



CHAPTER SIX - HIGH DAYS

As our national history has moved along, so like other towns and villages, we have had our fun and celebrations, which have been, broadly speaking, all on set schemes of teas, sports, entertainment and bonfires, but each one has something of its own to look back on which belong to that day alone.

On 22nd June 1911, the coronation of King George V, the children of the village school met at the school at mid-day, to see the photos of the King and Queen unveiled by the Chairman of the Parish Council. I believe that these pictures were hung in all schools throughout the country. After this little ceremony, we all sang the National Anthem followed by "God bless the Prince of Wales" and "Land of Hope and Glory". These two songs seemed to fit perfectly with that day, but somehow they don't have the same meaning now, I don't know why, unless it is that we are beginning to realize that other peoples count too.

From the school we marched to the cricket field where grand preparations had been made for sports, teas and entertainment, following a service in the Church adjoining. One of the high spots of the day was the maypoles. This was the only one that I remember ever seeing. A number of dances were performed by girls of different age groups, and some were very pretty indeed.

The tea was served in a large marquee, all set out on long tables with the tea to drink for each child put into a Coronation mug, which was kept for a souvenir. I went in with a group of boys, who beforehand, agreed to see who could pocket most buns. Now I had never tried this pastime before, nor ever heard of it, but to keep my face with the crowd I tried, finishing up with one jam tart! Oh dear, every time I put my hand in my pocket I got smothered with jam, but this trouble was small compared with what happened when I got home, I can assure you. I never tried that one again.

Soon after tea the weather broke up and set in for a really wet night and the outside festivities had to come to an end. As many as could crowded into the tent and the village String Band augmented by a few brass and wood instruments, gallantly tried to entertain, with one or two local singers filling in with a song. A noble effort indeed.

The funniest bit in the improvised concert was unrehearsed and unexpected. The rain was so heavy that the weight on the roof of the tent, pushed a ventilator flap in the wrong way. Now right underneath it was a young man playing a cornet and wearing a straw boater on to which the water just poured, drenching several others around him. I am afraid this incident proved more interesting than the item being played.

As the evening wore on the continuing rain making it impossible for the firework display to take place. The bonfire was lighted to take its place in the beacon chain, but very few stayed to see it burn. In spite of this damp and dismal day of celebrations, it proved to be the beginning of a long and glorious reign.

1919 saw the Peace Celebrations after the first World War. The cricket field again was used on this great day for our village gathering, and this time the weather was all that could be desired and so the fun went with a good swing from start to finish.

To-day we take for granted electricity and all the things that go with it and what a lot of work and time it saves. Although it had been in use for some time, the number of its uses was still limited, and amplification of sound was yet to come. To add light to the place, poles had been erected with a wire running around the top and hanging from this wire were little glass jars of many colours with night lights inside, hung quite close together and when they were wanted each one had to be lighted with a taper, a long and tedious job, but these were the fairy lights of 1919.

The centre of the field had been mown and rolled well and then fencod off in readiness for a grand dance while the bonfire blazed.

The music was supplied by a piano and three or four violins set on the windward side of the pitch so that they could be heard to the best advantage. What a lovely scene on a warm summer night, after a day of heart felt rejoicing, on Peace Day 1919.

It was sixteen years before the next national holiday, which was the Silver Jubilee marking the twenty-fifth year of the reign of King George V. As I look back I cannot help but feel the effort made to make a great day of it was only half-hearted, for although our King and Queen had been wonderful people, the times the country had passed through had not been of the happiest, having seen a

terrible war, and after that long years of unemployment.

Through this period our part of the country had not been one of the worst hit, but it had been bad enough and I remember there were quite open grumbles about the imposition of a penny rate to cover the expenses of the celebrations.

Nevertheless we had our tea, sports and bonfire, this time in the recreation ground which had been bought and opened up seven years before, when the field was bought by the Parish Council and laid out to meet the needs of the village.

Our King died the following year, and so the next similar event was the Coronation of George VI in 1937, again spoiled by heavy rain, and compared with the next big day was a very tame affair, for the Peace Celebrations of 1945 were quite stupendous. I am sure that everyone was truly grateful to be free from the terrors of war once more.

Weeks before the appointed day a committee was set up, drawn from all bodies and organizations and everybody worked with a will, so that in the end we had a wonderful day. There were still a number of troops stationed close around and amongst them were some first-class sportsmen, one professional runner, Sydney Wooderson and a champion jumper, both of whom put in some real work for the sports. The Auxiliary Fire Service, who had done fine service all through the war years, just let themselves go in a comic display. They were all local men and no one had ever realized that we had so many clowns and comedians. Unfortunately their skill in this direction only lasted for this one performance, and perhaps that is why it is so memorable. They had built a small house of burnable material and one dressed as an old woman with all the worry in the world was rescued. The only car they could find to tow the pump was an old Austin Seven, which never did reach the fire, for it blew up under the strain and after man-handling the pump and laying out their hose they managed to get it all coupled up backwards. What a good job it was only fun!

As I look back on this day I wonder however the ladies managed to put on such an array of refreshments as they did, for although the Ministry of Food released certain commodities for the occasion, most things were still in very short supply, but as usual, with a combined effort, they delivered the goods.

Most of the expenses on this occasion were covered by the side-shows, the most popular of which was Hitler's Coffin. A local sawyer had cut out a solid block of oak in the shape of a coffin, and immediately after the show had been declared open, four men carried it on to the field, placed it on a strong bench, where after paying twopence, you had the pleasure of driving a nail into it, by the end of the day the weight of the nails must have been as much as the lump of wood itself.

The heartfelt rejoicing at this time was so great that before this national day of celebration different streets in the village had had their own parties, actually setting up the tables in the streets themselves, for at that time there was not all that amount of traffic about for petrol was very scarce and very tightly rationed.

Another thing which was very noticeable after five long years of blackout was the lights everywhere, for folks just put on all the lights they could, as in the song which had been written during the war "When the lights go up in London", so they went up everywhere. Happy days indeed.

In 1953 our young Queen was crowned and through the wonders of television and modern recording everybody was able to get a real insight to the meaning and ceremony of the Coronation. This being so, very few places held their festivities on the actual Coronation day. Our day was arranged for the following week which gave us the chance of having a brass band from a neighbouring village, who had already had their fun.

The local electrician put in some good work with a loud speaker scheme and lighting for the dancing. How different from the night lights of 1911, just one switch to put them on or off, and they did not blow out with the wind.

In the past I have had quite a lot to do with preparations for sports and fetes etc. and I am afraid it is usual to find far more willing help getting a thing ready than clearing up afterwards, but on this occasion it was most remarkable that as soon as the National Anthem had ended two or three lorries pulled on to the field and a crowd of lads set to work with a will and in a comparatively short time, everything except four big flood lights had been cleared. I have made special note of this because it was so noticeable; just one more thing to show that there are still some good youngsters about, and I expect there will be when future high days come along.