

# THE FUTURE OF THE FAYRE

## BY CHRISTOPH LINDNER

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**For many people from South Bucks, West London and further afield, the late May Bank Holiday has been a fixture in the diary. Destination? Denham and its Village Fayre.**

The origins of Denham Fayre go back to 1227 when a Monday market and a fair were granted to Henry de Capella. In *A Brief History of Denham Village and Church* from 1954, written by RA Way (an ancestor of our current patron John Way), we read *"In the reign of Henry III we find the grant of a weekly market, and an annual three-days' Fair."*

It was mainly a trade fair for the local population who would be unable to travel too far afield. Interestingly, the old Fayre had a fixed date, 13th May. There were of course no "bank holidays" then.

In 2020 we had to cancel it because of Covid and then again in 2021. Last year the celebrations around the Queen's Platinum Jubilee meant that there was no late May Bank Holiday and - for the third year running - no Fayre.

This was, however, not the first time that it was cancelled. Here is RA Way again: *"This [Fair] lasted, at least as a one-day affair, until the 1870s, when my father [the patron Benjamin Henry Walpole Way] abolished it at the request of the Vestry."*



The Vestry was the annual meeting of parishioners and it would be fascinating to know the reason behind the decision. In 1871 the Fairs Act made provision for the abolishing of fairs that caused public disorder. In the previous year, the infamous Denham Murders made the village known far and wide. Were the locals afraid that the Fayre might attract trouble-makers? Whatever the reason, it was abolished in 1873.

The Fayre was revived in the 1920s, this time more for pleasure than business and to raise money for the repair of the roof of St Mary's Church, and again in the 1950s, when the infamous death watch beetle was again causing serious damage to the church beams. While many aspects of the Fayre have changed over the years, it has remained a highlight in the village calendar, when Denham welcomes thousands of visitors and provides an experience of fun and community. It's been a joy

to see how the many volunteers give generously of their time and skills to make it happen. The money raised has been a vital contribution to help ensure that St Mary's Church is kept in good repair and condition.

All of us have experienced how the coronavirus has changed so many aspects of our lives. In the years immediately before Covid, the Fayre Committee saw the retirement of some long-standing members, who had been active in organising the Fayre for many years. Others followed during the pandemic, so that we did not have a viable committee by 2022. In the autumn of last year, we had to acknowledge this. September/October is the time when we have to set the levers in motion for the organising of the Fayre for the following year. After our PCC explored various options, followed by conversations with other members of our community, no feasible plan emerged how we could restart it in 2023. Planning and running an event of this scope safely and in a way that it attracts visitors year after year is no small undertaking. So, what is its future?

We are pausing the Fayre again this year. This decision hasn't been taken lightly. It is an acknowledgment that we do not have the necessary support and expertise to run it at present. However, unlike in 1873, we are not abolishing it! There may be ways to reduce the scope in future to make it manageable, or to identify organisations to run it for us without changing the community character of it.



While the Fayre was initially owned by the Lord of the Manor and Patron of St Mary's, and latterly organised by St Mary's Church, it has always been supported by the Denham community at large. We haven't found another community group as yet who are ready to take on the organising of the Fayre, but a solution might well emerge over the next months. Are you someone who could make a considerable and consistent commitment to the planning of the Fayre (from October to May each year)? Do you want to help restart it, in whichever format?

Please send an email to our church office ([office@denhamparish.church](mailto:office@denhamparish.church)) or call our parish secretary Victoria Lucas (01895 832771) to give her your details.

*The Denham History website has an excellent article about the Fayre from 2020, with many personal memories of residents. You can find it here: [www.denhamhistory.online/post/all-the-fun-of-the-fayre](http://www.denhamhistory.online/post/all-the-fun-of-the-fayre)*