

Memories of Castleton Garland - 29 May (Oak Apple Day)

by Jessie Hall

Garland Day really started with the bell ringers (my father was a bell ringer in the old days); it was a great event when I was young, really something to look forward to. We had to be seven years of age to dance in the Garland and we practised in the school yard. Mrs Marples (nee How) and Miss Louie Robinson, who lived in the Market Place where Stanley "Pole" lives now, taught us and we had to do as we were told - no messing about.

The night before we went with old fashioned clothes baskets to gather the wild flowers from what we called Monkey Plantation, just beyond Dunscar Farm. There we filled our baskets with Bluebells, May Blobs, or Marsh Marigolds may be the correct name to call them, also Pink Campions and Mother Die, better known as Hedge Parsley. No bought flowers went into the Garland in my young days, except ones for the Queen at the top of the beehive and this was always made at the host hotel.



Jessie wearing her Garland dress photographed at the Russett Well by "Daddy Hawks" in about 1930.

I can remember many Kings: Teddy Benson, John Potter, Bill Ford, John Hall - all now just a memory - but not forgetting Gerald Melody, who, I am pleased to say, is still with us. Tommy Liversage, who is still around, was the King's Consort and also Harry Young, Dolly Medwell's brother, dressed in very different attire from today. Mrs Sarah Waining always dressed the Consort. She lived at the bottom of Goosehill where her daughter Beryl lives now. Tommy sometimes appeared in his wellington boots having just come from the fields where he worked. Farm hands were hard worked in those days and he often had very little time to get ready.

Children were dressed very much the same as today but rather more flowers on the head. Wild flowers were always used; many families had more than one child to dress and some of them had very little money, so that had to be a consideration.



Jessie, Nelly and Nora Hall, dressed ready for the Garland, photographed at Russett Well by "Daddy Hawks".

Some of the money collected at the Maypole "was given to the children, to help with their dresses and shoes, because many families were not very well off".

The horses were Shires in those days, lovely animals decorated in brass, and red, white and blue ribbons. They were very docile and the Castleton Brass Band did not seem to bother them. The Garland procession stopped at each public house in the village, where drinks were given to the dancers and the band.

Before the Garland started, the King and his Consort would parade the village. The Scouts and Cubs, with poles, helped to keep the crowds back. While the children were resting, the band played waltzes and the crowds joined in, in the centre of the ring, really enjoying themselves dancing. We always danced for Dr Baillie on the corner where Cambion offices are now. When we got to the George Hotel, the King went into the churchyard, where the Garland was hoisted up and put on the centre pinnacle. It always went past the clock at 8pm; Teddy Medwell and Heinrich Lampe were waiting at the top. Teddy was very particular that all went well.

Next was the Maypole in the Market Place, where "coppers" were thrown into the ring. Dolly Medwell was a good collector along with Ciss Eyre. In those days a

small amount was given to the children, to help with their dresses and shoes, because many families were not very well off. When the Maypole dancing was finished, we went to the War Memorial and a short service was held. The "Queen" from the top of the Garland was placed in a vase at the foot of the memorial.

Dolly's father always put the flowers on our dresses and then we had our photograph taken at the Russett Well by Daddy Hawks as we called him. He was a very good photographer and lived where Mrs M. Kenyon lives now. During the Second World War, the young married women in the village did the Garland and Maypole just to keep it going. It has never been put off in spite of thunderstorms and goodness only knows what. Castleton Garland was remembered by so many who all came back on that day like the gathering of the clans, not forgetting the big tall hiker who came every year from Sheffield.

The Sidebottoms, the Beverleys, the Eyres, the Abbotts, the Potters all played a big part and Stanley especially, leading the King's horse. I remember Joe Randerson who always wore a costume and George Gregory who was another helper along with Jack Beverley (Kate Harrison's father). We always had a party at the hotel afterwards. I remember one time at the George Hotel, we all took very pretty flowers for the vases. I do not know the correct name of those flowers, but they smelled just like onions, which rather made a mess of things. They grow near Knowle Gates Farm.

Well I must finish now. I feel I have gone on far too long, but I have many happy memories of Garland Day and times past in Castleton.

Copyright Jessie Hall 1995

