

Miss Olivia de Havilland, representing one of her ancestors, with the Lieut-Governor and Bailiff as he looked in 1813 and the present Constable of St Peter Port.



The present Lieut-Governor, Lieut-General Sir Charles Coleman, with the Bailiff, Sir William Arnold, before the reading of the Queen's message and the loyal toast.

There was a revival this year, of Guernsey's cavalcade. Its reappearance gives C. NORTHCOTE PARKINSON food for modern thought.

The Chevauchée de Saint-Michel

On July 28 Guernsey was the scene of the gayest festival held there for many years. The weather was perfect, sunny but with a cool breeze, and people—both islanders and tourists—were out in their thousands. The day was wildly successful and the revelry went on until long after midnight. But what is a *chevauchée*?

It is a cavalcade, a procession of horsemen; but the answer is not really as simple as that. The ceremony has its origin in remote antiquity, the prescribed route being one that connects a series of pagan altars and dolmens. The original procession was, in fact, a spring fertility rite performed on foot, the wand-bearing participants wearing the magical colours of red, white, and black. This they still do and the pions, the young men who walk the whole way, wear a special costume and are entitled to kiss any girl they meet. This privilege was not neglected on Thursday, one girl (in a bathing suit) being actually pursued into the sea while three others (in bikinis) were seen to be kissed at a first-floor window.

But the pagan aspects of the affair were made partly respectable in the Middle Ages by the monks of Mont-Saint-Michel, who founded a daughter priory in Guernsey which was called, by contrast, Saint-Michel-du-*Vallée*, and was tactically placed in the area from which the procession has to start. They succeeded in turning the ceremony into a Corpus Christi celebration, but with St Michael's patronage.

Feudalism, however, had a more permanent influence. It added the horsemen, to begin with, without which it could not have become a *chevauchée*. The riders were the officers of the Court of Fief de Saint-Michel, the manorial estate from which the monks drew a part of their revenue. Upon these there devolved, in the end, the whole responsibility for organising the cavalcade. These riders were the Seneschal, the Sheriffs, the Greffier, and the Vavasseurs.

Gradually the Chevauchée became less religious in character—although it began and ended with prayer—and its purpose was accepted as the inspection of the roads, with fines imposed for every neglect in maintenance. To exercise this authority on the king's highway, and indeed over the Fief du Roi—it became essential to co-opt the King's procuror, comptroller, receiver-general, prevôt, sergeant, and greffier. This done, it only remained for the Lieutenant-Governor to appear with a cavalry escort and the militia band, and the Chevauchée, as we know it, was complete, and so remained until 1966, when we added to the final banquet a costume display, a concert, and a barbecue.

The Court of Fief de Saint-Michel was abolished in 1862, so that the present revival was a *chevauchée* pageant rather than the Chevauchée itself; a pageant modelled on the revival of 1813. In every other respect it was authentic, picturesque, and lively. For the hundreds who took part and for the thousands who applauded, the whole affair was tremendous fun.

For the under-privileged, by contrast, who were in Britain at the time, one or two questions remain to be answered. On what stage does the Chevauchée take place?—The whole island is the stage and we use almost the whole of it. At what hour of the day is it to be seen?—It lasts the whole day from dawn to midnight. And what made this revival so memorable?—That is a difficult question to answer but for those most deeply involved there was a fascinating contrast between the spontaneous gaiety and the meticulous organisation. While the atmosphere was good-humoured, relaxed, and innocent, the actual performance went like clockwork. Here were riders, carriages, and pions who had to travel some 24 miles, performing all sorts of detailed ceremonies en route from fining peasants to enacting a "dance of derision," and they came into Castel, where their journey ended, at 6.35 pm, as laid down in the programme, not a minute early or late. This is more easily described than done and an immense amount of work underlay all the laughter, music, and colour.

This last observation leads on to a further thought. We are accustomed in our lives to the comparison between the efficient and the quaint. In London we have closely juxtaposed the computers and the cavalry, the physicists and the fanfares. We think of all that is modern and scientific—this is the world that really matters—and turn rather pityingly towards all that is merely picturesque. Only rarely do we realise that some institutions, like Trinity House, are both colourful and competent.

Guernsey is a case in point. Here is a backwater, it might seem, in the modern world; a place where the Seigneurs have still some vestigial privileges and where the Queen is still honoured as Duke of Normandy. So painful is the contrast, to some, between the states of deliberation at St Peter Port and the Hungarian economists of Whitehall, that they would like to see the Channel Islands absorbed into the world of mechanised efficiency. A visiting Member of Parliament made the suggestion recently that there should be a new Channel insular constituency; thereby ensuring at least that his own party would never have any footing in it. And what could be more logical? If we are offered the choice between all that is archaic and obscure and all that is stream-lined and nuclear, how can we seriously prefer the past to the future? We have, on the one hand, a bailiff in his bailliwick, the jurats and the constables, the douzaine and the dean; on the other, the financial and statistical wizards, the calculators and careerists, the men from Oxford and their underlings from the London School of Economics. The contrast is between peasants muttering to each other in Norman dialects which are not even the same, and super-technicians who can produce computerised data at the drop of a blue-book. To many in London any comparison would be ludicrous. In a contest between antiquity and modernity the issue, they would say, is hardly in doubt. To that observation, however, the Guernseyman can reply with one brief and shattering sentence. "But we," he can say, "are still *solvent*!" And at that point the discussion must end in a thoughtful silence. There may be something in medievalism after all.

There is significance, then, in the fact that the Chevauchée de Saint-Michel was revived in Guernsey by the Court of Seigneurs, whose finance at least is markedly superior to that of Downing Street. It is also significant that their success was based on the feudal virtues of public service. They proved, finally, that there is no need for Guernseymen to import their culture along with their multiple-store clothing and footwear. They have, in fact, a tradition of their own and a fair stock of native ability.

Among the local families of distinction there is that of De Havilland, famous in the aircraft industry and famous again in the world of entertainment. And if the Chevauchée of 1966 goes down to history for one thing more than another it will be for the part in it played by Miss Olivia de Havilland. Taking the part of an ancestress, Lady de Havilland, wife of the Bailiff, she rode in a carriage and filled her role to perfection. In a beautiful period costume, brought from Paris, Miss de Havilland was the idol, finally, of the whole populace.

She was well supported, however, by local people of talent, some representing their ancestors and others chosen for their reputation on the amateur stage. Central figure, after Miss de Havilland, was "Sir John Doyle" the Lieutenant-Governor of 1813, and the player who took this part was wearing Sir John's actual sword. A further link with the past was provided by the telegram which arrived from the present baronet. Even more important, however, was the message received from the Queen, which was read out by the present Lieutenant-Governor to the crowd at the town church. After the Chevauchée proper, Miss de Havilland presented the prizes for the best costumes worn by members of the public as opposed to those taking part. Many of these were beautifully made and not a few were originals of the period. The concluding concert was played to a full house and the subsequent barbecue organised by the round table earned £500 for charity.

Will the Chevauchée be repeated? This must depend upon the policy of the Guernsey legislature, but it is manifest that a repetition would be popular. Tradition demands that the Chevauchée should take place every third year and this might well become the accepted pattern; provided, at least, that all involved will agree to make the effort. Whatever the decision may be, there can be no doubt that the Chevauchée has given encouragement to all that is best in Guernsey tradition.

This revival will be remembered for years to come and much that was known only to a few has been shared now with many. It may be that the Chevauchée of 1966 will mark a turning away from much that is unattractive in the modern seaside resort and a return to things more characteristic of the island's colourful past. There was something which nearly died during the days of the German occupation. We have proof now that life remains and that visitors will find the island more lovable in being more itself.

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