

AT LEAST CRUISE IS CLEAN

Lynchcombe

"We are as disgusted and repelled by the presence of the females of Greenham as they are by the arrival of Cruise. At least Cruise is clean." Letter to Newbury Weekly News November 1983

This is the story of how the little Berkshire town of Newbury was sold 96 Cruise missiles. It's the story of how central government lied, how the local press closed its eyes, and how business interests rallied behind the scenes. But finally it illustrates how well the lessons of reaction are learned.

Cover design by William Godwin

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Dedicated to the few
The few who will survive Newbury's
first atom bomb.

AT LEAST CHURCH IS CLEAN

Lynchcombe

Dedicated to the few.
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Looking around the quiet countryside you might assume that the most significant local industry is agriculture. It is not; it's killing people. Just by the motorway that . . . RAF Welford, one of the biggest ammunition dumps in the world and probably the biggest tactical nuclear weapons store in Europe. There's also the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment at

INTRODUCTION

The setting

During the English Civil War, Newbury managed to support both sides, cheering alternating armies off to local mass slaughter. At the same time its worthy citizens complained (to both sides) about the 'injurious burden of taxation'. In Newbury little changes.

Newbury sprawls beside the Kennet and Avon Canal, between those rich West Berkshire meadows where they breed racehorses and people for the society pages. Its quaint, picturesque nature is echoed in those books by Miss Read about 'Thrush Green'. Indeed Miss Read lives locally.

Under her real name of Dora Saint she sits as a member of one of the most repressive bunches of magistrates in the country, with almost the highest proportion of offenders sent to prison. This little irony is just one of many inherent to Newbury. This is the town that banned *The Life of Brian* and let through *Caligula*.

The area served by Newbury District Council covers over 120,000 people. Most of them exude the kind of deferential, cap-touching Toryism that you thought went out with rotten boroughs. Newbury's Conservative Club presidency stayed in the same family for over 100 years, changing hands only recently. Opposition is a trifle limited: at the last election the Tories had over 300 cars to ferry voters to the polls; the Labour Party had 12. Real opposition comes from the Liberal Party, but, riddled with divisions and incompetence, they make a poor second. More of them later.

Looking around the quiet countryside you might assume that the most significant local industry is agriculture. It is not; it's killing people. Just by the motorway there's RAF Welford, one of the biggest ammunition dumps in the world and probably the biggest tactical nuclear weapons store in Europe. There's also the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment at

Aldermaston (now involved in the manufacture of Trident Missile warheads), the Royal Ordnance factory at Burghfield (more atomic bombs), the army depot at Thatcham ("We clothed the Falklands Army"), and the School of Military Survey at Hermitage.

These are just a few of the larger military establishments, most of them big local employers. They do not include the myriad of local companies working on assorted defence contracts. It is not unreasonable to suggest that the people of Newbury have a vested interest in the Cold War. When a youth ran recently into the Tory HQ, nicked a picture of Thatcher, then ran out into the arms of the Law, the first thing he did was ask for political asylum . . .

Perhaps I've painted a harsh picture of the people of Newbury. I like Newbury myself — I guess I'm just a sucker for ducks. People in Newbury are friendly — they really believe crime is something people come from London to do. Perhaps there's a certain insularity; perhaps a certain sense of the right way of doing things. Last year a Mr Denis Croft received two anonymous £20 payments in what was thought to have been a chain letter that had gone wrong. He handed the money over to the police, saying this was ". . . *not* the way things should carry on".

The paper

You cannot separate Newbury from its paper, the *Newbury Weekly News*. Every week for 14p the people of Newbury can buy over 40 pages of local news. Jam-packed with pictures of kids doing thumbs up to the camera (more faces = more sales), its influence cannot be overstated. It sells over 28,000 copies in an area covering 150,000 people — which for a local newspaper is blanket coverage. The *Newbury Weekly News* not only forms local opinion, it *is* local opinion. It reflects the locality in everything, not least in the fact that it features the arms industry prominently. Its largest job ads usually come from the AWRE at Aldermaston.

The *Newbury Weekly News* is very much an old-style local newspaper. In its first issue of 1867 it claimed that its endeavour would be, "to advance those principles of liberty and progression which Englishmen of all classes and opinions, love and cherish".

As an illustration of its love of progression I submit the following incident. Towards the end of '83, the *Newbury Weekly News* was told that a man in a Russian hat was meeting peacewomen as they got off the train at Newbury's railway station, handing them £10 notes for their taxi-fare to the Peace Camp. As a result, the *Newbury Weekly News* (NWN) had a

reporter and photographer waiting at the station for four days. "We'd have a few problems if he decided to change his hat", said one of the reporters.

CRUISE HITS TOWN

"The neighbourhood of Greenham has acquired a doubtful reputation for the disposal of dead infants. On two previous occasions within the last few years the decomposed bodies of moribund babies have been discovered, but in neither instance was any clue obtained as to the perpetrators of, to say the least, such scandalous proceedings. On Saturday last there was a further find of a similar character."

NWN 22.6.1980

Property 100 years before the

London (and other) newspapers

The announcement

It was in May 1941 that the MoD 'temporarily' requisitioned Greenham Common for the war effort. It was agreed that the Common would be handed back after the war. However, when the time came, the powers that be seemed to have changed their minds. The Air Ministry ignored two registered letters from the Town Council and from 1946-51 the airfield was drained.

Newbury's Chamber of Commerce even went so far as to produce a poster calling for the handing back of the base to the local community (1951). It was felt that: "The loss, now and forever, of ancient common lands and liberties would be a disaster". However, in 1952 the Labour government authorised the building of bases for the US Strategic Air Command. Greenham Common was one of them.

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NWN 10.6.1880

*(exactly 100 years before the
announcement about Cruise missiles)*

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they were 'grudgingly assenting to' was the decision to base nuclear Cruise missiles at Greenham Common.

The 'Tomahawk' Cruise missile is a direct descendant of the VI 'Doodlebug'. Relatively slow (a turbo-thrust engine), but with pinpoint accuracy because of its complex guidance and navigation system, which helps it elude planes, radar and killer rockets. Newbury was getting 96 of them.

With the pill came the sugar coating; Francis Pym (Secretary of State for Defence) spelt it out: "Substantially more than £16 million will be spent in this county in connection with the programme. There will be a lot of work generated by the decision. It will be available to local contractors but it has to be done by tender". Put like that, how could they have refused?

The issue following the announcement, 'grudging assent' was quantified in a *Newbury Weekly News* mini-poll. Of 127 people who voted, 74% opposed the arrival of Cruise, 45 people were 'not opposed'. Reactions in the town generally were varied. Take E G Juer:

"Those who love living in this green and pleasant land understand that it and its way of life can only be defended by the possession of, and demonstration of the possession of, a big and powerful swat. If the local lickspittles of the Russians do not like the missiles at Greenham, perhaps a ten-year sabbatical at the Gulag Archipelago would be apt. Welcome to the missiles at Greenham Common; what a pity we can only have a hundred" (*NWN* 26.6.80).

Or on the other hand, this letter-writer: "I note with considerable concern from the headline in your paper that we are now to have an exploration for oil carried out in this area. This, together with the nuclear missiles at Greenham Common and extensive housing estates at Thatcham, are gradually desecrating the countryside in the area against the wishes of the population" (*NWN* 3.7.80).

Some hit a patriotic note: "... but I suggest the headline in your issue of June 19th 'Grudging assent to Newbury's nuclear package' is mistaken and unhelpful. In the last war many people in and out of uniform were proud to play a leading part in the country's defence. Is Newbury now to set a new fashion?" (*NWN* 3.7.80).

Then there was the sane note of authority from Air Field Marshal Sir William Dickson, who argued that, as the whole country would be destroyed by a Soviet missile launch, it was irrelevant to argue that Newbury's danger had increased.

Finally, there was a slightly despairing note from C D Reddie, pointing out that as the missiles would be unmoveable in Market Day traffic, that

the Soviets would probably strike on a Thursday or a Saturday (*NWN* 26.6.80).

Aside from vulgar opinion, Newbury is lucky enough to have a Council which can cut through rhetoric and get right to the heart of an issue. Mr Reg Stubberfield, chairman of Newbury District Council, put the problem in a nutshell: "I am optimistic that the reactivation of Greenham in this way could provide positive economic spin-offs for the district and to local employment prospects".

Mr C Ward (Conservative Council leader) backed Reg up: "The missiles do not have the environmental disadvantages the other weapons had. If we have any representations to make on the subject, they must be on environmental grounds" (*NWN* 26.6.80).

As for the members of Newbury Chamber of Commerce, they were happy to point out that the reactivation of the base would provide hundreds of local jobs and that the arrival of 1300 US Air Force personnel was bound to direct some extra money into local pockets (*NWN* 26.6.80). The chairman of the Anglo-American Community Relations Committee felt: "It could be that the new people coming, who will be highly-trained professional people, will add a lot to the local scene . . ." Radioactive carbon?

An interesting piece of speculation in the paper concerned the possible lifting of the housing application ban around the Greenham flightpath, as there would no longer be the possibility of large-scale flying (*NWN* 19.6.80). This would mean a large tract of land up for grabs for local speculators.

But what, you ask, of local opposition to all this? At this point we introduce Mr Tony Richards, prospective Liberal MP and *ipso facto* leader of the local opposition. Mr Tony Richards . . . *deplored*, "the way the decision was announced" . . . (*NWN* 19.6.80).

Disinformation/lies

"One thing about these missiles, when the crunch comes, at least they'll be fired from somewhere else."

Overheard conversation

Thus ran the initial arguments after the announcement. The *Newbury Weekly News* spelt out Mr Pym's position under the headline: "Minister allays fears". "... (B)ecause the missiles would be dispersed countrywide

before a war started, West Berkshire was no more likely to be a target than previously" (*NWN* announcement issue).

The slick MoD public relations campaign underlined the point. A glossy handout for local residents on Cruise claimed that: "The mobility of the missile launchers means that they can be widely dispersed away from their bases in times of tension or conventional conflict so that there would be no incentive for a Soviet attack against the bases themselves".

This was the Big Lie. In January the MoD confirmed that some of the missiles probably *would* be fired from Greenham (*NWN* 29.1.81), though they subsequently backtracked: "Of course the missiles are going to be American and exactly how they are going to be handled is up to the Americans to decide".

How much the local authorities bought the 'Newbury not at risk' line can be seen in the major civil defence exercise 'Operation Square Leg', which took place on 22 September 1980. Officials from Newbury participated, including the chief executive, Brian Thetford.

During the exercise it was assumed that missiles had been aimed at Aldermaston and Greenham. Both had missed and flattened Newbury and Thatcham (its dormitory suburb) completely. Indeed, Newbury was honoured – it got this country's second missile. Officials had to simulate coping with problems of injury, disease, contaminated water, lawlessness and broken communications. According to Mr Thetford, they learnt a great deal from it.

In February Mr Thetford announced plans to build a nuclear shelter for council officials. It was not to be built under the new civic offices, as they were too close to Greenham and: "operating under a pile of rubble did not make sense". He hoped it would never happen, "but the boy scouts' motto was 'be prepared' " (*NWN* 19.2.82). In March 1983 the Ministry of Defence admitted defeat and the new Secretary of State for Defence, Sir Michael Heseltine, acknowledged that Newbury was a prime target in the advent of war. However, by then, the citizens of Newbury had 'loyally' decided to accept the coming of Cruise.

During this period Berkshire's emergency planning officer, Mr J D Hetherington, began 'educating' the people of West Berkshire about nuclear war. In October 1980 there was a report in the *Newbury Weekly News* of his lecture to Hermitage Parish Council, where he claimed that, "the best defence against the horror of a nuclear attack was a certain amount of very simple knowledge" (*NWN* 2.10.80). He was closely questioned as to the availability of geiger counters.

In April the following year he expanded on this to Hampstead Norreys Parish Council (Hampstead Norreys is eight miles from both Greenham and Aldermaston). Nuclear strikes would, "mainly shift tiles and break

windows", with "the main bogey, boredom and problems of coping with cramped living conditions for 48 hours". Reported without comment in our favourite local paper on 2.4.81.

Other disinformation gems included the 'Cruise-as-bargaining-chip' argument. Apparently, in reality, Cruise was all a bluff to bring the Russians to their senses – they wouldn't *really* be deployed. This ranks with: "training exercises will generally be arranged to cause the least possible inconvenience to the public" (MoD Cruise brochure). Try telling that to residents who have now been woken at 5am by the base's sirens some three or four times, thinking they've only got three minutes to live.*

A revealing incident, illustrating MoD news management, occurred in 1983 when the *Basingstoke Gazette* printed a story saying that the fence at AWRE Aldermaston had been cut by peacewomen who had mistaken the atomic base for Greenham. Where did they get their information? Well, the facts of the story came from the Ministry of Defence press office in London. So did the idea that peacewomen were stupid enough to mistake Aldermaston for Greenham – though that, of course, was on a strictly non-attributable basis.

* These base exercises are interesting in themselves. On the siren, a yellow flag is run up to signify a warning, and the population of the base heads for the shelters. Next a red flag is flown to indicate extreme danger, and finally a black flag is flown. A local correspondent asked two quite pertinent questions. Firstly, how many places have the Newbury folks got reserved in those bunkers? And, secondly, what happens to the person who runs up the black flag?



Michael McNair Wilson, MP for Newbury.

CONSULTATION

“There will be the maximum amount of consultation . . . with one proviso: that the decision has been made and cannot be changed.”

McNair-Wilson MP

Nationwide, BBC 1, June 1980

24 July 1980. The day set aside by the powers-that-be for the due process of local consultation: Democracy Day, Newbury style. Mr Francis Pym, Secretary of State for Defence, was coming all the way from London for the meeting.

Quite a lot of planning had gone into the affair. The *Weakly* (sic) *News* reported (10.7.80) that “officials are thought to be examining ways of limiting entry so that local people can question the Minister, rather than the meeting being used by pressure groups for a broad-ranging attack on defence strategy”.

Consequently, Newbury Racecourse was chosen as the venue, as attendance could be restricted to just 400. Tickets were available from the offices of the District Council and people wanting to ask a question had to submit it to the chairman of the District Council, in writing, before the meeting. He would then decide which questions were ‘appropriate’.

At the meeting itself, although a large number of people were excluded, seats at the front remained empty. The first few rows had been reserved for local councillors, but some of them did not bother to turn up. Despite the packing of the meeting, and despite exhortions to “listen and then ask questions”, Pym’s speech came in for some heavy heckling.

The first questioner was the mayor of Newbury, but from then on, questions took a critical line. Pym dodged these questions. For example,

on the question of the protection of the civilian population in the event of nuclear war, he could only say that government action was expected on this issue shortly.

Summing up the meeting, local MP McNair-Wilson claimed that such a meeting would never have been possible in Russia. This was greeted with howls of derision, which seemed a little unfair. It is probably the nicest thing he's ever said about Russia.

The debate on the meeting continued in the *Newbury Weekly News* (31.7.80), though in a more muted form: the main story was about a fares rise on a local bus service. Mr Stubberfield claimed that many at the meeting came from outside the area, as: "I did not recognise many people making all the noise", which is probably an interesting comment on how small 'his' Newbury really is.

A final comment on the behaviour of the protestors at the meeting I leave to P B Gildersleeves (Thatcham town councillor): "Our precious right to free speech was debased in Newbury last night and I for one was ashamed".

PRO, ANTI & ANTI-ANTI

"On the other hand, if the freedom that generations of British people have fought and died for is worth defending, that defence capability must be the mightiest available to us. I therefore welcome the arrival of Cruise missiles at Greenham Common Airbase, which is in fact in my own backyard. One only asks that they are placed in the most competent hands of the RAF, and top priority be given to the building of fall-out shelters in this part of Berkshire."

Margaret Chesterman

NWN 2.10.80.

Meanwhile the question of the nuclear deterrent was still exciting the local populace. McNair-Wilson, MP, had his own opinion (NWN 25.6.81): "The great mass of my constituents did not oppose the suggestion that ground-launched Cruise missiles should be stationed at RAF Greenham Common". And, indeed, in the same issue there was a letter complaining about the receipt of *Newbury Nuclear News* (an anti-Cruise broadsheet) while the writer was watching TV.

Inert and apathetic Newbury folk may be, but not all of them work for the war industries. 'Local opinion' operates at two different levels. Firstly there is the level of McNair-Wilson and the *Newbury Weekly News*. Reinforced with letters from the more articulate property-owners, it's the mouthpiece of the local Rotary Club – that collection of estate agents and magistrates that dominates Newbury. The second level of 'local opinion' is the real opinions of the local inhabitants. Undercut by traditional Tory passivity and local involvement in the war trades, how is it to find expression?

Despite the appearances to the contrary, I would contend that there *is* considerable local opposition to the siting of Cruise at Greenham . . . though you'd be hard put to find it. The Liberal, Trevor Brown, conducted a survey on his own estate (in East Newbury) and found over 70% opposed to the Cruise missile base. But surely, I hear you say, in this country the essence of our democratic system means that this feeling is bound to find a political expression? Question is . . . who with?

With West Berkshire's best political joke the local Labour Party, perhaps? Unlikely, as they're more slavishly pro-Soviet than the British Communist Party. However, they did spearhead the Newbury Campaign Against Cruise Missiles, which has done a lot of propaganda work.

What of Berkshire's real opposition, the Liberal Party? Its spokesman over this period was Tony Richards, parliamentary candidate. In September 1981 the Liberal Assembly voted to campaign against Cruise, despite opposition from Tony Richards. Tony was torn; as he remarked: "No issue has caused me more anguish than that of Cruise missiles" (NWN 10.7.80). Luckily he found that the Liberal Party did not demand "absolute allegiance to the manifesto".

This confusion was exploited by the Tories. K C T Hutton wrote: "Unilateral disarmament (the official Liberal Party policy, if not Mr Richards) will have a serious effect on local employment" (NWN 28.10.82). Liberal confusion was significant in other ways. At Berkshire County Council's debate on Cruise in November '81, if all the Liberals had voted against Cruise missiles the decision to accept them would have been reversed.

Why were the Liberals such a bunch of wallies? It wouldn't have been so bad for them if they had come out in favour of Cruise, but the hovering was disastrous. Why didn't they follow their own Party's policy? Because they perceived it as electorally impossible. Local opinion (as expressed in the *Newbury Weekly News*) would have characterised them as the Party that stood for mass unemployment, and they lacked the will, the skill and (most importantly) the strength, to capitalise on the *real* local feeling of opposition to Cruise.

It is difficult to find an official expression of the real opposition. But it is easy to see the way the *Weekly News* attempted to orchestrate support.

The march

Our story resumes with the town's reaction to the first local march against Cruise. As the *Newbury Weekly News* complained (10.7.80), the march had been mistimed: timetabled the same day as Newbury's annual

Agricultural Show. In fact the paper was unwilling to cover the march at all, as it was felt that all reporters would be needed for the Show. In the end, one of the reporters offered to cover both.

Come the day, this march (which received extensive coverage in the nationals) got half a page. Newbury's Agricultural Show got four pages. Coverage of the march centered on how Mrs Janice Florencki was delayed from returning home for 55 minutes, though there was some reporting of the march itself: "Unlike some marches and protests, this was happy and peaceful" (NWN 24.7.80).

Local reaction was varied: "If an anti-protest march was organised, using people only in the area, the town would be overrun with the masses. Fortunately the type of people I'm talking about would much rather let the government run the country" K M Bridges (NWN 9.10.80). E A Kingham (NWN 17.7.80) went for the more tolerant approach: "Finally may I say that anyone who speaks for communism, or anything that even smells of it, should be stamped on. It is a personal danger to us all, and anything that is possible must be done to protect us from this menace".

The environment

After the march the official Cruise debate continued asking its own fundamental question. Was Cruise going to devastate 'our' beautiful countryside? Luckily Greenham Common base was able to reassure the populace. "Considerable efforts had been made to protect the environment and ensure that the missile complex would not be unsightly and would merge into the surrounding area" (NWN 26.2.81). The Council's Western Area Planning Sub-committee (while rubber-stamping MoD plans for the base) assured Greenham residents that all they would be able to see of the complex was the fire tower (NWN 10.4.81).

At the same time the Commons and Countryside Sub-committee of the District Council was doing its bit for the environment. Members decided to ban the Army Cadet Force from using the Common for exercises. "No blanks would be fired on the Common", while they had a say in it (NWN 4.6.81).

Death of a debate

Meanwhile, away from officialdom, the paper was making its own unique contribution . . . Old lies never die, they just get reprinted in the letters column of the *Newbury Weekly News*.

"In the event of hostilities Newbury would be one of the safest places to live in Britain, for at the first signs of tension the Cruise missiles would be deployed throughout Britain and thus Newbury would no longer present a worthwhile target" (*NWN* 28.10.82). The author of this gem lives in Kent.

Other letters had a slightly different angle. James Bolarby for example: "We would be some of the luckiest people in the world, if we were right under the bomb when it exploded – not just near enough to die in agony weeks later. I certainly know which of these two choices I would make" (*NWN* 2.7.81).

'Ancient Briton', possibly a pseudonym for a county councillor, was against the whole debate: 'Everyone was issued with gas masks in 1939 but we never needed them. Who can prove or disprove that Hitler did not use gas because he was informed that we were protected against this form of attack? The best deterrent is to circumvent fear not inflame it' (*NWN* 10.4.81).

Our editor agrees. He's bored with the whole debate. Just over a year after the announcement, he closes the Cruise correspondence, except for those letters with "a fresh point of view" (*NWN* 30.7.81). As one of his correspondents notes: "An editor is one who separates the wheat from the chaff, and prints the chaff".

Some months later (in a fit of conscience perhaps?), the *Newbury Weekly News* discovered a "fresh point of view" and printed a map illustrating the effects of a nuclear bomb on Newbury. Headlined: "The nuclear attack few of us survived", it claimed that 85% of the local population would be dead within two months of such a strike (*NWN* 30.9.82). The only response to this was a letter in the subsequent issue: "... discussion of this subject should be restricted to a totally adult media".

A year after the announcement, the Cruise debate was dead. Our beloved editor had closed correspondence and reports on meetings of the Newbury Campaign Against Cruise were next to the Women's Institute News. More important issues had seized Newbury's attention (... like stubble burning). It was against this background that a group of women set up camp outside the base, becoming the Peace Camp on 13 September.

The women arrive

The story of the struggles of the Greenham peacewomen is a separate one. But the story of their effect on Newbury's Cruise debate is all too relevant

to this pamphlet. It was their intervention that awakened the debate, keeping Cruise on our TV screens.

Initially there was a certain culture shock and opposition: "Newbury District Council should rid us of this socially and environmentally obnoxious enclave" (*NWN* 11.2.82). But at this stage protest was muted. The paper even ran relatively neutral stories on a fire at the Peace Camp and on the women's carol singing that first Christmas. But pretty soon the Greenham Common women threatened one of Newbury's most sacred things: house prices. "I feel that the publicity Newbury is getting from the antics outside the base cannot be helping anyone who is trying to sell a house at present" wrote Mrs J A Raleigh (*NWN* 20.5.82).

Initially the assorted local authorities adopted their traditional approach to a new problem: they hoped it would go away. When it didn't, Newbury District Council finally ground into action. A new set of by-laws was introduced to try and evict the women ... and included the imposition of a £20 fine for anyone discharging missiles on the Common.

The first incident involving the women which really excited Newbury occurred when they demonstrated at Newbury's War Memorial. The War Memorial is a rather tatty stone cross by the bridge. It takes up a corner of a churchyard. Unkempt, it is one of Newbury's more prominent after-thoughts. Starting on Friday 6 September 1982, the peacewomen began a demonstration, commemorating the dead of Hiroshima. They filed past the memorial placing stones to represent the people killed in the explosion.

This attracted a whole range of opposition, from women in passing cars sticking out their tongues, to the attention of groups of taunting youths. By lunchtime the police had ordered the women to leave. Chief superintendent Scott-Picton (Ken to fellow Rotarians) claimed: "It was quite obvious that if the women had continued there would have been public disorder" (*NWN* 12.8.82).

What angle did the *Newbury Weekly News* decide to use? Oddly enough it was not a condemnation of the mobs of Newbury, but of the 'desecration' of the War Memorial. The editor of the paper in his local 'chit-chat' column called the attempt to commemorate the enemy's dead 'defilement'. From that point on, local opposition to the peacewomen was considerably more bitter.

A burden on the rates

Next the locals were concerned about how much policing the peace protestors was adding to the rates. In a meeting for local Tories held at the

council offices, Sir Michael Heseltine responded that this issue came under the aegis of the Department of the Environment. (At the same meeting, when asked about the lack of nuclear shelters in Newbury, he responded that this came under the Home Office. McNair-Wilson described this as a "very impressive speech" (NWN 10.2.83).

McNair-Wilson was quite short with the whiners in his own party. He pointed out that the RAF paid over £100,000 to the local authority in lieu of rates, more than enough to cover the extra policing. And when there were no peacewomen the local authority did rather well out of the arrangement.

Nevertheless, Newbury's ratepayers felt in their bones that the whole thing must be an additional burden. Janet Bell wrote the paper a typical letter, though curiously, after expounding on this point, she went on to add: "Mrs Thatcher should take note; never mind the extra expense, let us have a finger on the trigger" (NWN 10.2.83). But then, 'trigger fingers' come out of *central* government expenditure.

ELECTIONS & VIGILANTES

Elections

The Newbury District Council elections held in the middle of 1983 were the "most keenly contested for years" according to our *Weekly News* (5.5.83). What this means is that 100 candidates were fighting for 45 seats. Of these, 42 were from the Alliance (10 SDP).

Before the election the Tories had 28 seats, Liberals 21 and 'odds and Labs' had five. After the election the Tories had 35 seats, the Liberals 10. The Conservative majority had gone from two to 25, despite the fact that local reorganisation had led to there being nine fewer Council seats.

The *Newbury Weekly News* headlined this as: "Tories sweep aside Liberals on anti-Peace Camp vote". Some 48% of the electorate had voted (a relatively high turnout) and, according to Miss Heather Turner (Tory leader), the major issue was: "Greenham women being a nuisance". This was the stage-setter for the General Election of June 1983.

Of the three parliamentary candidates, Mr Richard Knight for Labour, rather optimistically stated that he had a "slim chance". Our incumbent, MP McNair-Wilson, was the Tory choice. He's an ex-journalist, who's been Newbury's MP since 1974. One of his best thoughts to date has been that: "Force will be the counsel of last resort in solving this crisis". No, he's not talking about Cruise, but about the Falklands.

The Liberal, Tony Richards, had, by his own admission, been "unpaid prospective parliamentary candidate for eight years". He's a senior executive with the London Chamber of Commerce and claimed to be a "keen, self-taught musician" (NWN 17.3.83).

Definitive election statements from the latter include: "I cannot go along with one-sided nuclear disarmament, but I cannot go along with rearmament either" (NWN 2.6.83). That one was addressed to a meeting of ten people.

When asked about local civil defence, Tony replied that the best defence was a world free from the threat of nuclear destruction.

Newbury was graced with a flying visit from Mrs Thatcher on her election tour. "Peace is the greatest prize of all and we are the peace Party", she told the assembled populace, before popping off to visit Micro Consultants, who make computers for military satellite surveillance. This firm has just taken on an extra 100 staff – another shining example of local wealth creation.

However, flying visit or not, the high spot of the campaign was Tony telling the women of Greenham to "Go home". This was two years after they had set up camp and a week after the Newbury District Council elections. Unfortunately this new, principled stand met with general derision and he was duly annihilated in the general election.

General election results – June 1983

McNair-Wilson (Con) 31,836

Richards (Lib) 8,798

Knight (Lab) 3,027

(Knight got 700 votes more than the number of registered unemployed in Newbury)

Sadly, Tony never recovered and in December he made his small contribution to Newbury's accommodation problem by moving out of his Thatcham flat to return to his family in London.

More local reaction

Aside from these world-shattering political conflicts, the people of Newbury had other concerns. One thing they certainly did not want to hear about was the threat of nuclear war. (A series of lectures on the threat had to be cancelled after the first meeting when only three people turned up. The organisers were reported to be: "... puzzled by the lack of response" (NWN 29.9.83).)

On the other hand, Newbury never fails to be interested in its rates. The neighbours of a house used by peacewomen were "incensed by their presence" (NWN 9.6.83). Their complaints included, "blocked driveways and plummeting house prices". What they wanted was their rates decreasing and, oh, "why don't they let us live our lives in peace?". Nine Greenham Common homes were lucky and had their rates reduced by up to seven and a half per cent. As Mr Adams, a local resident, explained (NWN 8.9.83):

"... my property has gone down in value by 20% ... it's like living next door to a Calcutta slum". (Note that *nobody* has had their rates reduced because they live near the base itself.)

Even the American authorities thought the presence of the Greenham protestors was pretty rough. In October 1983 two local people working in RAF Greenham Common were awarded the American Air Force Achievement Medal for braving the women, while travelling to and from work. (It just goes to show there are no heroes any more, just people who follow orders.)

Meanwhile in the town itself, one Sheila Shedden, a retired nurse, was organising a march against the Greenham Common women. The first march had about 300 people on it (NWN 1.6.83) and was addressed by Mrs Shedden. She said that the behaviour of the women was a "disgrace to womanhood" and that they should show "consideration for the people of Newbury, and go".

The second march was held a month and a half later and flopped disastrously with only about 60 people on it. Again they were lucky enough to be addressed by Shedden: "... to all you silly and pathetic young things at Greenham, I say are you really so stupid that you cannot see that you are being used as tools by other people to do their dirty work?". She refused invitations to talk to the peacewomen.

A letter to the *Newbury Weekly News* (21.7.83) voiced the opinion of many about the low turnout: "I feel Newbury has been dismally let down by its residents. Perhaps Newbury's motto should be 'Moan and do nothing' ". In the same issue there was a long letter on proportional representation by J E Lees. He concluded his letter with: "I seriously believe that sanctions such as public floggings and the stocks would cure the wayward habits of deviants like football hooligans and peacewomen".

Vigilantes

Throughout this period the peacewomen suffered a lot of harassment from local people: mostly abuse and being banned from local pubs. There were other incidents, including fireworks being thrown into tents, cement being poured over a standpipe used by the women, airgun attacks, attempts to burn tents, and rubbish was poured over personal belongings. Some of these attacks were by the same group of vigilantes, one of whom was interviewed (anonymously) on TV South.

The base for this group was provided by the Newbury Citizens' Relief Fund, which was set up by Mr and Mrs Learoyd (local newsagents), Mr and

Sheila Shedden and her march.



Mrs Main (who run the Railway Hotel) and a Mrs Eggleston. It was first set up to help pay the £400 fine of a local policeman who had driven at dangerously high speed through a group of peace demonstrators. (In fact, they were later stopped from paying this fine.) The relationship between this group and the vigilantes is well-recognised locally.

John Learoyd later became press secretary of RAGE (Ratepayers Against Greenham Encampments) which ran an advertising campaign in the paper in the form of vicious cartoons, attacking the women. Its aim was to focus local hostility onto the peacewomen. Its treasurer was Dr Tom Gibson (Freedom Association) and its chairman Mr Anthony Meyer. The campaign, which must have been a costly affair, has been the cause of much speculation, mainly because it is unclear who paid for it.

The school debate

On 17 November 1983 the *Newbury Weekly News* reported the announcement of the arrival of Cruise missiles – they'd arrived the previous Monday. Admittedly the paper's main story was the loss of 35 jobs at a local factory, but the missiles, or rather a description of the security measures used to protect them, was at least on the front page. The paper even went so far as to call RAF Greenham Common 'Stalag Greenham' (only after fierce internal debate, though).

The following issue a major row blew up around Greenham. The row was over a talk given by two peacewomen to fourth formers studying English at the Turnpike Comprehensive School. This talk created absolute outrage from both parents and governors, though previously they had had Wing Commander Stanley Pratt talking about 'Peace' (which is a bit like Atilla talking on pacifism: "Jolly useful stuff").

The editor, in his local chit-chat column, summarised the alleged reasons for local antipathy to the peacewomen: "... the squalor, the sneeringly overt lesbianism, the arrant disregard for the law and the contempt for their reasonable fears". This was by far the most articulate expression of hatred to appear in the paper so far.

In the same issue there was also this contribution from James D Duffet, 23 Russell Road, Newbury: "The females of Greenham can count themselves very fortunate that the people of Newbury do not follow their bad example by breaking the law of the land to try and force their point across, otherwise they might be physically ejected from our nice, clean town and be given the good thrashing they deserve.

"We are as disgusted and repelled by their presence as they are by the arrival of Cruise. At least Cruise is clean."

The peacewomen's talk continued to excite passions. There were threats from parents of withdrawing their children and loose talk of "Greenham trash". The letters were particularly angry about there having been a discussion about lesbianism, and the fact that one of the women breastfed her child in front of "impressionable 14-15 year-olds".

The response to the peacewomen's talk far outweighed local response to the arrival of Cruise and the two cannot be unconnected. Local people were aware of national interest in and (to some extent) sympathy for the peacewomen. The times when national coverage is at its greatest are also the times of greatest anti-peacewomen hysteria.

It is at times like these that a young author grasps for vulgar psychology. I quote from my *Introduction to Psychology* (sixth edition by Hilgard, Atkinson and Atkinson, published by Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich):

"Displaced aggression is an aggressive action against an innocent person or object rather than against the actual cause of frustration . . . Frequently the frustrated individual cannot satisfactorily express aggression against the source of the frustration. Sometimes the source is vague and intangible. The person does not know what to attack, yet feels angry and seeks *something* to attack. Sometimes the person responsible for the frustration is so powerful that an attack would be dangerous. When circumstances block direct attack on the cause of frustration, aggression may be 'displaced'."

Finally, I would like to end this section with a sweet 'olde worlde' contribution from A Adams (*NWN* 8.12.83). This is probably my personal favourite: "In my humble opinion the solution to the problem would be the establishment of a troop of mounted specials: there must be enough retired members of HM Forces who hunt and have enough equestrian skills to be easily trainable in mob control. They would also, I feel, be patriotic enough to devote one or two days a week to help their county and country".

HOW IT COULD HAVE BEEN

Greenham KC135 Protest Group, on being informed about the arrival of Cruise: "No brief for getting involved. Missiles and planes are completely different things."

NWN 19.6.80

It might have been thought from the preceding chapters that the people of Newbury were as lambs led to the slaughter. This is incorrect. They *can* be as lions — provided they're given the right cues. As an example of what could have been, I present the case of the KC135s.

The KC135 is a military version of the Boeing 707, which acts as a flying petrol tanker. In February 1978 Newbury was told that it was getting 15 of them at RAF Greenham Common. Another case for stiffening the upper lip and doing one's national duty? No way!

The first sentence of the *Newbury Weekly News*' announcement of the story ran: "Newbury people have less than nine months to prepare themselves for a permanent reactivation of Greenham Air Base" (19.2.78). There was also another horror story for the front page — house prices (well, those over 40 grand) would be slashed by 20% as a result of this decision. The cheaper houses would not be affected because of buoyant demand.

There was an immediate reaction from the local authorities. Newbury District Council called on the government to delay the decision so that local views could be gauged. McNair-Wilson called for a petition *and* a referendum on what he termed the arrival of the 'brutes'. Tony Richards — you remember Tony, "a voice on every issue, an opinion on none" — called for a public enquiry.

Meanwhile the *Weekly News* was doing its bit for journalistic objectivity:

"Huge campaign against flying gets under way" was its main headline on 16.2.78. Other headlines included "Minister appears to rule out compensation" and "£1 million drop in house values forecast". The paper also launched a poll on the issue on its front page.

Inside the paper under the headline: "Tanker planes: the big debate begins" there were two pages of mainly 'anti' letters. There was also a report by Newbury District Council which pointed out that although £1 million would be lost in house values (and rates), there would be an extra £1 million pumped into the economy, plus jobs for 250 locals at the reactivated base.

The next issue (23.2.78) the KC135 was still occupying most of the front page. There was a report on the petition which was striving for 40,000 signatures. There was also a report on the mass meeting at the Town Hall (remember that sordid affair at Newbury Racecourse?). In this packed meeting it was decided, amongst other things, to have a protest march the following month. A Mr F R Pedley (retired headmaster and member of the Rotary Club — see *Appendix 1*) joined the Action Committee. More of him later.

Next issue (2.3.78) KC135s were still taking up most of the front page. (Do you remember the editor closing correspondence on Cruise because he was bored with it?) There was the result of a readers' poll headlined: "No, No, No! Loud and Clear". Of 1100 who voted, 875 were against reactivation, whereas 152 welcomed it. (In other words, only five per cent more Newbury people were against the KC135s than were later to be against Cruise.) McNair-Wilson claimed it was an "admirable idea" to carry out the poll. Even the Vicar of Greenham came out against the KC135s.

In reality, if the KC135s were to go anywhere then Greenham Common was the most logical place. KC135s operate with F-111s and RAF Greenham Common is the nearest vacant field to Upper Heyford where the F-111s are based. Greenham Common has one of the best runways in Europe and half a million pounds had just been spent on resurfacing it. There were really not, as a letter tried to claim: "... so many other places to choose from" (*NWN* 9.3.78).

The campaign against the plane grew. The *Newbury Weekly News* issue of 9.3.78 carried a report on the anti-KC135 demonstration. Over half a mile long, with 1500 participants, it was led by McNair-Wilson and other local dignitaries. The local council had been working overtime. They'd sent officers to do noise tests on the KC135s and then produced diagrams (reproduced *NWN* front page 9.3.78) claiming large areas would be affected. One offshoot of a high noise corridor would be no new houses, thus hitting local speculators. (Completely off the point, the

same issue carried the headline: "Crime rate up: Police chief blames public".)

By the middle of March the paper was still filling the front page with the KC135s, though they were stretching it a bit. Our active Rotarian, F R Pedley, fed the paper a story about how Newbury would be an Academic Desert. He claimed that plane noise would cost 750,000 hours learning every year and seriously affect exam results. Nursery children would be traumatised by the constant noise. This was the main front page story.

Two issues later and (you've guessed it) KC135s are still front page stuff. The Action Committee had collected over 16,000 signatures for their petition, yet had successfully disassociated themselves from CND's 'political' opposition to the planes. The Chamber of Commerce had come out against the plane due to "long-term financial matters". Translated, this meant that their local market (particularly the better off) would be driven away by plane noise.

By the middle of April '78 (two and a half months after the announcement) the KC135s were still dominating the front page. There was another of those maps from the Council showing the effects of the noise corridor. At no point did the reporting of Cruise achieve this level. The *Newbury Weekly News* had orchestrated an imaginative local campaign against the KC135s, but there was nothing of this sort of reporting used on Cruise. Cruise reporting was 'reactionary' in a most immediate sense. It 'reacted' against all signs of opposition to Cruise.

On Friday 26 May the KC135 reporting paid off and Fairford got the KC135s instead of Greenham. McNair-Wilson claimed that this had "shown the power of public opinion". The final comment I leave to Peter Fawkes in a letter written three and a half years later: "If we had only accepted those planes . . ." (*NWN* 23.12.82).

WHO BENEFITS?

"We would recognise that we are not helping the situation, but then neither are many other big companies locally."

*US Air Force Lieutenant Brian Irving
on the local housing shortage*

So why didn't we see a rerun of the KC135 campaign when it was announced that Newbury was getting Cruise missiles? To answer that question, it is necessary to ask another: who benefits?

Right from the start the business community was behind the siting of Cruise at Greenham Common. The announcement issue had an article entitled: "Chamber of Commerce welcome", in which its president welcomed "the extra jobs created by work at the base and the extra revenue pumped into the local economy by servicemen stationed there". Yet concern over the number of unemployed can be seen in the business community's normal help for the unemployed - zilch. The extra revenue, now, that's a different matter. As Mr Tony Kimber (a now-retired president of the Chamber of Commerce) underlined, local businesses would: "benefit by millions of pounds each year".

Nevertheless, the number of jobs provided by RAF Greenham Common is not insignificant. In late '83 it was announced that there would eventually be jobs for 100 locals rebuilding the maintenance and clerical buildings for the civilian staff. These jobs were to last 18 months. The number of civilian jobs provided by RAF Greenham Common on a permanent basis is now around 300. They include clerical, administrative and maintenance workers, plus cooks and cleaners. Unemployment for the area is around 2500.

As for 'help' for local businesses, although the lion's share of the site's development was undertaken by Tarmac, a large number of Newbury firms were also engaged in the building of the bunkers. These included Cleansing Services (Southern Counties) Ltd, who disposed of waste chemicals, Newbury Fuel Injection Services, who repaired plant machinery, and John Stacey and Sons. The latter were the civil engineers who provided the rubble to cover the shelters. I give you their contract manager, Jim Hutchins: "We are a non-political, non-unionised organisation. If we were not doing the work, somebody else would be. A lot of people would have given their eye teeth to get the contract".

So far the benefactors are the business community generally, some unemployed and those firms engaged in construction work on the base. To go further it is necessary to look at planning controls in the area.

Planning controls

In 1983 Knight, Frank and Rutley published a research document called *Office Development in the Western Corridor* (the Western Corridor is land along the M4 from Hammersmith to Bristol). This document had two conclusions about Newbury: firstly that it would become a boom town and secondly that its control of planning applications was the tightest in the Corridor.

Tight planning control has three major effects. Firstly it pushes up the price of available land. The price of an acre of building land in West Berkshire now stands at a quarter of a million pounds, which is £20,000 on the price of a first purchase house and four times the price of land in Milton Keynes. Demand for land (especially in the South) is increasing and demand cannot, as elsewhere, be met from derelict city land.

Secondly, tight planning controls keep the local business community in control. This is the main reason why there are no shops in Thatcham, Newbury's dormitory suburb. Newbury's dominant business clique have made sure that Thatcham people have to come to Newbury for their shopping. Thatcham has 17,000 inhabitants, seven estate agents and one fish and chip shop. I exaggerate, it also has a Co-op, but you get the picture.

Finally, tight planning controls mean that the moneyed section of the community can live in some of the most beautiful countryside in Britain, complete with unspoilt views. Meanwhile the plebs are crammed into Newbury town itself, with all the concomitant problems of appalling conditions, overcrowding and ruinously exploitative landlords. In Newbury, environmentalism is the curse of tenants.

To this picture you must add the vast numbers of Americans at Greenham Common. By 1985 there will be about 5900 USAF staff and their dependants, plus another 100 RAF people (*NWN* 10.3.83). Some of these will live at the base itself, but the rest will have to get accommodation from the area; either rented or in USAF-purchased houses.

Local landlords lost no time in renting to USAF families when they began to arrive. They make ideal tenants: well-off and short-staying. In February 1983 there was a letter in the paper from the wife of an American serviceman pointing out that the Americans were being charged £225 to £300 a month for houses – higher than prevailing levels of rent. The USAF is unusually sensitive to pressure from landlords and there have been crackdowns on servicemen owing rent to civilian landlords. Servicemen are not allowed to return home without a letter from their landlord.

Imagine the knock-on effect of this on the accommodation problem. Even as early as 1982-3 there were 2723 on the council's housing waiting list, yet only 67 new houses and flats were built (*NWN* 6.6.83 – in a rare story on the housing problems of Newbury). The problem is acute, and even the government acknowledges it to some extent. In November 1983 the local Council got an extra half million for council houses – but it was nowhere near enough to solve the problems caused by the incoming Americans.

One effect of all this was to line the pockets of local speculators. Chief amongst these is John Norgate of Trencherwood Estates, the company which dominates all building work in Newbury. In November '83 Newbury District Council was "forced" (*Newbury Weekly News*' word) to pay four million to speculators for land they had cornered. The NDC needed the land for council houses, but was unable to find any of its own: the speculators had beaten them to it.

Trencherwood Estates was the major benefactor of this shoddy deal, along with Rockhold, another local 'wealth-creator'. Mr Brian Eighteen, the financial director of Trencherwood, said he was "happy to deal with the Council" (*NWN* 1.12.83).

A more direct link between the speculators and the base occurred earlier in July '83. An American officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Feldman, appeared on behalf of Trencherwood for a proposed site at Sandpit Hill near Newbury. He appealed for more land to be released for housing, pointing out that personnel must live within 30 minutes of those bunkers at Greenham Common.

All in all, it is not surprising that the *Financial Times* described Newbury as a "boom town". The report in the *Newbury Weekly News* (2.12.82) on this statement had Malcolm Bull (a Trencherwood director) in full agreement. Property-wise the situation was the same. "Encouraging

year for property sales say agents" (*NWN* 30.12.82), and 1983 was even better: a sellers' market. Even the big London investment companies (like Ravenscroft Properties) were ploughing millions into the town.

Leaving aside these questions of high finance we return to the mundane world of Newbury's Chamber of Commerce. Mr Anthony Kimber's speech on retiring as president (reported *NWN* 14.7.83) noted an increase in membership to around 300. He also asked for more informal links with the American community at Greenham.

The kind of links he had in mind became obvious with 'The Great American Supermarket Crisis'. At the beginning of 1984 the Americans announced their plans to replace their old commissary – a military food shop – with a new supermarket. Built on the edge of the runway, in the centre of the base, it would be twice the size of Newbury's biggest supermarket, Sainsbury's.

There was no surprise in this; there had been a supermarket there before and American bases are largely self-sufficient. For one thing, Americans prefer their own food. However the announcement started a local protest campaign far more vehement than the one that greeted the announcement of Cruise.

"Base store plan brings storm of protest" ran the *Newbury Weekly News* headline (as opposed to 'Grudging assent'). Basically all the local traders could see a possibility of grabbing some of those dollars and they brought their local politicians into action. Newbury District Council Western Area Planning Committee opposed the store on two grounds.

Firstly, it complained that the store would reduce the opportunity for USAF personnel to integrate within the existing Newbury community. As Chamber of Commerce spokesperson, Mrs Jackie Raleigh, said: "We would like to see more of the men and women at the base and would like to see them integrated with us" (*NWN* 16.2.84).

Secondly, the Planning Committee felt that West Berkshire's structure plan would not permit the addition of a large shopping area. Apparently, the people of West Berkshire are lucky enough to have a structure plan flexible enough for missile bases, but not for supermarkets. However, the government gave points for trying it on, but otherwise ignored the protests. The Liberals felt this was a shame. Mr Tony Heydeman commented: "We wouldn't allow Digital to build a supermarket for their employees here and we shouldn't make any exceptions just because of the nationality of the employer" (*Newbury Journal* 22.2.84).

THE OLIGARCHY

"The Rotary Club? Well, it's got to be a tasty leg-up contact-wise."

Arthur Daley

To you and me (I'm working on assumptions here), Cruise represents a way of killing members of our species more efficiently, more selectively and in greater numbers than the last lot of weapons. In other words, it's a threat. To Newbury's business community, however, Cruise is a no-strings-attached, local business development grant.

I've outlined to my patient readers the direct and indirect benefits of Cruise to these people: those construction contracts, the demand for accommodation from foot-sore Air Force personnel, and lastly the increasing demands on local shops. The question is, to what extent did our local business community see their common interest and what did they do to help it?

In a town as small as Newbury there are bound to be links between people in business – but which organisation provides the focus? The Chamber of Commerce, although vocal, is very much a second-rate organisation, without even its own office. Its low standing in the eyes of local (male-dominated) business can be seen in the prominent role women are allowed to play in it.

So if it's not the Chamber of Commerce, perhaps the real focus is the 'local Tory Party? Well no, in fact even the District councillors have noted how short Council meetings have been getting recently. With only one or two exceptions, Tory councillors provide docile lobby fodder, to be trotted out regularly in support of ratepaying and business interests.

If we've eliminated the Chamber of Commerce and the Tory Party, who

does that leave? The Round Table? This is a kind of kindergarten for young businessmen. Here males under forty serve out their apprenticeship, hoping to be selected eventually for the commanding heights of local business influence: Newbury Rotary Club.

The Rotary Club is ostensibly a charitable institution – but it ought to have as its motto ‘Charity begins at home’. In essence, in Newbury as elsewhere, it is an association of the most influential and wealthy. Combined together in this Club, these people make up the most powerful political force in the area since the Druids. And the Druids never had telephones.

Of the 55 members of the Rotary Club in 1983 (see Appendix 1), no less than seven were directly involved in land – most of them as estate agents. These included Desmond Barton (now also head magistrate) of the firm Dreweatt, Watson and Barton, probably Newbury’s most prominent firm, and John Pallett, senior partner of Neates, another old-established firm of chartered surveyors, auctioneers and estate agents. Another seven members ran retail outlets, including two garages, a chemists’ shop and Newbury’s own department store, Camp Hopson.

Can these people be said to have organised their interests to prevent an anti-Cruise campaign? It has to be admitted that there has been no obvious *pro*-Cruise campaign. But on the other hand, as we’ve already seen, all opposition to Cruise has been well and truly played down by the *Newbury Weekly News*. No prizes for guessing which Club managing director, Reg Blake, and editor, Lou Cummins, belong to. No doubt Cruise has been a major topic for discussion at their Friday night feasts at the Chequers.

Then again, if the Greenham women ever hoped for a sympathetic ear on the bench, it wasn’t for long. No less than ten of Newbury’s Rotarians in 1983 were involved with the blunt end of the law. Most of them were magistrates, but one is our friend Ken Scott-Picton, the local police chief.

No, not for these people the tawdry populism of a RAGE campaign. Just a few considered phone calls when things look unhealthy, a careful guarding of interests. A RAGE-type campaign is a sign of weakness; an emphasis on the debate, when all you really need is apathy.

Two good examples of the way the Newbury Rotary Club works concern member Jim Freeman. Now, Jim has been a major figure in Newbury politics for over 30 years and is Rotary Club president. He’s been mayor, head magistrate, and now he’s an alcoholic. Once, in 1979, he was stopped going the wrong way round the roundabout outside Newbury’s Police Station. When the officer concerned radioed in he was told to drive Jim home. But then, Ken Scott-Picton isn’t just a chief superintendent, he’s *also* the Rotary Club’s assistant secretary.

In a more serious incident, again in 1979, a motorcyclist was knocked off his bike by a ‘tired and emotional’ Mr Freeman. The police refused to

prosecute, which surprised the biker, until he found out that Mr Freeman was head magistrate. Disgusted, he submitted the details to the *Newbury Weekly News* but, surprise, surprise, Lou Cummins refused to publish. No doubt, the day after the accident, Freeman, complete with massive hang-over, was dishing it out to other local drink-drivers.

One of the only members of the local business scene who *isn’t* in Newbury Rotary Club is John Norgate, who, as boss of Trencherwood Estates, is Newbury’s most prominent speculator. When Trencherwood Estates goes public around the middle of 1984, Norgate’s worth (including holdings nominally held by his wife) are estimated at £13 million. How much of this can be directly related to the extra demand created by the Americans is impossible to say. However, it illustrates the amount of money involved in what is, after all, only a ‘bit of local speculation’.

If Norgate’s absence from Newbury’s Rotary Club is seen as a weak link, it ought to be pointed out that Norgate desperately *wants* to join – the Club’s charity concert was “generously sponsored by Trencherwood” (NWN 11.2.82). However, if he ever tried it, he’d be blackballed. Not only have his developments totally altered Newbury, to the disgust of older Rotarians, but he alienated many in the so-called ‘firework incident’.

During a night out with Thatcham Round Table in 1982, John Norgate organised a practical joke using a firework hidden inside a mock rocket. The firework set off the fire alarm and 250 people, including the wives who had been watching a fashion show, had to be evacuated.

So John, described by the *Newbury Weekly News* editor, Lou Cummins, as a “shy, sensitive human being”, will have to join *Thatcham* Rotary Club – a very much second-rate organisation. John Norgate knows only too well that to have real power and influence in Newbury – not to mention a helping hand from time to time – you have to belong to its Rotary Club. When *Thatcham* Rotary Club started in 1982, with 28 members, the best it could rustle up for its officers were an insurance broker, an accountant and a forestry worker.

Conclusion

To Newbury’s own mafia, the arrival of Cruise at Greenham was nothing more than an opportunity to line its pockets – dollar signs flashing up behind piggy little eyes. A few bucks were made on the construction works, but the real money was to be made in property. All that extra demand for property, which remained at the same level of supply. How our local landowners, estate agents and speculators wallowed in it. Then

there were all those bucks to be made by local shopowners as the Americans flooded into the town. It would have been churlish to refuse it all.

It's true there were one or two drawbacks to the long pointy things, but our friends in *the* local paper soon sorted that out. Those boys know how to manufacture a local campaign and they know how to kill one stone dead. When they say a debate is dead, you gotta believe it. Our media people sold those missiles like soap powder, and you know what? The suckers lapped it up.

You think perhaps I've been a little harsh in blaming the Rotary Club for the passive acceptance of Cruise. Yet who was it Colonel Robert Thompson (Commander of the 501st Tactical Missile Wing) visited in November 1983, just after the missiles had arrived? Yes, you've guessed it, it was the Rotary Club. Jim Freeman had the meeting cleared of press, and the good Colonel discussed with the assembled diners the impact of the base on the local area.

This was no organised conspiracy, just a coming together of wise heads, a realisation of their common interests. The men of the Rotary Club are not evil men. If they have a tiny fault, it's their habit of identifying the interests of Newbury with their own.

But perhaps as the rest of Newbury's honest folk fester amongst the radioactive piles of rubble that mark their little town, they might reflect on the value of their obsession with house prices and rates.

As the vomiting, weakness and sores increase, they could ask themselves whether it was really worth that cushy job at Aldermaston.

As the Rotarians quake in their 'all mod cons' bunkers, they can ask themselves if the aggrandisement of Trencherwood was worth all those deaths. Were all those half-truths and omissions *worth* the few extra grand they made?

As they all watch the children and elderly die first, they can comfort themselves with the thought that the same is happening in the good ol' USSR. As they die, they can wrap themselves in copies of the *Newbury Weekly News*.

APPENDIX 1

Rotary Club of Newbury, list of members for 1983

- BARTON, Desmond (*Head magistrate, boss of Dreweatt, Watson and Barton*)
- BIDDLE, Arthur (*Jeweller and past president*)
- BLACKBURN, Eric (*Retired*)
- BLAKE, Reg (*Managing director, Newbury Weekly News*)
- BLAKE, Bill (*Retired*)
- BLICK, John (*Vicar*)
- BROWN, Alan (*Retired, on supplemental magistrate's list*)
- BROWN, Stanley (*Wealthy landowner, boss of local Plenty Group of Companies, with eight per cent of the output going to the Royal Navy*)
- BUNCE, Ray (*Retired, Club treasurer*)
- BUTLER, Keith (*Retired*)
- BUTLER, Trevor (*Newbury Building Society*)
- CLIFFORD-SMITH, John (*Stockbroker*)
- CLOUTING, Barry (*Magistrate, works for Southern Electricity Board*)
- CRAWSHAW, Mike (*Retired vet*)
- CUMMINS, Lou (*Editor of Newbury Weekly News*)
- ENGLEFIELD, Len (*Retired police superintendent*)
- EYRE, Denis (*Merchant banker*)
- FOSTER, John (*Dentist*)
- FREEMAN, Jim (*President of the Club, ex-head magistrate*)
- GALE, Gus (*Surveyor*)
- HANCOCK, Aubrey (*Barclays Bank manager*)
- HAYNES, Beau (*Retired*)
- HILLS, Roland (*Solicitor*)
- HOGAN, Mike (*Oil distribution*)

HOILE, Charles (*Solicitor/Coroner, 2nd vice-president of the Club*)
 HOLE, Jack (*Retired*)
 HUMPHREYS, Peter (*Works for Newbury Diesel Co Ltd*)
 JAMES, Alec (*Retired*)
 KING, Peter (*Owns firm of quantity surveyors, secretary of the Club*)
 LESTER, John (*Runs a laundry*)
 LIVINGSTONE, Harry (*Retired*)
 MACKAY, John (*Works at Midland Bank*)
 MACKLIN, Bernard (*Electrical engineer, Club's social secretary*)
 MARKS, Ken (*Retired*)
 OVEREYNDER, Hans (*Nurseryman*)
 PALLETT, John (*Senior partner with Neates Estate Agents, first vice-president of the Club*)
 PARMENTIER, Len (*Former Clerk of the Court. Ran Secretariat for the Chief of Imperial Staff under Churchill during World War II*)
 PEDLEY, Ray (*Former headmaster, active in the KC135 campaign*)
 PHILPOTT, Brian (*Former major, runs own electrical company*)
 POTTER, Herbert (*Chartered surveyor and estate agent*)
 PURYER, Mike (*Director of Camp Hopson, Newbury's department store*)
 SCOTT-PICTON, Ken (*Head of Newbury police, chief superintendent*)
 SLEGG, Tony (*Manager of Williams and Glynn's*)
 STANBROOK, Francis (*Retired*)
 STREET, Wilfred (*Retired*)
 SUTHERLAND, Lesley (*Consulting engineer*)
 TUCKEY, Gerald (*Works at AWRE Aldermaston*)
 VINCE, Alan (*Agricultural merchant*)
 WAHLEN, Philip (*Runs Nias, Newbury's major garage, magistrate*)
 WARNE, Douglas (*Floor covering manufacturer*)
 WHEELER, Jack (*Owns another garage*)
 WILES, Clifford (*Building surveyor*)
 WILLIS, Clifford (*Owns chemist shop*)
 WINWOOD, Paul (*Travel agent*)

APPENDIX 2

The religious debate

With so much lip-service paid to Christianity in Newbury, I thought it might be interesting to look at the religious input on the Cruise missile debate.

Our first contribution comes from Gail Hocking Giles who is concerned about pacifist arguments on Cruise: "Just think what would have happened to Christianity if the early members of the Church had followed the peace at any price principle . . ." (*NWN 10.7.80*). She is supported the following week with a quote from the Articles of Religion (Article 37): "It is lawful for Christian men, at the command of the magistrate, to wear weapons and serve in the wars."

The following year Newbury and District Council of Churches expresses "grave concern" about all aspects of armament (*NWN 26.2.81*). Meanwhile at the Newbury Healing Group (*NWN 11.2.81*) 'Gildas' has communicated through Ruth White that spiritual turmoil "will not need to be worked out at the physical level, such as in another major world war". . . sighs of relief all round.

Next we have the learned turn of Chaplain David Crocker from the United States Air Force at Greenham — the man in the know. In his guest contribution to the paper's 'Christian Viewpoint' he avoids the weapons issue entirely, talking mainly about crayfish, but concluding "Christ is always near to refresh thirsty spirits" (*NWN 18.2.82*).

The following year this lack of theme is continued by Graham Hilton: "The problems of our society will not be solved by pursuing a fragile, outward peace" (*NWN 17.2.83*). Apparently what is required is an inner peace.

The penultimate contribution from the 'Thou shalt not kill' brigade comes from C Curran. "All, Christian or not, have the right and duty to

defend self, family and fellow citizens against criminal thugs; civil, political and international, by any necessary means including killing; these aggressors ask for trouble and deserve all they get" (NWN 17.6.83).

Our final contribution, again found in the 'Christian Viewpoint' spot, is the headline, "Newbury needs a crematorium". Amen.

- LESTER, John (Retired)
- LIVINGSTONE, Harry (Retired)
- MACKAY, John (Works at Midland Bank)
- MACKLIN, Bernard (Electrical engineer, CND & social secretary)
- MARKS, Ken (Retired)
- OVERSEYNDER, Hans (Workerman)
- PALLETT, John (Senior partner with Newton Estate Agents, first vice-president of the Club)

PARMENTIER, Leo (Former Clerk of the Court, Ret. 1950)

The following year Newbury and District Council of Churches expressed "grave concern" about all aspects of the Newbury Test Range. Through Ruth White that (particular) will not be seen to be at the physical level, such as in another major work, "Light and shadow" (1972).

Next we have the learned turn of Graham Hillon, United States Air Force at Greenham - (the 1980s) NWN guest contribution to the paper's 'Christian Viewpoint', he avoids the weapons issue entirely, talking mainly about crystal, but concluding "Christ is always near to refresh thirsty spirits" (NWN 18.2.83).

The following year this lack of theme is continued by Graham Hillon: "The problems of our society will not be solved by pursuing a facile outward peace" (NWN 17.3.83). Apparently what is required is an inner peace.

The penultimate contribution from the 'Thou shalt not kill' brigade comes from C. Curran. "All, Christian or not, have the right and duty to