

CARNIVAL AND WAKES CELEBRATIONS AFTER THE FIRST WORLD WAR

By Frank Cooper Snr

In a newspaper piece written in July 1920 to mark the Bradwell Wakes celebrated that year the author looked back to describe events that happened 'not half a century before' i.e. in the mid nineteenth century:

... Bradwell Wakes was a far differently celebrated festival than at the present day. In those days there were rabbit coursings, a good deal of beer flowed freely, and most folk had a small 9 gallon barrel (about 40 litres) in their house with which to drink the good health of their friends. And in still more remote times the lead miners of Bradwell had their bear and bull baitings. At the same time they had their annual 'sermons' – the Wesleyan Sunday School at Bradwell dates back to 1780, and while those old institutions have long ago disappeared, the last named noble institution has remained, and its anniversary on Wakes Sunday, the second Sunday in July is more popular and more successful than ever.

Returning to 1920, on the second Saturday in July that year, the Bradwell celebrations got underway to be followed by the Smalldale Wakes that started on the following on Tuesday, the 17th July. These were grand affairs in their own right following as they did the end of the 'Great War'. Money collections were at record levels.



Hay making on Cockey Farm Abney

Many different fields in Bradwell were used at various times over the years for the festival. Because of the haymaking farmers only let their fields be used if they had finished gathering and taking away the hay. The fields used included the Hazelbadge field, the Newburgh field, and two small fields where the Fire Station and the private houses are now to be found at the side of the Main Road.

Because of the depression in the early 30`s, there were a few years that the Wakes were not held but they were revived again in a big way when King George V`s Jubilee was celebrated on 6th May, 1935. The Bradwell Old Band had been disbanded in the 1920s following a disastrous fire that destroyed many of the instruments. However people in the village felt a band should be revived for the Jubilee celebrations. So great was the interest in this proposal that a group of people came forward willing to form a committee to organise a band but a Jazz Band rather than a Brass Band. Mr. Arthur Rowland became the Chairman and Mr. George Williams the band leader.



Bradwell Jazz Band c. 1935

The highlight of the Jubilee celebrations was the lighting of an enormous bonfire on the top of Bradwell Edge. So great was the success of the Jubilee celebrations that on August Bank Holiday Monday the same year, the Bradwell Pageant and Carnival was revived after an 8 year gap. The report of the event told of all the people of Bradwell uniting to make the event a great success. The attendance at the afternoon sports was over 2,000. The Bradwell Steeplechase, which included fell racing over Bradwell Edge and the surrounding hills, attracted entries from such as the Hallamshire Harriers, one of their members gaining a 'narrow victory over village youth, J. Liversidge'. The pageant at night attracted over 200 competitors in 17 different classes. After the judging in the Newburgh Field, the procession, nearly half a mile long, headed by the Bradwell Jazz Band, paraded the village 'while collectors took toll from the onlookers'.



A tableau representing the "Good Old Days."

Ready for the procession mid 1930s

The day concluded with a grand carnival dance in the Memorial Hall. Bradwell Hospital Committee benefited from the street collection from which they then made a donation to Sheffield Hospitals.



Helping the hospitals in the 1930s

The local fancy dress winners included the girls Mary Evans and Winnie Bossingham and the boys Gordon Spencer and T. Harrison. 'Prominent residents are taking a practical interest in the venture' and 'Monday promises to be one of the most attractive events staged in any village in the Hope Valley' were the remarks appearing in the papers and these certainly appear to have been true. It is perhaps worth mentioning that all these years later - 2007 - the Bossingham family whose members are still fit enough attend to the carnivals. There is now a bench in the Peace Gardens dedicated to the memory of several Bossinghams. On the other hand interest in the Jazz Band didn't last long after the event and it was disbanded after a couple of years, although not for ever.



Middle two first aiders Edgar and Thomas Bossingham

For the next few years everything was fine until the 2nd World War was declared in 1939. Although many of the village men had been called up to fight in the armed forces the wakes continued to be held and the money raised was donated to the war charities.

In 1950 the ancient art of wells dressing was revived in Bradwell. A good part of Derbyshire rests on limestone, which means that falling rain is soaked up and disappears quickly into the rock. Settlements and farms cluster around those areas where springs appear, and it seems only natural that annual festivals of thanksgiving for precious water supplies grew up.

Well dressing seems to be one such festival, and its origins lie in the remote past, when primitive man threw flowers in to a spring to give thanks for water to the spirit who supposedly dwelt there. Christianity adopted and adapted the ceremony, and we know that in the early Middle Ages, well dressings were held at Tissington. The art of well dressing is said to be known in Bradwell as long ago as 1780 but did not continue until its revival in 1950. After that wells have been dressed here ever since. A modern well dressing is a community effort, and although each village has developed its own methods and techniques of presentation, the basic process is the same. It begins with boards made into shallow trays, the bottom covered with nails, lathes or holes for the clay to key. Traditionally, the clay is locally dug, and well `puddled` before use. It is wetted and treaded out so all impurities can be removed, then pummelled and kneaded until the texture is fine and pure.

When the clay is prepared and spread in to trays, it is stamped down and smoothed out to an even surface for work to begin. A life sized outline of the finished design, traditionally, but not always, a biblical picture, is prepared on paper, and this serves as a pattern for the finished picture. The outline is worked in alder cones, seeds, barks and grasses, and then are added the mosses, leaves and flower petals. It takes a week of hard work, aching backs, strained eyes and good humour to complete a well dressing, and the glory of the finished board will last even less. Then the process begins all over again of choosing a picture for the next year!

The revival of Well Dressing in Bradwell in 1950 owed much to Mrs. Mills, the licensee of the Bowling Green Inn. She managed to influence some of the regulars at the pub to revive the art. Mr. Jim Williams agreed to draw the picture for the well and helpers who contributed were as follows: Mrs. B.A. Mills herself, Miss Joyce Smith, Mr. & Mrs. Alf Thompson and many of the village children who also wanted to help. The picture on the well was "The Good Shepherd". It was such a great success that it wasn't long before Mrs. Mills had influenced the people from the other end of the village and so the Church Street Well was erected the following year in 1951 when a Blessing of the Well in was introduced, involving both the Church choir and the Castleton Silver Band. The team in Church Street that year were Joyce Armstrong, Eileen Mather, Betty Bough, Angela Sammans, Bill Mather and Jessie Spencer.



Putting the finishing touches to the Church Street well dressing 1953

The other change made in 1950 was that the date of the Carnival was moved from the 2nd week in July to the 1st week in August to coincide with the August Bank Holiday (this now of course is at the end of August) and it was organised by the Bradwell Sports Club.

In 1948. Mrs H. F. England, the local doctor's wife, was the instigator of the foundation of the Bradwell Sports Club. The first officers of the Club were Mr. E.A.Bromage (the Co-op manager) Treasurer, Mrs. England Secretary and Les Barker Chairman. Unfortunately Mr. Bromage died soon after Sports Club was just beginning to attract local young members, however Mr. Reg Boyes ably took on the responsibility of Treasurer.

The first job to be done by the organisers was to select a village 'Queen' and her attendants, which was done at a dance held in Bradwell Memorial Hall and this was how the queen was chosen for the village for many years. In 1950 Miss Janet Repton was the first Queen to be chosen in this way, with Mavis Roberts and Molly Johnson as Senior Attendants and Rosemary Sammans and Zoe Elliott as the Junior Attendants. A procession led by the queen went through the village on a nicely decorated hay cart covered in flowers. The cart was towed by a tractor belonging to Jack Middleton and driven by Alf Higginbottom. The procession was followed by villagers in fancy dress and accompanied by Castleton Silver Band. By this time Jazz Band had reformed and joined in the procession. George Williams, who had been leader of the first band in 1935, once again led them through the village. At a ceremony on the Sports Field Janet Repton was officially crowned queen by Mrs. L. Coupland. Afterwards carnival celebrations took place on Ted Brammer's field behind the Bath Hotel next to where the caravan field is now located.



Janet Repton, Miss Crawford (Queen selector, Molly Johnson and Mavis Roberts.

In the 1951 the carnival for the first and only time had a queen selected not from Bradwell but from Little Hucklow. Kathleen Wragg was the queen chosen for that year. This of course was perfectly in order as Little Hucklow is included within the Parish of Bradwell. Unfortunately the Jazz Band that had been reformed for these early post war years once more had to close but the carnivals went from strength to strength throughout the following years. During the 1970`s and 80`s the celebrations were at their peak with the formation of the Bradwell Majorettes by Janet Bates, daughter of Cecil and Joan Bates of Town Lane. Over the years many people took on the role of training the Majorettes. These included Janet Spencer, who like others gave a lot of time and effort to the job during the late 1970`s. In 1978 the Jazz Band was once again re-formed with George Williams as band leader. For the next two or three years they attended many other village carnivals in the Hope Valley.



Queen Lesley Rowbottom and senior attendants Trish Frith and Tracy Capey, attendants Annette and Lorraine Habershaw (in pale blue) 1976/7

In 1970`s and 80`s the Carnival Committee were a very hard working bunch, consisting mainly of women. The Chairman however was Mr. David Wilson – better known as Corporal to one of the Carnival Committees – David would have known who they were as some of them still talk of the departed Corporal to this day. David ran the committee like clockwork and as soon as one event ended the task of raising funds was started all over again for the following year. They held Jumble sales, dances, sponsored walks and raffles etc. Towards the middle of the 1980`s the cost of the bands who were to take part in the procession was becoming increasingly more expensive, costing anything from £100 to £400 per band. Since at that time there might as many as six or more bands it can easily be imagined this money took some raising. It was amazing how many people thought these bands came on the day for nothing – if only!

It was during this period at a meeting of the Carnival Committee that the question of whether an alternative way of raising funds to cover the cost of the

bands etc. on the day could be found. Ken Tebenham, who lived in the village and worked for Yorkshire Television, expressed an interest in making a video of Carnival Week. His idea was to sell it to the public to raise some of the much needed cash to run the Carnival successfully. It was also suggested by Ken that the committee ask the village pubs if they would be prepared to sponsor a band on Carnival Day. There were five public houses in Bradwell at the time and this turned out to be a very good suggestion by Ken, as the pubs all donated £50 each towards the cost of the bands and very kindly continued to do so for the next few years.

Sadly the older teenagers, not only in Bradwell but throughout the Valley, seemed to lose interest in representing their village as the carnival queen, probably becoming too self-conscious to enter the competition so eventually the choosing of a village queen died out and the last queen to represent Bradwell was Sarah Jones, daughter of Dawn Jones (née Broadbent), with attendants Marie Middleton and Liam Earnshaw, in 1999/2000. In the following year it was decided to have a princess to represent the village and Eleanor Nash was the first young girl who was chosen and did an excellent job in her year of office with Petal Emily Dale and Rosebud Aimee Bowen. There has, of course, been a queen or princess every year since 1950 and they have all done an excellent job in their year of office but unfortunately it is impossible to name them all. The Princess in 2007/2008, at the time of writing, is Emily Siddons (aged 10 years) with Rosebud Eleanor Siddons (aged 8 years).

The success story is that there has been, and continues to be, a successful Carnival and Well Dressing every year for the past 55 years, due to the very dedicated people of the village who put in hours and hours of work to ensure everybody has a fantastic time during the whole of the week, and hopefully it will continue well past its centenary year.