

## **Peter Harris Remembers.....**

# **Television in the Fifties**



My Granny had bought an Ecko television especially for the Coronation. Naturally it was black and white and only showed Black and White. There was no BBC2, ITV or anything else. Programmes usually started with Children's Hour, introduced by 'Jennifer' at five o'clock. Transmission then stopped at 6.00pm until 7.30pm when a picture of a TV mast appeared with strange rings of Dan Dare air waves came from it. The male announcers always wore dinner suits and the females ballroom gowns, with elbow length gloves. Sylvia Peters, Macdonald Hobley and Mary Malcolm ruled the screen. At nine o'clock there was always an interlude giving viewers time to make a cup of tea, At the main national grid switching station near the Man in the Moon, engineers were ready to add more power generation to the now to be overloaded grid system.

The interlude was a film of a potters wheel and incumbent, or there was a spinning wheel, or a windmill going round and round. I remember stupidly trying to turn my head through 360 degrees to follow the sails before falling off the chair. Life was always a learning process in those younger days!

On Coronation Day the TV was on all day. We listened to Richard Dimbleby commenting on the ceremony at the Abbey in awe. We were all sat around the glowing box, including two or three of the neighbours. I remember the Duke of Norfolk bobbing around with a head like a Boiled Pudding. He had been in charge of the whole operation which went without a hitch until Richard Dimbleby uttered a very low key expletive for which he was nearly taken to the Tower to have his head chopped off. We bought a golden Matchbox coach and horses which resided in the front room for several years. One of the horses legs has since broken off hence its new home in the loft.

I used to watch Billy Bunter , "The Owl of the Remove" and his exploits with Bob Cherry, Hurry Ram jam Singh, Mr Quelch, Lord Mauleverer, Frank Nugent and Johnny Bull, not forgetting Coker of the sixth.

Other programmes included Educating Archie (on the radio), Whirligig with Humfrey Lestocq, and Mr Turnip. There was Muffin the Mule with Anne Hagarhand, Annette Mills and the indomitable cowboy 'Hank' (written by Francis Coudrill) persistently annoyed by Mexican Pete. Hank's faithful steed, as I remember, was the only horse knock kneed on all quarters. All your own was introduced by Huw Weldon and consisted of junior talent. On Sunday night we had What's My Line chaired by Eamon Andrews. Panellists Barbara Kelly, Lady Isobel Barnett, Bob Monkhouse and the very grumpy bespectacled Gilbert Harding. Who can possibly forget Gilbert Harding losing his temper when confronted with a 'Saggers Knackers Bottom Knocker' They just don't make programmes like that these days.

At ten o'clock the transmission ended with the National Anthem and we all stood up out of respect for the Queen. Then we watched this white dot in the middle of the screen disappear before it went silent and blank. That was it until five o'clock the next day!



**Billy Bunter - "Crikey! - I say you fellows"**

Image:From Peter Harris

**Peter Harris**

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# Redditch Carnival in the Fifties



We used to stand at the top of Mount Pleasant opposite the Park Inn and watch the procession come past with our pennies and half pennies in our hands. First we heard the noise of the bands coming up Front Hill. Then two works Royal Enfield riders would make their way up followed by Mr Mutton, one of the works Velocette riders and his partner. All riders wore glistening white overalls and really looked the part. The Bham Pipe Band would follow, the skirl of the pipes and drums sending shivers down the spine. The man at the front threw his mace high in the air and caught it on his return. Oh how we wished he would miss it and it would fall on his 'napper' The Limousine with the Chairman of the Urban District Council and his Lady would follow, with the Carnival Queen sitting high on her throne atop a Royal Enfield Lorry. Accompanying her would be her attendants a girl and a boy, Prince and Princess. The float was decorated with masses of flowers from the Council greenhouses adjacent to the Abbey Hostel This was run by Jack Spencer who was known as Mr Carnival. Known to everyone, a councillor and employee of Royal Enfield. The Redditch Jazz band would be somewhere in the midst of the various floats, proud girls and boys blowing into their Kazoos and high stepping, ablaze of white and red. Nell Jarrett with her pram and scores of people dressed up, walking and carrying collecting tins were in abundance. Army and Navy Bands would intersperse the long slow moving crocodile. From the backs of lorries stretched hands would plead for your pennies. And then they 'wuzz gawn' up to Daisy Gardener's up the Cross to have a welcome cup of tea and a rest.

But we were crafty. By remaining where we were, we got a second smack of the cherry as they returned back to the town centre down Mount Pleasant. Pennies all gone, and silence reigning, the throng traipsed back down Rectory road for another year.

Down town, the evening festivities were in full swing. The annual talent show was very popular. A scaffold stage had been constructed by the Royal Hotel between Market Place and Church Green. I remember some awful woman who used to screech the words 'Velia, oh Velia, the Witch of the Woods'. I cringe every time I hear that song now. The old green hut was erected and used to appear every year where Hot Dogs could be purchased for sixpence. In those days they were Real Sausages. A lot of cash was raised from there. Brightly coloured lights used to hang from the trees. In Royal Yard Wilson's fair kept the excited throngs entertained. Tom Wilson, grandfather to the present Tom Wilson used to stand at the entrance. A short stocky man with a cigar firmly stuck in his mouth. Another much appreciated donor to the proceedings. I believe in the old days his son used to challenge locals in a boxing ring to pay to try and knock him down.

There used to be a Carnival dance held on the preceding Saturday at which the newly crowned Carnival Queen was in attendance. On this particular night the guest of honour was Julie Christie (before she became famous). The night went well until the 'Brooks' family turned up and started their usual riot. The band was totally destroyed and the evening finished with a bang. Miss Christie had left by then... luckily!

Peter Harris

