

E. D. S.
SCOTT
XXV



TERRY REES LOOKS AT A VICTORIAN MAGAZINE

At one shilling a copy plus tax, the Illustrated London News of 1850 was clearly out of the reach of large numbers of people. Instead, it found its way into the parlours of the well-to-do and onto the desks of the mighty, for whom it was both a respected and influential journal. Once in a while, perhaps twice a year, the editor would find space to illustrate traditional and seasonal folk customs for the amusement of his readers. A certain amount of stress was laid upon the quaintness of these survivals, and this in turn required a certain amount of descriptive matter. Over the years, many interesting accounts of song, procession and dance have thus been included in the pages of this journal, and a modern reader with time and patience can have a deal of quiet fun looking for them.

But to return to 1850; on May 25th of that year, almost a whole page was devoted to the Lichfield Greenhill Bower procession. Some students of the Lichfield tradition will be familiar with this article. For those who are not, it is reprinted here, complete.

Charter of Incorporation of the City, which had its first establishment in the reign of King Edward the Second, in the year 1387, so that the festival cannot be less than 500 years old! In the olden times, processions were made by the public officers of the city, and the dozers (constables) of each ward bore tutelary saints, for which are now substituted posies, or emblems of their trade.

The origin of this mixture of a religious and military custom, which is very ancient in this city, has been variously explained. It is most probable that the Campius Martius gave rise to this practice, which was an annual assembly of the people upon May day, when they confederated together to defend the kingdom against all foreigners and enemies, as mentioned in the laws of Edward the Confessor. Until within the last thirty years, the procession was a great feature of the day; but since then, and up to the last three or four years, the "Bower" had not maintained its celebrity, but increased vigour, and the entire support of the civic authorities and principal inhabitants, brought it into new life, and this year was entirely successful.

Lichfield "Greenhill Bower"

This very ancient festival was celebrated on Whit-Monday, at Lichfield, with more than its usual ceremonies. The origin of it was a "Court of Array or View of Men and Arms," in existence long anterior to the

At an early hour in the morning the bells of the different churches were ringing, and the streets were decorated with triumphal arches, and the roofs of the houses gaily decked with laurels and flags. The railway trains from Nottingham, Leicester, Derby, Birmingham, Dudley, Walsall, the Potteries, and all parts upon the London and North-Western line, deposited their myriads of people at the Lichfield stations; and there could not have been less than 20,000 persons conveyed into the city by these and other conveyances.

The procession, at eleven o'clock, made its appearance through the great gateway of the handsome Guildhall,

amid the firing of the bells from the adjoining belfry of St. Mary's Church. This proceeded in the following order:—

Constables with Halbards

Tabor and Pipe, decorated with Ribbons

Tom Fool and Maid Marian

Morris Dancers dancing Sarabands, clashing their Staves

Two Men with Banners

Herald on Horseback, in full Suite

The City Arms

Esquire on Horseback, in full Suite

Full Band of Music

Police

Men with Banners

Wombwell's Brass Band

A KNIGHT OF LICHFIELD

Tem. Richard III, in Bataille arae, bearinge on hys Banderolle ye Cross of Sainte George; hys hors rich with Trappings

The High Constables

Chief Superintendent of Police

The High Sheriff

City Police

Gaoler and Sheriff's Officer

City Crier

Sergeants-at-Mace

THE WORSHIPFUL THE MAYOR

The Magistrates

The Town Clerk

Citizens and Bower Committee

Men with Banners

Police, etc., etc.

Up Bore-street, St John-street, Bird-street, Market-street, St Mary's-square (round Johnson's house and statue), Tamworth-street, on to the Greenhill, where, according to custom, a good old English fare was partaken of in the gaily ornamented "Bower." The healths of the Mayor, R. Green, Esq., and the "Knyghte," having been drunk, the Mayor (John P. Dyott, jun., Esq.) toasted the inauguration of the festival, and gave "Success to trade and the supporters of this ancient Bower." The authorities then returned with the procession to the Guildhall. The opening ceremonies having been duly performed, and the "Court of Array" proclaimed, Wombwell's menagerie, Holloway's and Douglas', and many other shows now besought the holiday and pleasure seekers, and the life and bustle of the Bower set in.



The Committee and the posies, with bands of music, perambulated the city all day long, calling at the houses of the principal citizens to invite them to the Bower, and taste their Staffordshire ale and old-fashioned dry port wine.

The magnificent Gothic Cathedral, which had been kindly ordered by the Dean to be set open all day, was a great attraction to thousands of enthusiastic admirers; while the beautiful Stowe Valley and the far-famed Borrow Cop had an abundance of admirers. The weather was, on the whole, extremely favourable, and all classes co-operated in the enjoyment of this old and valued festival, affording an amusement to the people of a good, time-honoured, and purely English character.

If the printed order of procession disagrees with the illustrations, this is because the artist has employed the age-old device of combining several different episodes together in one picture. But he has at least given us some detail of the dancers' costumes, and as far as we can tell, this appears to be in agreement with two nineteenth century descriptions which have come down to us

"... dancers, who appear in hair shirts with ribbands of various colours tied round their arms, and flung across their shoulders."

(Harwood 1806. History of Lichfield).

"... they wore clean white shirts with ends of coloured ribbon sewn all over them, straw hats with similar ribbons, ordinary trousers and boots."

(Ordish Papers, 1891).

The "ribbands... flung across their shoulders" look suspiciously like sashes, but where, oh where, are their bells? And what are those garlanded 'houses' carried on poles in the smaller of the illustrations? TERRY REES