

= Hoodening =

Hoodening (/ ʔd.ʔnʔʔ /), also spelled Hodening and Oodening , is a folk custom found in Kent , a county in south @-@ eastern England . The tradition entails the use of a wooden hobby horse known as a hooden horse which is mounted on a pole and carried by an individual hidden under a sackcloth . Historically , the tradition was restricted to the area of East Kent , although in the twentieth century it spread into neighbouring West Kent . It represents a regional variation of a " hooded animal " tradition that appears in various forms throughout the British Isles .

As recorded from the eighteenth through to the early twentieth centuries , hoodening was a tradition performed at Christmas time by groups of farm labourers . They would form into teams to accompany the horse on its travels around the local area , and although the makeup of such groups varied , they typically included an individual to carry the horse , a leader , a man in female clothing known as a " Mollie " , and several musicians . The team would then carry the hooden horse to local houses and shops , where they would expect payment for their appearance . Although this practice is extinct , in the present the hooden horse is incorporated into various Kentish Mummers plays and Morris dances which take place at different times of the year .

The origins of the hoodening tradition , and the original derivation of the term " hooden " , remain subject to academic debate . An early suggestion was that the term " hooden " was related to the pre @-@ Christian god Woden , and that the tradition therefore originated with pre @-@ Christian religious practices in the Early Medieval Kingdom of Kent , however this approach has not found support from historians or folklorists studying the tradition . Most scholars to have commented on the custom have thought it most likely that the term " hooden " relates to " hooded " , a reference to the sackcloth worn by the individual carrying the horse .

The earliest textual reference to the hoodening tradition comes from the first half of the eighteenth century . A number of scattered references to it appeared over the next century and a half , many of which considered it to be a declining tradition that had become extinct in many parts of Kent . Aware of this decline , in the early twentieth century the folklorist and historian Percy Maylam documented what survived of the tradition and traced its appearances in historical documents , publishing his findings as *The Hooden Horse* in 1909 . Although deemed extinct at the time of the First World War , the custom was revived in an altered form during the mid @-@ twentieth century , when the use of the hooden horse was incorporated into a number of modern Kentish folk traditions .

= = Description = =

Surviving sources testify to the fact that while there was clear variation in the hoodening tradition as it was practiced by different individuals in different parts of East Kent , it was nevertheless " on the whole remarkably uniform " . The hooden horse , which was at the centre of the tradition , was usually made out of a wooden horse 's head affixed to a pole about four feet long , with a hinged jaw that was moved by a string . This horse was then carried aloft by an individual who was concealed beneath a dark cloth . As part of the hoodening custom , a team of " hoodeners " , consisting of between four and eight men , would carry the horse through the streets . This team included the horse with a " hoodener " operating it , a " Groom " , " Driver " , or " Waggoner " who carried a whip and led the horse by a bridle , a " Jockey " who would attempt to mount the horse , a " Mollie " who was a man dressed as a woman , and one or two musicians . All of the men were farm labourers , usually being those who worked with horses . They performed the custom at Christmas time , and usually on Christmas Eve . The team would arrive at people 's houses where they would sing a song before being admitted entry . Once inside , the horse pranced and gnashed its jaw , while the Jockey attempted to mount it , and the Mollie swept the floor with their broom while chasing any girls present . Sometimes they would sing further songs and carols at this point . Upon being presented with payment , the team would leave to repeat the process at another house .

Hoodening was part of a wider " hooded animal " tradition that the folklorist E. C. Cawte identified as existing in different forms in various parts of Britain . Features common to these customs were the use of a hobby horse , the performance at Christmas time , a song or spoken statement

requesting payment , and the use of a team who included a man dressed in women 's clothing .

= = Etymology and origins = =

The folklorist Percy Maylam noted that most nineteenth @-@ century sources describing the tradition had spelled the word as hoden , but that he favoured hooden because it better reflected the pronunciation of the word with its long vowel . He added that " the word ' hooden ' rhymes with ' wooden ' and not with ' sodden ' as some writers appear to think " . Given this pronunciation , Cawte suggested that oodening was a better spelling for the tradition 's name . Maylam also noted that none of the hoodeners with whom he communicated were aware of the etymology of the term , and that similarly they were unaware of the tradition 's historical origins .

One possible explanation for the origin of hooden was that it had emerged as a mispronunciation of wooden , referring to the use of the wooden horse . Maylam was critical of this idea , expressing the view that such a mispronunciation was unlikely to emerge from the Kentish dialect . A second possibility is that the name hooden was a reference to the hooded nature of the horse 's bearer . The historian Ronald Hutton deemed this to be the " simplest " derivation , while folklorists Charlotte Sophia Burne and E. C. Cawte also considered it the most likely explanation . However , Maylam was also critical of this , suggesting that the cloth under which the carrier was concealed was too large to be considered a hood .

In his History of Kent , the antiquarian Alfred John Dunkin suggested that Hodening was a corruption of Hobening , and that it was ultimately derived from the Gothic hopp , meaning horse . Maylam , however , opined that Dunkin 's argument could be " ignored " , stating that it rested on the erroneous assumption that Hodening began with a short vowel .

Maylam concluded that the hoodening tradition was " a mutilated survival " of a form of Morris dance . Noting that some Medieval Morris dancers had incorporated games devoted to the English folk hero Robin Hood into their custom , he suggested that hoodening might have originally been a reference to Robin Hood . This idea was challenged by Burne , who noted that in his legends , Robin Hood was always depicted as an archer rather than a horse @-@ rider , thus questioning how he had come to be associated with the hooden horse . In addition , she noted that the Medieval games devoted to Hood all took place in May rather than at Christmas , as hoodening did . Cawte also criticised Maylam 's argument , noting that there was no evidence of Morris dancing in Kent prior to the twentieth century , and that neither hoodening nor Robin Hood had a particularly close association with the Morris dance to start with .

= = = Possible Early Medieval origins = = =

In 1807 , an anonymous observer suggested that the term hoden was linked to the putative Anglo @-@ Saxon god Woden , and that the tradition might be " a relic of a festival to commemorate our Saxon ancestors landing in Thanet " . In 1891 , it was suggested that the custom had once been known as " Odining " , a reference to the Early Medieval Scandinavian god Odin . The author of this idea further suggested that the custom had begun either with the ritual wearing of the skins of horses sacrificed to Odin , or as an early Christian mockery of such Odinic practices . Maylam noted that he was initially attracted to the idea that the term hodening had derived from Woden ? an Old English name that he thought a more likely origin than the Old Norse Odin ? but that upon investigating this possibility found " no sufficient evidence " for it . He added that it would seem unlikely that the W would be lost from Woden in the Kentish dialect , citing the example of Woodnesborough , a Kentish village whose name is often interpreted as having derived from Woden and which clearly retains its use of W. Ultimately , he stated that " one feels that the theory is based on inferences and analogies not strong enough for a foundation to carry the building erected on them " . The idea of linking the tradition to Woden was also dismissed as unlikely by both Burne and Cawte .

Believing it likely that the hoodening tradition " substantially pre @-@ dates " its earliest textual appearances , the folklorist Geoff Doel suggested the possibility that it had originated as a Midwinter

rite to re @-@ energise the vegetation , as evidence noting that other English winter folk customs , such as the Apple Wassail , have also been interpreted in this manner . Doel also suggested that the use of the horse in the tradition may have some connections to either the use of the white horse as the symbol of Kent , and the use of Hengist and Horsa (" stallion " and " horse " in Old English) as prominent characters in the origin myths of the Early Medieval Kingdom of Kent .

= = Regional restrictions = =

Historians have catalogued 33 recorded instances of the hoodening tradition extant in Kent prior to the twentieth @-@ century revival . These are clustered in a crescent shape along the eastern and northern coasts of the county , and all were found within the area historically defined as East Kent , with the tradition being unknown in neighbouring West Kent . More specifically , Maylam noted that there were no records of the tradition having been found west of Godmersham . This region was " a well populated area " during the period in which the hoodeners were active , and Maylam noted that all of the areas in which the tradition were found contained the East Kentish dialect . Cawte analysed the historical distribution of the hoodeners and found that it did not correspond with the areas of early Anglo @-@ Saxon settlement in Kent , and that it similarly did not accord with the county 's coal mining areas . Cawte also stated that " there is no apparent reason why the custom did not spread further afield " .

= = Recorded appearances = =

= = = Early textual references = = =

The oldest known textual reference to hoodening comes from the Alphabet of Kenticisms , a manuscript authored by Samuel Pegge , an antiquary who served as the vicar of Godmersham in Kent from 1731 to 1751 . After Pegge 's death , the manuscript was obtained by Sir Frederic Madden , and after his death it was purchased by the English Dialect Society , who published it in 1876 . In this manuscript , Pegge noted simply that " Hoodening (huod.ing) is a country masquerade at Christmas times " , comparing it to Mumming and the Winster Guisers of Derbyshire .

The earliest known textual description of the tradition is provided by a letter that was published in a May 1807 edition of European Magazine . The letter had been written by an anonymous individual who was describing their encounter with the hoodeners on a visit to the Kentish coastal town of Ramsgate in Thanet :

I found they begin the festivities of Christmas by a curious procession : a party of young people procure the head of a dead horse , which is affixed to a pole about four feet in length ; a string is affixed to the lower jaw ; a horse @-@ cloth is also attached to the whole , under which one of the parts gets , and by frequently pulling the string , keeps up a loud snapping noise , and is accompanied by the rest of the party , grotesquely habited , with hand @-@ bells ; they thus proceed from house to house , ringing their bells , and singing carols and songs ; they are commonly gratified with beer and cake , or perhaps with money . This is called , provincially , a Hodening .

Later commenting on this source , Maylam highlighted that its author did not appear to be from Kent and that , from their use of wording , it appeared that they had been told about the tradition by locals but had not actually witnessed it first hand . As such , Maylam suggested that the author may have been wrong in describing the use of a horse 's skull in the Ramsgate tradition , given that both later sources and the hoodeners of his own time all used a wooden model of a horse 's head . At the same time , Maylam noted that the use of a horse 's skull was not impossible , for such skulls had also been used in the hobby horse traditions of other parts of Britain .

The anonymously authored work was repeated almost verbatim in a range of other publications in the coming decades , giving its description far wider exposure . The first printed reference to the

hooden horse having a wooden head appeared in Mackenzie E. C. Walcott 's Guide to the Coast of Kent , where he referred to a " curious custom [which] used to prevail " in Ramsgate . Maylam later suggested that the Ramsgate hooden horse tradition died out between 1807 and 1838 , for he had interviewed a number of elderly town residents in the early twentieth century and while several were aware that it had once taken place in the town , none could recall it happening in their own lifetime .

= = = Latter nineteenth @-@ century = = =

Many years after the event , the Kentish antiquarian J. Meadows Cooper related that while sitting in a pub on the outskirts of Margate on Boxing Day 1855 he had encountered a party carrying a hooden horse that entered the building . Another local resident , Mrs. Edward Tomlin , later related that as a child she had lived at a house named Updown that was near to Margate , and that she remembered the hooden horse visiting them at Christmas time during the 1850s and up until 1865 . Maylam 's researches also found recollections of a hooden horse which had appeared in Herne and Swalecliffe but which been discontinued in the 1860s , another that was active from Wingate Farm House in Harbledown during the 1850s , and one that had been active at Evington but which had ceased by the 1860s . He found another based at Lower Hardres which had been active from at least the least the 1850s under the leadership of Henry Brazier ; it was subsequently taken over by his son John , until the tradition ended locally in 1892 . In a January 1868 edition of the Kentish Gazette , an anonymous author mentioned that hoodening had taken place in Minster , Swale on the Christmas Eve of 1867 . The author noted that the tradition featured carol singing and the ringing of Handbells , which were accompanied by the appearance of a hooden horse ; they expressed surprise at this latter event because they had thought that the horse was " as extinct as the megatherium " .

In their 1888 Dictionary of the Kentish Dialect , W. D. Parish and W. F. Shaw claimed that Hoodening was a term used in Kent to refer to a custom involving the singing of carols , but that in the past Hoodening had been applied to " a mumming or masquerade " involving the hooden horse . They added that they had gained information on this older custom in 1876 from the Reverend H. Bennett Smith of St Nicholas @-@ at @-@ Wade , who had in turn learned from a retired farmer in his parish that " the farmer used to send annually round the neighbourhood the best horse under the charge of the wagoner , and that afterwards instead , a man used to represent the horse , being supplied with a tail , and with a wooden figure of a horse 's head , and plenty of horse hair for a mane ... The custom has long since ceased . "

Parish and Shaw did not mention what time of year the tradition took place on or its geographical location . They also made no reference to a sack concealing the person carrying the horse . Doel thought it likely that neither Parish or Shaw had ever seen a hooden horse , and that instead their information was based on older written sources . He also thought it noteworthy that they described the tradition using the past tense , indicating that they considered it to be either dead or dying at the time of writing . However , Maylam believed that the information regarding the decline of the tradition was erroneous , because hoodeners were still active in St. Nicholas @-@ at @-@ Wade during the early twentieth century and various locals living in the area at the time could recall it taking place in the area back to the 1840s .

In December 1889 , a letter written by a resident of St. Lawrence named Charles J. H. Saunders appeared in The Bromley Record . Saunders stated that he had conversed with many elderly residents of Thanet on the subject of hoodening , and that they informed him that the custom had been discontinued around fifty years previously , after a woman in Broadstairs was so scared by the hooden horse that she died . He added that a horse 's skull was rarely used , " owing to the difficulty procuring one " , and that the wooden head was thus typically used as a replacement . He stated that the hoodening company typically consisted of a " Jockey " who placed himself on the back of the individual carrying the horse , and that it was the " sport " that bystanders attempted to throw him off , resulting in violence . The horse and jockey were also accompanied by two singers , two attendants , and an individual dressed as an " old woman " carrying a broom ; when the company knocked on people 's doors , it was the old woman 's job to sweep the inhabitants feet away with her

broom and to chase any girls until being paid off with money or refreshments . He was of the opinion that the custom had been restricted to the Isle of Thanet , noting that locals informed him that it had been carried out in Ramsgate , St. Lawrence , Minster , St. Nicholas , Acol , Monkton , and Birchington . However , contradicting this was a number of letters published in The Church Times in January 1891 which attested to the continuing practice of the hooden horse tradition at both Deal and Walmer .

= = = Percy Maylam 's investigations = = =

Percy Maylam was born into a farming family in 1865 at Pivington Farm in Pluckley , and in 1890 became a solicitor of the Supreme Court before working as a professional solicitor at Canterbury . Married to Kate Pearch , who had been born in Hastings , together they had two sons , Robert and James . Outside of his professional life , Maylam was a keen cricketer , coin collector , and amateur historian , and in 1892 joined the Kent Archaeological Society .

During the 1880s , Maylam came upon the hoodening tradition and began undertaking research into it , searching for textual references to the tradition in books , periodicals , and newspapers , and interviewing those involved in three extant traditions , at St Nicholas @-@ at @-@ Wade , Walmer , and Deal . He expressed the opinion that " in these days Kent possesses so few genuine popular customs of this kind that we cannot afford to be indifferent to those still in existence . This is my excuse for my attempt to record the custom as now existing before it is utterly lost to us . " The period in which Maylam conducted his research was one that was witnessing increased interest in the recording of Britain 's rural folk culture , in particular by members of the professional classes ? of which Percy was a member ? in part due to the fear that such traditions were rapidly dying out . Such folklore collecting was encouraged by The Folklore Society , with whom Maylam was associated , and also by the widely read book , The Golden Bough , a work of comparative folkloristics authored by the anthropologist James Frazer . Maylam published his research in 1909 as The Hooden Horse , in an edition limited to 303 copies . The book was reviewed in the Folklore journal by Burne , who described it as " an admirable piece of work , careful , thorough , unambitious , and complete in itself " , while Cawte later described it as " unusually good " .

Maylam concluded that at the time , there was only one hooden horse still in active use in Thanet , that stored at Hale Farm in St. Nicholas @-@ at @-@ Wade , which he noted was brought out each Christmas to visit Sarre , Birchington and St. Nicholas @-@ at @-@ Wade itself . The members included a man in female garb , known as the Mollie , in their procession , but added that this had not been done for some time and was thus reintroduced for Maylam 's benefit . In his book , Maylam included a photograph of the horse taken at Sarre in 1905 . On Christmas Eve 1906 , Maylam encountered a second hooden horse , this time at Walmer . This horse came into the local hotel tearoom at about 6 @.@ 30 pm , accompanied by two musicians ? one playing the tambourine and the other the concertina ? and a man named Robert Laming who lead the horse itself . They were wearing ordinary clothes , but informed Maylam that they had once worn smock frocks as part of the tradition . They had no Mollie , and the members could not recall a Mollie ever having been part of their custom . The hotel owner 's daughter placed a gratuity in the horse 's mouth , before the troupe moved on to the local shops , where they were also given gratuities in a similar manner . Maylam talked to the troupe about the tradition , and eventually organised the photographing of the Walmer horse and those who accompanied it in March 1907 .

Maylam also interviewed those involved in the hoodening tradition at Deal , whom he encountered in the summer of 1909 . One elderly gentleman , Robert Skardon , related that his own father had once led the town 's hoodening troupe , in which he personally carried the head , his father the drum , his " Uncle John Beaney " the fiddle , and " old Harry Chorner " the piccolo . For many years they had included a man dressed in woman 's clothing , who was known as a " Daisy " rather than a " Mollie " , but that this had been discontinued . Skardon had given up the tradition many years previously , and the hooden horse itself had come into the possession of Elbridge Bowles of Great Mongeham , who continued to lead a hoodening troupe after Christmas each year , visiting Deal as well as the neighbouring villages of Finglesham , Ripple , Tilmanstone , Eastry , and Betteshanger .

Maylam was also informed that at the time of Britain 's involvement in the Second Boer War , the horse had been decorated with military equipment . The fourth hooden horse that Maylam encountered was owned by the men who worked at George Goodson 's farm in Fenland , Word , near Sandwich . They informed him that it had been made by a farm hand in Cleve , Monkton , before being brought to Word when one of the Cleve farm workers relocated there .

Ultimately , Maylam believed that the custom ? as a " natural and spontaneous observance " among the people ? was clearly going to die out , expressing his hope that the hooden horses could be preserved in Kentish museums and brought out for specially arranged public processions so as to maintain their place in Kentish culture . In later life , Maylam focused his attentions on exploring his family history , privately publishing Maylam Family Records in 1932 , before dying in 1939 . In the century following his death , Maylam 's book on hoodening became difficult to obtain and expensive to purchase , and so to mark the centenary of its first publication , it was republished under the altered title of The Kent Hooden Horse in 2009 by The History Press . Writing an introductory article for the second publication , Doel , a specialist in Kentish folklore , praised Maylam 's book as a " classic study " which was " impressive for its separation of fact from speculation as to the origins and significance of the custom . "

= = = Twentieth @-@ century revival = = =

Writing in 1967 , the folklorist Barnett Field claimed that at some point after Maylam 's book was published , hoodening had " died out . The Horses were hung up in the stables , and when the tractors came , were taken out and burnt on the bonfire . " He noted that the first revival of the custom after the First World War took place at the 1936 Kent District Folk @-@ Dance Festival at Aylesford . A new horse was specially created for this festival , and was modeled on an older example that had been used at Sarre . This new horse was subsequently adopted by the Ravensbourne Morris Men , a Morris troupe based in the West Kentish village of Keston , in 1947 . The Ravensbourne Morris ' hoodening tradition is the earliest known variant of the custom to exist in West Kent , although there are accounts of a hooden horse being located at Balgowan School in the West Kentish town of Beckenham during the 1930s . As the Ravensbourne Morris included former pupils and staff of Balgowan school , there is the possibility that this was the same horse . At the 1945 celebration marking British victory in the Second World War , a horse was brought out in Acol ; this instance has been described as " a kind of missing link between tradition and revival " because the horse had been used as part of the historical hoodening tradition up until the mid @-@ 1920s .

Barnett Field (1912 ? 2000) had been born at Wych Cross in the Ashdown Forest and subsequently educated at Tunbridge Wells . He trained as a banker before working as manager of the Hythe and Folkestone branches of the Westminster Bank until his retirement in 1979 . Field and his wife , Olive Ridley , had a keen interest in folk dances ; she established the Folkestone National Folk Dance Group in 1950 , and he founded the East Kent Morris Men in 1953 . Field constructed a hooden horse for the group to use , based in large part on the Deal horse photographed for Maylam 's book , and unveiled it at the Folkestone celebrations for the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in June 1953 . After this , it came to be used by both the East Kent Morris Men and the Folkestone District National Dance Group 's Handbell Ringers , who took it with them for performances in various parts of continental Europe , including Austria , the Netherlands , Yugoslavia , Sweden , and Czechoslovakia , developing what came to be known as " handbell hoodening " . The Handbell Ringers also brought out the horse to accompany them as they went around in public collecting money for charity at Christmas time .

From 1954 , the horse was also brought out for a Whitsun celebration in which it was paraded from Charing to the village green at Wye . A special service was held in the Charing Church , in which the Morris Men danced in the chancel and through the aisle , while the vicar bridled the horse itself . The horse was also brought out for a July 1956 ceremony in which The Swan Inn , a pub at Wickhambreaux , was officially renamed as The Hooden Horse ; present were the East Kent Morris Men , the Handbell Ringers , and the Ravensbourne Morris Men . This venture led to the groups establishing a new folk custom , " hop hoodening " , which was derived in part from an older hop

picking ceremony found in the Weald area . Their new custom involved the different groups joining together on a tour around the villages of East Kent , beginning at Canterbury Cathedral and going through Ramsgate , Cliftonville , and Herne Bay before ending in a barn dance at Wickhambreaux .

In October 1957 , Field was introduced to Jack Laming of Walmer , who as a boy had performed in a hoodening troupe earlier in the century . Laming taught Field more about the historical hoodening tradition , and together they unearthed an old hooden horse that was stored at Walmer 's Coldblow Farm ; this artefact was later placed on display at Deal Maritime and Local History Museum . In June 1961 Field and his wife then established the first Folkestone International Folklore Festival as a biannual celebration of folk customs ; it continued for 28 years .

Since the end of the Second World War , the hooden horse 's use has been revived in Whitstable , where it is often brought out for the Jack in the Green festival each May , and is owned by a group called the Ancient Order of Hoodeners . Since 1981 , the Tonbridge Mummers and Hoodeners have made use of a horse , incorporating it into a play specially written for the purpose by Doel and Nick Miller . An annual conference of hoodeners was also established ; initially meeting at the Marsh Gate Inn near Herne Bay , it subsequently moved to Simple Simon 's in Canterbury . A member of the St. Nicholas @-@ at @-@ Wade hoodeners , Ben Jones , established a website devoted to the tradition . At the prompting of local residents , in December 2014 a pub named The Hungry Horse , located on the corner of Haine Road and Nash Road in Broadstairs , was renamed as The Hoodening Horse after the folk custom . Commenting on the Kentish revival of hoodening , Hutton suggested that its success was " due largely " to the desire of many Kentish folk to culturally distinguish themselves from neighbouring London .