

MERTON PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting
Held on Monday 8th May 2017 in The Clinton Hall

Councillors Present: Tim Horner (Chair), Steve Papworth (Vice Chair), Jill Malcolm, Philip Collins, Bill Brown and Chris Laughton

Parish Clerk: Zena Tett

Also in attendance: 6 members of the public were present

1. **Welcome and address by Tim Horner**

Firstly I would like to say that I have decided to step aside as Chairman. In the past year we have seen the introduction of faster broadband to the Village. This is something that I and the Parish Council have been lobbying for and at last we have success.

As you will have heard, we are supporting a planned light unit to enable night time landings for the Devon Air Ambulance.

The grass cutting in the Village is being done very well and under budget. I would like to thank all the people who help on a voluntary basis and Steve Jennings for his work as our contractor.

The playground committee have managed to secure full funding for the first stage of the new playground and we have negotiated a beneficial hand over of the old equipment. Although there have been divisions in the community I hope that when it is up and running everyone will see it as an asset. I feel that my chairmanship of that committee has come in for some criticism hence my standing down as Chairman of the Parish Council.

I would like to thank the Clinton Hall committee for running and maintaining the Village Hall which continues to be a great asset to the Village. I feel that attendance to functions from the community has dropped and hope that this can be rectified with new and more community events being put on by the Village.

I would like to thank Cedric and Wendy Askew for looking after the flower beds at the Village entrance.

2. **Minutes of the Last Meeting** – held on Monday 25th April 2016 were agreed and signed as a true record. Proposed by Cllr Collins, seconded by Cllr Malcolm and all agreed.

3. **Devon Air Ambulance**

Toby Russell, Community Landing Sites Development Officer explained how hard the DAA has been working towards extending flying operations into the hours of darkness. A copy of the leaflet he talked about is attached to these minutes.

4. **District Councillor Report**

District Councillor Richard Wiseman was not present.

5. **Annual Crime Report** –

During the period 6th April 2017 to 6th May 2017 Merton and Huish have been crime free. During the same period 1 call was received where a log had been generated reporting a branch in the road.

6. **Village Hall Management Committee Report**

Cllr Collins reported on the Clinton Hall, stating the accounts were completed and soon will be available online on the Charity Commission site.

They show a fall in income due to no £10K grant this year and show a deficit in the year of approximately £2500 on previous year, mainly due to additional repairs. The next expense is likely to be a new boiler which the Hall is obtaining prices for. The hall continues to function with a mixed variety of bookings through the year.

7. **Play Equipment Committee Report**

After three years of hard work, frustration, excitement and determination we are very near to achieving a result. Phase one of the project is about to start, and we hope will be completed by mid-June. This phase will give us five pieces of equipment for the younger children, phase two will finish the project with two large structures and one smaller structure for the older ones.

I think if we had realised the amount of work involved and the hoops we have had to jump through we may all have given up at the beginning. However we have watched the present equipment deteriorate, and parents taking their children to other local play areas, including Okehampton and Bideford. This has made us even more determined to finish what we started three years ago- a safe and secure play area on a new site here in the village for our children and grandchildren.

We would like to thank those who have contributed to the success of our fundraising, Merton Parish Council, Merton Moncks, Lottery and Coastal Recycling. We have had donations from Lord Clinton's charitable trust and other generous people in Merton. We would also like to thank the Village Hall Committee for giving up some car parking space for the new project.

8. **Merton & Huish Wildlife Report**

Over the past year the group has seen a steady increase in membership to over thirty members. However, all the events are open to the general public upon payment of the specified fee.

The 2016 events started in January with a fascinating talk by Adam Rhodes (Assistant Ranger) on Meeth and Ashmoor Quarry Nature Reserve. This was followed later in the year with a walk around Meeth Quarry. John Wilding MBE (Head of Forestry and Environmental Economy at Clinton Devon Estates) gave an illuminating talk on Forestry and the Environment illustrating the problems and pests that are rampant within our forests. This was followed later in the year by a guided walk on the Clinton Estate.

In April, the Wildlife Group held an Open Afternoon for everyone to come and join us and explore Slaughterhouse Wood. In May, Lord and Lady Clinton generously opened their gardens to the group for a Springtime Walk, each member making a £2 donation to Lady Clinton's charity. Jimmy Mann gave a superb guided evening walk in Eggesford Forest in June which was then closely followed by a visit to Halsdon Nature Reserve Hide where kingfishers were observed darting along the river. The summer season ended with a highly successful Wildlife Treasure Hunt in July.

In October, North Devon Falconry brought several raptors to The Clinton Hall and enthralled the group and visitors with details about each raptor. This was followed by an instructive Butterfly talk in November. The year finished with a superb Christmas Social organised and catered by two of our members, Anne Papworth and Trevor Higton. The food was superb, a great way to celebrate with friends.

The 2017 events started in January with an excellent talk on Peters Marland Quarry, its history, geology, ecology and wildlife which was attended by several people from outside the village. Sadly, the Quiz Night arranged for February had to be cancelled due to lack of numbers. However, David Evans, former Hamble River Harbour

Master, gave an informative talk on Nature Conservation in the Coastal Environment and the complexities that exist in this area of conservation.

The Group is working with Dolton Scout group and has recently procured pond dipping for Clinton Village School. It is thought that Slaughterhouse Wood will be a valuable asset in monitoring and encouraging wildlife and for use for educational purposes with local schools and community groups; this will require both time and investment. This project is at a very early stage but will include the creation of bird hides, footpaths and species specific areas of habitat. Sadly, in the 2017 gales, the hide in Slaughterhouse Wood was destroyed.

There is on-going work on the erection and monitoring of bird, bat, dormouse, owl and hedgehog boxes throughout the village. A night vision camera has been purchased for use by members.

A full programme of activities and future events are arranged for the next six months and are open to all villagers for their enjoyment and information upon payment of the appropriate fee. The Wildlife Group is currently seeking members' views on the kind of winter talks that would be of interest. Full details are on the Clinton Hall notice board and included in the Merton Monthly.

The group is in a good financial state but it is envisaged that this will be significantly reduced by purchases for Slaughterhouse Wood.

9. **Merton Moncks Committee Report**

A HUGE thank you to all those who supported us by helping with the Vintage Rally at the beginning of May 2016. We raised almost £7,000 for local causes in Merton, Petrockstowe & Petersmarland and it is due in no small part to the help and support we have received from members of the community. Over the last 4 years the Vintage Rally has raised and distributed over £25,000 to local causes.

Thank you to all those who helped set up on the Saturday or cooked the pork the night before, to those who marshalled cars, parked cars, let us use their land to park cars in, manned the gate, made hundreds of bacon rolls, manned the kitchen and the tea tent, cooked in the kitchen, washed up, manned the bar and the PA system, sold raffle tickets or bus and Rolls Royce ride tickets, made cakes and turned up and enjoyed the day and then helped pack away in the evening – we are very grateful to you all. Without you and all the exhibitors and stallholders we simply wouldn't have an event.

We have also received emails from people who thoroughly enjoyed the day. *“On behalf of Michael Thorn and myself may I pass on our appreciation for a really excellent rally on the 1st May 2016. We both felt that the range and variety of exhibits was matched by the excellent signage, helpful stewards. The entire atmosphere made for an exceptional and highly enjoyable day.*

How sensible to keep the gate price low and thereby leave us with more to spend once inside. Quite the best Rally by far. More power to you all for next year, With appreciation and best wishes from Paul Delahoy and Michael Thorne”

Also this one “Just a short message to say how much I enjoyed coming to the Rally & displaying my Meccano models. They created a great deal of interest & I met lots of interesting people-including Lord & Lady Clinton! Please thank everyone involved for making me so welcome & if possible I would like to come again next year. Best wishes, Paul Voaden”

On 30 April 2017 we are holding the 10th Rally and hopefully this will be as successful as previous years.

10. **Merton & Petrockstowe Heritage Group Report**

Last year Merton and Petrockstowe history groups joined forces because both groups were lacking in numbers. We are now called the Merton and Petrockstowe Heritage Group and meet on the second Friday of each month alternating between both village halls. The number of members has increased and over the last twelve months the group has enjoyed a variety of speakers on such subjects as Parson Jack Russell,

Torrington Then and Now, local Christmas Carols and Murder Most Foul by Simon Dell who told us about some of the murders that had taken place around the Dartmoor area.

We also hosted Buckland Brewer History Group and went for a walk with Philip around Merton Village which was very enjoyable. A walk with Peter Christie around St. Mary's church in Bideford and the surrounding area was also very interesting and in October the group enjoyed a meal at The Oxenham Arms at South Zeal where the proprietor told us the history of this very old building.

We hope to continue with a programme of speakers and trips that members will enjoy and plan an exhibition at Petrockstowe in September focusing on both villages during the 1950s and 1960s.

11. **Merton Churchyard Fund Committee Report**

I can report that after Mr Steve Jennings has agreed to cut the whole churchyard on the schedule as before. We have been successful in obtaining a grant from TDC for a new mower to replace the old broken one, delivery is expected very soon. The Church Yard Fund Committee have agreed for the use of this new mower for the Parish Council grass cutting.

The annual meeting of the Churchyard committee was held on 2nd May. The accounts show annual income of £421.25 – expenses of £983.38 and a closing balance of £1358.53 Income was lower due late arrival of last years' grant from Parish Council and will show in next years' accounts. Expenses were 188.77 more as late banking of cheques from previous years' accounts. Basically the figures are roughly in line with past figures but steadily falling balance.

If the churchyard is to continue to be cut to a similar level into the future the continued support of the Parish Council is extremely important. The Parish Council has regularly supported the Churchyard Fund which it has representatives sitting on the joint committee with a grant. I take this opportunity to request this matter be put on the agenda for the next appropriate Parish Council meeting. Regular income is the most important factor in maintaining the churchyard at its present regime.

I suggest a grant of £400 continues as a fair and reasonable sum to subsidise the parish council support. For many years now we do not receive any income from burial fees although Rev Martin Warren did agreed to enact this and it is still being looked into.

12. **Finance Report**

The Clerk confirmed an opening balance of £18,160. Total income over the last financial year was £15,372 which included a grant of £10,000 for play equipment. Total spend was £4,478 giving the Parish Council a closing balance of £29,054.

13. **Open Forum**

Bill Brown thanked the Chairman for his efforts during his term as Chairman.

SIGNED AS A TRUE RECORD: (Chair)

NAME:**DATE:**