

“There are other rushbearing festivals like this one but none are quite as spec-tacular,” said chairman of, the Rushbearing Association, John Coupe, after this weekend’s annual celebrations.

Sunshine, music and live-ly traditional dancing were enjoyed by all those partici-pating in and watching the 2004 Rushbearing Festival.



The streets of Sowerby Bridge and surrounding vil-lages came alive as the rush cart, pulled by 60 men wearing, black trousers, white shirts, clogs and panama hats, trundled through with its procession of rushbearers, maidens and collectors.

Mr Coupe said as usual, there had been a great turnout at this year’s festi-val, which celebrates the centuries-old tradition of replacing the rushes used as floor covering in churches.

“Every year there are lots of people take part and come out to watch,” said Mr Coupe.

“It is always a popular event. There’s really noth-ing else like it in the world.”

The event started at St John’s Church, Warley, Halifax, where vicar Ste-phen Bradbury blessed the cart and received the first bundle of rushes.

The pro-cession made its way through Warley and Sowerby, stopping at various pubs as It went, for refreshments and a burst of dancing and music from the eight dancing groups who were there.



Young women took it in turns to ride on top of the cart, changing at each stop. The

“cart maiden” for the first leg of the journey on Saturday was 19 year old Lisa Baigent.

“I have been involved with Rushbearing since I was tiny and been a cart maiden for the last few years,” she said. “I like the socialising, the drinking and the atmosphere. Everyone knows each other and it is a great get togeth-er.” Cart puller and com-mittee member Paul Holroyde has been involved with Rushbearing for the past 22 years, along with his wife Jennifer. The pair are celebrating their 25th anniversary this week and were enjoying drinks with friends.

“It is always such a good occasion, everyone is so friendly,” Mr Holroyde said.

The crowds who had gathered to line the streets and see the spectacle clapped and tapped their feet as the bands and dancers performed.

Resident Pauline Charl-nock had come to the Maypole Inn to see the procession arrive.



“I try to come every year to watch. It is always a bright and colourful event with such, a good atmosphere, it gives you a warm feeling,” she said.

Yesterday’s celebrations began with a service at St Peter’s Church, Sowerby. The procession wound its way through Cottonstones, to Triangle and down into Ripponden A songs of praise service marked the end of the festival.

The annual duck race, organised by the 12th Halifax Sea Scouts, was held yesterday, from County Bridge, and the winning duck was number 23.

**By Emma Hams Halifax Courier 6<sup>th</sup> September 2004**