

Crimean Peace Celebrations 1856

The Crimean War (1854-56) was the only major European conflict in which the British Army was engaged between 1816 and 1914.

The news of the signing of the treaty of peace at Paris on 30 March 1856 was received at Hiron's News Room.

The joyful intelligence was soon spread through the town, the church bells rang merrily, and small pieces of artillery were fired from the top of the church tower and in various parts of the town in celebration of the event till a late hour in the evening. The following night a party of young men collected, and provided with fire-arms, they paraded the town, and at given signals fired volleys to commemorate the restoration of peace.

Messrs. Mason, the "celebrated" axle-tree manufacturers, whose factory was located on the east side of High Street near The Tchure,¹ gave a treat to their workmen and families numbering around 70, to commemorate the re-establishment of peace. The treat consisted of tea and cake, after which the men were regaled with ale and tobacco, in two large sheds recently erected in Mr. H. Churchill's timber yard in the High-street.

The public peace celebrations in Deddington took place on 13 June 1856, and were summarised in the below succinct report the following day in the *Oxford Journal*, although it omits to mention that it rained incessantly almost all day.

There were grand rejoicings at Deddington yesterday (Friday) to commemorate the peace. We had two bands of music, and at two o'clock the bells rang a merry peal; at half-past two a procession was formed at the Town Hall; at three, donkey racing commenced; at four, a dinner took place in the Deddington Pavilion, erected in the Market-place; at five, climbing a greasy pole for a hat, leg of mutton, &c.; at half-past five, hurdle racing began; at six, tea was provided in tents, erected in the Market-square; at seven, foot racing took place; at eight, a variety of other amusements; at nine there was a display of fireworks in a field adjoining the town; after which, dancing in the pavilion, and a partial illumination of the town.

This almost immediate report was followed up by detailed reports in the Banbury and Oxford newspapers, whose local correspondents presented differing accounts of the festivities.²

¹ More recently the site of the Royal British Legion Club.

<https://www.deddingtonhistory.uk/buildings/theaxletreefactory> Work at the axle-tree manufactory commenced at 06:00 a.m.

² The newspapers were the *Banbury Advertiser*, the *Oxford Journal*, and an unidentified newspaper. A reprint of the latter report may be found in the Coggins Scrapbooks, Volume 2, folio 5. There is a transcript in https://www.deddingtonhistory.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0015/17016/Scrapbook2nonnewspapertranscripts.pdf

Circumstantial evidence suggests that the latter newspaper was the *Banbury Guardian* rather than the *North Oxfordshire Monthly Times*. Copies of the *Banbury Guardian* either do not survive for 1856, or were omitted when the publication was microfilmed.

The lengthy reports in the *Banbury Advertiser* and the *Oxford Journal* both highlighted the dissention amongst the inhabitants as to the nature of the celebrations. One faction favoured "illumination", including fireworks, while the other faction, the partisans of darkness, were concerned that the party of light might encourage unruly elements to cause disorder.

The "votaries of fire" prevailed, and rumours circulated that those who did not illuminate in the evening "would probably have their windows smashed".

This prompted some of the principal inhabitants to persuade the Magistrates that a number of special constables should be appointed as they had "reason to apprehend that a tumult or riot might take place".

On the day, 20 special constables were sworn in, and joined the proceedings in a light timber carriage, carrying flags, drawn swords, muskets and blunderbusses "to overawe the obstreperous", and with two banjo men in the rear of the car. The *Oxford Journal* alleged that the constables "quaffed the soul-inspiring strong ale at the various public houses as they passed along".

A dinner for the poor of beef and plum pudding was provided in a large marquee (the Deddington pavilion) in the Market Place and the Unicorn Inn for over 450 people at 4 o'clock, and at six o'clock tea and cake were served to nearly 500 women and children.

Many of the inhabitants were puzzled by the sight of the special constables, especially such a large number, and by their antics, but the day passed off quietly, partly because of the unrelenting rain.

The report of the proceedings in the unidentified paper mentioned in the footnote below, probably the *Banbury Guardian*, was much more positive, although it also referred to the behaviour of the special constables. Below are the details of the procession, described by the *Oxford Journal* as a "meagre affair", around the town.

Grotesque figure on horseback.

Flag - "Red, White and Blue."

Mr. C. Duffell Faulkner, solicitor.

The Deddington Band.

Children on horseback in fancy dresses, and horsemen.

A regiment of juveniles bearing the flags of all nations.

Blue silk flag. - "Let brotherly love continue."

All the employés at Messrs. Mason's factory.

Blue silk banner.

Mr. H. Franklin, and the carpenters, and joiners, and builders

Flag. - "Success to trade."

Mr. W.H. Hopcraft and the masons.

Several flags.

The tradesmen and the visitors.

Flag. - "Agriculture extended," and "The labouring classes."

Several flags.

The special constables, 20 in number, each shouldering a
blunderbuss, reversed, drawn on a cart by three
horses with outriders.

The donkeys entered in the races with their jockeys appropriately dressed,
riding them.

There were also peace celebrations at Clifton, with dinner provided courtesy of the
Rev. W.C. Risley. These passed off entirely without incident.