

Iris unrepentant after her brush with the law Isle of Thanet Gazette, 6 September, 1991

Parish Councillor Mrs. Iris Bedwell and her husband have become the toast of Birchington after the news that a poster they sabotaged has been banned from Britain's billboards.

The poster, which the couple described as disgusting, showed a new born baby covered in blood and still attached to its umbilical cord. It was pasted up in the village as part of clothing company Benetton's controversial nationwide advertising campaign.

Mrs. Bedwell (69) claimed that more than 200 villagers came into her florist's shop to complain soon after the poster appeared in Station Road on Saturday. After hearing their grievances, she wasted little time taking action. With husband Alf (74), she set out with paintbrushes, a ladder and a bucket of whitewash to block out the offending image. But the police were called and the pensioners were arrested for causing criminal damage.

They were later released with a caution on Saturday night, leaving Mrs. Bedwell little time to complete her preparations for their wedding celebrations the following day. The Bedwells' actions were part of a big protest against the hoarding which led to the Advertising Standards Authority criticizing Benetton on Wednesday. The Italian fashion company has now been told to pull down the posters because they were "distressing" to the public.

An ASA spokesman said: "Benetton has displayed a conspicuous disregard for the sensitivities of the public. We warned them about the poster when it first appeared, but they ignored our advice. Mrs. Bedwell's supporters have daubed "Iris Rules OK" along the bottom of the damaged hoarding and the couple were given a standing ovation when they returned from their evening in the police cells at Margate.

Mrs. Bedwell, who is president of the Chamber of Commerce, said: "Childbirth is a beautiful thing – but this poster is disgusting. "Birchington is a respectable, quiet place and dozens of people came into my shop to complain. My husband and I decided something had to be done.

"When we renewed our wedding vows on Sunday, our young curate said 'I wish I could have been there', and everyone was cheering and clapping. We were proud to do it for the village, and if it meant us going to jail, then I think it would have been worth it."

A police spokesman said the couple would not be charged and had been let off with a caution.

A Benetton spokesman described the poster as "a profound and wonderful image of a fundamental moment in all human life". She admitted the company had received complaints, but said surveys had shown a lot of positive response and she condemned the unlawful action in Birchington – which she believed to be the first such paint protest in Britain. She went on: "I think everybody has a right to express their opinions within the bounds of the law. If this couple had written to express their concerns, the complaints would have been passed on to Italy."

[And a fat lot of good that would have done !! (Jennie says!)]