



# LYMM MAY QUEEN YEAR BY YEAR



1888-1920

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The Band of Hope was founded in Leeds in 1847 and quickly spread nationally. Its mission was to counter what were perceived as the social evils of alcohol, particularly among children, by encouraging the signing of the pledge; a vow to not drink alcohol.

After a May Queen style event run by St Peter's in 1888, local churches co-operated to create the first Lymm Bands of Hope of Festival the following year. It drew on two local traditions: the religious walking days, known popularly as "Whit Walks" and May Queen Festivals like the one that was by then going strong in Knutsford. It was thought that this would appeal to youngsters, with the opportunity to dress up and take part in a parade.

At the centre of the day was the crowning of the May Queen herself, chosen in rotation, in the first few years, by the participating churches. The event soon began to attract huge crowds and the pubs quickly became among the main beneficiaries.

As a result, before long the Congregationalists were the only church group still involved and when they decided to pull out the Tradesmen's Association and other local people took it over and the formal link with the Bands of Hope was dropped. It was named Lymm May Queen Festival.

The local churches revived the idea of a more traditional "Walking Day" for a number of years, starting in 1908, but there is no evidence of that restarting after the First World War.

May Queen became so popular that for a while local neighbourhoods like Statham staged their own similar events. For some reason Lymm May Queen seems to have "run out of steam" in around 1935 before being successfully revived in 1948. Since then it has only been interrupted by atrocious weather or Coronavirus.

**This book records the history of the event, year by year. Please let us know if you can contribute.**

# 1888—May Queen, Annie Davies

All the records and festival programmes refer to 1889 as being the start of the Lymm May Queen Festival tradition, but recently discovered newspaper reports show that there was a “May Queen for Lymm”, as the headlines described it, in 1888. It was organised by St Peter’s, Oughtrington and at least one other church was involved as the brass band of the Primitive Methodist Society headed the parade. The event, modelled on nearby Knutsford’s May Queen, was clearly enough of a success to encourage other local churches to get involved the following year.

Annie Davies was 14 when she was crowned the first May Queen. Annie lived with her father Thomas 42 and her stepmother, Mary Jane who just 28. The family, including Annie’s five brothers and sisters, lived in a cottage on Rush Green Rd where, predictably, they made their living as fustian cutters. By 1891 though, older brother Thomas had “made his escape” from the trade and was married and working as a waterman on the canal in Barnton. Annie lodged with them.



*The Sandy Lane school where the procession assembled—long since demolished.*

## **ST PETER’S BAND OF HOPE, OUGHTRINGTON – CROWNING OF THE MAY QUEEN.**

“On Thursday afternoon the children connected with the St Peter’s Band of Hope assembled in the Sandy Lane School from whence a procession was formed, the central figure of which was the May Queen, Miss Annie Davies\*, daughter of Mr Davies of Heatley, who was very prettily attired and was attended by her maids of honour and the customary retinue. The ceremony of coronation took place in a field at Oughtrington belonging to Mr Stelfox.

The procession, headed by the Primitive Methodist Temperance Band, then proceeded down Sandy Lane, Heatley, Broom Edge, Higher Lane, Lymm, Rush Green and thence back to Sandy Lane. The children, to the number of about 100, were afterwards supplied with tea in Sandy Lane schoolroom after which various games and sports were indulged in on the field. At eight o’clock an entertainment was provided for the children which was appreciated.

# 1889—May Queen, Amy Astley

The St Peter's event the previous year had certainly encouraged all the other churches in Lymm to join together to create the first "Lymm and Oughtrington Bands of Hope Festival".

There was a ballot of the churches to decide who should choose the first May Queen and the Congregationalists were successful. They picked Amy Astley. Her father was an enthusiastic supporter of the Bands of Hope and the fact that the Congregational minister was in lodgings just two doors away may also have helped!

Amy Astley lived on what is now Booth's Hill Road. Her father, James, was employed by a timber merchant and mother, Ann, did not go out to work. Amy had only one younger brother (a very small family for the time).

There was much that was new for this first event for Lymm. The organisers would have been very keen to distance themselves from Rushbearing which had earned a reputation for being a rowdy, drunken affair. This was after all a temperance event. So when the procession assembled at the Cross for a 1.30 departure they started by singing a hymn.

*"Onward Friends of Temperance,  
Armed with heavenly might,  
Truth shall be victorious  
God defends the right"*

There would be several more during the day.

After a lengthy procession through the village the cavalcade arrived at Mr Grundy's field next to Maltmans Road. The day was hot and the ceremony and dances that followed lasted



over an hour so there was genuine concern for the children in their heavy, warm costumes which had been hired from W.A. Hume of Oxford St in Manchester.

After the afternoon of festivities which included, of course, maypole dancing there was another procession before the youngsters went to their Sunday Schools for tea. The children later returned to the field owned by Mr Battersby of Lymm Hall for more games and entertainment.

The newspaper reported

*"It is hoped that a similar demonstration will take place every year".*

It certainly has, (well most years anyway) though much has changed since the event's "temperance" inception.

# 1890—May Queen, Carrie Picton

This may have been only the second full-scale Bands of Hope / May Queen festival but the crowds it attracted were quite astonishing by modern standards. The newspapers reported that there were 5,500 people who paid to pass through the gates on that day. That's more than the total population of Lymm at the time.

With no motor-cars and no bus service how did they achieve such a remarkable number?

Well first of all a very large part of the local population would have attended. Very many of the village children were involved in one way or another.

It is worth remembering too that Lymm was already a very popular visitor destination especially during Whit Week. It was seen as a picturesque and "quaint" escape from Manchester, Salford and other industrial areas.

Visitors came on special trains. Some were twice the length of the platform to accommodate the crowds. ( See the picture on the 1893 page) Bicycles were also hugely popular by this time and thousands of people could be seen pouring down the main road through Sale and Altrincham, any summer weekend afternoon.

Many of the lasting elements of what was to become simply "May Queen" were already being established in these first years including the appearance of Britannia and John Bull as well as the Maypole Dancing.

While it was first and foremost a temperance event with hymn singing and dancing to the local Temperance Band there is no doubt that the local pubs will have also been an



important part of the day for some of those five thousand plus visitors.

With such a huge paying turnout it will perhaps be surprising to learn how within a few years the event was dogged by financial difficulties that put the festival's future in doubt more than once.

The May Queen in 1890 was Carrie Picton the youngest of five children of John and Heather Picton who had a tailors and drapers business on Eagle Brow near the corner of Bridgewater St.

This was the Wesleyans first "turn" at nominating the May Queen though the idea of selection circulating round the churches would not last for long.

# 1891—May Queen, Margaret Gibbon

Margaret Gibbon was 14 when she was chosen to be May Queen. She was the daughter of Edward and Annie, who had a farm on Crouchley Lane (demolished in 2020). She was the third of six children. They must have been quite a successful family as the 1891 census shows them having three domestic servants.

By 1891 May Queen was becoming quite a spectacular affair with crowds pouring in by train from Manchester and Warrington. There were a number of horse drawn carts and children in costume representing the seasons as well as other marching exhibits. The festivities continued in a field opposite the Congregational church (Today it's the United Reformed) where one of the highlights was balloon ascents!

In the same year Lymm's impoverished fustian cutters marched through the village as part of an unsuccessful strike demanding improved pay for their work.

1891.



Miss M. GIBBON,  
*Baptist.*

# 1892—May Queen,



Miss J. CLARE,  
*Primitive.*

Jessie Clare (16) was the oldest of seven children of Joseph and Mary. Jessie was a fustian cutter, as were her parents. They were members of the Primitive Methodist church on Eagle Brow. This simple version of Methodism was particularly favoured by the working classes at this time.

Jessie would later marry Lawrence Broadey, a local boot and shoemaker. The family had a shop below the Cross. When the May Queen was eventually restarted after the Second World War, in 1948, Jessie was asked to crown the May Queen.

## 1893—no event.—Smallpox outbreak.

There may have already been some concerns about the “revelling” and drinking at was meant to be a temperance event. See these comments in the press from 1891.

*“It might be a thorn in the side of the demonstrators to observe that the local public houses had a very good share of the day’s prosperity.”*

But the main concern was a smallpox outbreak in Warrington. At the end of April two patients had been brought to an isolation cottage near Booth’s Hill, much to the fury of local residents who protested in the streets and marched on the house to demand their removal.



## 1894 May Queen—Selina Thomason

There was no shortage of Thomasons in Lymm in 1894. It’s still a common name locally. The 1891 census shows two young females named S. Thomason but research has confirmed that the May Queen was the unusually named Selina who was christened at St Peter’s in March 1879. Her mother Lavinia (nee Forster) grew up in a family of fustian cutters on Oughtrington Lane. Lavinia married Thomas Thomason who was a stonemason but more significantly was also the sexton at Oughtrington Church who nominated the May Queen that year. In 1894 Selina’s older brother Levi was already a fustian cutter. Selina seems to have managed to avoid the trade by training as a dressmaker. A family would have had to pay for their daughter to be apprenticed at that time. In 1903 Selina married Richard Yarwood of Dunham who, like his father before him, was a wheelwright. They settled in Oughtrington but by 1911 still had no children.



Miss S. THOMASON,  
Oughtrington Church.

# 1895—May Queen, Florence Brearley

John Brearley moved with his wife and five children from Rochdale to set up a jewellers and watchmakers business on Eagle Brow .

Florence was just 13 when she was chosen to be May Queen by the Congregational church who appear to have been the only church still supporting the event.

Florence would go on to become an insurance clerk and was the only one of the five children still living with her parents on Church Road in 1911 at the age of 29.

The formal studio photograph was clearly a part of the whole business of being May Queen at the end of the nineteenth century. We have also found two later examples from 1908 and 1910. See those pages.

Being May Queen was a great honour and meant a thrilling day for the recipient but there were costs too. The crown was not passed on and each May Queen had to provide her own which she would then retain as a memento of the day. Perhaps it was because of this cost that they seem to have quite quickly become smaller after Amy Astley's very grand affair in 1889.

Florence is also clutching the sceptre, another important part of the ceremony. This too seems to have shrunk in comparison to the 1889 original. It is less clear as to whether this was also retained.



## The Rose Queen Tradition

In these early years the Rose Queen was, by convention, the May Queen of the previous year. This practice seems to have continued until at least 1920.

The thinking may have been that the Rose Queen could act as a guide and reassuring presence for the new, nervous young May Queen!

Nowadays as well as the May Queen, a Rosebud is selected, giving a younger person the chance to experience that special day.

# 1896—May Queen, Annie Winstanley

If you live in Lymm you will have heard of the Dairy Farm Estate and won't be surprised to know that is was the site of the Dairy Farm! In 1896 it was home to the Winstanley family including Annie, then 14 years of age, and her six sisters and one brother.

Older Lymm residents still refer to the area beyond Lymmhay Lane, as "Winstanley's Meadows".

We have not found any reports of how Annie's day as May Queen went but we do know that in 1909 Annie married Frank Brown, part of the family of prosperous local grocers who had shops next to the Golden Fleece (burnt down in the 1960s) and in Booths Hill.



ABOVE: Dairy Farm on New Rd/Rush Green Rd RIGHT & BELOW Two big days for Annie—As May Queen in 1896 and on her wedding Day in 1909 with her 6 sisters.



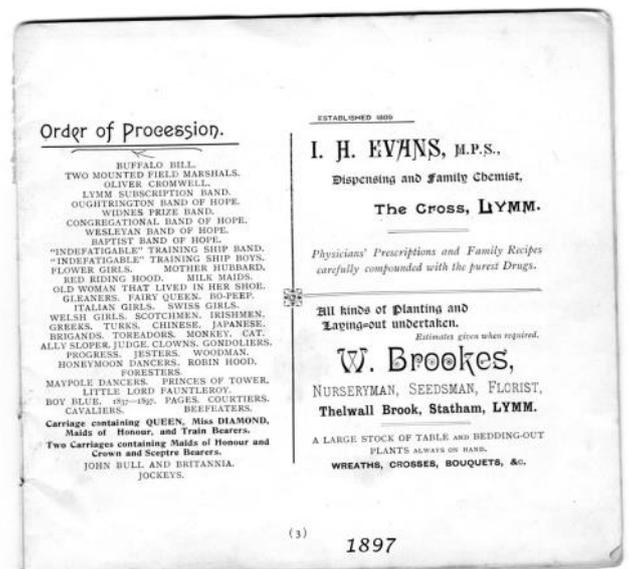
# 1897—May Queen, Elizabeth Diamond

Organisers of the 1897 event had a considerable extra challenge on their hands as Lymm prepared to celebrate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee just twelve days later on June 22nd. This event evoked a strong sense of patriotism all over the country. Lymm was adorned with flags and bunting, shop windows were decorated and there were sports and processions that would themselves have involved a great deal of organisation.

But the May Queen organisers had a master stroke up their sleeves, naming Elizabeth Diamond as the May Queen in Diamond Jubilee Year.

Elizabeth's father had come to Lymm from Somerset as a young man. He worked as a cowman and it would have been unusual for a man in such an occupation to travel halfway across the country for a job. He brought his Devon born wife with him. He must have been a man of some ambition and ability because by the time of the 1891 census his occupation was listed as Waterworks Manager—based at the water tower on Higher Lane. The family lived close by.

The Diamonds probably attended the Congregational church (now the United Reformed).



Elizabeth, who was 14 when she was chosen as May Queen went on to become live in housemaid to the widow of a former minister at the church—Rev Ouston.



This view along Higher Lane from the tower of St Mary's toward the Baptist Church shows how relatively undeveloped the road still was at the turn of the century.

# 1898 May Queen — Margaret Hester White

Margaret White was born in Lymm in 1885. Her father was a Scot who moved to Salford where he worked as joiner. They moved back to Lymm where two of Margaret's three brothers followed in his footsteps.

Margaret, like so many young women at the time went on to become a dressmaker. By the time she was in her mid-twenties both parents had died and she was sharing a home with her brother who was a chauffeur.

The day seems by now to have settled into familiar pattern though this year the procession was reportedly 'more complete and imposing than at any year's previous festival'. The boys of the Indefatigable, and their band were booked again. They started their presentation with musical musketry (whatever that may be!) followed by a dumb-bell drill. Four of them danced a sailor's hornpipe.

And of course before that was the procession and the crowning, followed by the ever popular maypole dancing.

The evening included a fancy dress cycle competition, won by J.A. Ferris as 'New Woman'. It is likely that the teenage rider had taken advantage of his father's drapery business in the village to create a costume parodying the new look of the women who were increasingly seen on bicycles round the village and who had to adapt their usual voluminous skirts in favour of something more contained in order to be able to ride safely .

It is certain that cyclists will have arrived in their hundreds for May Queen , including a number of new women" suitably dressed. There was money to be made by locals who would offer cycle storage for the day for 2d



## 1899—May Queen, Elizabeth Leah

This unusual spelling was common in Lymm

Elizabeth was raised on Cherry Lane. Her father was a joiner.

Lymm struck it lucky on the day. Similar events in other villages had to be abandoned due to rain but Lymm was saved.

Crowds poured in by train, by bus, by wagonette as well as the very many cyclists—something of a craze at this time. There was no shortage of entertainment. Apart from the home-grown variety, including a very well trained troupe of Maypole Dancers the special attractions included Proc-

tors Gymnasts of Manchester and a fancy trick cyclist.

A popular feature every year was dancing to music provided by Lymm Church Band as well as Lymm and Oughttrington Silver Band.

It was reported that Mr Bradshaw the Altrincham photographer was also in attendance. We would love to find his record of the day.

In 1911 Elizabeth was still living at home with her family on Cherry Lane. Like her older sister Arabella she had taken up that most ladylike occupation of dressmaker.

## 1900—May Queen, Sarah Boond.

Boond— It is an unusual name but one that can be traced back to at least the 17th century in Lymm.

Sarah was just 12 years old when she was chosen as Lymm May Queen. She lived almost opposite the Lymm Primitive Methodist Church which had opened its new building just three years earlier.

Trenance is a grand house at the entrance to Henry St, facing what would than have been Ardern's photographer's and stationers. Sarah lived there as the daughter of the housekeeper— Harriet Boond.

The owner of Trenance was William Williamson, a surgeon who originated from Yorkshire. Sarah's father, a groom, was still alive but does not appear in the 1901 census.

Soon after her special day as Lymm May Queen Sarah became apprenticed as a dressmaker . She never married and was still pursuing that occupation at the outbreak of World War 2 when she was sharing a home with a lady school teacher on Rectory Lane.



# 1901—May Queen, Ada Johnson

May Queen, Ada Johnson's early life would seem extraordinary to us now. Her father James was a Lymm man by birth but was master of a working boat, *The Bath*. In Ada's early life the whole family lived on the boat: In 1891 they were all counted by the census taker living on board at the wharf in Rochdale. Ada was just 4 and her brother Fred aged 2. But what makes it truly remarkable was that also staying on board was the mate Charles Thomas with his wife and their two children, both under 2!

Life was becoming ever more difficult for boatmen at that time. Competition from the railways meant a decline in pay and living standards which led to many families having to live aboard in order to be able to make

ends meet. But living space was typically tiny and it hard to imagine four adults with four small children in such a confined area.

By the time Ada was chosen as May Queen the family had a more settled life with a cottage in Mill Row at the lower dam though father would frequently have been away working on the boat for days at a time.

Ada was blessed with sunshine for her big day. The local newspaper reported that young Ada "comported herself with dignity and grace" and the reporter felt that Lymm was becoming an important rival to the Knutsford event upon which Lymm was modelled.



Part of the row of cottages at the Lower Dam in Lymm ( still standing) that was home to Ada and her family while their father was away working on the canal boats.

# 1902—May Queen, Gertrude Rigby

The name might sound quite grand but Gertrude's life certainly wasn't. Although she was just fourteen years old when she was crowned May Queen Gertrude had already been working for at least a year, full time, as a fustian cutter.

By 1900 the trade was beginning to decline in the village but still employed hundreds. The working conditions may have improved a little from the "bad old days" of fifty years earlier when children sometimes worked through the night by candlelight to complete a batch of work but it remained a back-breaking, repetitive drudge.

The prospect of being led through the village in royal robes to be crowned as May Queen must have sustained Gertie for weeks as she worked at her cutter's frame on another endless procession, walking up and down, knife in hand, splitting threads to make velveteen or corduroy.

So it must have been a cruel disappointment to Gertie when the atrocious weather on the day made it all but impossible for the event to carry

on as normal.

The ground was soaked, the roads were thick with mud and the procession as a whole presented a "sorry spectacle" according to the local press. The crowning ceremony was reportedly "deprived of all effectiveness" while the participants presented a "bedraggled appearance".

Poor Gertie.

It was a particular shame as the President that year, Rev C. Ernest Watson, the Congregational minister, was said to have made special efforts to "*make it more successful than the fourteen which have preceded it*".

Among the 150 participants in the procession were four "giant" policemen and nursery rhyme characters as well as the usual display of patriotic characters celebrating royalty and Empire.

In spite of the weather, or perhaps because of it, hundreds of cyclists stayed into the evening to see the Cross illuminated before wending their way home.



The Congregational church on Brookfield Road —later the United Reformed did more than any other organisation to keep the Bands of Hope / May Queen Festival going through the early years.

# 1903 May Queen—Annie Miller

Annie was already 17 when she was chosen as May Queen in 1903. She was a working girl, a fustian cutter, and had been for some years already, though later in her twenties she had found employment in the other main occupation for young women at that time - domestic service - as a live in cook to a widow and her daughter who lived at "Highfield" just along the road.

Annie herself grew up on "The Rookery" later known more politely as Clay Terrace, off Booths Hill Road: now demolished. In Victorian England a "rookery" was a slang term for a slum. The terrace, along with Newfield and Moston Grove, had been built in the 1860s to cater for the exploding population, the vast majority of whom locally were employed in the fustian cutting trade. It was very basic, high-density housing and much of it was earmarked for "slum clearance" soon after the Second World War.

By 1903 the Congregationalists were the only church still supporting the Bands of Hope Festival and Annie may have received their nomination.



The entry to Clay Terrace is between the two corner shops



Looking down Clay Terrace off Booth's Hill Road not long before its demolition. Late 50s ? Early 60s?

# 1904 May Queen—Mary Bradbury

Mary Bradbury, like Annie the year before her, lived in the Newfield district of Lymm.

Long terraces were built in the 1860s and housed large families where it was quite common for the whole household to be employed as fustian cutters, either working at home or in the local workshops.

In 1901 Mary, named after her mother, was still a “scholar” aged 11 at the local school but her old sister May was already cutting. Mary’s father Walter has died a few years. He too had been a cutter. He left a wife and five children.

Mary’s mother was from Galway in Ireland. It was not uncommon for Irish country girls (and

boys) to seek their fortune in England. Walter and Mary senior seem to have met in Salford, so to them a move back to Lymm where Walter had been born may have seemed a blessed escape.

The day started promisingly and the May Queen was duly crowned but shortly afterwards the heavens opened and the afternoon programme had to be abandoned, though some local visitors returned in the evening for the customary music and dancing.

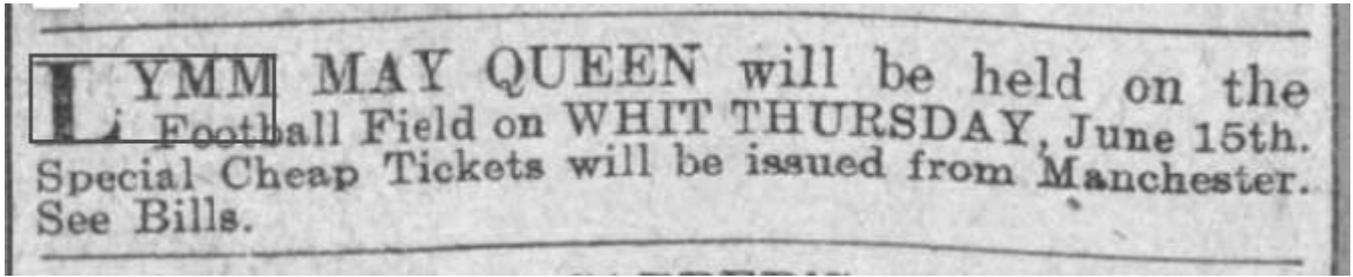
The weather certainly didn’t help the organisation’s already depleted coffers.

BELOW: Moston St in the foreground running toward the football pitch on Ridgway Grundy Park and at right-angles to Newfield Road

RIGHT: The houses stood for less than 100 years and were demolished as part of what was described at the time as “slum clearance”.



# 1905 May Queen— Alice White



The “Special Cheap Tickets” referred to above must have done the trick as the village was reportedly packed with visitors from “Liverpool, Manchester, Stockport and other neighbouring towns”.

The weather was fine and the May Queen, Alice White, dressed in cream cashmere with applique lace with a crimson robe edged with ermine, bowed graciously to her “subjects” as she passed along an extended route that took in Church Green, Brookfield, Booth’s Hill, Elm Tree Road and Eagle Brow. It eventually passed up Pepper St to the football field for the crowning ceremony and other festivities. The full procession was apparently an impressive sight with over 200 participants including the Lymm and Oughtrington Silver Band.

Alice was the daughter of a local policeman, a Yorkshire man by birth. She had been born in the home village of her mother, Kingsley nr Delamere, which had presumably been a previous posting for her father.

Neither was the main organiser a Lymm man. Charles Raper, who lived at the Grove, was one of that new breed of middle-class businessmen who found Lymm an attractive and convenient place to live. He was the District Manager for the Singer Sewing Machine Company.

Having previously lived in Cherry Lane, Alice’s family were in Henry St in 1911 and in another sign of the changing times Alice was employed as a telephone operator, quite possibly at the offices of the National Telephone company just round the corner on Eagle Brow.



Lymm & Oughtrington Silver Band

## 1906—No Event

The newspaper at the time explained the problem.

*“After some 14 years there is the probability of Lymm May Queen Festival not being held this coming Whit-week.... After some years the Lymm Church authorities withdrew and then St Peter’s Oughtrington followed by some of the non-conformist schools until for some years the Congregationalists alone have run the annual*

*show....It is hoped that should the Congregationalists decide not to carry on the festival, The Tradesmen’s Association will step in and keep going what is for Lymm a very great attraction to visitors.”*

Clearly they didn’t and so there was no event. When it did return in 1907 it was with the Tradesmen’s Association taking a more active role but relations with traders would continue to be a sensitive area for some years after.

## 1907 May Queen—Ethel Mullineaux

The 1907 May Queen is tantalisingly just out of shot as her horse-drawn carriage comes the round the corner into Elm Tree Road.

Ethel was not a Lymm girl by birth. Her father had been a policeman but the family now lived over the premises of the Union Bank in Heatley, where her father was the caretaker. (Yes there was a bank in Heatley!)

Just four years later Ethel was described as being a “schoolteacher”, at the age of just 18, possibly at the nearby Oughtrington School on Sandy Lane.

She was to marry Tom Elliott, son of a blacksmith, locksmith and bellhanger who lived on New Road. Tom became a draughtsman and went to be a very successful businessman with his own engineering business. His Rolls-Royce was a regular and notable sight in Lymm.



# 1908 May Queen—Ada Jones

After a difficult couple of years May Queen seems to have “bounced back” in 1908. Altogether there were 600 children in the procession which was considered to be the best in the twenty years since the event was launched.

May Queen, Ada Jones was Welsh by birth—Llanfairfechan on the North Coast but her mother Emma (Davies by birth) was a Lymm girl who appears to have left home for a job—almost certainly in domestic service. Having married and raised her young family there they all returned to Lymm to live on Higher Lane. Shortly after her day in the limelight young Ada was part of the new commuting generation, taking the train to Manchester to work as a shop assistant.

Not everyone was happy about the May Queen though. 1908 also saw the launch of Lymm Walking Day, harking back to the temperance aims of the original Bands of Hope Festival. (see following pages).



“Your carriage awaits”. In many ways this photograph sums up the romance of May Queen. A carriage drawn by four white (grey?) horses with two riders calls to collect the May Queen elect from a humble cottage on Higher Lane. It is just possible to make out mother, Emma in the doorway, also in her finery. Next door the curtains are pulled back for a better view.

The photographer has made a special trip with all his equipment and tripod to capture the moment.

# Lymm Walking Day 1908-1911

Walking Days are a North-West tradition. And the greatest of these was Warrington Walking Day which started as a counter to the apparent “vice and iniquity” of the races held at Newton (now Haydock Park) and which were attended by local parishioners.



Between 1832 and 1834, Walking Day became an occasion on which all the Warrington Sunday schools would go in procession to the Parish Church to hear a service and sermon, and afterwards retire for refreshments. However, By 1858, it had become an annual festival, a holiday for the young people of Warrington. There is no doubt that the original Bands of Hope Festival in Lymm was inspired in part by this tradition with “temperance” as a key message of the day.



However it was not many years after the Lymm event's founding that concern started to be expressed by the churches about the direction the May Queen was taking. This led to many of them pulling out altogether for a time. There is no written record of exactly how and when Lymm Walking Day was instituted but a 1909 newspaper referred to it as “the annual event” and we know it took place in 1908 as there are photographs. It was referred to as being run by the “Free Churches of Lymm” i.e. Baptists, Methodists and Congregational. If the photographs are anything to go by then the ladies of these churches were a driving force.



Top two pictures: Scenes from the first Walking Day 1908: emerging from Whitbarrow Road onto Brookfield and heading away from the village on Booths Hill Road.

Bottom Picture: Descending Penny Hill near St Mary's. Younger children rode on the back of horse drawn carts possibly due to the length of the route. We think this is 1910.

The event bore some resemblance to May Queen. There was a procession. Children were dressed up though not as specific characters. Small children even rode on a cart— probably a concession to the long processional route. There was maypole dancing and sports on what is now Ridgeway Grundy Park. But there was also hymn singing both at the outset and en route. A singing competition where the test piece was “Yield not to Temptation”

served to underline the message of the day.

We cannot say for sure when the last Lymm Walking Day was held but the last reference we have found in the newspapers and in photographs was 1911. So if it was a competitor to May Queen Day it was a short-lived one, though judging by the photographs it had been a popular event in its brief life.

RIGHT: Walking Day was not immune to the challenges that May Queen also faced -summer rain. Here they are marching along Booths Hill Road away from the village. The year was 1910 .

BELOW In the following year the Sunday Schools gathered at the Cross to sing a hymn before setting off on their procession. One boy is holding a “Come and join us” banner. Another holds up a number—as a meeting point for a specific Sunday School . Many participants are holding what were probably hymn sheets. It was a certainly a “best hat” day.



# 1909 May Queen—Emma Dixon

Research has so far failed to identify the mysterious Emma Dixon. There was a family of Dixons living on Moston St, fustian cutters inevitably, with a daughter Emma but she was born in 1890 whereas the newspaper described our Emma as being 14. The newspaper describes Emma as being the daughter of a local tradesman, not a term typically used to describe a fustian cutter. There was also a T.F.W. Dixon who was a steel merchant but with no record of a daughter Emma. Another Dixon family lived on Oldfield Road, but again no Emma!

Whoever she was it sounds as if the new Queen presided over a spectacular day. The newspapers reported there to be a barely credible 1,500 children in the procession. (The whole population of Lymm was only a little over 5,000.) Thousands of people descended on the football field for the festivities including a demonstration of the latest craze: roller-skating.

This success was in spite of what was seen as a disappointing lack of support from tradespeople. The previous year's event had only made £2 profit and there had been real concern about whether 1909 would happen at all.



Maypole dancing was all part of the annual tradition—it still is. Dancers were trained for many weeks and weaved intricate patterns. The maypole itself was mounted on impressive staging. (Exact year unknown)

# 1910 May Queen—Edith Wilkinson

King Edward VII had died less than two weeks before the 1910 May Queen Festival and he had not yet been buried. But this does not appear to have deterred the organisers of what, by now, is known as the Lymm May Queen and Rose Queen Festival. The organisers went ahead with their event on Whit Thursday May 19th. The event was advertised in newspapers as far afield as Crewe. There are some other interesting details in the bottom picture like the motor car disappearing up the hill under the flag. Bottom right two ladies, possibly local gentry, viewing the event from

their small carriage while a servant in white blouse and apron waits behind, not even looking at the procession. On the wall it is possible to make out the poster advertising the event

May Queen that year was Edith Wilkinson.

Her father Joseph Wilkinson was a cowman and the family had moved to Lymm from Tatton just before Edith was born. It must have been a huge event in the family when young Edith was chosen as May Queen.



This previously unidentified portrait in the Lymm Archive has been matched to a grainy newspaper picture. There is no doubt that it is Edith.

Can you see the May Queen poster on the wall in the picture to the left?



# 1911 No Event due to Coronation of George V

1910 looks to have been a busy and successful event but at the next AGM the treasurer reported that the event had lost £50, leaving just £16 in the kitty. Organisers had already been considering not holding an event in 1911 as it would precede “the real thing” - the coronation of George V by just three weeks. The prospect of trying to run it on a shoestring when the whole village would be preoccupied by the upcoming coronation led to a call for cancellation which was agreed round the table. Instead, interested parties, with experience of mounting festival events and special days channelled their efforts into making coronation day one to remember with buntings, flags, decorated windows like

the ones below, triumphal arches, processions, sports and teas for the children.

The planning of the day was under the chairmanship of Mr Oliver Smith, head of the elementary school who lived at Fox House on Higher Lane.

There may not have been a Lymm May Queen in 1911 but the year did see the start of a rival event: Statham Festival, run under the guiding hand of Cllr Fred Locker, landlord of the Star Inn. There was no May Queen and no crowning but dancing, teas and a procession with fancy dress were all featured at this new Whit Monday show.



Coronation celebrations: The shops are next to the Golden Fleece. The walkers are on Church Road, passing the fustian cutter's workshop and cottages.



# 1912 May Queen—Rachael Oddie

The event was restarted in 1912 after a break the previous year due to the coronation.

Rachael was the daughter of a Bury man, Richard Oddie who was the headmaster of the local school. He had married into a prominent local family. His wife Frances Ardern, also a teacher, was the half-sister of well known local historian, photographer and shopkeeper, Charles 'Pel' Ardern.

Poor Rachael was hit by the cursed weather. Just as the procession was due to set off, with the May Queen in an open carriage there was a peal of thunder and the heavens opened.

The rain was also a setback for organisers. They had cut their costs in order to try and improve the finances of the event but takings were badly hit by the weather.



ABOVE : May Queen and retinue, together with some of the "host of characters familiar from history and in nursery rhymes" as the local newspaper described them. Photograph via the Broadsmith family.



RIGHT: Rachel in a photograph for the local newspaper taken by her uncle, Pel Ardern.

BELOW: The procession. It could have been the Racefield with the canal in the background.



# 1913 May Queen—Gladys Hawthorn

The Hawthorn family, father, Joseph and mother, Mary plus Gladys and her younger brother had moved to Lymm from Manchester at least 10 years previously. They lived close to the new Charles Moore Salt Works in Heatley, on Carlton Rd in the shadow of the works chimney. There is no trace of the road now. The whole street eventually had to be demolished due to subsidence caused by the salt extraction. Joseph was an insurance clerk so it is likely that he took the train each day to

Altrincham, Warrington or Manchester for his work. The newspaper hinted that the event was still recovering and regaining its reputation.

*“The fact that the festival has not in the past been the success it deserved had the effect of enhancing that which attended yesterday’s”.*

Gladys’s day was blessed with brilliant sunshine. John Bull and Britannia made their traditional appearance along with a band of Gaelic pipers from Manchester Industrial School as seen below.



# 1914 May Queen—Dorothy Pearson



The newspaper that year painted an evocative picture of the scene.

From early morning householders could be seen putting up signs such as “TEAS” and “Cycles Stored Here” outside their houses. There were extra staff down at Lymm Railway Station and the police had also brought in reinforcements for the day to deal with the crowds as well as probably the inevitable drunks.

The old Cross was described as a “pyramid of cheering women and children” while Booth’s Hill, Church Green and Eagle Brow were lined with “a wall of humanity”!

Behind the scenes it was a very different story. On May 2nd a decision had been taken to abandon the event due to a lack of funds. But somehow or other this was reversed with planning only finally getting underway three weeks before the event resulting in much hurried rehearsal and preparations.

May Queen, Dorothy, who was a pupil at the Grammar School, lived with her parents Mr & Mrs John Pearson at Water Tower Cottages. She certainly had a day to remember. The event was also memorable for the winner of the “Guess the Weight” competition where the object under scrutiny was not a cake but a sheep that the winner got to take home.



*The Whitelegg family provided some of the main characters for the day including John Bull, Britannia and some of the train-bearers. In 2015 the family kindly donated their unique memento of the day which now hangs over the mantel-piece as part of our May Queen exhibit.*

Sadly the shadow of war hung over the event and it would be the last Lymm May Queen—though not the last May Queen in Lymm—for five years.

# 1915 May Queen—Neighbourhood Events

The initial thought must have been to cancel all celebrations whilst the war was in progress. How could it be right to be “celebrating” whilst the young men of Lymm were going through such an ordeal in the trenches? Many had only ever signed up at the Drill Hall to be Territorials and had never anticipated being thrown into the front-line.

By 1915 Lymm had two centres for Belgian refugees and there was a Red Cross hospital on Church Road that relied on local volunteers.

But there was also a school of thought that “life must go on” and children in particular should have fun days to look forward to even though the main Lymm May Queen event had been suspended. Many children had older brothers who were overseas, in action.

And so, wedged among the letters home from the trenches in the newspapers of 1915, we find reports of both Newfield, (Top Lane) and Rush Green May Queens.

Statham Festival too, which had started in 1911 continued throughout the war under the guiding hand of Fred Lockyer, landlord of the Star Inn.



Rush Green came first, on Whit Tuesday. Their May Queen, Lena Key of Yew Tree Cottages on Rush Green Road was just seven years old but was possibly chosen because all three of her brothers were fighting in the trenches.

On Whit Saturday it was the turn of Newfield, known to locals as Top Lane, (see picture above). The Event was arranged Mrs Jennings—a fustian cutter, and her daughter Alice who played the melodeon. Another daughter, Louie, was the May Queen. Their brother, Samuel, was fighting in France.

Lena Kay's three brothers returned safely but Samuel Jennings was killed in action in 1916.

# 1919 May Queen— Winifred Hewitt



The crowning and festivities took place on what is now Ridgway-Grundy Park

With the outbreak of War in 1914 May Queen had been allowed to lapse though there is a suggestion that a rocky financial position may also have contributed to the decision. The new Stat-ham Festival certainly continued through the war though they didn't start to crown their own May Queen until the 1920s. May Queen festivals also sprang up in Newfield and in Rush Green in 1915 –see previous pages. An impassioned letter to the local paper at the beginning of 1919 appealed to Lymm to “ *Let's have a good day in Lymm to show the boys at home and those that are coming that we have not forgotten the pleasurable parts of life*”. The letter was signed “ONE WHO WOULD HELP”.

Whatever prompted Lymm into action the event did get underway again in 1919 though it seems to have been a very last minute thing. A meeting

called just two months before the date to decide on whether to go ahead was poorly attended and just 12 days before the event there was a notice in the paper saying the event would be revived ... “details to follow!” The Queen was hurriedly chosen by the pupils at Lymm School.

Winifred Hewitt's father John had been a farm waggoner and in her early childhood she lived with her parents and two sisters at Tanyard cottage on Cherry Lane. (on the site of the tannery) By 1919 they had moved to Naylor's Cottages on Higher Lane where Winnie also attended the Baptist Sunday School.

A sign of the changing times: By 1919 Winnie's father's farming days were behind him and he was cycling over Warburton Bridge to work each day at the new Irlam Steel Works.



# 1920 May Queen— Lena Kay

Helena, that was her full name, is possibly the only girl to have been a May Queen twice! She had also been chosen at the age of just 7 to be May Queen for the short-lived Rush Green May Queen Festival in 1915.

The family lived, in her early childhood, at Dog Bridge in Oughtrington. The location gives a clue to her father's original occupation of canal boatman. Lena Kay's paternal grandmother was Mary Horsefield. It's a name that was very familiar on the canal at the time. The Horsefields, originally from Runcorn, owned a fleet of boats shipping coal from Manchester to Runcorn. At some point one branch of the family decided that Oughtrington was a more attractive proposition as a home than Runcorn and they even opened a small shop at Dog Bridge, catering for passing boatmen.

By 1909 Joseph and his wife Emily had seven children with Lena the youngest. Joseph must

have decided that the increasingly difficult life on the canal was no longer for him. Instead he took a job as a labourer at the recently opened Charles Moore Salt Works in Heatley. The family also moved to Yew Tree Cottages on Rush Green Road.

Lena was clearly a popular girl as she was chosen to be May Queen in a vote by her fellow pupils at Oughtrington School. The crowning and festivities were held, as in the previous year, on the field at the end of Maltmans Road that is today Ridgway-Grundy Park.

The crown-bearer was Arthur Leigh. As part of the ceremony Arthur would advance ten steps before pausing to kneel and bow. The Queen in return acknowledged the gesture with an inclination of the head. Serious stuff!

After the crowning, by Mrs Hinde, there was much jollity with music and dancing until dusk.



The May Queen and Rose Queen with their retinues on what is now Ridgway-Grundy Park. The houses in the background are on Maltmans Road.

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Alan Williams.