

Disgusted of Tunbridge Wells moves to the web

By **JAMIE MCGINNES**

HE, or indeed she, has long been the voice of the morally outraged resident, revealing the concerns and frustration of Middle England in countless complaints to newspaper letter pages.

The anonymous grumbler from Tunbridge Wells is thought to have been invented in the 1950s. The editor of a newspaper in the genteel spa town told staff to fabricate a few readers' letters because of a shortfall.

One signed his 'Disgusted of Tunbridge Wells' – and the cliché was born. But now the person really does exist – and he has a website.

Robert O'Callaghan, 39, set up his Disgusted of Tunbridge Wells site because he was fed up with the unkempt state of the town.

The site documents hundreds of "grots," ranging from potholes and out-of-order street lights, to untidy sign arrangements, graffiti and broken benches.

He said: "All the time I hear about great schemes going on, which are changing big chunks of Kent, from Kent County Council or Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, but on a daily basis I see roads being left to rot away.

"In the street I live, Pembury Road, we don't actually have a path on one side and it's getting worse every year.

"You start getting other problems like graffiti and you get rubbish being left everywhere and



TWIN TOWN: While some visitors to Tunbridge Wells may not see beyond the smart Pantiles shopping area (above), at least one disgusted resident says the town is run-down the tone of the area goes down."

To coincide with the 400th anniversary of Tunbridge Wells, Mr O'Callaghan, a former City IT worker turned househusband, decided to record 400 grots – and report them to the councils.

"It's important for local people to do their bit, whether that's picking up rubbish or just

reporting things.

"Unless somebody actually tells KCC or Tunbridge Wells Borough Council something needs fixing it's not going to get fixed."

He encourages members of the public to chalk symbols next to eyesores to show when they were first spotted, the type of grot and what action needs to be taken.

However, each time he ventures out he finds so many he has decided to stay in for a while for fear of hitting his target too soon.

"When I set out I didn't think I'd make 400 grots. What I've found out is that there are so many it's like shooting fish in a barrel."

While out looking for grots he has even found allies who share his disgust.

On one grot-spotting trip he walked all the way along Pembury Road, which has about 400 homes, to find out how many street lights were broken. He counted 25.

Mr O'Callaghan said: "Normally I don't worry about anything. But the more I've looked the more I've realised how bad it is."

Cllr Keith Ferrin, cabinet member for environment, highways and waste on KCC, said the council inspects roads on a regular basis and has a £50 million annual budget for repairs and maintenance.

"In a real sense you can never do enough. Ideally everything should be fixed today or tomorrow, but in reality that's not possible.

"With 8,000km of road out there there's always something to be done. On a network that big there's always inevitably going to be problems, but the fact remains that we inspect all our roads on a very regular basis."

Cllr Peter Davies, deputy leader of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, said: "A resident has been in touch to discuss various issues relating to the local street scene in his area and his concerns have been forwarded on to KCC."

There are 250,000 street lights in Kent and 150,000 roadworks each year.

Mr O'Callaghan's site is at www.disgusted.tw.