

## Garlands Day a History

Speculative Thoughts on Castleton's Ancient and Garland Day

*If you are not familiar with Garland day please first read "Castleton Garland Day in the 21st Century"*

Think with an open mind about the progression of this intriguing story as I have set it down and together with what we know about Garland Day it is just within the bounds of probability that our Garland Day originated a very long time ago.

Nobody knows when the celebration that we call Castleton Garland Day actually started but from what evidence we have it is quite clear it is a very ancient ceremony and that it has undergone many changes. Here are some of the changes we know about.

Word of mouth says in earlier times the whole ceremony was done by men and the Dancers were boys, not girls. It is possible the ceremony was a form of Morris Dancing.

The Consort was a man dressed as a woman. This changed in 1957. The Consort is now a female.

Currently the King and Consort are elected by the Garland Committee every four years, but not both in the same year.

Previously, once appointed, the King and the Consort could serve for as long as they wished.

The Garland is no longer made at the host Pub.

Money cannot be thrown for the Maypole dancers to collect.

Until recently only the large part of the Garland was allowed onto the Consecrated ground of the Churchyard to be hauled up the church tower and mounted on a pinnacle.

Until 2009 the finial that fits on top of the Garland and is known as the "queen" has always been removed outside the churchyard. Some local Christians still consider it to be pagan and suggest it should be removed before the King and Consort ride to the base of the church tower. The "queen" isn't worshiped as a pagan goddess so I don't see any problem of it coming into the churchyard.

Several years ago the Vicar of Castleton threw the Garland off the Church tower because he said the whole lot was pagan.

Another interesting thought; in my lifetime the church has never benefited from the collections taken around the village on Garland Day, nor has a share of the proceeds ever been offered to the church by the Garland Committee.

There is no record of when the Church allowed the Garland to be exhibited on the church tower. The most likely time would be around 1660 at the restoration of the Monarchy when probably branches of oak leaves decorated the pinnacles on the church tower as they do now.

The ceremony at the War Memorial can only have started after the War Memorial was made. It was created within the Market Place sometime after 1919. There is photographic evidence dated 1864 showing the Market Place devoid of anything. The first thing to appear in it was Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee Memorial Tree, followed soon after by the Memorial Seat circling the tree.

The 1864 photo also shows the row of cottages in Castle Street that backed onto the churchyard. The photo shows quite a different entrance into the churchyard, the wall that now makes it easy for someone to stand on to remove the "queen" isn't there.

Nobody really knows why the "queen" is the only part of the Garland said to be pagan. We should remember that most of England's ancient ceremonies are steeped in tradition and started long before Christianity came upon the scene. Nearly all ancient celebrations were pagan, at the appropriate time many were eventually converted to Christianity. A surprising number of Great Britain's ancient ceremonies are still pagan.

There are several ways that ancient traditions, fertility rites, ceremonies and legends have been handed down. The most common ones are; by word of mouth, by example, by taking part in them and similar to our own Garland celebrations, the older people teaching the younger ones.

Very often in ancient times the ceremonial information was a closely guarded secret kept thus by the elders of the village or tribe. This retained power within the hierarchy of the tribe.

There is a very small bit of fragmentary evidence suggesting some form of ancient fertility rites took place at what is now the Russet Well in what is now Castleton. This was the discovery of a carved stone head very near to the Russet Well.

Over 3000 years ago a tribe of Brigantes described as a "splinter group" came from Northumbria to live on Mam Tor. Within double earthworks they enclosed around 16.5 acres of land right on the top of Mam Tor. Here they built their village and started some form of community life that lasted for around 1000 years.

A carved stone head that turned out to be their goddess or "queen" was discovered in the early 1970's very near to the Russet Well. It is now displayed in the Castleton Centre.

The discovery of the head caused a great deal of excitement locally and in archaeological circles, it provided a strong link with Mam Tor and is the best Mam Tor encampment artefact unearthed.

After the discovery of this carved stone head a considerable amount of research to establish the authenticity of the head was done by Miss Greatly, an archaeologist from Manchester University. It was Miss Greatly who recognised the stone head for what it actually was, a carved stone head of a Brigantes goddess and probably the “queen” of the Mam Tor settlement. The head shows clearly the winking eye of an enchantress, her very sensuous lips and the carved stone sides that appear to be hair. Miss Greatly suggests she was a benign goddess of fertility.

In many places around the country the Brigantes had much larger settlements than our local one on Mam Tor. In some of the larger villages carved stone heads are not so rare. Several books have been written by well known archaeologists about the Brigantes and quite a lot is known about them.

There were one or two small springs within the Mam Tor earthworks that would soon dry up in summer. The rocks of Mam Tor are impervious so most of the rain that fell on it would run off. Bearing this in mind when the Briganties came across the river in the valley and followed it to its source where they found an outflow of pure water that appeared to rise from the bowels of the earth, no doubt to them a most awesome, even fearful sight.

What better place could the Brigantes find to celebrate their fertility rites and to worship their goddess or “queen” than this magical place, a natural resurgence producing about 2000 gallons (about 9000 litres) of pure water a minute that never dried up.

We might suggest “queen” Brigantia, garlanded with flowers, attended by her male Consort and possibly the maidens of the settlement performed at or near the Russet Well their spring-time fertility rites. The “queen’s” Consort was probably the Chief Priest or Head Man of the settlement, the person with the real power.

If fertility rites did take place near the Russet Well it was never recorded; neither was it recorded when the local fertility rites ceased. The most likely time for the ceremonies to end would be shortly after A.D 60. It was in A.D 60 that Queen Bouddica attacked Colchester, at that time the Roman capital of Britannia. Until Bouddica’s cowardly attack on this open and undefended city the all powerful Roman conquerors had been more or less content to live alongside and to integrate with local populations.

After Bouddica’s treacherous attack on Colchester all settlements like the one on Mam Tor were brutally destroyed by the Romans and the inhabitants dispersed. This probably made the Brigantes hide their “queen” by burying her in the earth and the head remained hidden until it was found in the 1970’s.

There are several other possibilities. It is possible the Brigantes carried on their fertility rites under the noses of the Roman oppressors. The area around the Well would be like a wilderness where things could happen without the Romans knowing.

Another possibility, having been ejected from their settlement the Briganties continued some form of ceremony without the “queen”. If this was the case the head was forgotten but the ceremony carried on. Is it remotely possible that the fertility rites were never really discontinued?

There is no evidence to suggest when or even if the Brigantes spring-time fertility celebrations continued or were re-started. They may have continued in some form or other after their village was destroyed. There is evidence of people living and working in this area before, during and after the Roman occupation. Usually the Romans did not prevent local people continuing to celebrate their fertility rites.

What is very clear is that some form of a local ceremony either continued, or was re-introduced, or was created in this area. The evidence for this is very apparent on the 29th of May.

We know the focal point of the current celebrations is a mounted Garland King and Consort. The King is complete when carrying a large bell-shaped flower and leaf arrangement that covers the top part of his body. The top or finial of this Garland was and still is a separate part and always called the “queen”. Accompanied by his Consort the King carries the Garland on his shoulders around the village.

The Garland itself is not just a single decorated frame, but made in two parts, one large and one small. The main part of the Garland is a large frame made of wood and metal. Wide leather straps are attached to the Garland and they rest on the Kings shoulders and take the weight. The small frame fits on the very top of the large one and is called the “queen”.

Currently the “queen” is made with flowers tied onto an old hand posser. This appliance can only have been used for the “queen” since their invention, possibly early Victorian. Previously it must have been a smaller edition of the large frame, no doubt both made of wood.

Strange as it may seem the King’s Consort continued to be a man dressed as a woman until the mid 1900’s. The last male Consort was Tommy Liversage, when he retired no other man wanted the job so Jean Abbott became the Consort. This change meant that if “queen” Brigantia did have a male consort the role of Consort changed from a male to a female only last century.

Castleton Garland Day is the 29th of May, if the 29th is a Sunday the ceremony moves to Saturday the 28th. As well as Castleton Garland Day 29th May is Oak Apple Day or Royal Oak Day, a national celebrations day to commemorate the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660. Oak leaves have been highly significant in fertility rites for a very long time, long before Charles hid in the oak tree.

We now come to a lot of "ifs". We have no way of knowing if the following statements are true. From what little evidence that exists they are more likely to be true than false.

If Castleton Garland Day was dormant in 1660 it must have been revived as a celebration to commemorate Charles II escape from the Parliamentarians by hiding in an oak tree.

If Castleton Garland Day was active in 1660 it must have been modified to fit in with the celebrations to commemorate the Restoration.

Before 1660, if Castleton Garland Day was active, but not held on the 29th of May the date must have been changed.

If Castleton Garland Day was always held on the 29th of May its date would remain unchanged.

Therefore, if Castleton Garland Day was active in 1660 when did it start?

Castleton Garland Day celebrations include the King and Consort currently "Doing the Bounds". Mounted but without the Garland, the King and Consort ride to various places around the village but not to the modern boundaries of the Parish of Castleton.

This is the 2009 "Doing the Bounds" route.

From Mill Lane up Back Street to Doctors Corner, turning left onto How Lane, turning right into Weaving Avenue, along Peveril Road, around Peveril Close and back onto Peveril road and by taking the short cut come onto Back Street again, then up Back Street and 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 to turn 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 Cross Street and go to the "Host Pub" to have the Garland put onto the King's broad shoulders, the wide leather straps taking the weight.

The pattern of most of the roads in the village, apart from the Weaving Avenue/Peveril Road area are very little changed from the way they were planned and laid out in 1186 and when Castleton was bounded by the Town Ditch.

The "Doing the Bounds" route appears to be not far away from where the remains of the ancient Town Ditch are. Might I suggest the original "Doing the Bounds" was to the entrances and exits of the Town Ditch.

If we assume this to be the case, from the evidence we have, Castleton Garland Day was being celebrated as long ago as 1186.

But remember, the original "queen" still exists. The carved stone head of "queen Brigantia" is still in the Castleton Centre. If "queen" Brigantia was the centre of fertility rites it was over 3000 years ago.

It seems ironic that we had a "queen" at the beginning of this story and we still have a "queen" every 29th of May. Has her presence been handed down through the years by word of mouth, who knows? But what an intriguing speculation.

Castleton Garland Day is really unique; unlike any other celebration in England.

May it continue for ever.

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