

# SEASONAL CROYDON

There was once a time when life was tied in to the changing seasons. We had to ensure we had sufficient food to get us through lean times in late winter and early spring, when one year's food was running out and the new year's food wasn't ripe for the table. Food was salted or dried to preserve it. Off flavours and odours could be masked to some extent by spices. Firewood or furze would be gathered for the wintery nights, but only if you had the right to collect it. Punishments were grave if you were caught stealing supplies, no matter how dire your circumstances were.

How we lived and what we did depended to a great extent on the changing seasons. Customs and traditions helped mark the seasons and functioned as a reminder, if the fear of starvation wasn't reminder enough. Some of these traditions have survived, etched into our consciousness, handed down by earlier generations. Churches offer up thanks for bounteous harvests, while pagans have played a major part in reviving ceremonies such as beating the bounds, which originally had a ritual element aimed at obtaining a good harvest from the gods. Corn dollies come from this custom. Modern folk get on the internet and book skiing holidays in the Alps, while unconsciously using sympathetic magic by wishing for the return of spring.



Snow in George Street, 2005

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## **Midwinter doesn't have to be bleak**

Hallowe'en  
Christmas cheer  
New Year

## **Rites of spring**

Lent  
Good Friday  
Easter  
Pentecost  
May Day



Millennial Croydon - the Croydon Eye

# MIDWINTER DOESN'T HAVE TO BE BLEAK

**The Saxons' midwinter celebrations in their northern European homelands included evergreen branches being carried into the home to ritually remind the sun to return and awaken nature to make things green again. Several cultures, including the Romans, rulers of Britain when Christianity started to spread from the easternmost parts of their empire, celebrated midwinter by turning customs on their heads. Servants would lord it over their masters, there would be extravagant feasts with flowing wine and the giving of presents. This was seen as a jolly good thing, and the Lord of Misrule was a popular folk figure in England until only a few centuries ago. We can see how this taste for seasonal excess resonates in today's society. Celebrations of the winter solstice have long included holly, mistletoe, yule logs and wassail bowls, and these are among the elements that folklorists are striving to retain.**

So, what are we doing about it in Croydon? Midwinter celebrations recorded over the years include dancing by North Wood Morris on New Year's Day, and mummers plays (both dealt with elsewhere). But let's start with Hallowe'en, which technically falls in our autumn nowadays.

## HALLOWE'EN

Midwinter celebrations and New Year have, of course, shifted over the centuries. All Souls' Day was moved to 2 November in 988 to take the place of the Celtic Samhain. All Saints' Day had already been moved in 835 to 1 November from 13 May, another important Celtic festival.

We might think we have lost our Celtic rituals, but many of them have been interchanged with our present Bonfire Night celebrations. Samhain was regarded as marking the New Year, the beginning of winter. Samhain featured cattle markets, the slaughter of surplus animals which could not be fed

throughout the winter, and feasting on their meat. It was regarded as the time of year when the veil between the worlds was easier to cross. Fires were lit to welcome home returning spirits and to keep away unwanted ones. Communion with the next world was easier at that time.

Samhain is still an important time for pagans and Wiccans, who celebrate the Crone goddess, the eldest of the trio of goddesses. The Crone goddess is symbolized by the waning moon, the carrion crow, the cauldron, and the colour black. Samhain is a time for reflection on the past year and honouring the dying god, and also marks the end of the harvest period.

Many elements from these customs and ancient beliefs are reflected in today's celebrations, even if most people have forgotten where they came from. And let's not forget the Romans, whose Pomona, goddess of fruit trees, may well have brought us bobbing for

apples.

At Hallowee'n in 1992 North Wood Morris and other dance troupes performed outside (allegedly) haunted venues in and around Croydon. These were the White Lion at Warlingham, near a haunted pool; the Bell Hotel, Godstone, near where a witch is said to have lived; the Wattenden Arms on Old Lodge Lane, Kenley, opposite a haunted cottage; and outside the Whitgift Almshouses, near the site of the Old George Inn. This was followed by a torchlight procession and display of fireworks at Sanderstead, sponsored by Croydon Round Table.



North Wood Morris, Hallowee'en 1992

There was a huge rush on pumpkins in 1992, with greengrocers reportedly running out and hoping to get more stocks in. The *Croydon Advertiser* showed a little girl in a witch costume with a huge lantern made from a pumpkin grown on an allotment. The use of pumpkins for making spooky lanterns is a relatively recent thing, as turnips were traditionally used. Nowadays pumpkins are available in a huge range of sizes and in huge

numbers. And there's the added benefit of being able to use the flesh you scoop out for pumpkin pie, another tradition imported from the United States of America along with Trick or Treat. This looked set to become a big thing in Croydon some years ago. It involves groups of children knocking on doors and begging for goodies. Woe betide if you don't hand over sweets or at least 50p - you're likely to get an egg thrown at your window.

Some churchmen from the borough are concerned by the increasing prominence of Hallowee'en as a celebration. In 1996 Wetherspoon's held a Hallowee'en beer festival at the George Inn on George Street, with beers called Crouch Vale Creepshow, Nethergate Nightmare and Hampshire Hellraiser. In 1998 'The Monster Show: Return of the living dead' was staged by Drydo Magic, a production company formed by staff from Croydon Council's leisure services department. Special songs about Dracula, the Bride of Frankenstein and Wolf Man were written for

the show by librarian Julian Dryden. In 2000 local broadcasters Cable 17 screened a live 'ghost hunt' from Airport House on Purley Way on Hallowee'en, using microphones and cameras to detect 'supernatural howls and bumps'. The *Croydon Guardian* told us the ghosthunting pair felt a 'strong presence', whatever that means. The respected Selsdon Park Hotel also made Hallowee'en plans in 2002, consulting Martin Jeffrey, editor of MysteryMag.com, to help Hallowee'en

'pass peacefully'. He reportedly advised staff to drape the entrance with wreaths of herbs, including St John's Wort, believed to be 'obnoxious to the ghostly palate'. Groups also use Hallowe'en parties to raise funds for charity.

The Reverend Peter Evans of St Luke's in Woodside told the *Croydon Advertiser* in 1995 that, to combat the 'evil influences' released on Hallowe'en night, his church was holding a special Eucharist service. He said that Hallowe'en seemed like a bit of fun but the 'seductive excitement of fear' was a wonderful tool for working against Christianity. A 'saints and angels' party was to be held for children to show them a more positive side to life. A Baptist minister from South Croydon, writing in the *Croydon Advertiser* in connection with Witchfest 2004, reported that some churches gave children a party at Hallowe'en to give them 'all the fun and none of the sinister elements of that festival'. His church was throwing a party for up to 70 children. He was sad to see that Witchfest was 'so widely encouraged and promoted' while Christian events weren't always covered in the press, although they were seeking to provide a 'healthy alternative'.

## CHRISTMAS CHEER

Christmas marks another Christian festival planted on top of (and intended to supplant) age-old pagan festivities. For Christians it is the time when the baby Jesus was born, to pagans it is a celebration of midwinter. Over the centuries it has come to be a gloriously inclusive hotchpotch of customs in which people from any religious or cultural background can take part.

Back in 1995 a journalist from the *Croydon Advertiser* looked into the traditional elements of the Christmas

story and punched great holes in them. He examined whether the sheep would really have been out on the hills; when in the year the original celebration of Christmas took place; the precise year of the nativity; where the magi tradition originates from; the fact that the Greek word 'kataluma' meant a room, not a stable; the appearance of the Star of Bethlehem, etc. But who needs historical truth to justify a celebration?



The 'pagan versus Christian' argument that occasionally surfaces spilled over into the pages of the *Croydon Advertiser* in December 2004, with a letter writer pointing out a few home truths to MP Peter Ainsworth's comments on the 'true spirit' of Christmas and the Christian basis for it. The MP and readers were informed that the Ecumenical Council meeting in Nicea in 325AD adopted many existing pagan festivals and renamed them. December 25 was the birthday of the sun god Mithras, which was combined with Roman Saturnalia, the Nordic Yule festival and the Celtic winter solstice. Christians should therefore not claim that they invented the midwinter celebrations and discredit everyone else.

Croydon is a hotspot for naturally growing mistletoe. A survey by wildlife

experts from the London Biodiversity Partnership, reported in 2002, showed that Croydon ranked second among London boroughs (admittedly behind neighbours and rivals Bromley) for being a fertile breeding ground for mistletoe. Some of the individual sightings dated back 20 years, so the Council was keen to update records, encouraging residents to report sightings. You can't have a Christmas without mistletoe, after all.

Shopkeepers and publicans might think Christmas starts in August, but Christian religious preparations for Christmas start with Advent, launched in the parish church in 1991 with a dramatic service, reported in the newspapers. It started in total darkness. A line of flickering light emerged at the high altar and divided into two streams of light, formed by the candles carried by the choir. Singing plainsong, the choir grouped beneath the great tower and made their way to the choir stalls. The light grew as the service proceeded.

In addition to watching mummers plays, Edgar Browne in the 19<sup>th</sup> century recorded how the Waits would walk round Thornton Heath, playing from dusk until after midnight. Apparently it was not the done thing to complain about the din produced by the trombone. The 'hot drinks' given to the players only made the music 'confused and discordant'. I think we can assume that these beverages were alcoholic.

In Browne's day carol-singing was mainly practised by young, poor people, while the well-off would do it for fun. Nowadays this custom is perpetuated by the straggly groups of schoolchildren who grudgingly give you a couple of lines of 'Jingle Bells', but only if you open the door to them. At least they

haven't started pelting windows with eggs, like disappointed Trick or Treaters at Hallowe'en.

If you want to hear carols sung properly, go to a church service. There are plenty to choose from in Croydon. At some you'll get the chance to sing along, but at others it's the choir who gets star billing. There are also concerts of seasonal music in the Fairfield Halls. Croydon was one of the first towns to celebrate Christmas with the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols, now a firm favourite in the calendar. It probably began in 1880 in Truro Cathedral, Cornwall, performed by Archbishop Benson. The Archbishop spent much of his time at Addington Palace and is believed to have introduced the service at St Mary's in the 1880s, making it the first British parish church to perform it.

Or how about a 'scratch' *Messiah*, where a volunteer choir and orchestra gets together and performs Handel's masterpiece without weeks of troublesome rehearsals? Give it a try! In the 1990s you nearly lost the chance. Gander Music Ltd attempted in 1992 to register the term 'Messiah from Scratch' as a trade-mark, and the Croydon-based London Mozart Players were among the interested parties objecting to the application. Their argument was that, even before Gander Music existed, they had invited local musicians in Croydon to take part in a scratch rehearsal of the piece. The trade-mark would have prevented them using the word 'scratch' to promote their activities. However, the *Messiah* isn't just for Christmas. As it covers the period from Christ's birth to his resurrection, some choirs perform it at Easter.

Croydon Council's festive spirit hit an all-time low in 2004. Previous years had



Christmas spirit, Centrale, 2004

seen the same old lights and decorations coming out of storage, with the tired and yet proudly metallic tree set up on the traffic island in George Street. In 2004 the Council turned Scrooge and decided on a cost-cutting yuletide, but did not give the shops enough notice that they would have to stump up £50,000 for new lights. Letters of complaint flooded in to the newspapers. Outlying districts such as Waddon held raffles and collections and raised money for their own lights. Folly's End Church paid for Surrey Street market to be lit up. The Christmas tree in North End was sponsored by McDonald's, but the Council charged for storing, transporting and disposing of the tree, leaving only just enough money to light it and not enough for any other tree decorations.

After Christmas the Council triumphantly announced that its measures had saved the taxpayer £135,000 - but how much did the shops lose when people decided to do their Christmas shopping

somewhere that provided a little more seasonal cheer? The letters columns could only speculate, with some supporting the Council for not wasting the town's council tax contributions, and others criticizing them for not being able to manage their funds better.

As Christmas 2005 approaches, the Council has again announced that it won't fund Christmas lights. It has put alternative plans in place, hoping to secure sponsorship for decorated Christmas trees throughout the borough. It is talking to business representatives to make sure they make their plans in good time to book and fund displays. The Council is quoted as saying that it will do its best to 'help local traders put up lighting schemes that symbolize Christmas and add to the appeal of their own shop window displays'. This includes helping to organize displays by putting groups of traders in touch with lighting contractors. They will also lend out lights they have in storage. The Whitgift Centre was quoted as saying it would only chip in if other stores showed a 'united front'. Its tenants already paid towards the Whitgift display and might not want to pay for lights in the town as well. A spokesman said a lot of the town's shops would be 'freeloading'.

The Whitgift Centre did us proud with its decorations in 2004, even if the Council didn't. However, they blotted their copybooks by complaining about the racket that the Trinity School choir and band made with their carols. Thus ended a 20-year tradition. The *Croydon Advertiser* criticized Whitgift shoppers for seemingly not knowing that the school had stood on the site of the shopping centre until 1965. The Whitgift Centre manager was reported as saying 'at the end of the day we're not a

theatre'. And the choir reportedly lost the chance to raise money for Barnardo's, a children's charity. A slightly modified and fuller version of the story appeared later, with all sides making conciliatory noises about the size of the band, busy schedules and Barnardo's not losing out.

Never shy of criticizing Croydon, an unnamed national newspaper ran a story claiming that the Whitgift Centre was one of several shopping centres banning Father Christmas, his grotto, elves and presents - either because of the fear of offending non-Christians or because the grotto took up too much space. Angry shoppers inundated the centre's management with phone calls. The Whitgift managers responded immediately with the claim that their Christmas plans were their biggest ever. Father Christmas (even if generally referred to by the Americanized name of 'Santa Claus') would be present from 1 December to Christmas Eve. The Whitgift Centre was very much pro-Santa. There would be a giant ice mountain, treasure hunts, a story-telling Santa, a tree where people could leave presents for underprivileged children, and a charity stand wrapping Christmas gifts.

Croydon newcomer Centrale had glitzy decorations in its rival shopping centre over the other side of North End, but lacks the open spaces that the Whitgift Centre has used so well for exhibitions and shows over the years.

When he wasn't too busy with his elves in shopping centres, Father Christmas popped up all over the borough in all sorts of vehicles, costumes, shapes and sizes. In 2004 he worked from a bus parked outside a Shirley school. The bus contained the bazaar, which offered

activities such as a crafts room where the children made Christmas gifts, and a games room.

Croydon seems to have an affinity for oddball Father Christmases. By the 1930s Kennards was the largest department store in town. In 1943 it advertised 'the fattest Father Christmas in the world'. He weighed in at 43 stone and had a waist measurement of 6ft 8 inches. In 1995 *The Big Issue* reported the story of one Sandra Figgis from Croydon. Sandra married childhood sweetheart Reginald Claus of Purley. Her career as Santa Claus started as a joke when her husband came home with some red felt knickers and a false beard, asking her to pose on the chimney while he took photos. Soon she was climbing chimneys in places as far afield as Epsom and Carshalton. I have my suspicions about the veracity of this story, as I've not even seen it referred to anywhere else.

Not a Santa himself, but a nostalgic Santa fan who confessed to going 'weak at the knees' over Christmas, James King had been collecting Santa figures for over 30 years by 1999 and had more than 150 models. He even renamed his house 'Santa's Home'. His story was that he grew up in a large family in Norbury and had fond memories of the festive season. His models were on display all over the house and his wife found him a bit nutty.

But it appears that Mr King has a rival. A Christmas market was held in St Francis' church hall in Monks Hill in December 2004, with a display of 107 mini Santas. These were from the collection of Michael Wort and were arranged around the church to welcome the new vicar and visitors. The *Croydon Advertiser* reported that Mr Wort

couldn't resist dinky Santas and liked showing them off .

Other preparations and celebrations for Christmas over the years have included a 'Victorian Christmas Fair' held at St Mary's in Addington Village in 1991 to raise funds for its upkeep. Hundreds attended. A photo in the *Croydon Advertiser* showed a woman dressed as Queen Victoria, with a boy holding a basket of toffee apples.

It was a Victorian and Edwardian custom for butchers to set out displays of poultry for Christmas, displaying them outside the shop with scant regard for hygiene. In 1909 Goddard & Sons of Addiscombe, near the defunct Leslie Arms, put on a 20-foot high display and ran a competition for people to guess the number of birds exhibited. The prizes were a turkey, goose or chicken.

In 2004 the Black Horse Residents Association in Addiscombe held its annual Christmas party for 46 children and felt the need to ask parents not to eat the children's food. There hadn't been enough to go round in 2003.

In the vestry at All Saints in Carshalton there is a small rectangular panel of stained glass representing the Nativity. It is believed to date from 1743 and come from the Low Country.

Nativity plays, mumming, morris dancing and other midwinter activities and entertainments are described elsewhere.

## NEW YEAR

Millennium celebrations in central Croydon were low key. The fireworks were kept so far from the masses that hardly anyone was aware of them. The fair and international food stalls in the

Queen's Gardens were a damp squib. Maybe I was there at the wrong time of day, but all I saw was one trailer selling south-east Asian food and a tiny children's playground.

In January 2000 the Arriere-Ban medieval re-enactors organized a banquet of medieval food as the finale of a day of (belated) Twelfth Night celebrations in Frylands Wood off Featherbed Lane. The fifteen courses were what the merchant classes would traditionally have eaten, with a wealth of spices and colour. The troupe followed the tradition of the King and Queen of the Bean, a ceremony to find out who would sit at the top table and get the best of the bread (the 'upper crust'). Cakes held a bean for the man and a pea for the woman. Another game had servants trying to flick doughnut-shaped cakes off antlers stuck to their heads.

Of course, it's not just the calendar Christians use that includes a New Year. In February 2005 traditional Oriental celebrations filled the Singapore Orchard restaurant in Coulsdon for four days for the Chinese New Year festivities bringing in the Year of the Rooster. Diners were also given a 'hong bao', a red envelope containing a token to bring good luck in the New Year.

# rites of Spring

**The Christian Easter festival embodies many pre-Christian traditions. The name derives from 'Eastre', the Teutonic goddess of spring and fertility, whose festival was the vernal equinox. Traditions surviving from this time include Easter rabbits, a symbol of fertility, and coloured eggs, whose bright colours represented spring sunlight. Over in Germany Easter is the time of year that bonfires are lit. The events in the Christian calendar were based around events in the Jewish calendar, which explains why they are celebrated around Passover. The Christian services and traditions are very well-known, but the origins of a few of the old customs risk being forgotten.**

## LENT

This commemorates the forty days and forty nights that Jesus Christ spent testing himself and his resolution in the wilderness. It comes before Easter in the Christian calendar. The run-up to Lent in modern times has been a period of excess (think of the Rio and Venice carnivals), with sports locally being a popular choice for letting your hair down before the solemn period of fasting. There is an entry in the parish records, mentioned by Lysons in 1792, that Samuel Fynch, vicar of Croydon, permitted his sick mother-in-law, a brewer's wife, to eat meat during Lent. This was normally so strictly forbidden that there was a charge for this licence to be registered in the presence of the church warden.

Other parts of Surrey (but not Croydon) used to play football on Shrove Tuesday, with rules that varied from town to town. Mass football in London was recorded as early as 1174, involving apprentices and students. It was generally a very rough sort of game, since the form we know was only introduced in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In towns there would be two sides, one half of the town playing the other, and the ball would either have to be retained by one side at a certain time or somehow got to the other team's goal post. The most popular game in Surrey

took place in Kingston upon Thames, and in 1797 the magistrates posted bills outlawing the game. These were ignored and several players were arrested and convicted at Croydon Assizes. The judge let them off with a warning, but the game continued to be played.

Another traditional pre-Lent custom is pancake eating and racing, and this is not in danger of being forgotten. Shrove Tuesday, of course, more often goes by the name of Pancake Tuesday nowadays. The original aim was to use up food items whose consumption was not permitted during Lent. The foods to be got rid of would have included some of the ingredients used in pancakes. Committed Christians nowadays often give up meat (but not fish!), chocolate, alcohol or other luxuries during Lent. All of this makes the Easter Egg a particularly delicious treat, representing the goodies they have gone without. On Shrove Tuesday in 1992 twelve chefs from some of Croydon's leading hotels held a pancake race for charity at Coulsdon Court Hotel to raise funds for the baby unit at the Mayday Hospital. The chef from the Selsdon Park Hotel won, and the prize was an engraved frying pan.

Ash Wednesday is another important day in the Christian calendar. At a

service in Croydon Parish Church in 1994 the palm crosses kept over from the previous year's Palm Sunday were burnt to ash by the Vicar of Croydon and his senior curate. This ash was then used to mark a cross on the congregation's foreheads when they were blessed. This marked the start of Lent.

## GOOD FRIDAY

Good Friday is a solemn day commemorating the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The Croydon Parish Church choir announced in 1992 that it would be singing Stainer's *The Crucifixion* on Good Friday, with the congregation invited to join in with the hymns.

Notices posted in newspapers in recent years have included advertisements for Easter services and events, including 'acts of witness' and 'walks of witness' and open-air services. The Churches in Croydon group has organized re-enactments of the Crucifixion on the streets of Croydon, with a Passion Play performed outside the Whitgift Almshouses in 2002. Palm Sunday parades are also held, involving palm fronds and donkeys.

For some reason Good Friday has long been associated with sport in the UK, presumably because it was one of the rare days that working people had off. Edgar Browne records activities including 'pedestrianism' and walking and running races in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These attracted large crowds, and in his lifetime funding had changed from gate-money to voluntary subscription.

Until around 1885 the game of quoits was played in Shirley on Good Friday. The score was kept on a 'tally', a notched stick similar to the sort once also used to record cricket scores. It is also believed that men from the village used to play marbles on Good Friday at around the same time.

## EASTER

Easter is the joyous time in the Christian calendar marking the resurrection of Jesus Christ three days after he was put to death. This is when children are traditionally allowed to start eating their Easter Eggs, but over the years celebrations have diverged far from the original themes.

Paying lip service to the pagan egg theme, a huge Humpty Dumpty egg made from over 7000 yellow, white and blue balloons was hauled up into the Whitgift Centre's glass pyramid as an Easter decoration in 1992. It was created by a couple of professional balloon artists from Shirley and Kingston, working as 'Rainbow Balloons'. School celebrations reported in newspapers over the years have included fancy dress parades, Easter bonnet parades, visits by characters dressed as superman and giant bunnies, teddy bears' picnics and hunting for hidden eggs.

Eschewing the starting of fires, Coulsdonians decided they would eat fire at Easter in 1995. The first event in the Coulsdon Easter Festival was a decorated egg competition on Easter Saturday, but other planned events included Easter bonnets and decorated bike competitions, fire eating and juggling. Croydonians of Guyanese origins also held an Easter Bonnet parade in 1992, followed by a social event with home-made cakes.

It's hard to see what connection many of these things have to either the pagan or the Christian festivals, but they are rapidly becoming part of the new traditions. And, of course, hot-cross buns can be had all year round.

## PENTECOST

Pentecost was a Jewish festival, but it also entered the Christian calendar after

that first Easter and its aftermath and now commemorates the day when the disciples were visited by the Holy Spirit to make them ready for their campaign of preaching and conversion. One of the gifts from the Holy Spirit was the ability to speak in tongues, much more convenient than the hours that I remember spending in the school language lab.

Churches in Sanderstead celebrated what the *Croydon Advertiser* strangely announced as the 2000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Pentecost on the village green at Sanderstead on 11 June 2000. Red, orange and yellow balloons were due to stand in for the flames containing the Holy Spirit. Except they would have risen into the skies instead of coming down and landing on people. Processions were to set off from each church and head for The Gruffy for prayers and singing, and the story of Pentecost was due to be acted out. A 'social hour' was to be followed by an outdoor Communion service, the cutting of a giant birthday cake, Scottish dancing and the release of hundreds of balloons with messages.

## MAY DAY

May fairs go back a long way but were at risk of vanishing until the 19<sup>th</sup> century Merrie England movement came along to revitalize things. Those of us who danced round maypoles at junior school, albeit in Lancashire in the 1960s, have a bunch of Victorians to thank for it, not the Elizabethans. Often the May Queen festivities got tangled up with walking the bounds, with a procession of children, banners and fussing mothers parading round the parish before the coronation and picnic.

A May fair used to be held at Broad Green and a huge maypole also stood outside the Crown Inn in central Croydon. It was surmounted by one or more crowns in Tudor and Elizabethan

times. For a while it was commemorated by a plaque on the brick garden, now demolished. Anyone dancing there nowadays would be at risk of being squashed by a tram. Crown Hill was also the site where the Kyngham Game was performed. Browne, observer of so many customs and traditions in Thornton Heath, also saw the 'Jack in the Green' procession there on May Day before it died out.

Back in 1904 May Day fell on a Sunday. The May Queen was crowned that day, but the parade had to be held on the following Monday. It was a wet day, but the local drivers made their usual display. Most of the horses came from the yard of Alfred Bullock, the main contractor to the Corporation, and they were judged in his yard in Tanfield Road. I wonder how many times Mr Bullock got jokes about his surname and how he was looking after the wrong animals.

Drivers spent days paying special attention to the grooming of the horses and the burnishing of their harnesses. Numerous prizes were awarded, split between the various Corporation divisions. There were about 50 entries from the Dust Collection Department, 30 horses on display from the Roads Department. The top prize listed was £1. The parade round the borough was held after the judging.

Crowning the May Queen is still important in some parts of Croydon, thanks largely to the Townsend family. In 2000 the *Croydon Post* announced that the Coulsdon May Queen and Caterham-on-the-Hill May Queen were to take part in the London May Queen procession on Hayes Common, where they would represent the district. The Coulsdon May Queen group was formed in 1913, but since 1960 the organizer had been Dawn Townsend.

In 2002 Dawn's granddaughter Sallyann Townsend-Know was inaugurated as London May Queen in a ceremony at Hayes Village Hall on 13 April. She was given a tiara to wear for all official May Queen engagements until her coronation at Sundridge Park in Bromley on 11 May. She explained to the *Croydon Advertiser* that she was now 17 and joined the May Queen movement when she was four. The progression was that you began as a fairy, then became an attendant before moving on to being a character. Eventually you became local May Queen. Once you became London May Queen you had to retire. Her cousin was due to be crowned that year's Merry Prince of England and would be the following year's May Queen. Her sister was also involved in the movement, as were her mother, aunts and, of course, grandmother.



Maypole site, Crown Hill - before the trams came