

1<sup>st</sup> May 2023

May

**“As full of spirit as the month of May.”**

William Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part 1*

For many centuries May Day has been a day of festival throughout Europe. Half-way between the spring equinox and the summer solstice, May Day festivities included gathering wildflowers and green branches, weaving floral garlands, crowning a May Queen and dancing around a May Pole. In 1889, it was chosen as the date for International Workers' Day, and in some countries, it is still a day when Trade Union rallies are commonplace.

May Day has been celebrated in Scotland through countless generations. One part of that – still common in the Scottish Borders – is the “Beltane Festival”. In “The Maitland Manuscripts”, a collection of 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century Scots poetry, this piece, *Peblis to the Play*, appears:

*At Beltane, quhen ilk bodie bownis  
To Peblis to the Play,  
To heir the singin and the soundis;  
The solace, suth to say,  
Be firth and forrest furth they found  
Thay graythis tham full gay;  
God wait that wald they do that stound,  
For it was their feast day, the day they celebrate May Day,*

This is a description of the celebration in the Borders' town of Peebles of “Beltane”, still re-enacted through a parade and pageant each year, including the “Common Riding” – the riding round “the marches” or the boundaries of the town – and the crowning of The Beltane Queen.

When I was a student, there was a custom that at dawn on May Day the students in Halls would climb to the top of the adjacent Arthur's Seat in Edinburgh to bathe their faces in the May dew. It was reputed to make you more beautiful – though, in my case, it was a singular failure.

How will you mark this May Day? Join a rally in solidarity with International Workers; ride a horse round Peebles; wear a floral garland; dance round a May Pole; beautify yourself in the May Dew? As for me, I'll see it as just another day, say with the Psalmist “This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it”, and leave it at that!

**A prayer for today**

*Another day to make good use of and to be thankful ... May I get that right today. Amen*

*An original reflection © Tom Gordon*

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