

Mediaeval Lymm Rushbearing cancelled due to road closure costs

LYMM village's historic Rushbearing parade was cancelled due to road closure and traffic management costs being imposed by Warrington Borough Council.

Local organiser Chris Limb says the costs of over £1,000 have effectively "killed" the event which dates back to mediaeval times, which he helped revive around 40 years ago.

Chris explained: "With the co-ordination and funding from Lymm Parish Council various local people involved with public events in Lymm

attended a traffic management course several weeks ago, which it was understood would enable us to man events without the involvement of commercial traffic management company.

"It now appears that that is not the case and the borough council still require road closures and still require a traffic management company to be engaged. Even with a reduced and in my view unsatisfactory route and with some reduction of standard fees, the total required is over £1,000 and

possibly notably more.

"It now appears to be the case, previously unknown to me, that various events, both in Lymm and elsewhere in Warrington, have fees waived and traffic management fees paid by the borough council.

"The only reason Rushbearing was not consulted, considered or even informed appears to be that despite its history, only the May Queen has been held for longer in Lymm, the borough council were unaware of it.

"Rushbearing is not an "organisation" in the sense of being a society or group with a committee. It is simply an event. A small but traditional event. Everyone involved gives their time without fee. It makes no charge – even the refreshments have been given for free. Even including the church service and the "post-procession" time at the Village Hall it lasts about 2 hours.

"The fees and costs do, I am afraid kill the event.

"There have been some suggestions made to me which have a chance of enabling the event in the future, but there is nothing which enables it this year. I make it plain that I was extremely grateful for the support of the Parish Council last year but would not expect it to make grants of similar amounts on an annual basis.

"I have arrived at a date beyond which it is not appropriate to delay a decision longer.

"I thank all who have supported and enjoyed the event over the last 40-plus years.

"With regret and great sadness I have decided to cancel this year's Rushbearing," added Chris.

Lymm Rushbearing was re-born in the early 1970's (having probably died out in the early years of the century, possibly during the First World War) and for the last several years has been held on the second Sunday in August, although it has over the years been held on other days. For many years in the twentieth century Rushbearing Monday was a local bank holiday.

Ormerod's late Victorian history of Cheshire refers to the festival taking place in many communities on or near to the feast of the parish's patron saint – hence Lymm's tradition of having the festival during the summer holiday period and close to the feast of the Assumption of Saint Mary.

Although the carrying of fresh rushes to church (normally on a horse-drawn cart) was a central feature, and the replacement of the old rushes upon the earthen church floor a very practical necessity in former days, this gathering of locals also involved festivities including not only the procession and Morris dancing but also sports, fairground stalls, and very full public houses!

Until 2015 the route started from Pepper Street and then processed via The Cross up Eagle Brow, left into Brookfield Road and left into Church Road to arrive at St Mary's Church. After a short service the procession returned via Rectory Lane to the Village Hall for light



refreshments, judging of the rushbearing garlands, and more Morris dancing.

The procession includes Morris men, people carrying Rushbearing garlands and rushes, the Chairman of the Parish Council and the Mayor of Warrington, the May Queen and various local groups. It is mediaeval in its origins and Lymm is one of a very small number of communities which have maintained the tradition.

Local councillor Ian Marks added: "The situation regarding road closures is totally unsatisfactory and must be urgently sorted out. It all came to a head last summer when there were major problems with Rushbearing.

"Very sadly this longstanding event has been cancelled for this year. For twelve months I have been urging that a proper round table discussion takes place between all the event organisers who need a road closure, the Borough and Parish Councils and the Police. This has never happened. We thought that the training that took place a few months ago would help but this was not the case due to a communication problem.

"Lymm is enormously fortunate in having such a number of popular community events. The problem is that they require road closures. The cost of a closure is huge and the paperwork required is complex so we just have to find a pragmatic solution. We cannot let these events die out. As Chairman of Lymm Festival I have a specific interest for our Foodfest and I am very familiar with the problems the Historic Transport Day had.

"The meeting must be organised as soon as possible so we have an agreed way forward well before the next road closure is needed. We know money is tight but with some creative thinking surely we can fix it."

A Warrington Borough Council spokesman said: "Due to budget pressures Warrington Borough Council pays for road closures for only a very limited number of major public events. Groups organising smaller events in Warrington have been made aware of this in previous years and the situation has not changed."

*Lymm Morris kept part of the tradition alive by performing on the Pepper Street car park, on the Cross



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