

## NEW ALRESFORD PARISH COUNCIL - PART III

*By*

Alex Hankin

The 1970s were no doubt affected by Local Government reorganisation and I wonder, with hindsight, whether some of the frustrations and failures of the Parish Council during this period, were in no small part, affected by these changes. The Officers of the County and District Councils were changing jobs, and the Authorities themselves had more than enough on their plates than to give in depth consideration to Parish Councils.

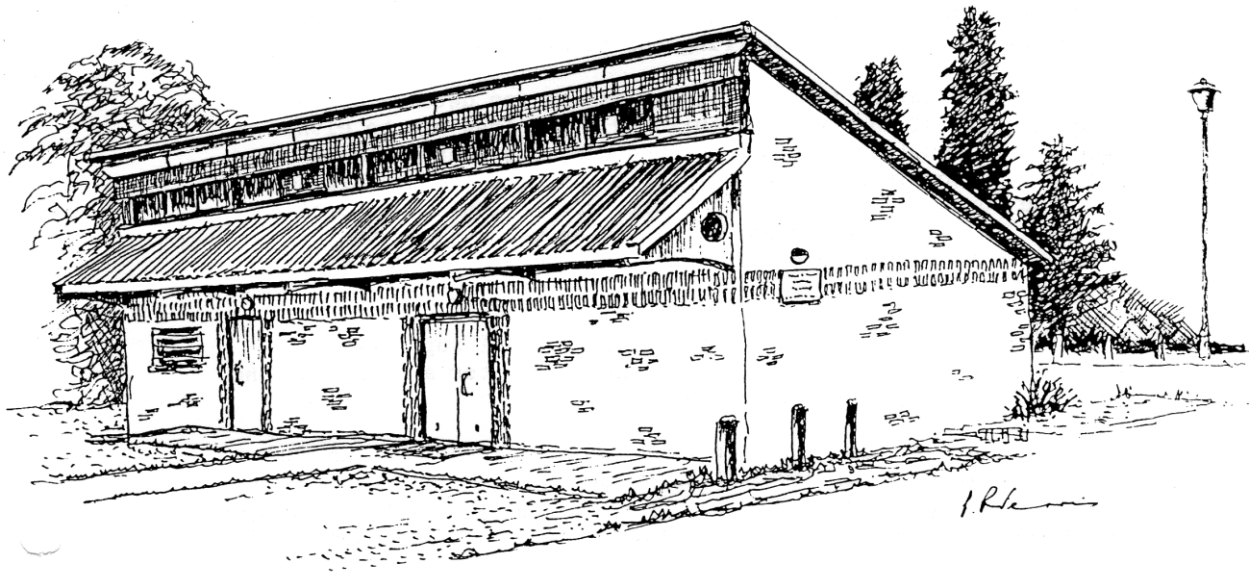
One of the early problems facing the Parishes was the new financial arrangements. In the past the Parish was limited in raising a rate over, if I remember rightly, 2.5p. For money beyond this, lighting being the main item, the Council had to ask permission, at either the Annual Parish Meeting, or at a special Parish Meeting. Although very democratic, this was not very helpful for long term planning.

Reorganisation gave the responsibility to the District Councils, in our case the new Winchester City Council, of the method to be used to finance their Parish Councils. I will not bore the readers with the details, but let it suffice to say that a very stormy meeting with the City Council and the parishes of the district took place. At the time the new senior City Officers were mainly the previous City Officers, who had no practical knowledge of Parish Councils. Alresford representatives took an active part in the debate, and the Parish Councils obtained the right to prepare their own Parish estimates of expenditure and precept for their own part of the Rate.

There were many major items on the Parish Agenda at this time, and after a considerable amount of hard work by Councillors, they all fell by the wayside.

I wrote in Part II of the Car Park problem. With the expected closure of the Railway an obvious solution presented itself, namely that the larger area should be developed as the general Car Park. At the end of 1972, the District Council re-affirmed that if the Railway closure took place, an extra piece of ground in the Station area would be wanted for the Car Park extension. A year later they did not think it necessary, as the existing capacity was under used. The Parish Council pointed out that in order to enter this area one had to drive and walk across an unmade potholed entrance which was often flooded, to gain access to an unsurfaced Car Park. As the street parking was not Warden controlled, small wonder that the Car Park was not being used.

The Railway finally closed in February 1973. There was Council support for a Private Company to try to run a passenger service from Winchester to Alton, which in turn was replaced by the tourist type of Steam Railway, which exists today. The County and City finally negotiated with the latter body to produce the present very fine Car Park. This followed some twenty years of continuous pressure from the Parish Council. These twenty years had been stormy, with lack of help and even replies to letters, from the Railways and indeed the City and County Councils.



### Stratton Bates Pavilion

The proposed new Community Centre produced another period of complete frustration. In 1971 the Government's policy changed, so no money was available. The Council looked at three choices. (a) To wait and see, (b) Abandon the Station Road Scheme, (c) To develop a new Centre in the Perin's School ground at the Jacklyn's Lane end. Grants were available for this joint use type of development. They chose (c).

A meeting was held with the Hampshire Education and Further Education Authorities, and it was agreed with enthusiasm to build a Centre on this site. A heated Swimming Pool was also considered as part of the project, but this was found not to be feasible. Financially the Government would fund 50%, the Community Association 25% (sale of existing building), possibly a W.R.D.C. Grant, and the Parish Council would raise a loan of £16,000. A Public meeting was called to give authority for the loan. Only 5 Councillors attended and 15 Members of the Public, and then only 13 voted! It was passed. The Department of Education was approached by the County Council who, in turn agreed to 12.5%, and the District replied in the affirmative after some delay. By then the County were not sure about their promised funding. A year later all was moving again, "which should not produce an impossible financial burden on the Parish". The Parish Council would own the Building with a renewable 60 year lease of the land.

There were now objections to the change of use of the existing Community Centre whose Committee were now in serious financial difficulties. Over the next year agreement was impossible with either the Community Association or the County Council who were producing problems about staffing the joint usage.

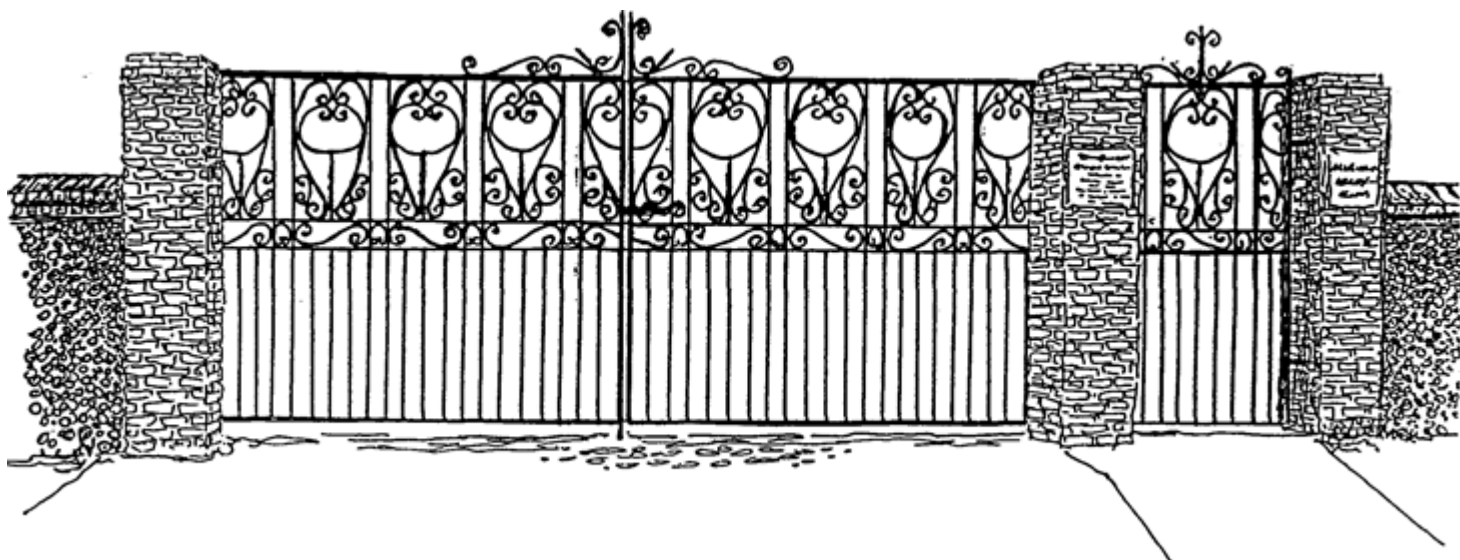
By 1976 the Parish Council was asking for details of the running costs of the existing building. The idea was to either renovate or demolish and build a more useful structure on the site. The Charity Commissioners were prepared to meet the Council together with the Community Association to discuss the implications of the change. The latter would not agree to the meeting, so the Commissioners in turn would not meet the Council. So died the project.

The next stage was that the Parish Council supported the Community Association in obtaining grants to alter and upgrade the existing building. By then it was 1978!

Public open spaces were not much more successful. In the various surveys of the town, it was always said that further open spaces were necessary. Sun Hill had been the only additional area since the town had increased in size, and was just becoming available for use.

At the end of 1973 two other sites were considered as possibly becoming available. First was the Sheep Fair field on the Bishop's Sutton road, rented for that purpose by the Town Trustees from

Winchester College. However there were problems and it was marginal to the population, so this site was not pursued. It was rumoured



CAPTION 1

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THESE GATES WERE GIVEN BY HIS FRIENDS IN  
MEMORY OF GEOFFREY SEARLES  
1897 - 1979  
WHO ENJOYED GIVING A LIFETIME OF SERVICE  
IN ALRESFORD.

ARLEBURY PARK RECREATION GROUND

that Arlebury Park Farm was likely to be sold. The Council asked if it could purchase 10 acres. The owner was willing to sell, but only at a price. This valuation was not agreed by the District Valuer and the Parish was only able to offer the latter's figure. The Council was legally only able to negotiate through the City Council. The delays and lack of action were everlasting, even to the extent that the City formed a committee to see if the land was necessary to the Parish. The arguments went on; then at last a

Compulsory Order was obtained. Although no final figure of purchase had been approved, entry was made on 22nd March 1979.

From then on various works were put in hand and a great deal of time was spent organizing the whole project. Grants and loans had to be obtained and advice taken on several matters. Landscaping, fencing, and the roadway entrance. Also the Searles Memorial Gates had to be produced. The main building was to be built to enable a Squash Court and Sports Space to be added at either end, at a later date.

With considerable advice the Arlebury Park Association was formed, with the Council having a 5 to 4 vote, thus controlling its Committee. The object was fund-raising of every sort, to assist in paying for the general development of this area, and was a great success in the early days. The Association also dealt with the planning, development and overseeing of the general building, reporting back to the Council.

By the early 1980s all was on the go at last. The idea was that a Sports and Social Club should be formed to take over the running of the completed scheme as tenants of the Parish Council. Unfortunately, the various Sports governing bodies were unable to agree, and one Sport ended up controlling the Social side. As far as I know the constitution is there, for the other users to press their points by vote, for the extension of joint usage. The Council has tried on many occasions to encourage a happier solution, but to little avail. The rent pays for the maintenance of the building, and thanks to Huxleys, who have the use of the grass to test and demonstrate their equipment, the area is mown free of charge for the Public. I am sure there must be a great future for Arlebury Park as a Sports and Social Club, but it requires very strong leadership to get it all together.

The Parish Council was, of course, under a great deal of public pressure regarding the By-pass. There was still a small minority not wishing to have a by-pass at all, and a pressure group set up by those wanting a By-pass as soon as possible, and not too worried about where it went. The line of the proposed road had been suggested in the early 1930s, and the preferred route was made at a meeting in 1947.

One group was against this line and proposed a southern route beyond the Golf Course.

Reorganisation of Local Government had relegated the road to thirteenth in the order of priorities, but it soon came up the list. The Parish Council took a fairly open stance asking and getting a great deal of help from the County in putting the various plans and their details over to the public. I look upon this as a very great success story of co-operation between County and Parish.

The southern route was finally rejected by the Parish Council as there was a real risk that it might result in the re-location of the Golf Club, with the existing Club area being used for housing. It was also quite clear that the great deal of screening which was being provided would protect the householders in Spring Road and Tichborne Down from most of the noise and impact.

Footpaths have rightly always taken up a lot of Council time. Local people walking them report problems, and the County, which has the responsibility of their maintenance, need to be lobbied all the time; otherwise your Parish can lose out. In the 1980s the new owner of the Fish Pond to the south side of the Dean to Eelhouse footpath, claimed that the Public were interfering with the fish and fishing. He requested a closure order on the path, with relocation on the north bank of the river, approached by a bridge. He also said that he would fence with close boarding between the Fish pond and the footpath if the path was not moved, thus totalling screening the down river view. The Parish Council had, with great reluctance to go along with the alternative route and so protect the very fine view for the public albeit from the far bank.

A public enquiry was held over two days, with many points and arguments heard. I believe the owner sold the Fishpond before he took the matter further, and all parties were very relieved.

Having written of some of the major developments and problems, it must be said that throughout, the Council continued to improve and maintain the existing recreational areas. The lighting was also improved with in-fills in dark areas, and ensuring that new developments included the street lighting being up to agreed standards.

Although the Parish Council has no control over Planning, it has a responsibility to submit comments on the Planning applications to the Planning Authority, in our case the City Council. They in turn are obliged to have regard for any comments they receive, but not necessarily to agree with them. In the early 1970s a great deal of time was spent obtaining reasonable information and access to the various planning applications to enable the Parish Council to carry out this responsibility with the due care it deserved. I am pleased to say that the problem was finally overcome, and the Parish Council are now informed of all Planning applications most of which they inspect, passing on their views to the City. In the case of major developments, the City Council and also, where appropriate, the County, carry out full and informative consultations with the Parish, which represents a considerable change of attitude.

It is hard to summarise the immense amount of work and breadth of subjects covered during the latter years of the Parish century.

The bulk of the work is undoubtedly the very important job of ensuring the Parish gets its fair share of the local Government cake and that its problems, be they footpaths, highways, drainage, housing, lighting, or planning are well represented to the City or County, in a fair and acceptable manner. The Parish Council has, over the last ten years, improved the recreational and childrens' play areas to a very high standard.

It regularly assists by Grant aid Churchyard maintenance, the Mini-bus and the Community Centre. It made a Grant to the Bowling Club to help them in the building of their Club House. It attempted to

develop a Croquet Club at Arlebury Park, but this unfortunately failed, but the potential remains. It has agreed to assist the youth of the town by grant aiding the Youth Association in their "Tonix" project. The Council does not give away our money lightly, and each grant is debated at some length; the regular grants are reviewed, regarding the amount of increase or otherwise to be given.

In the hundred years the Parish has come a long way, and expanded in scope a great deal. As a Council it is now respected by the other Government bodies, as a truly representative body of local views and opinions. It also acts, as the Minutes show so well, as collectors of all the minor but important public nuisances, from potholes, to lights not working; from ditches blocked to uneven pavements; from litter to dog fouling. Of the trivia it has dealt with, I must end with a Minute that took my fancy. It was looking at prices of new Cleaning machines, and it was suggested that one be purchased and locked away. For the future?

The Parish Council needs much more public interest to be taken of its work. It now spends £56,000 of your money. Only about one third of the voting population bothers to do so, and still fewer attend the annual Parish Meeting.

The Centenary year has been marked by the replacement of the old N.F.S. Hut on the Recreation Ground in Grange Road, by building new Sports changing facilities; it is now called the Stratton Bates Pavilion.

Our thanks are due to all the past and present Councillors for their time, energy and interest in these public affairs; may the next 100 years see Parish Councils still surviving.

Alex Hankin, October 1995.

Source : Parish Council Minutes.