

SHIPTON MAY-DAY

'Good-morning, ladies and gentlemen,
 We wish you a happy day,
 We've come to show you our garlands,
 Because it's the First of May.'

The happy sounds of young children May-ing are no longer heard in the village streets. Years ago, May morning was something to look forward to and to be enjoyed. If it had been a cold spring it was difficult to find enough of the sweet-smelling may to decorate the garlands and wands. We jealously guarded our find if we were lucky enough to find a bush that looked like being out in time for the great day. It was considered unlucky to bring the may indoors so the wooden hoops we used for garlands were decorated in the garden shed. We borrowed our Mother's copper-stick for the wand. Wild spring flowers were added to the may, the thing was to get out early and have the prettiest garlands.

Dressed in our prettiest dresses and snowy white pinafores we sallied forth singing our songs.

'Please to smell the may,
 Please to taste the cake,
 Please to ask the lord to kiss the lady's face.'

It wasn't considered right to go on a friend's territory, so we kept to the nearby lanes and if strangers were spied on our ground we chanted,

'Down-street scrubs, born in a tub,
 Couldn't get out for lice and bugs.'

We tapped on doors and showed our garlands, pennies and half-pennies might rattle into our old cocoa tin. We soon got tired and when the flowers began to droop, wended our way home to share the spoils. This was usually about 1s.3d. to divide between four of us.

'Good-morning, ladies and gentlemen,
 At your door we'll stay.
 Please put a penny in the tin
 Then we'll go away.'

D.M. Brookes