

The story of the Pettaugh village sign

Information provided by Gordon Janson, Pettaugh Parish Councillor (1991 to 2007).

On a warm late spring day in May 1995, the traveller passing through a village along the A1120 would have seen three men engaged in digging a hole in the middle of the village and erecting a stout wooden pole with a sign at the top. The sign depicted a colourful scene, wrought in metal, of a farmer and pair of horses ploughing a furrow in a field, an anvil, a church, the Domesday Book, and a windmill which surmounted the rural landscape. All five features depicted in the scene encapsulated the history of a little village in Suffolk, named on the sign as 'Pettaugh'. This short account gives the background to the idea for having a village sign in Pettaugh, and the process of design and manufacture of the component parts of the sign.

The originator and driving force behind the village sign was Gordon Janson who served as a Pettaugh parish councillor from 1991 to 1995 and then 1997 until 2007, and had been Chairman of the Parish Council from 2001 until 2004. Gordon and his family moved to Pettaugh in 1987 and were the second residents of the new housing development of four detached houses on what had been the 'Lentins' meadow along Debenham Way. In his role as parish councillor, he could be frequently seen riding his bicycle around Pettaugh to meet parishioners and discuss any issues they might wish to raise. Many residents expressed the view that they wished to have a village sign but Gordon had realised that the parish council did not have sufficient funds to afford a sign as the village was small and had a modest precept, the local tax on households in the village to cover parish expenses. He therefore decided to take on the project of providing a village sign personally.

To understand the practicalities of manufacturing a sign, Gordon visited the blacksmith at Brandeston, Hector Moore, who was well known for the aluminium casting of signs. Hector enjoyed a high reputation for his work which included exports to the United States of America. He provided a provisional quotation of £1000 for a typical village sign but it became clear that the cost was beyond the financial resources of the parish council which might have only been able to afford £100 at most. Having discussed the matter with other councillors, Gordon approached the local artist Liz Worsley, who advertised her work in the Debenham benefice 'Together' magazine. Liz prepared the artwork which is still used for the cover of the magazine. After studying graphic art at the Kingston School of Art, Liz developed wide experience in the field of graphic art, undertaking commissions for the British Tourist Board and, after moving to Suffolk, Mid Suffolk District Council. This work involved the artwork design of leaflets and examples of her work are shown below. She reviewed the many sketches and ideas that Gordon had compiled for the village sign and provided a scaled sample painting for the Pettaugh Parish Council to approve. This design and artwork was approved by the parish council and it became the template for the full-size production design.

During a few months of early 1994 Gordon was undertaking work at the Sizewell B Nuclear Electricity Generator construction site near Leiston. It was policy for the contractors at Sizewell B to support local projects in Suffolk and provide the practical expertise to assist the projects achieve their aims, provided that such involvement was not unduly costly. Three willing contractors provided spare materials and associated labour content free of charge. The work involved cutting the Durbar steel plate to achieve the village sign shape, the angles and plates, welding and galvanising for the bracket support, and the preparation and protective undercoat paint finish. The heavy, prepared sign plate was taken to Liz Worsley. She completed the preparation of the metal template and then painted the detailed village scene. The village sign was delivered in May 1994.

It was many months before the sign could be erected. This was due to many issues, including its final location, planning permission from Mid Suffolk District Council, approval by the water and electricity utility companies, insurance requirements and the need for a post on which to mount the sign. During this time, work projects took Gordon away from Pettaugh during the week and he had to temporarily relinquish his role as parish councillor. Nevertheless, he pursued all the outstanding issues to

completion, including the agreed donation of a telegraph pole from Bob Staines of Poplar Farm in Crowfield. The finished village sign was finally erected in its present location in May 1995 when two parishioners, Glyn Webb and Robin Davies, assisted Gordon in the task. It is reputed that a few pints of beer were required by the three labourers to replenish the loss of bodily fluid lost by perspiration.

In addition to the materials and work donated by the Sizewell B contractors, this project was also supported by the Farnish family, who provided the Hammerite paint, in memory of Jill Farnish's father, Harry Newlove, a former resident of Pettaugh and long-serving member of the parish council. The Janson family provided most of the funding to cover the cost of the fabrication and artist's fee. In November 1995 the parish council generously agreed to a donation of £100 towards the cost of the project.

By 2012 the village sign had become faded since it was erected in 1995 and was in need of refurbishment and redecoration. As part of the Her Majesty's Diamond Jubilee Celebrations one of our parishioners, Howard Dimmock, undertook the task of restoring the village sign to its original state. He took down the village sign with the help of a local company which provided the lifting equipment. Howard and his wife, Ann, cleaned and repainted the metalwork and Ann used her training as an artist to repaint the fine details of the scenes depicted on the sign. Cans of the original Hammerite paints with which artist Liz Worsley decorated her designs on the sign were discovered by Gordon Janson who originally commissioned the sign. The cans had been carefully stored in his garage and were found to be in excellent condition. The village sign, now resplendent in its cleaned state with bright new colours, once again occupies its place in the centre of the village.