

Abinger's Pageant Of Sport



Enter Queen Elizabeth I, escorted by Sir Walter Raleigh
—an episode in the pageant. [Photo: T. A. Wilkie.]

THE ambitious Pageant of Sport staged at Abinger Common on Saturday cost less than £100 to produce. Four months ago the idea had not even been put on paper.

The pageant was a great success, and with a fete and competitions, helped the fund for rebuilding and refurnishing the Parish Church, which was severely damaged by a flying bomb in 1944. Gross takings were nearly £500.

Man behind the pageant was Mr. Charlton Abbott, 47-year-old agricultural merchant in London, who has made his home in Abinger for 16 years.

Mr. Abbott, who had seen only two pageants in his life, began to devise and write the pageant in February, and this was his first attempt of its kind.

Men and women of Abinger and organisations from the district—a cast of nearly 200—took part. Some of the costumes had to be hired, but most of them were home-made and beautifully done.

ON VILLAGE GREEN

The scene was the Village Green—local point of village sport—in the natural beauty of this unspoilt corner of the Surrey countryside. Nearby is the old Parish Church on the slopes of the highest hill in Surrey, and now showing no sign of its war-time damage.

For 90 minutes between two and three thousand people watched a picture of colour and movement on the Village Green as Elizabethans, Georgians, and Victorians strode the turf as they had done years before. The organisers took great pains to make the whole picture as authentic as possible, and it was this eye for detail that contributed a great deal to the pageant's undoubted success.

Two heralds in white, with gleaming post-horns, preceded on to a central stage the Spirit of Sport (David Holmes), who delivered the prologue. Throughout the pageant he spoke the romantic narrative from "behind the scenes."

ROBIN HOOD AND HIS MERRY MEN
First came the mediæval scene with the ancient sport of falconry, presented by members of Abinger Pony Club, followed by the romantic heroes of Sherwood Forest. The appearance of Robin Hood, who sent an arrow away into space over the trees, was the signal for a rollicking entry of the Merry Men in Lincoln Green.

This was Stoughton Youth Club's contribution, and they demonstrated the sports of archery (there were three

or four "bulls" from 30 paces), wrestling, and single-stick. During a wrestling throw Leo Sewell broke his collarbone, and Jack Page sprained a wrist, but both pluckily continued a very realistic scene.

BOWLS, SKITTLES, CHESS

On to the Elizabethan era and the more serene bowls and skittles, country dancing, and chess. The last-mentioned was outstanding in presentation. A chequered cloth was spread on the ground, and children of Abinger Hammer School, dressed to represent chess pieces, acted a game between Good Queen Bess and a nobleman. Others in the Elizabethan scene included members of Abinger Bowling Club and children of Abinger Common School (trained by Miss Gore).

Stool ball, displayed by Miss Brooker and friends, a delicate minuet by Shirley Munro, and a realistic-looking sword and dagger duel by members of Guildford Fencing Club were chosen as popular sports and pastimes of the 17th century.

Two men of Surrey Constabulary gave a bout of bare-knuckle boxing, and men and women of Westcott were supporters and onlookers in this 18th-century episode.

The early 19th century was represented by a charming group of children at play. Children of Abinger followed into the arena a cleverly constructed shoe-house, drawn by a cart-horse. "The Old Woman who Lived in a Shoe" and other nursery rhymes were sung by Patricia Faure, accompanied by Veronica and Heather Harrison, and mimed by the children.

"HEYDAY OF SPORT"

Lastly came the Victorian age, which the programme described as perhaps the heyday of British sport, and also with its tradition, dignity, class distinctions, and decorum. There were plenty of laughs at the gentle fun poked at our grandfathers and grandmothers. This scene was presented by men and women of Abinger and chil-

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dren of Abinger Common School. Then dignified tennis (Lady Touche and friends) and croquet (1st Holmbury St. Mary Girl Guides) were followed by a "slow motion" and comical football match by Holmbury St. Mary F.C. The Victorian scene closed with the greatest of all English games—"that manly sport"—cricket, played by "whiskered" men of Abinger.

APPRECIATION

After the epilogue the whole company paraded and received well-deserved appreciation from the audience.

The pageant was arranged by a committee under the chairmanship of the Rector (the Rev. Clifford Chapman), with Mrs. Alan C. Abbott as secretary. Production was by Nance Chapman and Mr. Abbott, dances by Nance Chapman, music by David Holmes, and mistress of the robes, Mrs. N. Hamilton. Many of the costumes were designed by Mrs. Abbott, and Miss A. King was also one of the principal pageant helpers. There were, of course, many others who contributed towards the success of the afternoon.

During the evening there were displays by Coldharbour stoolball team, Miss Gibson's School of Fencing (Godalming), and members of the Society for International Folk Dancing. Square dancing, in which anyone was invited to take part, was led by Guildford Youth Club, with Mr. I. O. Pope as caller.

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