

The Revel's conception

The origins of civic pageants goes back a long way and some of the earliest were in the form of Passion Plays, such as that at Oberammergau in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Bavaria, which was first performed in 1634. That one was instituted as a thanksgiving for the town escaping the bubonic plague.

In England during the Jacobean period there were 'entertainments' produced by the City Guilds for the Lord Mayor's show, with processions on religious and secular themes, transported on decorated wagons through the city.

Pageants on a large scale had disappeared by the Victorian period but the less constrained times enjoyed by the



Edwardians allowed for their revival. There was a movement also to educate the masses in the history of the country and engender a feeling of nationality. Mr. Louis Napoleon Parker was the first person to initiate such a pageant when he became the author and director of the festivities at Sherborne in Dorset on the 12th to 15th of June 1905. He was assisted in writing the pageant by Walter Raymond and the "Sherborne Pageant" took place in the ruins of the old Castle Grounds. This event was so successful that it led to a wave of 'Pageantitis' with at least six other events being staged outdoors, mainly after 1907.

The crucial elements to these pageants were the retelling of the history of the place in a series of episodes, the stage being preferably a place of historical interest itself, and the general public being encouraged to participate in large numbers as actors. The visual aspect of the spectacle was considered more important than the text or spoken word. L. N. Parker went on to supervise the Warwick pageant held in the grounds of Warwick Castle from the 2nd to the 9th July 1906. A black and white film was made of this latter pageant.

However, Butleigh beat Warwick on the draw and was the **second** place in England to hold a pageant, and one that in its day was acclaimed, though more provincial and entirely amateur in direction, as being superior to that of Warwick. It came about as follows.

Several people of note from Glastonbury and its surrounding villages had travelled to Sherborne to see the first pageant and on their return journey had talked about holding such an event in Glastonbury itself, a place of great historical and legendary interest. Without someone with the drive and foresight to carry such an idea forward, however, the dream would never achieve reality and the vision would fade to nothing. According to Mary Albinia Berkeley, the only daughter of the vicar of Butleigh, she tells how her mother persuaded her, just before the Christmas Holidays of 1905, to write 'a few scenes of local historic interest that the villagers would be able to act in the garden'. The script she wrote was more complicated than first intended and the leading parts would have to be given to friends of the family who could cope with such prominent roles

A gentleman who accepted one of these roles suggested that they ought to get an audience of at least five hundred people. On that basis they continued with their plans which grew and developed into what became the 'Butleigh Revel' of June 1906.