

King George V Coronation Celebrations – 1911

Edward VII, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India, died on May 6th 1910 and was succeeded on the throne by his son, King George V.



Figure 1: A display of snowdrops in the grounds of Kildwick Hall, celebrating the reign of Edward VII and accession of George V. Presumably planted in 1910 and photographed in 1911. ER 1901 / GR 1910

On May 10th 1910, Farnhill Parish Council held their regular monthly meeting in the Methodist school-room, where they composed the following letter to the new king:

To the King's Most Excellent Majesty, Most Dread Sovereign,

The Chairman and Members of Farnhill Parish Council on behalf of all Inhabitants of the Parish of Farnhill desire to convey to Your Majesty their profound sense of loss, which they, in common not only with the whole British Empire, but with all those who throughout the World would desire to see peace ensue have suffered by the death of our late Sovereign Lord, King Edward VII.

They assure Your Majesty in all humbleness and loyalty, of the sympathy they have with Your Majesty, Your Revered Mother, the Queen Alexandra, and all your Royal House, and humbly tender to Your Majesty their willing and unalterable fealty.

That God will vouchsafe to Your Majesty many years of life in which to reign over them, they Your Majesty's true and faithful subjects will ever pray.

As was the case for the coronation of Edward VII in 1901, so again for the coronation of George V, on June 22nd 1911, it is clear that a bonfire was a major part of the celebrations. The Parish Council have retained:

- Hand-written minutes of the local “Coronation Celebrations Beacon Fire Committee”, dated from the beginning of May to June 8th 1911, amounting to around 20 pages.
- A printed leaflet, published by the government’s “Central Coronation Bonfires Committee”, that describes the arrangements that should be put in place for the lighting of bonfires and the letting-off of fireworks.

Local Committee Plans

Obtaining material for the bonfire

People seem to have been quite generous in donating material for the bonfire, in fact some offers had to be declined by the committee:

- Mr. R Wilson and Mr. O. Wilson promised to fire 10 gallons of paraffin.
- A load of old wood was obtained from Royd House.
- Two loads of firewood were purchased from Steeton Bottom Mill.
- A disused canal boat, already broken up, was purchased.
- All local coal merchants promised coal.
- The local Gas Company supplied Gas Tar.
- Sir George Lane-Fox, owner of the Farnhill Hall estate, allowed some trees to be cut down from Farnhill Wood.
- Railway sleepers were provided by the LMS railway company.

In addition, Mr. Whitaker of Holme Farm was thanked for the offer of a tree, which was declined.

The location of the bonfire

The bonfire was built on Farnhill Moor, near the Cairn, on the same site that was used for the 1897 Diamond Jubilee; the fireworks were let-off from slightly higher ground nearby. The committee arranged for the way up to the Cairn to be made fit for the carting of material and also for the path to be lit with Road Lamps on the night of Coronation itself. Mr Barritt did the carting and the lamps were loaned by Mr. Barritt and Mr. Pickles.



Figure 2a: The bonfire being built on Farnhill Moor

This photograph is undated – we think it's 1911, but it could be the 1935 Jubilee or the 1937 Coronation



Figure 2b: A long-distance view of the same bonfire (with thanks to Mike Scarffe)
Bonfire on the right, the pinnacle on the left.

Lighting the bonfire

In accordance with the recommendations of the government committee, which were affixed to the local committee minutes, plans were put in place for Sir John Horsfall, Mr R. Wilson and Mr. O. Wilson to set off a Signal Rocket at 9:55pm and a Star Rocket at 10pm. The latter to be followed by the lighting of the bonfire.

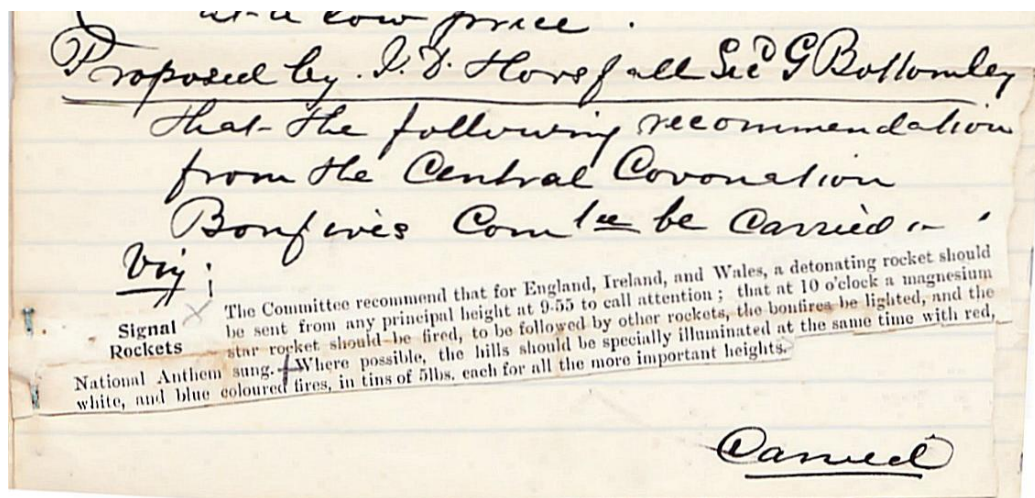


Figure 3: Part of a page from the local committee minute book

The bonfire was lit by young girls from each of the local districts. The following girls were selected:

- Mary Sarah Holgate – Kildwick
- Nellie Wrathall – Farnhill (see photograph on the following page)

- Eleanor Elizabeth Cowgill – Glusburn
- Kathleen Standring – Cross Hills
- H. Nelson – Junction
- Frances Mary Clough – Sutton
- Edna Overend – Sutton Mills

Seven lighters were purchased and tapers were provided by Mr. Barritt.



Figure 4: Nellie Wrathall (born 1899) with her younger brother. In 1911 the Wrathall family lived at Farnhill Hall Farm

How much did it all cost ?

The reverse side of one of the minute pages includes a pencil-written list of the costs involved, as follows:

Item	Cost
Fireworks	£8 15s 0d
Canal boat	£2
Wood from Steeton	£1 3s 6d
Building the fire	£4 10s 0d
Carting: from Steeton, Farnhill Wood, Royd House [Cononley], Canal Wharfe Kildwick	£2 1s 0d
Road making	8s 6d
TOTAL	£18 18s 0d

Other, less complete and less clear calculations, on the reverse of another sheet give a number of different values for the total cost, including: £19 5s 6d, £19 18s 9d, and £21 5s 0d.

We can assume the actual cost was around £20 (around £2000 at 2014 prices).

Other celebrations

How the school celebrated

The Kildwick School log book for this period, completed by the headmaster Thomas Appleby, reveals how the school celebrated the Coronation.

- May 26th 12 boys and 12 girls have stayed behind each night [this week] to practice a drill to be given at the Local Coronation Festivities on June 22nd.*
- June 2nd Special practice of music for coronation this afternoon from 3:15pm to 3:45pm in place of the usual singing lesson.*
- June 15th In place of the usual History lesson this afternoon, the children of Stds II-V1 had a special lesson on "The Coronation of the King".
At 3:30pm, the above children left school to attend a combined practice of the Coronation Songs at Sutton Council School.*
- June 16th School closed today for One Week's Holiday in honour of the Coronation. To re-assemble Monday June 26th.
A flagstaff has been erected on the East wall of the school and a new flag (a Union Jack) has been displayed. These have been presented to the school by the Crosshills and District Coronation Committee.*

June 21st At 6:30pm the children were presented with Coronation mugs and boxes of chocolate. The Vicar addressed the meeting and Mrs. Petty of Lingsted distributed the gifts. The children sang two songs and the National Anthem, and gave a display of drill.

June 22nd Twenty-four of the scholars from this school, attired in fancy dress, gave two displays of the British Empire Flag Drill at the Local Festivities.

June 26th School re-opened today. No. present 102.

Coronation seats

We've not been able to discover much about the financing of the 1911 celebrations. However a short piece in the Keighley News dated August 3rd 1912 indicates that a profit was made.

With the money left after the expenses of the Coronation festivities were defrayed, it has been decided to erect seats about the villages of Kildwick and Farnhill. Three seats were finished about a month ago – one opposite the church, one at High Farnhill, and the other on Farnhill Moor. It has now been decided to erect another four at Priestbank Bottom, near Kildwick Hall, at High Crag Top, and at Wyke Gate Bottom.

The same issue of the Keighley News included the photograph below, showing six old men on one of the new seats.

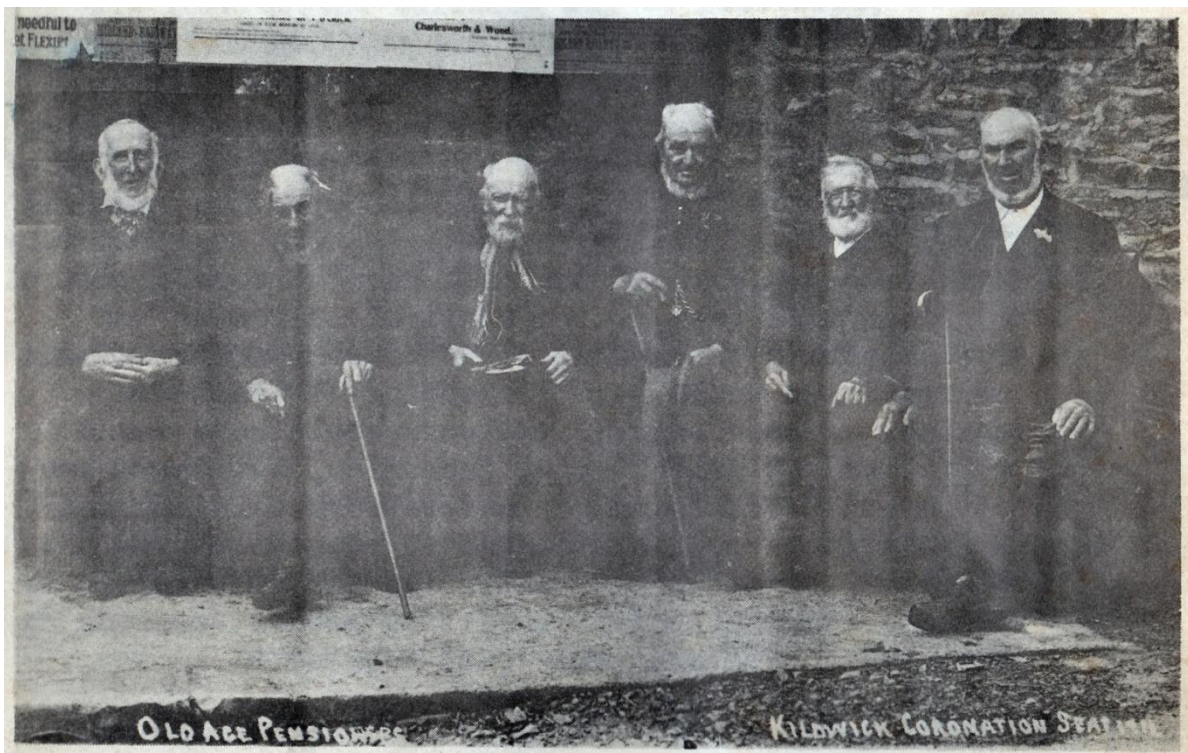


Figure 5: OAPs on Kildwick Coronation Seat 1911. It is believed that this seat was the one placed at Kildwick Corner, adjacent to the Smithy (now a private house, opposite the White Lion). In a separate article we have put names to all of these gentlemen.

The Coronation Bonfires leaflet

The government's four-page 1911 Coronation Bonfires leaflet is reproduced here, in full. At least it helps us answer the question "How many MPs does it take to build a bonfire?" Quite a few by the looks of things.

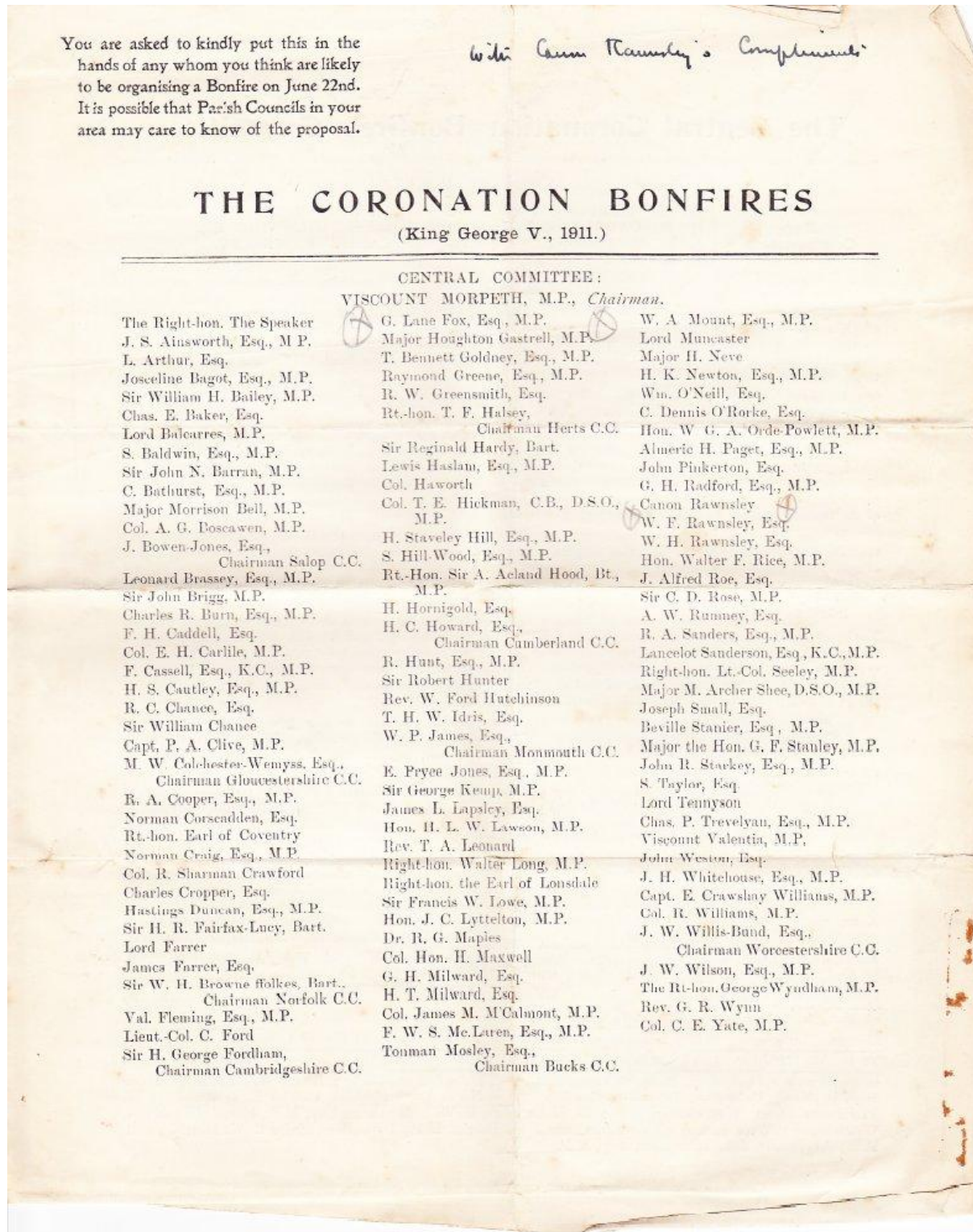


Figure 6: Page 1 of the government Coronation Bonfires leaflet

The Central Coronation Bonfires Committee.

CHAIRMAN ... VISCOUNT MORPETH, M.P.

HON. CO-SECRETARIES,	W. R. CAMPION, Esq., M.P. H. M. CADELL, Esq. J. M. M'CALMONT, Esq., M.P. T. H. W. IDRIS, Esq.	F. W. S. McLAREN, Esq., M.P. G. H. MILWARD, Esq. CANON RAWNSLEY.
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DEAR SIR,—At a meeting of Members and friends of the movement, convened unofficially in the House of Commons on March 21st, a Central Committee was formed of which Lord Morpeth was elected Chairman, to enlist the sympathies of the Counties and Boroughs of Great Britain and Ireland and the Colonies in a Bonfire Scheme in honour of the Coronation of King George V., on June 22nd, 1911. The following resolutions were passed:—

General Committee No. 1.—That a General Committee be appointed, with power to add to their number; the gentlemen above named to act as Honorary Co-Secretaries.

Hour of Lighting No. 2.—That a circular be sent to the Lords Lieutenant, Chairmen of County Councils, the Lord Mayors and Mayors, Lord Provosts, Provosts, and Conveners of Counties, inviting them to urge, through their respective bodies and the local press or otherwise, that their Counties and Boroughs should co-operate, by forming Bonfire Committees to fall in with the plan suggested of firing their bonfires simultaneously at 10 o'clock, Greenwich time, on Coronation day. North of the Border the hour to be 10.30 p.m., owing to the long light in the north.

It was pointed out that the bonfires, if properly constructed, would last well on towards midnight, and that the distance, especially to mountain heights, made 10 o'clock an hour quite late enough for the convenience of spectators, south of the Border.

Signal Rockets The Committee recommend that for England, Ireland, and Wales, a detonating rocket should be sent from any principal height at 9.55 to call attention; that at 10 o'clock a magnesium star rocket should be fired, to be followed by other rockets, the bonfires be lighted, and the National Anthem sung. Where possible, the hills should be specially illuminated at the same time with red, white, and blue coloured fires, in tins of 5lbs. each for all the more important heights. For Scotland, the same arrangements at 10.25 to 10.30. At 11 o'clock, when all bonfires will be a-light, it is hoped that a bouquet of rockets will be sent up and the National Anthem be again sung. Rockets will probably be sent up at intervals till 11 o'clock; but this must be left to the discretion of local committees.

A Caution The Committee wish to caution the public against standing too near to leeward of the bonfire mass at the time of lighting if it has been saturated with paraffin; the flame has been known to fly out as much as 150 feet, and the Committee are very anxious that no accident should mar the Coronation night.

Fireworks Special arrangements have been made with Messrs James Pain & Son, by Royal Warrant Pyrotechnists to His Majesty the King, Mitcham, Surrey (Tel. address, "Pain, Mitcham"), who offer to supply all Bonfire Committees, *bona fide* members of our National Bonfire Union, at a discount of 25 per cent. on all their rockets and coloured fires, and a further 15 per cent. reduction if the orders are sent to them on or before June 1st; also 15 per cent. on flambeaux. The order from each Bonfire Committee who wish to ensure this reduction in price, must be accompanied by a card of introduction from our Central Committee. All who intend to join in the Bonfire Scheme, and wish for introduction to Messrs Pain, are asked to communicate as follows:—London, Middlesex, Kent, Surrey, Sussex, Hants, Wilts, Dorset, Somerset, Devon, Cornwall, Isle of Wight, and Channel Islands, with W. R. Campion, Esq., M.P., House of Commons, London, S.W. Monmouth, Gloucester, Oxford, Berks, Bucks, Herts, Essex, Suffolk, Cambridge, Bedford, Northampton, Hunts, Warwick, Worcester, Hereford, Salop, Stafford, Leicester, Rutland, Norfolk, Notts, with G. H. Milward, Esq., 40, Buckingham Palace Mansions, London, S.W. Cheshire, Yorks, Lancashire, Westmorland, Cumberland, Durham, Northumberland, and Isle of Man, with Rev. Canon Rawnsley, Crosthwaite Vicarage, Keswick. Scotland, with H. M. Cadell, Esq., Grange, Linlithgow, N.B. Ireland, with Col. James M. M'Calmont, House of Commons. Wales, with T. H. W. Idris, Esq., 120, Pratt Street, Camden Town, London, N.W. The following also have kindly offered to assist:—For Derbyshire, Robt. W. Greensmith, Esq., Dalbury Lees, Derby; for the Weald of Kent, Major Herbert Neve, Pullington, Benenden, Cranbrook; for North Pembrokeshire, Charles E. Baker, Esq., 54, Parliament Street, Westminster, S.W.; for Lincolnshire, F. W. S. McLaren, Esq., M.P., House of Commons, Westminster; West Riding of Yorkshire, Sir John Barran, M.P.; Devonshire, Major E. W. Morrison Bell M.P.; Argyllshire, John Ainsworth, Esq., M.P.

Figure 7: Page 2 of the government Coronation Bonfires leaflet

**Hints for
the Building
of Bonfires**

The following hints as to the construction of bonfires may be useful:—Experience has shown that the taking of railway sleepers, tar, wood, and other materials to the tops of the greater heights for fuel is very costly, and that furze, whin bushes, thorns and faggots make a bright blaze but burn out too quickly, and are disappointing. It is suggested that, wherever possible by leave of the owner, peats should be dug at the nearest point to the summit. These, if cut thin and set up to dry without loss of time, in ordinary weather, should be ready for fuel by the 22nd June. They can be sledged up by a horse and gear a day or two before the building of the bonfire without much cost, and if built with good air passages at the base communicating with a central chimney and saturated with a barrel of paraffin or petroleum or creosote (use a water-can sprinkler or long-handled ladle), will burn with a steady fire for three or four hours. The diameter of the base must, of course, be determined by the amount of peat ready to hand. It has been found with a diameter of 12 feet and a height of 10 feet a very considerable body of fire is obtainable. The only caution needed is, that the peats should not be built solid, but like open brickwork with interstices to allow air passage. If occasional layers of dried larch-cuttings or faggots can be interposed to give lightness to the mass, so much the better. Light from the top, and from time to time rake out the bottom flues with a larch pole to keep the air-ways clear. The cost of two bonfires thus constructed on Skiddaw was £20.

To ensure the success of ordinary bonfires, all that is necessary is to keep a good air draught through the centre of the pile; to effect this, let short vertical posts be placed in the ground in a circle round a central pole, which may be 10 feet to 20 feet high, with which they must be connected by horizontal bars like the spokes of a wheel. The bonfire materials may be piled on to and round this staging. For the construction of larger bonfires up to 50ft in height, full instructions, with illustrations, will be found in a pamphlet in verse, "A Bonfire Ballad for Boy Scouts," price 2d., published at the Boy Scouts' Scottish Headquarters, 1, South Charlotte Street, Edinburgh.

On the most inaccessible heights it has been suggested that, instead of a bonfire, what is known as a "Flare" could be arranged for. The flare light on Coniston Old Man at the Diamond Jubilee was a great success: it shone out like a star. Mr. J. M. M'Murtrie, 212, West Regent Street, Glasgow, will supply on hire "Lucal" Lamps (weighing about 1 cwt.), fitted for one, two, or three flares from 10,000 to 20,000 candle power, at a cost of £7 per light, plus carriage each way. These flares will burn two hours. For fuller particulars as to amount of oil and water needed, address Mr. M'Murtrie, as above.

Coloured lights, if used as at the Diamond Jubilee, on any church, cathedral, and town hall towers, should be burnt in iron buckets, to prevent all possibility of fire: so burned, safety is assured. N.B.—When used on mountain tops, burn them a little below the summit.

The Committee are extremely anxious that it should be known that they do not undertake to advise as to the cost of rockets, paraffin, or bonfire material; nor have they any central fund from which to subsidise local subscriptions to cost of bonfires.

We shall be very glad to hear as early as possible of any Bonfire Committees in your County or Borough who intend to join us, in order that an official record may be kept. Matters would be simplified if some one person would act as local secretary for his County or Borough.

We sincerely hope that the Boy Scouts may lend a hand, not only in collecting material for the Bonfires, but, when built, to prevent mischievous firing. The suggestion is approved by Headquarters, and has been inserted in their official gazette. We suggest that landowners and farmers, instead of allowing their workmen to burn fallen wood, tree and hedge clippings, should keep them for use on Coronation day.

It will much facilitate the keeping of a record if correspondents who send us the sites of Bonfires would state the County in which the Bonfire is situate.

We have the honour to remain, yours very faithfully,

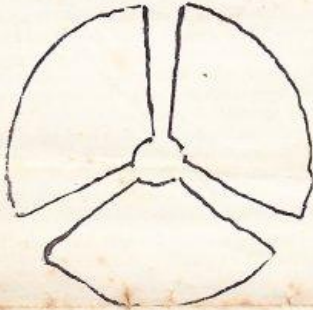
W. R. CAMPION,	} Hon. Co-Secretaries.
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T. H. W. IDRIS,	
F. W. S. McLAREN,	
G. H. MILWARD,	
H. D. RAWNSLEY,	

NOTE.—The question of sending up rockets at intervals of one, five, fifteen, or thirty minutes, or one hour after lighting the Bonfires, must be left to each local Committee to decide according to the funds at their disposal; the more continuous the display the better.

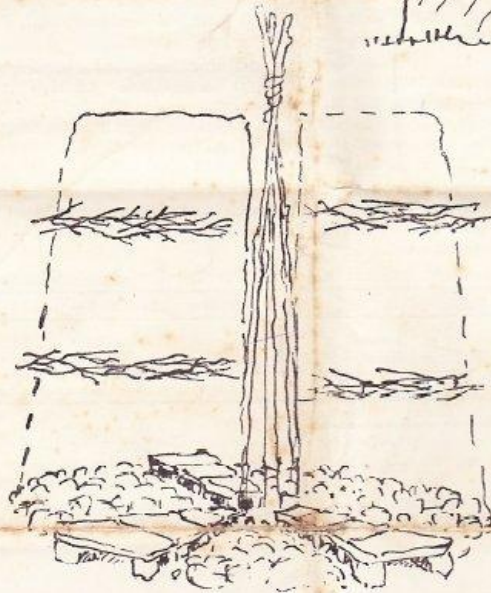
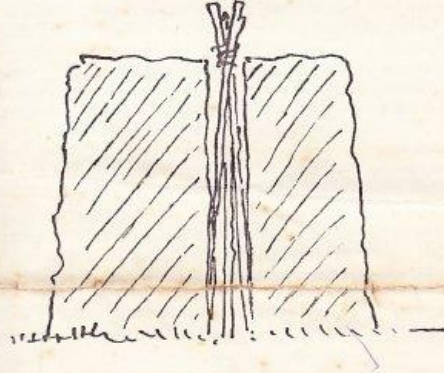
Figure 8: Page 3 of the government Coronation Bonfires leaflet

DIAGRAMS OF PEAT BONFIRE.

1
Ground Plan,
shewing air passages to central flue,



2
Section, shewing central flue, with upright
larch poles, tied at top with strong wire,
to prevent peats, &c., falling in.



3
Shewing air passages at base
to central flue, and layers of
larch branches at intervals be-
tween the peats to give air to
the mass.

4
Shewing method of building up
the peats with air spaces.

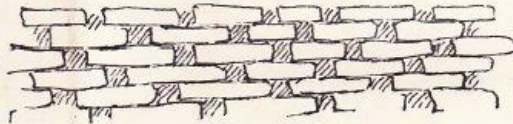


Figure 9: Page 4 of the government Coronation Bonfires leaflet

What next – can you help ?

Do you have any further information or documents concerning of royal celebrations in Farnhill or Kildwick that you would be willing to share ? The Farnhill and Kildwick Local History Group would like to hear from anyone with their memories of the 1935 Silver Jubilee, the 1937 Coronation, the 1953 Coronation, or the 1977 Silver Jubilee. Please email history@farnhill.co.uk.

Acknowledgements

The Farnhill Local History Group would like to thank Farnhill Parish Council for the loan of documents. The photograph shown in Fig 1 was provided by Helen Moran; Fig 2a and Fig 5 were provided by the Keighley and District Digital Archive. Fig 2b came from Mike Scarffe.

Particular thanks are due to Kildwick School for permission to scan the school log (1907-1922).