

Garland Day in the 21st Century

The 29th of May is Castleton Garland Day. If the 29th falls on a Sunday Garland Day moves to Saturday 28th.

The 29th of May is "Oak Apple Day" or "Royal Oak Day" as well as Castleton Garland Day. To a great extent our Garland Day is thought to commemorate Charles II escape from the Parliamentarians by hiding in an oak tree and eventually, the restoration of the Monarchy in 1660.

The Castleton Garland Day Maypole ribbons are coloured red, white and blue, as are the ribbons on the dancing Girl's sticks. The barrel supporting the Maypole is wrapped around with the Union Jack and the pinnacles on St Edmund's Church tower are decorated with oak leaves and branches. Mute evidence of much Royalist support in the village.

Not so mute are the activities of some of the local boys!, if you are not wearing your oak leaves you are likely to be "nettled". Other boys are there to give you a sprig of oak leaves in return for a "donation" into the collecting box!

For longer than I can remember the Garland was made at the "Host Pub" from where the Procession starts. Being the "Host Pub" changes each year so that every Public House in the village in its turn has the honour of being the "Host Pub" and having the Garland made on their premises. If the "Host Pub" had a large room the Garland Dance was held there. The dance is now discontinued; all the hotels with a large function room have had them converted into dining rooms, bedrooms, etcetera.

In days gone by there were many more Public Houses than the six we have now. Time has passed and eventually the six remaining pubs have all been renovated and brought up to modern standards leaving nowhere for the Garland to be made under cover.

Starting about 1989 the Garland was made in the large barn at the west end of Mill Lane. I am told only a limited number of people find this barn and are able to watch the Garland being made,

In 2006 the making of the Garland moved to the open-sided glass shelters at the Castleton Centre where it could be seen being made by many more people, visitors and locals alike, in fact it could be seen by everyone arriving in Castleton by car or coach and using the village car park. Also it was a prime site for the "donation bucket".

After a trial period of three years it was found that the flowers and greenery wilted very quickly under the glass roof of the shelter so the making of the Garland moved back to Mill Bridge Barn,

The Garland is a large bell shaped frame of wood and metal. Wide leather straps are attached to the inside of the frame, they rest on the shoulders of the Garland King. Mounted and with the Garland in place he carries it around the village with only his legs visible.

When fully decorated and with the "queen" on top, the Garland weighs between 50 and 60 pounds. (23 to 27 kg.) The variation in weight is due to the amount of woody branches used rather than just flowers and leaves. An early or late spring decides what greenery and flowers are available to the Garland makers.

The complete Garland is made in two parts, a large bell shaped frame and a much smaller part that fits on top of the large frame. Currently this small part is a decorated hand posser with flowers tied onto it. This small part is always referred to as "the queen".

The large frame is covered with flowers and greenery. The posser is covered with flowers. When both parts are fully decorated the "queen" is fitted onto the top of the large frame to complete the Garland.

Now that the Garland is made at Mill Bridge Barn and the Procession still starts from the "Host Pub" two men have to carry the Garland on a pole to the "Host Pub" where it awaits the arrival of the King after the King and Consort have ridden the "Doing the Bounds" route.

At about 5-30 pm. the King and Consort leave Mill Bridge Barn to start their ride called "Doing the Bounds". After "Doing the Bounds" the King and Consort arrive at the "Host Pub" in time to have the Garland put onto the King and to start the Procession at about 6-30 pm.

This is the current "Doing the Bounds" route.

From Mill Lane up Back Street to Doctors Corner, turning left onto How Lane, and then turning right into Weaving Avenue, around Pevenil Close and onto Pevenil Road. By taking the short cut come onto Back Street again, up Back Street to pass along the east side of the Market Place to Bar Gate, Pindale Road and Townhead. From here return to the Market Place passing through it on the south side, then down The Stones to Waterside, over Goosehill Bridge, up Goosehill and turning around at Lunnons Back. Return down Goosehill and turn left into and cross over the Joule Yard. (Peak Cavern car-park) At the Buxton Road turn left and in about 150 yards turn around near the last house and return to the Host Pub via Cross Street.

At the "Host Pub" the Garland is put onto the King's broad shoulders, the wide leather straps taking the weight.

When the King has the Garland in place he and his Consort still mounted and dressed in their colourful Stewart Costumes make ready to move off. Following the King and Consort is the Castleton Silver Band; they play the special Garland Tune for the Garland Girls to dance to. The dancing Girls complete the Procession.

Scouts (if available) and young men with staves form a ring around the Girls who need a clear space to dance in. It is not an easy job trying to keep the pressing throng of watching people at bay

To be a Garland Girl she must go to Castleton Primary School or live in the Parish of Castleton. All the Girls wear pretty white dresses with several posies of flowers fastened on; they also have head bands with flowers woven into them.

All the girls carry Garland Sticks thought to be miniature Maypoles. The sticks are held upright when the girls are dancing. The Garland Stick is a short stick about a foot (30cm) long covered with red, white and blue ribbon. Fastened to the top of the stick are several red, white and blue ribbons about the same length as the stick.

The Procession leaves the "Host Pub" at about 6-30 pm and without stopping goes east along How Lane to Spital Bridge. At Spital Bridge the Procession turns around. Keeping the Procession in the same order they start the return journey. The Garland processional route is; back along How Lane to Back Street, Cross Street and Castle Street. The Procession halts at several places on the return journey ending in the Market Place for Maypole dancing.

Hemmed in by the crowds the Procession makes its way from Spital Bridge to the Cheshire Cheese always the first Pub or stop on the Garland route through the village.

At each stop the Band plays the Garland Tune and the Girls perform the Chain Dance. There is one Garland Tune and two Garland Dances, both are performed on the way from the Cheshire Cheese to all the other Pubs, the last one is the George.

When the dance is finished it is traditional for the landlord of the Pub to provide refreshment for the participants, usually the King, Consort and the bridle holders, the Band, Dancing Girls and the stave carriers.

The same routine takes place at all the Pubs. The only stop without refreshments is at the Doctors Corner. For many years Peveril House was the residence and surgery of Dr. Baillie our much loved G.P. When he became ill the Procession stopped and performed for him. Dr. Baillie is long gone but the tradition still continues. I wonder how long it will be before this stop is discontinued?

After dancing outside the Cheshire Cheese, the Peaks Inn, on the Doctors Corner, the Nags Head, the Bulls Head and the Castle the Procession reaches the last Pub, the George,

While the dancing takes place outside the George the King moves over to the entrance to St. Edmund's churchyard. Here the "queen" is removed from the top of the Garland. The "queen" now accompanies the Garland to the bottom of the Church tower. In earlier years the "queen" was described as being pagan and not allowed into the churchyard.

Relieved of the "queen" the King and Consort ride to the foot of the church tower where a waiting rope is fastened to the top of the Garland so it can be lifted from the tired and aching shoulders of the King.

The Garland is hauled to the top of St. Edmund's Church tower where it is mounted on the centre pinnacle on the south side and where it remains until withered. (about a week)

When the Garland has been hoisted up the church tower, The King and Consort (accompanied by the carried "queen") ride into the Market Place to watch the older Girls do Maypole Dancing. There are six Maypole Dances and the Band will play six tunes, a different tune for each dance.

The crowds gather in the Market Place leaving a circular space where the Girls will do Maypole dancing. The Maypole is sited under the copper beech tree in front of Castleton Hall. After each dance the people watching used to throw coins for the Girls to pick up. This is now very much frowned upon because of cuts that might be inflicted on the children if hit by a coin. A pity really, the children loved scrambling for the coins and it made a welcome change from the dancing. Also it was a good money earner for the Garland Fund.

When the Maypole dancing has been completed the Girls move to the War Memorial forming up into two lines along the short route to it. The King and Consort also move the short distance to the War Memorial.

For the next few minutes the occasion becomes quite solemn.

The Hymn, Abide with Me is sung. During the second verse the King dismounts and presents the "queen" to the War Memorial. After the Hymn a trumpeter plays Reveille. After Reveille the National Anthem is sung.

This completes the solemn interlude and jollity returns, the procession reforms and leaves the Market Place. The departing dance is called the "Criss Cross". In the past the young Garland Girls were joined by anyone who had been a Garland Girl in

previous years. Now anyone can join in this dance, somewhat annoying to any Garland Girls who were taught to do this dance properly. As it is now, so many people join in the "Criss Cross" there isn't enough room to perform the steps correctly.

A diminishing number of people follow the Procession back to Mill Lane Barn where Castleton Garland Day ends where it began.

But not the celebrations in the pubs!, that goes on far into the night. The consequences of which are suffered by many throughout the following day.

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