

# STAPLEHURST PARISH COUNCIL

14<sup>th</sup> January 2015

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Dear Dr. Stowell

## **Abraham Lincoln 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

I thank you for your letter of 21<sup>st</sup> November which I read with great interest.

I shared the contents of the letter not only with my fellow councillors but also with members of the local community, which has in turn generated coverage in our Parish Magazine and in the village section of our local newspaper 'The Kent Messenger'. I have enclosed copies of these items for your information.

Our local historians have uncovered information about press coverage here at the time, which I reproduce below for your possible interest. The Maidstone Telegraph of Saturday 6 May 1865 reported that:

"On Monday evening last [i.e. 1 May] a public meeting was held in the Congregational Lecture Room, which was tastefully draped with mourning. Mr. J. Jull presided. The leading articles from the *Times*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Morning Star*, *Patriot*, and *British Standard* newspapers, on the death of President Lincoln, were read by various gentlemen, and listened to with the deepest interest by a numerous audience, after which the following resolutions were unanimously passed:

'That this meeting regards with intense horror and indignation the assassination of President Lincoln, and desires to express its sympathy with Mrs Lincoln, the Government, and the people of America, in their severe trial.'

'That this meeting expresses its sympathy with Mr Andrew Johnson in the responsible office to which he is thus suddenly called, and sincerely hopes he may be able so to

conduct the affairs of the country as to complete the emancipation of the slaves, and secure the establishment of permanent peace.'

A cordial vote of thanks to the chairman terminated the proceedings."

The resolutions quoted above are, of course, those set out in the copy letter from Mr Jull which you sent to us.

Staplehurst is now a village of some 6,000 residents, so I am afraid we are some way short of the city status you mention in your letter. Strictly speaking, Mr Jull is not my predecessor as parish councils did not come into being until some years after 1865. However, it is interesting for us to consider how the death of Abraham Lincoln clearly moved the local community to hold a public meeting and express its condolences in the eloquent way described in the letter.

Staplehurst has always had a strong non-conformist tradition and many inhabitants were strongly against slavery; but not all, even in the 1860's. We have records of Edmund Barnes, born in Staplehurst, who emigrated to New Orleans and was a supporter of the Confederacy. However, I think it is safe to say that the majority of our village have always been against slavery and in favour of democracy, the twin pillars of President Lincoln's avowed convictions. The Atlantic ties go further, in that Staplehurst residents emigrated to the United States to found Staplehurst, Nebraska, and of course, in two world wars citizens of both states fought together for democracy. Staplehurst had an Advanced Landing Ground to support the Normandy Landings in 1944. Both US and Canadian squadrons flew from it.

Lastly, I think it is important to remember that 2015 is not just the anniversary of the death of President Lincoln, still very much admired in England. It is also the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Magna Carta at Runnymede, the bedrock of our joint democracies.

On behalf of Staplehurst Parish Council I would like to wish you well in your initiative to mark the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's passing and thank you for making us a part of it.

Yours sincerely

Rory Silkin  
Chairman, Staplehurst Parish Council