

England and it's Odd Traditions



C.E. Holloway

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The tradition is still continued, although the mayor is trusted as more honest than older variants.

Weighing the Mayor is a High Wycombe tradition that serves as a good humoured excuse for a large civic gathering, although its roots lie in a democratic process.

At around 11:30, an hour long process takes place in which all of the Civic Officials are weighed in on scales in front of the Guildhall. This occurs at both the start and end of the mayoral year, ceremony taking place in May

The weights are kept on record and with each check, 'tolling-out' and 'weighing-in', cheers and boos are given by the crowd depending on the increase or decrease in weight.

The interest originates in weight gain being a mark of a lazy and over-indulged mayor, using public funds. Weight loss would supposedly be the mark of hard work.



The Mayor of Abingdon is weighed-in
(1946)

Weighing the Mayor

Tied to the "Tolling-Out" of the Mayor, the traditions dates back to the 17th Century. In 1678, the then Mayor Henry Shepard was found to be drunk and disorderly. As a public punishment, he was to be marched from the Guildhall to the sound of the town bell tolling on the morning of the new Mayor's inauguration.

Weighing the Mayor was introduced for the same period of local history.



The Fowell Family

As a part of a Wakes Week Fayre, given permission for creation in 1221, the Horn Dance takes place on Wakes Monday. Starting at 8am, the dance begins at St.Nicholas Church where the horns are housed, where it follows a path around the town that ends at Blithfield Hall.

The dance is performed by 12 dancers: 6 carry the horns and are accompanied by a Jester, Maid Marian

Marian, boys with a bow-and-arrow and triangle, an accordionist and a hobby horse. The horns are legally the property of Abbots Bromley Parish Council and are on display for every other day of the year in St. Nicholas Church. There are a set of Red Deer antlers that are used if the dance is to be performed outside the parish boundary.

It is best to check the date each year as it is worked out in a particularly confusing fashion.



The Bentley Family

Abbots Bromley Horn Dance

Although the tradition is believed to have started not long before 1686, as the first record can be found in Robert Plot's Natural History of Staffordshire, the Hobby-horse is mentioned as being used in 1532. Carbon dating of the antlers used places them as artefacts of the 11th Century, and there is a concurrent theory that the tradition has Anglo-Saxon roots and ties to the dominion of Mercia. The hunt grounds were no further than a days walk and there are records of granted lands being managed by a forester, who would have danced to favour the next hunting season. Until the end of the 19th Century, the dancers were from the Bentley Family, and the titles changed to the Fowell Family which remain to the day,.



The Abingdon Horns

As a means of selecting a mock mayor as a representative of the people, more specifically the local Morris Association, the Mayor of Ock Street serves as a celebration of the village.

On the Saturday nearest the 19th June, the event starts at 10am in Abingdon-on-Thames, with a Morris dancing competition involving many local groups and associations. The event is much like a village fayre, with stalls and

The event is much like a village fayre, with stalls and games. As a good excuse for a drink for many people, the winner of the election takes a celebratory pint in an Applewood Pint Tankard used every year whilst being carried through the streets.

Groups from around the country are invited to take part, so the event has become something of a Morris Festival, with varieties of styles on show.



The newly elected Mayor is carried by his group as part of the procession.

The Mayor of Ock Street

Ock Street used to be the area of Abingdon in which the poorer towns people lived, so this tradition was born of needing a Mayor of the people who would hold the wealthier (formal) Mayor to account.

The event also generated a local icon, the Horns of Ock Street. In 1700, the celebration included a roasted ox that was spread amongst those taking part. The local boys took the horns and skull and set to taunt the boys of the Vineyard at the north of the town after a fight to decide who would get to keep them. This grudge is maintained, although in good nature, to this day. A cast iron replica is the current totem, and the Morris group refuse to dance without their presence.



The festivities also include Fayre games and spectacle like the Hobby Horse.

Hunting the Earl of Rone takes place on the last weekend of May, and last for a full long weekend, with a drum procession on the Friday evening, a Children's day and social evening on the Saturday, the full procession and games on the Sunday, and the Hunting of the Earl on Monday Evening.

Revived in 1974, the tradition is centred around the Grenadiers, hunting, finding, and parading the

Earl of Rone through the streets on a donkey. Mounted back-to-front, the Earl is repeated shot (blanks) falling from the horse, to be remounted and taken to the beach, where his execution and burial take place. Dressed in a hessian outfit, the Earl is buried at sea, often requiring a hand to get out well and truly alive.



The Earl of Rone is caught in Lady's Wood

Hunting the Earl of Rone

Although the origins are uncertain, the event was 1837 due to drunk and disorderly behaviour.

Local legend says that he was Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone, who was forced to flee from Ireland in 1607 and was shipwrecked in the local bay known as Raparee Cove. Hiding in the woods and surviving only on ships' biscuits, he was eventually captured by a party of Grenadiers sent from Barnstaple. Although the story is proven somewhat false as O'Neill made it to Spain, the festival is now run by a Village trust and those in local parishes, serving to celebrate Coombe Martin, with any excess funds going to local charities.



The Straw Bear hides on procession from viewers in the window.

Following the blueprint for the public spectacle tradition, the Whittlesea Straw Bear is part of a parade that includes a show of a variety of different styles of Morris Dancing and a Show Plough pulled by local boys acting as traditional 'Plough Boys'.

Festivities take place throughout the week after the first Monday after the Twelfth Night, and the Bear is taken on procession on the

Saturday, before the suits' burning on the Sunday.

In earlier times, the suit was made from rolled straw 'ropes' bound to the body of the wearer, although the straw is now attached to a wire frame. The amount of straw needed can weigh up to 5 stone, so the outfit is shared in the procession by a number of people. In 1999, the bear was partnered with a similar Straw Bear in a German town called Walldürn.



Recently, the Straw Bear has become the Straw Bears,
joined by a small family of characters.

Whittlesea Straw Bear

Although its true origins are unknown, a newspaper of 1882 reports that "... he was then taken around the town to entertain by his frantic and clumsy gestures the good folk who had on the previous day subscribed to the rustics, a spread of beer, tobacco and beef", so the tradition must date to at the latest this year. Perhaps used as a piece of village charm, it is also thought that the processions were a form of 'cadging', or begging.

The tradition died out in 1909, with the review of an over enthusiastic police man for that reason. A newspaper article from 1936 shows a cartoon of the Straw Bear Procession, so it is quite likely it was at the least occasionally revived by those with fond memories of the event.

For more Odd English Traditions please see the other volumes. Included are these traditions:

Haxey Hood

Burly Man

Hurling the Silver Ball

Royal Shrovetide Football

Hare Pie Scrambling

Morris Dancing

Model Village

Allendale Tar Barrels

Swan Upping

Cooper's Hill Cheese Rolling

Obby' Oss'

Dwyle Flonking

Kiplingcotes Derby

Esk Valley Quoits

Mummers Dancing

Weighing the Mayor

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_8zDw1HfLWo

<https://lets gobritain.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/weighing-the-mayor-tradition.jpg>

Abbots Bromley Horn Dance

<https://www.ibiblio.org/fiddlers/abbotbroml.jpg>

<https://www.facebook.com/AbbotsBromleyHornDance/photos/a.1199437253406366/1199437150073043/?type=1&theater>

The Mayor of Ock Street

<https://mail.google.com/mail/?tab=im&authuser=0>

https://lh3.googleusercontent.com/proxy/shjdXGJ5V9Pncz8lrBhPrMtrHta3C7M2rAnFRMIUwD2GVegl8AwdMeLKVYCIv3H6mS0hfkx1x0j8cSXnoSa1cQIHg_segOLfyHJ24QSSZzG2IrDChk7IKR1JwDVZmjOSiduH1lloP-pGTDcnMiKxdocVFm5HtnW06fvNLSc0zM

Hunting the Earl of Rone

<https://i.pinimg.com/originals/e2/4a/37/e24a3722dfc172a60b81d92b7facd045.jpg>

<https://i.ytimg.com/vi/UweafAMDJ0/maxresdefault.jpg>

Whittlesea Straw Bear

https://www.emmawoodphotos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/WhittleseaStrawBear_1.jpg

<https://lp-cms-production.imgix.net/news/2017/01/GettyImages-631658792-e1484577086866.jpg?w=1200&sharp=10&vib=20>