

WHITCHURCH BULLETIN

Vol. 1. No. 1. October 1965.  
Published by Whitchurch Parish Council on Alternate Months.

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Byways,  
Hardwick Road,  
Whitchurch.

We hope that you will read this Bulletin with interest. Its intention is to keep you informed of what your Parish Council is doing by giving a clear account of important matters that may be discussed at our meetings. It is also to remind you that the Council Meetings can be attended by any elector and, frankly, we would like to see more electors at our meetings.

We would like this Bulletin also to become a vehicle for the dissemination of news of interest to all residents and we invite all organisations to send us details of any events or meetings they would like to appear. Would you kindly send such information to Councillor D. H. J. Holmes at The Haven, Eastfield Lane.

Our thanks for this Bulletin are due to Councillor Holmes who has taken on the job of Press Officer of the Council and who has brought to its production a very great deal of enthusiastic interest.

H. C. SYKES,  
Chairman,  
Whitchurch Parish Council.

PARISH COUNCIL MEETING

held on  
Tuesday, 14th September

As no reply had been received from the County Surveyor to requests to clear the ditch in Eastfield Lane, it was agreed that a letter should be sent direct to the Chairman of the Oxfordshire County Council asking for some immediate action to be taken. Mr. Aldridge is also making a personal approach to the local Land Drainage Officer of the Ministry of Agriculture.

Regarding the tree felling at the Hillside development site about which the parish council had protested, the County Council stated that the trees had become dangerous through undercutting and were not felled deliberately. An apology had been received from the developers. Consequently the County Council stated that they did not intend to take any further action. The parish council's Planning Sub-Committee were instructed to pursue the matter and to inquire into the recent collapse of a defective retaining wall on to the main road, at the same site.

Work had now commenced on the new primary school, but it was agreed to ask for a progress report from the education authority to ascertain if the school would be ready for the autumn term 1966. If it could not be completed on time, the council were to ask if extra accommodation would be provided at Woodcote Primary School.

Consideration is being given to organising a poll for the toll-gate referendum.

The Planning Sub-Committee reported that they were not satisfied with the revised plans for the development of the Old Barn site and had asked for more detailed elevation plans.

It was also reported that there were two sewers without lids on the site, constituting a danger to children and health. It was agreed to contact the Public Health Department.

The Highway Department is to be asked to erect road name plates at Eastfield Lane and Hardwick Road.

The Highway Authority are to be approached to provide adequate surface water drainage at Eastfield Lane. No reply has yet been received regarding the extension of the speed limit in this road.

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ESTABLISHMENT OF OFFICE FOR CONSULTATIONS IN  
THE HENLEY AREA

Every Friday morning from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. a member of the County Planning Department is available to meet members of the public, applicants and other persons concerned with planning matters in the offices of the Henley Borough Council, Westhill House, Westhill, Henley-on-Thames. To avoid inconvenience to all concerned, interviews should preferably be by appointment in every case.

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AN ANCIENT WATERCOURSE

To many people not familiar with all the byways and fields within the parish, the brook in Eastfield Lane means but little, so it may come as a surprise to learn that this is a very ancient watercourse and constitutes one of the oldest features of the village.

In Canon Slatter's History of Whitchurch, under the heading "Some Few Tokens of Antiquity" it is mentioned thus.

"The next thing to be noticed is a ditch, or trench, striking out of the river at some distance above the mill, and carried round at some little distance from the river, and at last brought back into it, about the same distance below the mill as it started above

it. This seems a unique feature in a Thames village. It may be conjectured that it originally formed the defence of the Saxon village from incursions of hostile bands coming down from the high land. It is now the size of an ordinary brook, but it may have been wider, and defended by a stockade on the hither side. In passing through part of Walliscote grounds, it is carried now by a subterranean channel, and is utilized to fill a large open tank or pond in the kitchen-garden, and thence, being carried under the village street, appears again beyond as a flowing brook."

This was written exactly 70 years ago, when an open brook formed the boundary between The Greyhound and the Old Forge. Afterwards it was covered in and conveyed by pipes - with a manhole to the stream in the Old Forge House garden - to where it now comes out into the open again on the south side of Eastfield Lane.

About the same time a section of the brook that ran through Thames Bank was diverted, turning east at the end of a plot of ground formerly occupied by the village hall, and then diagonally through Thames Bank again to link up with its original course.

Sir Rickman Godlee also refers to the stream in his book, "A Village On The Thames", as "that rather mysterious ditch... It is this ditch which floods the main road."

Owing to this flooding, the footpath opposite The Greyhound was raised, but in later years, with the improved control of the Thames, and the restriction of the brook by several large pipes in a meadow of Walliscote Farm, flooding was reduced to a minimum.

County Council workmen have, at various times, cleaned out the culvert at The Greyhound, which is used as a surface water drain for the main highway, and also cleared out the entire stretch of the brook from Eastfield Lane to the river.

When the parish council considered a previous complaint about "the clearing of an important ditch" in May, 1951, it was over a year before the county surveyor finally "agreed to be responsible for clearing out enough to ensure that there would be no flooding of the village from road surface water". In view of the foregoing facts, it seems strange indeed that responsibility is still disputed.

Part of the eastern section of the stream became blocked in 1960 when the main drainage system was installed. Pumps operating day and night to clear the deep trenches of water, discharged their effluent into the brook, which gradually silted over the outlet from under the road. Since then it has become progressively worse. No longer is it a swift running brook, abounding with a bustling family of wild life and the haunt of kingfishers. Gone, too, are many hours of enjoyment for our junior tiddler catchers! An absorbing recreation still as much appreciated today as by countless generations before. In addition, an effective drain for the flooded meadows on both sides of the lock will be lost, leaving these pastures waterlogged for unnecessarily long periods. It is to be hoped, therefore, that our efforts to restore this ancient watercourse to its former condition will eventually be rewarded.

#### IT DEPENDS WHAT YOU MEAN BY PEACE AND QUIET

(First published in MODERN WOMAN, October 1964)

Almost a quarter of a century ago, when I came to live in a village, I went for the first time to the annual parish council meeting. The village hall was crumbling, ill lit, and smelt of damp. Huddled round a red-hot stove were five members of the parish council who, after a solemn reading of the minutes, voted each other in again for the next three years. Perhaps I was too young and did not understand, but I found it dull.

Five years later I went again. This time it was not dull.

The parish councillors are the father figures of the village, to whom we take our troubles. Troubles? Well some people may call them good causes. Perhaps it is the weather, the mud, the rain and the mists that turn us country-dwellers inward upon ourselves and make us so devoted to our causes. At any rate, we can get aggressive about them.

The row at that meeting was over a very simple thing - a new village hall. It started as a gentle argument; but the row dragged on for ten years. It was hinted that vested interest in building was involved. Families refused to talk to each other. Ownership of the hall, even the site, was hotly disputed.

After twenty years of meetings we have the hall. It is clean, warm and gay. But feelings are still so tender that any casual remark on the subject by a newcomer may spark off the old rows.

Memory is one common possession in a village. We still fight out the topic of the old blind parson and his dog, though he was dead and gone a long time before I ever came to live in the village. The question is - did he or did he not know and encourage his dog to poach pheasants?

I know one woman who became ill trying to protect trees. She went to every meeting and wrote to every local newspaper in order to get support. She went frantic when electricity workmen cut 'beautiful branches' to protect their 'silly wires'.

Another man who had the same cause at heart went about secretly planting tiny trees on the verges of the road and just in other people's land. He always had a pocket full of acorns and chestnuts that he scattered as he walked.

I took up the cause of preserving our footpaths. I walked them in the blazing heat when I could have been sun-bathing in order to slash the corn that had accidentally

or purposely been sown there. And I walked them again, ankle deep in mud after the ploughing. The only thing I ever seemed to achieve was getting a footpath sign reinstalled after a car had knocked it over and it had been left rotting in the grass and nettles.

We read in the papers of great companies having 'take-over' battles. But you don't have to be in the city to find this; it's all there, in every village. Two yards of land can disappear very easily when fencing is being put up. Cows can munch their way through an allotment. And pheasants can vanish as completely as gun smoke in the autumn mists.

A friend told me of a cottage in their village that disappeared brick by brick, rafter by rafter.

I thought after living most of my life in the country I knew all the causes, but I was wrong. The other day I saw a neighbour standing at his gate staring upwards and counting. "Thirty," he said at last.

"Thirty what?" I asked.

"Thirty posts belonging to the electricity company and the telephone company. Far too many for a small village. I'm going to get all wires put underground."

He may beat me to it. I mean, get his wires underground before I get the dog-pound restored. One day I found myself staring at a small triangular piece of ground which I had passed year after year and never really noticed before. I discovered that it had once been a dog-pound, where strays were put until claimed. What a good idea, I thought; and public ground shouldn't disappear. I'm taking it up at the next council meeting.

For we all go to the village hall with our causes to fight for, and our grumbles, and we're surprised to find our neighbours have done the same, and they think OUR village is THEIR village.

MODWENA SEDGWICK.

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AGENDA FOR THE MEETING OF THE WHITCHURCH  
PARISH COUNCIL on 9th NOVEMBER, 1965 at  
6.45 p.m.

1. Minutes of the Council Meeting held on the 14th September 1965.
2. Points arising:
  - (a) The Brook, Eastfield Lane.
  - (b) Report of Planning Sub-Committee concerning Hardwick Road Development.
  - (c) Progress on construction of the new School.
  - (d) Footpath to the river steps.
  - (e) Preparation of the Bulletin.
  - (f) Provision of Street name plates.
3. Report of Village Hall Management Committee.
4. Finance.
5. Correspondence.
6. Any other business.