

The Hooky Insurrection of 1991

by Freethinker

1. Independence

Hook Norton declared itself independent and a United Democratic Revolutionary Village (U.D.R.V.) after an unusual spate of litter dumping on South Hill and the Swerford Road, which was followed by vandals from Banbury and Oxford knocking out half a dozen windows.

"It's the last straw!" declared Colonel Ballantine-Dumbleton-White¹ at an emergency meeting at the Memorial Hall. "Here we are, 'The Village that Time Forgot' according to Granada Television, under attack by a bunch of scallywags from the Outer Oxfordshire Regions".

"Let's go it alone", went on the gallant colonel, warming to his theme. "God knows we've talked about it often enough at midnight in the Pear Tree and Bell Inns".

"Reet good stuff that old Hooky", put in the oldest Villager.

"We've got everything we want right here in the village", continued Colonel B-D-W, ignoring the shouts from other parts of the Hall to "give 'im another beer!" "The finest little brewery in the nation, the best church with the finest old font in Britain, first-class shops well-stocked for a possible siege, over a hundred horses in case they cut off petrol supplies, not to mention our own doctor, dentist, potter, engineer, scientist, artists, musicians, intellectuals and odd-job men Who wants more? Who needs more? We're fed up with politicians and interfering busybodies", went on

¹ This character appears to be based on Colonel Colchester of Southrop House, who was a familiar figure riding round the village on his horse. The surname seems to be a composite of three village literary types – John Ballantine, George Dumbleton and perhaps Maurice White – but apparently was not a confession of joint authorship. Maurice denies all knowledge.

the Colonel, amid cries of mounting enthusiasm. "Let's declare the village U.D.R.V. and make it Hooky for Hookyites. Who says Aye?"

"Aye - Aye - Aye", thundered the assembled villagers, and plans were put into operation immediately to carry out the ambitious plan. Barriers were erected at all entry points - across the old railway bridge at the top of the hill on Swerford Road, near the Railway Tavern on the Bloxham Road, at the cross roads by The Gate Hangs High, and two near the bend at the Pear Tree Inn. Craftily, all border points were situated near to public houses, so there was no shortage of volunteer guards.

The Colonel, and his Revolutionary Committee, made provision for possible attempts to starve village revolutionaries out of their Hooky hideaway by buying up 200,000 cans of baked beans and storing them under the stage in the Memorial Hall, thus bringing on the stories in the *Guardian* and *Mail* of "Mystery Banbury Bean-Eaters" causing a county-wide shortage of baked beans.

Visitors to the village, as well as businessmen and bureaucrats and workers from the various public services, were vetted at all entry points and - providing they satisfied Hooky Home Guards as to their genuineness - were allowed to move freely in and out. No attempt was made to seek national publicity for, as Colonel B-D-W pointed out, "We're just trying to start a revolution - not start a war!"

The first sign of trouble came when a Cherwell District Council officer was refused entry at Checkpoint Pear Tree. Apparently, the Planning Officer, who was on his way to inspect an outside loo in Brick Hill, was upset, not so much by being refused entry to Independent Hooky, as by being described as a "f----- furriner" by the old Villager who was sitting on a firkin of Hooky Ale on duty.

It is suspected that an adverse report from this interfering bureaucrat was leaked to the one member of the Raving Monster Loony Runner Bean Party in the House of Commons, who rose at Westminster on the very next day, to ask the potent question: "Is the Prime Minister aware that a Village in North Oxfordshire has declared itself Independent, and What Is He Going To Do About It?"

2. *The Threat*

One week after Hook Norton declared itself U.D.R.V., Colonel Ballantine-Dumbleton-White, the elected leader of the Revolutionary Parish Council, received a telephone call from an influential member of the Oxfordshire County Council.

"What the devil is going on up there in North Oxfordshire, Colonel?" asked the county dignitary after engaging in the usual pleasantries.

"We've just had enough, Councillor", the Colonel told him in his brisk manner. "The whole village seemed to be spending its entire time cleaning up after louts, picking up plastic drink bottles and litter, not to mention excavating rubbish dumped wholesale behind our hedges and trees, and repairing windows and doors broken by vandals over whom we have no control. We were up to our eyes and ears in it. We won't stand for it. And we just won't take any more!"

The VIP's blink could almost be heard at the other end of the line. "But do you realise that questions have been asked in the House of Commons about your going UDRV?" went on the Councillor, after gathering together his senses. "No town or village has ever opted out of the United Kingdom. It's ... it's ridiculous", he spluttered.

"Nothing of the sort", interjected the Colonel. "You've got to realise, Councillor", he went on, warming to his theme, "that Hook Norton—or as we prefer to call it, Hooky—is, and always has been, an exceptional place. A very exceptional place", he emphasised.

"How do you mean?" asked the man in Oxford, intrigued despite his intention to be very severe.

"Well, for one thing, many of our villagers never ever leave the village. Many have never seen the sea, for example. And many regard the occupants of surrounding villages like Swerford and Wigginton as foreigners, species from another

planet. I came here in 1956", went on the Colonel; "that's 35 years ago and I am only now becoming accepted by many of my fellow villagers".

"My God!" whispered the County Councillor. "You mean., you mean, you're a bit like that village described by H.G. Wells ... the Village that Voted the Earth was Flat?" With awe he now realised that the whole matter was far from a temporary joke.

"I wouldn't go as far as that", answered the gallant Colonel. "Hookyites do NOT consider the Earth flat. But it's my earnest belief that some of them even today think that they will be far better off running their own affairs".

"So the business is actually serious?"

"There's no doubt of it", briskly replied the gallant Colonel. "Our struggle was described in the Revolutionary Council the other day as a Battle against Bureaucracy and Bums from Outside. Another suggested we should erect prominent signs 'Ignore the Bastards', but I am thankful to say that that motion was turned down by a good majority. Suffice it to say that we have - perhaps temporarily, but time alone will decide that - voted ourselves Independent. Personally, we think we'll be better off that way. After all, we've got everything we want right here in the village—our own water supply, brewery, shops, fire brigade, plus every kind of professional class, including doctors, accountants, dentists, veterinary surgeons, scientists, artists, second-hand garages and a whole range of tradesmen, from plumbers to television engineers".

There was such a pregnant pause on the other end of the line that the Colonel thought there must have been a disconnection. "Are you there?" he finally enquired.

"My God, you're all mad", said the Councillor hoarsely. Then, being a true politician, he dropped the velvet glove and showed the iron fist. "You'll never get away with it!" he yelled.

"That so?" said the Colonel sweetly.

"What about the rates?" roared the County Councillor. "What about those important road signs that the Council has so kindly put up indicating that 70 foot articulated lorries cannot go from Bell Hill into Park Road? What about the trash collecting, the grass cutting, the planning permissions, the signs about canines not being allowed to deposit foreign matter on to roadside verges and gardens? What are you going to do without all those good things?"

"You must be joking", came back the Colonel sarcastically. "You can take away all your road signs and stuff them where they'll do you most harm. And as for the verge cutting, signs and planning permissions we'll be better off without them. "Let me tell you, Councillor", went on the Colonel, a steely tone edging a voice that used to make Nazi generals quake in their jackboots. "We have some ideals here, and we're going to run our own affairs until our just demands are met".

"What demands are those?" asked the Oxford bureaucrat, curious in spite of his outrage.

"We are demanding much more say in our own affairs, simply because we think we know best what makes Hooky tick. We want the right to punish litter-louts and vandals by bringing out the stocks that have, for two hundred years, been lying in the barn at Farmer Brown's as chicken roosts. And we demand the right to guard all entry points to the village, from the Pear Tree to the Gate Hangs High, to keep out undesirables. Until these demands are met, you can tell the country - from the PM down - that Hooky will stay independent!"

The County Councillor finally lost patience. "Let me tell you, you ... you ... jumped up Village Mussolini", he exploded. "I was encouraged - yes, kindly asked - to ring you as leader of your anarchist village crew to try to sort this business out man to man. Hook Norton Independent Village, eh? Pah. I have to inform you, Colonel", he added, in the sort of voice an income tax inspector uses to ask one to come in and see him, "that certain steps are even now being taken to bring Hooky to heel What they are, I am not at liberty to disclose but they shall be ... the terrors

of the earth. Do not say later", he concluded before putting down the phone with a bang, "that you have not been warned".

3. *Heady Days*

Within one week of receiving (in triplicate) threats from an Oxfordshire County Councillor that the Hooky rebellion would be crushed without mercy, the Village Revolutionary Committee met in the Memorial Hall under its leader, Colonel B-D-W, and decided on counter-measures.

"We've got them on the run", the gallant Colonel cried jubilantly. "We must strike them hard where it hurts. On the seats of their pants!" It was he, after all, who had sounded the first peal of the revolt. His battle-cry was: "We won't stand for it. We won't take it any more! We'll just have to break away from what we consider a disunited and dirty United Kingdom".

At the next emergency meeting of the villagers, the oath was confirmed: "Hooky will Go It Alone!" The village promptly was put upon a war footing. Checkpoints at the Pear Tree, the Gate, the Railway Inn and the Wheatsheaf were reinforced. Production at the Brewery was stepped up. More cans of beans, together with large supplies of essentials like tea, coffee, salt and pepper, peas and prunes, were smuggled in by night. The threat of starvation was averted although gaseousness proliferated.

Allotment holders were encouraged to dig trenches as well as "Digging for Victory". The Silver Band played martial music outside The Bell each lunchtime, outstanding favourites being "The British Grenadiers", "My Way", "You'll Never Walk Alone", and a new Hooky Anthem to replace "The Queen" composed by Dr Wolfgang A. Hardbottle, the first verse of which went:

We know what is best for old Hooky
We'll fight to the last drop of beer,
Great Britain may think that we're kooky
But we're making our last stand right here.

Freed from the pulverising pulchritude of district, county and national bureaucracy, the Hooky parish council swore to wipe out unemployment, crime, poverty, class distinction, alcoholism, expensive housing, adultery and unhappiness. Stocks were reintroduced and set up near the bus shelter. Minor offenders spent one hour in them. Perpetrators of more serious disorders were obliged to sit there for most of the day in their underclothes, the object of scorn and ridicule. Outright villains (such as black marketeers) were stocked all night and pelted with rotten eggs.

Hooky prospered during these heady days. A communal cleaning company was set up called "Hooky Cleaners". Householders who had been constantly and vainly soliciting help in the windows of the Village Shop and the Post Office found squads of bright, cheerful and energetic fellow-villagers descending upon them at a mutually-agreed rate of £3 per hour. Second-hand goods and clothing were sold daily by volunteers in the Sports Club, thus providing superior quality products without the 17.5% VAT, and the proceeds were turned over to the Revolutionary Fund.

As a result of debates in the House over the Phenomenon, hordes of newspapermen flocked to the various checkpoints where they received daily free beer and wrote glowing accounts of the village success in an alcoholic daze with headlines like:

LUCKY HOOKY - THE VILLAGE GOING IT ALONE

and

HAPPY HOOKY - THE VILLAGE THAT HAS VOTED FOR MERRIE ENGLAND

Early attempts by outside authorities to bring Hooky to heel were farcically unsuccessful. When water was cut off at the mains, Hookyites simply used the various springs around the village. Fair exchange replaced filthy lucre - one lettuce for ten tea bags and a dozen eggs for one chicken. Dr Milton Friedman telegraphed from the USA that he would like to become the Honorary President of the one place in the world that (to use his own words) "showed some common horse sense".

A state of blissful euphoria descended upon Hooky as villagers made love and war by candle-light after the MEB had been ordered to cut off electricity. All seemed too good to be true. And it was. On the night of September 30th, while the Council was in full session, a Hooky U.D.R.V. Irregular rushed in to report helicopters over South Hill. Tanks were trundling noisily along the road from Great Tew. And a detachment of the Black Watch encamped at Wigginton, their bagpiper ordered to make the night hideous with cacophonous squealings. It was all too plain that the Powers That Be were not prepared to let Hooky enjoy its idyllic freedom.

4. *The Final Showdown*

Hooky's lead had been followed by similar action by another Midland village, Cleeve Prior, which had also declared independence and issued "passports" to its residents. Cleeve's action, however, was more the nature of a *Passport to Pimlico* stunt and Hookyites sniffed when they saw pictures in the press of their "rivals" dressed up like panto clowns. Hooky's insurrection by contrast had been a deadly serious affair and Whitehall and the national press were quick to see the significance of the revolution. Although a few of the press corps deserted Hooky for the "Cleeve gig", most newspapermen stayed close to the four checkpoints guarding Hooky, set up cunningly by the side of popular pubs.

"There's absolutely no comparison in the quality of the two stories, old boy", explained one gossip writer to a straw-sucking Hooky yokel. "I'm on pretty good expenses from Fleet Street as it is, but the bitter here—that's the real bonus!"

The togetherness induced by the revolt's success - which had as its slogan "We Just Won't Stand For It Anymore" - resulted in a total lack of unemployment, poverty and unhappiness in the village. People actually began to speak to one another, whatever their class, wealth or stature, both in the market place and in the lanes bedecked with autumn berries. Teenagers and seniors alike started to see each other's points of view. Thrown together in such a situation they had little choice. November 5th passed as a bonfire of bonhomie. The giving of gifts became

a pleasant and common habit. Orchard-owners and allotment-diggers delivered bags of apples and pears, lettuces and potatoes to workers, Hooky guards and OAPs alike. The village teenagers, from hanging out in bus shelters and around the shops, showed "the right stuff" by throwing themselves wholly into the task of defending the village and doing much of the heavy work. National Service, it appeared, had been replaced by "Hooky Service" and it was all to the good.

"Happy as Hooky" became the watchword. And it was clear that the Colonel who had led the Insurrection had been right when he had declared at the start of the Revolt, "What do we need the rest of the UK for, when we have our own beer and water, food and fruit, brains and brawn, shops, vets, firemen, doctors, dentists, musicians and artists, poets and painters? Let's go it alone!"

Alas, Hooky's model of rustic paradise was too ideal to be allowed to continue by the bureaucrats of Cherwell and the politicians of Whitehall. Not to mention the Ministry of Defence, for the hills surrounding the village were soon dotted with the hardware of harsher conflict: tanks, helicopter gunships and, worst of all, the bagpiper of the Black Watch who, from the safety of several fields away near Wigginton, made the nights hideous with his discordant playing of "Scotland the Brave". It was impossible to sleep as all the dogs and cats of the village howled in sympathy - or was it protest? - throughout the evening hours. Most villagers took to having a midday nap.

Matters came to a head when the PM himself was escorted down the hill to the Pear Tree HQ to be met, appropriately it was felt, by one John Miner, a member of the Revolutionary Committee. The Revolution had, of course, been non-political, but some Labour supporters protested that Neil Kinnock, in addition to Mr. Major, should have been summoned. His ears, tuned melodically to Welsh Male Voice Choirs, would - it was argued - have been dinned into sympathetic protest at the bagpiper's cacophony. Colonel B-D-W and the whole Revolutionary Committee have sworn an oath never to reveal what passed between themselves and the PM, in return, it has been rumoured, for a satisfactory denouement.

Whatever was demanded, or promised, the Final Showdown took place on the green at Beanacre on the Swerford Road. It went down in Hooky history as the Beanacre Bash. It was the greatest confrontation at Southrop since - as one ancient villager put it - "the Saxons beat the s--- out of the Vikings across the Swerford brook". Ringed by tanks and helicopters, the Black Watch regiment was deployed - in their kilts but without their weapons - line abreast across Beanacre Green. Facing them the gallant Colonel and his Revolutionary Committee, together with a representative mixture of the young and old of the village, stood firm as rocks behind banners bearing the Hooky watchword, "Whatever Comes—We Never Flinch".

Hundreds of custard pies, baked overnight, were handed out to both groups of combatants. At the command "Present Pies!" issued simultaneously by the Colonel and the regimental Brigadier, scores of arms held aloft their deadly burdens. Chaos and mayhem ensued as pies galore were slung, without mercy, into the faces of soldiers and villagers alike. Squash, squelch, splash, garooh! Uncontrollable merriment broke out and "foreigners" over the hill at Swerford reported that the roars of laughter and howls of glee at the bloodless battle could clearly be heard.

Thus ended the Great Hooky Insurrection. Honour had been satisfied on both sides. Toffee medals were struck and boiled in a huge vat behind the Primary School and issued to all who took part. They announced proudly:

HOOKY 1991—I WAS THERE

Perhaps the Colonel himself summed it up best when he stated later: "We feel that Hooky showed the whole nation the right way forward. As for the rest of the world – well, I've always hated beastly war and all it stands for. This is not necessarily the end of the insurrection", he warned. "Next year we may well begin a global campaign aimed at doing away with all nuclear weapons in favour of custard pies!"

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