

Woodford Feast Memories

Diary Extracts

1935

14th July Feast Sunday.

Extremely hot day. 11am CWR Thurston's Engine came to Mill Terrace with its loads (The Waltzer) first time at Woodford. Henry Thurston's Noah's Ark is at Northampton this year. Boys delighted, but there does not seem to be much side stuff.

Monday 15th July

What a welcome change. This morning nice cool fresh air. Trust this now continues a few days at any rate. Fair building up as this is Feast Monday. 3pm Hot again. 4.50pm Well I've finished work, everything is quiet so think I will away home to the Feast. 5pm Fair set up. Boys have popped to see the new ride - The Waltzer

7.15 pm Too hot for Mrs W so J and I stroll to the Green. This is the first time J refused to go on a big ride, but really I had never seen the like s of the Waltzer. About a dozen cars on a track larger than Noah's Ark , they go round

and back and do a swift turn. Most people appeared very shy of venturing but later more patronised the machine. I was disappointed at there not being a children's ride or any sideshows. Tommie Essam grumbled at poor trade. J and I had a ticket for the spinners, we just missed a prize.

8.30pm To the club. Back to the green at 9.30 talking to the Turners, E J Barnes, J Just. The former offered me a ride on the Waltzer. Dick Reynolds, then some time later, Reg Bosworth were invited so on the Waltzer we went and I enjoyed the thrill

Wednesday 17th July

Quite a change much cooler. Raining and blowing . 10.30am Just seen one feast lorry go along Mill Road from Woodford. 1.15pm Just seen Engine - the "Victory" and loads (Waltzer) heading off to Weedon.

Thursday 18th July

..... so cool I have been glad to light the office fire - a remarkable change since Sunday.

1936

Saturday 11th July

Heavy Rain from midday to midnight

Sunday 12th July

We had great hopes of John H Thurston coming with his handsome Ben Hur Chariots but I've no doubt his being unable to leave the Feast Field at Kettering where the water was standing deep.

I had written to John Thurston at Kettering and received a wire saying he would endeavour to visit . but conditions were bad at Kettering.

Rain commenced again 3.pm and continued through the evening - visitors were few. John Thurston came over and cancelled his men's longings as he is unable to get off the Kettering Feast Ground in time for our Feast owing to the wet state of the ground. Most disappointed as it would have been an exceptionally nice fair on our green

Monday 13th July

A nice little set out on the green . children rode on the children's roundabout. Tommy Essam's spinner, darts etc, Billy Manning's American jigsaw, Harvey's Hoopla etc Johnsons children's rides. Very nice too, a platform on this machine. Harry Wright's famous lucky dip an old visitor. Tilley's sweet stall. Weather kept fine a large number present on the green I won a box of toffees and bought a coconut

Tuesday 14th July

Went to the fair with children. Enjoyed themselves on the juvenile roundabout. Rain came again at 10pm carried on through the night.

Wednesday 15th July

A little finer, saw the fair leave for Weedon

1939

Feast Sunday 9th July

4.30am. I awoke and perceived a clear blue sky and thought it a promise or sign of a nice day, but at 8am the clouds again appeared and also wind, but there were bright warm periods. Recalled the days when I used to take J sometime walking, sometimes in the push chair along Mill Rd to see Thurston's Engines and other paraphernalia coming to the feast on Sunday Morning. The fair did not arrive from Kettering until mid day.

Monday 10th July

6.pm Amplifier on John Thurston's Joy-boats commences (Oh for the return of an organ)

7.30pm I to fair to find J. Not so many people as there used to be years ago. J spotted me, had just got a fortune card from a machine, we paid Harry W Wright a visit for a lucky dip. I was not pleased at all with the set out. The chariots barely set up. No hoardings again or fancy attractive pieces. Tommy Essam as usual looking much thinner, he has been ill. Looks older than his 58 years. Called at the Bakers Arms for a little drink and then the club where I stayed longer than intended. I called at the green very late and had several rides and knocked down a coconut. What luck. Everyone in bed when I got in - cold night. Had talked to Frank Warren on green spoke of boyhood days and nights at the feast, Taylors show, organ etc. And so ended Feast Monday once more

Tuesday 11th July

Fair did not open until 7pm. I went down at about 7.30 rode on John Thurston's Joy

chariots with J, "Roll 'em in" games and Tommy Essam's spinner, but we were not lucky enough to win a prize.

Wednesday 12th July

Nice morning 7am John Thurston's Engine and two loads go past on their way to Mildenhall Suffolk to open on Thursday for flower show. Other joints still not taken down at 8.30am. 2.30 pm just saw several inc Harvey's and Mills go along from Woodford on their way to Weedon.

Home from work, all fair had cleared off the green a disappointing set out this year. Big ride not half erected and juvenile ride not set up.

Walked to the Rectory to fetch J home who had been to tea. I recalled the days of long ago, when as a boy we used to sit down on the lawn and be served with tea, our annual church Sunday school treat on the Wednesday in feast week. Prizes used to be given at bottom school on the Wednesday morning by our then rector Rev J Watson 30 - 35 years ago. The then two Miss Chews used to serve us, filling our mugs from jugs and shouting anymore tea. I still retain those words in my memory, then in the evening the Woodford Brass Band would play for dancing, we, having had our races and games then at 8pm we would hurry up to the green to visit Taylors cinema Show for the last time as Wednesday usually was the last night at Woodford and so ended our happy days of Woodford feast of long ago.

I forgot to mention the troublesome gnats which were forever present.

1940

Wednesday 10th July

Mr Waterman's house / chimney / roof of the "White horse Inn" damaged by lightening.

14th July - Our Feast Sunday

Recalled the times of years ago when I would walk to Mill Terrace to watch the arrival of Thurston's Engines - what happy visions and memories are thus recalled. Only one caravan arrived by midday, others followed in the afternoon and engine didn't arrive until 5pm . John H Thurston again this year Henry Thurston not now the Lessee of the green. He let us down so many times so the green was re-let and John who has attended these last three or four years "took" the green. No band this year - war time feast - I recall the "Great War" - time feasts - one or two years no fair attended. Taylors last visit was about 1915

Feast Monday 16th July

Lovely Feast weather. This morning fair people busy erecting their joints and roundabout. I remember as a boy living near Baptist Church looking out eagerly on feast Monday morning to see the first swing-boats being erected. Jack Woods Tommy Essam flags flying on top and so on

Home across the Leys , could see the brightly coloured vans on the green. Familiar amplifier, no organ. Left home at 6 for the fair, at the infant school a street photographer took my photo. J refused and walked on. I looked in vain for Harry Wright's Lucky Dip which we have never failed to visit. He and the late

Tommy Essam's Spinner etc are absent on this occasion. We had tries at the hoopla, "Roll 'em in", Darts, Shooting and coconuts, but we did not win a prize. Quite a lot of side stuff and a juvenile roundabout - A Summers. I think this was very nice as there had not been one, for two or three years past however, J now too tall so ride on the juvenile set. Didn't want to come for a ride with me on the racing cars, - a new machine presented by Mr John H Thurston. A nice ride. Frank Neall and I enjoyed three rides. We tried mechanical games and won some coppers, after a good look around - no toffee applies - I left J to go to the club where there were many present. The fair had closed when I went back - war time - no lights allowed and which we sadly missed as the lights gave a special charm to the fair

Tuesday 17th July

Very dull and some showers during the day - not much like our dear old Feast weather. 7pm to fair. J went a little earlier a good crowd there but showers threatened. With Frank Neall for half an hour, he wouldn't ride again we looked around, then to club until 9.30pm Found J, J and I went on the motors, only ride we had together this feast. Raining quite a lot J got some Brandy snap. Fair closed down at about 10pm and so ends one more Feast Spoke to John Thurston in Dukes Arms. Hoped for "better days" at another Feast. He was satisfied with business.

Wednesday 17th July

Taking down Fair - dull showers. At noon I saw the engines leaving along Mill Road for Mildenhall

1953

Sunday 12th July

This is our Feast Sunday and the weather is dull and cold. I went to 8am Communion about 50 -pleasant. After breakfast I walked along Mill Road and down to the station. I used to do this with the children to watch the engines of H Thurston coming from Kettering or Raunds Feast along the Turnpike to our feast. . Now it is all motor diesel wagons not half so charming or fascinating as the loads used to be.

It was at 4pm that John Thurston "Joy" (Living Van) arrived in showery weather which had come on again much to our disappointment. Finedon Band Turned up by Coach but we saw them turn round and go back again as weather was wet and it looked like a wet evening, another Feast Sunday over.

Monday 13th Feast Monday

Fair people not a in a hurry to unpack, not until 2pm did the weather improve, but the wind still howled like winter time - it was cool.

5.45pm Fair all set up on the green Flags and brightly coloured caravans standing in an avenue as far up as the gate to the Rec. Then at 7pm just as the fair opened came a storm and a rainbow appeared, soon it was fine again and we could see many people round the stalls

8pm I strolled to the fair. I watched the bumpers - drive your own car but I did not stay as I saw nothing interesting such as we used to have in the old days. Quite a lot of the paraphernalia distributed over most of the greens. Disappointing to discover no ride for the children except for a small set of swings

which was encouraging. I went to the Dukes Arms where I had a chat with John Thurston for a short time. Of course the loud speakers dominated everything. Then to club returning home at 11 but did not go to fair ground. And so ended a disappointing feast Monday considering set out on the green and the very wet weather.

Tuesday 14th July.

A brighter morning as I looked at the green and the sunshine on the fair ground a little like old scenes of feast mornings. Storms again. I went out at 8pm called on the green and saw Mr Thurston who went to his living van and wrote out a list of travellers who were with him, for this I thanked him. We then adjourned at his invitation to the Dukes Arms and had a glass of ale. I mentioned the matter of the children's ride and he explained that Mr Holmes had bought one but could not erect it owing to a special wheel (crown wheel) which broke soon after arrival on the green on Sunday. This was most unfortunate for the owner and for the children. Mr Thurston set off to Clerk of Parish Council (Mr Perrett) to pay the £11 for standing on the green. Later I met Mr Summers, Mrs also who invited me to a beer. Pot stall was doing food but not many patrons on fair, saw Mrs Thurston in pay box of the dodgems. Called at Dukes Arms chatting to showman employees and home at 10.40 fair closed down soon afterwards.

Wednesday 15th July St Swithins

Nice bright early July morning. Just before 6am I heard a fair load go up the street then before 7 o'clock most of the lorries drove past en route for Mildenhall. Shortly after Mr Thurston van passed and then Mr Thurston in his car. The green was all clear again and another Feast gone past.

July 1959

Sunday 12th July Woodford Feast.

10am John Thurston's living van arrived and his car and goods, others followed, I strolled to Alledge and saw one or two loads coming down Mill Road. Memories of years ago when J and others and I used to go to meet the engines of Henry Thurston. A stormy day.

Monday 13th July

Woodford Feast Monday. A cloudy day but evening quite pleasant. , not at all like the dear of feasts of long ago. A good crowd on the green at 8pm but at 9.30 -10pm the green deserted. The pubs and club crowded. The people do not support the fair as they should do. 11pm all closed down

Tuesday 14th July

A few on the green. Dodgems riding well-fewer people. 10pm hardly anyone about. Things set worse as years pass. One star as I look out of bedroom window at 10.45 pm Thurston's dodgems are closed, as I write these notes no noise of dynamos

Wednesday 15th July- St Swithins

A lovely summer day. Met John Thurston this evening in the White Horse.

Friday 17th July

Lovely warm July day. Yellowhammers singing in the warm sunshine. I paid a visit to the fair after 10pm. I won coconut and various prizes - spent a few coppers with each showman as it should be. A few still about at 11pm fair finally closing at 11.30pm

Saturday 18th July

A lovely July Summer day -typical Woodford Feast weather. Went to the fair and seemed a good evening for everyone. Dodgems did not close until 11.30pm A lovely warm summer evening..

Sunday 19th July

A beautiful summer Sabbath morning.....very hot sunshine. Show people sitting outside during the afternoon.

Monday 20th July

On this beautiful bright summers morning the fair people are leaving. Some at 6.30am, others followed at 7.00 as I dressed..... John Thurston left at 8am and so goodbye to another Woodford Feast.

1962

Sunday 8th July

This is our Feast Sunday and we are blessed as this is the best summer's morning we have had this year - lovely and warm and bright. Church at 8am. Saw Charles Thurston's Diesels conveying the jets down the street at 9.30am. Walked up to Alledge corner and Mill Road and saw one fair wagon come down Mill terrace

Monday 9th July Feast Monday

A fair warm although dull and cloudy morning. At 3pm wind arose and made for a cold evening. Charles Thurston, son of John had built up his jets - a novel machine in which 3

could be seated and spun round and rise up high in the air.

7.30pm I went to the green and watched. I've been ages sampling the new riding device. A nice little fair. Spoke to Bing Summers, Frederick Mills and other. Had a hot dog at 10.15pm before retiring.

Tuesday 10th July Feast Tuesday

Very dull cool morning with thunder showers afternoon clearing by 7pm

I watched the jets and chatted to the foreman - a Dutchman. I was pressured to have a ride on the jets but could not be persuaded, and so ends another fair and Woodford Feast

1963

Feast Sunday 7th July

Fair arrived at 1pm. John Thurston - Dodgems. Kettering Fair was wet. I tried to see them coming down Mill Road but was unsuccessful. I came home from Church in the evening - band playing (Thrapston) near gate to Rec.

Monday 8th July Feast Monday

As I waited for the bus at 8.10 I spoke to Percy Summers as he was putting up his joint aided by his wife. Weather cool - not like the usual Feast Weather

8.30pm down to the fair - a few people about

Tuesday 9th July

I called at the green and talked to Henry Parker, Frank Harvey, Bert ?. Later talked with John and Mrs Thurston and P Summers in the Duke. Fair closed at 10pm very lean - very cool.

Wednesday

Feast closed until Friday

Friday 12 July

Cool with some sunshine Fair opened at 7.30pm a few on the green. I met John Thurston and chat called in Duke at 10.30pm - a lot there.

Saturday 13th July

As I write at 11pm I can still hear the fair, and so our feast once more has come to an end

Sunday 14th July

A very bright sunny morning at 5am but cloud developed later - not a July day at all

Fair dismantled today

Monday 15th July

I said goodbye to P Summers and others as I boarded my bus to work. Green all clear when I arrived home. Disappointing weather for St Swithins day today

1964

11 July - Saturday

I went on the 6pm bus to Kettering Fair (Feast). I visited the small shows, was disappointed. I expected to see a real dwarf, but it was a skeleton of a 19" man found abroad. "Sleeping Beauty" - a girl was posing as such and looked very real. I could perceive her breathing. I returned home on 9.20 bus - not very pleased with the modern fair.

July 12th Feast Sunday

Went to church at 8am, 11am and 6pm Church looked lovely inspiring service and good old feast hymns including "The Church's one foundation"

July 13th Feast Monday

Fair opened at 6.30pm. I went along at 7.30pm. Pot stall busy - a fair number of people on the green. Cheery Roundabout organ playing old tunes (B Holmes). Dodgems seemed to be busy. Called in the Dukes Arms where there were many people. Feast seems to be good for the pubs and club but poor for the fair people, who bring in the people from around. Fair closed at 10.30pm. Not feast Monday like it used to be. Gets poorer and poorer each year.

Tuesday 14th

Fair - few people were there worse than last night, all had closed down by 10.15pm. Dukes Arms packed as usual.

Friday 17th July

Beautiful bright sunny morning and day quite hot and like Woodford Feast used to be. On fairground John Thurston and I imbibed at the White Horse and more people about the fair at ¼ to eleven.

Saturday 18th July

Pleased to see a good number of people on the green tonight sampling the fair. Some rain at 6pm but then a fine warm evening prevailed like old fashioned feast weather. Fair closed at 10.45 and so ends another Woodford Feast

Sunday 19th July

Conversed with John Thurston. They are due to leave the green tomorrow for Ramsey Feast, Hunts

Monday 20th July.

Saw P Summers wagon pass home. J Thurston and others had not left as I boarded my bus, but green was clear when I reached home at 6pm