

## **THANINGTON WITHOUT CIVIL PARISH AND COUNCIL AS SEEN FROM THEIR MINUTE BOOKS 1894-1994**

Tracing the development of a parish and its Council is not easy. Neither constituents nor historians pay them much attention. And although there are many sources, including the recollections of parishioners, they are often not easily available. And memories are often fallible. However, we can get some way towards understanding them through their minute books. For, while these are far from complete records, they do allow us an insight into the organization and attitudes of a Council as it emerged from the changing pattern of local government in England. For Civil Parishes have never been able to decide their own organization. This has been laid down by national legislation. In other words, they are creatures of Parliament.

In the case of Thanington Without the minute books allow us to trace the evolution of both the original Parish Meeting and its successor and, after 1935, of the Parish Council itself. So after looking at the nature of our sources, we can look at the legal framework of local government which created and modified civil parishes. We can also gain some impression of how it was that, over a hundred years ago, two civil parishes were, briefly, created in Thanington. While we know little of Thanington Within we can trace the gradual evolution of activity and organization in Thanington Without. The minute books also show us something of what the Council felt about its place in the scheme of local government. They are an even better source for tracing the issues facing the Parish and the Council over the years and the impact that social change and contemporary events have had on them.

Thanks to these, and the evidence of the old Vestry minutes and other sources, we find seems to be a process of slow and somewhat unrecognised consolidation of parish activity. In this it fits very clearly into the general pattern discerned by the major book on parish councils: Bryan -Lucas & K. Poole (Parish Government, 1894-1994, London, NALC, 1994). Essentially the Council has been a safety valve and a representative, rather than a provider of services. Very often it has been a lobbyist, asking other authorities and agencies to act, because it does not have, or want, the powers and resources to do this itself. At least this is what the Minute Books seem to tell us, but assuredly there is more to be learned.

### **The Minute Books**

While the minutes of the former ecclesiastical, or 'ancient', Parish are kept in the Cathedral archives, with the minutes in a large note book, the Civil Parish Minutes are in the possession of

the Clerk. At first the civil parish minutes were kept in specially prepared and numbered Minute Books, with Thanington Without on the cover. The first of these, bought from E. Crow of Canterbury, was headed Parish Meeting Minute Book: Thanington. It covers the period 1899 to 1988. Up till 1935 this dealt solely with the Annual Parish Meeting which was the first form of local government enjoyed by Thanington Without and which initially elected the Parish Council. From 1935 to 1988 the book contains simply the minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly, the yearly public meeting open to all ratepayers and electors. In practice this was essentially a consultative and not an elective body although it could pass binding resolutions.

The minutes themselves were written in a variety of long hands, and in a variety of styles. Again, the minutes were entered in longhand until April 1945 when they were typed and then pasted onto the page. This continued until the end of the book. Only occasionally were the minutes dignified with headings, whether to the left or via underlining. Very often entries are short and very formal. Sometimes there are no more than half a dozen lines. This means that the debates behind decisions are not revealed. Equally, no real attendance lists were provided, especially in the early days.

The second minute book, which had Thanington on the spine as well as on the cover, was produced for the newly established Parish Council in March 1935 by Arthur Bell of Butchery Lane. It covers the period from 15 April 1935 to 26 May 1967. It has an alphabetical section at the front for an index but, apart from half a dozen random items, this was never filled in. However, the left hand column of the book was specially ruled so that a subject heading could be written against the minute itself. Again, the minutes were entered in longhand until April 1945 when they were typed and then pasted onto the page. The left hand titles continued in the typed versions and numbers were still not used to help identify and locate decisions.

From 1967 minutes were kept in a series of standard Twinlock Crown Ring binders without any title embossed on them. After 1989 minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly were included in the new books, along with the Council Minutes. The latter continued to be typed but, from January 1990, they were produced on an Amstrad Word Processor. At this point the leftwards subject heading was replaced by a title at the head of each article. The rubric Parish Affairs was also introduced for a collection of disparate points which in the past would have had separate entries. In May 1990 a numbering system was introduced although no index was established. Subsequently minutes were produced on a standard PC and hence are now being made available on the internet at <http://www.thanington-pc.gov.uk/>.

The entries have become fuller over the years so that, as well as knowing the decisions which the Council took (and which could often be to take no action) sometimes the reasons for the Council taking the view it did can sometimes emerge. Although this is not strictly necessary according to law, it is very helpful to new councillors, not to mention historians. Merely stating what the decision was leaves the intriguing, and important question of why, unanswered. Most decisions, it should be said, seem to have been taken by consensus as votes are rarely if ever recorded. Hence the minute books are only a starting point and do not tell us all we might like to know. However, to do this would take more time and effort than is presently available.

### **The Legal Framework**

The fact that there is a Civil Parish in Thanington Without enjoying legal powers is due in large measure to national politics and legislation. While ecclesiastical parishes go back a long way, as does that of Thanington (to which the previously superior church parish of Milton was added in the late nineteenth century), they were not part of a coherent and planned approach to local administration. They fitted into a complicated patchwork which grew up over the centuries to meet a series of needs. In other words, for much of early modern English history there was no proper system of local government as we now understand it.

Much administration was undertaken by Justices of the Peace, the qualification for which was to be a substantial property owner and a member of the Church of England. They met in regular Quarter Sessions to hear cases and decide policy. In Kent there were two such Sessions for East and West Kent, meeting in Canterbury and Maidstone respectively. Beneath these were Petty Sessions which dealt with things like highways, the poor and rates, as well as with crimes. Because these met infrequently, the church authorities, or Vestry, were called on to provide actual services notably where the poor were concerned. Money to support such services, and notably to pay for poor relief, came from rates imposed on property owners.

The main levy was the Poor Rate, collected under an Act of 1601, while there was also a county rate tacked on to this to pay for things like roads. These rates were levied on agricultural land which could be a burden hence the Agricultural Rates Act of 1896 reduced the rate and met the deficit by a central grant. The Church rate began to be phased out after 1868. By tradition, though not by statute, the rates (or 'sess' - ie assessments - as they were known in Kent) were collected by the Vestry. In rural areas this was usually an open vestry - or meeting of the people of the village - whereas in towns they could be closed or 'Select' Vestries. Thanington may have had a Select Vestry in the 1820s but by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it was clearly an open one. In

any case Keith-Lucas & Poole say they were not always competent and were soon dominated by farmers and the middle classes. This seems to have been the case in Thanington.

The main duty of the Vestry was to appoint churchwardens and, especially, Guardians and Overseers to raise the rate and provide monetary relief to the poor. And, while the overseers themselves were supposed to administer the system under the supervision of the JPs, in practice the Vestry set rates and policies. Its annual meeting was open to all ratepayers, and not to all adult residents. The Vestry could also employ constables (a law enforcement office dating back to Anglo-Saxon times), surveyors of highways and a parish/vestry clerk and, especially, an Assistant Overseer. This was a salaried post set up by an Act of 1819 to actually carry out all the demanding day to day business of the Poor Law.

From the late 18<sup>th</sup> century relief was increasingly provided through the new workhouses which serviced groups of parishes or Unions (especially after 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act). Thanington was in the Bridge Union, and the buildings of the old workhouse can still be found in Union Road there. The Vestry gained health responsibilities in 19<sup>th</sup> century while other bodies were then created for other functions. However rural areas lagged behind in this. Some areas were also subject to old fashioned manorial courts like the Lordship of Thanington which was in the hands of George Bowdler Gipps, a noted local landowner who, for many years, lived at Howletts. This had lost its old judicial powers but it demanded a kind of oath of allegiance, administered at a 'court' which met in the Hop Poles, and the payment of a quit or ground rate. This was redeemed by a one off payment after his death in 1929.

Such new nineteenth century authorities were said to have been more concerned about the level of the rates than with any responsibility to provide better services. Nor were they interested in fair representation. Hence the poor were not entered into the Rate Book and so had no voice. A List of the Poor was also kept. The system lasted well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century and was only finally and formally ended by the 1948 National Assistance Act. Prior to this, in 1922, Vestries had been abolished and, from 1929, replaced by Parochial Church Councils. At the same time Guardians and Overseers were abolished, their rating powers being transferred to the Rural District Councils [RDC] in 1925.

Things had begun to change well before this time. Thus the 1888 Local Government Act [LGA] extended local self government from towns, where it had developed earlier in the century, to the country by creating County Councils. However, the creation of a simple and straightforward system was undermined by the creation of many County Boroughs. These were autonomous bodies within the county but not subject to it. Indeed they enjoyed the same powers.

And Canterbury was allegedly the smallest County Borough in the country. Competing ambitions and the limited resources of some county boroughs led to many feuds. Towns sought to get independent status and avoid paying the costs of things like rural roads. This patchwork meant that England never got one clear and comprehensible local government system such as is found on the Continent and the US.

The draft act had also envisaged the establishment of lower tier authorities but these were left out of the bill probably because of Tory opposition. However, the idea was not abandoned as they were taken up by the Liberal party. So, despite the scepticism of those who said that local electors would prefer a circus to a parish council, they were adopted. Their aim was partly to assuage non-conformist opposition to the domination of Anglican squirearchy through the vestries and to create an educated and land owning peasantry. Parish Councils also reflected contemporary dreams of about restoring Anglo-Saxon democracy. In any case they were included, along with urban and rural districts, in the 1894 Local Government Act.

This created Parish Meetings and Parish Councils. Both inherited the major secular functions of the Vestries. Where a parish had under 100 inhabitants it could only have a Parish Meeting. If its population was between 100 and 300 it was left to the Parish Meeting to request the County Council to create a council as well. Above 300 people a parish automatically got a council.

Thanington Without initially fell very much into the first category. It apparently had 120 inhabitants in 1901, living in 23 houses. This was far smaller than the 'ancient' parish. The old parish had 1213 acres of land and 9 of water meadows. In 1870 there had been 43 inhabited houses, 63 ratepayers and 209 inhabitants. But by 1894-5 there were 700 residents. Even though Thanington Without met the numerical requirements for consideration for a Council, it seems to have been one of the many small parishes which found it hard to sustain its Parish Meeting, let alone go further. Even one annual meeting to be held once a year within a week, either side, of 25 March was a problem. And, in fact, these meetings were supposed to meet twice a year although there was no mechanism to enforce this. And, as we will see, Thanington Without never really managed to do this. Hence there was no initial desire to have a parish council. Parish Meetings were not to start any earlier than 6pm so as to allow labourers to attend after work. Councils had to have an annual meeting and at least three others in the year..

The powers of parishes - which were defined as places with a separate poor rate - were essentially transfers of responsibility from the vestry and did not involve any real new responsibilities. They could elect a Council, appoint an Assistant Overseer (but no other officers),

adopt lighting and water powers, run libraries and act on public hygiene. They could also rent land (for allotments) and accept delegated powers from RDCs. Parish Meetings could also approve and raise the rates subject to a nationally imposed ceiling.

In the Canterbury area the first elections were held on 4 December 1894. They were meant to be annual elections - by show of hands - but if a poll was called, ratepayers had to go on a given day to a communal venue and vote. Full secret voting came in later. At first Councillors served just for one year but from 1899 this term was extended to three years. With the LGA of 1972 it was further extended to four years. And later elections were co-ordinated with those for District Councils.

For Keith-Lucas & Poole, the new parish councils were pedestrian bodies until after World War Two when they caught the local imagination. They often met sporadically. Meetings were even less active than Councils especially before World War One. It really needed some local controversy to attract people. This may have been because only people with rateable property in the village could vote (even if they lived up to seven miles away) and, until 1928, only if they were male. This was to change from the 1940s. With elections being suspended during the war, when they were resumed in 1945 the national registers in existence for conscription and rationing had to be used to define the electorate. As this was based on residence, it meant that the restriction of voting to property owners disappeared in 1949, leaving a wider franchise. The rights of non-resident ratepayers were abolished in 1969 leaving residence as the sole criterion.

Their post-war revival may also have been helped by pressure for a planning voice which emerged in the 1950s, and spread in many parts of the country in the 1960s until be formalized in 1972. New lighting powers under the 1957 Parish Councils Act underlined this. So, after 1963, did the power to spend a fifth of the rate on the general good of the local community. This was later modernized in line with changes to Community Charge and Council Tax.

### **The Pre-History of the Parish**

Thanington Without largely followed this general pattern. However, we need to remember that, at its inception in 1894, Thanington Without was actually one of two parishes created out of the ancient or ecclesiastical Parish. Their boundaries were close but not identical. Initially they went a little further towards Harbledown and, more recently, Thanington Without has retreated from the areas south of Iffin and New House Farms which are still in the church parish. In any case,

both were outside not merely the historic city but also outside much of Wincheap. It would have been more accurate to have called them Near and Far Thanington.

Why there were two is unclear. It may have been a civil servant's fantasy but it may have been an attempt to isolate the urban parts of the old Parish from the more rural elements. However, Wincheap was not then really built up being still an area of orchards and gardens. And the ecclesiastical parish has never embraced the whole of Wincheap, stopping at the city end of what is still described on a plaque as Thanington Place. If the idea was to unite urban areas it would have been more sensible to bring all of Wincheap into the new parish.

In fact Thanington Within was a rectangle cut out of Thanington Without. It stretched southwards from the river with its eastern boundary on Hollow Lane and its western past the junction of Cocking and Ashford roads. When it was created in 1894 it had a population of 663. So, although it was smaller in size it was actually more populous and probably more prosperous than Thanington Without. The Cathedral Archives have documents for the period 1884-91 which relate to it as part of the ancient parish which report a Borough rateable value starting at £572.10.0 and rising to £692-5-0 in 1887. This derived from a penny rate levied on 41 houses in Wincheap. Large arrears in payment were reported from time to time. In 1891 Edward G. Wood was collector and William Ashenden Clerk.

By 1895, when G. Jones and G. Webb were overseers, according to the Parish Poor Law Book, it was being described as Thanington Within. However, there do not seem to be any records of meetings in the Cathedral Archives. The Parish then included 56 properties in Wincheap Street, 13 cottages (and a house) in Hollow Lane (all owned by G. Gaskin, on Manor of Thanington land), and others, including farms in, Thanington Road (11 houses and 5 plots of land). There were 13 cottages in Ada Road plus more in Marlowe Terrace, St Jacob's Terrace, Railway Way, together with houses called Maida Vale, Woodvale and Laurel View. The last was owned by William Lillywhite a farmer who was to be a major figure in the early years of the parish. He also rented Oast House in Wincheap from G.B. Gipps, together with land in Hollow Lane owned by Mathew Bell of Bourne Park, another significant landowner.

In all there were 139 ratepayers and perhaps 160 occupiers. By 1911 the number of ratepayers had risen to 209, thanks to addition of Western Terrace and Westview Terrace, which were presumably newly built. The parish as a whole had a rental value of £5302 and a rateable value of £3448 with a rate of £399. It is doubtful that Thanington Without had either such population or wealth, although there are no sources to confirm this.

No doubt because it was so closely connected to Canterbury, and represented a gain in income for the city, the Within parish soon lost its autonomy. It was transferred from Bridge to the Canterbury Poor Law Union in 1910. This was a few years after the Kentish Gazette reported that Bridge was talking of adding it to Milton (although this seems more likely to have referred to Thanington Without). This shows the confusion created by the 1894 structure. It was finally and fully absorbed into Canterbury in 1912. And, although the name was revived after 1989, the area which adopted it was probably largely outside the original Thanington Within.

Some years after the disappearance of Thanington Without, the Local Government Act of 1923 reviewed many boundaries. As a result the 1929 LGA cut the numbers of districts. Its operation had a medium term effect on Thanington Without. As a result of its boundary reviews, as from 1 April 1934 two changes were made. On the one hand, 55 acres with a population of all of 23 were transferred to Canterbury, while, on the other, Milton next Canterbury was added to Thanington Without. The parish gained 403 acres and population of all of 13. The transfer allowed the Council to start the housing estate which was built in two stages, the main road side by about 1933 and the southern side by 1939.

By then Thanington Without was increasingly different geographically from the church Parish. It also seems to have had fewer powers. At one stage the Thanington Vestry had been responsible for paying both the Country and the 'Borough' rate and for drawing up jury and parliamentary electoral lists. The old parish had an annual meeting of all ratepayers to appoint Parish Officers and examine accounts. The former had, in the past included Constables and a Waymaster, but by the 1890s it only elected two Churchwardens, one Guardian, two overseers and an Assistant Overseer, the latter being paid £20 pa.

For its funding the ancient parish relied on the Church Rate. In the 1880 this had raised some £7 pa out of which the clerk, Leslie ? Collard, was paid. By the 1890s it was not producing anything like this because farmers were proving unwilling to pay their rates, no doubt because they were on their way out. Consequently the clerk's salary could not be met. So, in 1894 the Vicar undertook to ensure that the Clerk's son and successor, would get the full salary of £10 pa. It was later suggested that there should be a subscription list instead of using the rates list but we do not know if this was ever done.

The meeting was normally held in the Church Vestry, which may physically have been the space under the tower. Luckily it rarely attracted more than seven people. Members of the Cooper family were prominent in its activities as was one Jarvis Bing, a farmer from Sheepcourt near Waltham. The exception was in May 1893 when a Special Meeting was forced to adjourn to

the School Room across the road from the St Nicholas in Thanington Road. The extra numbers are explained by the wish to dismiss the Assistant Overseer, Frank Hardiman, probably because of irregularities in collection. After a poll he was replaced by Frederick Drury. The last time that Overseers (G.Wood, E.Homewood, and F. Hammond) and a Guardian (S.Miles of Iffin Farm) were elected by the Vestry was in March 1894. Yet, even though the two Thaningtons were in existence and Poor Law business was being dealt with by them, or somewhere else, for several years thereafter the meeting was still being described as an annual meeting of ratepayers.

Only from 1901 was the Vestry referred to as simply a meeting for the election of Parish Officers. By then the meeting itself was becoming increasingly ecclesiastical in nature, appointing only churchwardens and sidesmen and dealing with things like the installation of an organ and the removal of an outdated heating apparatus. For many years the Vicar's Churchwarden was a man called Lacey while the People's Warden changed more regularly. However, William Lillywhite, who had first appeared at the meeting in 1893, was elected from 1896 to 1900, before switching to serve as Vicar's Warden between 1901 and 1904. What happened thereafter we do not know since the last minutes were for the 1905 meeting. And, although these were signed by the Vicar in 1906, there is no record of any meeting being held then.

The new Civil Parish of Thanington Without got off to a less than distinguished start. For, although Poor Law business ceased in the Vestry, there is no evidence to show that this was actually handled by the new body. And, although Thanington Without was reported, by the Kentish Gazette of 8 December 1894, as having appointed a Chairman of its Parish Meeting, we are not told how this was done. Thanington Without was one of five in this situation, the others being Crundale, Fordwich, Nackington and Swalecliffe. The newspaper makes no mention at all of Thanington Within which may suggest it was a body which had even less appeal than Thanington Without.

The Chairman of the Thanington Without Meeting was called Hammond, presumably the F.Hammond who has already appeared in the Vestry minutes of 1894. He probably lived in Seymour Place and later in Fern Villa, Thanington. Moreover on 6 April 1895 the Gazette noted that "As an instance of the lack of interest taken by some parishes in the new Local Government Act, Thanington Without, Canterbury, probably 'takes the cake'. At the first parish meeting, in December last, properly convened by notice according to the Act, there was not a single parochial elector present. At the annual parish meeting on the 29<sup>th</sup> March the same thing occurred again". Come meeting times over the next three years the paper did not report any assemblies in either of

the Thaningtons although in 1898 it did note a Vestry meeting. All this makes it seem that the Thaningtons lived down to Keith-Lucas & Poole's dismissive view of their pre-war inactivity.

It also rather suggests that the poor law administrators in office in 1894 continued to act, without re-election, and with no formal meetings being held or minutes taken. Only an urgent need to replace the Assistant Overseer in 1899 seems to have led to a formal meeting with minutes. Hence the first Minute Book only starts in 1899. To judge by the local paper this first recorded meeting was very much livelier than the minutes suggest. It led to the deposing of Frederick Drury as Assistant Overseer and the installation of Edward G. Wood of Burgate Street though why this was is not stated. The fact that its first meeting was in August and not the normal spring date suggests that the parish elite had been pushed into meeting not by realisation of their illegal failure to hold meetings but by a further crisis in Poor Law administration. However, once a meeting was successfully called, the Parish went on to meet annually although without much enthusiasm. Attendance continued to be limited and, in 1903 only one person turned up so that the meeting had to be cancelled yet again.

### **The Early Years of Real Activity**

Beyond this, the first Minute Book shows that, once up and running, the Parish Meeting went through three phases. It started by behaving very much as the Vestry had done then, from the 1920, it showed the first stirrings of communal activity before, in the early 1930s, preparing the way for the installation of a Parish Council. For many years it was held in the Parish (or Mission) Hall (or Room) in Hollow Lane although for the first ten years the minutes do not specify any meeting place. And in 1918 it is recorded as once more meeting in the Church Vestry. The site of the Hall was almost opposite the entrance to Hollowmede. Usually it met annually and normally called itself the Annual Parish Meeting though in 1906 the term Assembly was used.

In August 1899 which, as noted was not the set time, it met with the Rector, the Rev. Mathew Evans, in the Chair. However, William Lillywhite, who we have already seen as Poor Law Overseer and Churchwarden and who was then farming from Thanington Court, was usually elected Chairman for the year. The Assistant Overseer presumably took the minutes. The Meeting's main business was to appoint a Chairman and an Assistant Overseer. William Lillywhite and Ernest Wood were appointed year in and year out to these posts. Then and later it also appointed Overseers who were usually William Lillywhite and one of the Miles brothers, tenants of Iffin and New House Farms. George served between 1899 and 1902 and Sidney from 1902 to 1905 and again from from 1911 to 1918. They were followed by Henry Ashenden,

Stephen Tolputt Ashenden and another Tolputt in the 1920s. The Ashendens were then well ensconced as estate agents and farmers at Milton. No Guardian seems to have been appointed but the Assistant Overseer was, at regular intervals, awarded a new contract at a higher salary.

Apart from this the meetings were very routine. Only in 1908 did a non poor law issue arise with complaints about a tarry road and a dangerous bend near St Nicholas Church. Footpaths were also mentioned in 1912. So it is not surprising that these appear, as we have already seen, to have been very short and poorly attended meetings. However, 1914 Parish Constables were appointed from amongst the leading farmers to ensure that law and order was maintained in the 'disturbed situation of the country'.

Things began to change slightly in the 1920s. Indeed on one occasion 'gentlemen' had to be debarred from speaking and voting because they were not local government electors but simply residents in the city part of the larger Church Parish. Presumably such denizens of Wincheap had some issue with what was happening west of the city but we are not told what. In any event, the Council agreed to beat the bounds soon after 1920, revised the Valuation and Parochial Lists, submitted its accounts for Audit, presided (in 1926) over the modification of the line of what was to be New House Lane and elected representatives to the Bridge RDC Rating Authority. It also followed the abolition of the whole Overseers system in the late 1920s. This still left it with very little to do so that in 1929 and 1930 there was no business at all for the meeting to consider.

Despite this, in 1931 there was a large and representative meeting in the Parish Hall. People were attracted because there were now several houses in New House Road (as it then was) and, especially, because the 1929 Local Government Act had led to suggestions that the status of the Parish might change with half of it being absorbed into Canterbury. There was very strong, and well publicised, opposition to Thanington Without being moved from a large administrative county into a small and, in what the parish leadership thought was a poor, small and stagnant County Borough and at a time when the trend was towards larger units. Canterbury was said to have built no new houses and to have little life but a big appetite for areas with a high rateable value. Moreover, as became clear the following year, such a move would have implications for the supply of electricity since the City was only willing to lay a main a few yards into the parish, ignoring Ashford Road, Iffin Lane and New House Road, whereas the Kent Electric Power Company was laying a full main.

So no case was seen for the move and this was confirmed by two meetings. An appeal was also made to KCC to give Thanington more power. However, the County would not agree to

consider this until the boundary question was resolved. Ernest Wood was deputed to oversee the question and fight the move at the Boundary Review meeting. In the end, as we have seen, only a small part of the parish went into the City and this was, in part, compensated by the addition of the large but under populated Milton Parish with effect from 1 April 1934. This echoed what the Church had done many years earlier.

Before then the Parish Meeting, which was then no longer chaired by William Lillywhite who had resigned the post on account of age and deafness, had begun to move into a more active mode. He also stepped down as Rural District Councillor being replaced by Ernest Wood. Then, under the chairmanship of F.G.Leigh, who had already served as interim Chairman, the Meeting started to set a precept (initially of £10), sought estimates for bringing water supply to New House Road and pushed for better bus services. Road conditions, library provision, footpaths, rates and cess pool problems also appeared on its agenda before the transition to Parish Council status. It also started to plan for acquiring a Council, presumably by invoking the 1894 provisions on creating a Parish Council. It recommend that there should be seven members given the number of new houses being built although this must have been balanced by fact that the Parish was so close to Canterbury and might not need a big Council. Finally in January 1935 a special - and well attended - election meeting was held to select the first Parish Council.

During this time the Parish was part of Bridge Rural District with whom relations were not good. Thanington Without was dissatisfied with the attitude taken to bringing services to the parish. Electricity had come to the north of the Parish but not to the south. Nor had New House Road obtained mains water. Equally the RDC had not responded to suggestions that it should build more houses under the Smallholders Act. More generally, the Meeting seems to have been very dissatisfied with the administrative practices of the RDC and this left an unfortunate legacy to relations with the new enlarged Bridge-Blean authority of which Thanington Without became a constituent in 1935.

### **Parish Assemblies after 1935**

The fact that Thanington Without acquired a Parish Council did not mean that general parish meetings ceased. In fact the Parish was required to hold an Annual Assembly at which reports were made to the electors. The latter could still raise questions and perhaps do more than this though the meeting had lost its elective and rating powers. It cannot act itself, this being the responsibility of the Parish Council. It was chaired by the Chairman of the Parish Council but had the right to nominate its own clerk to take minutes. This is presumably a guarantee that a fair

record was kept and that the Council could not ignore public concerns. In practice, Assemblies have, without exception, agreed that the Parish Clerk should take the minutes. Special meetings could also be held, as happened over lighting in 1947 and 1950 for instance.

Until the 1950s the Assembly was held in the Hollow Lane Parish Hall. Then from 1947 the new Ashford Road Social Club Hall was used as, from about 1970, was St Faith's Hall. More recently assemblies alternated between the Ashford Road and St Faith's halls. But no matter where the assemblies were held, attendance was rarely very large. In 1935 and 1936 a 'fair number' were reported as having attended but during the war no more than seven were present, most of them Councillors. With the exception of 1951, when 30 attended, between 6 and 8 was the norm in the 1950s. This meant that, to all intents and purposes, there were virtually no members of the public present. Only the odd one or two electors felt it worth while attending in other words.

Things improved slightly in the 1960s since, apart from 1963 when only nine were recorded as present, attendance was always in double figures, reaching 50 in 1962 and 65 in 1965 when the installation of mains sewage in New House Lane was being discussed. This seems to be the highest figure recorded in the first century of the Parish's existence. Unfortunately, enthusiasm soon waned and from 1971 to 1983 attendance was again low, ranging from 6 to 20. The latter figure was reached in 1978 when the controversial question of New House Lane street lighting was being discussed.

However, in the 1980s there was a real improvement. Up to 1987 an average of 23 attended. And, probably thanks to the decision to circulate a report and notice to all houses in the Parish numbers went up considerably. They were over 50 in the late 1980s and at least 30 in the early 1990s. Overall, attendance has been marginally higher when the Assembly has been in the South Ward.

The format of the meeting has generally been the election of a clerk, the reading both of the notice of meeting and of the minutes of the last assembly, reports from the Council, the approval of parish and charity accounts and any other business which the Council or the audience wished to raise. From the 1980s it became a regular practice to have an outside speaker to talk on a subject of interest to the parish in the hope that this would attract more people to attend. Examples have been the City Planning Officer and the City Chief Executive. Equally, local Councillors, whether District or County have often been successfully invited to take part. From the 1990s the habit of asking organizations active within the Parish to report on their doings has become a tradition. Refreshments can also be served.

The issues raised at the Assemblies are, not surprisingly, of a piece with those considered by the Council. In the early days water supply, cess pits and sewage, refuse collection (then known as 'scavenging'), street lighting, and the provision of bus and phone facilities were major items. Roads, whether width, surface, speed limits or the exposure to surface water after rain storms were also regular concerns. So were footpaths and rights of way.

The Assemblies also gave attention to more specific questions thrown up by the passage of time. These included celebration of national events, civil defence, the future of the Churchyard, the fate of old charitable funds and the Neighbourhood Watch scheme. Planning matters such as the opening of a Montessori School, the golf course proposal, the St Augustine's development and the Wincheap shopping centre were also considered. However, there was rarely any discussion of structural matters concerning the Parish Council.

### **Council Organization and Membership**

The creation of a Parish Council endowed the Parish with a new decision making authority. Yet, despite its new significance, coming to terms with how it organized itself and how it operated is not easy. Thus the earliest meetings of the Council do not say where the Council met. Only in 1941 was it recorded that they took place in the now lost Parish Hall in Hollow Lane. Sometimes this alternated with the nearby Wincheap Farm House, the residence of the later Chairman W.Edmond.Lillywhite and now the Old Farm Residential Home. The last meeting in the Hollow Lane Hall was in 1958.

By then most meetings were taking place in 123 Ashford Road (the home of Chairman Arthur Palmer), although occasionally St Faiths (1959) and the Ashford Road Social Club (1960) were used. From 1964 the latter became the preferred venue despite a call for meetings to alternate between the two Wards. Previously some meetings were held in a house in the Orchard Estate as Bramley Avenue was originally called. In theory the Council met in public although it was not until February 1951 that members of the public were first reported as being present. Over the years very few electors have chosen to attend.

Meetings were relatively rare. In the early days there were only two a year, often in March and April. And in 1945 there was but a single meeting. This went up to 4 in 1946 and 6 in 1947 before settling down at about quarterly. In May 1949 the Council expressed the view that meetings should only be called when business demanded. So this continued into the 1960s though by then there were about six meetings a year. Monthly meetings seem to have started in the 1970s.

Attendance was fairly good, although in the late 1940s one member from the South Ward was demitted from office for unexplained absences over six months. However, the Council hoped that the offender would stand for re-election in 1949. He did not. In 1951-2 the Council was also worried about the absence of one of its former Vice Chairmen, both from its own meetings and from the RDC. It turned out that he had been in India, probably making a film since he was a cinema technician, and had told Bridge-Blean of this. He was back in the Council by March 1952 but stepped down the next year.

At first the Council has seven members, not apportioned as between the various parts of the Parish. So, at the very start, there were actually four members from what was to become the South Ward. In 1946 the Council petitioned for an increase in numbers to reflect the growth in population since 1935 but KCC rejected this probably on grounds of insufficient size. Indeed, the advisory body for parish councils, later to become the Kent Association of Parish Councils [KAPC] reduced its subscription at one time because Thanington's population in 1935 had only been between 251 and 500.

However, by the time of the 1951 census, the population was recorded as being 683 and by 1971 this had risen to 1075. This creeping growth meant that, in December 1947 the Parish Council agreed to be divided into two wards and, after some argument with KCC about precise boundaries, this was done. This probably reflects diverging interests between the two different parts of the parish. The South Ward was allocated two, and the North five. Later when the boundaries were altered because of the A2, the Council's numbers were expanded to 9 with the South ward, by then a much smaller proportion of the total population, retaining its allocation of two.

They were not directly elected at first but by show of hands in the Parish Meeting. Formal processes with nomination, and if necessary a normal poll, were then brought in by the 1948 Representation of the People Act. However, polls have been very rare, there only having been a couple in the late 1980s and 1990s. Unfortunately the minute books do not contain details of the elections as such. Indeed, getting a full team was often difficult and many new councils have had to declare a casual vacancy and then if, as usually happened, nobody demanded a poll, to seek people whom they can co-opt. That has not always been easy. As we have seen, the election timetable was changed in the late 1950s so that it coincided with that of District Council elections. The three year term was extended to four in 1972. And, until 1966 all the Councillors were masculine. However, by the late 1980s women were often virtually a majority.

Sub-committees were equally rare. They tended to be set up for special occasions such as the Coronation. However, by the 1990s the Parish had a footpaths group - initially led by someone outside the Council who was later co-opted - again composed of non Council members. A sub-committee was also used to interview potential clerks. Attached to the Council for many years was Glen Sharman, again a non-Councillor, who served as Tree Warden.

So who were the Councillors ? The first Chairman was F.G.Leigh of Dunrovin, New House Lane (now Close), a retired sanitary engineer. He was introduced to the electorate as someone who had shown great interest in the Parish since he had become a resident there, probably about 1930. In fact he had been active in the Parish Meeting and had been its chairman from 1933 until 1935. He served on the Council until 1946 although he stood down as Chairman in 1940. He also remained a member of the Bridge Blean RDC until 1946. He died in 1951.

By then he had been replaced by his Vice Chairman, W.Edmond Lillywhite of Wincheap Farm who, like his father, was both a major landowner in the parish and a long standing Churchwarden and benefactor of St Nicholas Church. Despite one attempt to give up his post he stayed there until 1957 when he resigned for reasons 'known to the Council' but not revealed in the minutes. His replacement was Arthur Palmer who had joined the Council in 1952 and become Vice Chairman the following year, following two one term Vice Chairmanships. The manager of a wine merchant, his tenure was an extremely long one, lasting until 1983. He was also a member of Bridge Blean RDC after 1951 ending as its last Vice Chairman. He also sat, first as an Independent and then as a Tory, on Canterbury City Council. Although he became Sheriff in 1978 he lost his seat the next year.

He gave way to two one term Chairmen, former history teacher and POW, Charles Day between 1983 and 1987 and Clive H. Church, University lecturer, between 1987 and 1991. Both had previously been Vice Chairmen. Since 1991 the Chairman has been Graham Page, a BT administrator. The Vice Chairmen in the 1990s were Miss S.Knott, a Post Office Counters clerk and then Mrs P.Blackman, a retired housewife and administrator. Of the other Councillors we know that the first seven to be elected, apart from Leigh, were an architect, a carpenter & joiner, an engineer, a farmer, gentleman's outfitter, a market gardener and a shop keeper. A bricklayer and a bus driver failed to get elected. By 1946, when the last Parish Meeting election took place, along with the continuing engineer and farmer, there was a collector of taxes, a film technician, a mechanic, a retired nurse and a water softener. In later years many retired people also joined the council, along with clerks, business people and housewives. Fuller details on membership are provided in separate files.

The Council has only one employee, a clerk. Initially this was R.J.H.Wood . He was replaced by Ernie Kite, a legal executive who served for many years. He also acted as clerk to Chartham for 18 years. His starting salary was doubled to £10 and he was made Press Officer. His salary then rose in 1950 to what turned out to be a controversial £25. Once approved this went up to £32 by 1967. From the late 1950s the clerk's private telephone was also subsidised so that he did not have to bear the cost of conducting the Council's business. When he finally retired on 31 October 1976 he was replaced by Esther Eyles, a former administrator in the Women's Institute County Federation Office in Canterbury. She was one of 22 applicants after a first round in which none of 13 applicants proved satisfactory. In turn she was followed in 1989 by former headmaster and lecturer Dennis Gould. On his own retirement in 2001 he was to be replaced by Roger Cheeseworth who had also been in the wine trade. Each change in tenure seems to have produced a change in style of minute taking.

The Clerk's salary was often one of the major items of Council expenditure. It rose slowly over the years, reaching £60 in 1970, £150 four years later and £273 by 1979. The introduction of national scales, related to the size of the parish, added to this trend. Hence the clerk's salary in 1993 was £2385. A bonus was also payable for higher education qualifications in local government studies, linked to a course for clerks at Gloscat. Provision also had to be made for a final gratuity. The Parish was a leader in this although a number of legal difficulties emerged about this. This reflects a professionalization of the clerk's post. Clerks tended to belong to the Local clerks Society and were able to take advantage of training sessions. Further study was now validated by a special certificate. The Council also began to provide equipment in the form of a filing cabinet in 1986 and photocopying facilities.

The costs of the Council were born, for many years, by its own precept. That is to say the Council tells the collecting agency how much money it wants collected. The District then builds this into its assessments, collects the money and pays it over as a lump sum at the beginning of the tax year. This was done first by Bridge RDC, then by Bridge Blean RDC and finally by Canterbury District Council. The sum involved was initially normally £10 pa, or less, until the end of the last War. It then rose to £32 in 1948 and £48 in 1949 - the increase being the result of expenditure on lighting. Thereafter, for much of the 1950s, it fell to about £35, though it rose as high as £42 in 1954 and fell as low as £26 in 1955. This represented a rate of five farthings per house. The precept oscillated between £28 and £80 in the 1960s although in 1966 there was no precept at all because the Council had sufficient funds in hand. And for many years the Council

refrained from using its right to levy the free fifth to spend on general purposes of use to the parish.

It did, on the other hand, take an increasing interest in the investment of its balances and banking facilities generally. Thus it switched banks in the 1980s to take advantage of better terms in a Savings Account. It also successfully fought both new and old banks to have cheques returned to it free in order to satisfy the auditors. Generally it sought to have a year's expenditure in reserve in case of any breakdown in income.

In any case, thanks to the post oil crisis inflation, the precept began to shoot up in nominal terms. Thus it rose to £500 by the beginning of the 1980s. Five years later it was up £980 and twelve years later it reached an exceptional £5800, before falling to about £3300. At the end of the century the precept was £4100. Extra money was also raised for special projects. This did not mean that the Civil Parish was over taxing its electors since, when the Poll Tax came in, it was shown to be requiring less than almost all other parishes in the Canterbury District.

The precept was based on a rateable value of £4041 in 1950. By 1970 this had risen to £28,914 (when a penny rate raised £120) and, again thanks to inflation, to £100,000 in 1980. Within a decade, of course, rateable value ceased to have any meaning with the introduction of the Poll Tax and then the somewhat different Council Tax. The Council also raised monies in other ways at times.

In the early days expenditure was of a very limited kind: the Clerk's salary, postage, hire of a Hall for meetings, insurance and the cost of the audit 'stamp'. Later capital expenditure items made their appearance. Other items such as a Chairman's allowance, starting at £15 in 1975 and rising to £50 in the early 1990s were added, along with photocopying and ultimately a photocopier. All this was subject to external audit, on a three year cycle after 1985.

### **Council Principles and Powers**

Party politics have left no trace in the Council's minutes. However, on a number of occasions the Council took stands on issues of political principle. Many of these relate to its own powers. Its relations with its larger surrounding authorities were therefore tense at times even though, until 1972 it had a guaranteed representation on the Rural District Council. The Parish Meeting was unhappy with aspects of the administration of Bridge RDC prior to 1935 and things were even worse with Bridge Blean. In the early days the Council had few relations with other bodies.

Along with the Church it had a hand in the Harris Charity, a poor relief fund established in the previous century and paying a small allowance to two beneficiaries.

From the 1950s it was also represented on the Management Board of Wincheap School, though not on the scale and status it felt it deserved. It also had a representative both on the Rating Authority and, from 1940 to 1972, on Bridge-Blean RDC. Much of its work was contacting the Bridge-Blean Engineer and Surveyor because of various problems. Relations with the RDC were not always good, as we have seen, and in 1939 there was a major clash over the financial burden imposed by the Council on the parishes, and the purposes for which it was imposed.

Thus its 1944 affiliation to KCASPC, the predecessor of KAPC, was undertaken as part of a move to demonstrate its rejection of any diminution of its powers which was then being canvassed nationally. However, three years later in June 1947 the Council, meeting in a house in the Old Dover Road, agreed to the idea of the City extending its boundaries to take in the built up area of the Parish but only if the whole of the parish were included. In the event this offer was not taken up and only very minor boundary adjustments were in fact made in 1948.

Twenty years later it took a very different view when the question of boundaries was again posed. Come October 1965 it made it very clear that it was against both absorption into Canterbury and to any boundary changes. In the event the projected review did not take place and the status quo was left untouched. However, the Council did apparently make a submission to the national Local Government Review in 1967 though what it said is not recorded in the minutes. . It also supported the KAPC submission to the Redcliffe-Maud Royal Commission on the Constitution.

At about the same time, in 1944, the Council affiliated to what was then the County Advisory Service in an attempt to maintain its effectiveness. This was the beginning of active involvement in what became KAPC. The Council usually nominated representatives to the Association's General meetings while, in the 1980s and 1990s, it was also represented on the Canterbury Committee of the Association. In fact Clive Church and Graham Page both served as Vice Chairmen at different times while Esther Eyles acted as Secretary for some while after she retired from the Parish Council.

The Council rejected the idea of having a Village Warden as urged by a county predecessor of the CPRE. Equally it opposed Bridge-Blean taking over street cleaning. In November 1956 the Council also objected to the idea of the parish being declared a Green Belt area in which no development would be allowed. However, planning matters did not come within

the Council's ken until the late 1950s. The Council was, in fact, involved in February 1961 in KAPC attempts to gain information rights for Parish Councils. Bridge Blean agreed to provide brief information from January 1962 and seems to have done so although the minutes do not make it clear what its precise views were, apart from a marked objection to retrospective applications. Applications were usually referred to the appropriate Ward Councillors for their opinion. Later full details were submitted by Canterbury City Council. By the early 1990s it was dealing with between 10 and 30 applications per year, occasionally involving site visits. It was also involved with Local and Structure Plans.

When re-organization finally came on the scene the Parish Council sought to avoid being put into a District Ward with Dane John but changed its mind in 1975 when it found that the alternative was to be part of a Stone Street Ward. So four years later it accepted a place in the new Wincheap Ward. But some things it would not accept. Hence it twice rejected Canterbury's request that it take its monies as a grant rather than a precept. Equally it refused to provide additional audit information to the City, since it was an autonomous body, and it complained strongly about the District Council's expensive, and in Thanington Without's view, unnecessary plans for a new headquarters building.

This arose because the Council was always very concerned about the level and impact of the rates and thus rarely engaged on any activity which would increase local taxes. This was true both under rates and when the Poll Tax came in. The Council was very mindful of its 1938 Poll Tax payers. Thus it was not willing to fund the church although it did agree to help with surgery to the historic yew tree in 1968. In 1970 it refused to subsidize the East Kent Road Car company's bus services when urged to do so. However, somewhat surprisingly, in 1977 the Council committed itself to wanting to 'light' all the parish. It also took some note of the District's concern that excessive Parish precepts would be counted against the District and cause it problems with central government. And, in the 1990s, it became Custodian Trustee of the Ashford Road Community Association. However, it also administered the local Lottery Fund until this was outstripped by the national lottery and took money from KCC's Paths Partnership.

Towards the 1980s boundary issues again became very salient. The Parish thus objected to the suggestion that Cockerling Road, Ashenden Close and Bramley Avenue should be incorporated into the City. It counter proposed that more of the area should be added to the Parish. Then, in 1980 Thanington was approached by Chartham to do a boundary swop at Howfield where Thanington had allowed Chartham to install a light for Howfield Lane.

Chartham wanted to take over the piece of land involved but Thanington rejected this and offered to take over the light. There seems to have been no response to this.

Much more significant was the suggestion arising out of the construction of the A2 bypass and a further boundary review that Thanington Without should absorb the Council Estate. Despite its earlier stance, the Council was then very resistant to this and sought to create a separate East Ward. This was on the grounds that there was a fundamental difference in interests between the old and the proposed new parts of the Parish. However, this was denied as was the subsequent suggestion from the Parish Council that the enlarged parish, whose boundary with Chartham was also altered, should be known simply as Thanington.

Similarly, when in 1995 it was suggested that Parish Councils should be given enhanced powers, the Parish Council's view was that it wanted no new responsibilities. It believed that the present system worked well and that taking on new tasks would make office holding too burdensome for present and would be councillors. This fitted in with the desire to keep local taxes as low as possible. This meant that the Council was always cautious about taking on new tasks within its existing powers.

### **Ongoing Issues**

Throughout its life the Council has been forced to deal with a series of problems which never seem to have gone away. Perhaps the most regular and voluminous concern has been footpaths and rights of way: whether they have stiles, are overgrown, have been locked or diverted. The provision and maintenance of finger posts were frequent agenda items. All this eventually led to both the production of a footpaths map of the Parish and the creation of a specialist footpaths group. And this was not just a talking shop because councillors and parishioners, often using Council provided tools, took it on themselves to clear such footpaths as 490.

Probably the most contentious footpath was that connecting New House Lane to the bottom of Hollow Lane and Wincheap School. This was originally mooted after the war as a means of giving school children safe access to the school, so that they did not have to jump out of the way of lorries. In the mid-1950s a deal was done with Edmond Lillywhite to create a high level path in return for the closure of a footpath across the middle of Wincheap Farm. This took some time to build and as soon as it was done problems arose about safety rails, illegal cycling and overgrowing brambles.

One of the problems faced by the Council in dealing with such difficulties after 1974 was that the ownership of the land on which the path was constructed became unclear. The transfer

from Bridge Blean to Canterbury may have led to the deeds disappearing, although the road was a county matter. In any case the local authorities denied responsibility so that getting action was hard. And this was galling because Hollow Lane itself was the source of many complaints and problems. Trees and rocks tended to fall into the road, threatening traffic, while the area proved an ideal spot for fly dumping. In fact old apples were once left in Hollow Lane. The lane was also threatened by overhanging trees and only once was the Parish able to get them trimmed.

Second to this, therefore, must be questions related to roads. Lighting, markings, noise, speed limits, sweeping, surface water and widening regularly appear on the agenda. So does the provision of a pedestrian crossing on the A 28 and the creation of one way systems. Getting this took many years, and a 1990s petition on the former. The latter was eventually installed in Gray's Way and Tonford Lane a little later. Equally the Council saw some of its wishes about road markings accepted. However, complaints and recommendations continued to abound.

Thirdly, from time to time there have been calls for more facilities. Prominent amongst these were requests for more recreation grounds in both wards. But the Council could never find farmers willing to give up the land needed for this. Equally, in 1969, the Council was resistant to the idea of having a public toilet in the Parish. However, in its early days the Council was also occupied with getting and then maintaining phone boxes, such as the one at the junction of Hollow and New House Lane. These too have suffered from vandalism. Electricity supply was also a problem at various times, including in 1958 and the late 1980s.

Support was also given by the Council to the long drawn out requests for gas supplies. The Council also took an interest in library questions: seeking to get KCC to establish a branch in the 1930s (when parishioners were not allowed to use the Beaney), putting it into storage during the war, lobbying for something similar in New House Lane, and considering the location of mobile library stops. The Council has also supported both Ashford Road Social Club, as it then was, and the parallel St Faith's/Hilltop bodies. In the 1970s and 1980s it directed to them some of the Canterbury Lottery Funds allocated to it.

Bus services have also much exercised the Council. Fares, stops and provision for school children have taken up a good deal of time. Unfortunately while some improvements were secured along the Ashford Road, from the 1940s to the 1990s it proved impossible to persuade any operator to route a service through the South Ward. This was felt, probably rightly, to be not viable economically. Complaints about misparking on the verges and elsewhere would seem to reinforce this. However, the post bus was rerouted to serve New House Lane in 1973. From the 1980s the Council also began to express its opinion on train timetable proposals for Canterbury.

Lighting of the Parish's streets seems to have been an even more frequent and problematical fifth concern for the Council. It is also the service on which most money was spent, both capital and recurrent. Schemes were considered as early as 1946 but with public opinion divided it was decided that the £100 involved would impose far too much of a strain on rate payers. The Council then came back to the idea only to see it stalled, after much preparation, by a Ministerial circular. The electorate called for lights in October 1963. And by the mid 1970s these were installed in Gray's Way, Tonford Lane and Bramley Avenue. Installing them in New House Lane in the late 1970s proved much more controversial and installation was halted. However, demands for lighting were renewed in 1993. And, once the lights were installed, there are many references to malfunctioning and un-synchronized lights, all of which annoyed the parish.

Fifthly, there have always been a series of environmental and public nuisance questions. Thus the state of the Tonford Level Crossing and the nearby bridge were ever present themes. Gravel extraction towards Milton was also a problem. So were the state of hedges, and the inconvenience of overhanging trees, notably in the South Ward. Preventing motor cyclists from using Larkey Valley and parts of Wincheap Farm as a race track was a frequent concern as well. General vandalism in fact goes back a long way into the past of the parish. Indeed in 1989 this even extended to an electricity sub-station. Similar problems over street name signs also re-occur.

A sixth issue which has occurred with increasing frequency since the late 1950s is planning matters. As we have seen their volume has considerably increased over the years. Some major schemes like the proposed golf course between Cockering Road and New House Lane have been rejected. Public meetings were sometimes called to consider these or were debated at the Annual Assembly. However, where smaller developments were concerned the Council often approved them subject to there being no complaints from neighbours. Sometimes concerned parishioners did attend Council meetings, or wrote to it, and were thus able to make their feelings known. On occasions such developments were referred to ward councillors for their views, other times decisions were taken by the full Council. Thanington has not, in other words, followed some other parishes in establishing a specialist Planning Sub-Committee. However, the Council did work with Councillors from other bodies, notably the Liberal Democrat Focus Team, on this and related issues.

Finally, throughout its life the Council has always been concerned about Notice Boards because it needs these to publicise its meetings and activities. Finding locations for them in various parts of the parish and getting them erected have been major concerns. So have costings which have sometimes been shared with the Church. But their use by the District returning

officers for parliamentary elections has also been resisted. Mending them when they fell down or were vandalised, and weather proofing them have been a continuing problem.

This was something which the Council did itself. However, a vast amount of its work on such ongoing issues, actually involves getting other authorities and services to act. Clerks over the years have been required to write, and write again to get the responsible bodies to take the requested action. This was true of Bridge RDC, Bridge Blean and Canterbury District, not to mention KCC and public utilities. However, constituents did not always understand either this or the limits on the Parish Council's powers.

### **Events and Changes**

If these problems seem to have been ever present, and no doubt still concern today's Councillors, there have also been a series of problems and activities which have been marked by specific events and changing times. Some of these have reflected national life, others new developments and other still changes in fashion. Yet the minutes say surprisingly little about such things. Nonetheless, they have been an additional preoccupation for the Council.

Surprisingly, the First World War seemed to have only a limited impact on the Parish. However, in 1914 the Parish meeting, because of what it called 'the unsettled state of the country' did think it wise to appoint Parish Constables as had sometimes been the case in the past. What effect they had is not recorded. There was also an army camp down on Thanington Road. The Council was also involved in the creation of a war memorial in the Church porch.

Between the wars, there was a terrible problem with sewage, due to the overflowing of the Tonford cesspits. Some fourteen houses in Tonford Lane fed into cess pools which often overflowed before Bridge Blean could be persuaded to empty them. The Parish Council again felt that the RDC was failing in its duty on this as on other matters. Yet, despite this problem, Tonford Lane was late in getting mains sewage since it was not until the 1960s that this was provided. Bramley Avenue and Cockering had been done in 1954 and 1956 respectively. The same process was started in the South Ward in 1965 but the firm involved went broke and there was a worrying delay until a new contractor, Bowzell took over and finished the task in 1966. The Council followed this very closely and consulted the electorate widely.

Another passing problem in the early days was the propensity of cows from the Hambrook Farm in Tonford to stray into the Lane and leave unpleasant reminders of their presence. During the inter-war years the Council followed the coronation festivities though

preferring not to organize its own because of its closeness to Canterbury. Prior to this it has also noted the final ending of the old Poor Law and its officers.

The Second World War cast a shadow before it in the late 1930s with discussion of air raid precautions. An Air Raid Precaution [ARP] service branch was established in 1937 and at its peak it numbered 22, all of whom were volunteers. They probably used the Home Guard hut at the top of New House Lane as their HQ. Their main problems seem to have been an inability to find a Chief Warden for the area and difficulties in arranging for sirens to be heard throughout the Parish. Apart from the destruction of a shop in Ashford Road in 1940 by enemy action, air raids and air defences do not seem to have been mentioned in the minutes. Constituents obviously felt that the authorities were too slow to make good the damage. However, they did benefit from parcels of food and fruit from the Dominions, which were channelled through the Council.

After the war both Wards seem to have organized their own victory celebrations. And later royal and public events also left their mark. Thus the 1953 Coronation was celebrated very profitably so that the proceeds were given to other good causes in the Parish. £200 was raised for celebrations for the Silver Jubilee to support events in both Wards. The Council also welcomed the birth of Prince Charles, his marriage to Diana and to the Queen Mother on her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, sending telegrams to the royal persons involved.

However, for many years, reminders that the Parish lived in uncertain times cropped up with calls on the Council to help with Civil Defence provision. But, as with the ARP, it proved hard to find an organiser. The need for this largely passed by the 1980s but, in the early 1990s, the parish was called on to appoint people to act as liaison officers for planning for non war related emergencies. The idea was to have people in both wards who would organize and stimulate activity in the case of a grave emergency hitting the area. Luckily this did not happen because volunteers did not last long in office.

The Council also had a hand in assisting new developments in the area, suggesting renumbering New House Lane in 1944 although this only happened in 1962. Bramley Avenue and Ashford Road had both been done in 1955. The South Ward finally followed in 1967. The Council played a part in renaming New House Road and Lane as New House Lane and New House Close respectively. It also suggested names for wholly new roads, notably Hassall Reach and Manor Close, setting aside unsuitable ideas from the developers.

Environmental concerns also emerged on the scene in the 1980s, leading the Council to think about wheelie bins and recycling generally. The Council also participated in tree planting and nature conservation schemes. In the late 1980s it also got KCC to install a series of grit boxes

in new House Lane and elsewhere to deal with icy road conditions. Equally it financed the production of an embroidered map of the enlarged parish created by Esther Eyles. This now hangs in the new Ashford Road Community Association hall.

This concern also emerged in worries first about the state of St John's Church, Milton, which was finally closed in the 1970s and fell into disrepair until Bretts took it in hand, and the impending closure of the St Nicholas Churchyard. While willing to make grants for churchyard maintenance, the Council was opposed to the sale of a strip of land to developers because of the fact that the graveyard had been gifted by the Lillywhites for burials, something which was acknowledged by the erection of a plaque. But it eventually accepted the case for the closure of the graveyard once it was full and was happy to ask the District to take over responsibility as it was legally entitled to do. It saw this as more cost effective than seeking to do it itself. It would also have liked to wind up the small charity funds inherited from the past but this was not legally possible.

One more unpleasant sign of the times was the emergence of a concern for law and order. One aspect of this was the creation of neighbourhood watch schemes which were encouraged by the Council. This was very necessary since enthusiasm was limited and, at one stage, the scheme imploded. There were also meetings with the police about violence in the area in the early 1990s. This had involved attacks on the Post Master in Ashford Road Post Office.

Such concerns for the fabric of parish life also surfaced in the idea of doing as many other parishes were doing and drawing up a village appraisal. This was done by a sub-committee of Councillors and concerned parishioners and appeared in 1989. Some thought was given to redoing this a few years later to reflect the rapid pace of change, which led to the final disappearance of commercial premises other than farms from the parish. They had been driven out by the steady increase in demand for residential property. Unfortunately there was insufficient interest for a further Appraisal to be worth undertaking. And the Post Office, which was to go some years later, was already under threat despite its value to inhabitants of the North Ward, as lengthy discussions in the minutes testify. All this reflected national social changes which Keith-Lucas & Poole see as undermining the old settled communities and promoting a lack of civic involvement.

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So, when, on 24 September 1994, Councillors took part with Chartham in a centenary walk round the parish boundaries, echoing the beating of the bounds promised seventy five years earlier, they

were completing one significant century of change and beginning another. From uncertain beginnings the Parish administration has developed and tried to respond to many difficulties. It has done its best to represent the parish. However, whether the people of the parish have been as aware of this, and as supportive, as they should be, always remained open to doubt. Like many other things about Thanington, to find this out this requires more research than has yet been done.

*CHC 16 ii 2005*