

Found in the bins at Swithland Triangle

In July 2010 a letter arrived at the village Post Office. It was from a Mr JD Green of Ratby, and it enclosed an old brown envelope containing a number of documents. Bob Rankin was postmaster at the time and he must have passed it to Brian Axon, but I can't trace what Brian did with it. Anyway, it finished up in the side pocket of an old suitcase.

After Brian died I found the suitcase in the History Group archives. It was taking up valuable space so I resolved to free-cycle it, but just before a lady came to take it away I checked the pockets and found Mr Green's letter.

The letter explained that Mr Green had been employed many years ago to clear rubbish from outbuildings at "The Cottage" on Swithland Triangle (now known as Swithland Manor), where he found an old brown envelope. He was getting old (indeed he died only six weeks after writing the letter) and he wanted the material that he had found to be preserved for posterity.

Inside the brown envelope

There were a number of documents inside, but the one that caught my attention was the hand-written draft report of the Parish Council for the year 1894/5. It was elegantly written in black ink and signed by the Clerk to the Council, Isaac Kirk. There were a number of corrections in red ink which (as Mr Kirk explained on the outside of the envelope) had been added by the Chairman of the Council, Mr Robert F Martin.

As I perused this document I realised that it was actually the first such report, because the Parish Council had only been inaugurated the previous year when the Local Government Act 1894 became law. Indeed Mr Kirk starts: "*When first entering office we were naturally somewhat uncertain as to how far our authority extended*", but continues "*On more intimate acquaintance with the statute many of our expectations were disappointed, and we found our powers strictly limited in all directions*".

The issues of the day

One of the first priorities of the new Council was to establish a recreation ground. They tried to persuade Mrs Perry Herrick to part with a field near Hungerhill Wood – but failed. They considered taking a lease on Long Close, but although they liked its central location they felt the site was too narrow and didn't like the fact that a public footpath passed through it. Little did they know that it would take forty years to find a solution!

They had more success with the Manchester Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway Company, who were planning a new line to London (later to be called the Great

Central). The railway company were proposing that the bridge over the railway in Woodhouse Road would be 25ft wide, whilst that in Rushey Lane would be just 15ft wide. After pressure from the Council both bridges were built ten feet wider than the railway company had planned.

The sanitary condition of the village was another pre-occupation. The report says “Steps have been taken to ensure the efficient removal of sanitary pans by the appointment of a public scavenger – which in our opinion is a great improvement on the method hitherto adopted.” Sadly there is nothing about the precise role of the public scavenger, nor how much he (or she) was paid.

Dodgy arithmetic

The Council decided to adopt the 1882 Electric Lighting Act, and £29 was voted to meet the cost of four new lamps with iron columns and a year’s salary for the lamplighter. But the figures in the report didn’t add up... they totalled £23 11s 6d and not the £29 0s 0d that they should have done!

The report finishes in the wordy style that runs through the whole document: “These and various other affairs have occupied the attention of the Council, which, if not altogether as satisfactory as we could desire, are nevertheless evidence of our endeavour to serve the interests of the Parish to the best of our ability.”

Roger Berkeley

Photographs

Mr Green’s letter



Dear Sir/Madam,
2-7-10
Please allow me to explain that some years ago, I was privileged to be employed at “The Cottages” Woodhouse End on Swubland Triangle, as gardener/caretaker by Mr Bailey of “Pees Socks”.
When the property changed hands, I was instructed to clear out the rubbish from the several outbuildings within the property. In the process I was thrilled to discover the enclosed old documents and, “as is my want” needed to preserve them, always intending to pass them on to your village History Group or Parish Council.

The first page of the report

Report of Parish Council 1895

Ladies & gentlemen

We take the opportunity which presents itself at this meeting, of thanking you for the confidence reposed in us by you twelve months ago, when you elected us members of the first Parish-Council for Woodhouse. — When first entering upon office, we were naturally somewhat uncertain as to how far our authority extended, and to what extent we might hope to inaugurate improvement for the public good. — ~~We ought to say that~~ on more intimate acquaintance with the Statute, many of our expectations were disappointed, we found our powers strictly limited in all directions — however we have endeavoured to the best of our ability to make use of the powers at our disposal; — one of the first things claiming our attention, was the provision of a Recreation ground, it was generally admitted that the Village was very badly provided for in this matter

Dodgy arithmetic

With this sum 4 new Lamps with iron Columns
were purchased at a cost of £9.1.0

1 Yrs Salary to Lamp-lighter	£ 0.0.0
Repairs to Lamps &c	1.16.6
Storage of Lamps during summer	7.3
Carriage & fixing new Lamps	12.6
Lamp glasses & Wicks	1.3.4½
Balance over	2.10.10½
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	£ 29.0.0

Appendix

The Parish Council report

Ladies & Gentlemen,

We take the opportunity which presents itself at this meeting, of thanking you for the confidence reposed in us by you twelve months ago, when you elected us members of the first Parish Council for Woodhouse.

When first entering upon office we were naturally somewhat uncertain as to how far our authority extended, and to what extent we might hope to inaugurate improvements for the public good. We regret to say that on more intimate acquaintance with the statute, many of our expectations were disappointed, we found our powers strictly limited in all directions.

However we have endeavoured to the best of our ability to make use of the powers at our disposal; one of the first things claiming our attention was the provision of a recreation ground, it was generally admitted that the village was very badly provided for in this matter. This being so, the Council at once proceeded to ascertain their powers in this direction and found that in such a parish as ours it could only be obtained by a voluntary agreement with the owner of any land required for the purpose.

The Council next proceeded to consider the most desirable field for the purpose, and after due consideration it was decided to make application for part of the field near Hunger Hill Wood, in the occupation of Mr Simpson, and owned by Mrs Perry Herriot. A deputation accordingly waited upon Mr Humphries and Mr Simpson, but found that the field would not be available for that purpose; application was afterwards made for the "Broad Acre field" situated in Farbridge(?) Lane, in same occupation and ownership as before, but this was equally unsuccessful.

An offer was made by Mr Humphries to the Council to rent the "Long Close", which from its central situation offered many advantages, but after consideration the Council were unable to avail themselves of this offer, chiefly on account of its narrow width, and also on account of the public footpath passing through it, and so the question was reluctantly put aside for the time being.

With regard to the lighting of the village streets the Council thought it in every way desirable, that the voluntary system hitherto adopted should be replaced by a system more in keeping with the times, viz by public contribution with public control. They therefore advised the Parish Meeting to adopt the Lighting Act, which was done, and £29 was voted to meet the expenses it would be necessary to incur during the year.

With this sum 4 new lamps with iron columns were purchased at a cost of	£9. 1. 0
1 year's salary to lamplighter	8. 0. 0
Repairs to lamps	1. 16. 6
Storage of lamps during summer	7. 3
Carting and fixing new lamps	12. 6
Lamp glasses and wicks	1. 3. 4½
Balance over	2. 10. 10½
	£29. 0. 0.

The Council have also not been unmindful of the right of the public with regard to footpaths proposed to be stopped by the Leicester Corporation in the construction of their new reservoir, and also with regard to the M.S &L Rly Coⁱ new line in respect of proper bridges for highways etc in this parish.

A bridge 25 ft wide is now about to be placed over the Rushy Fields Lane in place of one 15ft wide, on the representation of the Council to the company's engineer that the road in question was a public high-road and the width of the bridge near the new station is to be increased from 25ft to 35ft. The Rushy Fields road being made good for a considerable distance by the Leicester Corporation and the rly co, the Council think that the remaining portion from the bridge to the Brand Lane should be put in a good condition by the Barrow District Council. We have therefore called the attention of that Board to the matter.

The sanitary condition of the village has also received our attention, and several nuisances dangerous to the health of the village have been abated. Steps have been taken to ensure the efficient removal of sanitary pans, by the appointment of a public

scavenger – which in our opinion is a great improvement on the method hitherto adopted.

The provision of an adequate supply of water has also received the attention of the Council, and the Leicester Corporation has been approached as to their willingness to supply the village from their new reservoir. But they will not pledge themselves until these works are completed.

The parochial charities have also been carefully considered, and the Charity Commissioners have been communicated with, to ascertain our powers in regard to the appointment of additional trustees where necessary, and we believe that a satisfactory arrangement will shortly be made in relation to this matter. In the case of T Rawlings charity it is provided by the new scheme that one of the Trustees should be appointed by the Parish Council of Woodhouse.

The sewerage of the Brand cottages which at present is allowed to turn into an open ditch is about to be laid into a proper sanitary pipe by the Barrow District Council, and this plan has been examined and passed by the Council.

These and various other affairs have occupied the attention of the Council, and which if not altogether satisfactory as we could desire, are nevertheless evidence of our endeavour to serve the interests of the parish to the best of our ability.

J Kirk
Clerk to the Council

ⁱ The Manchester, Sheffield & Lincolnshire Railway Co, shortly to be renamed the Great Central Railway Co.