



Parish Affairs at Wishford - Letter from the Chairman of the Parish Council

To the Editor

Dear Sir

Will you allow me to take up a little space in giving the parishioners of Wishford and explanation of my position in regard to the question before us, i.e. the Parish Council of Wishford. Well, you are aware that about three years ago the Parish Councils' Act came into operation in England, and in the first flush of enthusiasm caused by the fact that for the first time the people were enabled to manage their own civil affairs for themselves, that the meetings of the new body were to be held in the evenings when working people as well as others would be able to attend, there was elected a good Council, fairly representative of the whole parish. They got to work and endeavoured to carry out the Act, to the best of their ability, but in consequences of the illness and death of the head of the previous body, the vestry, the late rector of the parish, in whose custody nearly all the documents and accounts of the parish were, there was considerable delay, and in the anxiety of the new members of the Parish Council to do their duty, they pressed their request for accounts, etc., on the new rector, perhaps unduly, thus creating some friction. Then when things were getting a little settled there was suddenly discovered by the new rector a parchment bearing on the fire engine, causing still greater feeling. Without my reciting to you all the details concerning that question, you know it eventuated in three of the members Messrs. G. Plowman, (the Chairman,) Mr. Thatcher, and Mr. Fifield, resigning their positions as councilmen, and in their places myself, Mr. Yates, and Mr. George Bryant were elected, and I took the chair at their request. At that time the Rector had commenced an action in the Court of Queen's Bench on behalf of the church authorities, issuing a writ on the Parish Council claiming possession of the historical fire engine. After consideration of the value of the fire engine, the undoubted greater value of the peace and good feeling of Wishford, and on my part of the doubt of the issue of an action at law, it was decided by the council to give way on the question on certain conditions, which was done, thereby causing the resignation of Councillor Scott. At the next election of the council only 5 persons were nominated viz. Messrs. George Bryant, G. Tutt, S. Yates, W. Snook, and myself, and as the Act directs, it was resolved that the 3 retiring councillors be written to, and asked to serve on the Council. They refused, and the County Council directed the Parish Council to nominate others to fill up the Council. Mr. Scamell was nominated, and he consented to serve.

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At the next election of Parish Council 6 were nominated by five only were elected, Mr. Yates declining to serve, and it (the Parish Council) has continued incomplete to the present time.

Now gentlemen, I have done what I considered right in asking some other gentlemen to take their places on the council, but for some mysterious reason they have refused, there being some disintegrating force operating in Wishford, the result being the breaking up of the various societies which have existed in this village.

I wish to make a few remarks on one criticism that has been passed on to the parish council relating to the payment of rates viz. that there are some persons on the Council who do not pay their own rates. Now I do not agree with the contention that it is necessary that a man should pay his own rates to make him an efficient servant of the public, and I am sure that must be the opinion of the largest ratepayer of the parish, who is, I believe, the Rector, for he has associated with him in the spending of comparatively speaking and enormous amount of money (£120 or £130 a year) a gentleman, who has ceased for a considerable time to pay any rates at all, and another person, a most respectable man – none more so in Wishford – who pays no rates. I am alluding to the managers of the school. That is an object lesson to all those interested in this subject. Now I believe that either or both of those gentlemen would do their duty as well as, and no better than, any present member of the Parish Council. The same remarks may be made on other parish officers, viz., the churchwardens, neither of whom is a ratepayer but who has the expenditure of parochial money. Of course it has been open at any time for the large or small ratepayers of Wishford to have a seat on the council and I think it comes with an ill grace from those who refuse to do their duty to make invidious remarks on those who have tried to do so.

There would be a fair subject of complaint if the majority of any spending body were not either interested to some extent in keeping the out-goings to a reasonable figure, or limited, as in the case of Parish Councils, where the Law lays down that not more than a 3d. rate (£10 in Wishford), shall be expended without direct authority from a Parish meeting. A 1d. rate or less, has been the average expenditure in Wishford, so that the complaint that indirect ratepayers are on the Council, simply means that the poor man, the labourer, should not be represented at all by members of his own class. I think I have shown that the criticism as to the indirect ratepayer question is not well founded, but on the other hand, if any of those who have made the complaint will express their desire to remedy what they consider a blot by serving on the council, I will not only nominate them myself but shall always be ready to vacate the chair so that a more worthy man shall fill it.

But if a “dog in the manger” policy, should still be pursued by the opponents of the Parish Council, I hope they will not complain if those ratepayers who will not do their duty should be represented, or perhaps they would consider mis-represented, by non-ratepayers, as it will simply be their own fault.

Yours, sir,
GEO. M. YOUNG.
Chairman of the Wishford Parish Council.

Salisbury Times, 11 March 1898