

## ROUND AND ABOUT - THE PAGEANT OF ASHDOWN FOREST

From the 16th to the 20th July 1929 the Pageant of Ashdown Forest took place in Kidbrooke Park, Forest Row. Villages adjacent to the Forest were asked to take part, and Danehill rose to the occasion and much of this article relates solely to Danehill.

The Pageant was the brain-child of Lord Edward Gleichen, a cousin of King George V, and in September 1928 Mrs Olaf Hambro of Kidbrooke Park broke the news to Lord Gleichen that the Village Hall was badly in need of £1500 for building its new wing. She thought that the only way of raising the money would be to have a pageant - "A pageant of Ashdown Forest. Wouldn't it be fun?" Winifred Hambro had the idea of trying to secure the presence of a distant cousin of hers whose name would in itself attract a large number of people. After a tantalising delay the lady in question (the Duchess of York - who became Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother) graciously accepted the invitation. For this to happen the show had to be for charitable purposes for the whole county and they had to promise that the takings would benefit five county hospitals. Thus their sphere of action was expanded to nearly five times the original plan.

However it offered a concrete solution to the impasse with the other villages, for now there was no excuse when they had their own hospitals to help.

Early on it was settled that there could not be speaking parts -



Back row (l to r) Lord Edward Gleichen; Olaf Hambro; Rudyard Kipling; Gwen Lally; Admiral Sir Stanley Colville. Front row (l to r) Lady Gleichen, Winifred Hambro; the Duchess of York; the Duchess of York's sister, Lady Colville

all was to done in a dumb show, although there was to be plenty of natural noise. There were several Episodes but here is Danehill's contribution Episode 1(b) - Ironworks.

This was a portrayal of the dispute between Lady Isobel de Audham and her daughter, Agnes Malmeins, regarding the forge at Parrock. The arrival of merchants to buy bar-guns, the earliest form of cannon, drew the attention of the contestants to the work being carried on whilst they disputed ownership. This episode, set in 1263, showed a large ten foot hammer, which was worked by waterpower or, as in this case, by manpower. (Historically this forge was already in some state of disrepair because the dispute had been going on for some years). Every day the blacksmith made a flower, such as a lily, or a rose,



which was presented to the most notable visitor of the day. The Chief Smith was Mr George Etherton (left). In real life George had the Forge at Danehill and this photo shows him with the wrought iron rose he made and presented to the Duchess of York. It was therefore appropriate that he should represent the Chief Smith.

The photo above is of the hammer in use. It was found that 4,000 spectators could be accommodated; special trains brought people from London and the programmes sold for 2 shillings. Souvenirs were commissioned suitably embossed 'Ashdown Forest Pageant' and these were sold at the stalls between performances. The photo is of one of the souvenirs. Sideshows and

entertainments were laid on. This photo, right, shows the entire Danehill section. The event cleared over



£3,000, so not only did the Village Hall receive its £1,500 but the hospitals of East Grinstead, Uckfield, Haywards Heath and Brighton also received most welcome sums of money.

With thanks to Ian and David Etherton, Robin Wood, Terry Lucken and the late Ron Wenham.