

## Yorkshire Evening Post 29 September 1923

### THE SHADOW OF REDMIRE FEAST

#### OLD CUSTOMS FADING

#### PROCESSION OF THE CLOCK DRESSERS ABANDONED

Redmire Feast, if the young-old villagers are to be believed, is but a shadow of what it was twenty years ago, but even then, the old folk say the feasts were nothing like what they were forty years ago. There are those in the little Wensleydale village who remember the feasts of sixty years ago when there was horseracing on the Scaru top and when the feasts were all the feasts should be.

Before the War, the stalls were spread along the streets of the village, and at night, when the last of the sports were being run, the competitors raced between the flaring lights. The races were always run through the village until this year, when they were held in the football field. Time is not so far distant when trotting matches were held on the Dale roads. Then feasts were feasts, indeed.

Dances at the Town Hall went on until the band collapsed, and many a man has gone straight from the dance to his milking. This year the feast dance finished long before three o'clock, and the "young-old-uns" and the "old-uns" when they heard of it clearly showed their disgust.

The feature of the old Redmire Feast was the procession of the "Clock Dressers and the Cheesecake Harvesters". There was no procession this year, and all that remains of the old custom is the picture that hangs in the kitchen of the King's Arms, and the stories.

#### SETTING THE CLOCK

The picture shows a merry party, gaily dressed in strange and wonderful costumes, and a weird band of musicians. Their duty it was to visit every house in the village to "dress t'clock". They carried carefully a bottle with a feather in it and several baskets, and at each house they inquired after the clock.

The reply was always the same: "Nay, t'clock's reight eno'!" the householder would say, and then he would produce his contribution to the cheesecake harvest. It mattered not whether it was money, food or drink, the clock dressers accepted all.

The drink went into the "Oil bottle" with the feather in it, the cheesecakes or buns into the baskets, and the money into the treasurer's pocket. Then, when the round had been completed, the harvesters made their way to the King's Arms, to store away their gleanings until the follow Saturday.

It was on the Saturday, the last of the Feast days, that the harvesters had their jollity. Old worthies shake their heads knowingly and smile reminiscently when they tell of it. The money paid for a "Round Robin" and the cheesecakes were good to eat, except those that had been unfairly made.

"There were them" an old dalesman told me "as played with their cakes and put pepper and suchlike into harmless looking buns. But it was fun. There was always something to take the bite o't'pepper away, and the band played well eno' and we had a reight band i'Redmire once."

## **“GENTLE” PERSUASION**

The harvesters did not finish their work when they set the clocks right on Feast Tuesday. They were there to see that everyone joined in the fun, and those that were reluctant, whether strangers or not, were persuaded gently. Sometimes the persuasion took the form of blacking the stranger’s face – and sometimes the harvester, prepared for all emergencies, carried with him a bag of blue colouring.

Though the harvester no longer wears his gay clothes and though the old customs have gone, there is still a cheery welcome for all at Redmire Feast.

If the stranger is content to listen he will hear the yarn of “Ock” Moore’s famous ride at one feast. Ock, a powerful man, rode astride two of the Feast donkeys to Bolton.

There he called on an old friend to ask him to join the fun. The old man did not want to ride the donkey Ock had brought for him, but Ock, with one hand, swung him into the saddle and led him and the donkey to the water-trough. There he endeavoured to tip his friend into the water.

He completed the trip by taking the donkey to call on a good lady of the village, and the story ends with a bright description of how Ock and the donkey were chased round and round the house with a broom. Men of Redmire still chuckle when they hear this story.

This year, as always, Redmire men came from far and wide for Feast week. In the King’s Arms one saw many friendships renewed. There was one man who left Redmire for Manchester many years ago, and in Lancashire he did well. Listening to his talk one marked the hard burr of the Lancashire accent in his voice, but as the day sped on he went back again to the soft Wensleydale accent.

He played in domino handicaps, watched the fell race to the top of the Scaur – won, by the way, by a Metcalfe, a descendant, probably of one of the troop of Metcalfes who rode white horses and were the retainers of the Lord of Bolton Castle centuries ago – and he saw the quoit-throwing on the village green. In the evening he sang the old dales songs with the rest.

The fair itself was curiously different to shoes in the cities. There were half a dozen stalls and nut shies on the green, and they were kept busy all the night, though rain fell hard. The skittle throwing contest on the road went on till dark, then the “young-uns” went to the dance in the Town Hall, and the “old-uns” stayed near the fireside.

Times may change and old customs may go, but there will always be a Redmire Feast, just as there will always be feasts of some kind in all the villages up and down the dale. The old dalesman in the village inn told the reason why when he lifted his glass to the Feasts.

“The Feast and Friendship” he said, and he meant it.

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*Transcribed by Katie Howson, 2022.*