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# SPALDING TULIP PARADE

by Marjorie Clark

Photographs by courtesy  
of the Lincolnshire Free Press

right: N.F.U. float in the 1976 Parade.



Tradition dies hard in rural England. Although we may not see the children dancing round the Maypole nowadays, in Spalding there has developed over the past 25 years a fresh tradition called "The Tulip Parade". It started in a small way and was organised then, as now, by the Tulip Committee, which was formed from members of the Holland branch of the National Farmers' Union Horticultural committee.

The first attempt at a parade was a tour of the tulip fields by Miss Tulipland and two attendants. Travelling in one undecorated car their route covered 20 miles of field after field of kaleidoscopic colour. This proved to be so popular among the public who had come to visit the flower fields that it was decided to add a little decoration to the Tulip Queen's car. This small effort predated the parade as it is today by eight years. Its popularity decided the committee to ask the designer of the Dutch parade to produce a design for the Queen's car. Adriannes Van Deil was so enthusiastic that he turned the former single car tour into a small cavalcade. From this unpretentious beginning came the magnificent parade of decorated floats as it is today.

Adriannes' son, Kees Van Deil, undertook the designing of a parade of floats. Every float is covered with tulip heads, each one representing some special aspect of the theme or themes chosen by the designer for that year. Every year has a different theme, and the parade makes a circuit of the town by a pre-arranged route. The theme for 1977 is "The Celebration of the Queen's Silver Jubilee" and the parade will be held on May 7th. On that day Spalding will be host to 400,000 or more people who come from all parts of the UK and from as far away as Australia.

The Hasland Drum Corps in the Parade.



"To make a float takes months of work," Mr Dodds the skilled blacksmith who makes the ironwork for the floats told me. Each float has a delicate ironwork frame, which is covered with precision strawing, which in turn is covered with tulip heads. These heads can only be "pinned" on 48 hours before the parade so that the flowers do not wilt. In all a total of 10 million tulip heads are used to cover the floats.

On the day of the parade Spalding turns into a fairy-tale town. Every house has its decoration of tulips, and flags wave along every road. Elaborate parking arrangements are made for cars and coaches and from 9 am the town is progressively closed off from the outside world. Within that circle is a magic world of flowers, clowns and music. The route through the town is 4½ miles and the first section of floats start on the circuit at 2 pm. There are no stands and there is no charge made for watching. The route is published and those who come can choose their place anywhere along the tree-lined sidewalks. Family parties plus the dog arrive with their picnics hours before starting time to wait patiently for this unique spectacle.

Round the floats has grown an exhibition which has attracted exhibitors ranging from national institutions to local enterprises. The parade is arranged in sections, and between each section are small cameos of amusement with never a dull moment. From six years to 60, there is something to give pleasure and laughter to everyone.

The Tulip Queen and her Deputy are chosen annually by the South Holland Tulip Time and Tourism committee. Entries are received from girls of 18 and over from all over Holland (Lincs) and competition to gain the honoured position is very keen indeed. The committee short list 12 girls and the queen and her deputy are then chosen from the short list by a committee of six. The winner receives £200 and the deputy £75, plus the attractive gowns and cloaks which mark their offices and in addition an outdoor outfit of their own choice. The girls have a busy year visiting old people's homes and hospitals, opening fetes, and performing many other gracious duties.

As the parade goes by, the concrete jungles many of the watchers come from are for the moment at least forgotten. Children are hoisted on fathers' shoulders to wave to the Queen as she passes by, clowns go dancing along, and men and girls on old fashioned bicycles dressed in the fashion of a bygone age ride perilously past. Within this magic circle of flowers, fun and laughter, for one day in the year we can re-live the tradition of Merry England.