

## **Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee 1897**

### **Excerpts from Helmsley Parish Magazines May 1897, Charles Norris Gray (Vicar of Helmsley 1870 – 1913)**

Helmsley seems to be settling down very quietly as regards any arrangements for the Jubilee rejoicings; indeed we hear of no preparations. Possibly, as everyone is in such a state of grumble over the rates, it is felt there is no more blood to be drawn from those well nigh bled to death for any improvements whatever ; and the rejoicings will degenerate into a tea and some races, and a few mugs or medals given to the children. This seems a pity, as the papers are full of the plans and schemes to be carried out in all sorts of towns and villages, great and small, for a real and lasting commemoration of the great and good Queen's reign.

Nothing commemorative was done for the Jubilee proper in the way of permanent memorial; the Diamond Jubilee should hardly be passed over in the same way. There are many schemes which might be carried out which would be of great advantage and benefit to the town. The Town Hall is of course one of these, but it is so large a scheme that we fear it is at present beyond the reach of the ordinary inhabitants, as the expenditure will, we suppose, run into thousands.

A lesser scheme that has been a good deal talked about is the providing a public swimming bath at the Mills cut. This would be extremely popular amongst all the younger portion of the population, male and female, and no more healthy or life-giving exercise could be found than that of bathing and swimming ; we believe that a good swimming bath, say 40 feet long by 15 feet wide, with glass roof, could be easily provided for two hundred pounds, and that for another £150 a small cottage for the keeper, with boiler for taking the chill off the water in winter, so that the baths could be used all the year round, could be provided, the whole scheme complete for £350, or the covered bath only for £200. If some of our moneyed men would come out handsomely the scheme could be made to go, and would be a lasting benefit to the town, and a good memorial of the benefits of our Queen's reign.

### **The Historical Fete performed at Helmsley Castle An introduction from Helmsley Parish Magazines August 1897, Charles Norris Gray**

A grand Fete will be held, by kind permission of Lord Feversham, on the Castle Hill on two days, Tuesday August 31st, and Wednesday September 1st. Early in the afternoon of each day some historical scenes from the ancient history of Helmsley will be represented in the Court Yard of the old Castle. There will be several scenes.

The first will be a hunting scene, with songs and games and dances, and the departure of the hunters. The next will be the sad death of young Walter Espec, thrown from his horse. Then will follow the Battle of the Standard, where Walter Espec leads forth his men to victory against the Scots, the vows on the battlefield to conquer or die, the wonderful standard, and the joyous return to Helmsley of the victorious army. This will take up three scenes. Then Walter Espec joins his own Abbey of Rievaulx, which with Kirkham and Warden, in Bedfordshire he had founded, is solemnly received by Abbot Aelred, and after two years dies there.

Then there will be a final grand procession of gods and goddesses of the sea, and war, and trade, and agriculture, preceding Britannia, all in triumphal cars. After the procession all will group and sing some patriotic songs. When these scenes have been acted there will be other Entertainments, a Bazaar, and later on dancing, and on the second night fireworks.

The North Eastern Railway has kindly arranged to run special trains from Leeds, York, and intermediate stations on the first day, and from Scarborough, Whitby, and other stations on the second day. There will be late trains also taking visitors back to Gilling and Pickering on both nights. Lord Feversham has kindly granted leave to all holders of Fete tickets to enter Duncombe Park on those days without further charge.

The scenes will all be acted by the children dressed in the costumes of the 12th Century. There are special songs for the occasion, kindly put to taking music by Mr. Dugard, Mus. Bac., as well as some old well-known English melodies. These scenes in the old Courtyard of the Castle will be very appropriate, and form a very pretty as well as interesting sight. There will be also, through the kindness of friends, some very lovely dresses. The Helmsley Band will play on days, accompanying the songs and assisting in the dancing. There will be a tea and refreshment tent, and a bazaar tent, and we hope that with this very attractive programme all in Helmsley will do their best to make it a success by inviting their friends from a distance to come over for the occasion, and also making it well known amongst friends in neighbouring villages and towns.

### **Helmsley Parish Magazines October 1897**

The children certainly did their parts on the two days extremely well, better together and with more go than ever before in the practices. Ernest Williams, who took Espec's part, Florence Cossins (Lady Adeline), Stephen Kirby (young Walter), Fred Atkinson (The Bishop of Orkney and Abbot Aelred), as well as the two fools, the fat porter, the two barons, and the messengers, all did their parts exceedingly well; and the drill of the soldiers, the singing, and the grouping of the girls were distinctly good.

This entailed, of course, an *enormous* amount of previous drill. Mr Slater especially was most indefatigable with the boys; Miss Spencer laboured with the girls; and Mr

Dugard was most kind and patient in the singing drills; whilst to Miss Taylor, of Kidderminster, is largely due the immense improvement in the elocution of the individuals who had to speak. The dresses were copied from drawings of the period, kindly obtained by Mr Temple Moore, from the South Kensington Museum; and under the great artistic taste of Miss Dennis, the numbers of magnificent dresses sent by friends and kind supporters from all over the Country, were worked up into an exceedingly fine show by a most diligent band of workers.

The concluding scene, when the whole body of children appeared in a great procession was very fine, all the infants and babies appear as gods and nymphs and fairies, trumpeters, heralds, soldiers and sailors. The first car drawn by sailors, and preceded by heralds and trumpeters, and decorated with seaweed, bore a Sea Nymph (Kitty Baldwin) dressed in blue, followed by a group of children who had been acting in the historical scenes; then came the Goddess of Trade in golden yellow (Mabel Strickland) on her car, drawn by tradesmen in aprons and caps, with heralds and followers; then came Britannia (Clariss Waines) crowned and holding the sceptre, with the British flag flying; then came Ceres, the Goddess of Agriculture (Amelia Johnson) drawn by reapers, and decked with corn; and finally, Mars, the God of war (Oswald Frank) in golden armour, drawn by soldiers. These more than one hundred and seventy children grouped in one great semi-circle, made up of five smaller semi-circles round each car, sang " The British Grenadiers", " Hearts of Oak", " Red, White, and Blue", "Rule Britannia", and " God save the Queen", marshalled by Miss Bennett, and under the conducting rod of Mr Dugard all went bravely; and so the show ended.

The Fete had been well advertised, the clergy of many parishes had been kind in noting it in their Magazines and posters and handbills had been well distributed. The N.T.R. kindly ran trips from Leeds and York, Scarborough and Whitby, Stockton and Middlesbrough, including many other places, as well as allowing all within sixty miles to come for a fare and a quarter. The *Yorkshire Post* had also helped by inserting a very kind and favourable notice of three-quarters of a column the day before the Fete. The result was that on the first day something short of a thousand visitors were present, and on the second something short of two thousand.

The first day was a stormy morning, but it cleared and dried, and there was a beautifully bright afternoon, so that when the play began, at a quarter to four, though the ground was damp, it was sunshiny and warm.

On the second day, though fair in the morning, it began to rain soon after four, and eventually became a downpour. The greatest compliment to the performance was the immense crowd staying on in the rain those two hours to see the play through. It was most unfortunate, for many of the visitors got drenched through and through; the tent was full, and as the downpour went on that began more or less to leak. The Low Schools were thrown open, and Miss Spencer kindly lighted fires, and some got up a dance there. Others filled the private houses and hotels to overflowing, and did what

they could to get dry and get refreshment. It was most unfortunate, and we were very sorry for them. It, of course, injured our tea committee's proceeds very considerably, as people rushed off to find houses to dry their clothes. The Bazaar too, over which Miss Dawson presided, of course suffered, very little being sold. It was a sort of "keep skins dry who can." Those who had the pleasant business of packing up the eatables, crockery, etc., and the Bazaar things, had no pleasant job, and many of the lady workers must have got drenched; whilst Mr. Beecroft, Dr. Collins, and Mr. Archie Atkinson, and others, who dragged the rullies, laden with goods, from the tent to the refuge of the Castle cellars, through what was practically now a marsh deep in water, had a sort of amphibious life for a couple of hours.

So the evening which was intended for a merry dance in the Castle yard by torchlight, with refreshments and Sale of Work, winding up with fireworks, thus ended in a *fiasco*.

Where so many, some three hundred or more friends and parishioners helped in all sorts of ways, it is impossible and would be invidious to single out any individuals for special thanks. We should have to begin with Lord Feversham who kindly lent us the grounds and opened the Park and Home Terrace free to the visitors. We should have to thank Mr Bennett, for his constant practical advice and supervision of the arrangements; the teachers and drillers; the kind givers of the splendid dresses; the armourers; the sandal-makers and costumiers; and the large band of dressmakers, led by those daily attendants, Mrs Cussins, Mrs W. Atkinson, and Mrs Fred Jones; the food givers and the caterers, with a train of bakers and confectioners, bread and cake makers, and workers and cleaners of all sorts, with an army of waiters under Miss Goldsbrough, with carvers, refreshment bar keepers; and then the Bazaar department under Miss Dawson, all the stewards of the ground, the tent erectors, ticket sellers, money changers, the police and others; we could not mention all, but we here most heartily thank them all. And above all we have to thank everyone for the heartiness and goodwill with which they worked. Never has a big thing been got up or gone so smoothly in Helmsley; not a single jar; not a cross word or look, all as bright and merry as a summer's day. We thank all for their kind help and the pleasant way in which it was given.

But, say our readers, you have left out the most important part of the whole tale. What did it all make? How much did you clear? Well we really don't know. The expenses were heavy, and we have been unable, with a crowd of arrears, to get things balanced yet. We hope to be able to give this in our next issue. And now we must conclude; only adding that there are already loud calls from many quarters for a repetition of the play next Whitsuntide, if it could be managed. Would everyone, we wonder, help again? The Vicarage is tumbling down, and must be rebuilt; would all work to try and raise some funds for this purpose by a Whitsuntide performance, if it could be managed?