

Whilton Local History Society

Our March 2009 meeting was based on fetes and festivals of Whilton in the last century.

Our ancestors were governed by two main factors for their festivals. These were the Christian calendar and the agricultural year. The calendar of saints' days and religious festivals was once much better known than today, and had a significance for daily life.

Each parish church was dedicated to a saint or saints, and on that saint's day, there would be the **patronal festival**. For Whilton this was St Andrew, and his day is 30th November.

Rents, annuities and debts were often paid on the **quarter days**, and servants were sometimes hired from one to another.

These were four days, coinciding with religious festivals, each three months from the next. The days were:

25 March, Lady Day, once the first day of the year.

24 June, Midsummer, the Feast of John the Baptist

29 September, Michaelmas, the Feast of St Michael and All Angels

25 December: Christmas Day, Feast of the Nativity

By the twentieth century the significance of many of these festivals had faded, and one or two had been revived perhaps from pagan days. The roots of May Day are definitely based on some sort of fertility ritual. There was a revival of May Day in the early twentieth century, and Whilton is no exception in this. The traditions of Rogation and "beating the bounds" may both have mixed origins in Christian and pagan traditions. In Whilton the Rogation tradition has been continued to modern times, and has been extended to such events as pet blessing services, which are really a development of praying for blessings on crops and livestock at Rogation time.

For the farmers, harvest was important and Harvest Festival is still celebrated. The importance of Christmas, of course, has been noticeably over emphasized during the later twentieth century

At the Local History Society in March we used written memories and old photos to recall some of the special events of the twentieth century. Here is a small selection:

May was a good time for days off. In the 1930s the May Queen was crowned on the Green. The Maypole was sometimes in the playground, sometimes on the Green. They sang May songs around the village, and then walked to Norton or went on a wagon, for May Day at Emery's. Even the children had cake and home made wine at Norton Lodge. Stan Haynes remembered shivering in a white blouse, while Ozzie, Mrs Osborne the teacher, wore her winter coat with fur lined collar. He remembered the year when Annie Bingley looked regal as queen and he and Hilda Clements danced a minuet.



Annie Bingley as May Queen. Stanley Haynes is last on the right.



Phyllis Essen as May Queen

Mrs Osborne's logbook: 1931 1 May *"School closed today for May Day celebrations. After crowning the Queen (Phyllis Essen) posing for photographer, we visited neighbouring farms and were refreshed at Norton Lodge with wine and cake. Mr and Mrs W Emery gave the children a splendid tea – followed by Sports with prizes for all."*

There was a fancy dress parade for the coronation of Elizabeth II.



This shows Mick and Edna Gardner as Queen Victoria and Prince Albert in 1953.



Later twentieth century fetes brought back a few memories:





The produce tent at the fete

Harvest Festival was always important. This undated photo shows the font in St Andrews.



There were good written memories, but sadly no photos, of the Christmas parties for children at Whilton Lodge, where the host was Colonel Shaw, with his moustache, monocle and red countenance and his film star like wife. For most village children presents were sparse at home. Don Welch remembered having an orange, nuts, a book and a drawing book from his parents. Stan Haynes remembered the excitement of having pork pie for Christmas breakfast.

We completed our evening with a photo of the bellringers welcoming the 21st century on 1st January 2000.



DECEMBER

Mrs Osborne gave Christmas party at end of term and gave children presents.

21 Dec. 1937. Children's Xmas Party was held in the School this evening. Rev and Mrs Brown and the Managers were entertained to tea by Mrs Osborn. A very enjoyable evening was spent and children went home well pleased with their presents.

Col (previously Captain and then Major) Shaw's Christmas parties for children.

Sent up horse box. About 30 children. Ended with firework display.

Stan Haynes detailed memories

63. Carol singing on the Green, c.1955.

Don: Christmas: an orange, nuts, a book and a drawing book from his parents. A relative from Doncaster also provided old tin cars and lorries.

Stan Haynes memories of Christmas

NEW YEAR: MILLENNIUM

64. Ringing in the new Millennium. 1 January 2000.

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The March meeting was based on fetes and festivals in Whilton over the last century. Old photos and written memories recalled people and events, including pre-war Christmas parties for children at Whilton Lodge, hosted by Colonel Shaw with his salt and pepper plus-four suit and his cherry red countenance, the crowning of the May Queen on the Green and summer fetes in Wadd Close.



Howard Tooley with his shire horse and cart at a Whilton fete in the 1980s



A community effort to raise the marquees at the 1983 fete

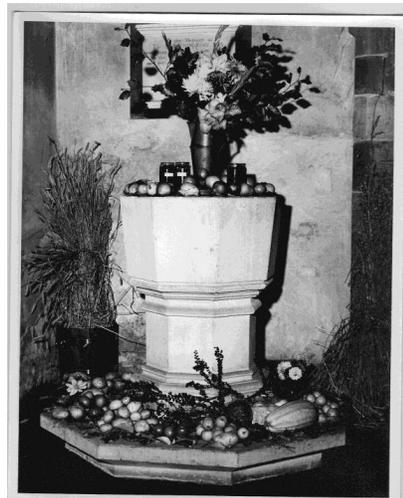
We heard how Empire Day activities on 24th May 1937 suffered from bad weather: *“Part of the afternoon was to be devoted to Games in the field, where we are allowed to play through the kindness of one of the Managers, Mr Emery, but owing to the dampness of the grass they had to take place in the playground.”* At the 1953 coronation, *“the children were presented with the County Souvenir, Richard Dimpleby’s book, “Elizabeth our Queen”, and each child was given a ½ lb Coronation box of chocolates by the Head Mistress.”* There are still clear memories of this.

We heard Tony Allen’s memories of bidding for apples with Marcus Swinford at a harvest auction in the 1960s, only to find they were cookers!

We relished Stan Haynes’ account of Christmas Eve here in the 1930s: *“In the church new candles were in place, the stove was going well, and the polished copper lamps shone on the holly which decorated the lectern and pulpit... The boy in the corner pumped the organ, Parson Brown announced the hymn, Betty Pride played the opening chord, and the church rang to the sound of “O come all ye faithful.”*

Our evening finished with a photo of Whilton bell ringers ringing in the Millennium on 1st January 2000.

The next meeting of the Local History Society will be in St Andrew’s Church. We shall meet at 7.30 p.m. on Thursday 21st May for “Monuments and memories in Whilton Church.” All will be welcome to join us there.



The font decorated for Harvest Festival sometime in the twentieth century.

Anthea Hiscock