

The Village Feast

The Melbourn Village Feast has, from medieval times, started on the first Thursday after the 1st July, unless that day is also a Thursday, in which case it would be a week later. It was originally held on The Green in the centre of the village, and was an ideal opportunity for bawdy merry-making, sports and games, including archery, bowling, dice, quoits, skittles and wrestling. In 1859 there were five or six side shows depicting the wonders of the world: a pig with two heads and a sheep with six

The Feast

Our village feast took place on Thursday week, and was kept up till Saturday night. There was the usual quantity of stalls and spice cakes, toys, &c., and a large quantity of shooting galleries and swinging boats. There were also five or six shows (which made it look like a large fair), the owners of which appeared to try who could make the most noise, inviting the juveniles to walk up and see the wonders of the world, acting monkeys and dogs, a pig with two heads, a sheep with six legs, and a legion of other wonderful things, for the charge of only one penny. There was one called a juvenile circus, where a tomfool was on the stage, making ugly faces, and requesting those who stopped to listen to listen to him, to recollect that it was the only juvenile circus in the known world. There were two photographic establishments, which we believe did a good deal of business. We are happy to add, that we did not notice any drunkenness or quarrelling amongst our own townspeople; peace and good-will appeared to be the order of the day, during the time the feast lasted.

Cambridge Chronicle 16th July 1859

Shadows of coming events

The whitewashing and colouring of houses, the putting up of clean curtains at windows, the arrival of extra beer and the dusting of many wine glasses by housewives are evidences of feast time. The last three days of this week will witness the annual village feast on a Moor field, while next Sunday will be Feast Sunday. We look like having a passably good feast as modern feasts go, but it will be a poor thing compared with the feasts held on the green and along the High Street in the good old days before motor traffic came to worry and stifle us.

Royston Crow 8th July 1932

WHAT THE PAPERS SAID

Joe Cooper, playing the clown



Womens' Institute fancy dress competition, late 1920s

legs, for example. Shooting galleries and travelling photographers also had stalls. The Feast was a special time, as relatives from all around would try to get home for the fun. In 1882, due to excessive rowdiness, the Feast was obliged to move from The Green to the Recreation Ground on the Moor.

Many baptisms took place at this time as family members returned home for the Feast.

Sunday last was Feast Sunday, when many visitors came to the village to renew old friendships, and to sample the many varieties of home-made wines, which usually flow so freely at feast times. The feast, which since about the year 1877 has been held on the Moor, was, on preceding days, the scene of much merry-making, and all passed off orderly and well. The feast itself seems to have been larger and more successful than usual, it starting in earnest on the Thursday, a day earlier than in recent years. According to those who profess to be 'in the know' the larger feast was due to altered conditions of letting the sites. There are no signs of Melbourn feast disappearing, as so many like events have done.

Royston Crow 15th July 1932

WHAT THE PAPERS SAID