Chapter 13
Upton Celebrates

Occasionally, celebrations are planned for the whole village community. In the past these truly involved the full community although much less so since the mid-1900s. Such celebrations have generally been triggered by either a major national occasion or by a landmark in Upton's own community life. Coronations and Royal Jubilees have traditionally provoked such community celebrations and their success has often inspired periods of annual events and revival of past customs. Garden parties, shows and fetes from the days when Upton was a smaller community were previously held in the grounds of the various large houses until adequate communal halls became available. An early annual event was in May with the crowning of the May Queen who then processed round the village followed by dancing round the maypole and sports held in various fields or suitable large estate grounds. This chapter looks at village-wide celebrations – roughly in chronological order – from our earliest records through to recent times.

Our first recorded festivities were on the occasion of the celebration of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887. The parish festivities started on the morning of 23rd June;- *'A very hot and fine day'*. The festivities began with a service in church to which nearly the whole parish came, men, women and children – '*of all ranks'*.

A procession was formed headed by the Band of the Earl of Chester's Volunteers, and they marched to the church in the following order –

Band Banners of Upton Oddfellows

Girls Boys Women

Upton Oddfellows with insignia

Men Churchwardens and Sidesmen and finally the Festival Committee.


Jubilee
OF
Her Majesty
Queen Victoria.
1837—1887.
PROGRAMME
OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE
FESTIVAL
TO BE HELD IN THE
PARISH OF UPTON-BY-CHESTER,
ON
Thursday, June 23rd, 1887.
THE BAND OF THE EARL OF CHESTER'S RIFLES
WILL PLAY AT INTERVALS FOR
DANCING
AT DUSK BALLOONS WILL ASCEND, AND A BONFIRE LIGHTED.

PROGRAMME.

1-0 p.m.—**A Procession** will be formed in the Cricket Field and march four abreast, headed by the Band of the Earl of Chester's Rifles, by way of Smoke Street to the Church. The Committee hope that all the Parishioners will join in the Procession.

1-15 p.m.—**A Thanksgiving Service** will take place in the Church.

2-0 p.m.—**The Procession to be re-formed** and march by way of the Cross back to the Cricket Field. Those invited to dinner to break off at the Schools.

2-15 p.m.—**Dinner** will be served in the School-room to the Workmen resident in the Parish.

4-0 p.m.—**A Substantial Tea** will be served in a Marquee on the Cricket Field to all Women and Children resident in the Parish.

5-0 p.m.—**The following Programme of Sports** will commence and will be conducted as under:—

Clerk of Course.....MR. E. DEAN, JUNR.
Starter.....MR. E. T. LOGAN.
Judge.....MR. C. H. ASHTON.

1st.—**5-0 p.m.—Race for Boys attending School. 200 yards.**
First Prize, 2s. 6d.; Second, 1s. 6d.; Third, 1s.

2nd.—**5-10 p.m.—Race for Girls under 14. 100 yards.**
First Prize, 2s. 6d.; Second, 1s. 6d.; Third, 1s.

3rd.—**5-25 p.m.—Race for Boys under 17. 300 yards.**
First Prize, 5s.; Second, 3s.; Third, 2s.

4th.—**5-30 p.m.—Treacle Bun Race for Boys attending School.**
First Prize, 1s.; Second, 6d.

5th.—5-45 p.m.—Flat Race for Single Men. 200 yards.
First Prize, 10s.; Second, 6s.; Third, 4s.

6th.—6-0 p.m.—Sack Race. 100 yards.
First Prize, 5s.; Second, 3s.; Third, 2s.

7th.—6-15 p.m.—Flat Race for Married Men. 200 yards.
First Prize, 10s.; Second, 6s.; Third, 4s.

8th.—6-30.—Three-Leg Race. 100 yards.
First Prize, 5s.; Second, 3s.; Third, 2s.

9th.—6-45 p.m.—Flat Race. Half-a-mile.
First Prize, £1; Second, 10s.; Third, 5s.

10th.—7-0 p.m.—Obstacle Race. Half-a-mile.
First Prize, 10s.; Second, 5s.; Third, 2s. 6d.

11th.—7-15 p.m.—Tug of War. Married *v.* Single. 12 Men a side.
Prize, £1 10s.

12th.—7-30 p.m.—Pig Hunt for Women only.
Prize, the Pig.

8 p.m.—Distribution of Prizes.

CONDITIONS.

The Committee reserve the right to alter or withhold any Prize if they consider there are not sufficient Competitors.

All Competitors must be residents in the Parish of Upton.

The Judge's decision in all cases to be final.

All entries must be made in writing to Mr. T. Wickham, Upton Bank, or Mr. T. Dickenson not later than Nine o'clock on the night of Wednesday, June 22nd.

Committee of Management:

The Vicar
~~Mr. T. W. Thomson~~
" E. Dean
~~Mr. E. A. Dickson~~
" ~~C. Greenhouse~~
" W. Shone
" ~~J. Dickenson~~
~~Mr. C. Townshend~~
" ~~C. A. Abrell~~
" W. Holland

Hon. Treasurer.....Mr. B. C. Roberts.
Hon. Secretary.....Mr. S. J. Carr.

In Church Lane the procession was met by the surpliced choir, the Chaplain to the County Asylum and the Vicar of Upton. The church was '*crowded to excess*'. After the service the procession re-formed and returned to Mr. B. C. Roberts' field. The men sat down at 1 p.m. to a dinner in the schoolroom, while at 4 p.m. the women had a tea of a very substantial character in a marquee erected in the above field. Athletic sports and dancing were carried on until the evening. At 10 p.m. a bonfire was lit**,** rockets and fire balloons were sent up and coloured lights were lit. The National Anthem was frequently sung during the day and the company dispersed about 11 p.m.

'*A highly successful day's holiday*'. Arrangements were carried out by a committee of parishioners and the whole village took part.

In the 1897 Diamond Jubilee there were rejoicings similar to the festivities of ten years earlier. This time, however, we learn that dinner was provided for the men in the schoolroom, and tea for the women and children in the afternoon. There were '*sports for the men and dancing for the young men and maidens*', finishing up with a bonfire in the evening.

Again in June, 1911, at the Coronation celebrations of King George V and Queen Mary practically the whole village went to church. This time the procession was formed at the school and they marched to church, headed by the Boy Scouts. The children were each given a New Testament, '*a coronation cup and two pence in the new coinage'*. As on previous occasions there was a dinner at 1 p.m. for the men, followed by sports, while at 4 p.m. the women had a '*knife and fork tea'* and at 5 p.m. came the children's turn. The festivities were held at Upton Lawn which was illuminated, and ended with a display of fireworks. The photograph shows Walter Cockram's home in Upton Park being suitably decorated with patriotic flags. Several Cockram photographs have been used in this book covering the early 1900s.



In 1919 the Upton Council discussed the Peace Celebrations and agreed to a sum of £5 to provide a tea party for the 120 children with a further £2 for sports prizes. Deans handled the catering supplemented with 3 gallons of Ithell's milk.

In the days of the smaller community there were real '*village weddings'*. In June 1904, when the eldest daughter of Mr B C Roberts was married, the village was decorated with bunting and arches. The whole village was invited to

the celebrations. The children were given tea and entertained with hobby horses and swings. The rest of the village then had a tea with dancing to follow.

The Rose Queen Festivities



The earliest photographic record (above) of Upton's Rose Queen parade is from 1929 although it is likely that the event dates from very much earlier. The photograph below dates from 1933 taken in the grounds of Upton Lawn – a frequent venue for such community events due to its magnificent grounds.



The photograph below is understood to record a 1940s Rose Queen event, after which it appears there was a lull until the 1953 Coronation celebrations.



Further national occasions from the mid-1930s

A £50 precept provided tea and treats with a children's souvenir for the 1935 Jubilee celebrations. Two years later the coronation of King George VI again saw village celebrations. Frank Morris organised tea for the children and buffet teas in the evening for the older folk. No longer were the sexes segregated for these festive meals. The over-60s were given tea or tobacco, and a bank book and £1 deposit was given to the oldest and youngest parishioners respectively.

The 8th June 1946 was chosen to celebrate the peace after WW2. Again the Council allocated funds - £124 this time – for games, sports and light refreshments. No definite photographs have been identified; however this vicarage garden party may have been part of the celebrations.



The Early 1950s

The early 1950s saw three major occasions – each celebrated with significant events involving the whole community – Festival of Britain in 1951; the Coronation in 1953 and the parish church centenary in 1954.

Festival of Britain Week was celebrated with entertainments for all ages – as can be seen in the programme below. It is interesting to note that the '1951 WI History of Upton' records that

'to-day there are more attractions outside the village and less general participation in (village community) affairs'.

BRITISH LEGION
UPTON-BY-CHESTER BRANCH

Festival of Britain Week

2nd to 7th July, 1951

Souvenir Programme

Price Threepence

. . . *PROGRAMME* . . .

Monday, 2nd July
Grand WHIST DRIVE
in THE VILLAGE HALL
Commence 8-0 sharp. Admission 2/-
NUMEROUS AND VALUABLE PRIZES

Tuesday, 3rd July For Children only
MARIONETTE SHOW
(Kindly given by Mr. NIXON)
Interlude by VINCHENTO, Entertainer and Mystifier
in THE VILLAGE HALL
Commence 6 p.m. Admission Free

For Adults only (over 16 years)
MYSTERY NIGHT
in THE VILLAGE HALL
Any time after 8 p.m. Admission 3d.

Wednesday, 4th July
OLDE TYME DANCE
in THE VILLAGE HALL
Music by JACK PARR'S BAND
Dancing 8 to 11.45 p.m. Admission 2/-

Thursday, 5th July
Festival WHIST DRIVE
in THE VILLAGE HALL
Commence 8-0 sharp. Admission 2/-
NUMEROUS AND VALUABLE PRIZES

Friday, 6th July
St. Matthew's Concert Party
(SALTNEY FERRY), present "HAPPY DAYS"
A Review of Music, Laughter and Charm
in THE VILLAGE HALL
Doors open 7-15 Commence 8 p.m. Admission 2/-

Saturday, 7th July
CHILDREN'S SPORTS—(see back page)
CARNIVAL DANCE
in THE VILLAGE HALL
Music by "THE ARCADIANS"
Dancing 8 to 11.45 p.m. Admission 2/-

Queen Elizabeth's Coronation in 1953 was marked with village events following the formation of a committee comprising amongst others – the Joseph sisters; the Burgess brothers; Rev Wheldon Williams. One outcome of their plans was to revive the Rose (or May) Queen tradition.

The Coronation Celebrations Committee decided that the Rose Queen should be selected by auditioning to find the local girl who could best recite the speech originally made by Queen Elizabeth on the occasion of her 21st Birthday. Her retinue were then chosen from a draw. The first crown, which was quite heavy, consisted of a metal frame made by Mr Ernie Lloyd and covered with masses of little pink rosebuds by Kay Joseph. The train was made from pink furnishing velvet - quite an achievement because it was not easy to get suitable fabric at that time.

Smaller communities within the growing village organised their own street parties – see colour photo on page 9 and the organising ladies below.



The next year – 1954 – marked the centenary of the parish church. This was a major event and as the following programme shows set out to involve the full village community. A large marquee was set up in a field off Heath Road with the scouts sleeping in it overnight acting as nightwatchmen. One decision of the organising committee under Rev. Wheldon Williams was to continue the recently revived Rose Queen ceremony and procession. This started a tradition of the church's annual Rose Queen that has continued through to the current day. At first the Rose Queen and retinue were chosen from girls at the large Sunday school. Loyalty and good attendance were the criteria and everyone enjoyed seeing the delightful way the successive Queens and their retinues behaved with such dignity and really entered into the spirit of the occasion. Latterly the Guides have supplemented the numbers.

CENTENARY FESTIVAL CALENDAR

SUNDAY, MAY 30th.

8- 0 a.m. Holy Communion.
10-45 a.m. Matins and Sermon. *Preacher*, The Vicar.
3- 0 p.m. Service for Freemasons—in the Marquee.
Preacher: Rev. W. Wilson, Vicar of St. Andrew's, Crewe.
6-30 p.m. Festal Evensong—in Marquee.
Preacher: Canon S. J. Marriott, Sub-Dean of Westminster Abbey.
Mr. Basil Nield, M.B.E., Q.C., M.P., will take part in this Service.

MONDAY, MAY 31st (Day of Consecration of Church).

7-15 a.m. Holy Communion.
7-15 p.m. Short Service in Church with Procession and Festal Evensong in Marquee.
Preacher: Canon S. J. Marriott, Sub-Dean of Westminster Abbey.
8-30 p.m. Play **"Everyman"** — Admission 2s. — in Marquee.

TUESDAY, JUNE 1st.

7-15 a.m. Holy Communion.
7-30 p.m. Social Gathering of all Parishioners.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 2nd.

7-15 a.m. Holy Communion.
10-15 a.m. Holy Communion—Mother's Union.
8- 0 p.m. Centenary Parish Dance—in Village Hall.

THURSDAY, JUNE 3rd.

7-15 a.m. Holy Communion.
7-30 p.m Celebrity Concert—in Marquee
Artistes:—
Eirwen Jones, *Soprano*
Jeanette Thompson, *Contralto*
Walton Pritchard, *Bass*
Deva Ladies Singers
Chester Male Voice Choir
Chairman: Ald. Mrs. L. Bromley-Davenport, J.P.
Admission 2s.

FRIDAY- JUNE 4th.

7-15 a.m. Holy Communion.
6-30 p.m. Senior Children's Centenary Party—in Marquee.

SATURDAY, JUNE 5th.

7-15 a.m. Holy Communion.
3-30 p.m. Kindergarten Children's Centenary Party — in Marquee.

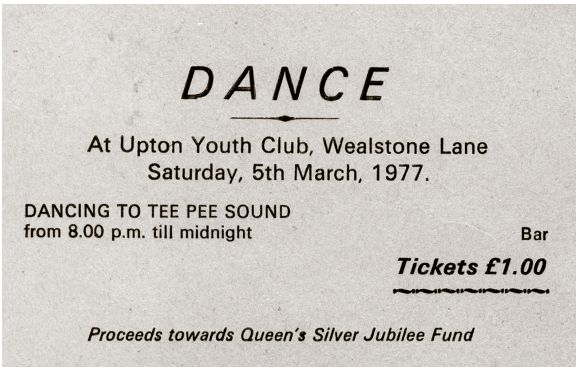
SUNDAY, JUNE 6th (Whitsunday)

7- 0 a.m. Holy Communion.
8- 0 a.m. Holy Communion.
10-45 a.m. Matins and Sermon. *Preacher*, The Vicar.
11-45 a.m. Holy Communion.
3- 0 p.m. Children's Service—in Marquee
6-30 p.m. Festal Evensong—in Marquee.
Preacher: Lord Bishop of Chester.

The Carnival years 1977 - 1980

1977 marked the Queen's Silver Jubilee – the first major royal event for 25 years to be strongly supported throughout the country – and the first with Upton now significantly grown and part of Chester's suburbia.

An organising committee was formed in October 1976 chaired by Eric Gerrard with Secretary Ailsa Clegg and Treasurer David Clegg supported by Len & Betty Holland. They had ambitious plans and a determination to involve the whole village community. A target was set to raise funds of £2000 – enough to present each child with a commemorative mug and to hold a carnival complete with a procession. Fund raising events were many and varied with dances, weekly coffee mornings and a grand draw. With village traders providing prizes, this latter event raised over £300 - the main prize going to a person from South Wales.


DANCE

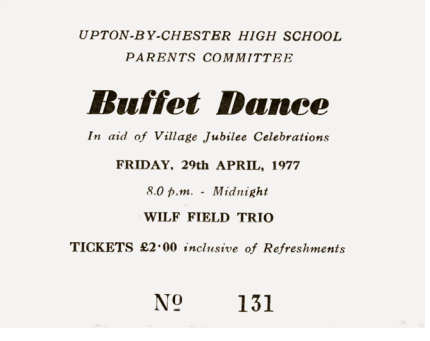
At Upton Youth Club, Wealstone Lane
Saturday, 5th March, 1977.

DANCING TO TEE PEE SOUND
from 8.00 p.m. till midnight

Bar

Tickets £1.00

Proceeds towards Queen's Silver Jubilee Fund


UPTON-BY-CHESTER HIGH SCHOOL
PARENTS COMMITTEE

Buffet Dance

In aid of Village Jubilee Celebrations

FRIDAY, 29th APRIL, 1977

8.0 p.m. - Midnight

WILF FIELD TRIO

TICKETS £2·00 inclusive of Refreshments

Nº 131

Eager to revive past traditions they noted that for the 1937 coronation – the oldest villager and the first-born baby were presented with special momentos to mark the day. Articles in the local press were used to track down the oldest villager – eventually locating Mrs 'Granny' Brough.

As Jubilee day approached various local organisations and residential areas were holding their own events. The Cotebrook Drive Street Party was the first in Chester – and choosing an early date, gave them the benefit of glorious weather which wasn't so available on the actual Jubilee Day. Flags & bunting were stretched around lamp posts & trestle tables were covered with yards of white paper decorated with the children's designs of crowns & Jubilee messages. One of the organisers - Mrs Jean Demack -commented that "*all the food had been eaten - including the huge Jubilee Cake made by a resident - and that there had been real community spirit.*"

A plan for the residents of Lawn Drive, Penfold Hey and Upton Lane to have a party in the grounds of the demolished Upton Lawn had to be abandoned because of bad weather, so it was held in the Church Hall instead. After a Musical Parade by the children there were party games, a table tennis tournament and a special tea. Pets (including budgerigars) had been invited and they too had refreshments.

Celebrations Programme

1.45 p.m. Procession of Floats

Route:—

Upton High School (grounds)
St. James' Avenue
Weston Grove
Gatesheath Drive
Heath Road
Upton Lane
Church Lane
Upton Cross
Wealstone Lane playing field (Pavilion car park)

Participants (accurate at time of going to press):—

Army Vehicles
Boys' Brigade Band
Upton Royal British Legion
Upton Acresfield School
Upton County High School
Upton Manor School
Upton Mill View School
Upton St. Mary's Infants' School
Upton Westlea School
United Reformed Church
Upton Parish Church
Upton Girl Guides and Brownies
Upton-by-Chester Scout Group
Chester Vintage Car Club
Henley's of Chester (Rolls-Royce)

All participants gratefully acknowledge the generosity of companies who have loaned vehicles

3.00 p.m. Official Opening by the Right Worshipful the Mayor of Chester

ORDER OF EVENTS
(approximate times)

3.15	Judo Display
3.30	Country Dancing—Westlea School
3.45	Beer Race—local public houses
4.00	Fancy Hat Parade—under 5-years-old groups
4.30	Physical Education Display—Upton County High School
4.45	Sword Dancing, Morris Men } Upton Manor School
5.00	Tug-o'-War—teams of eight
5.30	Barbecue Cooking—Scouts
6.00	Brass Band Recital—Cheshire Constabulary Brass Band
7.30	'Last Orders'
8.30	Youth Disco—venue: Upton Youth Club (price 40p)

OTHER ATTRACTIONS

Stalls
Side Shows
Bar
Refreshments
Finals of Tennis and Bowls Tournaments

The village-wide Carnival took place on Saturday 18th June 1977 and was very well supported. The day started with a procession including 20 floats (see page 8 colour photographs) and took a route along St James Avenue, Western Grove, Gatesheath Drive, Heath Rd, Upton Lane, Upton Cross and Wealstone Lane to the car park on Carnival Field (Wealstone Lane Playing Fields). Granny Brough rode in a Rolls Royce with floats from local schools and churches as well as businesses and organisations such as the British Legion.



Cllr Eric Gerrard and Mayor Shiela Garston with 'Granny' Brough

Upton resident Mrs Sheila Garston was the Mayor of Chester at the time and she officially opened the Carnival at 3pm. Teams from the Wheatsheaf Inn carried off major prizes in the Beer Race and the tug of war. A newspaper reporter wrote - '*The normally reserved village of Upton let its hair down as crowds lined the road to wave on the grand procession'*.

Upton Parish Council attended a special service on the following Sunday. At the United Reformed Church there was a Family Service - a re-enactment of the Coronation, ending with a hearty rendering of '*God Save The Queen'*.

Another Jubilee event was the Grand Field Day & Donkey Derby held by the High School at the County Officers Sports Club field. There were many stalls and sideshows and the High School Band gave its first outdoor performance all helping raise funds towards a new minibus for the school. The children of Upton Manor School were presented with their Jubilee Mugs by Mr John Ross as Chairman of the Governors. Nearly *£500* was raised at the *'Jubilee Jaunt'* and £300 of this was presented to the Jubilee Committee.

Festivities continued into July with a Gala Day at the Upton Youth Club in Wealstone Lane. As well as displays by local musicians the day had a strong football link. Former England Manager Joe Mercer attended and visitors were invited to '*score a goal against Chester F.C. Ace – Grenville Millington'*. The police even competed in a soccer special against the girls.

The Carnival clearly renewed a strong community spirit and enthusiasm that enabled the event to become an annual occasion for a number of years. In practice the 'Summer Carnival' survived through until 1980 – each year being self funding from prior fund raising and ticket sales. Without supporters to run future events the Carnival fund wound up and the remaining £400 donated to the Village Hall Re-roofing fund.

The 1979 event took on a nostalgic theme of 'through the ages' and was attended by the Duke and Duchess of Westminster as well as Chester's MP – Peter Morrison. The procession of floats was led by the Chester City Band.

Recent years



The Parish Council organised a Family Fun Day in 1994 to celebrate the centenary of Parish Councils. The Clerk - Andy Reilly – handled the organisation with Brenda Southward entering into the spirit of the event as seen here in her clown outfit.



The Queen's Golden Jubilee was not celebrated by village-wide activities, however many specific local communities held their own events, including street parties.

For the new Millennium, 'Churches Together in Upton' worked with the Parish Council to organise a summer celebration on Wealstone Lane playing field. This free event was funded jointly through the Millennium Lottery Fund and the Upton Parish Council. Local churches, schools and organisations provided entertainment with bands, choirs, comedy and numerous stalls. The day was well supported, across the community, despite the wet weather.

As this book goes to press arrangements are being finalized for Upton's first Music Art & Literature Festival with a theme of 'Upton Yesterday & Today'. Events spread over March & April 2005 should showcase much of the current local talent while reminding people of their local heritage.