

For quite some time, I have heard it said, and regretfully have more than a degree of empathy with the comment, that without volunteers our society would crumble very quickly. A local friend and colleague commented in his long experience of life, there is a general 10% of society which is prepared to get stuck in and walk the extra mile for their community, about 20% who have the courage to say they have no intention of being social animals and do nothing for anyone and abide by it, with the remaining 70% doing the bare minimum trying to be seen to take part but actually not doing much unless there is some self benefit in the deed. I haven't seen too much wrong with that analysis either. There are volunteers in the wider field, e.g. hospital visitors, drivers, helpers in charity shops etc., but also in rural communities, and Buckland Brewer is no exception - our volunteers are equally vital. Take people that work in the shop, your parish councillors (they are the only government body who don't get a penny!), helpers at the Safari Lunch and plant sale, flowers that appear in the church apparently by magic, I could go on and on...with apologies to all those I haven't mentioned, I know you're out there. They amount to around 70-80 people, the same people multi-tasking and getting older by the week – and we are a community of nearly 800.

So why, pray, does an element of our society who, when seeing things aren't right, aren't what they used to be, rather than stopping to wonder why and whether they could actively do something about their gripe, or address concerns where those concerns should be addressed, simply launch into a tirade of abuse to whichever volunteer is to hand or possibly the easiest to access or browbeat, assuming that somehow this individual is responsible for the perceived shortcoming? Is it simply lack of understanding of where to complain to (the information has been to hand for a long time for those that can be bothered to "wise up"), or is it that it's easier to take the lazy way out and not get involved, hoping by passing the buck that this will somehow miraculously resolve what has upset their tiny little bit of world?

If you see things that aren't quite as up to scratch as they were a few years ago, there is inevitably a reason. For example, grass verges not cut, issues with waste collections, dog mess (this seems to be an eternal problem wherever one lives), Post Office van not functioning properly or turning up, a sub-standard vehicle on the bus route, the reasons will be outside the control of our volunteers, otherwise despite it not being their job, they will have gone to every length to sort it already – remember they aren't the self-centred ones here.

Stop and think, and act appropriately. "Vollies" are entitled to a private life – they are not on call 24/7 and many are worrying about things not really their problem into the early hours already. The "vollies" will be a long time gone. If you feel you haven't got what it takes to be one of them, at least consider their feelings, respect their privacy and please treat them with a bit of dignity – you may get a bit more mileage out of them that way.