

**HISTORY WORKSHOP PAMPHLETS**

*Number Eight*

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**WHITSUN**  
**IN**  
**19<sup>th</sup> CENTURY**  
**OXFORDSHIRE**

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**by**

**Alun Howkins**

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**Price 60p**

241

## HISTORY WORKSHOP PAMPHLETS

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## CONTENTS

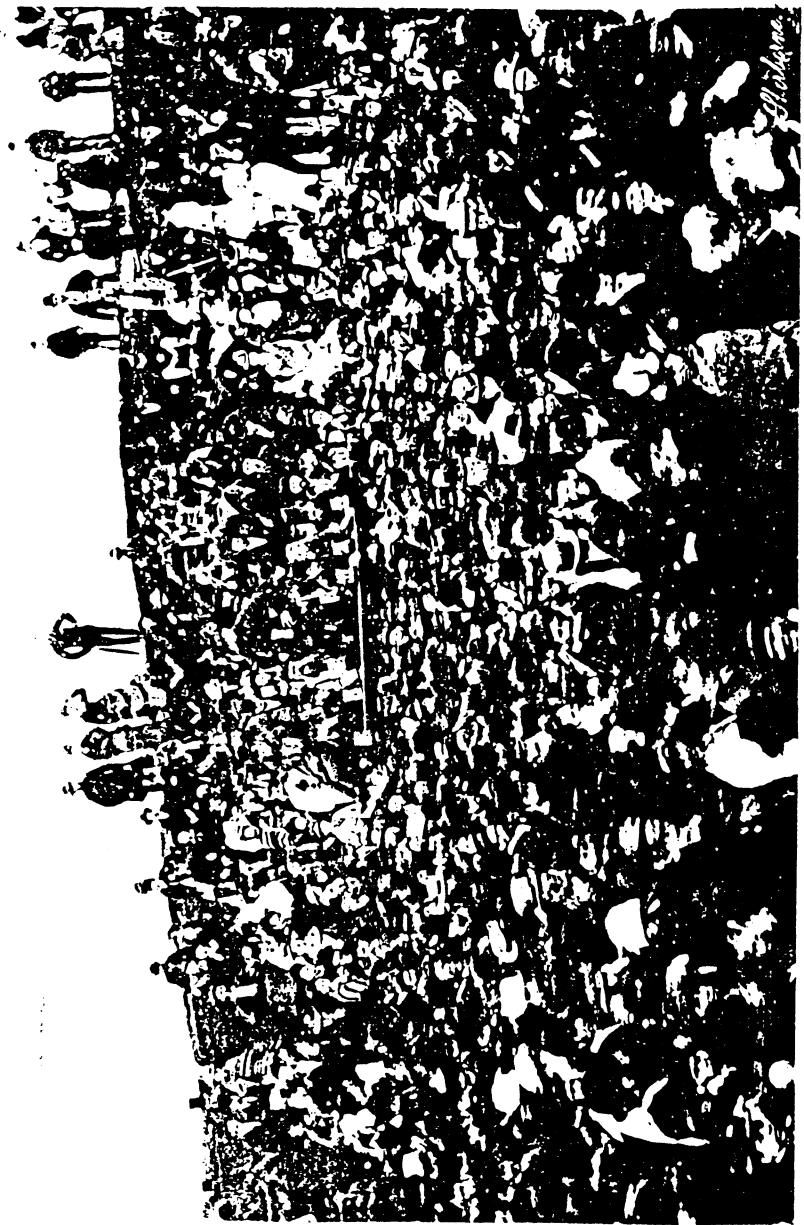
I	The Old Ways.	1
II	The New Spirit.	19
III	Club Day.	28
IV	Rational Recreation.	44
V	Kitchener's Army.	63

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- 1 Rational recreation: National demonstration of Farm-workers, Ham Hill, nr. Yeovil, Whit Monday 1877.  
Copyright N.U.A.A.W.
- 2 Foresters' Club Day at Iffley, Oxon. c. 1900, Museum of English Rural Life, Reading.
- 3 The old ways: A Whit Ale in Woodstock, 1829, from Thomas Little, *Confessions of an Oxonian*, London, 1826.

## Editorial note

Alun Howkins is a native of Bicester and a collector and singer of Oxfordshire songs. He was a student at Ruskin from 1968-70; is now at the Queen's College, and next year plans to be starting work on Norfolk farm labourers in the 1890s.



243

344

## FOREWORD

My own first real contact with the kind of things this pamphlet is about is fortunately preserved for posterity. It comes from a rare, and hitherto unpublished manuscript entitled 'English Book, Alun Howkins, Form 1', and apparently drawn up at the Bicester Highfield Secondary Modern School in 1959.

On Whit-Monday my Dad borrowed Mr. Powell's car and took me and my sister out for the day for a drive. Because my mum is a cook in the hospital she had to work so she could not come. We drove to the Cotswold Hills which were very nice and we picked some flowers for my Mum. We went to a place called Winchcom where there is a castle and we had dinner there in a cafe. After dinner we went to Bibury and to a place called Bampton. Bampton was good fun, there were lots of men dancing. They are called Morris dancers, but they are nothing to do with the factory but are very old. They danced facing each other and waved handkerchiefs. They were dressed in white with blue and red ribbons and bells on their feet. There was a man called a fool who had a clown's costume on and went round hitting people with a ball on a stick. He chased my sister Tina and was very funny. There was a man with a cake with a sword in it. Afterwards we sat outside a pub and had some lemonade. My Dad had some beer. When we went home we were tired and happy and had enjoyed our half term.

Since that date my growing interest and love of English country music has taken me to Bampton many times, and it was the love of the old music and the atmosphere of Bampton which led me to the work for this pamphlet.

However there is little in it about Bampton and the 'old ways'; the pamphlet deals more with the taming of the holiday. There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, the old ways were dying in the 19th century and although they survived in some villages, these were exceptional. Secondly, lack of sources, there is much more information about 'club day' than its more spontaneous predecessors. Thirdly the 'taming' of Whitsun occupied the greater part of my period, since the new ways were already gaining a foothold in the 1810s.

I have to admit that my feelings about Whitsun have changed during the writing of the pamphlet. To put it simply I feel personally ambiguous about the process of 'taming'. When I began I had no doubt that I was 'on the side' of the old ways - now I am no longer sure. The old Whitsun represented a world which was in many ways more sympathetic than the one which succeeded it. The libertarianism of many village communities for instance can only be more attractive than the later imposed, and highly regulated work discipline. Similarly the Morris represents a culture (now all but dead) which contained some of the finest songs and liveliest dances that Western culture has produced. I am also deeply in sympathy with the old village and most of the communitarian features it threw up. But there is another side to Whit and one which equally inclines me to take the opposite view. Simply the old Whitsun, or aspects of it, was nothing short of barbaric. Bull baiting, dog fighting, badger baiting and bare fist fighting were not romantic subjects for a sporting print but revolting and bloody spectacles of man's inhumanity to his fellow creatures. In the last analysis my mind is not firmly made up and the reader must attempt to judge for himself from the evidence presented.

I should like to say a word of thanks to all those who, either directly or indirectly, helped bring this pamphlet to the light of day. Firstly to Raph and Anna, for painstaking editing and checking, and all the comrades of the History Workshop, without whom it certainly would never have been possible, and without whom I would never have even heard of social history let alone written about it. Secondly, and in a different way equally, to Sue Himmelweit, a great comrade, a fine person and my companion through the writing of this. Thirdly, to my parents for being good parents. Fourthly, to the bearers of the tradition, most of whom don't know me from Adam but whose songs and music are the ultimate inspiration of this pamphlet. Thanks then to Reg. Hall and Francis Shergold at Bampton as well as Mr. Tanner in that village, to Jim Phillips of Quarry, the entire Abingdon Morris side, and to any one who plays, sings or dances in the old way. Finally, just people who have been nice in the last two years when a town boy found himself unhappily amongst the gown, especially Tim Mason, John Prestwich, Dr. Alistair Parker, John Walsh, Dan Davin, and Phillip Waller.

Lastly, a word about sources. In my account of 'the old ways' I have relied heavily on a source referred to in the footnotes as 'Manning MSS'. These are the notes of Percy

Manning, a fellow of New College and an amateur folklorist, who amassed a great deal of material in the twenty or so years before the great war. Much of this is conventional antiquarian stuff, but it also includes some remarkable village autobiography and memoirs of an altogether different quality. This material was collected for Manning by Tom Carter, a self educated stone mason from St. Clements in Oxford City who deserves better treatment from posterity than he had hitherto received.

I should like to humbly dedicate this pamphlet to the farm workers of the world, in the belief and hope that soon they will have what is rightly theirs.

Alun Howkins

Oxford City, December 1972

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iii

241

I THE OLD WAYS

They ploughed him in the earth so deep,  
With clots upon his head,  
Then these three men they did conclude  
John Barleycorn was dead.

There he lay sleeping in the ground  
Till rain from the sky did fall,  
Then Barleycorn sprung up a green blade,  
And proved liars of them all.<sup>1</sup>

Whitsun, like May day and Easter, is in origin a celebration of the end of the darkness, infertility, and cold of winter. When primitive man planted his grain at the beginning of winter it seemed to him that it lay dead in the cold ground through the long dark months. Then, as the frosts ended, the apparently dead seeds came to life and pushed up their small green shoots. However the cycle of death and rebirth was not left to chance factors: man intervened in the process with his own sympathetic magic. Until recent years in the Balkans young couples made love in the furrows to encourage the corn to grow. At Padstow, Cornwall, on May day, a man dressed as a horse is danced through the streets, and then made, to fall, exhausted, to the ground. The crowd gathers around him singing gently and urges him back to his feet. When he finally rises the triumphant shout goes up, 'Oss Oss, We Oss' and the song and dance begin again through the streets. In the past, the man who danced the horse was naked under his wide skirts, and young girls caught under them were taken to the ground when he 'died', which assured them of fertility in the coming year.

Unite then Unite and we shall all unite  
For summer is come unto day  
And whither we are going then we shall all unite  
In the merry morning of May

1. John Barleycorn, possibly one of the oldest songs in the English tongue it tells, in allegory, how the earth and the seeds die in the winter only to come back to life magically in the spring. Collected from Edward Warren, South Marston, Wilts, in A. Williams, *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, Reprinted 1970, p.246.

goes the Padstow song, although its vitality is impossible to appreciate without its tune, played on melodeons and kettle drums.

These elements of sympathetic magic were retained when magic was rationalised into ordered religion. In the Spring Judaism celebrates Pesach, the festival of escape from Egypt, of delivery out of bondage, while in the Christian calendar Easter, the festival of death and resurrection, falls at the same time. Whit Sunday, in the Christian calendar, is a further symbol of rebirth, marking the time when Christ finally ascended to heaven, six weeks after the crucifixion, passing on his spirit in the tongues of fire that appeared over the heads of the apostles on Whit Sunday.

The incorporation of these 'pagan' elements into the Christian calendar gave Whitsun many of the characteristics to which clergymen from John Bromyard in the fourteenth century to Edward Elton, Vicar of Wheatley in the nineteenth, most strongly objected. John Bromyard wrote a number of sermons specifically attacking the old spring festivals, which he treats as the Devil's own revenge for the severities of Lent, 'to annul . . . contrition'.<sup>1</sup> 'The rigours of Lent now give place to the rejoicings of Eastertide; and the thoughts of men and women turn to the open, the merry greensward, May-games and revelry, whither they will go with heads rose-garlanded for the feasts and shows.'<sup>2</sup>

The celebration of Whitsun in the past was not always clearly separated from May Day. As we shall see maypoles form an important part of Whitsun celebrations in Oxfordshire; while the children of Bampton carried May garlands around on Whit Monday until the beginning of this century.<sup>3</sup>

Chappel quotes a much earlier example of 'going Maying', from Bourne's *Antiquitates Vulgares*: 'On . . . the first day of May, commonly called May-day, the juvenile part of both sexes are wont to rise a little before midnight and walk to some neighbouring wood, accompanied with music, and the blowing of horns, where they break down branches from the trees, and adorn them with nosegays and crowns of flowers. When this is done, they return with their booty homewards, about the rising of the sun, and make their doors and windows to triumph in the

1. Bromyard, Sermon, 'Contritio' in G.R. Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England*, Oxford, 1966, p.393.
2. Bromyard, Sermon, 'Munditia', paraphrased in Owst, *loc.cit.*
3. Jackson's *Oxford Journal*, (hereafter J.O.J.), 25 May, 1907, p.7.

flowery spoil.'<sup>1</sup> In Bicester a degenerate form of this custom was still carried out by children in the early years of this century. Mrs. Cherry of Bicester gave me this version of the song which they sang as they carried the garlands from house to house!

Good morning ladies and gentlemen we wish you a  
merry May  
We hope you like our May garland because it is May  
day  
A bunch of may, I have brought you, and at your  
door I stand  
It is but a bit but it will spread about the work,<sup>2</sup>  
of our Lord's hands. . . .<sup>2</sup>

To Puritanism May games and Whitsun were anathema, whether because of the work ethic (as some historians have suggested), or simply because they were most hostile to the 'profane' side of religious festivals and feasts. We don't have to look far in the literature of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries for attacks on the traditional sports and games. Philip Stubbes in his *Anatomie of Abuses* (1585) denounced the frolics and games taking place at 'May, Whitsuntide, or some other time of the year'; and singled out maypoles for a vehement attack.

But their chiefest jewel . . . is their May-pole, which they bring home with great veneration, as thus: they have twenty or forty yoke of oxen, every ox having a sweet nosegay of flowers tied to the tip of his horns; and these oxen draw home this May-pole, (this stinking idol rather), which is covered all over with flowers and herbs, bound round about with strings, from the top to the bottom, and sometime painted with variable colours, with two or three hundred men, women and children, following it with great devotion. And thus, being reared up with handkerchiefs and flags streaming on the top, they strew the ground about, bind green boughs about it, set up summer halls, bowers, and arbours, hard by it; and then fall they to banquet and feast, to leap and dance about it, as the heathen people did at the dedication of their idols, whereof this is a perfect

1. W. Chappell, *Popular Music of the Olden Time*, New York, 1965 ed., Vol. 1, p.132.
2. Song from Mrs. Cherry of Bicester in Oxfordshire, collected by author in May 1971.

217

242  
pattern, or rather the thing itself.<sup>1</sup>

Some Puritan magistrates tried to suppress the spring festivals. James I, although a Calvinist (of sorts) did not back them up, and in 1618 issued his *Book of Sports* directed against those Puritan magistrates and preachers who taught that 'no honest mirth or recreation is lawful or tolerable in Our Religion'.<sup>2</sup>

Our Pleasure . . . is, that after the end of Divine Service, Our good people be not disturbed, letted, or discouraged from any lawful recreation, such as Dancing (either men or women), Archery for men, Leaping, Vaulting, or any other such harmless recreations; nor from having of May Games, Whitsun Ales, and Morris Dances; and the setting up of May Poles, and other sports therewith used . . .<sup>3</sup>

Although there were attempts during the Commonwealth to suppress Whit Ales they showed considerable powers of survival. The earliest description of Whit Ales in Oxfordshire comes from Blount's *Ancient Tenures*, published in London in 1679. Blount writes:

At Kidlington in Oxfordshire the Custom is, That on Monday after Whitsun week, there is a fat live Lamb provided, and the Maids of the Town having their thumbs ty'd behind them, run after it, and she that with her mouth takes and holds the Lamb, is declared *Lady of the Lamb*, which, being dress'd with the skin hanging on, is carried on a long Pole before the Lady and her Companions to the Green, attended with Music and a *Morisco Dance* of men and another of Women, where the rest of the day is spent in dancing, mirth and merry glee. The next day the Lamb is part Bak'd, boyl'd, and roast, for the Ladies feast, where she sits majestically at the upper end of the Table, and her Companions with her, with music and other attendants, which ends the solemnity.<sup>4</sup>

1. Quoted in Chappell, *op. cit.*, p.133.

2. *The King's Majesty's Declaration to his Subjects Concerning lawful sports to be used*, London 1618. Reprinted in *An English Garner, Social England Illustrated*, New York, 1964, p.312.

3. *Ibid.*, p.313.

4. Quoted in P. Manning, 'Some Oxfordshire Seasonal Festivals' *Folklore*, 1897-8, p.312.

In Oxfordshire Whit Ales survived into the nineteenth century. As late as 1837 *Jackson's Oxford Journal* was able to write, 'In no other part of the united kingdom, we believe, are these old English revels [i.e. Whit Ales] celebrated with such spirit, and so much original character, as in the midland county of Oxford, particularly at Woodstock, Marston, Beckley, Headington, etc., septennially, and at the village of Kirtlington annually in the week following Whitsun-week . . .'<sup>1</sup> This list would seem to be far from complete for the years before 1830. To it we can add with certainty, Milton-under-Wychwood, Brill, Chalgrove, Finstock, Charlbury, Bucknell, Eynsham, Kidlington and probably several others. While all over the county there were the village 'feasts' at Whitsun, which were often descendants of Whit Ales.

Blount's description fits, in most respects, the most perfectly recorded of the Whit Ales, the Lamb Ale at Kirtlington which was held until 1858. Tom Carter, who was collecting Oxfordshire folklore for Percy Manning in the 1890's, interviewed Mr. and Mrs. Pearman of Kirtlington, and from their account drew up the following description of the Kirtlington Lamb Ale:

The centre of the festivities was the "Bowery", a shed made of green boughs set up on the village-green, where the ale previously brewed was sold during the nine days of the feast without a license, the proceeds going towards the expenses incurred. One of the villagers was chosen "Lord" of the feast, and he with his mates picked out a "Lady", who was paid for her services. At 11 o'clock on the Monday morning the "Lord" started from the "Bowery" to the "Lady's" house, whence a procession marched round the village. . . First came a man carrying a live lamb on his shoulders, which was, if possible, the first-born of the season, and the finest of the flock. Its legs were tied together with blue and pink ribbons, and blue ribbons hung round its neck. Next came the "Lord" and "Lady" gaily dressed and decked with pink and blue ribbons. . . The "Lord" carried slung over his shoulder a tin money-box called the "treasury". Both he and his consort held in their hands badges of office, known as "maces". . . Following the "Lord" and "Lady" came the Fool, known as the "Squire", who wore a dress of motley, and

1. *J.O.J.*, 6 May, 1837, p.4.



carried a long staff with a bladder and cow's tail at either end. His duties were to belabour the bystanders and to clear a ring for the dancers. Next came six morris-dancers, who were dressed in beaver hats, finely pleated white shirts, crossed with blue and pink ribbons and rosettes, and white moleskin trousers with bells at the knees. Their music was supplied by a fiddler, and a "whittle and dub" man, as the musician was called who played the pipe and tabor. At the end of the procession were two men carrying "forest feathers", which were wooden clubs about three feet long, covered with leaves, flowers, rushes, and blue and pink ribbons.<sup>1</sup>

At Woodstock the Ale began with the raising of a May-pole, which, by custom, was provided by the Duke of Marlborough. The *Journal* reports in 1837, 'On Monday last one of the finest May Poles ever seen was set up at Woodstock, as the signal for the rural sports of a Whitsunale; and on Thursday, being Holy Thursday,<sup>2</sup> *My Lord* and *My Lady*, with their usual attendants - the tabor, pipe, and the fiddle, with an excellent set of morris dancers, paid their respects to their neighbours, to invite them to *My Lord's Hall and Bower* during the Whitsun-week.'<sup>3</sup> The pole was simply 'a bare pole, ornamented with ribbons and flowers.'<sup>4</sup> As at Kirtlington the 'Hall and Bowery' was a long shed decorated with evergreens; like the May-pole, it was also provided by the Duke of Marlborough. At Woodstock we also come up against the deliberate mis-naming of commonplace objects. 'In front of the "Bowery" were hung up an owl and a hawk in cages, and two threshing flails, which went by the names of "The Lady's Parrot", and "The Lady's Nut-crackers."<sup>5</sup> At Finstock, where the Whit Ale was part of the Whit Hunt and called the Youth Ale, the owl in the cage was called "My Lord's Parrot" while the flail was called "My

1. Manning, *op. cit.*, pp.313-314.

2. Holy Thursday is the Thursday before Whitsunday, so presumably the *Journal* report means that the pole went up on the Monday before Whit Monday.

3. *J.O.J.*, 6 May 1837, p.4.

4. P. Manning, 'Stray Notes on Oxfordshire Folklore', *Folklore* 1903, p.171. John Kibble, the methodist mason of Charlbury, knew about maypoles. 'A maypole from Wychwood stood in Church Street and for a week things not pleasant to think of were to the fore'. John Kibble, *Historical and Other Notes on Charlbury*, Oxford, 1927, p.90.

5. Manning, 'Stray Notes', p.171.

Lord's bagpipes."<sup>1</sup> To call these objects by their correct names was to incur a forfeit. An amusing, if unsympathetic, account of the Woodstock Whit Ale, can be found in a three-decker novel published in 1826, *Confession of an Oxonian*. The hero, an undergraduate, goes for a stroll in Blenheim Park.

I was suddenly roused from my reflections by the sound of tabors, flutes, pipes, tambourines, and fiddles, mingled with shouts of merriment and rustic songs, all indicative of glee and rural festivity; and having now passed the gates of the park, I was able to discern the quarter whence the sounds of this merrymaking proceeded. On inquiry, I learned from an honest, chubby-looking clod-pole, that the present occasion was one of no small importance in the vicinity of Woodstock, since it recurred once only in the space of seven long years; that the period of its celebration was always at Whitsuntide, and that it was denominated by the ancient appellation of an ale.

Off I walked to be a spectator of the festivities of the Whitsun ale. On elbowing through the throng, the first fellow I met who was engaged as a party in the revels was an old man dressed up in the motley garb of a Tom Fool or Clown, and I must say he looked his character to perfection. "How do, master?" cried he. "May I ask your honour what you call that yonder?" pointing to a painted wooden horse, placed in the middle of a ring. "A wooden horse, to be sure," said I. "What should you think it was?" "A shilling, Sir, if you please," answered the clown; "A forfeit, if you please, Sir."

"A forfeit! A forfeit! What for?" I inquired. "I'll give you no shilling, I assure you."

"Bring out his lordship's gelding. Here's a gentleman who wishes for a ride! Bring out the gelding! His lordship's groom, hey! Tell her ladyship to be mounted!"

Here I was seized by four or five clumsy clod-poles, dressed up in coloured rags and ribbons. They were forthwith proceeding to place me on the wooden hobby just mentioned, behind an ugly, red-haired, freckled trull, who personated the lady of the revels. I

1. Kibble, *op. cit.*, p.89.

250  
bellowed out that I would pay the forfeit without more to do; and thus was I sconded of a shilling for not calling the cursed wooden hobby his lordship's gelding. Shortly after one of her ladyship's maids of honour came up to me, and begged me to look at the pretty bird in the cage, hanging over her ladyship's saloon, or dirty oblong tent made of tarpaulin. There was a great ugly white owl, stuffed; and I thought I should be safe by answering that it was the very handsomest owl I had ever seen! No sooner had I uttered this, than the fair maid of honour screamed out in treble, shriller than the squeak of a Christmas porker, or a pig driver's horn, "A forfeit, Sir, if you please. A shilling forfeit!" "Pooh" said I, "I've paid forfeits enough!" On which, continuing in the same strain, "Bring out her ladyship's cook! Here's a gentleman who wishes to marry her!" On this, all the dirty baggages, which formed the group of her ladyship's maids of honour, brought out a fat ugly wench, with a nose and cheeks reddened with prickdust, and bearing a toasting-fork in one hand and a dish-clout in the other; and were on the point of commencing a mock ceremony of marriage between myself and this fair syren of the kitchen, in the course of which I was to have received three pricks with the toasting-fork on each buttock, and to have had my nose wiped with the dish-clout, had I not saved myself by producing a shilling as the penalty of my mistake, which consisted, as I was afterwards given to understand, in not denominating the stuffed owl her ladyship's canary-bird. . . At short intervals tents were erected for the purpose of dancing; and all the maidens and swains of the whole country round were hoofing and clumping up and down the middle and up again, beneath their welcome canopy.

The procession and the bower recur in descriptions of Whit Ales; so does food. At Kirtlington cakes, called Crown Cakes, were sold. These were ' . . . about nine inches across, and were made of an outer crust of rich currant and plum dough, with a centre of minced meat and batter', (possession of a piece of cake was considered lucky<sup>2</sup>). Similarly at Woodstock

1. Thomas Little, *Confessions of an Oxonian*, London, 1826, Vol.1, pp.169-73. See illustration from the same volume.
2. Manning, 'Seasonal Festivals', p.314.

cakes were sold which Manning describes as ' . . . like the modern Banbury Cake, called the "Whit Cake", and these were offered to people to taste in return for a small payment.'<sup>1</sup> An advertisement in the *Journal* for a Whit Ale at Brill in 1808 lured visitors with the promise of 'the best CAKE and ALE the village affords',<sup>2</sup> while at Milton-under-Wychwood in the same year prospective visitors were told that there were 'Barrels of home-brewed Ale (9 months old), and Cakes, as numerous as gnat flies in the summer.'<sup>3</sup> Dancing as well as feasting played an important part; the Brill advertisement also mentioned 'an excellent band' that was 'engaged to play in the Hall', and Milton made similar claims in other years. The style of the Milton advertisement (which was signed by 'Good Humour', Secretary General) deserves quotation.

MILTON WHITSUN ALE, NEAR BURFORD, OXFORDSHIRE  
CELEBRATED BUT ONCE IN 20 YEARS

Come then, ye votaries of pleasure, and pay your adorations to the shrine of Venus, Bacchus, and Comus: lose not this charming opportunity of hiding from care, in the bowers of love, festivity and harmony. You may not live 20 years more: hilarity, jocularly, and rural simplicity will move hand in hand conducted with the greatest discretion, modest demeanour, and appropriate etiquette, by his Lordship, attired suitably to the occasion, assisted by his Lady, specially elected for the pleasing task from the youth and beauty of the neighbourhood. - Be not afraid, nor encourage unfounded prejudices (if any exist), for the utmost attention will be paid to due decorum. So strong has been the resolutions of the Honourable Committee in that respect, that a retired Castle has been provided in the neighbourhood, where nothing can be heard more divine than the croaking of a Crow, or the braying of an Ass, to which all the enemies of innocent mirth will have the liberty of retiring during the merry week. Barrels of home-brewed Ale (9 months old) and Cakes, as numerous as gnat flies in the summer, with various other elegant repasts, tastefully set out in his Lordships Hall and Her Ladyship's Boweries and Tea Gardens, Will be at the service of the

1. Manning, 'Stray Notes', p.171.
2. *J.O.J.*, 21 May, 1808, p.3.
3. *Ibid.*, 14 May, 1808, p.4.

Company. A May Pole, as lofty and well decorated as ever was seen, will nod its assent on Holy Thursday; and the superb *fete* will commence on Whitsun Monday and continue during the week, in a Hall and Boweries, rurally decorated for the Occasion, and attended by a Band of eminent Musicians.<sup>1</sup>

Morris dancing was always associated with the spring holiday, and by the nineteenth century seems to have been mainly restricted to Whitsun and dancing competitions - often with rival village 'sides'. A Brill advertisement in 1808 announced that '...the Right Hon. Earl Chandos Temple has kindly condescended to give a PRIZE of ONE GUINEA and a set of RIBBANDS to the second best... a PRIZE of RIBBANDS, and a HAT of one Guinea value, to the best set of Oxfordshire Morris; and a HAT of Half-a-Guinea value, and RIBBANDS to the second best.'<sup>2</sup> Manning gives us two examples of the competitive spirit in the middle of the century. At Minster Lovell 'there was a competition between the Morris Dancers of Leafield, Stanlake, Ducklington, Brize Norton, and Bampton, at the "Pike" Inn when Leafield won easily'<sup>3</sup>, in another competition the Kencott and Langford morris sides danced for a Cake, 'The Test Was the Side that Made the Least False Steps in Three Different Tunes.'<sup>4</sup> Not surprisingly, such competitions often did not end (if they ever began) in a spirit of 'sportsmanship'. 'These contests, tho' friendly enough at first, often ended, after a drinking bout, in a fierce fight, in which the sticks carried by the dancers were answerable for not a few broken heads...'<sup>5</sup> In the early 1860s Ascott danced at Pudlicot House on Whit Monday morning 'and the Gentleman then living there after Seeing their Dancing Set them Boxing for Money the First to Draw Blood to Receive 2/6 the Second 2/0 - they Received 14/- that Morning for the Entertainment - and as Much Beer as they Liked to Drink...'<sup>6</sup>

1. *Ibid.*, p.3. Milton celebrated at least 3 ales within the next 20 years, in 1808, 1809, and 1828.

2. *J.O.J.*, 21 May 1808, p.3.

3. Bodleian Lib., MS Top. Oxon. d 200, fols. 225-6 from Jonathan Williams, aged 70, Leafield. The competition would have taken place about 1845.

4. MS Top. Oxon. d 200, fol. 193.

5. Manning, 'Seasonal Festivals'.

6. MS Top. Oxon. d 200 fol. 133.

Not all the travelling done by the morris was competitive however. Then, as now, Morris sides would travel around nearby villages during Whit week, and sometimes the week after, dancing in the streets. The Bucknell side spent Whit week dancing in Bucknell and the villages around,<sup>1</sup> while during the nine days of the Kirtlington Lamb Ale the dancers would go out every day and return to the Bowery at nights'.<sup>2</sup> from visits to neighbouring villages to collect money.'<sup>2</sup> Swinford's memoir of Filkins also speaks of the travelling done by the old Morris side from that village, 'I have heard say that Whitsun week they spent the whole week visiting the different club feasts every day. They started on Monday and did not come home until the following Sunday, sleeping in stables or lofts, at night, and not taking off their clothes or boots.'<sup>3</sup> Later in the century the Headington Quarry Morris side danced in Oxford City on Monday morning, Headington on Monday afternoon for the Havelock Lodge of Oddfellows, Quarry all day Tuesday, rested on Wednesday, and then danced at Milton, Great Hasely, Long Crendon and other villages in east Oxfordshire for the rest of the week.<sup>4</sup> Other sides that Manning lists as dancing all week at Whitsun are Kencott, Langford, Wheatley, Field Town and Oakley (Bucks). Early in this century Bampton also went out on tour in Whit week, to dance for the 'little bit' of money they could get'; they went to Aston, Clanfield, and other local club days 'just the little local ones round 'ere.'<sup>5</sup> Jinky Wells the Bampton fiddler who taught Sharp many of the Bampton tunes, used to travel on his own round the villages during Whit week playing the fiddle and singing and dancing. In Jubilee week, 1897, he went to Kingham, Stow, Burford, Lew, Crubage (sic: Curbridge), and Witney. 'I have done what no other known man ever attempted to do, I have been to village clubs, singlehanded in full war paint, with Gosoon Dress, two sets of Bells on, Stick and Bladder, a stocking of a sort, Ribbons and Sashes, with my Fiddle in my hand. The jingle of Bells would fetch people out. They would shout "Here's the Bam Morris". When they saw only one member, "Where's the Morris?" "Here's the Morris", says I. Ah, and I have done well too, for I have brought as much as a sovereign back... I

1. MS. Top. Oxon. c515, fols. 29-30.

2. Manning 'Seasonal Festivals', p.315.

3. Bodleian Lib., MS. Top. Oxon. d 475, G. Swinford, 'History of Filkins', fol.76.

4. T.W. Chaundy, 'William Kimber, A Portrait', *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society*, 1959, p.204.

5. Interview of the writer with Mr. Tanner, Bampton, Whit Monday, 1972.

251

have been out as far as Stow-on-the-Wold, Kingham, South Lea, Leafield, Kingston and dozens of other places single-handed and have met with plenty of old Morris dancers that used to take part in sets that are broken up and gone, but always met with a civil reception and got on well.<sup>1</sup>

The different sides had different styles of dancing and different colours (Bampton blue and red, Abingdon green and yellow, Kirtlington pink and blue), and although their tunes were often similar, dances done to them varied considerably from village to village. The old sides would only dance their own dances and would scorn to dance anybody else's. Cotswold Morris now tends to be seen through Headington eyes, since this was the first place that Sharp collected and he continued to think of it as the 'spiritual' home of dancing. But there were, and indeed are, many other traditions. The next most famous is probably Bampton which is still danced on Whit Monday by a village side (or rather three sides) and has an unbroken tradition. Also surviving is Abingdon, apparently considered by Sharp to be degenerate but with an unbroken tradition stretching back to at least 1700. Their dancing is not now associated with Whit but with a 'Lord of Misrule' survival, 'The Mock Mayor of Ock Street', celebrated in June. Another side with an unbroken tradition survives at Chipping Campden in Gloucestershire. Probably the most famous of the vanished sides is Field Town, from Leafield in the Forest of Wychwood; Jinky Wells said in an interview in 1952, '... they was wonderful dancers. . .';<sup>2</sup> Ambrose Preston, interviewed by Manning in 1894, said, 'The Field Town Morris Dancers were noted for their dancing. . . They had a blind fiddler to play for them. A wonderful man he was; they were dancing once, and he said to one of the men, "You began on the wrong foot then, I hope nobody noticed it." And nobody had noticed it, but the fiddler heard it right enough. . . Some of them used to dance jigs to please the farmers, over two bacca pipes crossed on the ground. One Cyphus was a great man for jigs; he "could all but speak with his feet" . . . They used to go out travelling round for a week or so, and make lots of money.'<sup>3</sup> An old man called Franklin spoke to Cecil Sharp in 1912 and told him 'Headington men don't get off the ground enough.' At Field Town they 'capered as high off the

1. From notes written by Jinky Wells, quoted in 'William Wells 1868-1953', *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society*, 1953, p.12.

2. *Ibid.*, p.5.

3. MS. Top. Oxon. d191a, fols. 196-8.

ground as that table'; 'Then the sweat ran down their faces; then they'd drink again, and the sweat ran down again!'<sup>1</sup> Field Town seem to have stopped dancing by the 1880s; but a few village sides were still dancing after that date apart from Headington and Bampton: Eynsham last danced at the Jubilee in 1935, Bucknell were certainly still dancing in the 1890s, as was Shipton-under-Wychwood (although this may have been a side of boys); a Brackley side, just over the border in Northants, last danced in 1914.

Morris is danced now by men, and despite seventeenth century references to women dancing it, most authorities tend to accept that it is a male dance. An old dancer told Sharp in Ducklington in the 1900s 'Girls have got things for their use and men have got things for *their* use and the morris is for men.'<sup>2</sup> This seems however to be incorrect even within this old man's lifetime. There are several reports of a side of women dancing at Spelsbury in the 1820s. 'About 70 years ago a set of women Morris-Dancers used to dance on Whit-Monday. They were mostly farmers' daughters, girls of eighteen or twenty, and were under the escort of a man who looked after them. They wore head-dresses of ribbons and flowers, short skirts, and bells on their legs of the same kind as those worn by the male dancers, and carried white handkerchiefs. With them went a clown or "squire" with a bladder and cow's tail, and a man playing the pipe and tabour.'<sup>3</sup> Much more recently, Mr. Tanner of Bampton told me that in his lifetime a woman, Tizzy Buckingham, danced with Bampton on occasions and that 'she was as good as a man' and 'just danced in her ordinary clothes.'<sup>4</sup>

In social terms Morris sides were working class, and the dancers tended to come from the same families. The Wheatley side of 1860 - six dancers, fool and foreman - whose names are recorded by Manning were all labourers, while the list of Field Town dancers given by Sharp for the same year, and checked against the census shows a similar result.<sup>5</sup> Jinky Wells said, 'Oh! I've been working on all sorts of work, every sort. I've been fagging, mowing, worked on the farms, thrashing -

1. Clare College, Cambridge, Sharp MSS., 'Folk Words', II, fol.84.

2. *Loc.cit.*, 'Folk Dance Notes', III, fol.121.

3. MS. Top. Oxon. d200, fol.235.

4. Writer's interview with Mr. Tanner.

5. Manning, MS. Top. Oxon. d200, fol.224; Sharp MSS., 'Folk Dance Notes', II, fol.89.

all sorts of work. I've walked six miles to work and six mile back at night for two bob - two bob a day. . .<sup>1</sup> Merry Kimber, the great Headington dancer and concertina player was a building worker, as were many of the Quarry side. When Sharp first saw them it was Boxing Day. 'They apologized for being out at Christmas; they knew that Whitsun was the proper time, but work was slack and they thought there would be no harm in earning an honest penny.'<sup>2</sup> The family links in the sides are also easily seen. Manning's list from Wheatley gives three dancers with the name Putt, and Sharp's Field Town list gives Jason Eels, Stephen Eels and Richard Eels. The tradition of dancing was handed down from father to son. Mr. Tanner of Bampton speaks of four generations of Tanners dancing there; his own father taught him to dance as a boy, whistling the tunes to him. In the 'twenties Mr. Tanner's father, he himself and his two brothers danced with Bampton. Jinky Wells says his grandfather was 'head of the Morris' and that he had three uncles who danced with the side as well as his father. Merry Kimber's father also danced with Quarry and many more of the old side had fathers who had danced before them.

The original instrument for Morris was the pipe and tabor. Jinky Wells, born in 1868 could remember when he was 'quite a little kid' the pipe and tabor (called locally 'whittle and dub') being played.' Stanton Harcourt had a famous pipe and tabor<sub>3</sub> player called John Potter who could almost make it speak<sub>3</sub>, while Wheatley's was played by Old Tom Hall of Islip. It would seem however, that by the middle of the century 'a squeaking fiddle' was beginning to take over from the whittle and dub,<sup>4</sup> although it was not until the end, and then only at Headington, that the instruments of the 'squeeze box' family began to move in. In the end the shortage of musicians became acute. Jinky Wells had to go and play at Field Town because they couldn't get a musician while Ascott-under-Wychwood had to pay a man from Finstock 7/- a day to play pipe and tabor. Bucknell though never seems to have lacked musicians: one John (?) Powell played a pipe and tabor there until the 1920s and the Morris side was able to provide musicians for church services.<sup>5</sup>

1837 is the last date of a Whit Ale being mentioned in the

1. 'William Wells' in *J.E.F.D.S.S.*, 1953, p.2.
2. A.H. Fox Strangeways and Maud Karpeles, *Cecil Sharp*, Oxford, 1955, p.27.
3. Sharp, *Loc.cit.*, 'Folk Dance' Notes, II, fols. 85-6.
4. *J.O.J.*, 29 May, 1858, p.8.
5. MS. Top. Oxon. c515, ff.29-30.

*Journal* but vestiges of the old 'Ales' remained at village feasts and other events. Spelsbury is a good example of what was probably a degenerate Whit Ale, '. . . Spelsbury Fair or Club was held on Ascension Day [Holy Thursday] in May. My mother told me that it was the largest affair of its kind in the neighbourhood when she was a girl. It was kept up for two or three days, with all kinds of festivities, especially dancing and Morris dancing. . . Mrs. Hitchcock said she remembered hearing how the Romanies used to camp along the Green Lane and play their fiddle for the dancers. Her parents were both great dancers. She used to have her father's bells. . . Mr. Caleb Lainchbury can remember shooting at a goose by the Chéquers Inn . . . with old muzzle-loading guns and a bit of paper on a tree for a target. He can just remember the last of the booths down the street, for the Fair, but there used to be many more before his day.'<sup>1</sup> Capps Lodge Plain, near Fulbrook in the Forest of Wychwood was the site of what was possibly another degenerated Whit Ale. Ambrose Preston told Percy Manning 'Capps Lodge Fair was held on Whitsunday. There was a cockpit there, a round wooden building. There used to be lots of fighting with fists there.'<sup>2</sup> Bucknell's Whit Ale survived until later and in a less corrupt form. In the early 1900s the Oxfordshire Archeological Society sent a letter to all incumbents asking if any old customs survived in their parishes and got the following reply from Bucknell, 'The observance of Whitsun Ales was kept up until recent years. The scene of the festivities was the Rectory Barn, and in later years the Parish Pound, where a tent was made with rick-cloths. There was dancing on the ground in front of the barn, as many as fifty couples dancing at a time. There were also morris-dancers . . . accompanied by a musician who carried a pipe and small drum. . .'<sup>3</sup> A feature of the old Whitsun in and around Wychwood Forest in West Oxfordshire was the Whit Hunt. The Whit Hunt seem to have originated in a common right enjoyed by the villagers within the bounds of the old Royal Forest. At Whitsun they claimed the right to take three deer from within the Forest, one going to Witney, one to Hailey and one to Crawley. All the villages in and around the Forest joined in the Hunt, though Bampton, Brize Norton, Leafield, Ascott, Shipton, Charlbury, Finstock etc. Manning, in 1895,

1. Elsie Corbett, ed., *A History of Spelsbury*. . . Compiled by *its Women's Institute*, Shipton-on-Stour, 1934, pp.235-6.
2. MS. Top. Oxon. 191a, fol.171.
3. *Oxfordshire Archeological Society Reports 1903*, Banbury, 1905, p.34.

353

254

collected a considerable amount of information on the Whit Hunt from John Fisher aged 80, John Bennet aged 87, both from Ducklington, and Ambrose Preston, aged 85 in 1903 and born in Leafield. 'At the hour of midnight on Whit-Sunday, the villagers were roused from their sleep, by the blowing of "peeling horns", and the loud shouts of their bearers, to prepare for the coming festivities.'<sup>1</sup> Peeling horns were a primitive musical instrument made from a long spiral strip of willow bark peeled then rolled into a long funnel shape, about 11 inches long, and 2½ wide at the longer end with a willow reed in the narrow end.<sup>2</sup> 'At daybreak on the Monday, all the men of the village who could beg or borrow a horse, rode off to the village of Hailey on the edge of the Forest. . .'<sup>3</sup> The *Journal* reports the Hunt in 1837 when Lord Churchill took part (as in 1811 when the hunt is also reported). 'Our annual chartered hunt had a numerous attendance on Monday last. At an early hour in the morning the whole of the athletic population of Witney appeared to be in motion, and were seen pouring in crowds to the Forest Copses, the scene of the action. The noble stag hounds of Lord Churchill threw off at five and by eight o'clock a brace of deer were killed. The sport was suspended for a time to refresh the hounds and another deer was shortly afterwards killed. . .'<sup>4</sup> The carcass seems to have been cooked and either sold or given away, but there was a good deal of rivalry over the skin and head. 'The man who was first in at the death of the deer claimed the head and antlers as his trophy, and the antlers seem to have been kept for years after as a mark of distinction.'<sup>5</sup> The deer was then taken to an inn where it was skinned. A piece of the skin was a much prized trophy, it was ' . . . cut into pieces, and distributed, and happy was the maiden whose lover could sport a piece of skin in his cap, for it brought good luck and ensured her marriage within the coming year.'<sup>6</sup> Although the deer by right could only go to three of the villages, there was in fact a lot of squabbling over the spoils. Ambrose Preston told Manning that there was great fighting over the deer between the 'companies'. He remembered seeing Jim Rowell standing over a deer with his long stick in his hand, and his company round him and saying to the other companies, 'Take it if

1. Manning, 'Seasonal Festivals', p.310.  
 2. There is an example of a peeling horn in the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, presented by Manning.  
 3. Manning, *op.cit.*, p.311.  
 4. *J.O.J.*, 20 May 1837, p.4.  
 5. Manning, *loc.cit.*  
 6. *Ibid.*

you be man enough.'<sup>1</sup> Fighting broke out over other matters too! John Butler, the blacksmith, of Minster was a great fighter, though a 'quiet civil man'. Once after the hunt Preston sat next to him when they were drinking at the tail of the cart. There used to be a cart with barrels of beer in it, following the hunt, Preston was getting up to go, when Butler said, 'Thee stop where thee be'est, thee may have to hold my clothes'. Then some of the others said 'Who's he?' 'Why Jack Butler'. 'Who cares for Jack Butler?' So Jack stood up and held his cap over his head and said 'The man as doesn't care for Jack Butler, stand up!' But they 'were all as quiet as mice - there wasn't no man as could stand up to him'. 'No horse couldn't kick no stronger than Jack Butler could hit,' said a friend of Preston, who had fought him. 'Terrible work there used to be, terrible.'<sup>2</sup> Manning adds in his article 'The forest meeting was recognised as the fittest place for settling up old grudges and quarrels, and many a fight took place between private enemies or the champions of different villages.'<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, back in the villages preparations were going on for a local version of the Whit Ale, called a Youth Ale, which followed the end of the Hunt. A bowery was built and a may-pole set up. The morris sides of the different villages danced in their own village and then set out for others. On the return of the hunters from the Forest, the Ale began in earnest, and continued with drinking and dancing through to the Saturday when the deer was cooked (the hunters were given free portions while outsiders had to pay a shilling for a taste).<sup>4</sup> The Youth Ale was the scene of yet more fighting, and again we have a description from old Ambrose Preston who seems to have had a less rosy view of his youth than most of Manning's informants. 'Sorrell the carrier of Charlbury and Joe Jackson, the butcher of Witney fell out once. Jackson had married a girl who had been Sorrell's old sweetheart, and Sorrell treated her to a drink, and so they fought. Jackson "wouldn't give out". His eyes were blinded, and they were lanced twice, to let the blood out, and at last he had to be carried away.'<sup>5</sup> The Hunt continued until at least the 1840s and as late as 1851 the *Journal* wrote 'It is not definitely known whether

1. MS. Top. Oxon. d191a, fols. 183-4.  
 2. *Ibid.*, fols. 184-5.  
 3. Manning, *op.cit.*, p.312.  
 4. *Ibid.*,  
 5. MS. Top. Oxon. d191a, fol.184.

this annual event is to be abolished';<sup>1</sup> but there is no reference to it after this date.

Cock fighting was a part of early nineteenth century Whitsun in some places. Certainly from 1806, and probably earlier, till 1812 there was an annual cock fight at the King's Head in Wantage, 'COCKING, THE ANNUAL FIGHTING at the King Alfred's Head in Wantage, will be on Whit-Monday next, the 3rd of June. There will be a great Number of Cocks up; and it expected to be a great Meeting, as the Subscribers meet on that Day to enlarge their Subscriptions for the Cups for next Year. The Cocks to be sent in to Pens on Friday and Saturday the 24th and 25th of May Instant. INOTT, Feeder!'<sup>2</sup> Every year until 1815 a similar match took place at the Green Dragon in Chipping Campden, and there are more occasional references to cock-fights in other places. Even when suppressed cock-fighting lingered on in places like Wheatley, on the turnpike out of Oxford, and was indeed encouraged to remain here by the fact that undergraduates would come out from Oxford to witness the spectacle.<sup>3</sup> John Juggins of Wheatley was a famous cock fighter and breeder of fighting birds known as 'Juggins's Reds'. He died on October 19th 1870.<sup>4</sup>

At Wheatley bulls were also baited. The Vicar of Wheatley wrote of the 1840s 'Rude sports lingered here as in their last resort. . . Before this the custom was at the feast or at Whitsuntide to parade a bull through the streets covered with ribbons and during the next day to bait him tied to a stake., i.e. everyone who had a savage dog was allowed to let him loose at the bull, This was done in the old quarry and a brutal scene it was.'<sup>5</sup> Bulls were also baited at Garsington ' . . . a butcher-farmer of Garsington used, for some years, to purchase a plucky bull: allow it to undergo the torture of being baited up at Garsington and a week or so afterwards bring it down to Cowley Marsh to be similarly treated. . .'<sup>6</sup> Bulls were baited on the other side of the county at Field Assarts, part of Leafield, and Phillip Franklin, from the Pottery at Field Town, was a well-known breeder of bull baiting dogs.<sup>7</sup> Badger baiting and dog fighting were also popular

1. *J.O.J.*, 31 May 1851, p.4.
2. *J.O.J.*, 25 May 1805, p.3.
3. Cuthbert Bede, *Mr. Verdant Green*, London, 1840, Pt.II, p.41 for example.
4. MS. Top. Oxon. d201, fols. 473-474.
5. 'Diary of Rev. Edward Elton' in W.O. Hassall, *Wheatley Records, 956-1956*, Oxford, 1956, p.106.
6. MS. Top. Oxon. c192, fol.28.
7. MS. Top. Oxon. d191a, fol.176.

sports, both practised at Whitsun and both continuing long after the animal protection societies declared them vanished. As man committed violence on his fellow men at Whitsun he committed even more on other creatures.

## II THE NEW SPIRIT

As the century progressed Whitsun became more respectable. It grew shorter in length - a one day holiday rather than a three or four day affair; and it came under the increasing control of the local gentry and clergy. The old Whit Ales disappeared. The Littlemore Whit Ale - the Hills Ale Feast - had by the end of the century been turned into a temperance sport's day. At Milton-under-Wychwood in 1903, where a hundred years earlier (it will be recalled) a maypole was to ' . . . nod its affent on Holy Thursday. . .', things had come round full circle when, 'A May-pole dance, conducted by Miss M.D. Venvell, was much enjoyed, the children taking part being picturesquely attired in quaint Old English costumes.'<sup>1</sup> Probably what happened to many of the old Whit Ales was what had happened at Bampton. By the middle of the century all that was left of the old ways was the Morris and the children going around from door to door with maces or garlands collecting pennies; the club procession was now dominant. In Bampton at least the Morris was to survive, but elsewhere it vanished. In 1860 there were about 20 Morris sides dancing in Oxfordshire and around 1914 there were six.

The changes were noted with approval by the respectable. For example, at the Bletchington 'Black's Head Benefit Club' in 1862, when memories of the Whit Ales in nearby Kirtlington must have still been fresh in many minds, the club surgeon, Mr. T.C. Blick, 'made some feeling allusions' to the changes he had witnessed, and forcibly contrasted the present 'orderly and unanimous meeting' with those of years gone by, 'when riot, dispute, and dissipation prevailed;' 'they had taken a step in the right direction'.<sup>2</sup> Bletchington's other club, 'The Valentia' was no less orderly, as *Jackson's Oxford Journal* reported: 'It was a pleasing sight to see nearly a hundred young, fine, clean, and well-dressed labourers follow their banner . . . to the quiet old church - it was a convincing proof of what unanimity and good feeling can affect . . . This

1. *J.O.J.*, 7th June 1903, p.4.
2. *Ibid.*, 21st June 1862, p.8.

355

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was a meeting bearing strong contrast to those of years gone by, when riot and drunkenness was the result. . .<sup>1</sup> 'Although we saw more symptoms of intemperance this year than for two years past,' the Watlington correspondent of the *Journal* reported in 1858, 'Still we can but admit, on the whole, that there were fewer instances of intoxication than on similar occasions a few years back, and there were no broils and fighting annoyances in the streets on this occasion.'<sup>2</sup> Even such slight doubts as these are usually absent from the Whitsun reports of the later nineteenth century. At Henley in 1864 ' . . . order and decorum prevailed throughout the day, which passed off, we believe, without the slightest accident or occurrence to mar the pleasure of the meeting; a pleasing contrast to the coarser amusements at the Whitsuntide revels of half a century since.'<sup>3</sup>

The power of moral reform reached the countryside in a variety of ways. Enclosure led to more wage labour and the growth of a regular working week on many farms leaving the worker with less flexibility in the ordering of his time. Sunday schools and day schools, usually under the direction of some form of religious authority, replaced the field and hedgerow as the place where morality and experience were learned. Authority in general began to appear more frequently in the village in the shape of the village constable. The most important agencies of introducing moral reformation in the countryside, at least at holiday times, were the church, the chapel and the village Benefit Clubs, and the numerous organisations and events that they created and provided.

The Anglican Church played an increasingly active role in parish life in the course of the century. New churches were planted, older ones were occupied by resident Clergymen rather than port-swilling absentees. Oxfordshire caught the mood of change when Samuel Wilberforce became Bishop of Oxford in 1845. Wilberforce had very clear ideas as to the duties of his priests. His attack on pluralism began almost within days of being appointed to the Bishopric. In February 1846 he wrote to the absentee Rector of Henley. ' . . . your . . . parish . . . is overrun with Dissent and Godlessness. Its population, now above 3,000 souls, most urgently needs the instant Care of another Curate. . . Souls committed to your charge and government, for whom you must render account at the

1. *J.O.J.*, 21 June 1862, p.8.
2. *Ibid.*, 29 May 1858, p.8.
3. *Ibid.*, 21 May 1864, p.8.

Judgement Seat of Christ are passing daily unprepared into their Eternal State.'<sup>1</sup> Wilberforce also attacked some of the parson's traditional pleasures. In August 1848 he wrote to a young man who had applied to be licensed as curate of Stowe in Buckinghamshire: ' . . . You will be placed . . . in the midst of a country which is much given to field sports: & I feel it to be so important to the true efficiency of your Ministry that you should not be ensnared by the facilities which may lead you to become a sportsman that I must beg you to give me your assurance that you will not join in any field sports whilst you hold my license. . .'<sup>2</sup>

We can see the effect of the new type of vicar in the case of the Rev. Edward Elton at Wheatley. When Elton came to the village in 1849 he was told by Wilberforce 'that it was one of the worse places in the diocese'.<sup>3</sup> In the Visitation Returns of 1872 he reflected on the parish as it had been when he first arrived. 'The large majority of the people seemed to be almost wholly ignorant of Church teaching and in consequence paid no attention to her ordinances. Many of the older parishioners who resisted all efforts for their improvement have passed away: some remain to this day living wholly without God.'<sup>4</sup> Bull and badger baiting had been made illegal in 1835 but Elton still found badgers being openly baited in 1851. As we follow Elton's diary we see the village and its people slowly coming under control. The children and young people were the first to feel the effect of the transition. In 1860 when Elton gave a large school feast for the children of the local schools, 'nearly 230 paraded the street with a band. . .' Two years earlier he had also succeeded in starting a night school of some twenty pupils. The village feast was changed too. In 1851 Elton confided to his diary. 'The Wheatley feast began today, a sad time of drunkenness. A badger baiting intended. . .' but by 1877 he was able to record that he had managed to get many people to the schoolroom for a temperance entertainment. Elton launched a temperance campaign in the early 1870s with meetings in the National School Room; by the end of the decade the cause was well advanced and by 1881 Wheatley possessed both an adult temperance society and a Band of Hope. Elton's efforts extended to other kinds

1. *The Letter Books of Samuel Wilberforce 1843-68*, Oxfordshire Record Society, Oxford, 1970, Letter 91, p.56.
2. *Ibid.*, Letter 244, p.130.
3. 'Diary of the Rev. Edward Elton', in Hassall, *op.cit.*, p.106 n.3.
4. Bodleian Lib., MS Oxf.Dioc. c338 fol.446, Visitation Returns, 1872.



of mid-Victorian 'improvement'. He supported, indeed actively campaigned for the railway to be brought to Wheatley, and obtained grounds and funds for a new school. From 1867 his wife ran a soup kitchen in the village, in that year feeding some 100 families; and from 1870 'Excellent, cheap dinners for the poor.'

Nonconformity provided a second arm of respectability. It grew rapidly in rural Oxfordshire during the first half of the 19th century.

In 1851, at the religious census, there were 34,942 Dissenting sittings in Oxfordshire, some 32% of the church-going population. The 1854 Visitation returns, which are, beyond question, incomplete, show 178 chapels and meeting houses in Oxfordshire. The 178 consisted of 43 Wesleyan Methodist chapels, 31 Primitive Methodist, 30 Baptist, 18 Independent, 10 Quaker, 3 Reformed Methodist, 2 Antinomian, 1 each of Unitarian, Plymouth Brethren, Calvinist, Particular Baptist and Congregationalist, and 35 belonging to unspecified denominations.<sup>3</sup> Nonconformity did not develop evenly in Oxfordshire and in certain areas the chapels were markedly better represented, for instance in the villages around the Forest of Wychwood.<sup>4</sup> In the eighteenth century this had the reputation of being a particularly lawless area. Chapels began to be established from early in the century. There was a Baptist Chapel at Milton-under-Wychwood in 1808 and at nearby Ascot in 1816. At Chadlington in 1821 the Rev. W. Grey of Chipping Norton preached from a wagon in the open air and gained many converts for the same denomination. By the 1850s there were two Baptist Chapels at Milton, one of them being 'strict', one at Ascot and one at Chadlington. Wesley had preached at Finstock in 1775 and had left small communities both there and in Charlbury, at the home of one Mr. Grace, a rope spinner. By the 1820s there were methodist meetings in Bladon and

1. Quoted in Alan Everitt, 'Nonconformity in Country Parishes', in Joan Thirsk ed. *Land, Church and People, Essays presented to Prof. H.P.R. Finberg*, Reading, 1970, p.181.

2. This figure is almost certainly wrong. Those classified as Independent may be Congregationalist as well as many of the unspecified.

3. *Bishop Wilberforce's Visitation Returns for the Arch-deaconry of Oxford in the Year 1854*, Oxfordshire Record Society, 1954, *passim*.

4. See Everitt *op.cit.*, for a general discussion of nonconformity in forest villages.

Stonesfield. Permanent chapels soon followed, and by the 1850s there were also chapels in Charlbury, Chadlington, Finstock, Bladon, Coombe and Milton. The Primitive Methodists, who had sent 'missionaries' into the area in the early 1830s, if not before, had chapels in Charlbury, Chilson, Bladon and Milton by mid-century.<sup>1</sup>

Nonconformity created a new sort of countryman. To see the village Methodists or Baptists as a majority would of course be wrong but they were a powerful and influential minority who could, and did, impress their fellows. It was the Primitive Methodists in Joseph Ashby's Tysoe who formed the branch of Joe Arch's union in the village; it was the dissenters, earlier on, who had fought for the villagers in the dispute over the village charities. Such men and women were a moral example to men like Ashby,

Here. . . were proofs of the power of religion, something very interesting for a boy to contemplate - men who had been drunkards and wife-beaters, brutal fellows whose lives had been changed. There was a frank, brotherly attack in the sermons on all sorts of simple evils - drink and gaming and strong language. One old brother would scold about a game of football, thinking that the old brutal sports might be coming back.<sup>2</sup>

The growth of friendly societies in the countryside was another major influence, and so far as Whitsun was concerned the most directly important, since they 'expropriated' Whitsun and turned it into their 'Club' day. There can be little doubt that the gentry and clergy, who played a large part in promoting them, saw the Friendly Societies as active agencies of social control, as well as a means of relieving the rates by encouraging self-help on the part of working men. Many village clubs were actually founded by gentlemen and clergy. In many cases they had the effective running of the clubs, as honorary members or officers. Kidlington Friendly Society is a good example. It was founded in 1839 by the Vicar, Rev. A. Arrowsmith<sup>3</sup>. Its constitution seems to have placed power firmly in the hands of a committee composed of the Vicar, his curate, and a number of the local gentry. At Club dinners

1. This paragraph is based on the three books of John Kibble, the Charlbury stonemason.

2. Mabel K. Ashby, *Joseph Ashby of Tysoe 1859-1919*, Cambridge, 1961, p.80.

3. *J.O.J.*, 14 June 1852, p.3; 13 June 1857, p.8.

257

2  
24  
this group dominated the speechifying - proposing endless toasts and votes of thanks to each other, while the humble 'brothers' of the society hardly got a word in. The President of the society in the 1850s (Dr. Richards, absentee Vicar of Kidlington, Rector of Exeter College, Oxford and one of Prince Albert's chaplains) was often unable to attend, but there was no shortage of clerical gentlemen to take his place. So in 1851 the chair was taken in his absence by the Society's Vice-Chairman, the Rev. T. Whitehead (his curate), and the first toast was given by a Rev. J.C. Clutterbuck, Vicar of Long Wittenham;<sup>1</sup> while in 1849, when Dr. Richards was also absent, attending 'some important meeting of the University, which would not allow him to be with his parishioners on that occasion', the Rev. M. Anstis took his place and conveyed a message from him wishing 'his people' a happy holiday<sup>2</sup>. The speeches and toasts took place after the meal, when the cloth had been removed and the labourers' pots of beer (the gentlemen had glasses) were well filled; presumably the 'gentlemen' sat in a group: the 1849 account refers to 'the leading farmers of the parish and neighbourhood' (some thirteen of them are listed) as being seated near the chairman. Later in the evening, when the singing and dancing began, control of the proceedings was delegated to the humbler members; at the 1849 dinner 'At half-past six o'clock the Chairman, with Mr. Whitehead, left the room, having appointed as his successor for the evening in the chair, Mr. Rouse, the churchwarden.'<sup>4</sup> At the 1857 dinner the room was cleared with 'God Save the Queen' 'at nine o'clock precisely,' and an exhortation to go home quietly 'so that the pleasures of the day might not be marred by any ill conduct of the evening'.<sup>5</sup>

The honorary members at Kidlington not only monopolised the speeches on club day; they also organised the day itself. In 1861, for instance, an 'adjourned meeting of the honorary members' resolved that the anniversary meeting should be celebrated in the National Schoolroom on Thursday June 13. 'The members are to meet at the club room at a quarter before eleven, to answer their names when called. They are then to walk to church in procession to attend divine service. . .'<sup>6</sup> In 1856 there is a similar report. 'The honorary members of this

1. *Ibid.*, 14 June 1851, p.3.
2. *Ibid.*, 16 June 1849, p.3.
3. *Ibid.*, *loc.cit.*
4. *Ibid.*, *loc.cit.*
5. *Ibid.*, 13 June 1851, p.3.
6. *Ibid.*, 25 May 1861, p.8.

Society held their annual meeting in the schoolroom on Thursday night, to audit the accounts, elect officers, and make arrangements for the celebration of anniversary day.<sup>1</sup> The honorary members did not only choose the President, Secretary, etc. (posts which were invariably filled from among their own number), but also the Father, and the Stewards, whom they 'elected' from the ordinary benefit members.<sup>2</sup>

The affiliated societies (such as the Foresters) were less easily dominated by honorary members than the local ones. In Mabel Ashby's book the contrast is well made. Young Joseph is given a book of rules prior to joining the old village society run by the Vicar. The response from his older friends, all members of the Foresters, was immediate. Old Master Blunn, the saddler explained to Joseph why he, already a supporter of Arch and on the way to being a Methodist, should join the Foresters rather than the old Club.

"Look here", said Blunn, turning over the leaves [of the rule book], "The Club's got to be run by Trustees and they're always to be drawn from the honorary members, paying a guinea subscription. As good say a labourer's got no sense. Why can't the members manage their own money?"<sup>3</sup>

How many village clubs were like the one at Kidlington is difficult to say, certainly a considerable number. But in all the clubs the influence of the local ruling class was felt, even at the club day meetings of the affiliated orders. The influence and interest was expressed in two main ways, through the traditional club day sermons, sometimes by the vicar of the parish and sometimes by a visiting preacher, and through the speeches of the honorary members at club dinners. Both give a clear picture of the way in which the local gentry viewed the clubs and what role they expected them to play in village society.

The texts from which these sermons were preached reveal a surprising diversity. One popular text was Galatians vi.2., 'Bear ye on another's burdens and so fulfil the laws of Christ' which was invoked at Bampton in 1846 and 1875 and Heyford in 1861. Some texts support the conventional ideas of the Friendly Society movement. Ecclesiastes iv.12 for example, 'A three-fold cord is not quickly broke' (Kidlington 1867); 1st Epistle of St. Peter 2 v.17 'Love the Brotherhood'

1. *Ibid.*, 17 May 1856, p.8.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Ashby, *op.cit.*, p.71.

(Bampton 1846) or 1st Thessalonians 5 v.14 'Support the Weak' (Kidlington 1857). Wider social messages do, however, creep in. At Bampton in 1856 the text was taken from xii Romans 2 'Not slothful in Business, fervent in Spirit, serving the Lord.' At Kidlington in 1884 the brethren were warned to 'Be sober and watch unto prayer', while all forms of pleasure were warned against at Bampton in 1864 with the grim text 'Abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.' Some texts were downright inappropriate, considering the preacher was usually paid two or three guineas for his efforts. At Watlington in 1845 the text was taken from vii Ecclesiastes 2, 'It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting.' Hardly an appropriate sentiment for those who were going to devour what one honorary member at Kidlington described as the '. . . one good dinner of such luxurious things . . .'<sup>1</sup> that they had in a year.

Figuring largely in the sermons are exhortations to temperance on Whitsun and throughout the year. The Watlington sermon referred to above is an extreme example: the sermon amounted to an attack on the whole idea of club day. 'The Rev. Preacher deprecated the practice of annual feasts, and bands, flags, colours, as tending to immorality and vice, the music, &c. as a useless expense.'<sup>2</sup> A more typical example comes from Bampton two years earlier when the preacher warned his hearers to take care 'lest by their conduct that day they should disgrace their profession as christians, and make the club tend to the dishonour of God.'<sup>3</sup> In 1855 the Bampton preacher enlarged upon the effects of intemperance, neglect of attendance at God's House, and other sins, observing, that for present enjoyment many were content to give up their hopes of future happiness, and concluded by a special and earnest appeal to the members of the societies to conduct themselves towards each other in such a way that their union on earth might be continued in heaven.

The church also lost no chance to emphasise the self-help aspects of Friendly Societies. Not only did these societies promote social order but they also reduced the poor rates. At Burford in 1893 the vicar urged his listeners to look to the Bible for example.

1. *J.O.J.*, 13 June 1857, p.8.
2. *Ibid.*, 17 May 1845, p.3.
3. *Ibid.*, 10 June 1843, p.3.
4. *Ibid.*, 2 June 1855, p.8.

After alluding to the practical nature of St. Paul's epistles, the preacher dwelt at some length upon the Apostles' independence of the pecuniary assistance of others. This was the lesson he would impress upon his hearers, Christian independence, or self dependence. . . What was possible and moreover a duty, was for every man by means of thrift to be as independent of the help of others as circumstances would allow.<sup>1</sup>

At Dorchester in 1901 the vicar used the club dinner to urge a similar message.

They never knew when the rainy day might come to any of them, and if, when it did come, they had something to fall back upon, some fund to draw upon . . . they all rested much more happily . . . and so it was important, both for themselves, and families, that they should belong to a benefit society.<sup>2</sup>

A more ancient message was preached at Bampton in 1875, recalling the mediaeval idea of the Great Chain of Being.

. . . He (God) would have all people of one nature, from the Queen on her throne down to the labourer in the field, bound by one law of helping one another. Yes, we are all links of the same chain, whatever our lot or condition may be in this life; whether we are high or low, rich or poor, master or servant, each should be guided by the same rule, not with the selfish thought of our own private profit, but seasoned with the idea as members of one and the same great family, working for the benefit of the whole community . . . bearing the burdens of others, and so fulfilling the law of Christ, viz., the strong helping to support the weak, the healthy waiting upon the sick, the rich administering to the wants of the poor. . .<sup>3</sup>

By the early Victorian years the Club 'feast' was beginning to replace the old traditional Whitsun. It was an altogether more orderly affair. Enshrined in the rule books of most Clubs were detailed instructions as to how members should behave themselves on the club's social occasions.

1. *Ibid.*, 3 June 1893, p.7.
2. *Ibid.*, 1 June 1901, p.8.
3. *Ibid.*, 22 May 1875, p.7.

Club Day, not surprisingly since its *raison d'être* was eating and drinking, was the most strictly governed of all. For instance the rules of the Prince of Wales' club at Clanfield said 'If any Member use any scurrilous language, or reflect of a Brother Member's character, or shall strike, collar, or use threatening language during club hours. . . for every such offence he shall forfeit one shilling to the stock. . .'<sup>1</sup> At Ambrosden and at Clanfield members were fined if they attempted to turn up at the feast without attending Church,<sup>2</sup> and at Ambrosden they were also instructed 'to wear a clean decent white apron, or forfeit 1s 6d. . .'<sup>3</sup> The times at which the feast should end were also forcibly set out in many rule books, and the timetable of the celebration constitutionally fixed, as in the following example:

XVII - That a feast shall be held on Whit Monday in every year, when the Society shall meet together by ten o'clock in the forenoon on the Feast Day, to go to Church in a decent manner, walking two and two, and return in the same order. Every member intending to partake of the feast shall on the Club night before the feast, or on the Feast Day, before he goes to Church, pay down two Shillings towards providing the same. The Committee, together with the Stewards and Wardens, shall provide provisions for the feast, and see that no more be brought in than what, in their computation, will be thought sufficient: the Dinner to be on the table at One o'clock. . . The Feast to close the same night at Ten o'clock. . .<sup>4</sup>

The Prince of Wales club's rules contained similar instructions.

28 - That a feast shall be held on Whit-Tuesday in every year, when the Society shall meet together by nine o'clock in the forenoon, on the feast day, to

*Rules of the Prince of Wales Friendly Society or Club Established at the Mason's Arms Inn, Clanfield on the 14th day of June 1875, Bampton, 1875, p.7.*

*Ibid, and Rules and Orders of the Amicable Society of Tradesmen, held at the House of Thomas Whale, Turner's Arms, Ambrosden, Oxford, 1818, p.10*

*Ambrosden, op.cit, p.10.*

*Rules of the Victoria Club held at the Harcourt Arms, in Stanton Harcourt, Bampton, 1874, pp.8-9.*

go to Church in a decent manner, walking two and two and returning in the same order; and if any Member neglects going to Church he shall pay sixpence to the funds of the Society. Every member shall, on the feast day, pay down three shillings and sixpence towards providing the feast . . . The feast to close the same night at 9.30 o'clock, and no part of the expenses to come out of the funds.<sup>1</sup>

Club Day was a village celebration as much as the club's, the procession, the church service, and the club feast serving as a nucleus around which the traditional celebration of Whitsun rearranged itself. The band marching around the village was for everybody, the dancing in the evening was also usually open-air and often there was a small fair, a coconut shy and a couple of small booths, sometimes swingboats and even a small roundabout. Club day was one of the great days of the village year, looked forward to and saved for, for months beforehand. For the daughter who had gone away to service, or the son who had taken up employment in the town, it was the great day of re-union, 'the only day in the year when they saw their friends,' as George Swinford, the Filkins stonemason, wrote.

For the village, Club Day was ushered in by the ringing of the church bells. So at Highworth in 1843 'At an early hour in the morning a merry peal was given';<sup>2</sup> similarly in 1888 'The Burford Church ringers . . . were early in the morning at the belfry'<sup>3</sup>; at Bampton the 'merry peal' ('never . . . omitted within our recollection') was missed in 1857.<sup>4</sup> The arrival of the band was another early morning feature. At Faringdon in 1853 'the day was ushered in with merry peals from the parish church bells, and the entrance into the town of the two brass bands engaged by the clubs to perform during the day.'<sup>5</sup> At Filkins, too, the band was brought in from outside.' The steward and flagman met them at the entrance of the village, and the band played to the clubhouse at about 9 a.m.<sup>6</sup> At Kidlington the village in 1849 'presented a very animated appearance.' The bells were rung at 5 a.m., 'and throughout the morning the inhabitants were engaged in the

1. Clanfield, *op.cit.*, p.11.
2. *J.O.J.* 10 June 1843, p.3.
3. *Ibid*, 2 June 1888, p.7.
4. *Ibid*, 6 June 1857, p.8.
5. *Ibid*, 21 May 1853, p.4.
6. Swinford, *op.cit.*, fol.78.

decoration of their houses and gardens.<sup>1</sup> It was midmorning when most clubs began the first procession of the day, which was also in some ways the most important. From their club room or from the market place, carrying the club banner, the members marched 'two by two in a decent manner' to church, with boots shining, unfamiliar collars tight round the neck, watched by the multitude. At their head went the band, either from their own village, or one nearby. The old photos show the bands gazing fixedly ahead as they march in precision with military style uniforms and those curious rimless Victorian military hats. The music itself, however, may not always have matched these imposing appearances: the observer who reported Bampton's festivities in 1853 claimed that the practice of many country bands was to make as much noise as possible, and stifle the more unpleasant portion of it with the drum.<sup>2</sup>

Bands were as essential to mid-Victorian Whitsun as clubs. It is generally stated in musical history that brass bands were restricted by and large to the industrial areas of the North where bands such as the Black Dyke Mills band play an important part in working class culture to this day. However, even a cursory glance at mid 19th century local newspapers will show that village brass, silver, fife and drum and saxehorn bands were very nearly as common in the rural areas of the South, and they were no doubt followed and supported with equally partisan fervour. 148 village bands are mentioned by name in the Whitsun reports of *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, between 1840 and 1914. Whitsun was a field day for the village band and they were involved at every stage of the day. At Burford in 1862 the band played through the town at a very early hour, 'just to rouse the inhabitants from their slumbers.'<sup>3</sup> The band headed the morning procession to the church, though members did not necessarily attend the service, as a Bampton correspondent noted in 1852:

To us it seems quite at variance with the decent usages of society (to use no severer term) for men to go to the church, and then leave and return again in time to accompany the Club to their inns without attending the services at the church, or where the members go to worship; it is a practice that requires alteration, and the members of the band would do well to profit by this hint.<sup>4</sup>

1. *J.O.J.* 16 June 1849, p.3.
2. *Ibid*, 21 May 1853, p.4.
3. *Ibid*, 14 June 1862, p.8.
4. *Ibid*, 5 June 1852, p.2.

The band sometimes enlivened the club dinner by playing 'lively airs'; they filled in any gaps in the day's proceedings with impromptu performances; their playing was of course the justification of the afternoon parade and collections; and in the evening they provided music for the dance. So for example at Filkins 'About 7 p.m. seats were brought out on the grass for the band and they played dance music until 9 p.m.'<sup>1</sup> At Bloxham in 1894 'the band was engaged in the large barn until the early morning hours, discoursing sweet music to a large attendance of lovers of the light fantastic toe.'<sup>2</sup>

It seems fairly clear from the loving way in which many local correspondents followed the fortunes of their village bands that they evoked considerable local pride. Their members were drawn from the villagers themselves. At Roke, according to Moreau, 'a surprisingly large proportion' of the men and the grown lads of the village were involved: 'Everybody was proud of the Roke Band'.<sup>3</sup> Participation in the Roke band involved a weekly subscription: one of Moreau's informants recalled that as a boy, when he played the side-drums, he was supposed to pay twopence a week subscription. 'His mother gave it him all right but he spent it on marbles. When the bandmaster complained to the mother that several twopences were outstanding, that was the end of his playing.' Moreau also quotes a comment on the Roke 'Temperance' Band: "'Temperance, my foot; some of 'em couldn't half knock it back.'"<sup>4</sup> In Filkins the band was more true to its name:

About 1900, it was called the Filkins Primitive Methodist band, and it played at all the camp meetings. The first Sunday out was at Filkins on Whit Sunday, the Chapel anniversary . . . After the service the band played in the street, generally near the museum at the bottom of Rouses lane, where they had a collection for the band funds. . .

Subsequently the band

was asked to attend flower shows and garden parties. This did not please all the members and a few harsh words were said when they started to play dance music.<sup>5</sup>

1. Swinford MS. Top. Oxon. fol.79.
2. *J.O.J.*, 2 June 1894, p.8.
3. Moreau, *op.cit.*, p.85.
4. Moreau, *loc.cit.*
5. Swinford, MS. Top. Oxon. fols.25-6.

261

The sort of music played by village bands seems, on the whole, to have consisted of popular march tunes, plus waltzes, polkas and traditional or semi traditional dance tunes. The standard of playing was not always admired. The Bampton correspondent of *Jackson's Oxford Journal* was persistently critical. In 1852, referring to the visiting bands from Shipton-under-Wychwood and Stow-on-the-Wold, he complained of their narrow range:

The music given was, with the exception of the National Anthem, Rule Britannia, and a Glee (by Wainwright), of the usual commonplace description, and with their apparent resources, it seems to us that they might, instead of giving the usual *quantum* of marches &c., easily interpret a selection of choruses by Handel, Haydn, Mozart, and the other great composers, which would amply repay them for the trouble it would cost them. . .<sup>1</sup>

The following year his attack was more general:

To the last year's band we gave a hint or two, and as this is from the same place, we may observe that what was said last year has passed unheeded. The practice of many country bands is to make as much noise as possible . . .<sup>2</sup>

He found occasion to complain again of Bampton's bands in 1857, 1859, 1865 and 1872, so his advice was obviously not heeded: the villagers continued to prefer noise and joviality to 'good taste' as defined by the anonymous writer and judging from his condemnation of the village's morris dancing one is inclined to agree with them. Bad taste or not though the bands with their 'capital songs' marches and 'lively jigs' played a vital part in Club Day. By the playing in the streets and dance music in the evening they made Club Day into a village affair; and they also brought in outsiders: at Watlington in 1861: ' . . . the notice of "no music" resulted in "no visitors" and the day was more quiet than for many years past . . .'<sup>3</sup>

Village bands playing for the club feast were not the only ones to provide music at Whitsun. Apart from what one might loosely term 'entertainments',<sup>4</sup> the religious bodies also used

1. *J.O.J.* 5 June 1852, p.2.
2. *Ibid*, 21 April 1853, p.4.
3. *Ibid*, 25 June 1861, p.8.
4. H.B. Kendall, *History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion*, London 1911, *passim*.

the saxe horn, fife and drum, and the brass band, to sing the praises of the Lord. The Primitive Methodists held Camp Meetings with bands and hymn-singing as a counter attraction to the great traditional feasts and wakes; and many other religious or quasi-religious organisations adopted the practice, if in less spectacular forms. The Temperance movement used music extensively as an alternative leisure occupation to drinking, as well as for publicity purposes. Thame, Tysoe, Watlington (the Watlington Nephalites), Bloxham and Stokenchurch all had temperance bands playing at various club days in Oxfordshire, and there were certainly others.

Another important group of bands were those attached to the volunteer movement and to regular army regiments. As in the case of religious and temperance bands these bands obviously had other purposes besides simply providing music. The red and blue uniforms, flashing buttons and braid plus the chance to play an instrument must have tempted many a young farm labourer to forsake the life of the fields for the seemingly more glamorous army. The presence of a military band at a village club feast was probably worth four or five of the more traditional recruiting sergeants and one imagines aroused less hostility. Among the military bands who played at club feasts in Oxfordshire there were the 8th Berkshire Rifles Band, 3rd Battalion Royal Warwickshire Regiment Band, 4th Bat. Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry Band, 3/4 Bat. North Warwickshire Regiment Band and the East County of Oxfordshire Light Infantry Band. From the Volunteer Rifle Corps we see bands from the University, Thame, Wantage, Wiltshire, 11th Berkshire, Abingdon, Oxford City, Swindon, 13th Gloucestershire, Evesham, Banbury and Bicester; from the Yeomanry Oxford, Oxford Yeomanry Cavalry, and the Royal Berkshire Yeomanry, while other bands appear from the Militia and Cowley Barracks. All in all these bands must have represented a substantial aid to recruitment as well as providing music and entertainment on Club Day.

Although this first procession was to the church, it was not so much the service which gave the occasion solemnity (the frequency with which rule books reiterate a scale of fines for non-attendance shows this), but the dignity of the procession itself. At Kidlington in 1849 we read 'At eleven o'clock the Kidlington Friendly Society assembled at the National Schools, and, after each member had answered to his name, marched in procession to the church, preceded by the village band . . .'<sup>1</sup> At Burford in 1893, nearly fifty years

1. *Ibid*, 16 June 1853, p.3.

later things were still done in much the same way. 'A few minutes before eleven the members, preceded by the band, marched to the parish church to attend the special club service.'<sup>1</sup> At Bampton in 1859 the local correspondent criticised the procession for its want of precision:

Club-day had arrived, and the various necessary preparations had to be made. Soon after ten o'clock the members of the two benefit societies donned their holiday suits - the best *toga* was not left at home on that day, and were soon at their respective hostelries, where the bands played a tune or two on their arrival. Visitors, more than usually numerous, presented themselves, and the dresses of many of them vied with the colours of the brightest rainbow, and which were only outshone by the dazzling brightness of their eyes. The clubs met - one at the Fleur-de-lis, the other at the Horse Shoe, from which houses they walked to church, preceded by the bands, the clergymen and some of the honorary members. The services of a drill sergeant were required here, for to our mind the procession appeared to want the order and precision of former years; however, they all reached the church, where the Rev. F.E. Lott, Vicar of Lew, preached. . . .<sup>2</sup>

At Filkins the procession was preceded by a collection:

At 10.30 a.m. the band formed up on the road ready to march to the church. The members stood in a group and the secretary called out their names. They fell in behind the band, two deep. As they passed the secretary there were two boxes where each member put sixpence in one for the secretary, and twopence in the other for the women who were cooking the meals. . . .<sup>3</sup>

As well as being dressed in their best clothes the members of the clubs often wore club favours, or sometimes (especially in the case of the affiliated orders) regalia, and they carried banners and flags. Unfortunately, very few of those belonging to the old village clubs have survived, and there is little detailed information about their appearance. The Bampton Friendly Society in 1843 had a new flag on display for the

1. *Ibid*, 3 June 1893, p.7.
2. *J.O.J.* 18 June 1859, p.8.
3. Swinford, *op.cit.*, fols.78-9.

first time, 'It was the work of Mr. Stevens, of the late firm of King and Stevens, and was very creditable to him as an artist.' It was gilded and bore the motto 'Love the Brotherhood, fear God, honour the King'.<sup>1</sup> 'Bear ye one another's burdens' was the exhortation on one of the banners in Deddington's procession in 1857.<sup>2</sup> Some banners were presented by wealthy patrons, as was the one belonging to the Valentia Club at Bletchingdon.<sup>3</sup> Along with banners and clubflags, the Union Jack was often seen in the processions. Many clubs expected their members to wear the club's favours, usually in the form of a rosette or ribbons. Staves were also sometimes carried. Margaret Fuller in her excellent book on West Country Friendly Societies<sup>4</sup> remarks that brass headed staves were popular in the West Country. There are several references in the Oxfordshire papers to the carrying of staves on club day, though they may not have had brass heads. They were carried by the club officials - perhaps even by all members - and were probably painted in the club's colours. At Filkins they were carried by the stewards and had bunches of flowers tied on the top, 'generally the old double red peony'.<sup>5</sup> A women's Friendly Society at Banbury in the early years of the century also carried staves. 'They used to march to church, each carrying a light staff with a hook at the end and a bunch of flowers tied with a bit of ribbon under the hook'.<sup>6</sup> After the church sermon the club returned to the lodge house for the dinner, again marching in order with the bands, banner and due dignity. (In some clubs the procession to church took place in the afternoon, and was preceded by the dinner, but this seems to have been comparatively rare.)

The club dinner was also conducted with some ceremony, though at one club at least 'The members brought their own knife, fork and spoon. The joints of mutton and beef were brought up from the bakehouse where they had been cooked, the hams already there, and the vegetables . . .'.<sup>7</sup> The costs of the dinner were usually borne by the members themselves. In order to qualify for registration under the various Friendly Societies Acts, as has already been noted, none of the club social

1. *Ibid*, 10 June 1843, p.3.
2. *Ibid*, 13 June 1857, p.8.
3. *Ibid*, 21 June 1862, p.8.
4. Margaret Fuller, *West Country Friendly Societies*, Reading, 1964.
5. Swinford, *loc.cit.*, fol.79.
6. George Herbert, *Shoemaker's Window*, Oxford 1948, p.54.
7. Swinford, *loc.cit.*

272

events could be paid for from the stock, although there can be little doubt that on occasions this regulation was evaded. Most clubs made provision for payment for the feast in their rules. The rules of the Ambrosden Society say '... each Member shall pay 2s 6d towards (the feast)'<sup>1</sup>. This was a lot of money in 1819 when those rules were printed. In 1875 the cost at Clanfield was 3s 6d<sup>2</sup>; the members of the Victoria Club at Stanton Harcourt could get their feast at this time for two shillings.<sup>3</sup> Temperance was obviously cheaper: the United Christian Benefit Society at Banbury provided a Whit-Monday '... public Tea Entertainment ...' at the cost of one shilling.<sup>4</sup> The only drinking club which seems to have been able to rival this for cheapness was Kidlington, 'each of the benefit members had an opportunity of enjoying this holiday with his fellow members, and have his dinner, beer, tobacco, and the pleasure of a band of music for only one shilling.'<sup>5</sup>

After the meal there were the speeches and toasts. As with sermons, they were used by the Honorary Members, to pass on their own particular version of the prevailing ideology. The toasts also reflect the social order of the day. As well as toasting themselves, members also drank the health of the Queen, 'the Bishops and Clergy' and later in the century, the Army and Navy. At the end of the dinner there were occasionally performances from the band or from one of the club members. At Sibford Gower in 1881 someone in the band was obviously a part of the real culture of the English people for he sang a version of the *Husbandman and Serving Maid*,<sup>6</sup> '... capitally sung, and received with rapturous applause by an appreciative audience.'<sup>7</sup>

Regalia was very important to the affiliated orders, partly as a conscious imitation of the masons, but perhaps more

1. Rules of Ambrosden Society, *op.cit.*, p.3.
2. Rules of Clanfield Society, *op.cit.*, p.11.
3. Rules of Stanton Harcourt, *op.cit.*, p.9.
4. *Rules of the United Christian Benefit Society Established at Banbury, November 16th 1840*, Banbury 1841, p.13.
5. *J.O.J.*, 10 June 1871, p.7.
6. Widely spread traditional song expressing clearly and concisely the theory known to historians as 'the court and county'. Thames valley version in Alfred Williams, *Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, London 1923, p.1.
7. *J.O.J.*, 18.6.81 p.7.

crucially because it created a common bond between the members, making a Forester working as a cowman in Oxfordshire feel he had more in common with another Forester in Oldham than with his fellow workers on his farm who were not in the order. Most regalia worn by members of the affiliated orders was secret, and had little meaning to those outside. As the *Journal* said in 1891 reporting on the Oddfellows' anniversary at Stow-on-the-Wold. 'In addition to the differently-coloured regalia which the members wore, a number of silver emblems were carried which to the uninitiated were meaningless puzzles but to those who knew illustrated the teachings of the different degrees and offices of the Society.'<sup>1</sup> The Foresters were perhaps the most extravagant in their regalia, at least in the Oxford area. Several reports refer to members dressed as "'Bold Robin" mounted on his charger.'<sup>2</sup> and even occasionally as accompanied by a retinue of Little John etc. Few Foresters processions however went this far in pageantry at least before the end of the century when big parades of all the clubs in Oxfordshire were held in Oxford City. But their costume was always picturesque. At Brailes in 1848 the Foresters appeared in 'beautiful green dresses, with caps and feathers.'<sup>3</sup> Similarly at Wantage in 1868 the Oddfellows '... appeared in new caps of scarlet and blue velvet, according to the various offices held by them.'<sup>4</sup>

Most clubs spent at least part of the afternoon and early evening going the rounds of the club's patrons and the wealthier local inhabitants to collect for club funds. For instance at Faringdon in 1854 'In the afternoon both Clubs, with their bands of music, paraded the town, and played at the houses of the gentry and supporters of the Club...'<sup>5</sup> In some places the club dinner extended through the afternoon, and the parade took place later. At Cowley in 1889 it took place 'according to the usual custom,' in the evening when the band paraded the streets, 'calling at residences of patrons of the Society'.<sup>6</sup> At Bampton the bands and clubs simply paraded the streets of the town as they had done in the morning, 'accompanied by crowds of persons - the juvenile, the adolescent, the adult, and hoary age, all of whom enjoyed to the full the gay scene

1. *J.O.J.* 6 June 1891, p.8.
2. *Ibid.*, 25.5.6. 8.4, also Deddington 14.6.84. 7.6.
3. *Ibid.*, 17.6.48 3.6.
4. *Ibid.*, 6.6.68 7.6.
5. *Ibid.*, 10 June 1854, p.8.
6. *Ibid.*, 15 June 1889, p.8.



before them, while the musical *cognoscenti* were appreciating, with eager ears, the performances. . .<sup>1</sup>

It was custom in some villages for the band and the members to receive a drink at the houses of the friends and patrons of the club, so at Blockley ' . . . in the evening the members embraced the opportunity of tasting the quality of their neighbours' beer and cider, &c.'<sup>2</sup> It was this custom that led to a famous, if apocryphal story told by an old man from Beckley. In the last years of the century Beckley lodge of the Oddfellows had their own band which played from house to house on club day for a tanner in the box and a taste of home-made beer. The drummer in the band was an old man called Harry who was not only just five feet tall but also stone deaf. One Whit-Monday the beer had flowed more generously than usual and old Harry had gotten a bit the worse for wear. Being so small he couldn't see over the top of the big drum and being in the state he was he was beating it louder than usual and so didn't see or hear the rest of the band when it turned off the main road leaving him - followed by the kids in the village, marching proudly on alone up the village street. After having a laugh one of the kids thought he ought to tell Harry about his mistake and went up to him 'Ere 'arry,' says the kid, 'the rest of the bands gone off down the other street' 'Don't worry I,' says Harry still beating the drum, 'I knows the tune.'

At Bampton, as well as parading the streets behind the band it was the custom to chair new members through the village, 'much to the amusement of the youngsters, whose duty and pleasure appeared to be to make the welkin ring with their voices.'<sup>3</sup> In the slightly grander clubs of country towns such as Thame or Faringdon the band often spent the afternoon playing on a raised platform outside the clubhouse. At Thame in 1864 the Thame Brass Band ' . . . played some music in capital style, in an orchestra erected with much task in front of the Fighting Cocks Inn. . .'<sup>4</sup>

As Club Day drew to a close some clubs returned to their rooms at the village pub simply to drink, smoke, chat and sometimes sing. At Wantage in 1865 after parading the streets the Odd-fellows ' . . . returned to the Lodge-room, and with song and

1. *J.O.J.* 25 May 1861, p.8.
2. *Ibid.*, 5 June 1858, p.8.
3. *Ibid.*, 18 June 1859, p.8.
4. *Ibid.*, 21 May 1864, p.8.

glass the festivities of the day were prolonged till about 11 o'clock.'<sup>1</sup> Another way of rounding off the day was to have a dance, often in the open air. At Northleach in 1856 ' . . . the day's amusements were concluded by a dance in the Market place.'<sup>2</sup> At Adderbury, nearer the end of the century, there was an afternoon dance 'in a field kindly lent by Mr. Henry Butler,' and in the evening, 'a ball . . . in the school-room'.<sup>3</sup> At Hethe the clubroom was open in the evening, when 'the members had supper together, whilst dancing was indulged to the strain of the band';<sup>4</sup> at Bloxham the Foresters 'held a dance in the large barn, for which an extension had been granted to one o'clock.'<sup>5</sup> The clubs however did not always meet with such sympathetic magistrates; at Marston in 1889 the dancing was brought to an early termination 'owing to the County Magistrates not permitting anything of an intoxicating nature to be sold on the ground after 7.30, which was a great disappointment to many, as it caused the party to break up prematurely.'<sup>6</sup>

Few descriptions of nineteenth century rural social dance survive, but it was clearly removed from the elegant renditions of today's folk dance enthusiasts (and I include myself here!) Listen to an old lady from Northleigh talking in the twenties to a collector from the Folklore Society.

. . . the principal times for dancing were at the feasts and clubs, in the dancing booths and club-rooms . . . Oh that was real dancing! There was no walking or gracefully gliding through the figures, as was the custom in other circles, but real hard, energetic dancing, a step or a stamp to every note of the music, and when the dance was over the men sat down hot and panting and wiped the perspiration from their faces with their red handkerchiefs. . .<sup>7</sup>

Again, in an article based on conversation with 'Merry' Kimber, the great Anglo-Concertina player and Morris dancer from

1. *Ibid.*, 17 June 1865, p.3.
2. *Ibid.*, 17 May 1856, p.8.
3. *Ibid.*, 6 June 1891, p.8.
4. *Ibid.*, 1 June 1901, p.8.
5. *Ibid.*, 27 May 1899, p.10.
6. *Ibid.*, 15 June 1889, p.7.
7. A. Parker, Oxfordshire Village Folklore, *Folklore*, 1923, no.34, p.332.

Headington Quarry, T.W. Chaundy wrote, 'At night (Whit-Tuesday) there was country dancing: if anyone dared introduce quadrilles, such as the Polka Quadrille or the Caledonian Quadrille the old women hooted and called for traditional dances. . .'<sup>1</sup>

At some Club Days there was a fair, which, like the drinking, eating and fighting, like the regalia and the evergreen decorations, and like the Morris which still continued in some villages, provided an echo of the old, dead, Whitsun. Such fairs were inevitably small affairs, with a few booths and a shooting gallery, coconut shies, and perhaps (very rarely) a roundabout and swingboats. At the simplest level it was merely a normal village pastime, such as Aunt Sally, organised on a slightly grander scale, perhaps with some small prizes.<sup>2</sup> A step up from this was the slightly more elaborate, but still distinctly village organised, traditional games and sports. These were usually held outside an inn and run by the landlord, who no doubt hoped to profit by raising a holiday spirit in his customers. At Bampton in 1853, 'In the close at the Horse Shoe Inn, the younger part of the community had an opportunity of exercising their skill in eating treacle buns, diving in tubs for oranges, money &c., and thus pleasantly amused a numerous array of spectators.'<sup>3</sup> And at Eynsham in 1856, 'In the evening, near the Swan Inn, there was a series of diversions - jumping in sacks for a new hat decorated with ribbons - young ladies racing for a beautiful and fashionable ready trimmed bonnet boys racing for caps &c., &c.,'<sup>4</sup> Such 'amusements' as these, in the view of the correspondent from Faringdon in 1845, (who also mentioned climbing poles for legs of mutton) ' . . . tended much to keep up the good old custom of "keeping Whitsun"'.<sup>5</sup>

A few booths, ginger bread stalls etc. came to Club Day but it seems that it was not until the eighties and nineties that roundabouts and swingboats visited club day in any number. At Kidlington in 1889 there were 'a goodly number of roundabouts, stalls, &c.'<sup>6</sup> At Burford in 1893 there seems to have been a bigger fair: 'Sheep Street had all the fun of the fair

1. T.W. Chaundy, William Kimber, A Portrait, *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society*, Vol.VIII, No.4, 1959, p.204.

2. c.f. an example at March Baldon, *J.O.J.* 30 May 1885, p.8.

3. *Ibid.*, 21 May 1853, p.4.

4. *Ibid.*, 17 May 1856, p.8.

5. *Ibid.*, 17 May 1845, p.3.

6. *Ibid.*, 15 June 1889, p.7.

to itself, stalls, roundabouts, swings, &c., being congregated there.'<sup>1</sup> But steam roundabouts never really came in: they made it necessary for a showman to invest a great deal of capital in his rides: a casual visit to a small village feast was hardly profitable.<sup>2</sup>

By the end of the century the Foresters and the Oddfellows, along with the newer Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes (the 'Buffs') were taking over from village clubs. A man who joined one of these orders could take his subscription with him and go anywhere with it when he changed jobs. By 1893 Club day had completely vanished in Witney. Instead the affiliated orders met on Whit Sunday, and marched behind their District banners. They did not go from house to house collecting a tanner and a glass of beer, but paraded through the streets collecting for Oxfordshire Hospitals.<sup>3</sup>

If club day was, by and large, quieter, less brutal and less colourful than the old traditional Whitsun it retained, on its fringes, elements of the earlier celebrations. We have already mentioned morris as a constant factor, and although this declined there were others which did not. The regalia was one. Bold Robin Hood at Wantage in 1867 ' . . . in full costume, mounted, with his attendant, "Little John", bringing up the rear '<sup>4</sup>, has a distinct feeling of 'My Lord' and 'My Lady' about it as does the custom of decorating the club room with evergreens as at Milton-under-Wychwood in 1855.<sup>5</sup> The old Whitsun circuits were retained, with morris sides, village bands, and the villagers themselves moving from club to club in the area during Whit week. Even after the Bank Holiday Act Whitsun remained in parts of the countryside an indeterminate holiday of several days rather than the one recommended by the Act.

Another echo of the old Whitsun was the possibility of fights. Tom Carter, the mason, who collected folklore for Percy Manning, remembered 'a fight or two' in his native village of Marsh Baldon along with dancing on the green, 'for the Garsington roughs made it a point to be there, and of course the

1. *Ibid.*, 3 June 1893, p.7.

2. For a discussion of the changing character of the 19th century fair see Sally Alexander, *St. Giles' Fair 1830-1914*, History Workshop, 1970.

3. *J.O.J.* 27 May 1893, p.7.

4. *Ibid.*, 15 June 1867, p.8.

5. *Ibid.*, 2 June 1894, p.8.

Baldon folks returned the compliment at Garsington feast.<sup>1</sup> The reports in the *Journal* have little to say about this. An exception is Leaffield (Field Town), on which the following report appeared for Whitsun, 1875:

The morning passed off very well, but long before evening set in the extra policeman's services were much needed. It was an imitation of Donnybrook Fair, many of the men feeling in that happy mood as to invite other men to "step on the tails of their coats". There was even one faction fight. Saturday was a repetition of Friday's sport.<sup>2</sup>

Club Day at Field Town was perhaps the strongest survival of the old ways to be found in the later parts of the century. There were three public houses at Leaffield, and on the occasion of the club feast, each had a band of music. The feast lasted for two days, Friday and Saturday. 'On Friday morning all the club members went to church, but they occupied the remainder of the day as well as the following one in eating enormous dinners, drinking and dancing. . .'<sup>3</sup> John Kibble, the working-man historian of Wychwood, and a Methodist, disapproved of these proceedings and drew a moral:

Sometimes we heard a fiddle. That was very delightful to our young ears, but generally the associations with drink, dancing, shame and sorrow made it not quite the thing for some I know. I sat by the bedside of a fiddler and I remember he said to me: "I have gone with my fiddle to Field Town Club for the two days, and I have brought home more money than both the bands had, but the money was no good." As he lay ill, looking at life as it was, thus was his summing up. An old book I have gives a verdict somewhat similar in the words, "Vanity. . . all is vanity."<sup>4</sup>

By the last decade of the century then, the old village clubs had all but had their day. In some places the affiliated orders were taking over and simply marched around the village

1. Tom Carter in MS Top. Oxon. d 193 fd. 1 2 (Bodleian Library)
2. *J.O.J.*, 29 May 1875, p.7.
3. Taken down from George Pratt Hambridge b.1846 by his daughter Muriel Groves in Muriel Groves Ed., *The History of Shipton-under-Wychwood*, Compiled by the Womens Institute, Shipton 1934, p.58.
4. John Kibble, *Historical and Other Notes on Wychwood Forest*, Oxford 1928, p.54.

(or neighbouring town) to collect money for the local hospitals. In some places the village fete, which had started as an afternoon addition to club day, eventually replaced it altogether. At Berrick Salome the village club kept up its celebration only by combining with another village, and lost its local character.

For subscribers to the Compton Pilgrims' benefit Society, who could club together and somehow arrange to be transported to that remote village on the Berkshire Downs, Whit Monday was a great day. First a stop was made at the Swan at Crowmarsh, for beer and to pick up 'an old chap with a cornet. He used to play "Wait for me at Heaven's Gate" and "Soon we'll be in London Town" a treat. But when "The Honeysuckle and the Bee" came in he went fair mad about it and would hardly play anything else.' . . . As men trickled in they were given a bread and cheese lunch. Then came the admission of new members and an open-air religious service. In a huge decorated marquee with 'facing the entrance a legend "God save the Queen", five hundred persons sat down to a hot dinner served by fourteen carvers.'<sup>1</sup>

But for most there wasn't even the possibility of going to the old sort of club feast, but instead there was the highly organised 'fete' with marches, fancy dress competitions, athletic sports and perhaps a demonstration by the volunteer fire brigade.<sup>2</sup> Even at Bampton, once the home of at least two flourishing clubs, 'the only procession we used to have', Porky Tanner recalled, 'was with the Foresters . . . and that was on Hospital Sunday'.<sup>3</sup>

1. R.E. Moreau, *The Departed Village*, Oxford 1970, p.88.
2. *J.O.J.*, 29 May 1912, p.7.
3. Interview Howkins/Tanner, Whit Monday, 1972.

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21. A We have already shown that benefit societies had a decisive influence in the taming of Whitsun. In some measure, and in most villages, they replaced the wildness of the early years of the century with sobriety and order. Nevertheless, they were very much an offspring of the old festivities. The change that took place was, by and large, quantitative rather than qualitative; many essentials remained the same, the eating and drinking, for example, the decorations and the regalia, and the dancing and music. But there was another group of Whitsun activities which marked a more decisive break.

They were based on an entirely new principle, one which in some senses personifies what is new in the nineteenth century and can best be summed up in the phrase (evocative of Samuel Smiles, and a favourite among many nineteenth century social reformers): 'rational recreation'. This phrase enshrined the essential idea that leisure should be useful. It counter-posed, for instance, athletic sports, which improved the body and if the *Boy's Own Paper* is to be believed the mind, against drinking, smoking and the older country pastimes like climbing greasy poles. The advocates of 'rational recreation' were diverse, and it would be wrong to see an organised movement (let alone a conspiracy) at work. Those who supported, say, athletics, were not necessarily against drink, while many temperance reformers were only too ready to organise dances, provided they were free from beer.

Rational recreation was both more and less successful in the countryside than in the towns. It was more successful because in many cases it provided the village with a whole new world of entertainment. On the other hand its active promoters in the countryside were comparatively few. In rural Oxfordshire there do not appear to be any working men's literary or scientific institutes, debating societies or libraries, and temperance itself, as a movement, did not acquire such fierce partisans as it did in the towns.

In the cities it was possible to cream off an advanced, self-helping artisan class and organise them into some sort of movement with a predominantly working class membership. In the countryside where the artisan class was not only qualitatively different, but much smaller, no such possibility existed. The whole of village working class society had to be involved, if 'rational recreation' was to find a base, and

it had to take account of the villagers' local horizons.

A graphic illustration of this localism is afforded by the countryman's apparently unhappy affair with the railways. A major aspect of rational recreation in the cities was the organised railway excursion. Temperance societies, chapels and Sunday Schools turned to them regularly as a way of delivering men from the devil's Whitsun temptations. When we turn to the countryside a quite different picture emerges. Nothing was more calculated to drive a nineteenth century local correspondent to paroxysms of praise than the organised, orderly, outing. Chapel teas or sports days at Whitsun are often mentioned, yet in sixty years of Whitsun coverage there is not one mention in *Jackson Oxford Journal* of an organised village excursion. There are certainly advertisements in the papers for excursions from Oxford stopping at villages on route but no village report ever mentions their arrival or departure, let alone how many people, if any, took advantage of them. On the other hand there are many detailed reports of excursions from Oxford City from the 1870s onwards. Earlier, in 1851, an organised excursion from Chipping Norton (a town interestingly with a strong dissenting tradition and a large woollen mill) gets detailed coverage.

The members of the Provident Society, formed here in the autumn of last year for the purpose of receiving subscriptions to enable them to visit the Exhibition on the most economical terms, have determined to start on Saturday and to return on Tuesday. A lecture on the Exhibition, to enable them to make the best use of their time when there, and to direct their attention to the objects most worthy of their notice, was announced to be delivered ... and, although but four hours' public notice was given, the large room was filled with some hundreds ...<sup>1</sup>

More successful, at least on occasions, were the various attempts to put down beer, either by setting up temperance friendly societies or by convincing some of the existing friendly societies to abandon drinking at club feasts or to stop meeting in public houses. Temperance friendly societies were organised nationally into an affiliated order, the Independent Order of Rechabites, founded in 1835. The Rechabites grew slowly and not until the 1860s did they begin to have a large membership, even by 1868 they only had 13,000 members.<sup>2</sup>

1. J.O.J. 14th June 1851, p.3.

2. Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians*, London 1971, p.336.

The rules of the society clearly stated its differences with the other orders. Rule 1 was 'That this Society shall be denominated the Independent Order of Rechabites and shall consist of persons of good moral character, free from lameness or disorder, of any religious persuasion, who shall be members of the Temperance Society, having signed the following pledge:- "I do hereby voluntarily promise to abstain from all intoxicating liquor - such as Brandy, Whiskey, Rum, Gin, Wine, Ale, Porter, Cider, Perry, distilled Peppermint, etc. I will not engage in the traffic of them and in all suitable ways discountenance the use, manufacture and sale of them."<sup>1</sup> Only one branch of the Rechabites was established in Oxfordshire as far as I have been able to tell. This was at Watlington, where the club had been founded in 1861 as the Nephthalites Friendly Society. 'Another Benefit Society is, we understand, about to be formed in this town by total abstainers from all intoxicating liquors, and it is likely to be largely patronised by that class, their proposed scale of payments being smaller than any other club for the same allowance in sickness, the promoters of the club presuming that there will be less liability to sickness and a more speedy cure where the subject is a "teetotaller".'<sup>2</sup> However the Watlington Nephthalites did have local precursors, the members of the New Wesleyan Provident Society which from 1852 met in the school room attached to the chapel.<sup>3</sup> This club was also a temperance club; it met on the same day as the Old Fellows and a younger offshoot called the Bold Fellows, but in different style. The more quiet Wesleyan Club held their meeting without music, but 'they did ample justice, we understand, to "the roast and boiled", indulging in the afternoon in the "cup that cheers and not inebriates", with many visitors and friends.'<sup>4</sup> An unusual feature of this club was that it appears to have been a 'sick and divvy', a form of club, with its annual share-outs, which temperance reformers often attacked. The Wesleyan Provident Society continued to exist right up until the beginning of this century although it seems to have dropped the principle of the annual share-out sometime during the 1860s. Since neither of these clubs were registered with the Registrar general, (again, curious was

1. *Jubilee Record of the Independent Order of Rechabites, Salford Unity*, Salford 1885, p.11.

2. *J.O.J.*, 25 May 1861, p.8.

3. *Ibid.*, 5 June 1852, p.2.

4. *Ibid.*, 2 June 1855, p.8.

such respectable institutions,) we have no idea of their membership figures or of how successful they were in attracting members away from other clubs in the village by their lower payments and temperance propaganda. In 1864, three years after the foundation of the Nephthalites and twelve years after the Wesleyans the *Journal* gives 24 members for the former and 86 for the latter. The older, non-temperance, clubs are credited respectively with 50 to 90 members.<sup>1</sup> The growth of the Nephthalites continued. In 1882 the *Journal* writes that '... they dined together in the Hall to the number of 150.'<sup>2</sup> The numbers increase steadily from then on: 'nearly 200' in 1883; 'nearly 250' in 1884, 240 in 1889, and 'upwards to 250' in 1890. The number seems to have remained around the 250 mark for the rest of the years covered. On the other hand the Watlington Tradesmen's Club, which was already in existence in 1841 when reporting of the club day begins, had eighty one members in 1893 - exactly one more than it had 52 years earlier.<sup>3</sup>

The Nephthalites, in common with most clubs, hired a band for their club day and held a procession through the town with banners etc. In 1882 the Reading Temperance band was engaged; by 1889 the club had its own band: 'The Nephthalite Band, a musical outcome of this important club, played during the day some capital music, one item of which - an original march by Mr. John Youens, the hon. bandmaster, and called "The Nephthalites' March" - was much admired.'<sup>4</sup> Again in common with other clubs the Nephthalites held an annual dinner, but it was held in the Lecture Hall rather than in the usual public house. The Nephthalites also attempted to provide diversions for the visitors to the village and non-club members, with sports and a tea meeting in the late afternoon. 'After dinner cricket, baseball, and ring games were freely indulged in by the large gathering of people who had collected in the meadow, kindly lent by Mr. Dixon, swing boats and cocoa-nut stands also coming in for a fair share of attention by those present ...'<sup>5</sup> More direct propaganda for temperance was also made. In the evenings a public tea meeting was usually held at which temperance lectures spoke and exhortations to temperance were delivered; at this meeting in 1884 it

1. *Ibid.*, 21 May 1864, p.8.

2. *J.O.J.*, 3 June 1882, p.7.

3. *Ibid.*, 17 May 1841, p.2.; 27 May 1893, p.7.

4. *J.O.J.*, 15 June 1889, p.8.

5. *J.O.J.*, 31 May 1890, p.7.

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was claimed that over 500 sat down to the tea, and presumably listened to the speeches.<sup>1</sup> The chairman of these meetings was invariably Mr. H. Dixon, Coroner for South Oxfordshire and a local temperance advocate. In 1885 he said that teetotalers should bring pressure on parliamentary candidates in the forthcoming elections, requesting those of his audience who had the privilege of being electors to ask candidates, whether Conservative or Liberal, the crucial question "Will you vote for Sunday Closing and Local Option?" and to vote for that man who gives an affirmative reply.<sup>2</sup> In other years open air meetings were held after tea and before the Nephalites returned to their hall for supper. In 1893, as we have already said, the Nephalites became a tent of the Rechabites but their celebration of club day did not alter up to 1914.

As well as the Nephalites at Watlington there were other Clubs in the county either through the temperance principle or adopting it on club day and other festivities. There was a group of United Christian Benefit Societies in various parts of North Oxfordshire including Banbury and Chipping Norton. At Bampton in the mid-70s there was a Total Abstinence Club with its own fife-and-drum band.<sup>3</sup> Like the Nephalites this club also tried to promote their cause by organising a total abstinence entertainment on the evening of Whit Monday. At Enstone the Vicar founded a Sick and Benefit Society on total abstinence principles, and affiliated it to the Church of England Temperance Society. The first fete day was held on Whit Monday, 1885: 'About 200 sat down to tea in front of the Vicarage, and after a few addresses on the advantages of temperance, especially to the rising generation, the festivities of the day were brought to a close by the young people enjoying a dance on the green. The musicians came from Banbury.'<sup>4</sup>

Besides the clubs dedicated to temperance or teetotal principles there were others (usually under the influence of the local gentry) which kept away from pubs and avoided drinking. The Registrar of Friendly Societies forbade any club which wished to be registered to spend any of the contributions on beer either on club night or at the feast;

1. *Ibid.*, 7 June 1884, p.7.
2. *Ibid.*, 30 June 1885, p.8.
3. *Ibid.*, 7 June 1873, p.8.
4. *J.O.J.*, 6 June 1885, p.7.

and the custom of meeting in public houses was constantly being deprecated in his reports. This tack was taken up by an honorary member of the Barton Friendly Society who wrote an open letter to the club members following the club feast in 1878.

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE BARTON FRIENDLY SOCIETY  
FRIENDS AND FELLOW MEMBERS,

Let me say that I felt much obliged when you asked me once more to take the Chair at your Annual Dinner, on Tuesday the 2nd, inst., in the unavoidable absence of the President of the Club; and that I feel equally so still for the kind reception with which you favoured me at the meeting. The way too in which the names you are accustomed to welcome were applauded, and the harmony which prevailed, were just such as befits a gathering of club-able men. But I hope that I may now be allowed to make a few remarks, as your late Chairman, upon the termination of the day, and may not suffer in your kind estimation for so doing. I trust that you will take it well.

I have often heard it mentioned, as a subject of lamentation, that your entertainment does not always close as it begins. It did not altogether on this occasion. It is of course only from a small minority, and that not entirely composed of members of the club, that the difference arises; but then it reflects its character upon the whole club; and people are frequently unable, from want of knowledge, to make a right distinction, and in this, as in other cases, the many have to suffer for the few. I know of the withdrawal of more than one Honorary Member for such a reason.

Without saying anything against the custom of drinking, in its proper place and degree, I am convinced that the introduction of it at such a meeting as ours, had, if possible, much better be avoided. It is from this cause, so far as I know, the unpleasant remarks arise: and I wish you to consider whether such a course as this cannot be adopted; - it is simply to omit to ask the Magistrates for an extra licence, and to prohibit the introduction of any intoxicant on the Ground, by a rule of the Club.

No doubt the proposal will seem strange and impracticable at first; and I should have thought it so at

one time myself. But public opinion has made much progress in this direction; and I am convinced that it is possible to have as true an enjoyment of a day without drinking as with it. It is only to have the firmness to make the trial, and you will find it too.

You propose to consider at your next quarterly meeting the means of securing a good party next year. Please do me the favour to take this into consideration with the rest of the proposals.

I hope that I may feel that we know one another well to require any further explanation or apology.

And believe me, friends and fellow members,

Very faithfully yours,

EDWARD MARSHALL

July 5th. 1878,

Manor House

Sandford St. Martin.<sup>1</sup>

At Beachampton the Club Anniversary was celebrated by a dinner in the schoolroom and 'in the afternoon tea was provided for the women and children'.<sup>2</sup> Clubs which met in schoolrooms and chapels rather than in the traditional public house, remained very much in the minority, but a glance at the lists of the Registrar General of Friendly Societies shows how frequently it was attempted to found them. The Garsington New Benefit Society was such a club. On its foundation in 1881 the *Journal* noted approvingly '... we may observe that one very desirable object has been obtained by the promoters of this Society, namely, that none of its meetings ... are held at the public-house, all the business of the club being conducted, with the consent and hearty co-operation of the Rector, in the School-room.'<sup>3</sup>

As well as temperance or teetotal clubs there were numerous attempts by temperance organisations to organise 'rational' alternatives to the Whitsun festivities. These included public teas, sports days, meetings and processions by temperance bands, etc. By 1881 the temperance cause had

1. Bodleian Library, GA Oxon. C22, single Folio.

2. *J.O.J.*, 6 June 1885, p.7.

3. *Ibid.*, 18 June 1881, p.7.

even penetrated to the notorious Field Town.

The first annual festival of our villagers' branch of the Church of England Temperance Society was held here on Whit Monday, the Shipton and Milton Branch combining. The members assembled at the Schoolroom at 1.30, and headed by a local band, and with an imposing display of banners kindly lent by the Witney Temperance Society, they proceeded to meet the Shipton party. Upon the arrival of the latter the band led the way to the Parish Church, the bells ringing merrily, and a good number of the parishioners turned out to witness the procession and to attend the choral evensong at 2 o'clock ... Service over the procession re-formed, and having paid a visit to the lower end of the village proceeded to a field placed at their disposal for the afternoon. Here cricket, dancing, quoits, knock-em-downs, and other games were entered into, a small charge for admission being made on non-members up to 5 o'clock, when admission was free. A public tea was provided in a barn by the proprietor of the Shipton Coffee House, to which some 160 sat down ...<sup>1</sup>

It is an interesting comment on the state of Field Town that the contingents for this particular celebration were largely contributed from outside the village, the banners from Witney, delegations from two other villages in the procession, sermons preached by outsiders as well as the local vicar, and refreshments provided by a Shipton Caterer. It was, in fact, a rally, and the tactics were those which minority organisations have often adopted to make themselves seem big. Temperance advocates from a large area would go to one place in order to propagandise, thus presenting an impressive front, and making their numbers seem much larger than they in fact were. This can also be seen at Bloxham in 1893 where attendance at the afternoon entertainments (which included 'tea and light refreshments ... of a strictly temperance regimen') was less than expected, because of the Foresters' Fete 'and other attractions in the village', but later, at the ball in the National Schoolroom, 'a break load of gentlemen coming from Banbury, considerably added to the success of the evening.'<sup>2</sup>

1. *J.O.J.*, 18 June 1881, p.7.

2. *Ibid.*, 27 May 1893, p.7.

Bands providing music for dancing or just for listening to were frequently used by temperance groups. At Bloxham the Church of England Temperance Society engaged different bands for a number of Whit Mondays in the 1890s. In 1895 Mr. Kay's Band was engaged and played in front of the Post Office from about mid-day before marching to a field lent by a local sympathiser for a temperance fete and sports.<sup>1</sup> In 1890 it was the Bloxham Brass Band which performed a similar service, while in 1892 and 93 the C.E.T.S. provided its own band.<sup>2</sup> In a similar category can be placed temperance 'entertainments', another form of counter attraction popular with temperance organisations on club day. Most of these, like fetes, took place in the afternoon and evening, conflicting intentionally with the hours when most of the club drinking took place. At Bicester in 1892 26 Post Office officials gave 'an excellent temperance entertainment in St. Edburg's Hall...' The entertainment consisted of songs, readings and speeches including one from Mr. F. Kirtland, who recalled that during his 26 years as a postman - 18 of them as a teetotaler - he had walked over 130,000 miles, and during that time he had only had a fortnight's illness.<sup>3</sup>

One success for the temperance reformers was the transformation of the Littlemore Whit Ale, the Hills Ale Feast, into a temperance sports day. It was a highly respectable affair. In 1904 for instance the Rev. T. W. Mallam was in the chair at the Hills Ale Dinner, while in 1906 the guests included the Mayor of Oxford, many of the local clergy, and the daughters of Sir William Herschel. In the afternoon there were sports with prizes donated by the local gentry and presented by the vicar's wife.<sup>4</sup> The process had begun several years earlier when Sir William Herschel's daughter noted in her diary 'On Whit Monday the usual Hills Ale took place - the feast was supplied with good gratuity of temperance drinks which greatly reduced the amount of beer drunk on this occasion...'<sup>5</sup>

An aspect of Whitsun which grew in importance through the century was the village sports day. Sporting events at

1. *Ibid.*, 8 June 1895, p.7.
2. *Ibid.*, 31 May 1890, p.7; 27 May 1893, p.7; 11 June 1892, p.7.
3. *Ibid.*, 11 June 1892, p.7.
4. *Ibid.*, 28 May 1904, p.4; 9 June 1906, p.7.
5. MS. Top Oxon d 444, Diary of the daughter of Sir Wm. Herschel, Bodleian.

village celebrations became more formalised, and large organised sports days, after the 1870s appear in large numbers. Brian Harrison has an interesting discussion of the relation between temperance and the growth of athletic sports. 'The temperance reformer' he writes, 'vigorously attacked the rural sports - greasy poles, sack races and crude enjoyments...' They also attacked blood sports, which had strong links with the drinking place. Such sports were also alien to the spirit and disciplines of industrial society '...requiring unrestricted space, unspecified periods of time and a taste for animal cruelty.' The new athletic sports according to Harrison, saved both time and space, and were much more in tune with the needs of urban industrial society.<sup>1</sup> In the country the temperance attack was the same; and the general movement away from the old amusements was comparable to that in the towns, but the reasons for the trend are less clear (lack of space was not a rural problem), and there are differences which await further examination and discussion.

The bigger sports days very quickly became established annual events. Farringdon, Charlbury, Abingdon, and Banbury, all of which had Whit Monday sports meetings established in the 1870s, were still holding them in 1914. Charlbury provides an example we can follow in some detail. Its first 'Amateur Athletic Sports' was held on Whit Monday 1874, under the patronship of most of the local gentry including the Duke of Marlborough, Viscount Dillon, Lord Churchill and the local Tory M.P. In 1874 the sports began at 1 o'clock 'with the Quarter-Mile Flat Race for boys under 16 years of age...'<sup>2</sup>, and continued through the afternoon and into the early evening. Most of the events run would be familiar to anyone who has attended a village sports day but there was one notable exception, and a definite concession to earlier days in that a horse race was included. Again in 1875 there were pony and Galloway races, and horse racing and driving contests continued until nearly the end of the century. In 1893 bicycle racing was introduced.<sup>3</sup> In 1889 there were four running events including one for Lord Churchill's Silver Cup, throwing the hammer, hurdles, a sack race, a tug of war and the pony and Galloway races.<sup>4</sup>

1. Brian Harrison, *op.cit.*, pp.330-31.
2. *J.O.J.*, 30 May 1874, p.8.
3. *Ibid.*, 27 May 1893, p.7.
4. *Ibid.*, 15 June 1889, p.7.



In 1875 the *Journal* obviously expected its readers to have heard of some of its runners. '...W. H. Seary, of Oxford renown, ... won the hurdle and steeple chases, being second for the mile and half-mile races'.<sup>1</sup> Seary and others presumably travelled from Oxford in order to take part.

Sports were organised by a variety of bodies including village clubs, the Oddfellows, the Foresters and, as we have already seen, temperance groups. In accord with the general tone of sports days they were often temperance in character even when run by other groups. At the Eynsham sports in 1883 (organised by a village committee) 'Nothing but temperance drinks were sold upon the field, the Magistrates having refused to grant permission for the sale of alcoholic drinks...'<sup>2</sup> At the 'Beaconsfield' Club Sports, Abingdon, in the previous year, there were only 'refreshments of a non-intoxicating description'.<sup>3</sup> Another sign of change was the organisation of sports days to collect money for charity (often hospitals); or with special charitable arrangements as at Milton-under-Wychwood in 1903 when the inmates at the Childrens' Homes at Shipton were given tea at the sports and had special races arranged for them;<sup>4</sup> or again at Faringdon in 1882 when '...the children from Faringdon Workhouse were admitted to the fields. The old people were provided with Tobacco and Snuff...'<sup>5</sup>

Athletic sports were not the only form of 'rational recreation' which infiltrated club day. The other major newcomer was cricket. It is difficult to say when cricket, as a popular village sport, began to become important. As early as 1804 the following advertisement appeared in the *Journal* 'To Cricketers, Gentlemen fond of the game are hereby informed, that the sum of Five Guineas will be played for on Thursday in the Whitsun-week, at the Fox, in North Afton, Oxfordshire - Eleven of a Side - The Wickets to be pitched at Ten o'clock, and Articles will be produced'.<sup>6</sup> At Thame's

1. *Ibid.*, 22 May 1875, p.7.

2. *Ibid.*, 19 May 1883, p.7. I cannot refrain from mentioning that at the Ensham Whitsuntide Sports in 1883 one W. Howkins was third in the 200 yards Foot Hurdle Race - my great grandfather, in his forties but still in his prime.

3. *Ibid.*, 3 June 1882, p.7.

4. *Ibid.*, 31 May 1890, p.7.

5. *Ibid.*, 3 June 1882, p.7.

6. *Ibid.*, 19 May 1804, p.4.

Whitsun in 1828, 'A challenge was given on Tuesday by eleven tailors, to play eleven shoemakers at the game of cricket, which was accepted, and played on Wednesday, when the *snobs* proved too much for the *Knights of the Thimble*...'<sup>1</sup> In the mid-fifties village cricket matches are quite often reported as part of Whitsun festivities; like the Married v. Single match on Whit Monday 1856 at Ludgershall, on the Buckinghamshire border, which was followed by a 'sumptuous repast... at the White Hart Inn'.<sup>2</sup> In the 1860s we find it in the club day celebrations. At Longworth in 1865 for instance '...a match was played between the married and single members of the club...',<sup>3</sup> while at Clanfield in 1868 a match was played between Clanfield and Aston (after which the players resorted to the Plough Inn, to refresh the inner man, and the conviviality was kept up till 10 p.m.) A return match was to be played on Aston Feast Monday.<sup>4</sup> At Thame in 1871 two courts of Foresters, ('Court British Queen' from Thame and 'Court Hampden' from Watlington) played a cricket match which was the only afternoon entertainment of the day;<sup>5</sup> and at Eynsham in 1899 cricket had so taken over that the *Journal* headed its club day report 'Foresters' Cricket Match and Dinner'.<sup>6</sup> The elevens were not invariably drawn from other villages: in Whit Week 1874 Bicester played teams from Queen's College and Magdalen.<sup>7</sup> But most village matches remained essentially local affairs, and there does not seem to be any evidence of the games being organised on a league basis before 1914.

Bicycling, as a sport, was little practised by the rural working class before 1914; and for some years was regarded as a curiosity, beyond their reach. (There is a story in W. H. Hudson's *A Shepherd's Life* of how one day he was riding across the downs when he saw a boy scaring crows in a field some distance away. As he approached the boy he saw that he was running across the fields to intercept him. Hudson, thinking that something was the matter, stopped, and asked the boy why he had run to meet him; the boy replied 'Just to see

1. *Ibid.*, 31 May 1828, p.4.

2. *Ibid.*, 17 May 1856, p.8.

3. *Ibid.*, 17 June 1865, p.8.

4. *Ibid.*, 13 June 1868, p.7.

5. *Ibid.*, 10 June 1871, p.7.

6. *Ibid.*, 27 May 1899, p.3.

7. *Ibid.*, 30 May 1874, p.8.

373

you pass'.<sup>1</sup>) An advertisement in the *Oxford Journal Illustrated* for 3rd June 1914 gives prices from £5 12s. 6d. to £13 13s. 0d. for Royal Enfield cycles - 'The Bicycle that is made like a Gun... the Best Bicycle that money can buy.'<sup>2</sup> Such prices were beyond the reach of the farm labourer, whose wages in Oxfordshire averaged around 12s. a week. There was some cycling going on. But it was not until my father's day, in the late twenties, that cycling clubs became a working class institution in Oxfordshire.

Others besides temperance reformers sought, by providing other amusements, to keep country men and women away from the feasts. To many ordinary non-conformists and even churchmen they were Vanity Fair. John Kibble, the Methodist stonemason spoke for these people when he wrote, 'as a boy, without a word from anyone, I could see that to follow the path I had resolved upon I had best give feasts a wide berth, and after these many years I see no cause for regret at the course resolved upon'.<sup>3</sup> Armed with the evangelical spirit they took Christianity into Satan's lair and Whit Monday became a focus for various kinds of religious activity. The earliest report in the newspapers of a religious body using Whitsun for its own celebrations (other than the ordinary Whit services) comes from Standlake in 1839 when 'The ministers and messengers of the associated Baptist Churches in this and the adjoining counties held their anniversary meeting at Standlake on Tuesday and at Cote and Bampton on Wednesday last. Numerous and respectable auditories attended the several services - refreshments for ministers and friends were supplied at Cote, by Mr. Townsend, of the Bull Inn, Aston, while Mr. P. Williams, of Old Shifford, very humanely and liberally provided the poorer attendants with a good dinner and accompaniments gratis'.<sup>4</sup> This meeting, later known as the Oxford Association of Baptist Churches, continued annually for most of the century. Numbers of local Baptist chapels held their anniversaries on Whit Monday. At Thame in 1857 '...two sermons were preached by Mr. J. Hazelton of London. At half past five o'clock upwards of sixty of the friends assembled

1. W.H. Hudson, *A Shepherd's Life*, Everyman Ed., London 1936, p.5.
2. *Oxford Journal Illustrated*, 3 June 1914, p.5.
3. John Kibble, *Charming Charlbury: A Wychwood Gem*, Charlbury 1930, p.28.
4. *J.O.J.*, 25th May 1839, p.4.

and partook of tea together... After tea the company enjoyed a walk in the beautiful grounds of Mr. T. H. Seymour, which were kindly thrown open for the occasion, and added much to the pleasure of the afternoon. In the evening a goodly number attended the chapel; the collections were good'.<sup>1</sup>

The Primitive Methodists had from their earliest days held 'camp meetings', open air evangelical gatherings, in opposition to wakes, fairs, and feasts. In 1869 at Witney, one of their strongholds, 'As usual on Whit Monday the Primitive Methodist connection held camp meetings on Woodgreen both morning and afternoon, the latter especially being largely attended. The discourses were delivered with great fervour, and listened to with attention'.<sup>2</sup> At Curbridge in 1904 a special service was held on Whit Monday afternoon, followed by a public tea and in the evening '...a service of song entitled "Little Maggie's Mission"'.<sup>3</sup> The Wesleyans also used public tea meetings and concerts on Whit Monday to keep their members and possible converts away from the evils of the feast. At Bloxham in 1887, 'On Whit Monday the Wesleyans and friends of this parish had a tea meeting and concert, which may be classed second to none amongst the numerous attractions of the club-day. The state of the weather being taken into consideration (it was very sunny), the attendance at the tea was very good indeed, the upper and lower school rooms being both well filled. After the tea a free sacred concert was given in the chapel, which was also well attended, and which everyone enjoyed very much... The hymns were selected from Sankey's "Songs and Solos", and the musical portion consisted of the organ, three violins and a violoncello'.<sup>4</sup> The Horspath Methodists combined at Whitsun with nearby Headington, and in 1901 the *Journal* describes them as having had '... a lively time...' 'The proceedings commenced at 2.30 with a cricket match between Headington and Horspath, won by the Headington team. During the afternoon the Headington brass band played selections of music. At 5.30 a public tea was held in the Wesleyan chapel... After tea the band paraded the street, and at 7 o'clock an entertainment took place in the chapel ... A capital programme was gone through, consisting of songs and recitations, and

1. *Ibid.*, 6 June 1857, p.4.
2. *Ibid.*, 22 May 1869, p.8.
3. *Ibid.*, 28 May 1904, p.9.
4. *Ibid.*, 15 June 1887, p.7.

selections by members of the band',<sup>1</sup> Like the Baptists the Wesleyans held their circuit anniversary at Whitsun but this was usually restricted to discussion and teas; as the *Journal* wrote in 1899: 'It is an occasion when the whole of the circuit is brought together for social, financial, and spiritual purposes, and has, therefore, been of great service and is highly esteemed.'<sup>2</sup> The other non-conformist denominations followed a similar pattern at Whitsun; the Congregationalists of Chinnor had a tea '... and after ample justice had been done to the cake, bread and butter &c., the company resorted to the hills, where sports, games, and other pastimes were indulged in by the younger friends'.<sup>3</sup> The Congregationalists in Henley ran a Benefit Society which behaved, as far as can be seen, in exactly the same way as an ordinary club on Whit Monday right down to a dinner in a public house.<sup>4</sup> John Kibble would not have approved!

The Church of England rarely organised special Whitsun activities: it hardly needed to, since the central role of the parson in Club sermons and speeches, the importance (often) of the Church of England Temperance Society, and usually the dominance of the Church Sunday School, made church influence pervasive. Occasionally they did more. At Stonesfield in 1868 the church emulated the non-conformist and held a 'public tea meeting' on the Rectory lawn. 'After tea the people amused themselves with different kinds of games, and the evening's amusement was brought to a close with an entertainment in the School room...'<sup>5</sup> There were also occasional meetings of the Church Missionary Society or the British and Foreign Bible Society, but this would seem to be simple coincidence rather than a part of Whitsun. In the nineteenth century the Church Lads Brigade often paraded their town at Whitsun, but in rural Oxfordshire at least, this particular branch of the church militant seems to have had little appeal.

For many a child, even in my own day, Whitsun was indistinguishable from two things: the Buffs outing, and the Sunday School treat. The club outing replaced club day in the course of the 1920s, by which time too the Sunday School treat often

1. *Ibid.*, 1 June 1901, p.8.
2. *Ibid.*, 27 May 1899, p.3.
3. *Ibid.*, 26 May 1888, p.8.
4. *Ibid.*, 2 June 1855, p.8.
5. *Ibid.*, 13 June 1868, p.7.

took the form of an outing (I have not found evidence of Sunday School outings in Oxfordshire before 1914, although there are plenty of examples from other counties of excursions in wagons and even by trains before that date).

Sunday schools would hold their annual treat at Whitsun, often using it in advance to coerce the children into 'good behaviour': it was a reward for regular attendance, and exclusion from it was a potent threat. Its original purpose, at least in part, was to remove children from the dissipation of the village holiday, to prevent them taking part in it, by providing an alternative (and desirable) way of spending the day. The Charlbury Methodists in 1838 decided bluntly: 'The children shall not walk to make exhibition in the town, it being a day of worldly amusement, namely Charlbury Club feast'.<sup>1</sup> But often the diversion took the form of an organised parade. At Watlington on Whitsun, 1841, 'the teachers and friends of the Wesleyan Sunday School in this town presented the children with their annual treat: at three o'clock in the afternoon they formed into a procession and paraded the town preceded by a band for music: immediately after they adjourned to the spacious yard in front of the chapel, where 168 children of the poor partook of the bounty of their friends. The evening was spent by the teachers in an animating manner: several interesting speeches were delivered illustrative of the blessings of a religious education'.<sup>2</sup> Events of this kind were organised throughout the century by most chapels and churches. The Primitive Methodists of Long Hanborough celebrated their school anniversary at Whitsun: 'On Monday the teachers and children met at the Chapel and formed in procession, parading the village, headed by the brass band and singing at intervals'; then they had tea and games and a public meeting, in a barn lent by J. Joslin Esq.<sup>3</sup> The children of Anglican Sunday schools might have the advantage of a rectory garden in which to hold their treat, and no doubt the support of the richer local inhabitants. (As a child I remember heated sectarian discussion at school, not on the finer points of theology, but on who provided the

1. Minute Book of the Charlbury Methodist Sunday School, May 1838, quoted in John Kibble, *Historical and Other Notes on Charlbury*, Charlbury 1927, p.32.
2. *J.O.J.*, 17 May 1841, p.2.
3. *Ibid.*, 27 May 1893, p.8.

375

better treat, church or chapel). At Salford (Oxfordshire) in 1904, 60 or 70 scholars of the Anglican Sunday School assembled at the Rectory for a 'sumptuous tea', preceded and followed by games on the Rectory lawn.<sup>1</sup> Treats were often the occasion for the presentation of prizes for the year's work. So for instance at Wootton, 'Prizes for regular attendance and good conduct were distributed...'<sup>2</sup> while at the Baptist Sunday School in Eynsham prizes were presented to Rose Eltham, Alice Dance and Clara Lambourn 'for collecting for the Temperance Hospital', and certificates 'in connection with the Oxford and district Sunday School Union examination...' were awarded to nine other children.<sup>3</sup> On some occasions the treat included a concert or entertainment by the children for their proud parents. At Middle Barton in 1893 for example, a public tea was held to mark the 31st anniversary of the Primitive Chapel and 'At intervals between the speeches the musicians and the children enlivened the proceedings by playing and singing some of Sankey's songs and solos, Miss A. Chadbon presiding at the harmonium'.<sup>4</sup>

From the middle of the century onwards the fete begins to appear at Whitsun, with its fund raising stalls, tea tables, speeches by minor celebrities, and amateur entertainments. The first Whitsun fete in Oxfordshire reported in the *Journal* (there are a couple earlier from Reading) was held in 1855 in Witney in aid of the building fund for the Witney National Schools.<sup>5</sup> The Vicar of Bladon in 1859 was able to secure illustrious patronage for his attempt to withdraw the villagers from the 'boisterous and intoxicating revellings formerly as prevalent at Bladon as at other rustic annual feasts':

On Whit-Monday ... the villagers assembled at 5 o'clock in the afternoon, in an orchard kindly lent for the occasion by Mr. Adams ... The Duke and Duchess of Marlborough, by their kind and courteous presence at the principal tea-table, enhanced the enjoyment of the assembled throng; and His Grace, in a few suitable words after tea was concluded, expressed gratification at seeing so many ... When evening's shadows fell, the Harmonium was taken into the school ... and the music, both vocal and instrumental, was resumed until

1. *J.O.J.*, 28 May 1904, p.4.
2. *Ibid.*, 28 May 1904, p.9.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*, 27 May 1893, p.8.
5. *Ibid.*, 2 June 1855, p.8.

a late hour ... an unprecedented treat was afforded the village maidens by the opportunity of listening (probably for the first time in their lives) to Italian operatic vocal music ... Loyalty and devotion - 'God save the Queen', and the 'Te Deum' - concluded the happy evening, which will not soon be forgotten either at Bladon or by any who had the pleasure of being present.<sup>1</sup>

Fetes developed as a regular way of raising funds for church and chapel, as well as offering a more controlled and elevating alternative to the general village feast. The preparation of goods - as today for the Christmas bazaar - engaged the activity of members for months beforehand, with the double aim of providing exhibits for a lavish display and raising funds. The Winslow Baptists in 1881, faced with a debt of £150 on their hall, were able to raise £135 6s. Od. of it by means of a fete. The fete was held in the hall itself, and opened by the Hon. Rupert Carington, M.P. The stalls were '... laden with a very large assortment of goods useful and otherwise, clothing being probably predominant, but articles of vertu were not by any means absent'. There was also a 'Fine Art Gallery conducted by the Rev. Williams ...'; and scientific curiosity was catered for (as often at such functions) in this case by 'an incubator in full work' and 'a microscopical department ... furnished with an interesting variety of natural objects'. Refreshments were available and there were a number of 'superior' articles given by patrons of the Chapel.<sup>2</sup>

Apart from churches and chapels many other bodies came to adopt the fete as a means of celebrating Whitsun and/or raising money. Many clubs abandoned the Whit Monday processions in favour of the fete, especially those which were branches of the affiliated orders. In Oxford City in 1899 a fete even replaced the mildest of all imaginable club activities, 'Hospital Sunday', because of 'several objectionable features'.<sup>3</sup> At Stanton Harcourt in 1907, the local Foresters had not only replaced club day by a fete but had incorporated Empire Day - British Imperialism's contribution to the English holiday - and the ceremony of running up the flag and singing patriotic songs was added to the day's

1. *Ibid.*, 18 June 1859, p.8.
2. *Ibid.*, 11 June 1881, p.7.
3. *Ibid.*, 27 May 1899, p.3.

'amusements'.<sup>1</sup> In a like vein the Foresters' Fete at Headington Hill Hall in 1912 included a Scout Rally.<sup>2</sup>

Brian Harrison writes in *Drink and the Victorians*

Surveying briefly then, from the temperance viewpoint, the changes between the 1820s and the 1870s in the influence of drink, of drinksellers and of the drink interest - there had been a marked change. Alternative thirst-quenchers had become cheaper and more accessible. Seasonal and religious festivals had become more sober, and the link between drinksellers and long-distance public transport had been severely weakened.<sup>3</sup>

By 1914 further victories had been won and the earlier gains consolidated. In the sphere of leisure the changes had been enormous, and the ideas of 'rational recreation' had an important part in the transformation. Often unconsciously men and women responded to the change in manners which swept through the upper classes in the last half of the eighteenth century and spread those changes slowly over the whole society. The change in Whitsun took place unevenly and in stages, first by the rise of Club Day and the Clubs, then by the change in their character, as temperance and 'rational recreation' gradually encroached. The rise of the affiliated orders shifted the focus of Whitsun from the village to the district fete or rally. Whitsun as a village festival was on its way out when the clubs began to disappear, when the survivors stopped marching through their own villages behind their own village bands, to sing and dance till the early hours of the morning, and when the Foresters and Oddfellows, banners triumphant marched into Headington Hill Hall for their annual fete and sports day, to run, jump and parade with nary a drop to drink or a bit of fatty bacon to eat.

1. *Ibid.*, 25 May 1907, p.3.
2. *Ibid.*, 29 May 1912, p.7.
3. Harrison, *op.cit.*, p.346.

## V KITCHENER'S ARMY

It's fifty-one spring times since she was  
a bride,  
But still you can see her at each Whitsun-  
tide,  
In a dress of White Linen and ribbons of  
Green,  
As Green as her memories of loving.

.....

Down from the green farmlands and from their  
loved ones  
Went Husbands and brothers, went Fathers  
and Sons,  
... There's a fine roll of honour where  
the Maypole once was  
And the ladies went dancing at Whitsun.<sup>1</sup>

On August the 4th 1914 Oxfordshire received the outbreak of the great war in much the same way as the rest of the country. There were enthusiastic crowds, reservists in the streets, flags, children. Mabel Ashby remembered those last weeks of the old world.

The last week of July and the first days of August, my mother and I harnessed a pony every evening, and drove the five miles from the Lower Town to Kineton Post Office to read in its windows the latest telegrams on the news from Serbia, Austria, Germany, Russia and France. Each evening all the wide valley was bathed in golden serene sunset light, but on the third of August the weather changed. The sunset was more gorgeous than ever; but the valley was filled with mist of raucous purple. When my mother recited the message we had brought home there was a long stillness that Joseph broke with the only possible words: "Few things will ever be the same again"<sup>2</sup>

At first only the Regulars went, then the territorials, then at the beginning of 1915 recruiting began for Kitchener's

1. Words by Austia James Marshall to a song *Whitsun Dancing*, tune from Copper family.
2. Ashby, *op.cit.*, p.290.

277

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70  
Army. Among those who went to the recruiting office in Oxford was Jonathan 'Jack' Howkins; he was swallowed up into the Queens Own Oxfordshire Yeomanry Cavalry. Another recruit was a young man who worked on the roads over in Berkshire. He recalled joining Kitchener's Army: 'I worked for the County Council and, one morning, I left to go to work; we were repairing the roads in Windsor Park at the time, but on the way I met a friend who was going to enlist. Instead of going on to work, I went home, changed into my best clothes and went with him to the Recruiting Office in Reading'.<sup>1</sup> My grandmother remembered her first husband marching off with those early recruits; he ended up in an 'unknown grave' in the mud of Paschendael as a member of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry. When the war was over not only had the young men gone but things had changed completely. This is a platitude of history, but one which is repeated by practically every old man and woman that one talks to. An old man in Headington once said 'It was all different after' and when I asked why he said 'The donkeys and rabbits had gone'.

So had the clubs, even the affiliated orders were beginning to fail as the state took more and more responsibility for its citizens. As for Whitsun, it ceased to be a village affair. In place of the village processions and 'feast' there came the charabanc outing, working class cycling clubs, rambling, the day out and the holiday away from home. The carefully nurtured world of rational recreation also disappeared, simply because it too was based on the village. In fact what the war shattered beyond repair was not simply this or that aspect of village life but the whole concept of unified village activity.

The ideals, culture and indeed the physical form of the Oxfordshire village was completely altered by the Great War. The village community with its own lore and oral history; its own celebrations, bands and banners; and above all its own sense of separate identity, could not stand the shock of the wholesale depopulation which set in during and after the war. It seems to me, comparing Oxfordshire village life before 1914 and in my own childhood, that there are few continuities. Certainly I went on Sunday School treats, Friendly Society outings, even watched Morris and heard the occasional band, but they were not, with the exception of

1. Pte J.H. Harwood, 6th Royal Berkshire Regiment, in Martin Middlebrook, *The First Day on the Somme*, London, 1971, p.7.

some Morris sides, the product of distinct village cultures. They were planned and executed for a wider district.

'Whats the life of a man, any more than a leaf!' laments a song once popular throughout the Thames Valley, 'A man has his seasons, then why should he grieve?' And like man the village had its seasons, Spring and Summer were of great length and beauty; Autumn and Winter were short, bitterly hard; the 'frost came and bit'it, and the 'storm came upon' it in the shape of the Great War and like both the man and leaf in the song, although to the 'wide world' it appeared 'fine and gay', it tragically and all too quickly did 'wither and soon fade away'.

## APPENDIX: FRIENDLY SOCIETIES

This is no place to go into the history of Friendly Societies, however a few general remarks seem necessary.<sup>1</sup> The aim of Friendly Societies was simple. Members paid a contribution weekly when in work as a provision against sickness or unemployment. Sometimes clubs also paid for burials, gave cash payments for injuries, paid lump sums to widows and orphans and provided a small pension, and very occasionally a pension for the contributor when he became too old to work. Such clubs had been in existence in England since the end of the seventeenth century. In 1697 Defoe wrote, 'Friendly societies are very extensive...'<sup>2</sup>

The earlier Friendly Societies seem to have been got up among small tradesmen and artisans, but from the early 19th century they began to appear, in both town and country, lower down the social scale. Their early growth was encouraged both by the government in the form of sympathetic legislation (after carefully distinguishing between Friendly Societies and trade unions) and by the local bourgeoisie - gentry, farmers and clergymen - starting up clubs and usually keeping them firmly under their control.

For most of the period dealt with in this part of the pamphlet there were in Oxfordshire, as elsewhere, two distinct sorts of societies, the local clubs and the affiliated orders. The local clubs were by and large based on one village or parish, having no members outside and no funds apart from those collected from the members. The main reason why local clubs predominated in the rural areas was simple: their scale of contribution was much lower and more in keeping with the wages of a farm labourer. The Manchester Unity Oddfellows fixed their scale of contribution and benefit locally but it varied at about 4d., 5d., or 6d., a week or 17s. 4d., £1 1s. 8d. and £1 6s. 0d. a year.<sup>3</sup>

1. The standard history of Friendly Societies is F.H.J.R. Gosden, *The Friendly Societies in England 1815-1875*, Manchester 1960. This is now supplemented by an excellent local study, Margaret D. Fuller, *West Country Friendly Societies*, Reading 1964. Both give details of the development of the Friendly Society movement.
2. Quoted in Fuller, *op.cit.*, p.1.
3. Gosden, *op.cit.*, p.105.

Benefits were in turn varied from area to area although the Order by and large seldom paid less than 10s. a week in benefit. There were occasional exceptions as in Banbury where the benefit was only 7s. 6d. a week in time of sickness in a Lodge which had been started mainly for farm labourers.<sup>1</sup> The local societies collected smaller sums than this and paid lower benefits. In the West of England and parts of the South Midlands the maximum a labourer could expect from the club was about 6s. a week although it could sometimes be as low as 3s. 6d. or 4s. and very occasionally above 7s.<sup>2</sup> It was not solely economic considerations which bound men to the local clubs. For a start they were less closely regulated. This often meant that the club feast and beer on club night was paid for out of stock: a practice which the registered club had to abandon. Many local clubs were 'sick and divvy' in that they shared out their funds annually or divided them every few years. Local ties remained strong as well.

The two affiliated orders which gained a real footing in rural Oxfordshire were the Independent Order of Oddfellows, Manchester Unity, and the Ancient Order of Foresters.<sup>3</sup> The Manchester Unity had been founded in Manchester in 1810, but its real period of growth in Oxfordshire does not begin until the mid sixties.<sup>4</sup> In 1877 there were sixteen adult lodges of the Oddfellows in Oxfordshire and one Juvenile lodge. It is interesting to note though that nine (among them the juvenile branch) were in market towns, including four in Oxford City.<sup>5</sup> The Foresters, like the Oddfellows, began in the North and developed into a national organisation; but they were less centralised and because their

1. *Ibid.*, p.80.
2. Fuller, *op.cit.*, p.72, Gosden, *op.cit.*, p.76, these figures refer to the initial period of illness, they were lowered if the member was ill for long periods.
3. When the Oddfellows split in 1845 the number of lodges in Oxon. declined from 5 to 1 indicating that some lodges may have gone with the splintered group(s) or simply reverted to being village clubs. They certainly did not last long if they joined one of the rival Oddfellows organisations as no other affiliated orders are listed by the Registrar General in Oxon.
4. Gosden, *op.cit.*, Table 5, p.35.
5. Report of the Registrar General of Friendly Societies, for 1876, PP 1877, LXXVII.

Contributions were slightly lower, were more successful in rural areas, at least early on. In 1877 there were seventeen adult (and one juvenile) Courts of Foresters in Oxfordshire, and only four were in market towns, including two in Oxford City.<sup>1</sup> The growth of the Foresters was also greater. In 1863 both Orders had a foothold in the towns of Oxfordshire, but the Oddfellows had eight lodges and the Foresters only four.<sup>2</sup>

But during most of the century local village societies re-dominated in rural Oxfordshire. Out of 78 societies in the county in 1863, 66 were local village societies.<sup>3</sup> Similarly in 1877 there were one hundred and twenty-five local clubs, against thirty-five branches of affiliated orders.<sup>4</sup> The origins and organisation of these local societies was almost as diverse as the societies themselves. At these 125 have in common that they were all registered. They do not by any means represent all the clubs in Oxfordshire, for to be registered meant that the funds had to be properly audited and that the funds should only be used to meet sickness or other purposes approved by the Registrar and enforced by the magistrates. The largest group unregistered would be those who divided their funds at the end of each year or a period of five or seven years, who could not, in general register. But many local societies preferred to remain unregistered so as to be able to use part of the funds for the club feast or for buying beer on club nights, while others were deferred from registering through their ignorance of actuary science.

Ibid.  
 Report of the Registrar General of Friendly Societies for 1862, PP 1863, XXIX.  
 Ibid.  
 PP 1877, loc.cit.

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