

THE ODIHAM SOCIETY

SURVEY OF PUBLIC SEATING IN THE PARISH OF ODIHAM (February 2007)

INTRODUCTION

This project was first suggested by Derek Kearns, then incorporated in outline proposals for the content of the April/May 2007 issue of the *OdSoc UPDATE* newsletter. It was approved at the meeting of the Society's Executive Committee on 1 February 2007.

METHOD

Mrs Johns and I visited as many parts of the parish as possible, either on foot or by car, to seek out examples of public seating wherever we could find them. We were assisted by fortuitous conversations with Philip Riley (who told me about the seat at the end of Broad Oak) and David Kirkpatrick (who mentioned the seat, donated by the Society, in Buryfields). It is very likely, even so, that our compilation is incomplete, and of course I would welcome corrections or additions.

In our findings we have included the public seats in Odiham churchyard, even though the responsibility for their upkeep and maintenance presumably lies with the PCC.

FINDINGS

The general location of each seat is provided here, together with comments where appropriate, e.g., about siting. The condition of each seat is indicated by a numerical scale whose explanation is as follows:

- 1 = *Virtually brand new, immaculate, a credit to the community*
- 2 = *Quite new, good condition*
- 3 = *Just about acceptable, but not a source of pride*
- 4 = *Poor, possibly some structural damage, unkempt, rusty (if metal), mouldy (if wood), unlikely to be used as a seat*
- 5 = *Very poor, some structural damage (to backrest or seat), difficult to believe that anyone would volunteer to sit on it*

1. Close to War Memorial, in front of Gospel Green House. Green metal, quite old, not easily visible; condition: 3.
2. Canal picnic area. Wooden seat. Condition: 2.
3. Canal picnic area. Wooden seat, inscribed in memory of Dave Gregory, foreman of the Canal 1949. Condition: 4 (some slats broken on backrest).
4. Canal picnic area. Three table/seats for picnic purposes. Condition: 2 (2) and 1 (1) – the latter is virtually brand new.
5. Outside the George Hotel. One wooden seat. Condition: 3 (structurally sound, but could benefit from coat of preservative).

6. Outside No 81, High Street: One wooden seat, inscribed to memory of Phil Pellett ("Skip") – no further identification provided, and no date given. Condition: 3 (structurally sound, but could benefit from coat of preservative).
7. The Bury, adjacent to the stocks. Two seats, each inscribed 'The Bury'. Condition: 1 (brand new).
8. The Bury, at rear of parish room. One seat, curved round the rear of the parish room building. Condition: 3.
9. The Bridewell. One seat, donated by the Odiham Society. Condition: 3.
10. Near children's play area in park at rear of Vicarage. One double length seat. Inconvenient location, presumably intended for use by mothers watching their children in the play area, though this now unlikely because of (10). Condition: 4 (scruffy and dirty).
11. Children's play area. One seat. Condition: 1 (virtually new).
12. In corner of field at rear of quarry. One seat, very neglected and remotely positioned; not even in close proximity to any established footpath. Condition: 4.
13. At top of Palace Gate, opposite Greenaway Cottage. One seat, often used by elderly people on way to/from shops. Well positioned. Condition: 2.
14. By pond at lower end of Palace Gate. Two seats, both very poorly maintained; backrests leaning too far back to allow anyone to be comfortable (especially elderly people). Condition: 4 (1) and 5 (1) – one of the seats is partially broken. Either or both of these seats appear dangerous: it is possible that if anyone sat on them, the seats would fall backwards.
15. End of Broad Oak (rear of parking/turning space). One seat, metal, inscribed for Queen Victoria's Jubilee (1887). Condition: 5. Sited very badly, making it unlikely that any passing pedestrians would even see it. This seat surely has historical value that would justify conscious restoration and re-positioning in a more prominent place.
16. Top end of Odiham High Street (near start of West Street). One seat. Condition: 4.
17. Dunleys Hill, between Odiham and North Warnborough. One seat, partially obscured by plastic litter bin; inscribed with metal plate commemorating Queen Victoria's Jubilee (1887). Condition: 4.
18. North Warnborough (virtually opposite North Warnborough village hall): Two metal seats. Condition: 3/4.
19. North Warnborough (close to pub): One metal seat. Condition: 3.
20. North Warnborough end of Dunleys Hill: two brand new benches in small (newly installed) public garden.
21. North Warnborough: two seats adjacent to children's playground.

Odiham Churchyard

1. One seat inscribed to the memory of the Appleton Family (1963-2004). Condition: 1.
2. One seat by the East door of the church. Condition: 4.

3. One seat inscribed to the memory of Peter and Joan Benford (2004). Condition: 2.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Numbers of seats: 28 (excluding Odiham Churchyard).
2. Numbers in poor condition (classified 4 or 5): 9.
3. Numbers in poor locations: 5 (references 10, 12, 14, 15).
4. There are other places in the parish where seats could be usefully sited (e.g., near the Mapletons), though because of the absence of seats in such locations, it is hard to be sure that any new seats would in fact be welcomed and used.

RECOMMENDATIONS

I recommend the following actions:

1. The restoration and re-siting of the Victoria Jubilee seat currently located at the end of the Broad Oak. This seat would be far more visible if it were close to the Pest House.
2. Another seat commemorating Queen Victoria's 1887 Jubilee, in Dunleys Hill, has been badly neglected and is now almost unusable (see 17 above). It should be restored and the foliage round it cut back. The large black plastic litter bin almost in front of the seat should be removed.
3. The installation of at least one additional public seat at some suitable place within the parish.
4. A refurbishment programme for those seats which are retrievable (e.g., 15 and 16).
5. A replacement programme for those seats whose condition is too poor to make refurbishment a practical alternative (e.g., 14). In one or two instances, outlined above, it seems likely that the existing seats pose an unacceptable risk to members of the public.
6. Removal of any seats that serve no useful purpose and whose continued presence is an eyesore (e.g., 10).

TED JOHNS
1 March 2007