



A BRIEF HISTORY OF GREAT MISSENDEN PARISH COUNCIL BY COUNCILLOR F S M CLARKE

CHAPTER ONE - 1895 TO 1917

The last part of the nineteenth century produced a revolution in local affairs; in 1888 County Councils were formed and in 1894 Rural District Councils and Parish Councils were authorised. Hitherto, the Church Councils performed some secular functions, whilst Boards of Guardians at district level provided services for the poor

The local Overseers of the Guardians called a meeting on 4 December 1894 to elect the first eleven parish councillors. Nominations were in writing but election was by show of hands, although it was possible to demand a poll. A meeting of about 80 electors met in the schoolroom and there were 27 candidates.

The first meeting of the Great Missenden Parish Council was held on 7 January 1895. The eleven councillors decided to select an outsider as chairman and the Reverend G E Wilson was chosen for two years until 1897. Mr Lloyd Redding was appointed Clerk.

It may be appropriate at this stage to recall that Great Missenden Parish (which at that time included The Lee) was still a rural village in the horse and cart age. Water came from wells, it was without a sewage system and the village was lit with oil lamps. The roads were of flints or granite chippings. Population was approximately 2000. The railway arrived in 1892.

The first council examined the fire engine and decided on its renewal - a manual equipment costing £50! paid for with money from the existing machine plus a public subscription. It also appointed 10 Parish constables who were to be issued with staves and handcuffs. A parish meeting was held in September 1895 to adopt the lighting system - paraffin lamps taken over from the Churchwardens. The lighting cost was fixed yearly at a special meeting.

The early councils were elected for one year, the elections always by show of hands although sometimes polls were demanded. In 1900 it was ordained that existing councillors should remain until 1901 and thereafter be elected every three years.

The 1897 council decided to select a chairman from within its ranks and Mr Henry Groom was elected. Mr Lloyd Redding resigned as Clerk and Mr F S Hearn took his place. The clerk was assistant overseer of the Guardians and collected the poor rate and any other rate required.

In 1898 Dr E O Turner was elected chairman. This remarkable man, who became chairman again in 1901, first joined the council in 1896, continued in the chair until 1940 and died in office.

In 1899 and 1900 the Reverend W Dorey was chairman. The first 10 years meetings were much concerned with allotments, state of footpaths - the present Twitchell Road started as a path across Twitchell Meadow - the state of the roads - the responsibility of the County Council. The night soil cart was a responsibility of the Parish Council and the parking of the cart and the fire engine came up in the minutes. The digging of a well in Church Street and the adoption of a well in The Lee were mentioned. In 1898 the railway company was asked to build up the side of the station approach bridge so that trains were not visible to horses going over the bridge; in 1903 there was a complaint that carts and horses left waiting in the High Street caused obstructions - shade of our present parking problems! The landlord of the Waggon and horses complained of the dangers of driving bullocks in the High Street after dark. In 1902 the Rickmansworth Water Company announced plans to bring water to the village.

In March 1905 a deputation went to the Education meeting at Aylesbury regarding a new school for Prestwood. The cost would be divided - one quarter to the County, slightly over a quarter between Hughenden and Hampden and the balance (nearly half) by Great Missenden.

In the ensuing period until 1917, Dr E O Turner continued his chairmanship and Mr F S Hearn was Secretary. The fire engine, firemen and the housing of the engine continued to occupy the Council all through the period. In 1905 the council decided to erect 5 hydrants in various parts of the village but decided their cost (£50) be obtained by public subscription. Inevitably motor cars came into discussion and complaints were received of speeding! In 1906 it was decided that speed should be restricted to 10 miles per hour. A proposal by the council that the village roads should be tarred in April 1909 met a typical County Council response that all tarring must be paid for locally - the proposals was dropped. Increasing traffic found our narrow lanes and sharp corners difficult and there are various references in this period to discussions with the County Council.

The fire engine and its equipment were stored in various places in the village and the council paid the custodians a small rent, the two horses required to draw the engine were borrowed. In 1907 the Council adopted a proposal to collect rubbish described as glass and tins and dump it at the Dell near Cottage Farm - this I think was the ultimate responsibility of the rural District Council but was delegated to the Parish Council. In 1908 there was a public meeting to discuss the boundaries between Lee Parish and us, the original proposal was to join Lee Common and Potter Row to Lee Parish. It is not clear from the minutes how this was resolved but both parties met a Commission and it seems as if the then boundaries were left as they were.

The annual Parish meeting was always an important affair, not only was the election held there every three years but the Parish Council sometimes referred contentious matters to it. The meeting always included a statement of the three charities and although the accounts were always carried there was opportunity for comment: in 1908 a complaint was raised

about the distribution of three-shilling tickets and the fact that some recipients were working. In 1908 there is a strange note that a water cart used to lay the dust on roads was bought by private subscription and offered to the Parish Council which refused it.

In 1910 mention is made of Prestwood School which held 40 pupils; the Parish thought it necessary to enlarge it but the County demurred considering the present provision adequate - there has not been any mention of the proposal of 1905 that the school (or a further school) should be rebuilt.

This year a new Town Crier was appointed; this is the first mention in minutes of his existence. His duties were mainly displaying placards and in later years there are several references. Since its inception, the annual meeting of the Council has been in the Schoolroom and since 1909 mention is made of normal council meetings there; presumably, the clerk to the Council worked from his own house or place of business.

In 1911 the Council decided it needed its own office but none was under review. In this year the Council welcomed a proposal that Uxbridge Gas should extend to Great Missenden and in September 1914 asked the gas company about conditions for supply for street lighting - on learning that the council would have to pay for lamp posts and employ someone to light the lamps and clean them - decided to continue with oil. In 1911 there is a note in the minutes that celebrations for King George V's Coronation would not be a charge to the rates! A Councillor was disqualified because he was under contract with the Council to house the sanitary cart for a small fee. The County Council decided, however, that this was a beneficial undertaking and the disqualification was rescinded.

A proposal to exchange two half-acre plots for allotments in Potter Row exercised some time in meetings because of legal complications. Complaints were received about the closure of a footpath in Mobwell and the owner denied the existence of a legal path. This was discussed with the Rural District Council and a public inquiry was contemplated; in 1913 the Commons and Footpaths Preservation Society in a comprehensive opinion, which explored the law and the period history, finally decided that there was no case to retain the path. A copy of the paper is included in the minutes.

The first report of vandalism was made in 1915 when problems involving Prestwood Recreation Ground and Church Path, Prestwood were referred to the police. George Carrington, who had been a Parish Councillor for practically the whole period since 1895, died in 1916. He had played a very active part in the Council's affairs and is mentioned many times in Council minutes.

The above account covers the first three years of war which seemed to have little influence on Parish affairs.

CHAPTER TWO - 1917 TO 1922

Dr E O Turner remained in the chair for this period. The first meeting noted in this book was held in the Vicarage Room. Its first business was the appointment of the Town Crier and BillPoster who posted Council notices in the High Street and Church Street and paid one shilling year for the use of the Bill posting sites. The new man was a harness maker in the High Street. The Council also sought subscriptions to defray the cost of digging allotments for soldier's wives.

In May 1917 the Council noted the death of Sir Allen Liberty of The Lee who had been so helpful as a County Councillor. The war impinged on Council meetings in various ways - the large number of items concerning allotments, the purchase of a potato sprayer by the Council for use by allotment holders and in October 1917 the Amersham Food Control Council sought information about the milk supply. Council members served on the Great Missenden sub-committee Food Council.

In January 1919, in response to an inquiry from the rural district, the Parish Council considered that 40 new cottages were required in the Parish. In March 1919, the Council appointed a rat destroyer and in May the Council asked the County Council surveyor to tar the roads. This was done in June. The Council unsuccessfully sought land for a Bathing Pool and ask if Dr Anderson, Minister of Health, could help. This request was refused. The County Council had offered to pave the paths and removed the setts in Church Street - but half the cost was to be met locally and no action was taken. One wonders whether, by June 1919, the urgent need to grow food was over because the Council heard that 9 allotments were not properly cultivated. In November 1919 the Council agreed that High Street and Church Street be lit with gas and a lamplighter was appointed. Mr King of Great Missenden High Street was asked to dispose of the oil lamps.

The Council received a petition from one hundred residents of Ballinger asking that their Post Office be retained. The Council thereupon told the Chesham Post Master that in no circumstances would Ballinger be deprived of its Post Office. The March 1919 Parish Meeting was called by the parish chairman to consider a memorial to the war. It was decided that a village hall should be built. A Committee was set up "to obtain subscriptions and a site as soon as possible". In 1920 the first 5 gas lamps were in use - the lamplighter to receive one shilling per night. The council gave up its attempt to find a Bathing location.

In 1920 the proposal that the Post Office were to lay Telegraph lines on the West Side of the High Street reopened the suggestion that the setts be replaced with concrete slabs. The Council finally decided that the matter be allowed to drop. The housing of the fire engine still gave cause for concern and there were several discussions in the minutes: in September, it was noted that the Waggon and Horses was willing to accommodate it. In July 1921, there was a report of water scarcity on hills and it was proposed to erect stand pipes in Ballinger and Prestwood; the Rural District Council stated, however, that they had no powers to do this and the owners made their own arrangements with the water company.

The meetings in this period contained many entries about allotments, footpaths, refuse collection, the state of roads, recreation grounds - particularly efforts to find extra grounds for Great Missenden - the fire engine and Brigade and the collection of house refuse. There was as yet no sewage system and problems arose therefrom. Much of the routine work of the Council was undertaken by committees.

CHAPTER THREE - 1922 TO 1928

Dr E O Turner continued as chairman throughout this period. During 1922 the extension of the lighting system continued with an extra lamp outside the railway station. In 1923 Mr F S Hearn resigned as Assistant Overseer after 25 years.

At various times the Parish Council had discussed the obstruction caused by traders displaying goods on the pavements! In April 1923 the police had threatened proceedings livestock at the same meeting the Council told the Post Office they had no objection to Postmen having a half-day holiday on Saturdays. The Post Office - six months after the request - agreed to mount a clock visible from the highway!

Paths at Atkins farm Prestwood, although agreed by the Parish, were illegal according to the Quarter Sessions. The Rural District Council's duties to empty sanitary pales were delegated to the Parish Council but bills were to be paid by the district.

The council's request for a separate polling station for Prestwood in Great Missenden was granted after various plans and petitions had been submitted to the County. In 1924 it was reported that the Chief Constable had arranged for a telephone for the Great Missenden Police Station!

In June 1924 the medical officer of the District Council reported on the unsatisfactory state of sewage collection in Great Missenden and admitted that a regular drainage system and sewage farm would be costly. He proposed that a motorised sewage pump would help. The minutes are full of complaints about footpaths, stiles, allotments and overgrown hedges.

It is interesting to note that in 1925 the Assistant Overseer and Clerk to the Council was told by the Ministry of Health that as the population was below 4000, the Overseers could not provide a parochial office.

The November 1925 Council agreed to share with Chalfont St Peter the cost of buying and maintaining a motor cesspool tanker. The cost of £1000 and yearly maintenance about £1000, the money to be loaned over 7 - 10 years. This was subsequently vetoed by the Ministry of Health.

In 1927 the Council proposed to purchase a motor fire engine and equipment together with 20 hydrants and to raise a loan for £1250 to be repaid over seven years. This was rejected by a village meeting.

In 1928, the council was asked how many cottages were needed and estimated 15 non-parlour and two bedroom houses to let at 10 shillings per week and 15 three bedroom houses.

The council had supported a petition about the exchange of footpaths in Prestwood, under instructions from the district council. This resolution was posted on Prestwood Church and chapel doors.

1927/8 must have been rather wet, as there are minutes about the overflowing of the Misbourne and about Prestwood allotments being under water.