

Pilton Festival : The Early Years A personal view by Ian Thomas



I took up my post of Deputy Headmaster of The Bluecoat C.E. Junior School, Pilton in January 1978. At that time John Piper was the Headmaster and also the Organist and Choirmaster at St Mary's Church, Pilton and the Rev. Jimmy West was the Vicar and Chairman of the Managers of the school.

Anthony Geering became the Vicar in 1981 and we got on like a 'house on fire'. Then in 1982 Anthony had the idea of resurrecting the Pilton Festival [an event which apparently dates back to 1344 when Edward III bestowed the right to hold an annual market on the village]. He got Noel Harley, Albert Linacre and me together for an initial meeting and the rest, as they say, is history.



Anthony became the Chairman, Noel was the Secretary (I think) and I was the Treasurer. Albert did just about everything else, bless him. There were lots of money raising events and, as you can see from [Clifford Davies's film 'Pilton Festival 1982'](#) [a short version of which can be seen on The Pilton Story by clicking this link], lots of people doing a lot of work - it was very well received in the locality. Bluecoat School entered into the spirit of the thing with various events engineered to be part of the Festival - Sports Day, Summer

Fair, etc. - with mediaeval themes, and the children were also involved with other groups in the community doing their bit as well. As Treasurer I was responsible for collecting all the monies from fund raising events, making sure that helpers got their 'out-of-pocket' and other expenses, any equipment hired was paid for, making sure we stayed in 'the black', etc. The photo, above left, shows Anthony Geering as the Green Man making a proclamation at Pilton House.

The 1984 Festival followed much the same theme.

In 1986 a costume hire business in Newport became involved and the standard of 'dress' went up a few notches. If I recall rightly this was when the Horse and Bamboo

Theatre first became involved. They were certainly responsible for a good bit of the 1987 Easter Festival and the Pilton Egg Pacing production.



The photo, left, is of the 'Through the Centuries' procession of 1982. I am the Bishop granting the Charter - accompanied by my two children, Kate and Andrew. The photo, below, shows me reading out the Charter for Pilton's Annual Market in 1986, and the photo, bottom, is of my two children the same year.



By 1987 there were great changes in school management happening with Local Management of Schools being introduced. This meant that schools were becoming far more responsible for managing themselves and LEAs were taking a 'backseat'. The new headmaster, Dick Chamings, and I had a much increased workload because of this and I felt I no longer could give the time to being Treasurer of the Festival. Also, Anthony had moved on to Crediton and we had moved out of Barnstaple to Swimbridge for family reasons and were very much involved with increased family matters. I, therefore, resigned from the treasurership.



The 'School in the Community' became a major drive from our political masters and as I had been the main link to the Festival and other events in the church, the Headmaster thought I was the best person to lead this part of the school's work. This involved me linking up with other schools, organisations and businesses in Barnstaple and kept me very busy when not teaching, sharing the management of the school, etc.!

By 1997 my health was deteriorating and I was able to take early retirement in July of that year.

Ian Thomas