

ANCIENT TENURES by T. Blount, 1679 p.149

At Kidlington in Oxfordshire the custom is, that on Monday after Whitsun week, there is a fat live lamb provided, and the maids of the town, having their thumbs ty'd behind them, run after it, and she that with her mouth takes and holds the lamb, is declared "Lady of the Lamb", which, being dress'd with the skin hanging on, is carried on a long pole before the Lady and her companions to the green, attended with music and a Morisco dance of men, and another of women, where the rest of the day is spent in dancing, mirth and merry glee. The next day the lamb is part bak'd, boyl'd and rost for the ladies feast, where she sits majestically at the upper end of the table and her companions with her with music and other attendants, which ends the solemnity.

This statement was repeated with trifling variations in several works up to Strutt's "Sports and Pastimes" (1867) and Brand's "Popular Antiquities" (1873). An engraving of the maidens chasing the lamb is on p. 601 of "The Book of Curiosities of the Great World" by Rev. T. Platts, London 1822-5.

RELIQUIAE HEARNIANAE by Hearne vol. 2. p. 158. (1723)

Mr. Blount does not tell us the reason of this custom, but I am told 'tis upon account of the inhabitants being toll free in Oxford and other places. I was told yesterday (19.4.1723) that the same custom belonged formerly to Wightham in Berks..... What is said about Lamb Day in p. 149 of Blount's "Tenures", as belonging to Kidlington in Oxfordshire, is a mistake for Kirtleton; unless the same custom also belonged to Kidlington formerly, and is discontinued since.

ROWELL, *ibid.* p. 107 said:-

This statement is altogether a mis-statement. The name of Kidlington is given for Kirtlington, the two villages being about 4 miles apart: the story of the maidens catching the lamb with their teeth is doubtless a mere made-up tale, and I can only account for its having passed so long without contradiction from its apparent absurdity rendering it unnecessary for those of the neighbourhood. However, a description of the Kirtlington Lamb-ale, and how it was conducted, may be interesting and set this question in a proper light. This I hope to do fairly, as my remembrance will go back over 70 years; and I am kindly assisted by a native, and a long-resident of the village, an observer, and well qualified to aid in the task.

The "Lamb-ale" was held in a large barn, with a grass field contiguous for public dancing etc.; this was fitted up with great pains as a refreshment-room for company (generally numerous), and was called "My Lord's Hall." The lord and lady, being the ruling powers, attending with their mace-bearers, or pages, and other officers the lord, acting as master of ceremonies, strictly keeping order. All were gaily and suitably dressed, with a preponderance of light blue and pink, the colours of the Dashwood family, the lady appearing in white only, with light-blue or pink ribbons on alternate days.

The lamb-ale began on Trinity Monday, when -- and on each day at 11 am. - the lady was brought in state from her home, and at 9 pm. was in like manner conducted home again; the sports were

squeak of a Xmas porker or a pig-drivers horn!  
 "A forfeit, sir, if you please, a shilling forfeit!"  
 "Pooh", said I, "I've paid forfeits enough".  
 On which continuing in the same strain,  
 "Bring out her Ladyship's cook! Here's a gentleman wishes to marry her!" On this all the dirty baggages, which formed the group of her Ladyship's Maids of Honour brought out a fat ugly wench, with a nose and cheeks reddened with brick dust, and bearing a toasting fork in one hand and a dish-clout in the other; and were on the point of commencing a mock ceremony of marriage between myself and this fair syren of the kitchen; in the course of which I was to have received three pricks with the toasting fork on each buttock and to have had my nose wiped with the dish-clout, had I not saved myself by producing a shilling as the penalty of my mistake which consisted, as I was afterwards given to understand, in not denominating the stuffed owl as her Ladyship's "Canary bird".....At short intervals tents were erected for the purpose of dancing; and all the maidens and swains of the whole country round, were hoofing and clumping up and down the middle and up again, beneath the welcome canopy.

HISTORY OF KIDLINGTON YARNTON AND BEGBROKE. by Stapleton.

The Whitsun ales were kept up at Hampton Poyle until 1841, by which time they had sunk to a drunken revel in which a hired person from Oxford was carried about upon a wooden horse.

The unique feature of the Ales was the horse & curiosities. Other aspects are related to the May-day festivites, May-Queen, garlands, and Jack-in-the-Green. For example in 1894 the procession of sweeps in Oxford consisted of:-

1. Jack in the Green.
2. Lord and Lady, dressed in white, decorated with ribbons. Lady carried a ladle, Lord a frying pan (cf. Beelzebub in mummers)
3. A fool, dressed as fantastically as possible with bladder on a string to belabour bystanders.
4. Fiddler.
5. 2 or 3 men carrying money boxes.
6. Man with shovel and poker as a "musical instrument".

A photo of the party in 1911 appeared in Oxford Journal, 3.5.11.

They sang,  
 "Please to remember the chimney sweep,  
 Please kind sir, dont pass us by.  
 We're old sweeps and want a living,  
 Spare a copper, as in olden time."

SHARP MSS. F.D. vol. 1. p. 44

From Mss of Mr. Horne of Chipping Campden, who died 1898

About the year 1780 a Jubilee (or Club) was held at Milton-under-Wychwood where morris dancing was carried on and two people carried round the village dressed up for the occasion and called the Lord and Lady.