



Red Flag on the Plain

A Scramble For Life When the Guns Are Firing

At the meeting of the Pewsey Rural District Council, Mr. L. H. Arnold (Chisenbury) brought an important matter to the notice of the Council with regard to the obstruction of the public roads in various parts of the Bourne Valley during Artillery practice on the Plain. Many complaints had been made to him, he said, by his neighbours with regard to the closing of the roads across the Plain; they suffered a great deal of inconvenience and loss of time and money by many public roads which had been open for generations now being closed for many days in the year. He was asked to bring the matter before the notice of the Council with a request that it might assist the local residents in keeping the roads open. He suggested that the Clerk should be asked to enquire into it, and see what could be done. It was a serious matter for those who lived in the neighborhood. The obstructions were caused chiefly in Upavon, Enford, and Netheravon parishes. People had difficulty in getting from those places to about four villages in the Bourne district and about four in the neighbourhood of Shrewton. They had many miles to go round. His parishioners desired him to bring the matter before the notices of the Council, and he had great pleasure in supporting it.

Mr. May: Is it a road near the Artillery range?

Mr. Arnold replied that there were five roads leading over the Plain, and when the Artillery was firing the public could not pass over any of them.

The Chairman expressed sympathy with the matter, but pointed out that it was a question as to the legal position of the Council. They would ask the Clerk to look into the matter.

Mr. Arnold said he and some sheep beyond Shrewton, and instead of being able to send them at 10 o'clock in the morning they would have to send them at six, so as to get them past the Artillery range before eight or nine o'clock. To get there themselves at a later hour they would have to go by way of Amesbury or Red Hone, and when they came back in the afternoon it was the same thing, if the Artillery was firing late. In reply to a member, Mr. Arnold said they were not ordered to withdraw by a sentry; they used to be, but they were given to understand that if a red flag was up they could not pass over the roads. The public was not informed at all that the roads were closed, to his knowledge; he as a tenant and the other tenants were, but it was the public that the Council had to deal with. The public, Mr. Arnold added, only learned by seeing the red flag.

Mr. Best (Ludgershall) asked if it was not the same in the Bourne Valley as on his side of the Plain - permanent notices were put up, but it was not till they got to the notice-boards that they could see the red flag flying. He had experienced the same difficulty; he did not know until he got to the notice-board whether the red flag was up or not.

Mr. Arnold: Yes, that is just the same as in our district.

The Chairman: I have been turned back time after time. There were no notice-boards where I have been.

Mr. Arnold gave an instances of the inconvenience that might arise in this way. The track on the map called the old coach road - he did not know why they called it a coach road, but that is what it is called - leading from Shrewton to Upavon, had no notice upon it, to his knowledge. A person might go from Upavon two miles on the track before he came to a red flag, and then if he saw it and did not know what it meant he would go right over to Shrewton Folly.

The Chairman expressed the opinion that if the War Department had not the power to close the roads, having bought the land round, it would soon obtain power from Parliament to do so.

The vice-Chairman: It is our duty to protect the public rights over the roads.

The Clerk agreed. It was the most serious duty of the Council.

Mr. Wroth said it was a very serious matter in his opinion. The Pewsey and Amesbury District Councils did not do their duty to the public in not looking after the tracks. They were public tracks, and it was within his knowledge that the people had been over the roads without any warning. He instanced the case of a person who within the past fortnight came from Bulford to Collingbourne. There was no one to stop him and he did not notice the red flag, which, if there is no breeze, hung down the pole. He got within close range of the firing and had to scramble for his life to get out of the way. He was glad Mr. Arnold had brought the matter forward. The Council ought to have dealt with it years ago.

Mr. Parrott: Is not the red flag referred to, a big thing.

The Chairman: It is a big thing, but one cannot see it until he has been some way towards it. If one was in Rushall and going to Shrewton, he would not see the flag until he went some miles.

In the end it was resolved that the matter be left in the hands of the Clerk, for the present, to make enquiries.

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