

## **W for WHITSUNTIDE**

On Whit Friday we have the Whit Walks, the church procession, with a brass band to lead us. People stand on their doorsteps, and line the route to watch the procession go by. We try to march in time to the band.

*“Walk properly”* shouts the Sunday School Superintendent.

The older girls hold the Big Banner ribbons. On a windy day, the men have to catch hold of the ropes to stop the banner blowing away. The tiny children from the Beginners' class hold on to long tassels so they don't get run over by a bus. Our Sunday school class carries the corners of a grassy square with the “Hill of Calvary” on top. I collected some wild flowers for the pretend grass but I got into trouble because the pretty white flowers I found under the trees in Brunts Drive stank of garlic. The writing on our display says *‘Suffer the Little Children’* but we're not little, we're nearly ten!

My cousin is playing the drum for the Boys' Brigade. He has to wear a big apron made out of leopard skin. I didn't know there were leopards in Ashton!

My Dad is wearing his funny B.B. hat which has ribbons hanging down the back. He marches at the back of all the boys who look very smart in their pillbox hats and white stripe that crosses their front. Some of them play bugles and my cousin Alan lays a wreath at the War Memorial where we stop for a service. My grandma walks at the back of the procession with 'the Mothers' and my Mum is there too, pushing my baby sister in her pram. After we walk all round Waterloo and my pockets are jingling with pennies 'for my new clothes', we return to Sunday School for a hard raspberry bun and a glass of milk. The grown-ups have cups of tea poured from big brown tea-pots, with a digestive or Rich Tea biscuit. On Whit Friday afternoon there are 'sports' on the big field. I go in for the sack race even though the sacks are scratchy and a bit smelly. Perhaps the egg and spoon race might be better.

## **Whit Saturday**

The “charra” leaves from outside Sunday School at 9 o'clock on the dot so we have to be up sharp, with our egg sandwiches wrapped in greaseproof paper and the thermos filled. The scratchy red seats on the bus make a pattern up the backs of my legs. I have to be sure not to sit over one of the bus wheels or I'll be sick. I suck hard on my barley sugar sweet as we leave the mill chimneys and dark terraces behind and there's nothing but green fields, cow parsley and dry stone walls. A little crowd of adults and jumping children are dropped off in a country lane. We set off along well-trodden paths, through fields of brown cows and buttercups. We're told off for scrambling over a wall and dislodging some of the big stones, instead of waiting to use the stile. There's a horse licking a shiny shape on the grass. It's a baby foal, just struggling to its feet. It wobbles uncertainly. Its legs are long and gangly, a bit like mine really.

*“Mum, Mum, can we have a horse?”*

*“And where do you think we'd keep it?”*

*“In the wash-house?”*

We play by the river and hop across the stepping stones. Christine falls off and gets her shoes wet.

*“You'll get polio, you know,”* I warn.

We're met at lunch-time by the coach which is carrying the older people who can't walk so far. Sandwiches are unwrapped, tiny greenhouse-grown tomatoes are dipped in salt and there's a slice of gooey chocolate cake. An afternoon walk takes us by the river where swallows dart for flies and through the bluebell woods. There's tea in a Methodist Sunday school in Hope or Bakewell, with familiar strong brown tea from the urn, or bottles of pop that's lost its fizz and the remains of the picnic, if there's anything left. The '*Dads versus Lads*' football match starts in the park; the girls gather at the swings. Then, back on the coach for the homeward journey, with singing: "*One Man went to Mow*" and "*Ten Green Bottles*" and "*The Quartermaster's Store*".

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