

# **A History of Fun in Epsom & Ewell Jubilees and Junkets**

by  
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No doubt the ancient bells of St. Mary's have rung out for many coronations, but the earliest records of public rejoicing come from 25<sup>th</sup> October 1809, when George III celebrated fifty years on his throne – the first Jubilee. Ewell Parish Vestry raised an subscription, and James Hebard of Church Street was put in charge of spending the funds, which ran to £34 beef, £20 on bread and £18 in cash handouts. Held at a time of social unrest, the Jubilee was a great success: instead of being angry and hungry, the poor people tucked in, and revolution was averted.

After George III, royalty was less popular. William IV had stayed in Ewell when he was Duke of Clarence, but nobody celebrated his coronation – or even Victoria's. But when the new Queen got married, Epsom showed loyalty by lighting the streets with its newly installed gas lighting. Alas, the illuminations were substandard. 'At night, about eight, when the shops are all closed/ One would think the Old Town had gone into a doze'.

Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887 was popular with the schoolboys, who were given two days' holiday. Festivities were lacking, though – so much that a mock funeral and coffin, led by the bricklayer Jem Mace, paraded the streets of Ewell to bury the village's reputation for loyalty. It was not until 1897 that the area, now rapidly expanding and urbanising, showed what it could do. Epsom's procession was led by an advance guard of firemen, their helmets glittering in the sunshine, followed by the Volunteer Band. Next came the Urban District Council, led by the chairman. After the councillors came the postmen, then the Ancient Order of Foresters. After them stepped the Epsom Town Band, playing more or less the same tune as the Volunteer Band: then the Fire Brigade, with the municipal horses, which had been released from their duty on the dustcart for the day. Loyal cyclists pedalled along in the rear of this procession, which ended at the Clock Tower, where the Volunteer Band led the assembled townspeople in a jubilant rendition of the National Anthem. A gigantic bonfire blazed on the Downs, and a baby girl from Burgh Heath Road was christened Annie Jubilee Bridger, poor mite.

Fun was resumed at the Clock Tower in 1902, when a whole ox was roasted to celebrate the coronation of Edward VII. A fireplace was built at the foot of the tower, the ox being turned on a spit until it was roasted. Portions were cut and taken to a nearby marquee where bread and beer were handed out to go with it. Then came the junketings at the coronation of George V in 1911, co-ordinated by four committees, with a fifth one needed for the bonfire. Sports in the High Street

included climbing the greasy pole and a tug of war between married men and singletons.

In 1935, George V's Silver Jubilee saw the schools closed for three days, with an entertainment and tea for children at the Court Recreation Ground and a Grand Carnival Procession on the Wednesday afternoon. There was hardly time to take down the bunting before it went up again for the coronation of George VI in May 1937. Seven hundred old folk were brought in by car for a dinner in the High Street, and the children had a Fancy Dress Parade with musical clowns followed by rope spinning, a ventriloquist, and a hoop juggler. Sleepy children were carried in the grand torchlight procession up onto the Downs, where yet another colossal bonfire was ablaze. All that in May – and then in September the town turned out again for the Incorporation of Epsom and Ewell in a Borough.

The forbidding summer of 1952 didn't damp the spirits of loyal folk (does it ever?). A huge crown was put up, in the small hours of the morning, to bridge the central crossroads in Epsom. As was now tradition, luncheons were held for old folk at the Ebbisham Hall, Hessele Grove School (now Glyn School) and Danetree Road School. Entertainment included Dave Roberts (banjoist), Peggy Dale (a song and a uke) and Wayne Gosling (the singing accordionist). There were sports and other events at four venues: Ewell Court, Shadbolt Park, and Court and London Road Recreation Grounds. Punch and Judy was a highlight at Danetree, together with a physical training display by the 1<sup>st</sup> West Ewell Scouts, Scottish dancing by the Girls Friendly Society and a ladies' ankle competition.

The Jubilees of 1977 and 2002 were just as festive – but these are recent enough to be well known. Let's hope that the celebrations of 2012 live on as long in memory as their predecessors in days gone by.