



Oak Apple Day Procession, 1966

Oak Apple Day Celebration 1893

Interesting Festival

Then - Now

Oak Apple Day, Wishford

This is a great day with the people of Wishford. The village truly is en fete. Work is entirely abandoned, and all the people have given themselves up to holiday. As the dawn was breaking, men and women might have been seen wending their way up to Grovely Wood, and returning an hour or so later bearing in triumph fine oak boughs. The village is decorated with bunting, and a most picturesque appearance is presented, arches spanning the road, and oak saplings being displayed outside nearly every door. All are attired in their best, and from the youngest to the oldest the festival is taken up with great spirit. Townsend tree is

The Trysting Place,

and soon after noon the villagers meet together, form themselves into a procession, and, headed by the Steeple Langford Band (under Bandmaster Ford) perambulate the village. Each member of the pageant carries an oak bough, which he has taken as a trophy from the wood in the early morning. With flags flying and band playing the village is paraded, men and children looking on with great delight, and lustily cheering the processionists. At the Vicarage a halt is made, and there goes up a shout,

“Grovely, Grovely, All Grovely.”

From here the processionists adjourn to a marquee erected in a field belonging to Mr. Petty, of the Royal Oak Inn, where a sumptuous dinner is provided and done full justice to. Mirth pervades the assembly and they intend to enjoy this rural celebration. In the chair is the Rev. F. W. Macdonald, Vicar of Stapleford, who is supported by a number of local magnates. The meal over, toasts are proposed and duly honoured, and no sooner is the tent cleared than in troops a large number of women and children who are regaled with tea and cake *ad lib*. Swinging boats, and cocoanut saloons

constitute the rustic sport, and hundreds of people, many coming from Wilton and the neighbouring villages, enter into the terpsichorean exercises. The whole scene is one of festivity and enjoyment. So much for one picture – now for the other. Some five or six years ago, a proposition was made by the Earl of Pembroke that the villagers should

Give Up Their Rights

to the dead wood in Grovely, and as a compensation for their vested interests, they were offered about £10 a year in charities. The name of Pembroke is highly respected in Wishford, as indeed it is throughout Wiltshire, and it is not an easy task for village folk to oppose any wish of his Lordship's, which practically amounts to a mandate. The suggestion was very coldly received, and as the matter was talked over, it was found that the villagers were very reluctant to relinquish their right to Grovely. A meeting was called, the old charters were looked up, and the villagers almost unanimously respectfully but firmly refused to barter their liberties for the mess of pottage. Then, when the battle had to be fought between

The Peer and The People

None of the big-wigs were present. The people were left alone to resist the invasion of their rights. Then only one journalist espoused the cause of the people and only one newspaper took up the cudgels in their behalf. It was stated at the time that unless the villages acceded to the proposition that all the charities of Wishford which came from Wilton House would be cut off. But charity or no charity, the Wishford people remained firm in the advocacy of their rights, and as it takes two parties to make a bargain the offer fell through.

That attempt to get the people to relinquish their rights breathed life into the old bones. It was determined to celebrate Oak Apple Day with more zeal than for many years, and since then the event of the year at Wishford has been the Oak Apple Day celebration, when the villagers have re-asserted their rights and gone in for a more permanent basis, an Oak Apple Club has been formed, the membership of which is half-penny per week, which goes toward the annual feast. Nearly all the inhabitants belong to this club, the energetic Secretary of which is Mr. A. Scott.

To revert to

The Dinner.

last year Lord Pembroke was present, and in a post-prandial speech, confessed that he was wrong in asking the people to give up their rights. Today, unfortunately, his Lordship is absent, being away recruiting his health, which all are sorry to learn is giving his friends a good deal of anxiety. Mr. J. T. Kendall, the steward, represents his lordship, and it is gratifying to hear how well the new agent is spoken of by those who have come into contact with him.

Letters are read from Lord Radnor and Viscount Folkestone, M.P., regretting inability to be present. One of the most welcome visitors is the genial Mayor of Wilton, the Wiltshire Dialect poet, whom it is hoped will one day make this festival the subject of his rhyme. Amongst those also present are Messrs. H. Andrews (Little Langford), W. V. Moore, senior, W. V. Moore, junior, J. Moore, Elliott, White, Wright, Goulden, Hopkins, Claridge, and Kavney (Wilton); Lewis and Spearing (Barford); T. Tutt (London); Masters (Stoford); W. M. Hammick, H. W. Major, McGill, A. Goodere ("Salisbury Times"), and Raindle (Salisbury); Luckham (Stapleford), T. B. Sutton (Winterbournes), and Lee (Warminster).

The loyal toasts are duly honoured, and the toast of "The health of the Earl of Pembroke" is proposed in appropriate terms by Mr. G. M. Young, one of the moving spirits in the celebration and one of the few men beside the labourers who resisted the sale of the people's rights. He speaks highly of Lord Pembroke, and recalls his lordship's speech last year, when he spoke of his concurrent rights with the people of Wishford in Grovely wood. Last year, Lord Pembroke gave a handsome subscription and this

year he has doubled it. Mr. Kendell responds in appropriate terms, incidentally referring to the abuse of such privileges as Wishford possesses. It may here be well to say that members of the club set their faces against disturbing or taking of any game in the wood. "The health of the Rev. E. Hill," the Vicar, is proposed by Mr. Scott, and the Chairman makes the speech of the day in proposing "The Oak-apple Club," in which he seeks to shew that this is a celebration of the restoration of Charles II, evidently to him of blessed memory, and in which he delicately hinted that Oliver Cromwell would have received no mercy at his hands. As Chairman of the Club, Mr. Francis Tutt makes a humorous response, and reads an extract from the old charter -

"The Lords, Freeholders, and Tenants of Great Wishford have had or of right should ever time out of mind have yearly brought unto them against every Whitsuntide by the Ranger or his assigns one fat buck to make merry withal among their neighbours."

Mr. Tutt creates some amusement by saying that they are carrying out that custom minus the buck. Mr. Luckham proposes "Agriculture," and Mr. Andrews, in responding, draws a gloomy picture of agriculture, and exhorts the labourers to tell the farmers what they are to do. Evidently Mr. Andrews is longing for the rosy days of Protection, a striking commentary upon which is found upon the two stones inserted in the wall of the Wishford Churchyard:

1800
Bread
3s. 4d. per gallon

1801
Bread
3s. 10d. per gallon

Mr. W. V. Moore, junior, in proposing "The Chairman," has a neat little fling at these interesting and "mythical" historic allusions of the rev. gentleman.

"The Visitors" are toasted at the instance of Mr. Tutt, the Mayor of Wilton and Mr. Hammick responding, and the health of "the Host and Hostess" is drank with enthusiasm.

The Committee, who carried out the arrangements so successfully, were Mr. E. Tutt (chairman) Mr. A. Scott (Hon. Sec.), Mr. G. M. Young, Mr. Lever, Mr. Budden, and Mr. Mundy.

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