

## ENTERTAINMENT AND CELEBRATION

The social activities of a village are an important aspect of rural life and Napton is a village which has always had a busy social calendar. Darby and Joan, Luncheon Club, Playgroup and The Women's Institute are a few of the many which are presently flourishing. The village has lost over the years a few of the events which were common in the first half of the century. The Wake and Empire Day are two of the many that have disappeared.

Empire Day was held on May 24th and the Vicar would lead the procession of school children, each carrying their flags. Mary Fell remembers getting dressed up for the Empire Day procession...

"We had a pageant and we all used to dress up. This time it was all fairies and of course Mother was ever so old fashioned. All the other girls dressing up had their dresses up to here, (indicating a length just above the knees) but not my sisters and me, we had to have them down here, just above the ankles. They were only made of paper, that crinkly paper. We used to have to make our own. Anyway she said, 'That's it you're not going to show yourself up.' I had to tell the teacher they wouldn't let me do it. She asked why not so I had to tell her that I was too tall and I would have shown myself off like that, so she dressed me up as a witch. That was the year I left school and the eldest boy and girl put a wreath on the memorial. I didn't know I'd got to lead the band till I'd got my outfit on and of course I did feel a blinking twit."

Mary's husband, Joe, remembers another occasion for which they dressed up, the village carnival...

"We decided that we'd dress up as vagabonds, tramps and gypsies. We decided we wouldn't wash for a fortnight or shave and we got the women to turn out scruffy as well. On the day we'd turn out and sort of wander around, collecting on the way, then stand in the carpark of the King's Head, come back and everything would be alright. It poured with rain so we thought we'd better set up camp.

'We started from the village green, we'd got a gramophone in the pram, bacon, eggs, sausage, a frying pan and stuff to make a fire and we walked over the hill and set up camp in the carpark of the King's Head. We put all the women under the tarpaulin and the men sat around and believe you me we were scruffy, we smelt, we literally smelt, we were the actual part. We set up camp in the centre of the carpark and we waited, we knew something was going to happen. Eventually the landlord came to the door and said, 'You can't stay here,' but we said we could. He took us for real vagrants. We said, 'We're not moving, under the laws of vagrancy we're allowed seventy two hours to camp anywhere. We've come miles with our women, no-one wants us and we're staying on your carpark.' He fetched the policeman, now the local policeman recognised us and I think he saw that there was a leg-pull somewhere. He told the landlord that we could stay there but then the landlord said that he'd go to Rugby and get the Chief Inspector onto it. Well, we kept this on, we were cooking the sausages and the bacon and eggs and we got the smoke going there. In the end we decided that we'd better call off the joke so two of us walked into the King's Head. The landlord said that if we went in he'd set the dog on us. Of course we started to laugh and then he recognised us. Another time we went round on a lorry. We set off dressed up as Friar Tuck and we went to seven villages, into every pub we could find. We took the collecting box and we had a drink in every pub we went into. By the time we got to Southam we were pretty happy. What made this kind of thing die out was the fact that a lot of new people came into the village and they didn't enter into the spirit of it. As we are now, we've got people coming in and they're trying to revive things. And I hope, and I think, they will succeed."

Another tradition which has died out is the May Day celebrations. Although children are still given this day as a holiday the May pole and the dancing have died out in all but a few areas.

Mary Fell tells us...

"We used to have a May pole dance. We used to go round with posies on sticks and knock on people's doors saying please will you remember the Maypole and they'd give you a penny or sweets or cakes. The grown ups would make the Maypole for us and with the school we'd get into the fields and have a right old do. But it's all fell through now. They even stopped the Wake from coming. The fairground used to go down Dog Lane, all little side shows where they sold trinkets and shove ha'penny and a shooting gallery. Always used to be the third Sunday in August, they used to come the weekend nearest the 27th and they would stop for about a fortnight. This particular weekend they came, they used to come on a Friday night you see, put everything up on the Saturday, Sunday was a rest day and it would all start off on the Monday. This particular weekend this little baby was born, a little boy, and everyone was thrilled to bits. The Vicar, on the Sunday, used to go down and give a service on the green and this little boy was christened on the green. It was lovely, John Hood was his name, he would be in his fifties now. I don't know why they stopped it, the noise I suppose. The idea was that they were used as hiring fairs in the old days. You were hired at the mop, if you didn't like your job you could run away and get the chance to try again for another one. That's why it was called the runaway mop."

Tom and Harold French remember the Empire Day celebrations during Mr Payne's time as Headmaster of the school...

"They used to sing, we didn't, we were spectators, but when Mr Payne came he said that we were going to alter that and we had to sing as well. They even had us in the competition, singing at the Festival. We didn't win, but I think we might have been highly commended. There were two test pieces, 'Under the Greenwood Tree' and 'The Sandman'. Everyone sang them, the judges must have been fed up with it."

Another tradition kept at the school occurred at Christmas. Mrs Neal remembers the parties and the presents...

"Christmas we always had a party for the children. Every child had a present. They were allowed to choose. You chose what you wanted, even when I was working there, they still kept it up. You asked the children what they wanted. We had dances and whist drives and funds were raised. We had a huge Christmas tree and all the presents were actually hanging on the tree. Father and the Vicar used to cut them down and call the names out and the children used to climb up for them."

In the twenties the emphasis seems to have been on fun, perhaps to offset the austere conditions that prevailed during the first war. Mrs Balsom remembers the dances in the village...

"We used to have dances regularly. I never forget doing the Charleston. Dad and Uncle Tom, standing by the door, used to look on and laugh. They said we looked as if we were queuing up to go to the toilet. We used to start at 7.30 and go on till 2 o'clock in the morning. You see we were four girls and we were supposed to come home together. We used to stand sometimes, waiting for our older sister, in the porch of the house and we daren't go in. We had to wait for her, course we used to grumble at her when she did come and we'd all tip toe up the stairs at half past two in the morning."

Mrs Baynton also remembers the twenties, particularly the clothes...

"The girls all wore pretty frocks made out of beautiful material, chiffon with lots of sequins and beads. The style was for dropped waists and flat chests. There was a lot of interest in fashion. The dresses and shoes were well made and the stockings were made out of silk."

Dances were popular during the second war...

"There were a lot of dances called the 4d hops. You paid 4d and the band was voluntary. They got so popular they couldn't allow anyone from out of the village to come in the end."

Mrs Neal also remembers her Mother playing at the dances...

"Fourpenny hops, every Tuesday night and Mother used to play. Well, right from the early times she played at the bank house. The big, bank house here used to be called the Victoria Rooms. My Mother played there as well as the fourpenny hops."

One thing that all children look forward to with equal pleasure is the school outing and the children of the early 1900's were no exception. Mrs Gwyther tells us of one particular outing she recalls...

"We had a school outing to Madame Tussauds and to the zoo with lunch at a Lyons Corner Cafe. My Grandmother went with me but she and her friend didn't want to go to the zoo, so they went shopping. They missed the train and didn't get back till the next day. I remember carrying this beautiful peacock's feather all the way from the zoo and I'd nearly got to Napton when someone told me it was bad luck and threw it out of the window."

Mrs Gwyther also remembers that, during the winter, one of the favourite pastimes for her and her friends was to follow the fox hounds...

"We'd often be in trouble because we'd follow the hounds at dinner time if they were about. We'd get on our bikes and follow them and then we'd be late back for school. Then we'd have to stay in for two or three days as a punishment. Another of our favourite games was called tracking. We used to get chalk and draw arrows and one of us would have to find the others. We used to be all round the village tracing the arrows."