation ground for children and will maintain the fencing round the same in good order. In witness hereof Major Rickards hath set his hand and seal, and the Common Seal of Abbots Ann Parish Council was hereunto affixed in the presence of John Dalton (Chairman) and Jesse Threadgill (Clerk).

So the land surrounding the War Memorial Hall became the property of Abbots Ann, forever. The Council has recently fulfilled its obligation to keep the fencing in good order, but the provision of equipment has fallen behind the level provided elsewhere. Our energetic Cllr Rebecca Bone has been beavering away, and has now come up with a great plan for a complete transformation of the area to the north of the hall, using the entrance by the phone box with lots of new pieces of equipment around a central green space. Most commercially available equipment is astonishingly expensive, so the plan is for simple, but fun, designs which can be constructed from local materials by local contractors. We want to keep the dignified title of The Recreation Ground for Children and hope to show we mean business by making a start soon with new entrance gates.

We do want to know what you think and Rebecca Bone is really keen to hear from anyone who would like to see the plans and/or to make suggestions, so please don't hesitate to get in touch. Try rebeccajbone@btinternet.com.

Budget

Some goodish news to end with. The Council has adopted a budget for the year 2013-2014 which keeps the precept (the amount of our Council Tax that goes to the Parish) unchanged for the third year running. But there are gleams in the eyes of various Parish organisations thinking about work on the Sports Field, the Pavilion, The Recreation Ground, the inside of the War Memorial Hall and various consultations, not to mention the Apple Press. We are also being warned about some possible perils lurking in the small print of the Localism Act. So we can't hold the Precept down for ever. Another Murphy's Law says that everything takes longer/costs more than you think. Which also applies to Christmas shopping.

Adrian Stokes, Clerk