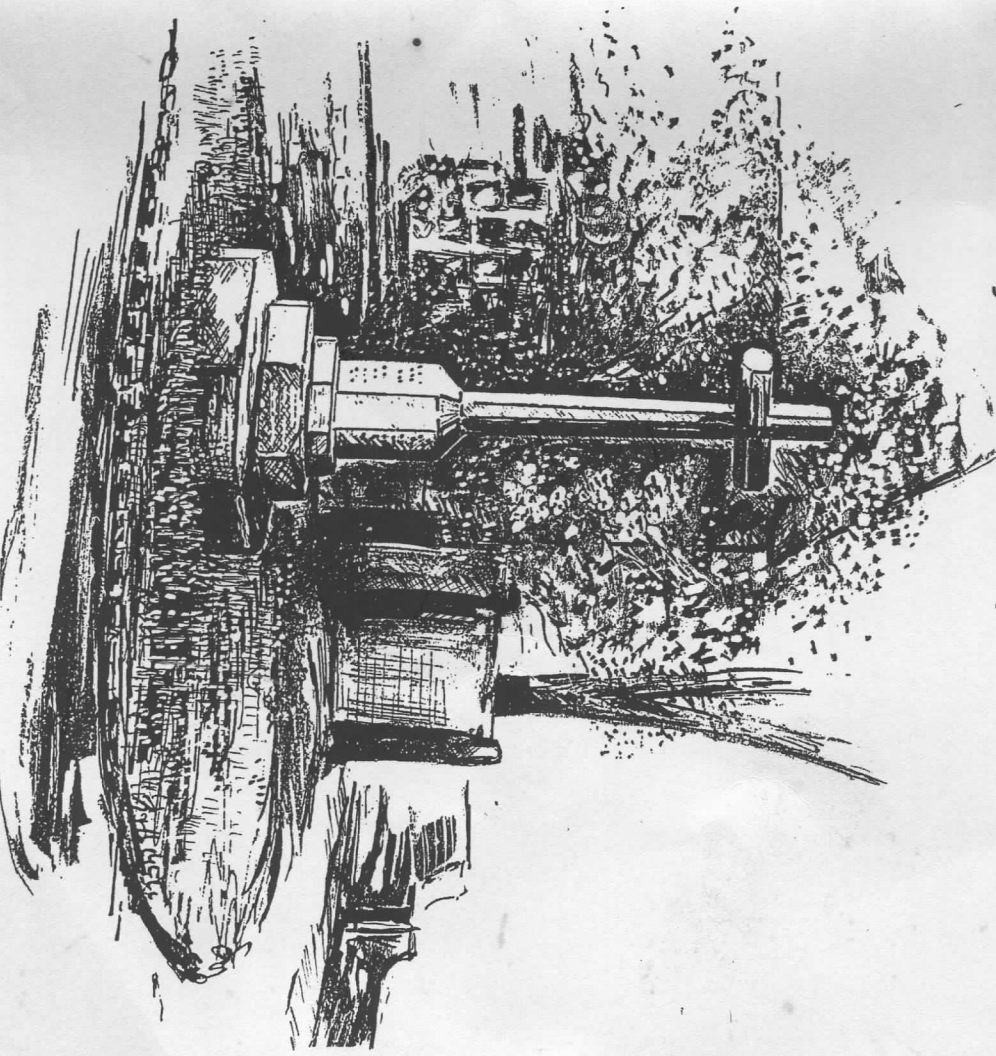


Langford Parish Council

1895-1995

The History of One Hundred Years of
Service

by Alison Kemp M.A.



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FOREWORD

This little history of the Parish Council of Langford in the County of Oxfordshire, has been written to celebrate its completing its centenary, along with nearly all the other parish councils throughout England. Langford is a small village. It is situated almost at the point where Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire meet, with Wiltshire only a mile or so away. Although its vernacular architecture is Cotswold in character, with stone-built houses linked by dry-stone walls, the landscape belongs to the Upper Thames valley rather than the Cotswold uplands. It is a beautiful village, with 29 Listed buildings, mostly in the centre, and a splendid church with late Saxon tower and sculptures. Nearly the whole of the village and its close countryside has been designated a Conservation Area. The population at the last census was 277.

The Parish Council consists of five elected members and a Parish Clerk. At its inception in December 1894 the Vicar was elected Chairman, and could be said to have been nominated rather than elected, because upon taking the chair he presided over the election of five councillors, bringing the total body of the Council to six. Until 1900 there was no Clerk, the clerky duties being carried out by the Chairman. When the Chairman resigned in 1903 the Council elected one of its own members to succeed him, and from then on there has always been an elected chairman and vice-chairman and three ordinary members. In the last hundred years only two women have been elected to the Council, one of them subsequently becoming vice-chairman and then chairman. The other is still serving as a councillor.

Councillors throughout the century have tended, once elected, to serve for many years. There have been very few contested elections, and to vacancies have usually been due either to illness, or even death, or to the councillor in question leaving the parish. One family has been represented on the Council continuously ever since 1894, providing either the vice-chairman, or, more often, the chairman, for 74 of those 100 years.

All the information about the Council's activities during the last 100 years has been taken from the Minute Books. The temptation to supplement the record with local reminiscences, anecdotes, and gossip has been firmly resisted, though the temptation has at times been great. The five volumes of Minutes have been a goldmine to the researcher, although, as in most mining activities, the work has

sometimes been arduous. Not all Clerks supplied headings or numbering to items recorded; two Clerks routinely omitted the year in their dating of meetings; only very few minutes give much of a clue as to the outcome of decisions taken by the Council, though future references to reminders, dissatisfaction, or, occasionally, polite acknowledgements of requests positively met, sometimes throw light on the success or failure of a policy. The Minutes were carefully handwritten in the minute book and read out at the beginning of each meeting. It was not until December 1987 that the first type-written minutes appeared, pasted into the minute book after having been photocopied and circulated with the agenda three days prior to the meeting. The minutes vary enormously in length, the record of three separate meetings in 1930, covering a period of nine months, totalling 11 lines in legible handwriting. Most minutes, however, ran to at least two pages, some to considerably more. Whether short, medium length or long, it is only fair to say that they were always meticulously written and easy to read. Very idiosyncratic spellings have been amended in direct quotations.

'THE PEOPLE OF LANGFORD MUST BE WELL SERVED' 1894-1900

The first Parish Council for Langford was elected on 4th December, 1894, at a meeting open to all the ratepayers of the parish. The Vicar, the Rev'd Constantine Wodehouse, was elected chairman, and conducted the proceedings "in accordance with the printed instructions". These instructions were pasted into the inside cover of the first minute book. The number of ratepayers present is not recorded, but as the highest number of votes received was 35 (for Mr William Reading) one can assume that at least 35 ratepayers were present. There were eight nominated candidates, but of these three, for reasons not disclosed, withdrew. It seems likely that they withdrew after the vote had been taken, as otherwise there would have been little point in counting the votes at all, as only five candidates needed to be chosen. In spite of the election having been held "in accordance with the printed instructions" the Congregational Minister, Rev'd Garner, demanded a poll, but fortunately for the finances of the new-born Council, subsequently withdrew the demand. The result of the election was:

Charles Cooper	Dealer	29
William Hobbs	Farmer	34
William Reading	Farmer	35
William Tayler	Horse & Trap Proprietor	30
Joseph Turner	Labourer	31

The three candidates who were "withdrawn" were

Richard Johnson	Roadman
William Farmer	Builder
Harold Milward	Gentleman

The newly elected Council wasted no time in getting down to business, holding its first meeting nine days later. Here the minutes of the election meeting were read, approved, and signed, members signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office, the Vicar was elected chairman, Mr Reading vice-chairman. It is interesting to note that the Vicar had not been elected to the Council, simply invited to chair it. Interestingly, no Clerk was appointed, the work of such an official being undertaken by the Chairman. The meeting decided that its name should be the somewhat cumbersome title of The Parish Council of the Parish of Langford, and appointed the manager of the County of Gloucester Bank in Faringdon as Treasurer.

Two days later the chairman received applications from eight parishioners for plots of arable land. This met with a commendably prompt response. A Council meeting was fixed for 7th January, 1895, and a notice posted inviting anyone wishing to apply for land to do so in person at this meeting. Three important resolutions were passed:

- (1) that it is necessary to obtain land according to the Smallholding Act;
- (2) that the Parish Council should take responsibility for corresponding with landowners;
- (3) that the Ecclesiastical Commissioners should be requested to supply land.

Both the Council and the would-be smallholders were clearly anxious to waste no time, for the Council met again on 17th January "to discuss further the same question which came before the previous meeting". They decided to forward particulars of seven applicants to the Commissioners, with the information that these seven had already selected Break Ground, opposite the Glebeland in the Grafton road, as the most suitable site. The seven applicants bore names that will happily be familiar to most of today's parishioners. They were

William Johnson
Richard Johnson
William Lafford
Charles Maisey
Raymond Maisey
Emmanuel Moreing
Charles Stanley

The Parish Council then paused, perhaps to get its breath back, but more probably to await a reply from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. They did not meet again until 13th March, 1895.

On 13th March it transpired that two applicants for land, Charles and Richard Maisey, wished to withdraw their applications. The Commissioners had proposed the Home Field for the plots. The Parish Council seemed to be happy with this and resolved to hire the land from Michaelmas next. They were less happy, however, with the proposed rent, and decided to write to the Commissioners asking them to reduce this from 30/-s to 25/-s per acre. (They had put the proposed sum to the vote, "was it a fair and suitable rent?". By three votes to two the Council decided that it was too high).

Apart from queries about the rent, the land for the smallholdings seemed secure, but it was not long before the Council began to tackle another major project. The first Annual Parish Meeting, an open

meeting for electors, was held on 23rd March, and requested the Council to secure a good water supply, and to find out more about the Coal Charity. The Council acted with its usual speed; it met on 4th April, when it was agreed to write to the Commissioners requesting permission to erect four standpipes. There was bad news over the smallholding rents; the Commissioners had declined to reduce them. It was agreed to shelve the question of the land for three months. It was further agreed to write to the Charity Commission for information about the Coal Charity.

The next meeting was the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council, held on 20th April. Negotiations with the Commissioners over water supply were proceeding; the current question was what would they charge for a water supply? There was bad news about allotment rents; the Council was obliged to accept 30/-s per acre, and stuck to its decision to hire from Michaelmas.

The Council did not meet again until 20th July, when the main agenda item was the welcome news that the Commissioners had agreed to a rent of £15 per annum to supply the whole village with water. The smallholdings and water projects were therefore proceeding satisfactorily, and the Council addressed a new issue. It wanted to get hold of the Parish Award (the Inclosure Award of 1810) and agreed to write to Mr Crowdy, in whose possession it was, asking for it.

For some mysterious reason, not disclosed in the minutes, Mr Crowdy seemed extremely reluctant to hand over the Award, and at the next meeting, on 9th September, it was decided that the chairman should write to the Editor of the Parish Councils Gazette - clearly a very new periodical - to ask for advice on the matter. We do not know whether any advice was forthcoming. The Council also decided, at this meeting, to ask the Ecclesiastical Commissioners for a formal agreement in respect of the smallholdings.

At the next meeting, on 14th October, the Council received a letter from the Solicitor to the Ecclesiastical Commission proposing terms for the agreement. The reading of this letter was followed by "an animated discussion". Members of the present Parish Council, almost exactly a hundred years later, would very much like to have more detail of what animated their predecessors, but will guess that the main contention was about who was to choose the tenants and how big each plot could be. The Council clearly felt on sure ground, because two days later, on 16th October, it held a meeting to allot the Home Field. This

was apparently achieved by drawing lots among four applicants. Two tenants took four acres each, two one acre, and the remaining acres were taken by Councillors, Mr Hobbs and Mr Cooper "so that all the land was disposed of".

The penultimate meeting of the year saw the Council holding what might be regarded as a tidying-up session. Drainpipes would be needed to complete the standpipes; the removal of the great stone in front of the Crown Inn should be brought to the attention of the Highway Board; and Mr Crowdy still seemed unwilling to hand over the Parish Award. Indeed, he seemed so unwilling that a brief meeting, attended by only three councillors, was held on 21st December to continue the campaign to get the Award. There was "no further business that needs recording". It would be pleasing to know that the three Councillors therefore repaired to the Bell Inn opposite their meeting place in the school, there to take a glass of Christmas cheer to celebrate a most active and productive first year for the new Langford Parish Council. If they did so repair, it is naturally not recorded..

So ends the first year of the Parish Council of the Parish of Langford - a very busy year indeed, with twelve meetings and much achieved. The smallholdings had been hired and allotted, the water supply secured, efforts begun to retrieve the Parish Award and to sort out the Coal Charity, even time at the year's end to consider the great stone by the Crown Inn. This was a memorable year of service to the Parish, and of growing confidence and expertise for the councillors. The minutes were now accompanied by a somewhat embryonic agenda and a record of attendance, but alas, they are still not full enough to tell us the end of most of the affairs discussed. There is no way of finding out why Mr Crowdy was so reluctant to hand over the Parish Award, though we know he eventually did so, because many years later it reappears on the Council agenda when the question of removing it from the Parish Chest to the County Records Office was settled. No trace, however, has ever been found among the Council records of the agreement drawn up between the Council and the Commissioners though nearly a century later a copy has come to light in Clutton's Oxford office.

1896 was a less frenetic year, mostly spent in tying up some loose ends left over from 1895. Problems about the water supply continued; the villagers feared that they would be less well served than the tenants of the commissioners. The Council succeeded in averting this danger, but was still not happy about the standpipes; were they adequately protected from frost, and served by satisfactory

drainpipes? The legal costs of the smallholding agreement turned out to be disagreeably high, and the Council found itself unable to find the necessary cash. As it explained to the Commissioners' solicitor, it had spent all its money on a poll demanded by Mr Garner, the Congregational minister, at the election of the new Parish Council at the Annual Parish Meeting. The Council was therefore obliged to request the Commissioners to await payment until they had "ordered" a rate, which unfortunately would not produce any cash until March 1897. The Commissioners' solicitor agreed, a trifle reluctantly, to this request. The point illustrates well the financial problems encountered by parish councils before the present system of estimating and precepting was introduced. Parish council finances were very tightly controlled from the beginning.

One of the mysteries that will probably never be unravelled is why Mr Garner was so determined to have polls for Parish Council elections. It will be remembered that he had tried - and failed - to have one in the first elections of December 1894. The minutes indicate that the elections in 1896 were again conducted with scrupulous care, and that the votes showed that two of the seven candidates tied at the bottom with 16 points each, six points below the first successful candidate, Mr Garner himself.

The Council continued to work as hard in 1896 as it had in its first full year. It met frequently, twelve times in all, often at very short intervals - as soon as it had received a reply to an inquiry of any sort. This industrious habit was not to continue much longer, as councillors became accustomed to the notion that the wheels of bureaucracy grind very slowly indeed. They were now embarking on a long-drawn-out campaign to improve the drainage of the village, informing the Rural District Council that the Main Drain needed "thorough cleansing" it was to be quite a time before it got it.

From 1897 to 1900 the Council settled down to the steady routine of serving the community, and soon realised that it is much easier to take a decision than to implement it. Now they had the smallholdings, but still lacked a formal agreement; the water supply, but many details remained to be settled. How were the standpipes to be protected from frost? Would the water be fit for human consumption? Would the Commissioners stick to the promised rent of £15 for a settled period? Would the Commissioners put in proper drainpipes? And, most vital question of all, who would have to pay for all this? All these problems took a long time, and much correspondence, before a satisfactory

solution could be agreed. Above all, the Council had the problem of the street drainage, and here (and no latter-day councillor will be surprised to hear this), progress was very slow indeed. The Rural District Council had already learnt some very cunning tricks.

Drainage being a perpetual preoccupation of many a small village, it is worth telling the beginning of the great Langford drains saga in some detail. The Council reported by the District Council were too small to take the drain traps installed by the District Council were too small to take the flow of water after heavy rain, and that the receiving chambers were "full of matter to the level of the outlet pipe". They therefore required urgent attention. This letter was dated 9th June, 1901. There next appeared a report in the Witney newspaper that Mr Powell of the RDC had been informed by the Parish Council that the drainage gulleys were too small, and that at times there was a very bad stench arising from them. He had inspected them and found that the traps and their seals were broken, and that they were connected to the village sewer. "In fact" his report continued "the road drain was converted into a sewer some six or seven years ago". Modern villagers, still awaiting main drainage, may be quite surprised to hear that the village boasted a "sewer" a hundred years ago. Nowadays we all have to depend on our private septic tanks and soakaways. The RDC now played its trump card, the Surveyor concluding triumphantly "it is undoubtedly a matter for the Sanitary Committee".

The Parish Council would have none of this. Mr Milward, one of the councillors who had drawn Mr Powell's attention to the drains, wrote immediately and privately to Mr Powell firmly denying that either he or his colleagues had complained about the stench. Because the traps were insufficient in working power to carry off the road surface water, and being broken to boot, "anyone with any sense would know that on hot still nights there must be a stench, but we did not as a matter of fact complain of that as it was taken for granted". He declared roundly that the Surveyor's attempt to shift the whole thing onto the Sanitary Committee "seems to me the wrong thing". Ending on a more conciliatory note he invited Mr Powell over to meet him.

This first skirmish of the drains is dealt with in detail because it illustrates so well the metal in which the first Parish Councillors were cast. They knew perfectly well what was wrong with their drains and they did not intend to be fobbed off by RDC officers. It cannot be claimed that they settled the problem of surface water drainage with this single blow. Anyone glancing through the minutes of the Parish

Council from 1994-95 will be aware of the continuing importance of surface water drainage throughout the village. The minutes of 1901 do not reveal whether Mr Powell accepted the invitation to meet him on site, but we do know that some ninety years later the County Council Area Engineer and his Assistant Engineer visited the village to discuss, with the Parish Council, current water drainage problems at various sites in the village.

TWENTY QUIET YEARS 1900-1920

The next twenty years, from 1900 to 1920, saw the Parish Council quietly continuing its work of caring for the interests of the parish. The major concern continued to be the allocation and rent collections of the smallholdings, with occasional wrangles with the Ecclesiastical Commissioners over the rate of rent demanded, especially when the season had been marred by drought or excessive rain. The fieldpaths came in for attention. Various stiles, and the state of "the white bridge" over Broadwell brook in the Meadows, were causes for concern, but in the days before there was any real legislation to protect footpaths much clearly depended on the goodwill of both farmer, and, in the case of bridges, the County Surveyor. The drains have remained an ongoing problem to this day. In 1899 there had been an urgent demand to the RDC for action over the main outlet of the street drain, which was described as "offensive and injurious to health". Five years later the Council was still sending reminders to the RDC on the subject. Footways were always a cause for concern. In 1908 the RDC was asked to provide a footway from the village to the station. Cluttons obligingly offered to supply 60 cubic yards of gravel to be dug from the pit on Lower Farm. Mr Reading, by now Chairman, equally obligingly, offered to extract this, and, at cost price, to lay it. The state of this footway remained a topic for discussion over many years, and it is sad to recall that in the end it totally disappeared, but good to know that in 1995 the County Council promised to reinstate it, not to the no-longer-existing station, but to the houses of Leys View which had not, of course, been built in 1908. Footways and fieldpaths were of great importance at a time when there was virtually no public transport in the village, hardly any bicycles, and few, if any, motorcars. If you needed to get anywhere there was no alternative to walking. So "the fieldpath to Alvescot", or, for that matter to Filkins or Clanfield or Broughton Poggs, often providing the most direct route, played an important part in village life.

After eight years of active chairmanship the Rev'd Wodehouse resigned at the Annual Parish Meeting in 1903. He was succeeded by Mr Milward, but was obliged to re-occupy the chair two years later when Mr Milward left the parish. Mr Chetwode had already, in 1900, divested himself of the office of clerk as well as chairman, and the first clerk to be appointed was Mr Jas. Robbins. His salary was £3 per annum, paid in two half-yearly instalments. As he remained in office for seven years he was apparently quite content with this modest reward. His task, indeed, appeared equally modest; from about 1910 meetings were held quarterly, and the agenda usually consisted of minutes, occasional financial transactions, and the election of officers at the Annual Parish Council Meeting, with perhaps a special meeting at Michaelmas to collect smallholding rents. This tranquil state of affairs is emphasised by the fact that no other parishioners appear to have attended the Annual Parish Meeting. Nor did the composition of the Council change much; vacancies caused by departure from the parish, illness or death, being quickly filled by the Council electing its own nominee. Presumably this new member would fall to be fully elected at the next Annual Parish Meeting, but as there were never more than five nominations they were duly declared elected, presumably by themselves, as there never seemed to be any other parishioners present. The only active election took place in 1919 when at least one other person was present, a Mr Sarsfield, who was voted into the chair. There were six nominations, but unfortunately no record of who the sixth man was. What might, without giving offence, be called "the old gang", was duly voted back into office by show of hands.

Very little remains to be reported during these two quiet decades. The smallholding gate needed repair (it often seemed to, rather surprising in pre-tractor days), and an outbreak of scarlet fever caused the Annual Parish Meeting to eschew the school for its meeting place and to gather instead in "the private Room of the Crown Inn". It might have been conjectured that during the years when the Great War was raging the Council would be engaging in many new ventures, but one would be wrong. There are only three minor reminders of the Great War: in September 1914 a special meeting of the Council was summoned to discuss what action to take over the Oxfordshire Fund for the Relief of Sailors and Soldiers. It was decided that the church and chapels should each be asked to donate a collection, and that a box should be placed in the post office. In January 1917 a circular about uncultivated land caused the Council to conclude "there was no such land in the parish". Nearly a year after the war, in July 1919, there was another special

meeting to discuss a housing scheme connected with the return to normal life.

At least peace was duly celebrated. The Local Government Board offered parish councils authority for expenditure out of the rates of "a reasonable sum for the celebration of peace". The Council decided - sagaciously, as it turned out - not to avail themselves of this offer, but that "the necessary sum should be raised by voluntary subscription from the whole Parish". The Peace Celebration Tea was duly held on 19th July, 1919, and the accounts are happily recorded in full. Voluntary subscriptions raised £16.9s.8d which was mainly spent on cake (£5.9s.7d), bread, butter, sugar and a ham (£1.11s.4d). There seem to have been many cakes, but no ale. There was, however, a band (£5), and the sum of 4/6d for labour (coppers). The real generosity of the villagers was revealed by the gifts in kind, which are worth listing in full:

Mr Wakefield -	1/2 sheep	Mrs Hearn -	1 lb tea
Mr Whitfield -	"	Miss Rose -	1/2 lb tea
Mr Reading -	salt beef	Miss Reading -	"
Mr Akerman -	Ham	Mr Gearing -	2 lbs sugar
Mrs Russell -	Roast	Mrs Russell -	"
Miss Akerman -	"	Mr Willis -	salad
& Mrs Pitkin -	Butter	Miss Reading-Milk	"

A collection on the ground for soldiers raised £3.12s.6d. There was a balance of £7.5s.6d on the expenses, and further contributions of £13.9s.6d were raised for the soldiers, leaving a total of £21.9s.6d with which "60 leather cases with names and addresses" were purchased. One hopes very much that 60 soldiers found these useful.

BETWEEN THE WARS 1921-1939

Much of the business of the Council for the first decade after the Great War was taken up with the provision of housing. In September, 1924 the RDC wrote to it asking if it needed any new houses for rent, and if so, what kind of houses, and at what rent. The Council responded by asking for eight "agricultural labourer" type of houses, at a rent of 5/- per week. Four houses were provisionally allocated to Langford, and the Council asked to find a suitable site and contact the landowner. It identified three sites, but two of the landowners refused to sell. The Commissioners, however, must eventually have entered into negotiations with the Council as a letter from Cluttons dated April 1926 provisionally agreed to the sale of two roods in the north-east corner of the smallholdings site. There are no further references in the

minutes to this being agreed, nor to any houses actually being erected, but they were, of course, Nos 1-4 Leys View. These houses may seem to have taken an unconscionable time a-building but it does not compare too badly with the five years it has taken the present Parish Council to secure the eight affordable houses on the adjacent site of Hooks Close, the delays once again being chiefly concerned with finding, and agreeing, a suitable site. However, with Hooks Close, none of the delay can be fairly blamed on the Parish Council, and it seems likely that the same was true of the Council in the twenties.

The whole performance was repeated in 1928, when the Parish Council asked for four more houses suitable for agricultural labourers or their like on the smallholdings site. This time the smallholders themselves objected to having to relinquish their land, and nothing seems to have happened for another three years when the RDC, possibly getting a little impatient, or perhaps feeling a little guilty, again asked if any more houses were required in Langford as many other parishes were anxious to get new houses themselves. The Council reiterated the need for four houses, and the RDC and the Council finally, in March 1931, agreed with the Ecclesiastical Commissioners to the purchase of another two roods on the smallholdings site. There is no further reference to them in the minute book, but they must have been Nos 5-8 Leys View. The total time taken to obtain the eight houses requested by the Parish Council in 1924 was therefore eight years. Speed has never been the essence of local government at any level!

Apart from securing the eight houses, little of note occupied the Council in the inter-war years. One issue upon which the councillors held strong views was a proposal from the Postmaster at Cirencester in 1929 to abandon the Saturday afternoon delivery, in order, as he explained, to allow the postman Saturday afternoon off. The Council objected strongly. The Post Office wavered, and suggested that letters might be collected from the village post office on Saturday afternoons. The Council reluctantly accepted this compromise, but despatched a stuffy letter to the Post Master at Cirencester which is worth quoting in full:

"As we are alone in our objection, we are willing to withdraw our opposition. We do not, however, consider that a Public Service should be interrupted in order that a half holiday might be given - others should be employed to fulfill their duties."

The Post Office capitulated; the Parish Council wrote expressing its pleasure. The idea of responsible public service is not an invention of the late twentieth century.

During this period the Council found itself from time to time taking up various issues with the Ecclesiastical Commissioners through their agents Cluttons. Relations between Cluttons and the Council could hardly be described as warm, but rather as conducted with cool courtesy on both sides. For instance, in 1925 when a smallholder was unable to pay his rent because of illness (he was probably a day labourer who only got paid for the days he actually worked), the Council requested Cluttons to waive. After a somewhat frosty exchange Cluttons agreed, but pointed out that this concession was "without prejudice" and that the rents were so low, compared with ordinary agricultural rents, that it ought not to be beyond the Council's power to put by a small sum to cover contingencies of this sort. The following year the gate into the smallholdings needed to be replaced and the Council requested Cluttons, as agents for the landlords, to provide a new one. Cluttons, masters of frosty letters, wrote back that this was the sole responsibility of the tenants. As the tenants (i.e. the Parish Council) "lacked the necessary resources" the chairman, Mr Reading, himself a tenant of the Commission, was asked to use his good offices and secure the necessary help from Cluttons. These informal negotiations worked; Cluttons agreed to pay for the materials, but not for the labour. This also was "without prejudice". In 1934-35 there was a politely conducted wrangle with Cluttons over the increased water rent demanded for supplying the new houses at Leys View. Cluttons prevailed; the Council decided not to extend the supply for the present. Presumably the dwellers of Leys View had to walk to the nearest standpipe, by the Bell Inn, to obtain water.

Road maintenance, footpath and footway problems continued to appear occasionally in the minutes. The path to the station was a frequent cause for complaint, as was the surface drainage by Lower Farm. The White Bridge over the brook leading to Barley Hill was felt to be in a dangerous condition, various stiles and footbridges were broken, obstructed, or, in the case of a bridge, "dug out and no longer there". In 1934 Mr Morley, upon resigning from the Council, handed over to it maps and schedules of footpaths he had compiled in consequence of the passing of the Rights of Way Act of 1932. Mr Fisher wanted a footway to the new school. He also wanted a speed limit through the village. We still do. The question of refuse collection involved leisurely negotiations with the RDC, and a scheme was finally agreed for a monthly collection of "tins, crockery, glass and culinary utensils". The RDC put this out to tender, Mr A. Willis's tender for £8 p.a. being accepted. Three years later it became clear that no adequate arrangements were in place for Mr Willis to get rid of all this refuse.

The Council found it had no powers to provide any funds for the purpose, so was able to slide the problem back to the RDC, who presumably found a disposal site. Those villagers of the present day who are constantly amazed at the number of pieces of broken glass and china, and odd bits of metal surfacing in their gardens, seldom of any archaeological value, may find here the explanation. Many a bit of "kitchen utensil", thrown out before 1935, may still lie beneath the vegetables and flowers, cast there before the advent of Mr Willis.

THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The first World War passed more or less without mention in the minute book. It was not possible to repeat this in the second World War. Letters from the Home Office about ARP, the Ministry of Agriculture & Food, the War Agricultural Committee, the Small Pigkeepers Council (small pigs or small people, one wonders?), appeals for Aid to China, Wings for Victory, Salute the Soldier Week, slipped through the letterboxes of either Chairman or Clerk. The Council's response was to dispose of such correspondence as quickly as possible. An Aid to China flag day was speedily handed over to the W.I.; money-raising campaigns were at once delegated to the indomitable Mrs Wansborough, rightly, as her skills at extracting money for good causes from every single parishioner were phenomenal, remembered throughout the village to this day, along with the great pleasure her visits brought.

The Parish Council duly answered such queries as it could; no, there were no uncultivated allotments; yes, Miss Rendell would continue to collect waste paper for salvage. There is no evidence that any reply ever went to the small pigkeepers, perhaps because all the pigkeepers in the parish were large people breeding large pigs, but we do not in fact know what this particular communication was about. Perhaps a notice was posted low down on the post office door for small pigkeepers to read in passing.

It is not conceivable that Langford, to use the contemporary phrase, "didn't know there was a war on". The village took in evacuees, and manned the Home Guard. Everyone was digging for victory, brewing up pig swill, collecting salvage, urging the hens to lay. The simple fact is that these activities were not the responsibility of the Parish Council, but sprang out of the energy and determination of the whole community to do its bit. Everybody, including the councillors, was busy with war work, either voluntary or job-related, and the parishioners made their own choices as to where to direct their efforts. The need for fire

watchers illustrates the point. Mr Fisher, Vicar and Councillor, raised the matter. The immediate response was "if you are worried, you do something about it. Call a Parish meeting". Alas, he called two, receiving negligible support. The Council agreed that "as a Council, the matter is now out of our hands, and that we could do no more in the matter".

So the Parish councillors, busy though they were, carried on with their quarterly meetings and stuck firmly to their task of looking after the interests of the parish. War or no war there were financial transactions to be handled with scrupulous care, allotment and smallholding rents to be collected on time, land to be supervised and re-allocated where necessary. A report went to the RDC in 1943 about the flooding of the road by Lower Farm, (surely we have heard of this before?). The next year the "extremely bad condition" of the road to the station was reported to both the RDC and the County Council. In the same year problems about stiles on the path to Broadwell Bridge were reported to the RDC. Two required repair; the third had disappeared. An earlier request to the County Council to erect signposts to Langford where Langley Lane leaves the Clanfield-Faringdon road, and at the turning to Grafton, was repeated. The County Council at last agreed to erect them in November, 1939. Did it actually get them in position just in time to remove them, along with all other signposts, in 1940? The minutes do not tell us.

Towards the end of the war rumours began to reach the local villages that the RDC was planning substantial building schemes. Mr Print reported that "he had been given to understand" that 22 new houses were included in the post-war building scheme for the District. Filkins Parish Council had been given the same understanding, and sent in a "lengthy memorandum" inviting Langford Parish Council to support its protest at the proposed concentration of new housing at Langford. Not surprisingly the Langford Parish Council, which had warmly welcomed the prospect of so many new houses, declined the invitation.

It was perhaps the impact of the war that stirred up a popular demand, headed by the W.I, for a telephone kiosk to be installed in the village. The postmaster at Gloucester was asked early in 1944 to install one "as it was urgently required". He wrote back simply saying that he was unable to erect any kiosks during the war. What with the flooding of the road by Lower Farm, the collapsing stiles, the appalling state of the footways and the prospect of a very large housing development, there was going to be enough work for the Parish Council once victory came.

There was one problem that deeply concerned the Parish Council, and on which it spent much time and energy while France fell and the English beaches were hastily swathed in barbed wire. This was the question of the guardianship of the Parish Handbells. This had first appeared in the minutes of December 1936, and it soon appeared that they were said to be held "in trust" by Mr Winfield. The Council was not satisfied with this; it felt they ought to be held by the Vicar and Churchwardens "in trust for the parish". Mr Winfield, however, continued to guard them and the Council seemed to accept that they were in safe hands until in September 1940 the situation changed dramatically. Mr Winfield had left the parish! Had the handbells also left the parish? Mr Winfield having moved no further than Broadwell it was possible to reopen negotiations. He disclosed that he had never removed the handbells, but had entrusted them to Mr Everitt, "who would certainly not give them up". It was decided that the Chairman and the Clerk should confront Mr Everitt - by this time the Battle of Britain was being fought over our English countryside - and demand that he hand them over. Mr Everitt refused. The Council then directed the Clerk to write to Mr Adams, senior handbell ringer, inviting him and his fellow ringers to a meeting with the Council. The meeting was crowned with success. A settlement was reached; Mr Leslie Moreing of Church Lane would hold the bells. Further custodians, who must be resident in the parish, would be selected by the ringers themselves. The Clerk was instructed to draw up a simple agreement, which all parties would sign, and this agreement was duly confirmed at the Annual Parish Meeting in 1941. The handbells were safe within the parish, and all over the towns and cities of England the blitz was mercifully drawing to a close. One hopes that, when victory finally came, the handbells were rung in celebration.

There is, as it happens, no indication at all in the minutes that anyone had noticed that the war had come to an end. The Council met in April, six weeks before VE Day, and next on August 21, a couple of days after VJ Day. Neither event was mentioned. The two agenda items for the August meeting were the efforts of Filkins Parish Council to get its hands on some of the 22 new houses said to be proposed for Langford, and the continuing effort to persuade the postmaster at Gloucester to provide a telephone kiosk. At the next meeting, in October, the main item for discussion was the state of the roads in the parish, and in particular the road outside Lower Farm. So the years of peace began, the Parish Council quietly continuing to pursue Langford interests: housing, roads, and the management of the smallholdings. It would be unfair, however, to omit the one passing reference to the coming of

peace. In April 1946 there is a brief minute: "Victory Celebrations: the question of the Victory Celebrations on June 8th was discussed and it was thought advisable to leave it to the village to arrange them". Inquiries were made at the tea party held to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of VE Day on 8th June, 1995. Although most of those present had been living in Langford in June 50 years ago no-one had any clear recollection of any celebration of any kind.

THE RETURN OF PEACE 1945-1955.

Some new issues soon emerged to join what one might term "the old favourites", that is, allotments, roads, and the regularity with which lorries ran into the fence surrounding the Memorial. The safety and preservation of the War Memorial indeed became one of the major preoccupations of the Council for some years to come.

The War Memorial

There is no record in the minutes covering the erection of the War Memorial after the first world war. Consequently one of the immediate problems facing the community was that no-one seemed to know whose responsibility it was to look after it. The Council took the sensible step of proposing to the Annual Parish Meeting of 1947 that the care of the Memorial should now be vested in the Parish Council. This was agreed, and members of the Council were relieved. Mercifully they did not foresee all the problems lurking in wait for them. The Annual Parish Meeting had not only invested responsibility in the Council but had received favourably a suggestion that the present "fence" - which consisted of chains made by Mr Print in his forge, hung between stone or concrete posts - should be replaced by a low stone wall. The Parish Meeting also agreed that the Names of the fallen in the recent war should be added at the same time.

The Parish Council acted forthwith to implement these recommendations. At its next meeting in June 1947 an estimate was accepted from Messrs Baker & Son of Highworth for £36.15s.0d to provide a protective wall. It was decided to ask for an additional estimate for adding the Names. The War Memorial then disappeared from the minutes until the Annual Parish Meeting of 1948, when there were questions as to when the work would actually be done. The Clerk explained that "in spite of repeated promises" the work had not yet been put in hand, but that Messrs Baker now hoped to complete in "two or three weeks". The three weeks had just passed when the Council next

met, with no firm date yet available, merely a letter from Messrs Baker suggesting the work be put in the hands of another builder. The Council, perhaps demoralised by the difficulty of achieving what had once seemed such a simple scheme, "decided to leave the matter in abeyance". It was left in abeyance for five months, and finally, at its last meeting in 1948 it was decided to ask Messrs Sparkes to undertake the work of building the wall. At its next meeting (the saga is now continuing into 1949), it was agreed to ask Messrs Sparkes to get the Names affixed.

It appears that the new wall, at least, was finally built, because at the Annual Parish Meeting of 1949 a petition was presented requesting that the War Memorial be placed upon the agenda. A lengthy discussion followed, in which it emerged that the new wall was raising as many problems as it was intended to solve. The Parish Meeting approved a resolution that the top stones should be removed and the wall levelled. What is clear is that, high wall or low wall, the Names were still not affixed. At the Council meeting of May 1949 it was agreed to chivy Messrs Sparkes. The chivying was not immediately successful and further efforts were proposed at the meeting in November, 1949. Although nothing is recorded, it would seem that the matter dragged on into 1950, five years after the end of the war. Messrs Sparkes had apparently left the field, and at its first meeting of the year a letter was read from Messrs Bartlett & Sons stating that the Names would be placed on the War Memorial "at an early date".

The Annual Parish Meeting of 1950 was held on the same evening as the Council meeting, and it was apparent that discontent over the Council's handling of the Memorial was growing. Once again there was a proposal to lower the wall. This was passed, though only after a more threatening amendment to set up a trust to act as "Custodians of the War Memorial" had been defeated. It does at least appear that (although the fact is not recorded, nor is there evidence of any payment for the work) Messrs Bartlett & Son had been as good as their word and the Names had at last been affixed. But the wall was still too high for the parishioners' liking, and they were annoyed at the failure of the Parish Council to lower it, for at its next meeting, in May, the Clerk was instructed to make inquiries as to the power of the Parish Meeting to veto Council's decision. The result - if any - of these inquiries is not recorded. But the matter of the War Memorial was not quite finished. It came up again at the meeting of February 1953, when Mr Print generously offered to supply an iron gate, if voluntary labour was available to install it. This offer was put to the Annual Parish Meeting

in March, and accepted with pleasure, especially when it was learnt that Mr Stacey had offered to install it. Its positioning was left to Mr Print "with the co-operation of Mr Pember". The War Memorial does not re-appear in the minutes until 1970 when once again the suitability of the surrounding wall came into question. In 1953 the Council must have felt considerably relieved at the signing of peace over the War Memorial as it now had many other weighty matters on the agenda, the chief of which was public housing.

Housing

This topic, primarily the concern of the Rural District Council, none the less caused a good deal of anxiety to the Parish Council in the immediate post-war years. There had been talk, already referred to, of at least 22 new houses, which had very much upset Filkins, but delighted Langford. Rumours of even more ambitious schemes, suggesting a grand New Village, with a road across the Closes to the railway station, had naturally engendered much speculation in the parish. However in September 1947 it transpired that only five houses were actually to be built at present. These were nearing completion in August of 1951, causing the Council, six months later, to request a further four bungalows, which seem to have been set in hand fairly quickly, as they were nearing completion in 1955. So in the eight years from 1947 to 1955 nine houses had been built. But who were to be the lucky tenants? It was here that trouble began. The Parish Council clearly thought that it should make recommendations to the District Council and that the latter should accept them as a matter of course. The RDC clearly thought otherwise. In March 1955 the Council expressed great dissatisfaction with the allocations "against the Council's views and recommendation". The Annual Parish Meeting endorsed this dissatisfaction in robust language, and the Council decided to approach the local MP. There is no indication that the RDC was swayed by these rumblings of discontent. Indeed, it appears positively to have sought trouble, by refusing to allow an OAP widow with a council house at Leys View to exchange it for a smaller, and therefore cheaper house, presumably at the fast-developing Elms. Indeed, the RDC was alleged to have served an eviction notice on her, which the Council described as "a disgusting act". It is not at all clear why this drastic action was even contemplated, as the Council alleged that she paid her rent regularly and kept her house in spotless condition. The whole story seems so strange that one has to conclude that a good many vital facts never found a place on the Council minutes. One simple fact is clear: the Elms were indeed beginning to take shape,

but what should have caused general satisfaction in the village had instead kindled a high degree of bitterness between the provider of the houses, the Rural District Council, and the Parish Council, who had hoped to see all the new houses occupied "by its own people".

THE POST-WAR YEARS 1955-1972

The first three decades of peace saw the Council handling some very significant issues apart from housing. Its main preoccupation was the growing threat of the railway closure, subsequent problems over bus services, and, basic to this, the deplorable state of the most important access to the village, the Filkins road. The Council, still only meeting quarterly, had plenty to keep it occupied, for alongside these potentially explosive issues were the perennial questions that had occupied the Council for at least half a century: road maintenance and drainage, management of the smallholdings, footpaths, signposts, and the need for a play area for the smaller children. In our contemporary life, dominated by the telephone, the computer, the photocopier, and the fax, we are struck by the leisureliness with which business was transacted in those not-so-far-off days, the fifties and sixties. The long-running story of the Filkins road illustrates this. A strong complaint was made to the County Surveyor in 1958 about the dangerously deep drainage gulleys that were a hazard to vehicles having to pull onto the verge to avoid oncoming traffic, which, it was pointed out, had much increased of late. There appears to have been no response from the Highway Authority, so at its next meeting, in February 1959, it was proposed that "a strong letter" be sent. Eight months later yet another complaint was necessary, and it was agreed that a member of the County Council Highways committee should be invited to meet a member of the Council to discuss the matter. It would appear that little good came of this, for the problem of gulleys and overgrown hedges still existed when, three years later, it was subsumed into the urgent need to prepare the Filkins road for a bus service, in view of the looming threat of railway closure.

Trains and buses

The threat to the train service was first hinted at in the minutes of October 1958, in the form of a protest to the British Transport Commission about the removal of the two morning trains to Oxford, which was justifiably suspected to be a move to prove that the train service was neither necessary nor economic. The Council, over the next four years, did all in its power to save its train service or, failing that,

to secure an adequate bus service. It continued to press the Highway Authority to widen and straighten the Filkins road, but had a hard fight even to get what it regarded as a first-aid measure, lay-bys. These were put in place in the Spring of 1961, when the Highway Authority agreed that the road must in due course be widened, when, in the time-honoured phrase, "funding was available". Meantime the Council could do little more than look on, with growing despair, as the rail closure came closer and closer, and negotiations to get a bus service into the village made no progress at all. In February 1962 the local press summed up the dilemma: it reported that the railway was definitely to close, but that there would be no bus service into Langford because the Filkins road was too narrow,

The Parish Council, with the strong support of all the residents, had done its best. It had begun its real campaign against the rail closure at the Annual Parish Meeting of 1961. Over 40 parishioners had attended, and expressed "disapproval in no uncertain manner" of the proposed closure. It was resolved that bus services should not be discussed at present, "the one idea being to do their utmost to keep the railway open". It was decided to send the strongest protest possible to the Transport Consultative Committee. The minute is worth quoting in full: "the Railway Authorities had done everything in their power to see that the line did not pay by not giving a decent service in the morning to Oxford for Hospital and Patients and Business appointments also that with a Diesel service a quicker and better service could be run more economically, also that reduction in staff and cutting out some of the signal boxes could help to make the line pay". A copy of this protest was sent to the local MP, Neil Martin, who was sympathetic. A public meeting in the village voted to support ASLEF, and, as the issue reached its climax four councillors and two other villagers were nominated to attend the Public Hearing.

It was all in vain. How could a council of a parish comprising some 270 souls prevail against the mighty British Transport Commission? The line was closed in 1962.

The Filkins road had its "first-aid" lay-bys but only vague undertakings from the County Surveyor about future widening. The Highways committee of the County Council actually decided to oppose any move by the East Midlands Traffic Commissioner to license a bus service into Langford, but was persuaded by the Surveyor to reverse this decision, which would have left Langford quite cut off from the world of shops, offices, and hospitals. It was reported at the Council meeting in May

1962 that both the County and the Rural District Councils were now prepared to support a bus service into Langford. The village was saved from total isolation, though there were still minor crises, such as a proposal, in September 1963, to withdraw the bus service. The Council described this as "a despicable proposal" and agreed that "a letter of protest be put together in the strongest possible terms opposing it". This seems to have done the trick. The service was not withdrawn, but various cuts, vigorously opposed, were proposed, presumably by the operators, to the Traffic Commissioners. The bus timetable continued as a regular agenda item for some years to come.

The widening of the Filkins road was finally undertaken in 1966.

Water

One more important development for the village must be recorded: the arrival of a public piped water supply which would be available for every household in the village who opted to join. This was proposed by the RDC and discussed at the Annual Parish Meeting in April 1953 and again in 1954 and finally installed in 1956. There seem to have been few difficulties or problems and a measure that was to bring tremendous benefits to the village generated virtually no discussion in the Council who, in its very first year of existence, had laboured so doughtily to get the standpipes that brought "Commissioners' water" within reasonable reach of every dwelling. Now the standpipes were turned off, sinks, toilets and baths installed in the majority of houses, and life for many villagers thereby transformed. For many years now the people of Langford have taken a water supply right into their homes for granted, but it should never be forgotten that when that first Parish Council met a hundred years ago their parishioners relied on wells, buckets and jugs, even water straight from Broadwell Brook.

These, then, were the main concerns of the Council in these first two decades of peace: the loss of the railway, the long struggle to get the Filkins road in a fit state to cater for a proper bus service and the comparatively easy transition to a public water supply. These were matters vital to the parish as a whole but, important though they were, the Council did not allow them to absorb all its energies. Still meeting only quarterly, it found time to deal with more routine matters, many of which had been appearing regularly in the minutes for half a century or more. The state of the roads and footways; the flooding down by Lower Farm and outside Leys View; the need for more street lighting, or for re-positioned lighting, or for repairs to lights that had not

worked for weeks or months; broken stiles on rights of way, maintenance of the War Memorial, management of the smallholdings; all these are familiar items. One newcomer is the concern voiced by a number of parents about the school bus to Burford. Did it have to leave the village so early? Who was responsible for children decanted from the bus before the school opened? What could be done about unruly behaviour on the bus? What indeed? The Clerk was from time to time instructed to write on the subject to the Head Teacher, or even the County Director of Education, without, it seems, expecting much in return. Nowadays these concerns would be handled by the School Governors, but in those days the Parish Council quietly accepted this rather intractable burden. The bus timetable was adjusted a little; the behaviour of the children on the school bus almost certainly did not change. A Parish Council cannot change its young parishioners into little angels; nor, indeed, can anyone else.

Another newcomer to the minute book was the work connected with the production of the first Definitive Map of the rights of way in Oxfordshire, following the passing of the National Parks & Access to the Countryside Act of 1949 which imposed on all County Councils the duty to map every path in their county which could be reasonably deemed to be a public highway. All parish councils and parish meetings were consulted, and different councils and meetings took their responsibilities in varying ways and with varying thoroughness. The Langford Parish Council was fortunate: the task was undertaken by Mr Eden and performed with exemplary efficiency. His work was duly acknowledged at the Annual Parish Meeting of 1952.

TIMES CHANGE 1972-1985

The Local Government Act of 1972, taking full effect from 1974, brought about a profoundly important change in the way parish councils could operate. Its great importance to parish councils was that it gave them a great deal of financial independence, which, of course, led to possibilities undreamt of in the past. This must be explained as briefly as possible before considering the achievements of the Parish Council in the last twenty years, 1975-1995. It is therefore necessary to summarise the various Acts of Parliament dealing with parish councils during the last hundred years.

The Local Government Act 1874

This is the great Act which revolutionised local government by

abolishing the old vestries and by establishing Rural District Councils and Parish Councils, the act whose centenary is being celebrated by parish councils throughout England. The legislators of the day were understandably wary of giving too much financial freedom to these new, totally inexperienced bodies, and therefore set parish councils a limit to the rate at which they could precept as 6d in the £. Furthermore, if a parish council wished to precept for more than a 3d rate it required the consent of the Parish Meeting. All parish councils were to be subject to the District Auditor, and all electors were given the right of access to parish council books and accounts.

This system continued right through to 1972, although in 1929 the rate limit was raised from 3d to 4d (6d to 8d with the consent of the parish meeting). There was an added constraint during World War II, a limit on what might be spent on the upkeep of war memorials. It is clear from an item in the minutes of 1961 that the rule was that 1/3rd of a penny rate might be spent on the War Memorial, that the product of a penny rate in Langford in that year was £7.7s.3d, and that therefore there was a limit on the Council's expenditure on the War Memorial of £2.9s.1d. Ten years later, in 1971, the product of the Langford penny rate had risen to £28.11s.5d, the result of the revaluation of property carried out in 1963 - the first revaluation since 1939. Inflation, however, ensured that the Council was in fact worse, rather than better, off.

As one reads through the minute books of the Council it becomes clear that, entirely dependent as it was on its precept for income, and having no assets of its own, the Council had no money whatsoever to play with. Older residents, who attended either Council meetings or Parish Meetings, will recall the gloomy response to any suggestion involving extra expenditure; "the ratepayers would never stand for it". The Clerk's annual ordeal of The Audit was an ordeal indeed. A good example of the restraint imposed on Council activities is the story of an attempt to create a children's playground. The need for one was often brought up at Annual Parish Meetings, but the Council was forced to resist pressure on the grounds that it could not be paid for unless voluntary funds were forthcoming. An attempt to set up a committee which would raise funds had met with no success. Nevertheless, the Council continued to explore possibilities, and in 1973 was able to negotiate the release of land at the Elms owned by the RDC for a playground, on the understanding that if the designated plot was later required for housing a playground would be incorporated in the scheme. Members of the Council rallied round to get the playground under way, one offering to donate the fencing wire, another the necessary posts. Volunteers were

sought to level the ground and to make a sandpit. But there the effort fizzled out. There was no money for equipment, for regular mowing, or for any form of supervision, no local authority grants available, and the plot gradually deteriorated into a bit of waste ground, used by local residents in the way that waste ground generally is. It was only in 1992, with a Council released from these dire financial restraints, that a fully-equipped playground was established on the very same site. It is a similar story over the problem of enclosing the War Memorial. It was only when the W.I. offered to pay 9/10ths of the costs that it was possible to replace the old posts and chains with a wall. The Council must sometimes have felt, as problems with the wall developed relentlessly, that even so they had not found the perfect solution.

So how did this financial freedom come about? It was the result of the Local Government Act 1972 that swept away the Rural District Councils, replacing them with the present District Councils, and removed from parish councils the general restriction on the rate for which they could precept and the necessity to consult the Parish Meeting for any rate rise above 4d in the £. The current position is that the Parish Council draws up an annual estimate of its expenditure for the following year and precepts the District Council for the required amount. The District Council has no power to refuse to meet the precept, and the only controlling factor in the financial powers of the Council is exercised by the District Auditor. By law the Parish Council has few duties, but many powers, which it may exercise or not as it sees fit. The District Auditor would certainly disallow any expenditure where he/she perceives that the Council was acting beyond its powers. Any elector, moreover, who believes, having examined the accounts and minutes, that such powers have been exceeded or abused, may object to the District Auditor who will hear his objection and adjudicate his case. The responsibility lies with the Parish Council to budget wisely and to undertake major expenditure only when it is sure that the objective is something desired by the electors and that the majority of parishioners are happy with it. The amount spent on the parish by the Council is calculated per head of the householders and added to their Council Tax. It is under these arrangements that the Langford Parish Council has operated in the last twenty years.

It took a long time before any change was discernible, or before the new financial freedom altered the way in which the Council regarded its responsibilities. It is not in the least surprising that it took time for the Council to develop what one might call a more adventurous

attitude to parish well-being. For one thing, the slumps of the late seventies and the first half of the eighties restrained initiative, especially in view of the steady erosion of local government independence by central government. The Parish Council, and its vital executive officer, the Clerk, were the same people who had operated for so long under the old system and both they and the new County and District Councils had to learn new ways and adopt new attitudes to deal with old and far too familiar problems. Village roads were still flooded after heavy rain; footways and kerb stones still fell into disrepair, footpaths and brideways were still frequently blocked and bus timetables changed, not always for the better. The Council could request, send reminders, urge District or County Councils to take some notice of their reports - and as old problems they still furnished the main concerns of the Council, as they had done for the last seventy-five years - but a Parish Council could neither compel action nor do the work itself. County and District Councils, hit by inflation and recession, had little money to spend on surface water drainage or road improvements. Potholes could probably be filled, and drains flushed, but full improvement of, say, the Broughton Poggs road, was out of the question. Moreover, the Council itself did not have the confidence to initiate any plans that would involve much expenditure. This was not surprising, as Parish Councils were urged by the District Council in 1981 to keep the precept as low as possible in view of Government grant cuts, and in 1984 Government guidelines imposed a precept increase limit of 3% except in special cases. It is therefore understandable that the Council minutes reveal that the 1974 Act had little impact on parish affairs for the next ten years.

Nevertheless, the precept rose steadily, as inflation increased, and a look at the annual estimates is instructive. In 1975 the Chairman reported to the Annual Parish Meeting that 1974 had been "a very quiet year". The precept for 1975-76 was very low, just the product of a penny rate, broken down into £145 to General Account, which included the Clerk's salary of £58, and £90 for lighting. Expenditure from the General account was minimal. Chains were purchased for the War Memorial and a tiny sum provided to pay for materials for a volunteer to put up temporary signs where rights of way left the metalled road. In 1976-77 the Council decided it really must tackle the deplorable state of the play area. Tentative, and not very successful, efforts were taken to get it cleared and cut by voluntary effort, and Mr Wood of the Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils kindly attended a Council meeting to explain how it might be possible to obtain a grant for fencing. He made it clear that the first, and vital, step was to obtain a

five-year tenancy agreement from the District Council, and the chairman set about negotiating this, while the Council courageously decided to precept an extra £200 for fencing. But owing to the slow progress of the negotiations an application for grant aid was unsuccessful, having missed the deadline. The Council was understandably aggrieved, as the delay had been entirely on the part of the District Council. Negotiations, however, continued, and the five-year tenure was finally granted in July 1977, with "certain reservations" which were not divulged. At last, in December 1977 the District Council gave the go-ahead for fencing, just in time for the 1977-78 estimates. These estimates were considerably higher than in 1976-77, illustrating the severe effect of inflation. The precept was for £700, which included £400 for fencing, £50 for tree planting, £120 for lighting. It was expected that 39% of the cost of the fencing would be recovered in grants, in the event, the Council was left with a net liability for £165.

The Council therefore turned its attention to what was to go within the fence. Equipment was required, but what would be appropriate? The public was to be consulted at the next annual Parish Meeting in 1979 but unfortunately, as the minutes reported, "there was no response from the public on what they would like in a playground". The Council therefore decided "to start off with the ordinary things, sandpit etc." No professional advice was sought and preliminary attempts to create the sandpit came to nothing.

The estimate for 1980-81 remained modest at £300 - so modest, in fact, that when the time came for signing the precept it was pointed out that it might well be not quite enough to pay the lighting account, and it was decided to increase the precept by £10. Alas, the Council did not get this extra £10 because it had not been included in the estimates, resulting in a rather disgruntled minute: "the District Council appeared to pay more emphasis on the Estimate rather than the actual Precept signed". Precisely so. The District Council was following the procedure laid down in the 1972 Act and it was the Parish Council that was at fault.

At the 1980 Annual Parish Meeting the chairman reported "slow progress with the playground through lack of labour" (that is, voluntary labour), but in August a minute reported that the Council was "hoping for news of the sand for the pit by the next meeting". None came. The

precept for 1981-82 again remained modest, at £360, but interestingly the Audit revealed that the Council had been advised to put £400 into an investment account, indicating that the Council savings were higher than all but one of its annual precepts so far. It is not clear where these savings came from.

The same restraint over finances continued. The precept for 1982-83 was £450, for 1983-84 £550, for 1984-85 £690. This is yet another illustration of the effects of the growth of inflation, though there was some additional expenditure. A sum of £220 p.a. was set aside for maintenance of the churchyard, and it was agreed to replace the battered cornerstones of the War Memorial. After leisurely negotiations it was agreed that these could be obtained for a sum of £290, with the expectation that a 28% grant could be recovered, but the negotiations proved so leisurely that an exasperated Council finally asked one of its own members to do the job. He obliged, for £87.

THE CENTENARY APPROACHES 1985-1995

By 1985 the Council seemed somehow reinvigorated, and much more confident, able to recognise that, with its new financial freedom, it could play an increasingly pro-active role, not merely protecting, but positively enhancing, the welfare of the parish. Its main preoccupations remained, but were tackled with growing determination: highway matters, such as drainage, potholes and parking, still dominated agendas, but the Council was not prepared to put up with the endless difficulties and delays so often encountered in the past. At the same time the Council's attention was becoming focussed on new projects, possibly demanding considerable resources from the parishioners themselves, through their share of the precept. The first example of this new attitude was the decision to build a bus shelter, so long desired by local people, but in the past always dismissed on the grounds that there were no funds available. Now, at the Annual Parish Meeting of 1987 it was reported that plans had been passed, an awkward problem over the siting of the shelter solved, a builder contracted and a sum of £1300 included in the precept. In August it became clear that the builder was not really prepared to get on with the job, so his contract was cancelled and an estimate of £1700 from Messrs R & T Stacey accepted. This was the first major evidence of the new spirit of enterprise, and a tribute to the retiring Clerk, Mr R. Lafford, who had served the Council so faithfully for 34 years, seeing it through good days and bad, known and respected by all. At his final Council meeting, in September 1988, he was presented with an engraved silver salver in gratitude for his great contribution to the

smooth running of the Council over so many years.

He was succeeded by Stephen Kemp, someone well fitted to administer an enterprising Council and to make sure that the Council's decisions were carried out without unnecessary delays. The next proposal of the Council was for a proper parish notice board and steps were immediately taken to consider designs and get estimates. A fine triple-panelled board was chosen and, with the kind permission of the Post Mistress, Miss Beckinsale, erected on the post office wall close to the letter box. It would be difficult to find a better parish notice board anywhere in West Oxfordshire, and the village puts it to full use. It was made by Swindon Woodworking Company of Faringdon at a cost of £358.56

The Council, with its bus shelter built, and its noticeboard in place looked around to see what else would be a desirable addition to the amenities of the village, and, at the end of the year decided that the next venture should be village signs. Four signs at £57 each were accordingly ordered from the Royal Label Factory at Chipping Norton. The following year Southern Electricity suggested that it might be desirable, and more economical, to substitute modern Son 70 watt lamps for the variety of old tungsten 100 watt lamps which were not only liable to frequent failure but in any case gave rather a poor light. This suggestion was eagerly taken up, and an experimental light fitted to the post opposite the church. The new light did not meet with unqualified approval, so the Clerk met Mr Franklin of Southern Electric to discuss further improvements, which were deemed satisfactory when put to the next Annual Parish Meeting, and accordingly a sum of £1245 was included in the next precept.

So by 1990 there was much visible evidence of Council activities, the bus shelter, the notice board, the village name signs and the new footway lighting. During the next few years several new lamp posts were installed, where need clearly arose, in the Filkins road, in Station Road between Church Lane and Leys View, and in the Broadwell road. But undoubtedly the most striking improvements during this period were the re-siting of the War Memorial and the creation of a well-equipped children's playground.

The War Memorial

Every Parish Council and its Clerk would be likely to pause before proposing any radical measure for the Parish War Memorial. The Langford Memorial had certainly provided many a headache for the Council over the years, and many a parishioner had been critical of the

Council's attempts to care for it. But the Council, with commendable courage, decided towards the end of 1988 to take a calm overview of all the problems it had encountered in the past. As it did so it became clear that every problem was connected with the exact siting of the Memorial. There it was, in the very centre of the large open area called Wellbank, which was also the junction for all the principal roads in the village. When the Memorial was erected this site was a most reasonable, indeed an obvious choice. There were very few motorcars driving through the centre of the village, and even fewer heavy lorries. Wellbank was very much the centre of the village, and almost everyone who lived in Langford was likely to walk through it from time to time. But alas, during the last sixty years all this had changed. Traffic had increased year by year, so that now there was a daily flow of cars and lorries coming in from the Lechlade road and having to negotiate the awkward turnings by the Memorial, either taking the left-hand bend by Dunford House to get into the Filkins road, or the right-hand turn to get to Faringdon. Visibility for both turnings was poor, and traffic travelled fast both from Filkins and Grafton, but most dangerously of all from the Lechlade road, with its almost blind curve into the area. The result was a steady increase in vehicles damaging the fence surrounding the Memorial. First, the pillars supporting the chains were not infrequently rammed; then, when the wall replaced the chains, that was damaged; finally pillars and chains were restored and, with increasing traffic, proved more vulnerable than ever. And it was not only the Memorial itself at risk. Vehicles found the junction perilous, and turning into the Street or the Filkins road nerve-racking. But most of all at risk were pedestrians, for there was no pavement on the south-west side by Dunford House, down which traffic sped from the Lechlade road, and only a very risky crossing from the footway on the north-eastern side. Many people had to use this dangerous bit of road to get to and from the bus shelter, the Village Hall, the Congregational Chapel and the Crown, and by now five new houses had been built in the Filkins road and their occupants needed a safe passage into the village to visit the shop or post office. The solution to all these problems suddenly presented itself to the Council: MOVE THE WAR MEMORIAL! Move it a few feet to the south-west and then realign the junction so that pedestrians had a safe, traffic-free footway to the south-west of the memorial and vehicles a straightforward T junction on the north-eastern side.

This was much easier said than done. Much consultation was required, with the Highway Authority, which fortunately welcomed the suggestion on grounds of safety; with the Vicar and the Royal British Legion, neither of whom had any objections; with adjacent

householders, who were agreeable, so long as the access to their properties, especially Dunford House, was not badly affected; and with the parish as a whole, who were by no means unanimously in favour, there being an understandable reaction from some that the Memorial was sacrosanct, and, if any changes were to be made, they should not involve anything so drastic as moving it. Great care therefore had to be taken to explain the scheme, and before the 1989 Annual Parish Meeting a plan was posted on the parish notice board. The Annual Parish Meeting in consequence supported the proposal by 12 votes to 2. There followed detailed discussions with the Highway Authority over the exact siting, division of work between the Authority and private contractors, estimated costs and so on. By 1990 the consultations were complete, and the proposal put to the Annual Parish Meeting for final approval. This time the voting was slightly less supportive, 10 in favour and 4 against. The main argument against was financial. If the Council had all this money to throw around what about creating something really useful, like a car park, or a renovated Village Hall? Those opposed to the move suggested tackling the safety factor by creating a traffic island, or simply requesting the necessary Give Way signs. At the Council meeting in October eight parishioners attended, were invited to voice their concerns, and reiterated their views as expressed at the earlier Annual Parish Meeting. The Council sensibly decided to complete the calculations of what it would cost, and, until that was known, postpone any question of whether to call a third parish meeting.

Accordingly the Council precepted for 1991-92 the sum of £3500 for moving the War Memorial and at its first meeting in 1991 was pleased to hear that the total cost would be £2092.61. As this was lower than anticipated and "well within the Council's available resources" it was decided that there was no need to call a parish meeting. The War Memorial scheme was, almost literally, off the ground. At the 1992 Annual Parish Meeting the Clerk was able to report the successful completion of the scheme.

The secret of this success was undoubtedly the full consultations, the very careful planning, the support of the Highway Authority, and the readiness to listen to professional advice on how best to carry out the delicate removal operation. The War Memorial is treasured by the village and there will probably be many more agenda items in the future dealing with its maintenance. Should the grass be replaced by shingle? Should rose bushes be planted in the grass, or annuals round the base of the cross? There has even been a suggestion that it might become a wild flower reserve, perhaps with a seat placed there. One thing

everyone seems to be agreed on: with a new light on the footway it is a safer journey for all who walk that way. One or two vehicles have left wheel marks on the grass, but better white-lining has hopefully solved that problem.

The Playground

The land for the playground had originally been obtained from the Rural District Council in 1973; the playground finally became a well-equipped, properly insured, thoroughly up-to-date play area in 1992. Why did it take so long? For the first few years it was undoubtedly lack of funds. Voluntary efforts were spasmodic and not particularly efficient, consultations with parents haphazard and ideas about what exactly was needed decidedly hazy. There did not seem to be any way of obtaining professional advice, or, if there was, the Council had not heard of it. But by the beginning of 1990 the new enthusiasm shown by the Council for getting on with jobs began to focus upon the somewhat derelict and depressing fenced area at the Elms, still referred to as "the playground". The Chairman and Clerk attended a meeting sponsored by the Oxford Playing Fields Association on the planning and management of play areas, and came back to the Council with useful information. It was decided that at least a start should be made, perhaps by simply installing a double swing, and that a phased plan could be adopted, after seeking professional advice. A sum of £1000 was included in the estimates and the Local Recreation Officer invited to make detailed recommendations on a suitable development plan. The Mothers and Toddlers Group associated with St Christopher's School was invited to suggest the most desirable equipment, and £1940 was included in the next estimates. By the end of 1991 Messrs R & T Stacey's quotation for a double swing, baby swing, ladder walk, log walk and balance bar was accepted, and a generous gift from the executors of the late Douglas Hook of Lower Farm was gratefully received and used to buy a seemly table and seat and a litter bin. A brass plate commemorating the long association of the Hook family with Langford was fixed to the seat. At the Annual Parish Meeting of 1992 the Clerk was able to report the completion of the first stage of the development of the playground. It took just two years to complete the project so hopefully embarked on 19 years earlier, and local children and their friends have expressed their approval by making full use of it.

Filling up the minute book

The bus shelter, notice board, village signs, children's playground and the new War Memorial junction were all Parish Council initiatives, making a dramatic impact on the village scene, but less obvious improvements were also being put in place, many inspired by private individuals or public bodies such as local authorities. In these instances the Council acted not as initiator so much as guardian of parish interests. The question of whether part of the village should become a Conservation Area is a case in point. The matter was first raised by a local member of CPRE (the Council for the Protection of Rural England), a voluntary organisation which had been pressing the District Council for some years to designate more conservation areas, and which had included detailed proposals for a Langford Conservation Area as part of its campaign. The local member was kindly invited to a Council meeting to explain CPRE's views in October 1986. In response to this the Council decided to call an open parish meeting in November "to give the Public a chance to say yes or no". This meeting was well-attended, and 28 people said "no", 26 "yes". As it was current District Council policy only to proceed with designation if it was recommended by the Parish Council - whose members a District Councillor quaintly described as "the fathers of the village" - and as the Parish Council felt bound to support the vote at the open meeting, and indeed, was divided in itself over the issue, the proposal was dropped.

Within four years the District Council's policy had changed; it was now urging the parish councils of its many beautiful villages to look favourably on the idea of designation. The Council studied the literature and correspondence sent to it by the Chief Planning Officer. However, in view of the earlier vote the Council decided, by a majority, not to call a further parish meeting. But pressure from the District Council and many local residents continued, and in March 1992 a special Council meeting was held to consider an invitation from the Chief Planning Officer to reconsider its attitude to the Conservation Area, enclosing a draft plan for its boundaries. The Council responded to this by arranging a special parish meeting to be announced at the Annual Parish Meeting, and by deciding to deliver an explanatory leaflet to every household. This special meeting was again well-attended, and revealed that the views expressed in 1986 had not changed to any extent, except that this time there was a two-vote majority in favour of designation. No record of this meeting appears in the minute book so the story ends here with the brief comment that the West Oxfordshire District Council formally designated Langford's Conservation Area in 1992.

The Conservation designation prompted many residents to suggest ways in which the appearance of the village might be enhanced. The inscription over the water pump by Middle House needed refurbishing, as the wording was barely decipherable. Passers-by could no longer read the warning "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again". The Council acted on this suggestion without delay. Another proposal was to repair the old wooden signposts by the War Memorial. The Council, having obtained the agreement of the Highway Authority, took over their repair and upkeep. They were found to be in such a poor state that it was decided to replace them with new wooden posts at a cost of £442.13. A request to get the old red telephone kiosk listed, to guard against its replacement by one of the new glass-walled kiosks, was agreed by the Council but unfortunately rejected by the Department of the Environment. However the kiosk was repainted early in 1995 so presumably its removal is not imminent.

There were other matters in which the Council was not the prime mover, but took an active interest. Chief of these was the provision of low-cost housing for local people. This was primarily the responsibility of the English Villages Housing Association and the District Council, but the Parish Council played a vital role in the long-drawn-out investigations and negotiations. It was the Council which took the lead in printing and distributing questionnaires in order to establish need. It entered with determination into the long and difficult search for a suitable site. It insisted on joining with the Housing Association to submit the planning application, so that it could help to achieve the design most likely to blend comfortably with the village scene. It was particularly concerned that the District Council should draw up a section 106 agreement with the Housing Trust (as the Association had now become) which would ensure that the houses would remain permanently available to local applicants and could not be sold on the open market. It took the best part of five years to secure the eight houses in Hooks Close, but the Council and Clerk, though fretting at what seemed at times quite unnecessary delays, did not begrudge the time spent on achieving these much-needed dwellings.

Another time consuming matter, this time primarily the responsibility of the School, the Diocese and the Village Hall Committee, to build a joint School/Community Hall at St Christopher's School, sadly came to naught after an optimistic and positive beginning. Here the Council's vital contribution was to give its blessing to the scheme and to prepare to give the necessary financial aid without which no grants could be obtained. Reserves were built up and the prospect of taking out a loan

carefully examined and found to be feasible, even though the necessary parish contribution had by 1994 risen to £9400 which "if the Council's reserve was committed and the balance was borrowed, would mean an increase of about £5 a year in Council tax for each household over a period of 15 years". It is sad that this scheme for a new hall eventually foundered. It would have been a great boon to school and community alike.

Highway improvements

One of the notable features of the minutes in the last ten years is the improved relations between the Highway Authority and the Parish Council. Although the Highway Authority was always short of resources, the Assistant Area Engineer once pointing out that the County's budget for road maintenance was less than that for the Isle of Wight, there are a number of references to visits from the Assistant Engineer to walk round the village with the Clerk and those councillors who were available, to discuss detailed problems and possible remedies. Excellent relations were soon established between the Clerk and the Assistant Area Engineer, which certainly proved their value when it came to re-aligning the Memorial junction. The Highway Authority has, over the last decade, made a determined effort to tackle the problems of surface water drainage that have worried the Council for the best part of a century. Torrential rain will probably still bring temporary road flooding but the old trouble spots, by Ansell's Farm, the junction of the Lechlade road and the Lane, the Street near the Church and, most persistent problem of all, the Station road from Lower Farm to the bottom of Leys View, are hopefully going to be long-remembered rather than constantly-recurring irritations in the future.

How has this marked improvement in relations with the Highway Authority been achieved? It did not, of course, happen overnight. Councillors had not forgotten the long-unanswered letters, the promises made but never kept, the same problems reported year after year. The improvement was probably very largely due to the use of that simple piece of modern technology, the telephone. Letters might remain unanswered, and reminders ignored, but getting a local government officer on the phone just to say, in friendly tones, "can I possibly have your answer before our parish council meeting next week?" worked wonders. When two people talk to each other they build up a personal relationship. There are a number of references in the minutes to the effectiveness of the telephone call. That most important activity, the site visit, became more and more frequent, not only from Highway

Engineers but Public Health Officers, Southern Electric technicians, Planning Officers. Getting people together by correspondence is a tedious business; by telephone it is relatively easy, and has the added great advantage that participants feel they know each other from the start. Other modern technology has helped the Clerk to manage the affairs of the Parish Council and to fulfill its decisions. Minutes and agendas can be typed, photocopied, and sent out in advance of meetings. Difficult financial matters can be worked over with a calculator. The photocopier, the word processor, even, at times, the fax have transformed the task of the Parish Clerk. Not always for the better, some might say, for the Council and Clerk are deluged with incoming paper in their turn. Even the new notice board is hardly big enough to display the endless stream of notices and posters so effortlessly produced by modern technology. That is perhaps why the simple telephone call is so important. With its help human voice calls to human voice, and perhaps as a result the potholes on the Broughton Pogs road get filled up at last.

A NEW ERA OPENS

So the story of the first hundred years in the history of Langford Parish Council comes to an end. In the Spring of 1995 the Parish Clerk, after seven years in office, suddenly and unexpectedly died, a week before the close of the Council year of 1994-95. A new Council and a new Clerk are beginning the work of the next century, so this is a fitting moment to bring this record to a close. As this study of a hundred years of Minutes reveals so clearly, the Langford Parish Council has conscientiously carried for a century the responsibility of looking after its parishioners. It has not sought fame nor recognition, and probably never expected much gratitude; it has always had one simple question in its mind: "what is best for all of us in Langford?" This is one of the reasons why Langford remains not only a beautiful, but a busy and friendly village, a village that people seem to like to live in. The new Parish Council and its new Clerk, like all the Councillors and Clerks of the past, will carry on this tradition into the future. There is to be no organisational change in Oxfordshire as a result of the recent Local Government Review, a decision firmly supported by Langford and most of the other parish councils in West Oxfordshire, but both the County and District Council have pledged themselves to a policy of full co-operation and consultation with parish councils, so the years ahead are full of promise. Who knows? The Parish Council may yet solve one of its remaining problems; it may yet be possible to get decent parking facilities at the Elms.

APPENDIX ONE

CHAIRMEN AND VICE-CHAIRMEN OF LANGFORD PARISH COUNCIL

CHAIRMEN	VICE-CHAIRMEN
1895-1902	Rev'd C.Wodehouse
1895-96	Mr W.Reading
1897-02	Mr Milward
1903-1904	Mr Milward
1903-04	Mr W.Reading
1905	Rev'd Wodehouse
1905	Mr W.Reading
1906-1914	Mr W.Reading
1906-09	Mr Whitfield
1909-14	Mr Edmonds
1915-1916	Mr Edmonds
1915-16	Mr Whitfield
1917-1920	Mr Whitfield
1917-18	Mr Wakefield
1919-20	Mr W.Reading
1921-1938	Mr S.Reading
1921-22	Mr Whitfield
1923-34	Mr Cooper
1934-35	Mr Print
1938-1941	no elections minuted
1942-1948	Mr S.Reading
1942-48	Mr Print
1949-1954	Mr Print
1949-54	Mr Hook
1955	Col. Craster
1955	Mr Eden
1956-1962	Mr J.Kirby
1956-62	Mr Eden
1963-1964	Mr Eden
1963	Mr J.Kirby
1964	Mr Lyon
1965-1969	Mr Lyon
1965-66	Mrs Kemp
1967-68	Mr J.Kirby
1969	Mr R.Clack

1970-1972	Mr J.Kirby	1970-72	Brig. Dolphin
1973-1976	Mrs Kemp	1973-75	Brig. Dolphin
		1976	Mr Clack
1977-1980	Mr R.Clack	1977-80	Mr R Kirby
1981-1987	Mr R.Kirby.	1981-87	Mr R.Clack
1988-1995	Mr R.Clack	1988-95	Mr R.Kirby

CLERKS TO THE PARISH COUNCIL

1984-1900	no clerk (duties fulfilled by Chairman)
1900-1907	Mr James Robbins
1907-1927	Mr Joshua Walker
1927-1934	Mr Percy Walker (his son)
1935-1948	Mr Frederick Jaggard
1948-1954	Mr Arthur Clack
1954-1987	Mr Robert Lafford
1987-1995	Mr Stephen Kemp