

## Platinum Jubilee street parties: How our community celebrations tell the story of who we are

‘Street parties are about so much more than the monarchy nowadays’

By Anna Bonet, published 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2022



*Emma Parsons-Read celebrated the Silver Jubilee in 1977 in Cardiff, Wales*

The British have used street parties to celebrate major national occasions for more than a century. The end of wars, coronations, royal weddings and jubilees have all been leapt on as excuses to get out the trestle tables and paper cups.

The events echo down the decades revealing just how much we have changed but how the simple desire to celebrate with neighbours in the middle of a street remains the same. Here, four Britons share their stories of street parties past and present.

## Mandie Groves in Essex



*Mandie enjoying the Silver Jubilee in Stanford-le-Hope, Essex, aged four.*

In 1977, the Queen was celebrating 25 years on the throne and on Scratton Road, in Stanford-le-Hope, four-year-old Mandie Groves was dressed in a pink crepe paper outfit for her first ever street party, just a few roads over from where her father had celebrated the Coronation. Homemade buffet food was served, one of the teenagers got a bit too drunk, and giddy children bounced about on the then-new craze: space hoppers.

This year, now 48, she is celebrating the Platinum Jubilee with a street party in the very same spot, after having moved back to the road she grew up on 12 years ago. A lot has changed in the meantime. "Everything was much simpler back then," she says.

"People definitely talked to each other more, and everyone was a lot more trusting. In our back garden, for instance, we had an adjoining gate with the neighbours so you could come in and out of each other's gardens. That has gone now, but that was very much my childhood."



*Mandie's father celebrated the Coronation with a street party just a few roads away.*

After having missed the Golden Jubilee because she was heavily pregnant with the first of her three sons, Groves was keen to re-live her childhood memories – and rekindle the community spirit – by throwing a street party on Stratton Road for the Diamond Jubilee in 2012.

“It was a huge success and we had a lot of fun,” she says. “It was a much bigger affair than the 1977 event. We had a stage, a DJ, loads of kids’ games like egg-and-spoon races and hula hoop competitions.

“We also had a ‘best of British’ theme so people dressed up as cricketers, beefeaters, knights – my husband went as the Queen – and we made things like a Tardis from a wheelie bin and a Millennium wheel with Activia yoghurt pots.”

The food served drew on the neighbours’ skills. “A Caribbean family brought an amazing curry, and the Turkish family did a lovely barbecue,” says Groves.

This year, much of the celebrations have been organised via the neighbours’ WhatsApp group. “We are a real close-knit community again now especially after helping each other through the pandemic. So no matter what people on the street feel about the monarchy, we are all excited to have a big party. I think everyone feels we really deserve it.”

## Emma Parsons-Reid in Cardiff



*Emma celebrated her first street party in her hometown of Cardiff back in 1977.*

Emma Parsons-Reid was 10 years old for the Silver Jubilee street party on Lon Werdd where she grew up in Cardiff and distinctly remembers feeling not good enough.

“I went as a boy in a blue tracksuit from the shop, while all my friends looked like princesses in costumes their mothers had made them,” she says. “My mum worked full time, which was still quite rare in the 1970s, so wasn’t a homemaker in the way the other mums on the street were.

“She didn’t have time to bake or make bunting or do a lot for the party at all, really. I remember that made me feel quite sad, and it has really stayed with me.”

It is why, she realises on reflection, she has since thrown herself into street parties over the years, hosting one for every Jubilee since. This weekend’s and a party for the Diamond Jubilee in 2012 have been on the very same street that she grew up on.

“I moved back here 15 years ago, so I get this special feeling of reliving the 1977 Jubilee and passing it on, because I’ve now got five granddaughters who are all excited about it,” says the 55 year-old. “So much has changed now. Everyone buys a lot more in, whether it’s food or costumes, because no one has enough time. What was the situation for my mum back then is the norm now.”

Nor are there such set gender roles anymore. “As I was on the ladder putting up the bunting for this weekend, I realised that is the one thing the dads on our street did in the 70s!”

## Jay Williams in Leeds



*Jay (in green, back left) during the Silver Jubilee celebrations.*

“There was a real sense of optimism during our Silver Jubilee Street party,” remembers Jay Williams, who was eight at the time. “We had long trestle tables with more trifle you could shake a stick at. Tonnes of fairy cake. We all got our own mugs. The Queen drove around the whole nation, so we waved our little plastic flags. We kids just embraced it wholeheartedly.”

Now? “I couldn’t give a stuff about the royals,” she laughs. Still, she is throwing a street party where she lives on Shaftesbury Road, Leeds, this weekend.

“I got involved with this project called The Big Lunch in 2014, which encourages neighbours to get to know each other through annual gatherings. This year’s is for the Jubilee. So for me, our Platinum street party is about much more than the monarchy – it is about that sense of community.”

“I’ve said to all the neighbours, if you want to bring flags and celebrate the Queen, you do that,” she adds. “And for those of us that are less fussed, let’s just see it as a big get together and a chance to have a good time. We should grab every little bit of happiness we can.”

## Andrew Flanagan in Hampshire



*A Jubilee procession took place on Church Street in 1977 (Wherwell Anthology).*

One thing that has never changed is the British weather's penchant for raining on a summer parade. Just ask the locals of Wherwell, upon whom the heavens have opened during their Silver, Gold and Diamond Jubilee Street parties, all of which have been held in the heart of the village on Church Street.

"Let's hope it does not happen again this Saturday," says resident Andrew Flanagan. "There is a village hall at the end of the street, so everyone can run in for cover, but around 200 people are coming to the party and the hall fits about 100. So, the race will be on."

Some things, though, have changed since the Queen's first Jubilee in 1977. "The demographic has really shifted," the 75-year-old says. "Wherwell used to be referred to as a bit of an old people's village, and it was actually. Most of the locals were retired. But in more recent times, a lot of younger people with London jobs have moved in with their families."

As such, the street parties have become more child-friendly with each Jubilee. "This year there will be a children's play area and lots of outdoor games are planned."

Another marked difference is fact the environment is far more at the top of the organisers' minds. "Compared with even just a decade ago, we are being much more eco-conscious this year," says Andrew Flanagan. "There is certainly more focus on reducing waste and we are using a lot more paper rather than plastic."

But the parties have also been defined by another constant, a little more cheerful than rain. "The number of people coming to the street party remains high, and I think that is a testament to community values that have stayed in place," he says.

"The idea of younger generations being less likely to talk to neighbours, I think, is just a stereotype. Those here are just as friendly, sociable and ready for a get together as anyone else."