

Village Fêtes and Festivals

Ewelme News, Oct-Nov 2021

Ewelme villagers were always eager to hold annual fetes and festivals to raise money for good causes. Events were held during the Boer War (1899-1901) to send comforts (British shag tobacco) to the soldiers in South Africa who included several Ewelme men. We have photographs of fetes going back to the early 20th century, but sadly the dates, figures and venues are not named. A garden fete was held in the Old Rectory grounds in 1909 for the Reading Room Fund. Prizes were donated by author Jerome K Jerome of Troy, and other local dignitaries. The early occasions were predictable - with teas, stalls, bran tubs, swings, coconut shies, skittles and bowling or dart throwing for a pig. Music was played by the Roke Band. Most events were held in the grounds of The Manor, the Old Rectory, occasionally Saffron House and after 1958, on the Common.

During the last war and long afterwards, fancy dress competitions for the children became popular. An early photograph of a 'Wings for Victory' fete at the Old Rectory in 1944 shows Jenny Townsend (now Mrs Baker) in a dress covered in aeroplane motifs and pilots' wings on her forehead!



The 1944 'Fete. L-R. Cyril Winfield, John Smith, Hazel Brooks, Mickey Smith, Jennefer Miners, Jenny Townsend



The 1944 'Fete. The children include the Brooks children, Eileen Mencarini and Sylvia Barnard



Over £500 was raised at a Whitsun fete held at The Manor, (probably in 1949), in aid of the church Death-watch Beetle fund. A crowd of nearly 1,000 watched film actress Celia Johnson (Mrs Peter Fleming from 'Merrimoles' in Nettlebed) judge the children's fancy dress parade. An auction was conducted by music hall comedian and radio broadcaster Gillie Potter, of 'Hogsnorton' fame. [A mythical Oxfordshire village]. RAF Benson's commanding officer Group Captain Colquhoun won a prize and was likely relieved it was not the Bowling for a pig competition, as his married quarter did not boast a pigsty.

In 1955 or 1956, shopkeeper Fred Greenway and Mr Nowell-Smith of the Old Rectory delighted village menfolk by inviting Miss Norma Sykes to open the village Fete in the Old Rectory grounds. Better known by her stage name 'Sabrina', the glamorous blonde 1950s TV personality was made famous by her bust measurement. Although this choice was not entirely approved of by purse-lipped village matrons, some village boys remember being awestruck by

her 41-19-36 inch figure, insured for £100,000! Naturally, she was escorted by the organisers who agreed her appearance fee, which was for a 'fridge or freezer - memories differ. (So celebrated did the bust become that the twin fuel tanks under the RAF's Hawker Hunter jets fuselage were named Sabrina's).

Less provocatively, in 1957 a Coster Fair was opened by Norman Painting, the actor who played Phil Archer in the radio soap 'The Archers' from its inception in 1951 to 2009. He sent a publicity photograph to Cynthia Winfield thanking her for her 'cheerful and charming help'. (She passed books to him to sign). There is a photograph of schoolteacher Miss Walker and schoolgirl Josephine Hutchins in Costermonger fancy dress. Another 'Archers' actor was invited to open a fete in an unknown year - he played the John Tregoran character, but as four actors played him over the decades, we do not know which one came.



The 1972 Whitsun church fete, held in The Manor grounds, was opened by Cynthia Harnett, the author of the historical novel 'The Writing on the Hearth' - the story of a 15th century Ewelme scholar. To coincide with the fete, Moira Calvert and Ida Winfield held an historical exhibition 'Five Centuries of History' in the Reading Room. The Elm Club scrapbook has photographs of Roundheads and Cavaliers marching to the Common to hold a mock battle, during which a façade of a house, made and painted by the school children with cardboard squares from the Honey Factory, was set on fire!

On another occasion in the late 1970's or early 1980's Andrew and Anne Browne of Fields End invited their friend, Scottish ballad singer Barbara Dickson to open an event. Peter Lemaire was assigned to look after her.

The 1977 Silver Jubilee Rose Festival on the 9th and 10th July had a Royal theme, with roses named after the Queen, Prince Charles, and the 'Elizabeth of Glamis' rose for the Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother. David Hicks, the husband of Lady Pamela [Mountbatten] of Britwell House, arranged a display in the font, commemorating the baptisms of their three children in the church. To the surprise of the village ladies in the church topping up the water on the 11th July, Lady Hamblenden of Hill House arrived unexpectedly - accompanied by her Labrador Jim and a Royal visitor, the Queen Mother! It was not just the village ladies who were surprised to see the Queen Mother in the church in 1977 - George Cannon took the school children up too. Anna Lemaire was very over-awed and could only tell her mother about the Queen Mother's diamonds!



Finally, although not strictly a Fete or Festival, most of us will remember Gemma Clive's friend TV cook Mary Berry opening the Horticultural Show in 2013 and judging the sponge cake competition.

Ewelme Village Archive