

SAVING JORDANS.

Need For Action.

The position of Jordans was never more acute than it stands to-day. The Percy Harvey Estates, Ltd., who some three years ago purchased the Chalfont Grove Estate for development purposes, have been held up with their scheme in consequence of a strong expression of public opinion against the widening of Welders-lane which forms one of the chief frontages to the estate.

Welders-lane is a delightful country lane, typical of the county, and from the high land it descends abruptly until it joins Jordans-lane. At the junction stands Jordans Meeting House in its time-honoured seclusion, which with its Penn associations is justly regarded, as a national asset, and the widening of the roads in its vicinity, with the consequent destruction of many trees and thick hedges, would undoubtedly spoil the setting that is quite an integral part of this "Westminster of Quakerism."

For three years the Harvey Estates have waited for a solution of the problem, and in consequence of the financial loss involved can wait no longer. Nobody has suggested sterilizing the land for building. Plans have now been sent to the County Highways Committee for the widening of the lane, and as Mr. Harvey explained at a meeting on Wednesday evening, the County Council had no alternative but to pass them. Immediately that is done, there is no provision or law that can prevent the company from beginning their development by the widening of Welders-lane. Mr. Harvey added that he did not wish to do it: his whole inclination was against it.

The meeting was organized by the "Penn Country" branch of the Council for the Preservation of Rural England, and was held at "Oldfields Furze," the residence of the honorary secretary, Mr. G. Langley Taylor.

In addition to members of the local branch, there were present representatives of the Society of Friends, the local committee of the Meeting House, Jordans Hostel, Mr. Percy Harvey (representing the Percy Harvey Estates, Ltd.), St. Luke's Hospital (who own "Welders," from which the lane takes its name), Jordans Estates, Ltd., Jordans Village, Ltd., Mr. R. T. Smith and Mr. R. Trench (representing Beaconsfield Urban Council), Gen. Sir Alexander Gordon (Chalfont St. Giles Parish Council), and Sir Selwyn Fremantle (Chalfont St. Peter Parish Council).

Unanimous Agreement Desirable.

Sir Charles Bennett, the chairman of the branch, presided, and explained that they were of opinion that the widening of either Jordans- or Welders-lanes would seriously and injuriously affect the Meeting House by destroying its greatest charm—its peacefulness. Broadly speaking, the proposals which had been discussed would involve the making of a road on the Grove Estate, which would join Jordans-lane at Twitchells-corner, at which point it would meet the old London-road, which ran in a southerly direction, until it joined Long Bottom-lane. That road was at present unsuitable for heavy traffic. The C.P.R.E. were interested in the saving of features of interest and beauty in the area, and it was for that reason that the meeting had been convened, in order that the views of all sections interested might be

voiced, and a unanimous agreement arrived at.

Alternative Schemes.

Mr. Langley Taylor, reporting on the position, said that some time ago Amersham Rural Council proposed a scheme for the widening of Welders-lane. The public opposition to it caused a public enquiry to be held, and the scheme was temporarily abandoned. Since then control of the roads had been taken over by the County Council. The Grove Estate had been purchased for development, and the question of dealing with the additional traffic which will result had necessitated the reconsideration of the question of new roads or road widening. Various schemes had been suggested for dealing with Welders-lane, and a new road across the Grove Estate, bringing the new road out on to Jordans-lane, possibly opposite Seer Green-lane. The County Council had proposed either widening Jordans-lane in front of the Hostel; making a by-pass through the field in front of the Meeting House; widening Jordans-lane itself; or making a parallel road by pulling down the hedge and many of the trees.

The Jordans Oasis.

The Penn Country Branch felt that the oasis round Jordans must not be disturbed by any road works at all, either to Welders-lane or the southern end of Jordans-lane. The owners of the Grove Estate had been approached by him, and he would agree that the development road might be taken north to Twitchells-corner, subject to the County Council's approval. From this point it is recommended that the County Council be asked to make the road down the existing bridle path.

It is recognised that the road work involved would be more expensive than the suggestion of going out on to Jordans-lane, but it is felt that the oasis of Jordans was worth the extra expense. In considering the question of expense, it must be borne in mind that under an agreement of November, 1926, Amersham Rural Council had agreed that "when in the opinion of the Council circumstances warrant such action, and satisfactory financial and other arrangements can be made with the Ministry, to construct a road forty feet in width on the side of or adjoining the bridle road between Long Bottom-lane and Twitchells-lane." He submitted that as that road would have to be made some day there was no necessity to widen Jordans-lane, which would ultimately mean two main roads in close proximity to each other, therefore it would be better to make the bridle path into a road immediately. If the whole scheme was adopted Jordans valley would be by-passed by a road leading direct to Seer Green halt. Welders-lane, he submitted, should not be interfered with, either by widening or closing.

Grove Estate Offer.

The Grove Estate had agreed to give a narrow strip of land on Welders-lane and sterilise it. The Estate had also intimated that they would agree to contribute the sum they have already offered for the shorter road, towards the cost of the new road, but the extra cost of the longer road must not fall on the estate.

A considerable sum of money has been raised to preserve the land surrounding Jordans as an open space. The Society of Friends felt that their efforts to save the land from all building in perpetuity should not be spoiled by any road construction or widening, a senti-

ment that was endorsed by the C.P.R.E. Some 60-70 acres had been secured, and he suggested that the matter must be looked at from a national rather than a parochial point of view. The bridle path road would be a direct communication between Chalfont St. Giles and Seer Green halt.

A Matter of Urgency.

The question which they were to consider presented very many difficult problems, and the Executive had convened the meeting in the hope that by all local interests discussing the matter an agreed scheme might be laid before the County Council. It was further desired to discuss the question on national and historical grounds rather than in connection with any particular private interest, or even local interest. With the information before the Executive that some road works have to be undertaken, a great deal of time had been spent in preparing the scheme put forward, which it was hoped would be acceptable to all interests, as well as to the County Council.

They were informed that definite proposals in regard to Welders-lane would be before the next meeting of the Highways Committee, and it was for that reason that it was important they should reach a unanimous decision, so that he might communicate it to the County Branch of the C.P.R.E., and ask them to communicate with the County Council.

Prominent Views.

Several letters of apology for inability to be present were read. Lord Astor wrote that he was strongly in sympathy with the efforts which had been made by the Society of Friends, and he hoped they would not be spoiled by any road construction or widening.

Lord Burnham felt as strongly as anybody that the oasis around Jordans ought not to be desecrated by road works. He was aware that a considerable sum of money had been raised to preserve the land surrounding Jordans, and it was not unreasonable that the Society felt strongly that their efforts should not be spoiled. The Penn country is in a real sense a national possession, and they ought to back up the Society of Friends and the neighbouring owners in their efforts to preserve its amenities.

Both Sir Gomer Berry and Lt.-Col. W. B. Du Pre were sympathetic with the meeting's object.

Earl Howe expressed the hope that their efforts would meet with success. He added: "The mere knowledge that this historic valley is, apparently, threatened ought surely to rally all lovers of a countryside of surpassing beauty to your support."

"G.K.'s" Views.

In characteristic style Mr. G. K. Chesterton wrote: "I am most warmly in favour of the effort, and so far as I understand the details of the scheme, which aims at preserving Jordans and its setting from the operations of this dull mania for driving ugly roads through places, and past places, to the disadvantage of those who still possess the intelligence to go to places. Jordans is not only a historic place; it is one of the few examples of such a place that has contrived to remain a place, and has not been turned by tourists into a totally different sort of place. It is a shrine of pilgrimage which does still to some extent exist for pilgrims, and not only for tourists and trippers. The shrine is not one of my religion, but it is one of enormous significance in the history of my country. What many people will not understand is that what should remain sacred in such

a place is the place; the approach, the surroundings, the background; not detached and dead objects that might be put in a museum. The effect of Stonehenge is the effect of Salisbury Plain. If you wire in Stonehenge like a beast at the Zoo, you are really making it a fetish, and idolatrously worshipping the mere stones; instead of seeing the large vision of the beginnings of Britain. Anybody who would leave Jordans must leave it looking like Jordans. And Stonehenge marks only a dead religion. Whereas the other is historical in the living sense that its history is not ended, for no one knows what may come at last of that revival of a purer mysticism in spite of the storms of Puritanism; of the beginnings of a Reformation of the Reformation, and of the greatness of William Penn."

"Soul of England."

Mr. J. L. Garvin, in expressing his views, wrote: "I am horrified by the proposed irreparable desecration of all we associate with the name of Jordans. Were that proposal carried out it would mean one of the worst among the ravages of vandalism which have defaced our land in these recent years. The whole scene thereabout is hallowed ground, instinct with historical and spiritual significance. There, in its gentle seclusion, quietly breathing great memories, it is a part of the soul of England; and a sanctuary of repose and thoughtfulness amidst this noisy and hasty age. To me, for one, the burial-plot, where Penn and the rest lie, is one of the most moving and calming little God's acres in the world. I know the American delegation thought so last year, when the Prime Minister brought them there, at a time when associations like these helped to establish a saving political settlement upon a foundation of goodwill. Penn belongs to America as well as to England, and he was the wisest and ablest amongst all the early prophets of a League of Nations. In that matter there are lessons to be learned from his pages still.

"So this is no ordinary cause. Let us be proud that it falls to us to fight for it, and let us get up this time to fight it with all our might. We are trustees in this matter not only for the honour and repute of our county, but for the whole country and the whole English-speaking world.

"So far as some extra expense is involved the preservation of Jordans Valley is worth it out and out. Historic monuments of an architectural kind are scheduled and preserved. But historical memorials of another kind may be at least as worthy of local and national protection. Jordans Valley is one of them. There is no excuse for destroying the bequeathed beauty of its aspects and the conditions of its ancient peace. If necessary we ought to appeal, as on a national matter, to the whole organization to which we belong and set all its forces in motion."

Getting to Business.

A series of resolutions were then submitted.

The first, "That no road construction or road widening works passing Jordans Meeting House should be undertaken, where there is any possible alternative," was carried unanimously.

The second, "That the meeting is aware of the agreement of November, 1926, between Amersham Rural Council and Jordans Estate, Ltd., and Jordans Village, Ltd., and is of opinion that, in the public interest, it would be unwise to construct any new road or widen Jordans-lane, if ultimately Wilton-lane

has to be 40 feet wide, and that there is no need for two such roads in close proximity."

In reply to Lord Addington, who is a member of the County Council, as to the facilities for the parking of cars and charabancs visiting the Meeting House, Mr. B. F. Crossfield explained that a parking place was available behind the Meeting House. He suggested that a notice should be erected prohibiting heavy cars and charabancs from using Welders-lane.

Mr. A. B. Gillett (chairman of the Society of Friends) said there was a danger of the new road being brought to Twitchells Corner, but going no further. This would result in all traffic using Jordans-lane, which passed the Meeting House.

This resolution was carried *nem. con.*, Mr. Runtz and the Beaconsfield Council representatives refraining from voting.

St. Luke's Attitude.

The next resolution was: "That this meeting urges the County Council to agree to the proposals made by the 'Penn Country' branch to Mr. Percy Harvey and which he has intimated he will favourably consider, if the County Council approve, to construct the road on the Grove Estate, to join the top of Jordans-lane at Twitchells Corner, even though the cost of such road construction may be greater, to some extent, than other proposals that have been made."

Mr. E. Munro Runtz, surveyor to St. Luke's Hospital, explained that in the past they had agreed to the three proposed schemes and opposed none. So far as the present scheme was concerned, he could see no grounds to which his clients could object. Under no consideration could he recommend his clients to agree to the closing of Welders-lane, or the sterilisation of the frontage. It was necessary to guard their interests for the future. They were a hospital, and in consequence, a charity, and eventually "Welders" would become a building estate.

In reply to Sir Selwyn Fremantle, Mr. Langley Taylor said the difference in the length of the road would be approximately 150 feet. He pointed out that the bridle path was down for widening in the future, but with the construction of an additional 150 feet of road, they would eliminate the necessity of the widening of Jordans-lane, and thus in the long run would save money.

Beaconsfield Oppose.

Mr. R. T. Smith (Beaconsfield Council) said the Council had given the proposals consideration and felt that, although the scheme and district was out of their area, the effect of the proposed new road would throw all west-bound traffic into the wrong end of Beaconsfield, which was not so constructed to take such traffic, and their feeling was that it would naturally involve the ratepayers in additional expense for road widenings and taking corners off. So far as the road went to Twitchells Corner, they supported it, but when it came to throwing through traffic into the wrong end of Beaconsfield, they could not support it.

Mr. Langley Taylor maintained that the points raised were not relevant to the discussion. The effect upon traffic would be absolutely negligible, whichever way it came. If the Mumfords-lane scheme was proceeded with, heavy traffic would go that way. If it was not done, he suggested that heavy traffic coming from the Rickmansworth direction would go down the North Orbital-road at Denham to the Oxford-road.

The resolution was carried, Mr. Runtz

and the Beaconsfield Council representatives not voting.

The last resolution was: "That the meeting considers that Mr. Harvey's offer to sterilise Grove estate frontage to Welders-lane, subject to the suggested proposals being adopted, should be accepted and the access roads, shown on his plan, agreed to. This meeting desires strongly to represent to the County Council that it is most undesirable to widen Welders-lane."

This resolution was agreed to similar to the preceding one.

This terminated the meeting, and an expression of thanks was accorded the Chairman and Secretary.

Beaconsfield Council
Minutes
1926