

THE BROAD STREET PLEASURE FAIR

by

THE WORKING PARTY.

'The night before Fair day I was allowed to stay up and watch from the bedroom window as the fair people arrived. Right on the stroke of midnight we heard the clatter of their horses' hooves and the



rumble of the wheels as they chased up from the Weir to bag the best place'. 'When we got married all our drinking glasses had been won at the Fair; good quality too! There was a boxing booth at the bottom of Broad Street, the galloping horses at the top and, in the middle, about six swing boats for the chaps to give their girls a ride. There were always couples waiting.' 'Brandysnaps! that's what I remember about the Fair. Never at any other time. Just wait till Fair day comes round again and we'll get brandysnaps'. 'Dreadful to think that Mrs. Bcnham was thrown off the roundabout and killed! That was fifty years ago, mind!' 'Squirters were a penny each; you could use them again and again by filling them at the horse trough at the top of Broad Street'. 'On a still night you could hear the steam organ on

Bartlett's roundabout from a mile away - proper music, none of that pop stuff. 'There was a lovely view of the Fair from the top of the Wall of Death'. 'Sometimes you got seven pennies change for sixpence!'

Such are the memories of the Fair - but today! 'Nasty cheap-jack prizes'. 'Maybe it's alright for children but the prices!' 'Can't hear the tellv for all that row; whv do we have to have it?'

Why? This paper goes some way to explain about the Fair and its people in the hopes that this year Alresford will view their Pleasure Fair in a different light. In 1573, Robert Horne, Bishop of Winchester, granted the tolls of the Fairs and Markets in New Alresford to the Bailiff and Burgesses of the town, who appointed a hayward to collect the dues.

The earliest entry on the subject in the Bailiff's minute book is dated 14 February 1613. There were weekly markets on Thursdays and four sheep fairs; on Old Midsummer day, on a Thursday in July and November and on Holy Thursday. In addition, there was one Great Market which was originally to be held on the Thursday after Michaelmas Day but was changed by Act of Parliament in 1752 to the first Thursday after the 11th of October which is the occasion of our Pleasure Fair today.

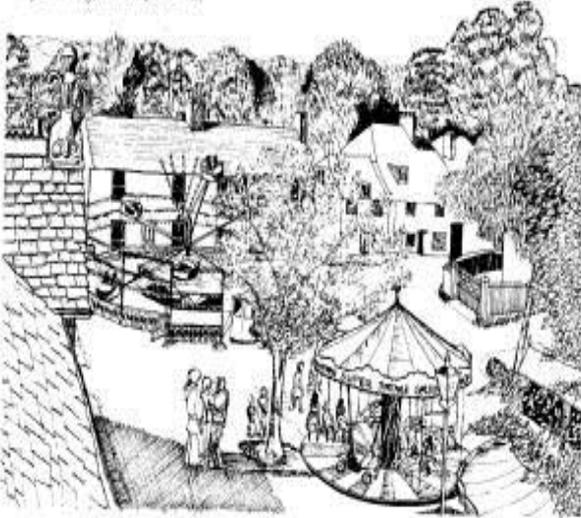
The Great Market was the statute fair for hiring servants in husbandry and many of these, with their pledge money in their pockets, were ripe for a bit of fun which the Broad Street Pleasure Fair offered. There were swing boats, gingerbread and toy stalls and fat women and two-headed calves. For a period there was also boating on the Pond and a rural dance at the Nythe.

So our Fair has 400 years of tradition behind it. Even the fact of a general election happening on the same day didn't stop Alresford having its Fair. When the Bailiff and Burgesses were replaced by the Town Trustees in 1888, the latter farmed out the handling of the Fair to Messrs Stubbs and Baker at a yearly rent of £80 a year (later reduced to £50) but the Second World War killed the profitability of the business which dropped from a profit of £61 in 1938 to a loss of over £8 in 1942.

The truth of it was that only professional fair people could make good business out of the Fair; there was no room for a middleman. Alresford has been lucky that the same family, the Walls, have been intimately connected with the Fair since 1907. The Showmen's Guild has allotted to this family of travelling showmen priority at the fairs of Haslemere, Alton, Pctersfield and Chichester. In the days of horse transport and traction engines, Walls couldn't always manage to get all their gear from Alresford to Chichester in a single day and so had to sub-contract part of the fair. This explains why old folk remember Bartlett's name. In 1946, when the Town Trustees applied to the Showmen's Guild direct for fair organizers, they were told that either they had the Wall family or nobody!

The Walls have tried experiments with various types of entertainment. For a time the Boxing Booth was replaced by a small circus. That was followed by motor cyclists on the Wall of Death. There was inadequate space for Dodgem cars and so we had Chairoplancs until finally the Octopus found its home here and has been the entertainment at the bottom end of the Fair for many years. In 1977, the Walls brought the Great Wheel as well - much to the children's delight.

Alresford Fair - 1977



At noon on the day before the Fair, Broad Street is 'poled out' by Mr. Wall to those whom he has engaged as Stall holders for the year. In the dim past there were fights to secure the 'most favoured ground' but the grip of Mr. Wall is strong and many of the stall holders are traditional figures at Alresford. In 1977, the well known figure of Mr. Davies was missing but his pitch will be reserved for him in future years.

A typical stall holder is Mr. Montague Hammond, the owner of the Octopus. He was born in 1907 in a fair caravan, which was pulled by piebald horses. With his four brothers he travelled the fairs concentrating on Rifle ranges. Hoop-la and children's roundabouts. Now his youngest son, Eddie, runs a coconut shy. Mrs.

Hammond keeps home for the family in her neat caravan. She insists that fair people are good living people. If roughs come around, the fair folk band together and see them off. Although they managed to keep the fair going during the 14/18 War, it was not possible throughout the 39/45 War while Mr. Hammond was with the Royal Engineers. However each Fair day, Mrs. Hammond came to Alresford and erected poles outside the Horse and Groom to keep the pitch for more peaceful years.

Thus the Broad Street Fair has a great and long history. It has respectable people to run it who have the interest of our entertainment - or that of our children and grand-children - at heart. Surely we can ignore the telly for one night a year and go out into the noise and bustle and colour to enjoy 'all the fun of the fair' amongst our friends, who stand on both sides of the stalls! What is more we can enjoy the annual marvel of walking down Broad Street on the morning after the Fair and finding that not a trace of it remains - like something from a children's fairy tale, it has vanished in the night.

This paper started with childhood memories. What do today's children say? 'We love the thought that the fair is coming; we want more things to ride on; we'd like better prizes even if they are harder to win and - if there are really proper fair brandy snaps, could we have those as well, please!'