

## East Winch and West Bilney Village Sign



The village sign, which stands adjacent to the main A47 road through the village, at the junction with Common Lane, was commissioned following Queen Elizabeth's Silver Jubilee in 1977.

Prior to the Jubilee it was proposed that some celebrations should be arranged for the village. A notice was posted in the parish magazine inviting those who might be interested in forming a committee to meet at the Carpenters Arms to discuss the matter.

A number of people turned up, including [Miss Smith](#), Gerry and Dawn Smith, David Wright, Chris Chestney, Tony Hephher and Cliff Robins. It may be that there were others too – but at present I cannot recall who else might have been there.

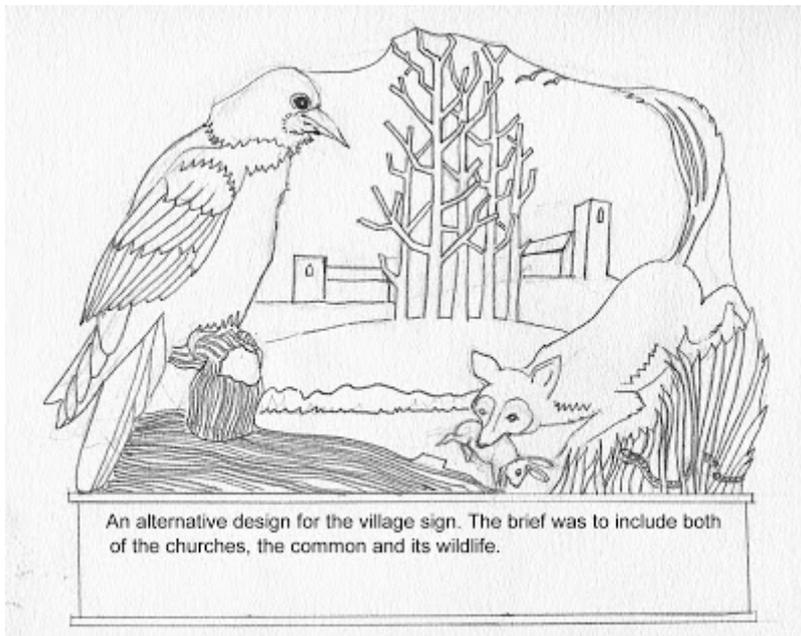
Over a beer or two it was decided to form a committee to arrange celebrations on the day. It was also decided that the committee should endeavour to raise funds for a permanent memorial of the occasion. It was well known that many villages throughout Norfolk had some very attractive carved village signs, usually erected in some prominent point in the village. It was thought that such a sign would be very appropriate for East Winch and West Bilney. The aim therefore became to raise enough funds to finance such a project.

A small committee was organised in the village to arrange the celebrations for the Jubilee; Gerry Smith was elected as Chairman, I believe that his wife Dawn became Treasurer and Cliff Robins was the Secretary.

For Jubilee Day a bouncy castle and fun and games were held at the village hall (or was it on the cricket field?) with stalls, a Bar-B-Q. Each of the children at the school was presented with a celebratory china mug and in the evening a party was held at the Village Hall, with music, dancing and so on.

For the design of the proposed village sign, a small competition was held. Villagers were invited to submit a design for the sign. A free hand was allowed, though it was expected that it should include elements relevant to the villages. A small prize would be given to the person who designed the winning entry. In the event, a rather limited number of entries were submitted and finally two were selected as being worthy of the prize which was therefore split between them.

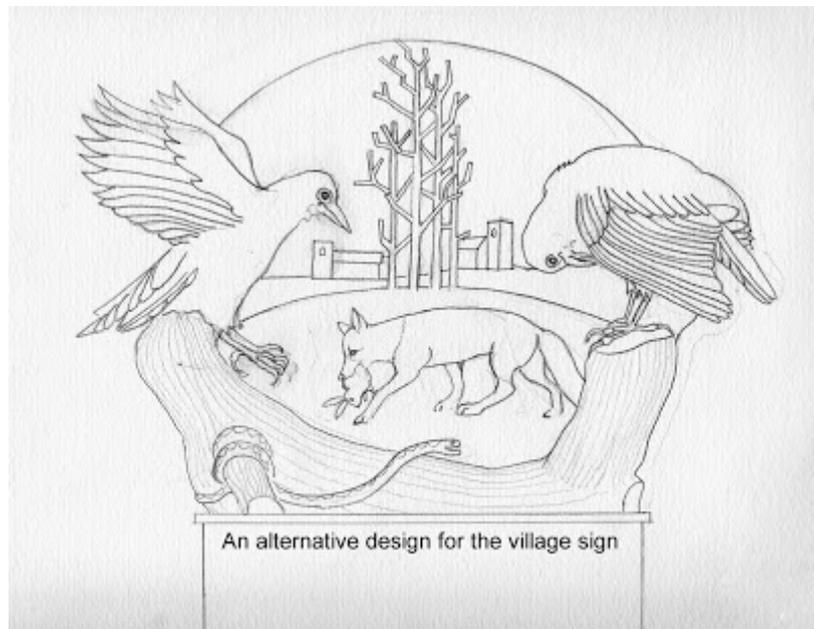
From those entries, the committee chose to combine elements from each. The brief given for the final design was to include reference to the two churches, the common, wildlife and agriculture.



A number of proposed designs were then prepared – keeping in mind that the sign was to be carved in wood and should be attractive and eye catching. You may see from the above photograph of the existing sign that, whilst very similar, the actual sign differs from the two drawings also shown here which were early alternatives.

Both All Saints Church and St Cecilia's are included in the design, as are the rooks that are commonly seen, a fox with a rabbit for its dinner, an owl and an adder – all of which may be seen around the woods and common.

Whilst the sign was being carved, by a woodcarver at Cantley, consideration was being given as to where to erect it. A number of options were taken into consideration, though with no 'Village Green' available, which might have lent itself as an obvious site, it was thought that placing it on the edge of the common, adjacent to the main road through the village, would make it visible to a greater number of people. Permission to site it there had to be



obtained from the Norfolk Naturalists Trust and from certain Common Rights holders as it was to be erected on common land. Permission was given and plans were put in place. An area was cleared, some paving laid and a base constructed for the sign.

Eventually the wood carver completed his work, the painting and varnishing was completed, and the sign was collected and brought back to the village. The committee considered that it was a magnificent and striking piece of work and were very pleased with the outcome.

The whole thing had taken some 18 months or so to get to this stage and arrangements were then made for a grand unveiling. It was now 1979 and we were lucky enough to be able to have the Bishop of Norwich – Right Revd. Maurice Wood – graciously agree to dedicate and unveil the sign.



The photographs here show the Bishop with the Parish Priest – Revd, Arthur Green - and members of the organising committee at the ceremony.

At this point the organising committee was disbanded – its work having been done.

Maintenance of the sign was handed over to the Parish Council. Since 1979 it has been re-painted a number of times by Derek Steele and some repairs have been required. In more recent times the sign has been fitted with a hood to protect it a little from the weather.

We hope to see the sign stand on the corner of the common for many years to come.



(Webmasters Note: Should you have any more information about the sign and are able to add to the story, please contact us. We should be very pleased to hear from you)