

SILVER JUBILEE MEMORIES

Committee Chairman Don Chapman recalls an eventful year that lasted almost five ...

In the spring of 1977 residents got used to being stopped by members of the Eynsham Silver Jubilee Committee on Saturday mornings and asked to contribute to the Silver Mile, a column of coins snaking down the west side of Mill Street. A few may have become adept at passing by on the other side.

The Silver Mile had two aims: to publicise the celebrations in June and to help raise funds for it. I doubt if the 5ps, 10ps, 20ps, the occasional 50p and odd 1ps and 2ps ever stretched more than 25 yards. But residents were remarkably generous as the final tally of £154.54 shows.



poster to promote the Silver Mile

At the Parish Council's request the late Dr. Charles Caine set up a working party in November 1976 to investigate how the parish might celebrate the silver jubilee and invited me, the late Peggy Garland, Robin Mitchell and the then Baptist Minister, the Rev. Chris Morgan, to serve on it. Later Peter Mathews and Caroline Price were delegated to join us by Bartholomew School.

We conducted a public consultation exercise in the Bartholomew Room in December, followed by a public meeting in Bartholomew School lecture theatre in January, where Dr. Caine said he could not continue as chairman because of other commitments, but I was willing to take over, and called for volunteers to serve on the Eynsham Silver Jubilee Committee.

The parish council nominated the late David Wastie to serve as my vice-chairman and the committee appointed Lindsey Mills secretary and the late Pat Carlton, a retired banker, treasurer. The other members were Eileen Brown, Sue Fowler, Carol Harper, Eynsham bookmaker Percy Lewis, Peter Mathews, Chris Morgan, Caroline Price and the late Fred Towns.

We inherited the residue of a £50 donation the Parish Council had made to the working party and asked for a further £50 loan (repaid in December 1977) to ease our cash-flow problems.

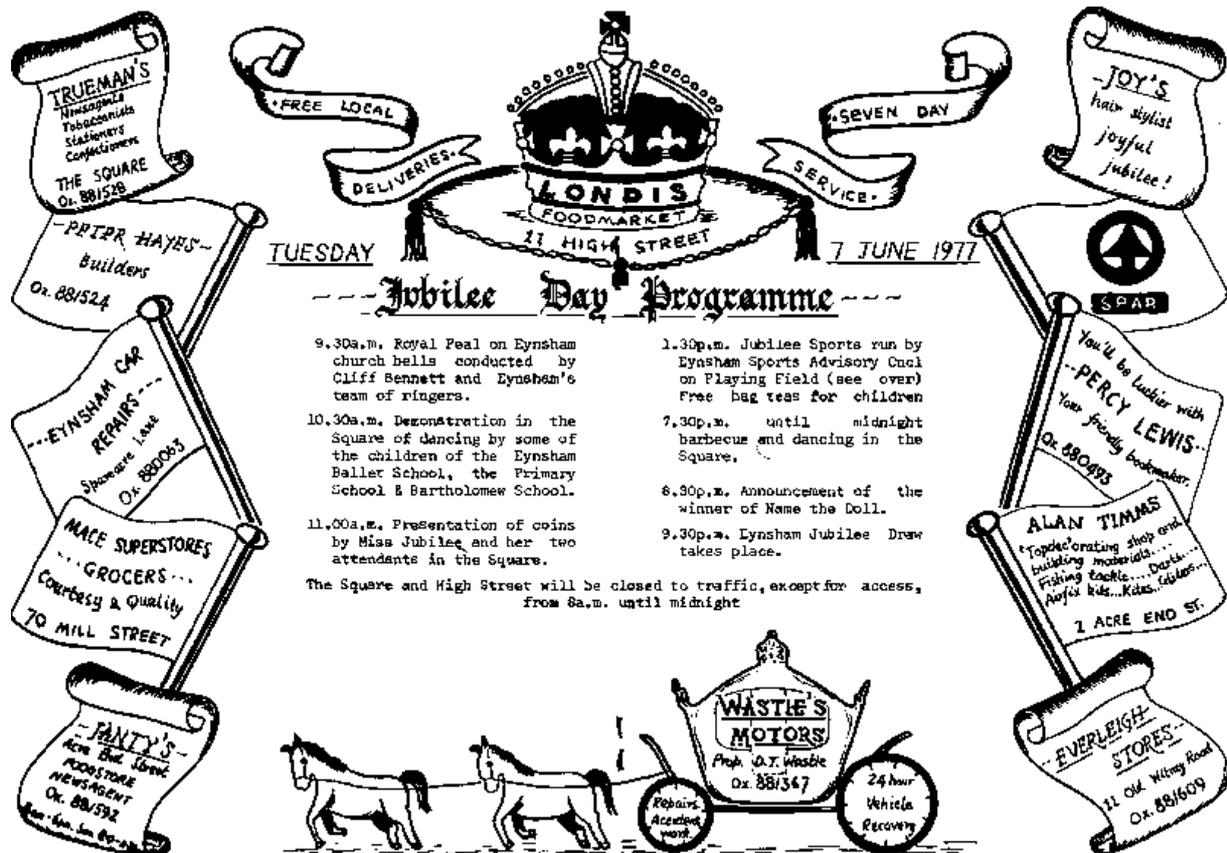
We worked hard and, despite the late start, by the end of March I was able to present the annual parish meeting with a three page summary of our plans, explaining that our only major expenditure would be on commemorative coins to distribute to the parish's children on Jubilee Day. Otherwise we planned to make the celebrations as self-supporting as possible and devote most of our energies to raising funds for a long-term memorial of the occasion.



Thanks to the generous input of other residents and organisations we were able to live up to our aims.

The Eynsham Play Group organised the dance at which Debbie Seeney was chosen Miss Jubilee and Nicola White and Wendy Smith her two attendants.

Jane Trease and Eynsham Rangers drew up the lists of children of 11 and under who were to receive coins and of residents over 70 who were to receive commemorative posies or button-holes. John Caunt and the parish's publicans organised the ancient Eynsham Beer Race. And other examples of generosity too numerous to mention are recorded in the programme, for which Sara Bannister hand-drew the layout (including the advertisements!)



Silver Jubilee programme hand-drawn by Sara Bannister

The celebrations began on Sunday 5 June with a parade led by the Royal British Legion, scouts and guides to a service of thanksgiving in the parish church which the Vicar of Eynsham, the Rev. Peter Ridley, conducted with Father Dinan and Christopher Morgan. The beer race – a marathon starting at the Britannia (now Boot) Inn, Barnard Gate, for serious athletes, a more leisurely pub crawl for social drinkers, took place on Monday.

On Tuesday, Jubilee Day, an action-packed round of events began with a royal peal on the church bells, took in a jubilee sports on the Playing Field and ended with a barbecue and dancing in the Square until midnight.

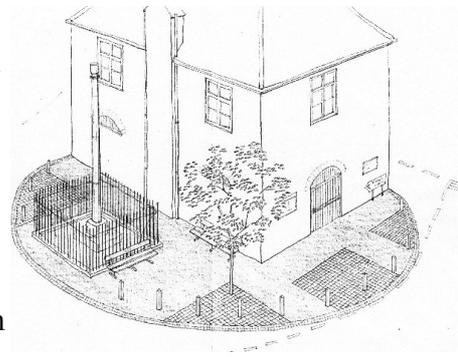
Inevitably there were hiccups. I had to despatch a special messenger to Barnard Gate with a posy for a lady who had somehow been overlooked. The dais, which a team of volunteers had worked overnight to produce, arrived too late in the Square for the teams of dancers from Eynsham Ballet School, the Primary School and Bartholomew School, to use. And the presentation of Jubilee coins by Miss Jubilee and her attendants took far longer than we had bargained for.

I remember Pat Carlton joking to me as the last child left the stage, clutching her precious coin, that the running commentary I had kept up for the best part of 90 minutes should qualify for an entry in the Guinness Book of Records.

But, overall, the celebrations were a huge success, owing more than anything to the community spirit the people of Eynsham show unfailingly on such occasions. The real fun started when the parish came to decide what to spend the money we'd raised on.

At the committee's suggestion the Parish Council called a meeting at which the Council chairman, the late Sam Timms, and I shared the chair. The 90-100 people packed into the Bartholomew School lecture theatre approved the donation of £250 to the West Oxfordshire Jubilee Appeal and after a series of exhaustive ballots on the 14 suggestions for a long-term memorial opted for a new pair of bells for the church in preference to brightening up the Square.

But first the bells proved to be considerably more expensive than their proposer had envisaged, then it turned out the fabric of the church tower would not support their weight. So in March 1978 the Parish Council turned to the Eynsham Society proposal for the Square.



Subsequently the Bartholomew Educational Trust, which could not afford to restore the Bartholomew Room (the third most popular suggestion at the parish meeting), began to explore the possibility of selling it and in August the Council, while 'still committed to considering the Eynsham Society scheme', asked what I thought of using the Jubilee money to buy it.

After consulting my committee, I replied that purchasing the Bartholomew Room would seem reasonable if, like the bells, the Square project proved impractical, but as chairman of the Silver Jubilee Committee I was 'bound by the decision of the public meeting' and my letter 'should not be regarded as an argument for short-circuiting consideration of Project Two in favour of Project Three'.

Despite pointing out to the annual parish meetings in 1979 and 1980 the adverse effect inflation was having on the spending power of the money we had raised, I heard no more from the Parish Council until January 1981 when an item appeared on the agenda: plans for the Square.



David Wastie and Don Chapman at installation of a memorial plaque on the Bartholomew Room; image © Sue Chapman, 1982

During the course of a heated discussion it became clear several councillors were

in favour of ditching Project Two in favour of Project Three, the chairman, Sim Timms, stormed out in disgust, councillors split down the middle on the proposition, and the vice-chairman, the late Julie Hyde, gave her casting vote in favour of the Room.

From the hindsight of history the decision was defensible. The Council had a once in a lifetime opportunity to buy the Room and faced a bill to repair it far outweighing the £1,500 it cost. But it caused a furore in the village and councillors promised solemnly in the not too distant future they would turn their attention to the Square.

In fact it was a completely different set of councillors who finally honoured that promise at the time of the Queen's Golden Jubilee with the help of a grant from West Oxfordshire District Council. Among the councillors most staunch in seeing it to fruition were my wife, Sue, and Debbie Seeney, the former Miss Jubilee!



The renovated Market Square was officially opened on 7 September 2002; image © Sue Chapman