

## SPRINGTIME IN DORNEY

As I write, the verges in Dorney are bright with cheery daffodils, and trees and shrubs are bursting into blossom. Thoughts turn to spring cleaning and a parish litter pick is planned. I remember that for many years we were encouraged to make our frontages look nice, as Dorney competed in the Best Kept Village competition. Volunteer litter pickers made constant efforts to keep our roadsides clean.



There was a time when Dorney had its own roadsweeper. Lewis William Webb was born in Cippenham in 1890 and married a girl from Dorney in 1912. He worked as a platelayer for Great Western Railway, helping to maintain the railway track. When he enlisted during the First World War, his skills meant he was posted to the Royal Engineers Railway Troops. He was sent to Salonica in September 1916, remaining there for two and a half years, helping to build and maintain railway lines to facilitate the movement of troops and equipment. When he returned, he went back to work for GWR and settled with his wife and children in a cottage near Dorney school. After he retired, he took up roadsweeping in the 1950s and kept five miles of Dorney's roads clean until he died in 1972. According to the book "Around Slough in Old Photographs", he was said to have contributed significantly to Dorney's success in the Best Kept Village competition in 1969 and again in 1972.

Newspaper reports from the 1850s indicate that May Day in Dorney was celebrated each spring by the local children. The occasion involved the children being “decorated in the costume of May-day” and making “their usual rounds” of the neighbourhood, before gathering at Dorney Court “according to custom”. There, some 75 to 80 youngsters were treated to refreshments and given cash presents by the Palmers. There were games and races and dancing, and the national anthem was sung. The whole event was characterised as “contributing to the perpetuation of good feeling between rich and poor”.

May Day is no longer a key event in Dorney (perhaps Halloween has taken its place for our young residents). But one tradition still observed is putting the cattle out onto the common for the summer. This continuity spans many hundreds of years. You can read on the Dorney History Group website a transcript of the manor court roll of 1526 which sets out the conditions under which commoners were allowed to graze their livestock. The rules may have changed, and we no longer see sheep, pigs or (domestic) geese on the common, but the principle remains the same. It's a joy to see the pleasure the cattle take from their release every spring onto the fresh green grass, and we are so lucky to live in a place where this practice continues.



Mid-19<sup>th</sup> century author Albert Richard Smith visited Dorney one spring day and was inspired to write a poem which included the following lines:

*Blossom and leaf and each fair thing,  
The emblems of the gentle spring,  
In one glad vast surrounding,  
And insects, poised on golden wings,  
With thousand gentle murmurings,  
Their notes of joy are sounding.*

Clearly Dorney made a strong impression on Albert, who also used the village as a setting in a fictional short story.

Step outside in Dorney this spring and enjoy the blossom and buds and unfolding fresh leaves and the buzz of insects, just like Albert and countless generations before and after.

**Virginia Silvester**