

## 9 - The Maypole

The maypole was a fertility symbol and is a common feature in Germano-Nordic lands. Here in England most surviving maypoles are found in Yorkshire and being probably the tallest in the country, Barwick's maypole is an outstanding example. Their existence in the past has not been recorded well as they were outside ecclesiastical or legal spheres of control. Contrary to popular belief the maypole is not recorded in the Domesday Book. Maypoles were banned under Cromwell but allowed again at the restoration of the monarchy in 1660. The ceremonial accompanying the lowering and raising has changed within living memory. It is a matter of speculation as to how much of the ceremonial has changed over the centuries but the technique used to lower and raise the maypole has probably not changed very much until 2005 when insurance and liability issues necessitated mechanisation. At the same time the Maypole Trust was formed to ensure that safety guidelines were strictly observed. The Gala Day necessitates closure of the roads to facilitate the parade of the May Queen (elected at the primary school), her Maid of Honour and attendants through the village accompanied by marching bands to Hall Tower Field where the May Queen is crowned. A street market is now included as part of the new arrangements designed to raise funds for the continuation of this ancient festival. The first ever Maypole calendar was recently introduced and proved very popular with demand warranting a larger print run for next year. The maypole is painted in patriotic colours. We know that the church bells were rung in the 1750's on Oak Apple Day, the day when the restoration and the birthday of King Charles II were celebrated. This could in time have been dropped in favour of Whitsun Tuesday, which was the date for the maypole raising until the late 1960's when it was held on Spring Bank Holiday Tuesday. The first mention of Barwick's maypole is in a poem by a local writer Edward Burlend which records the theft of the maypole by the men of Garforth in 1829. More recently the top section of the Pole was stolen from Hall Tower Field as it lay in readiness for painting. Several stalwarts from Aberford removed the bolts that secured the two sections by hammering them out as the Church clock struck midnight and no-one heard a thing. The small top section was eventually recovered from Parlington Woods. However, a new top section had already been acquired some weeks beforehand in order that the raising could take place on the scheduled date as planned. The painting below by W. R. Robinson in the 1840's shows villagers dancing around the maypole at the Cross. There is probably some artistic licence here. Similarly, the signature tune for "The Archers" is inspired by our maypole. Its title is "Barwick Green" and was written by the Yorkshire composer Arthur Wood. Mrs Wood was from the Bean family who lived in Scholes. As far as we know there has never been a "green" in Barwick. The maypole is famed for its height, some 90 feet and for its triennial lowering at Easter and its raising at the Spring Bank Holiday.

