

The Warley Maypole

The Maypole at Warley is a long-established public house which in the 18th century traded under the name of The Horns and which in 1773, was in the ownership of Joseph Farrar.¹ It is not uncommon for such establishments to change names and by the mid 19th century it was in the possession of Thomas Turner, trading under the name of the May Pole Inn.²

The earliest may pole in the township of which there is any reference, is for the year 1814 and which appears in a newspaper report of 1863, when it was being proposed to erect a new maypole to commemorate the visit to Halifax of the Prince and Princess of Wales.

In the year 1814, when peace was declared between England and France, the inhabitants of Warley erected a Maypole in the centre of Warley-town in commemoration thereof. It remained there for a number of years, and was ultimately blown down. A second one was erected, which was taken down a number of years since.³

No evidence was given in support of this date, and a later newspaper report suggests that it was in fact erected to commemorate the victory at Waterloo in 1815.⁴ Other reports suggest that it was still remembered by the elder generation.

There are no details of the festivities of 1814, and it is not until 1863 that we can read the interesting accounts of some *influential gentlemen* of Warley, their supporters and their opponents. Their first reported meeting to discuss the erection of a new maypole, was on 16 August 1863 at the Maypole Inn, when those present were, Mr William Dearden, of Warley Grammar School, Mr William Radcliffe, tailor of Warley Town Lane, Mr John Levers, of Steps, Mr William Dixon, watchmaker of Sowerby Bridge and Mr William Bowers. At a later date Mr Joseph Sutcliffe, woollorter of Warley Town Lane, and Mr John Taylor, tailor and draper of Marsh were co-opted onto the committee.⁵

The intention was to erect a maypole to commemorate and celebrate the Royal visit, but because this required the approval of the local authorities, and their next meeting was not until after the Royal visit, the project was delayed. On August 12 however, the Warley Local Board resolved that -

leave be given to the subscribers, to erect a May Pole in the centre of the space in Warley Town, provided that a gas lamp be affixed thereto.⁶

The Mayor and Town Clerk of Luddenden were invited to take part in the inaugural proceedings, but there was much dissatisfaction from some quarters, as many of those who considered themselves to be township worthies, were kept in the dark about the committee's plans until they appeared in the local news, and as opposition mounted, a war of words were exchanged in the local newspapers.

Opposition to the May pole was first voiced in the Halifax Guardian of October 3, and continued for some time.

THE MAYPOLE. - To the Editor of the Halifax Guardian. - Sir,- Permit me through your paper to address a few words to the inhabitants of Warley respecting the proposed erection of a maypole in that village. Some old customs and institutions are worth preserving, some it is as well to let die, among the latter I venture to think is the maypole of Warley. I have made considerable enquiries and am unable to find out who are the promoters of

the affair, but I know this, there is a very general disapproval of the project on the part of those who usually take the lead in our village matters. A much better plan it seems to me, would be to make a modest fountain in the centre of the open space in front of the chapel, and combine it with a public lamp, capable of lighting up the three roads which there meet. ONE OF THEMSELVES.⁷

The dissenters clearly believed that plans for the pole had been made covertly, something that was most vehemently denied by the organising committee in the next issue of the newspaper.

To the Editor of the Halifax Guardian, - Sir,- in reply to your May Pole correspondent, who, I feel assured, must be some old woman, whose taste for that which is beautiful and harmless is evidently on the decline, allow me to say that she is not one of the promoters of this "thing of beauty," which we intend to make "a joy for ever".⁸

The letter continues and states that the announcement of their intentions had appeared in the Halifax Courier of August 1st. But feelings were mixed on the matter and on the previous Thursday, following "the Fair", when it was customary to have a public tea party -

Not a single ticket was sold, consequently not a single cup of tea was made. The reason is said to be in consequence of the present unpleasantness respecting the Maypole; the proposed erection of which has not met with the approbation of so many of the inhabitants as was first expected.⁸

The fair which took place on the Wednesday preceding the above report, was primarily for the sale of livestock, but as was customary at large social gatherings, swinging boats, nut stalls and other shows were an integral part of the annual event.

Objections were also voiced in the Halifax Courier of the same week and in the Halifax Guardian the following week. The "committee" however, were men of resolve and by the end of the month both papers were reporting on the arrival and erection of the maypole.

MAY POLE, - On Tuesday the finial or heraldic device for the top of the May pole, arrived in Warley. It was taken to the May Pole Inn, where hundreds availed themselves of the opportunity of seeing it. The unanimous opinion was that it was a splendid piece of workmanship, and that it was to be regretted that it should be placed so high up where its beautiful qualities could not be so minutely ascertained. On Wednesday the ornamental gallery arrived, a piece of craft which does credit to Mr. Wm. Birch, of Halifax. It is of the circular form, and made to imitate a fruit basket. The finial and the gallery were fixed to the May Pole, and a hole was made six feet deep, of which one foot eight inches is rock. The requisite preparations, such as blocks, ropes, sheer legs &c., were applied, and from 20 to 40 of the inhabitants assisted the workmen employed. After working hard all the day it was deemed advisable to let it remain suspended until the following day, when some legs of longer dimensions could be obtained. On the same evening, the committee met at the May Pole Inn, and gave full power to Messrs Mr John Henry Turner, of Winterburn Hill, William Turner and John Carter to superintend the erection of the May Pole.⁹

On Thursday morning the tackle was adjusted and the pole easily hoisted into position, amidst the loud cheering of a large concourse of spectators.¹⁰

Mr William Garnett had been appointed to execute a design. Made from Norwegian pine, painted blue, black and white the erected pole must have been an impressive sight Standing 69 feet 6 inches high, its diameter at the base was 19.5 inches, tapering to 6 inches at the top. The finial which represented fruit, acorns and leaves, was carved by Mr Hellawell, of Gibbet Street,

and a photograph of the maypole taken late in the century, suggests that the finial was about five feet high.¹¹



The maypole in the late 1990s.
Photograph restored by Peter Allsopp.

Still the opposition continued and it was not restricted to residents of the village. The trustees of the United Reform Chapel wrote to Warley Local Board and the minutes of the meeting of 11 November 1863, record that -

The Clerk having read a letter from Messrs Wavell and Foster objecting on behalf of Trustees of the Warley Chapel to the erection of the May Pole It was resolved that the Clerk be requested to write in reply that their letter had been laid before them and that the Board had given permission for the erection of the May Pole before receipt of their letter and that the May Pole had already been erected and that they declined to interfere.

The inaugural dinner was held at the May Pole Inn on the evening of 25 November, their host being Mr Radcliffe. The pole was decorated with evergreens and flags and a display of gas illuminations were set up. Regrettably the pipe supplying them was too small and only sufficient gas was provided to light up the Prince of Wales plumes and the initials V.R. Nevertheless according to the report, there was sufficient light to brighten up the whole village and -

From all round the people assembled; throughout the evening crowds surrounded the pole, singing and dancing at intervals, and enlivened by the performances of Warley amateur band.¹²

For those within the public house —

The dinner was all that could be wished, and that being over, the chairman gave the usual toast. A party of the Halifax Glee and Madrigal Society sang the National Anthem, and "God bless the Prince of Wales, followed by appropriate songs at intervals throughout the evening. Sergeant Leever of the Sowerby Bridge volunteers suitably responded to the toast of "the Army and Navy."

Mr William Dearden, (*local poet*) at considerable length and with much eloquence, addressed the meeting on some of the ancient customs of England, especially those connected with the 1st of May and May Poles.

Mr Bowers the secretary, gave a financial statement to the effect that the expenditure of the committee was £32 and subscriptions were only £22. Many of those who had already subscribed made further donations and with additional subscribers, more than the deficiency was soon raised.¹²

Sir Henry Edwards, M.P was one of the original subscribers together with and Captain Edwards; Mr James Green, woollen manufacturer of Sowerby Bridge; Richard Wood, iron founder of Sowerby Bridge; Mr James Oldfield of Warley House; Mr John Naylor, Brewer of Warley; Messrs James Clay and Sons of Sowerby Bridge and Mr Michael Stocks, brewer.¹¹

No further celebrations were to be arranged until the following year, but the organisers must have been delighted with the events of Monday 2 May.

THE MAY POLE. - In honour of the advent of spring, the recently erected May-pole, on Monday last, was decorated with sundry flags, streamers, and garlands, and presented a very gay appearance. The Warley brass band also paraded, and gave the village a very lively aspect. It is computed that between 2,000 and 3,000 persons visited the usually quiet little village. Such was the crush, that the large lodge-room at the inn, where some addresses had intended to have been delivered, was crowded out with thirsty customers, and the speeches consequently had to be omitted. One address, however, was given by the secretary to the committee for erecting the May-pole, who expressed his regret that the ancient custom of dancing around a May-pole had, along with other pastimes, ceased to exist.¹³

It is worth noting that the relatively new fashion at that time, of dancing to plait ribbons around the lower half of a maypoles, (a practice introduced from Europe), was not adopted at Warley.

In subsequent years the number of those attending was estimated at between 4,000 and 5,000, and by 1867 it was being reported

MAY DAY.- Wednesday being May-Day the villagers were astir. The May-pole wore its usual honours, being decorated with flags, evergreens, and banners. The weather being very fine during the evening, a very large number of persons assembled and the "old, old tale" must have been very often repeated judging by the numerous lovers who were present. The "Warley amateurs" discoursed sweet music, and it was not till long after old Sol had sunk behind the western hills that the majority of the company appeared to think of wending their way homeward, dancing and other amusements being kept up until a late hour.¹⁴

In 1872 the celebrations were allowed to lapse due to the illness of Mrs Radcliffe of the May Pole Inn, but in 1874 the event was revived and the pole was repainted by Levi Crabtree of Luddenden. the upper half being white, and the lower half blue.

Some of the best descriptions of these annual celebrations are found in the newspapers of 1878 and 1879.

There floated at the top a beautiful streamer, 30 feet long, and the gallery, which is about the middle of the pole, was filled with Union Jacks, banners, &c. Underneath the gallery was filled with flowers. Shortly after three o'clock the Friendly Brass Band put in its appearance, and opened its programme by playing "May Day," after which dancing commenced, and continued (

with short intervals) until nine o'clock. At this time the crowd was very large, and it was computed that about 3000 people were present. A number of soldiers from the Depot gave a very nice appearance to the crowd. There were swinging boats, cross-bow shooting, Aunt Sally and "all the fun of the fair," together with oyster and other stalls. The proceedings passed off very quietly, and the village was cleared by 11 o'clock.¹⁵

The 'ancient festivities' consisted of dancing to the music of the Friendly Brass Band. As evening came on, the visitors from Halifax and Sowerby Bridge were very numerous. Among the latter were some worthies who entered the village bearing a flag and curious musical instruments. They left, or some of them, bearing the same flag, also a refreshing quantity of malt liquor. The May Pole Inn was crowded with customers, and the outside refreshments of various kinds were dispensed from stalls. At one shop the announcement was seen 'sandwiges' sold 'hear', much to the surprise, it is conjectured, of the officials of the School Board.¹⁶

Not all of the events however, were to pass off without incident, in 1885 it was reported

AT THE MAY POLE a young man named Henry Smith, labourer of Tuel Lane, Sowerby Bridge, was brought up at the West Riding Police Court, Halifax, on Saturday. Superintendent Carr said the defendant was locked up on the previous night for damaging a stall at Warley. It was the feast and there was dancing round the Maypole and the defendant and others acted rather foolishly. The defendant expressed his regret for what he had done. The case was settled on his paying the amount of damages 7/6d.¹⁷

The last description of Mayday in Warley, to appear in the Halifax newspapers was in 1885, when it was still drawing large crowds, but reports of May Day events in general were also in decline even though some celebrations continued into the 20th century. The condition of the Warley pole had by 1888 however, deteriorated to the extent that a replacement was the only solution if the village was not to lose its most prominent feature.

WARLEY LOCAL BOARD. In Warley Town a deputation from the chapel trustees, consisting of the Rev. T. Whitely, and Mr. Tom Sutcliffe, met the Board to urge the desirability of setting a portion of the road near the chapel, and also to complain about the condition of the Maypole. Upon examination the pole was found to be decayed and unless the parties interested put the pole into safe condition the Board will doubtless have to take measures, to protect the lives and property of the rate payers from any injury which might follow its fall during a gale.¹⁸

Following this, a committee was formed with the aim of replacing the pole. The new pole was erected on 12 September 1888, it was shorter and stouter but reports give no further details.¹⁹ It is somewhat curious, that the activities which were so popular up until 1885 and possibly until 1888, ceased when the old maypole was taken down and even after it was replaced. In 1890 it was reported -

MAY DAY has gone without any public ceremonial around the May Pole. The pole has not yet been painted and decorated which is one reason for the omission of the May Day celebrations.²⁰

Over the following years the unpainted pole deteriorated, until the winter of 1898/9 when it was blown down. There appears to have been little damage done other than to the railings that surrounded it. In the February, the District Council instructed the surveyor to remove the railings and the stones that occupied the site.²¹ The following May the Halifax Guardian reported -

A GIFT OF A DRINKING FOUNTAIN. Mr. A.S. McCrea of Warley House, has informed the district council that he is about to present to the district a trough, lamp and drinking fountain, made of the best native stone and wrought iron, to be erected on the site of the Maypole, at Warley Town. The Council tendered their thanks to the donor at their meeting on Monday.²²

In October the fountain was formally handed over to the district by Mr McCrea and although the newspapers reported that 'the brief proceedings were of an interesting nature',²³ we are not enlightened further. This was thirty-seven years, almost to the month, after this very thing was suggested by 'ONE OF THEMSELVES', in 1863.



The fountain. Photograph taken in the early part of the 20th century.

1. Tordoff, C.F. *The Warley Story*. 1979.
2. Walker, J.U. *Walker's Directory of the Parish of Halifax*. Halifax 1845.
3. Halifax Courier 1 August 1863.
4. Halifax Courier 6 May 1882.
5. Halifax Courier 6 May 1882.
6. *A Short History of the Local Government of the Township and Parish of Warley*
7. Halifax Guardian 3 October 1863.
8. Halifax Guardian 10 October 1863.
9. Halifax Courier 31 October 1863.
10. Halifax Guardian 31 October 1863.
11. Halifax Courier 14 July 1888.
12. Halifax Courier 28 November 1863.
13. Halifax Guardian 7 May 1864.
14. Halifax Courier 4 May 1867.
15. Halifax Guardian 4 May 1878.
16. Halifax Courier 3 May 1879.
17. Sowerby Bridge Chronicle 9 May 1885.
18. Halifax Courier 2 June 1888.
19. Halifax Courier 22 September 1888.
20. Halifax Courier 3 May 1890.

21. Halifax Guardian 27 February 1899.
22. Halifax Guardian 5 May 1900
23. Halifax Guardian 27 October 1900.