

ROUND AND ABOUT IN THE PARISH....

The Covid-19 pandemic has put a stop to a lot of activities, one casualty being the Ashdown Weekend. This originally started as the Ashdown Fair in 1973. It was the idea of Elsie Bates who wrote to the Parish Council asking why couldn't they run something which would be enjoyable for all the parish. Rebeka Hardy, who was Chair of the Parish Council, together with other Councillors, liked the idea and they decided to have something which would be fun and unite the parish of Danehill, Chelwood Gate and Furners Green.

Tickets, if purchased in advance, were half price at 10p for pedestrians and 50p for a car, which would cover all the occupants.

Major Michael Brady, who was on the committee, had been in the Queen's Regiment and he arranged for the Band and Corps of Drums of the 3rd Battalion to start the afternoon off at 2 pm, and to provide music throughout the event, concluding the afternoon's entertainment at 5-15pm with Beating the Retreat. The Band cost £69 (in today's terms £840).

Rebeka arranged the main attraction, the Red Devils, from the Parachute Regiment, who jumped from a small plane.



Gazing up into the sky on the hottest day for two years as temperatures soared into the 80's, the crowd saw three jumps. Lack of wind meant that one skydiver missed the target and landed behind trees and had a half-mile walk once he landed.

Suspended beneath their red and white canopies the skydivers landed on the X marking in the middle of the area to the cheers and applause of the capacity crowd, which numbered as many as 8,000. Landing exactly on target was Corporal Jackie Smith who was a new member of the team, and the only woman.



Perhaps most people came to see the Red Devils whose cost in 1973 was £165 (in today's terms £2,000) and they were not disappointed.

Special attractions included a tug-of-war won by a Sheffield Park team, who beat Danehill Football Club in the final. To add diversity there was a dancing display, a judo demonstration, a children's fancy dress parade, and a dog show. Inside the marquee (which cost £546 and in today's terms, £6,600) the art exhibition and other activities took place, as well as the evening's dance.

Fifty two organisations within the villages were represented. To name just a few: the Historical Society provided a display and also ran a quiz, the W.I. provided a stand called Portabello and the British Legion had a 'Good as New' stall plus two other stands. There were many other stands, too numerous to mention here.



For the evening dance, The Dark Blues were booked by Jenny Virtue. The group was well known as they had played for Prince Charles' 21st birthday celebrations and The Queen's Silver Wedding Celebrations. A bar was provided



by Mr and Mrs Gambrell of the Stone Quarry. The Dark Blues cost £179 (today's cost would be £840). Tickets for the dance were limited and cost £2.50, including Supper, and over 200 tickets were sold. This photo is of The Dark Blues from 1973. The group was founded in Oxford (hence the name) in 1962 and they were an amateur group as they all had day jobs.

A profit of £700 was made (today this would be £8,500) and would be used for the benefit of the Parish, to include a new kitchen and toilets at Danehill Memorial Hall, improvement of car parking at Chelwood Gate Village Hall, and a new games pavilion at Danehill Recreation Ground, accompanied by tree planting.

The whole event was an outstanding success and the following year the Ashdown Fair became known as the Ashdown Weekend.

My thanks to the Historical Society, Laurence and Rebeka Hardy, Tony Stevens and Jenny Virtue.

Jill Rolfe