

Emsworth Water Carnival

by Albert Madgwick and others

REFLECTIONS

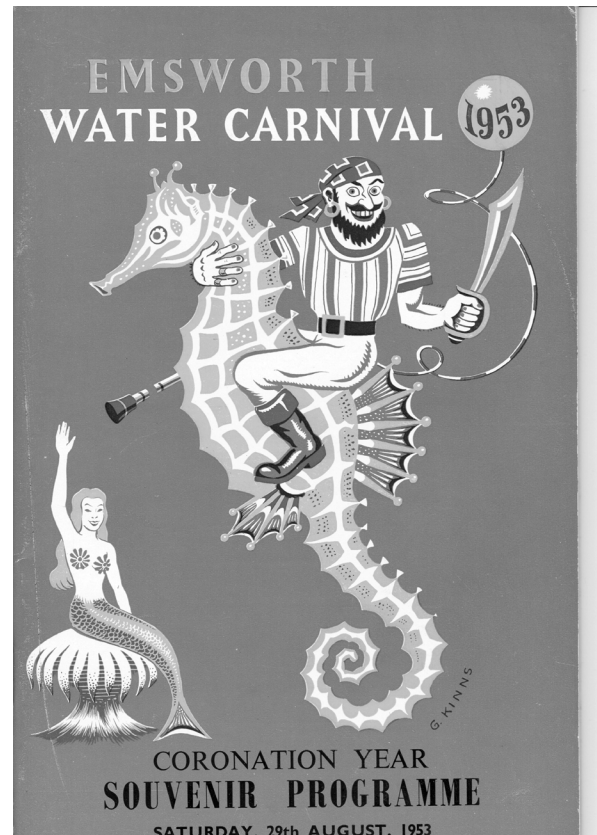
BY ALBERT E. MADGWICK (Hon. Secretary of the 1919 Carnival)

Printed in the 1953 coronation souvenir programme

In the early years of this century the Water Carnival at Emsworth was the great event of "Emsworth Week". This "Week" was celebrated towards the end of the summer, with events arranged by all sections of the community. Usually on the Wednesday in the afternoon there was a regatta in the harbour, followed by a water carnival in the evening, which drew large crowds of sightseers from all parts of the County and West Sussex. The water carnival was held in the Mill Pond, West Street, and the Emsworth town band played their selections from a field on the west side. The Mill Pond was not then enclosed with a sea wall – the water flowed in and out with each tide.

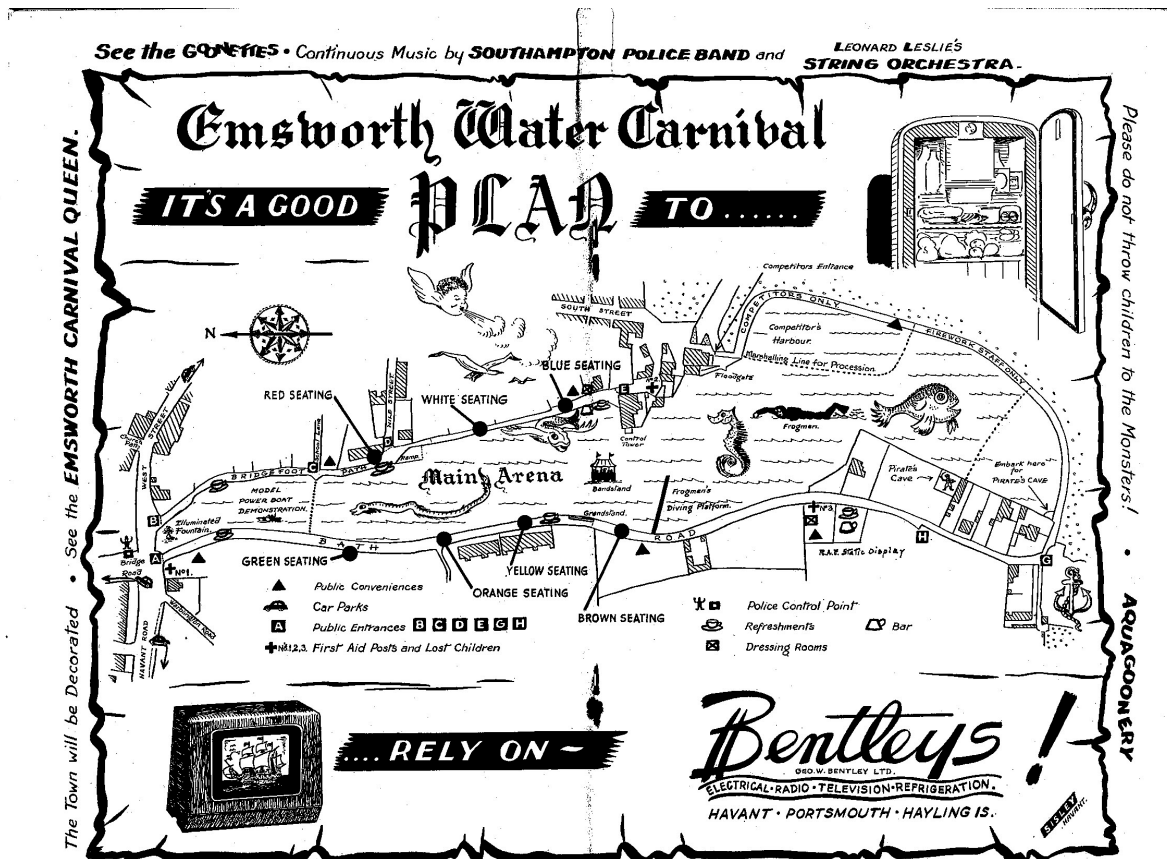
One of my earliest recollections of the Emsworth Water Carnival was in 1902, when with other young people of my generation we decorated a boat and took part. If you were not the proud owner of a boat, or it was not large enough for your scheme of decoration, it was the custom to hire a boat from one of the fishermen and decorate that. The decorations were of flags, bunting, streamers, fairy lamps, Chinese lanterns and similar hanging lights. Many created topical tableaux and there was keen competition amongst the younger folk to have the prettiest boat.

In the early evening as many as 25 boats were rowed around the mill pond and prizes were awarded to the different classes of entry. At dusk the mill pond was illuminated with fairy lamps – there was no electricity in those days. A fence was erected on the sides of the mill pond and glass fairy lamps of different hues of blue, red, white, orange,



green and brown were fastened on to the wire. In the lamps were placed night-lights and each had to be lit separately. This was a great task and occupied much time of the voluntary helpers. On the boats the glass fairy lamps and Chinese lanterns were illuminated and the whole effect was a real scene of fairyland.

Amateur musicians were on most of the boats and strains of music from the guitar, banjo and mandoline, mixed with the vocal efforts of the crews, floated across the mill pond, to the delight of the onlookers. The lights normally burned for three hours, and as each began to die away the water carnival was concluded by a brilliant display of fireworks. The crowds wended their way home on foot, there being no motor cars or buses, and only a few having a horse and trap. For weeks afterwards the water carnival was a major topic of discussion. "Emsworth Week" faded away with increased facilities



Centrefold of the 1953 programme

for new forms of recreation and for some years the water carnival was not held.

As a part of the Peace Celebrations after the first world war in July, 1919, the water carnival was revived. A regatta was held in the harbour on one afternoon, followed by the water carnival in the evening. As might be expected, it was difficult to obtain materials for decorations and only a few boats participated. These difficult conditions continued, and with changing public taste, it seemed that the Emsworth Water Carnival had become extinct. But this was not so. In 1951 great efforts by numerous helpers with modern facilities produced a water carnival at Emsworth of unequalled splendour, which was the talk and delight of the whole district for many months.

In this great year of our history the loyal residents of Emsworth are producing another water carnival as a part of the celebrations of the Coronation of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. May the great effort and

hard work of those inspired to do this be rewarded by a dazzling success ever to be remembered in the years to come as one of the "highlights" of the County celebrations.

The programme for the 1951 water carnival recalled the revelry and the unique spectacle enjoyed in even earlier years as the festival was revived to commemorate the Festival of Britain Year.

"Some of the earliest writings on the subject are contained in the Emsworth Parish Magazine for September 1894 which records that the evening the Carnival was held would never be forgotten.

The Mill Pond had been surrounded by thousands of fairy lights which were elevated sufficiently to get full advantage of the reflected light on the water, and the great crowd felt they were having something like a peep into a veritable fairyland."

Continued overleaf

Emsworth Water Carnival continued in pictures



Hoarding, left, advertising the 1951 Emsworth Water Carnival which was revived in 1953 for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's Coronation and again in 1977 for her Silver Jubilee

Patricia Fletcher was the Carnival Queen in 1953



Prizes have always been awarded for decorated boats. In 1919 a distinction was made between fishermen's boats and other boats while in 1951 other categories such as trade entries were added

Fancy dress competitions, swimming races, water polo contests, a tug of war with rubber tubes, all have featured in the daylight activities of the carnivals

