

THE CLERK'S COLUMN

September 2010

Two heads better than one?

OK, we went to town on hats in June's column, but that was before the arrival of a document from the Powers that Be of a document regulating the behaviour of *Dual-hatted Members*. I'm sure that our Councillors would be too polite to comment, but they would surely be a little surprised if one of their number came to the Jubilee Room bedecked with one hat, let alone two. However, dual-hattedness is a condition suffered, apparently, by quite a lot of public-spirited citizens - like our own County Councillor who also sits as a member of Chilbolton Parish Council - who have been elected to two Councils at once. The adjective derived from it has found its way into the official regulatory vocabulary. It's all to do with that dreaded word *prejudice*, and the document lists all sorts of ways in which a councillor's membership of another body could cause him/her to be biased and should therefore only speak (through his/her hat?) but not vote, shut up altogether, or even leave the room. Fortunately the list ends with a rare bit of common sense by referring to any situation in which a reasonable person would consider bias to be affecting a Councillor's judgement. Enforcement rests with the Borough Council, but the Government's axe is poised over the quango that thought up these regulations. Wouldn't life be much simpler if almost everything was covered by The Common Sense Act 2010?

Round and Round

Like many so-called "retired" people, the Clerk is multi-hatted, and the other day put on his bookbinder's hat to rebind some decrepit Minute Books from the last century. Some pretty gasp-making items jumped out of the flapping pages; for instance income from the rates was £1,300 in 1983 against today's £21,500, and Beech Hurst was little more than a relatively modest Victorian family house. But one also notices how often the same old topics keep cropping up: obstructed footpaths, wobbly signposts, litter, traffic issues, planning (remember the "Duck Street Development", now Hillside?) and, inevitably, dogs. Dog-problems can have their funny side, as illustrated by a typical silly-season newspaper story about a thief who snatched a bag from an elderly lady only to find that it contained the product of her conscientious dog-walking. Goodness knows how many times the issue of dog-fouling appears in the Minutes, including the latest instalment. And the Council's answer is always the same: however many bins, bags, notices and written grumbles are issued, conscientious owners will clean up; the others will take no notice, and probably don't read the Parish Magazine, or notices, anyway. There are quite fierce laws about it (see below), but Parish Councils no longer employ Beadles and have no powers to enforce them.

Public Nuisances

On the subject of crime and enforcement a Cornish Parish Council was alarmed by a police report that their crime rate had jumped by 100% this year, until they realised that after the previous crime-free year a single offence, the theft of coat from a porch, had been committed. We are lucky to have a rather similar level of criminal behaviour here; meanwhile Hampshire Constabulary have announced that tackling anti-social behaviour is a current priority, and they have helpfully produced a definition as: *Any aggressive, intimidating or destructive activity that damages or destroys another person's quality of life*, together with this list of national categories:

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| Abandoned vehicles | Animal Problems |
| Vagrancy/begging | Hoax calls to emergency services |
| Inappropriate use of fireworks | Malicious communications |
| Noise | Littering |
| Nuisance neighbours | Rowdy and inconsiderate behaviour |
| Street drinking | Trespass |
| Vehicle nuisance, including inappropriate use of vehicles. | |

Quite a list... You will find several of these cropping up in Minutes over the years. In fact the last item came up in September's meeting, as cars have been reported being driven extremely inappropriately on the Sports Field. Please remember that, though we can't do much in the way of direct action ourselves, we can notify the police by dialling 999, or if not quite so urgent, 101, and by noting details like number-plates.

Did you know?

Not long ago the Council was baffled by the inclusion of a *Durgo* in an application to build a bathroom extension. As it seemed to be relatively small and harmless, no objection was registered. Cllr Alison Barham was the first to come up with a definition as an air admittance valve for venting soil stacks; they can be placed within rooms or in the roof-space, avoiding the need for lots of pipe-work or holes in the roof. So it wasn't something out of *Lord of the Rings*.

PARISH COUNCIL MEETINGS

Sad News. The September meeting opened with a minute's silence in commemoration of Cllr David Kirk and former Cllr Pat Pierce - two men who had given outstanding service to the community and who will be sadly missed.

Glad News. The meeting also heard that Mike Butt, our tireless Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinator, is to receive a Good Neighbour Award from the County Council at a ceremony in the shadow of King Arthur's Round Table in the Great Hall of Winchester Castle. The invitation to the function kindly includes the warning that, in choosing what to wear under the heading of "smart casual", guests should be aware that the hall is unheated and the floor is made of stone, implying woolly underwear, a tie and sensible shoes.

Green Parties. Because of the holiday season, meetings at this time of year tend to be quiet ones, but the August meeting saw the Jubilee Room needing a dozen extra chairs for people concerned about the future of the Manor Close Playing Field. The Chairman outlined the current negotiations between the Parish and County Councils by which the Parish hoped to obtain control of the area by freehold or leasehold ownership. Then Mr. Rick Chattell spoke for the newly-formed Friends of Manor Close who have been working on an alternative plan for the area; they have submitted multiple applications for the area to be registered as a village green. This would also ensure continuing greenness, but would preclude possible use for allotments, though probably not for planting of trees, including fruit. The Clerk wriggled a bit, because village greens are a notorious source of clerkly headaches, with legislation going back at least to the Plantagenets. The two plans are not necessarily in conflict, and both are still being "processed" (not the same as "progressed") by the Ps that B.

Meanwhile the Council is very happy to welcome the activities of AAGA, the Green Women and Men of Abbotts Ann, who have been very active making sense of the concept of *sustainability* and getting all sorts of things organised, including their own formal constitution; for the rest, see their report elsewhere in the magazine, including the programme for Apple Day.

Traffic (so what's new?) We still have to wait about six months for changes to Red Post Bridge, but you'll have to go that way if you want to get to Weyhill without taking a grand tour of the Portway Industrial Estate. No doubt there will be lots of other complications for drivers at Hundred Acre Corner for ages to come.

Meanwhile we are all pretty sure that traffic along our roads and lanes is slowly but surely increasing in density, and indeed in size of vehicles; in the latter case it isn't just the proliferation of huge 4 x 4s, aka SUVs or Chelsea Tractors, but mighty lorries trying, for instance, to take tons of steel to premises on the Monxton Road. The Council is pressing for a vehicle count to be taken on Cattle Lane, to provide a base figure from which to get a true picture of future increases in traffic there.

As for speeding, it may be possible to get funding for installing some "build-outs" like those successfully restricting approaches to Monxton. There are still concerns about speeds on what used to be Red Rice Road. The Police, too have come up with a suggestion whereby a group of parishes could club together to supply them with radar guns, because, oddly, they are apparently being given training in their use, but not being supplied with the guns.

We haven't finished with St.John's Cross either. There is still the problem of telegraph poles obstructing visibility, particularly towards Salisbury at the exit from Red Rice. Nor will the Perennial Pothole Problem go away. The Clerk has been instructed to keep on nagging on the basis that in some parts of the Parish patching and hole-filling just isn't good enough. Church Road, Mill Lane and much of Cattle Lane are verging on Third World condition and nothing short of a proper re-surfacing job will do. Judging by the Minutes of 1983, as written up by yours truly who was Clerk then, the roads were OK 27 years ago...

For those thirsting for more details, the Minutes will be available in due course. The next meeting will be on October 7th.

*Adrian Stokes
wearing his Clerk's hat*