

Fawkham Fetes, 1953

There were two fêtes in Fawkham in 1953; the Church Fête, held in those days on the front lawn at the Rectory, and a special Coronation Fete held in the grounds of the Manor. How close it was to the Coronation I am not sure; my memory is vague, but I think it was after the Church event, which would itself have been on the third Saturday in June, so already after the Coronation.

That must have been the last occasion on which the Manor was used for a village event. I was taken along in the morning, when it was being set up, by my father, who was upbraided by Mrs Inskip (who lived at Pennis Farm) for his late arrival ("But Frank, you're on the Committee!" I can still hear her screaming. Fawkham's Lynda Snell?). Perhaps she didn't realise how useless Pa would have been at anything practical like setting up trestle tables.

I remember little of the fête itself, except that it included a sit-down tea, after which I betook myself to a slide at the back of the lawn, which I had been unable to have a go on earlier because of over-subscription, being a rather retiring child. I now had it all to myself, not realising until Pa came to rescue me that everyone else was watching a film show in the house.

We children had also, at some time in the proceedings, been presented with Coronation souvenirs; a prayer book in my case, a Coronation mug in the case of my younger sister. The prayer book I still have, though rather the worse for wear, partly because of a burst pipe at Saddle Gate, where we then lived, later in 1953, and partly because of daily handling by a small boy in a prep school chapel for five years. It is very small, 3 x 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches, ('32mo' in traditional print terminology) and a special issue for the Coronation, with a frontispiece of the Dorothy Wilding photograph of the Queen.

The inscription, on a pasted-in slip on the inside front cover, was written by W.T. Berry, a long-time resident who was the Librarian of the St. Bride's Library, off Fleet Street. Every morning he would walk to Fawkham station in his black jacket, pin-stripe trousers and bowler hat, an outfit which was looking rather old-fashioned even then. He lived in a bungalow off Castle Hill called Stanage, a pretty mock-Tudor affair. (Its name has been changed, as well as its form, which is no longer Tudor.) In addition to his calligraphic skill, he was a good watercolour artist; after retirement, he moved to Newnham, near Sittingbourne, whence for many years he sent my parents an annual Christmas card with a beautifully executed local view. He had also been the source, I believe, of much of the (not always accurate) information in Pa's 1951 history of Fawkham.

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