



**DORSET** UP ALONG  
AND DOWN ALONG



cakes, and so forth. In 1925 Mr. Valentine Rickman, of Durweston, died and left a bequest of £50, vested in the rector and churchwardens, the interest on which is divided amongst all legitimate scholars who go a'shroving to at least three houses.

Similar Shrovetide customs are still carried on at **Piddlehinton** and at other villages in the county, but in some places the children used to take 'shards' with them as weapons. At **Sherborne**, for instance, it was the custom for children to take any cracked or useless crockery and go to the neighbour's houses and sing:—

' Here I come, I never came before,  
If you don't give me a pancake  
I'll break down your door.

At the conclusion of the verse the crockery was thrown against the door and smashed. The owner of the house was supposed to come out and toss a pancake for the children to catch. This custom has now died out, but was still in use about fifty years ago.

**Marnhull**, **Blandford**, and many other places can record similar happenings. In some parts Shrove Tuesday was called Lin-Crock Day as a result.

In the nineteenth century at **Powerstock** there was a curious Shrovetide custom called 'Egg Shackling,' which took place in the School. The children elected a committee and a judge, and there were prizes for the whitest, the brownest, the biggest and the smallest eggs. Then all the eggs were gently shaken in a sieve. As each egg got a little crack, it was taken out, until the strongest one remained—and this one received the biggest prize.

May Day, held on June 9th, was the great day of festival in **Shillingstone** during several centuries. The Maypole, said at one time to be the tallest in England, was garlanded with flowers, and around the Maypole dancing was kept up till far into the night. Besides the dancing there were booths, coconut shies, cheap jacks and all the appurtenances of a fair. But the last Maypole disappeared from the village green before the war of 1939-1945. At **Cerne Abbas** was another famous Maypole, which stood near the Giant on the hill.

At **Sherborne**, on May Day in former times the children would come round with garlands; they decorated themselves with chains of flowers and wore wreaths and chanted a song, which began with the words:—

' The first of May  
Is garland day  
Please to remember  
The King and Queen."

At **Shaftesbury** they used to carry about 'Jack in the Greens' and ask for pennies. At **Wyke Regis** and **Abbotsbury** on May 13th and 14th the children used to make garlands of flowers and skip with them through the street and then hang them on the fishing boats. When the boats went to sea, the garlands were thrown overboard into the waters of West Bay.

During the nineteenth century the village feast or club-walking had largely taken the place of the old May Day festivities. With the growth of national friendly societies, old age pensions and health insurance, the old village clubs have now died out for the most part but some vestiges of them remain to this day.

It is not certain when the **Marnhull** Friendly Society known as the 'Blue Club' was originally formed, but in 1887 the Reverend R. B. Kennard (rector of Marnhull) at the annual dinner, expressed the hope that 'they will be favoured with the same beautiful weather that they have had for the past thirty years.' The old meetings used to take place in an open cart shed, now pulled down, near the Crown Hotel, the club room at the Crown Hotel being regarded by old members as the new club room. The Slate and Loan club later arose owing to the old Friendly Society being unable to carry on for lack of funds as the young men were joining the Oddfellows and Foresters instead, the Loyal Blackmore Vale Branch of the Oddfellows having been formed in 1881.

The Feast Day which was held on the last Wednesday in May was a great day for the whole of the village. Church bells rang early; members met at the Crown with ribbons and favours, and attended service at the church. They afterwards paraded the village with their flags and garlands and visited every house and farm-house of importance where they were plentifully supplied with ale and cider, and dancing was indulged in (the old-fashioned four-handed reel being the



favourite), after which they proceeded to the Crown for dinner where parson and squire, farmer and man, sat down together to enjoy the good things provided. In the evening the two breweries were visited, where ale was freely supplied and more dancing indulged in. No sports were held, but wrestling and cudgel playing used to take place.

On the Feast Day of 1887 a new two pole banner (with sashes) and flag were presented to the Club by Mrs. Kennard. These were supplied by subscriptions, the banner costing £25 and the small flag £2 10s. 0d. They were carried in the ensuing procession together with the old banner and two splendid garlands, the members wearing tri-colour rosettes and each carrying a pole. Many of the brass pole tops may be seen in houses in Marnhull to-day.

The Club walking custom died out here during the 1939—1945 war.

Ninety years ago the **Lytchett Matravers** Club was a flourishing one. Their feast day was Trinity Monday when all the members turned out in their best clean smocks and gay neckerchiefs and carrying and wearing garlands. There was a prize for the best garland of flowers. They first marched to church and had a service ; then they formed a procession carrying garlands and their club signs (in this village the emblems were of painted wood, not brass) and went round to collect from the farmers. A band led them which must have existed chiefly for this purpose, as there always used to be one, and it has died out since the club ceased. Having given the farmers a tune, they marched to the inn at Higher Lytchett where there was a great and solid meal awaiting them. This was well washed down with cider and beer, and then maypole and country dancing was kept up till late at night, and crowds of folk came from all round in coaches and waggons to watch. Stalls were put up too, 'almost like a fair,' they said.

**Stoke Abbott** is very proud of its old established 'Sick Club.' Until 1939 annually on the first Friday in June all members met and marched through the village, behind a brass band, and an ancient blue silk banner, carrying staves (copied from the original staves and presented to the Club by the kindness of Canon Dalison, a former Rector). After a service in Church, there was a dinner at which there were many guests of honour from surrounding villages, and the afternoon was

spent in sports and amusements and dancing. This day was very eagerly looked forward to from year to year, and it is hoped to revive the old custom in 1951, after a lapse of twelve years.

A resident of **Whitechurch Canonicorum** remembers the making of firmity. 'It was generally made after the harvest, of wheat, raisins, currants and a little flour to thicken it. These were slowly boiled and sweetened with a little sugar, and it was then eaten like porridge with a spoon. It was usually made on a Sunday called Firmity Sunday.'

In other parts firmity is still made on festive occasions—at Weymouth, for example, at Eastertide.

The harvest home supper was a great time for songs and dancing. A typical drinking song is recorded at **Marnhull** :—

'Here's a health unto our Master, the founder of the feast.  
I hope to God wi' all me heart his soul in Heaven may rest.  
And all his works may prosper, whatever he takes in hand  
For we are all his servants, and here at his command.  
Then drink boys drink, and see you do not spill,  
For if you do, you shall drink two, it is our Master's will.

Here's a health unto our Master, our Mistress shan't go  
free ;

For she's a good provider, provides as well as he ;  
For she's a good provider, and bids us all to come,  
So take this cup and sip it up, for 'tis our harvest home.  
Home boys home, home boys home,  
Fill it up to the brim, and drink it off clane,  
For 'tis our harvest home.'

At **Whitechurch Canonicorum** 'the Dance of the Broomstick' was generally performed at the breaking up of harvest suppers. Farmer John Bussell, who died a good many years ago, often entertained people with this feat which caused much amusement and was very interesting. At the winding up of the feast the following song was a favourite of Farmer John Dare :—

'Oh the joyful days  
When the apple trees grew bare,  
We'll sing and be merry  
All the whole year.'



'Bricks and Mortar' is the name of a traditional dance of **Marnhull**, danced at harvest homes and social gatherings, and still danced now. Here are the instructions how to dance it:—

'Longways for as many as will—

- A. (1) Top couple lead down the middle holding inside hands, other couples follow them. (Walking step).  
 (2) Cast off at bottom and return outside to places.  
 (3) Set to partner right and left for eight bars. (This is not quite the ordinary set, it is done on the spot, without a spring and is more like marking time with a change of foot).  
 (4) All forward a double changing places, set to partner for four bars.
- B. Repeat all this from the reversed position to arrive back at original positions.  
 Repeat whole dance until exhausted.

At **Piddlehinton** they still dance a Heel and Toe dance of polka type and in the West of Dorset at **Burton Bradstock** and elsewhere they have a famous Ring dance.

At one time Guy Fawkes' Day was considered to be the event of the winter. At **Marnhull** the last celebration was held on November 5th, 1908, when a torch-light procession, headed by a band, paraded the village. These processions were made up of mounted police, soldiers, sailors, poachers, other fancy dresses, decorated carts, and cycles, and 'Old Nick,' who had his tail full of pins to keep it from being pulled. The effigy of Guy Fawkes occupied a central position. Arriving at a field where a large bonfire had been prepared, Guy Fawkes was hoisted to the top and burnt.

Sometimes local happenings would be recorded at these events—for example, during the summer, a lady of rather large proportions went to a fair and wanted a ride down the helter skelter. She took her mat and walked up, but when she started to come down, rumour has it that she got stuck and required assistance to come down. This was represented in the procession by an imitation helter skelter with the lady half-way down, and the words—'Auntie can't come down,' in large letters on the side. This caused a lot of fun, but not to the lady concerned.

The Rev. A. H. Baverstock, for many years Rector of **Hinton Martel**, writes of an old custom formerly kept up in that parish on the feast of St. Thomas (December 21st). This day was known as Gooding Day, and the children sang a song about coming a gooding and begging for ingredients for the Christmas pudding. He says: 'I always used to give them a penny after Church on that day to keep the idea alive.'

At Christmas time the old mumming play of S. George and the Turkish Knight was acted in many parts of Dorset, but the custom broke down during the war years, 1914—18, although it has occasionally been revived at **Evershot** since that period.

Mummers at **Shillingstone** survived only until the late seventies of the last century, but the men and boys of the village kept up the ancient and terrifying custom of the Bull until a rather later date.

The Bull, shaggy head with horns complete, shaggy coat, and eyes of glass, was wont to arrive, uninvited at any Christmas festivity. None knew when he might or might not appear. He was given the freedom of every house, and allowed to penetrate into any room escorted by his keeper. The whole company would flee before his formidable horns, the more so as, towards the end of the evening, neither the bull nor his keeper could be certified as strictly sober. The Christmas Bull is now obsolete, but up to forty years ago, he was a recognized custom. In some parts of West Dorset this creature was known as the Wooser, and there are those who tell us that he has his origin in Devil-worship.

Shove-ha'penny and darts have been for long the most usual amusements at public houses and elsewhere. A hundred years ago cudgel playing was popular at fairs and other social meetings. The aim of each player was to break as many heads as possible and a prize was offered to the winning competitor. The old cruel sports of bear and bull baiting and cock fighting were carried on until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when they were finally put down by law, but it is said that badger-baiting still goes on in some parts.