Plymouth Tourism Weeks

Encouraging Tourists to Visit Plymouth

Anne Corry

During the 1920s, Plymouth concentrated upon different ways of attracting tourists. In 1924, a proposal made by the Public Services Committee of the Rotary Club was that a Plymouth Week should be held in 1925 with the object of advertising the town, extolling its charms and promoting its industries.

Plymouth Week

1926

This idea did not take shape until 1926 when the proposed Plymouth Week was arranged in conjunction with a forthcoming hospital fete with two representatives: one from the Chamber of Commerce and the other from the Plymouth and Devonport Mercantile Associations. It was to be called Plymouth Carnival Week and would include naval and military tournaments and displays; fireworks; a decorated motor car procession; a battle of flowers; marathon races; beauty competitions; competitions in golf, tennis and bowling; a baby show; a mannequin parade; swimming and sea angling, with dancing every evening. Plymouth was bedecked with flags and bunting, and the Hoe was transformed into a fairyland of electric lighting effects. The *Western Morning News* reported that many visitors were expected and holidaymakers from all parts of the West made arrangements to join in the festivities.

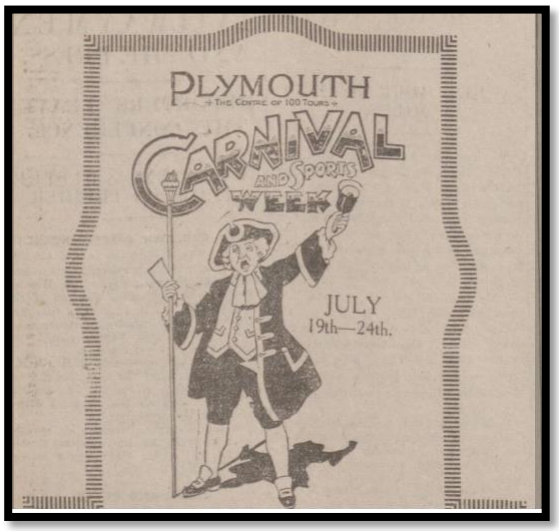

Figure 1: Plymouth Carnival Week poster in the *Western Morning News*, 1926.[1]

[1] *Western Morning News*, 6 July 1926.

Plymouth Carnival Week in 1926 was to be used to raise money for the University of the Southwest, but the General Strike affected arrangements. Mr E. Stanley Leatherby said that certain attractions could not go ahead, and the railways could offer no excursions and only put on a considerably curtailed service. Plymouth could hold a carnival that would draw the people of the adjoining districts but they would have to face the fact that the primary object would be defeated. The promoters of the Plymouth Week had set out to attract people of the Midlands and the north, to impress them so that they would themselves become the advertising agents of Plymouth.

In July, the *Western Morning News* reported that many thousands of visitors had been lured by the spirit of carnival to Plymouth. The reporter asked prominent townsmen, hotel proprietors, railway officials, garage proprietors and local businessmen three questions:

1) Has Plymouth benefited from the carnival?
2) Have many visitors been attracted?
3) Do such festivities as have been promoted mean prosperity?

He found that the general opinion was to be summarised in the phrase, 'Plymouth has had a Carnival, the success of which has surpassed all expectations.'[2]

The official in charge of the Corporation motor parking depot in Princess Square said that the number of private cars that had come to the town has been far greater than normal, and on Wednesday 300 cars were parked. There had also been an increase in the charabanc traffic.

Railway and omnibus officials stated that during the week, many thousands of visitors had been lured by the spirit of carnival to Plymouth coming from the great industrial centres of the north and Midlands. They will return to talk of Plymouth, its potentialities as a result and its carnival, and it is certain that many will include Plymouth Carnival as part of their future summer vacations.

The Mayor said everyone seemed anxious that the first carnival should be carried through in a manner befitting to this great town and so gratifying has been the success that it will undoubtedly become an annual event and it should be the means of greatly increasing the prosperity of the town, for it is bound to advertise it and bring enormous numbers of visitors from all parts of the country. 'We must endeavour to create a still greater interest in games tournaments, golf, tennis and bowls for these will help in bringing visitors and prosperity to the town.'[3]

In November 1926, Plymouth's Carnival Committee was considering new schemes of advertising the town. The Mayor, Alderman Moses commented 'King Carnival is dead, King Plymouth reigns instead'.[4] The committee decided after a long debate that the name was to be Plymouth Week as it was more dignified, although he hoped it would retain the carnival spirit. Mr W. G. Finch, chairman of the Carnival Committee said that to see growth would be the

[2] *Western Morning News*, 24 July 1926.
[3] Ibid.
[4] *Western Morning News*, 23 November 1926.

result of advertising. It was also suggested that they invite the 'Fleet'. Mr Ernest Underhill said they would need the backing of the tradespeople of Plymouth. They also hoped to be able to enlist Lady Astor's aid in getting publicity in America.

1927

There were various committee meetings during 1927 to organise Plymouth Week. People were asked to subscribe and many local businesses had promised to decorate many prominent places in the town, especially the Hoe, with lights. Representatives from the Mercantile Association said they were getting into touch with firms to see that confetti, masks, balloons, etc. were provided by local enterprises, unlike in 1926. Mr Spear was to get in touch with the big drapers in order to ask them to get in stocks of the special carnival colours that ladies would be induced to wear at the big reception hall. It was decided that all the juvenile organisations of the town should take part in the opening ceremony at Millbay Park. There would be a march-past, followed by a series of demonstrations lasting approximately an hour and twenty minutes.

A particularly interesting event would take place during Plymouth Week when the historic game of bowls played on Plymouth Hoe by Sir Francis Drake was to be reproduced in costume by forty well-known Plymouth bowlers. As far as possible, the traditional game was to be followed in detail and at one stage of the game there would be an interruption to warn the English Admiral and his captains that the Armada was in sight. It was decided by the committee who are managing the reproduction that the game should be played seriously.[5]

On 24 June 1927 at a committee meeting, Mr E. Stanley Leatherby announced that Plymouth Week would cost £3,500 and gave a list of various items of expenditure. He was looking to the generosity of the people of Plymouth to help out. He mentioned £500 had been spent advertising Plymouth and he was convinced that given fine weather, Plymouth would recover its expenses. Mr Leatherby made a further appeal to the public to support the efforts of the committee in their endeavour to benefit Plymouth.

In July an official souvenir of Plymouth Week was available for the general public, containing 128 pages. It was not only a guide to the Plymouth Week celebrations, but also a memento of Plymouth and its historic associations. There was a series of photogravures of the vessels comprising the Atlantic Fleet and the various municipal undertakings in the town were described. A self-explanatory map of the various tours both by road and sea was included in every copy.[6]

[5] *Western Morning News*, 7 May 1927.
[6] *Western Morning News*, 2 July 1927.

Figure 2: The Fleet and Plymouth Pier lit up for Plymouth Civic Week, 1927, courtesy of Chris Robinson.

Figure 3: Some of the decorated motor cars parading Plymouth in 1927.[7]

Mr E. Stanley Leatherby, chairman of Plymouth Week, declared that 1927 Plymouth Week was highly satisfactory.

> I am certain that the town is bound to profit from the publicity it has gained as a result of our efforts, and, whilst some business houses may have suffered from the temporary disarrangement of trade, the money that has been left in the town as a result of the influx of thousands of visitors is bound in due course to be circulated among them. The satisfactory result is due to the unswerving loyalty and service of the wonderful committee who have stood by me through the last seven or eight months of organization.[8]

The Mayor of Plymouth gave a broadcast talk from the Plymouth Broadcasting Station in July saying that Plymouth Week would stand out as an event in the town's history. He declared that 'the desire to combine the religious life of the town with Plymouth Week had borne fruit in the various services held in the churches, where civic responsibility was the keynote of the day'.[9]

[7] *Western Morning News*, 14 July 1927.
[8] *Western Morning News*, 19 July 1927.
[9] *Western Morning News*, 15 July 1927.

He was also proud to welcome the Atlantic Fleet and declared that as a result of the co-operation between the services and the town, the foundations had been laid to a naval and military scholarship at the University of the Southwest.

In July 1927 the Kinema Management gave the Plymouth Week film to the town. The film had been shown at the Savoy Picture House and many well-known Plymothians had taken part in the various events and were easily recognised. The film includes the opening in the Guildhall Square, events at Home Park and Millbay Park, the naming of the lifeboat, and views of the Fleet, including close-ups of the Iron Duke and the Marlborough and the Bowling Green Pageant. Members of the Plymouth Week Committee, including Mr Stanley Leatherby and Mr Finch are seen in a group with the Mayor and Deputy Mayor, Captain Bridges, Mr David Parkes and other well-known people.[10]

In October 1927 the management of Plymouth Week published details of the financial statements, with income at £3,985 17s 4d and expenditure at £5.985 17s 4d. Plymouth Week was to become an annual event for the purpose of advertising Plymouth. Mr E. Stanbury Leatherby said that the official souvenir guide for was brighter and better than they had before. It was full of interest to visitors, with almost every one of the sixty pages containing at least one modern photograph. Over twenty pages were devoted to an admirable description of Plymouth, its ancient associations, developments and surroundings.

1928

At a meeting of the executive of the Plymouth Week in June 1928, Mr J. H. Worley reported after his visit to London that he was able to secure allegorical and grotesque figures for use in the Plymouth street processions. These had been used in carnivals in Nice and other locations in the South of France. Mr Karl Hooper, who brought the figures to England, and his manager, Mr Ashley James, were keenly interested in Plymouth Week, which they considered after Blackpool, a pioneer of England's carnivals.[11]

The Americans too liked Plymouth Week. Mr Wilbur J. Carr (assistant secretary of state for Washington) and his wife, with Dr A. B. Cooke (American consul), guests of Lady Astor, entered with zest into the spirit of Plymouth Week and attended all the events.

In July 1928, the *Western Moring News* was reporting that this was Plymouth's most successful Week, with the carnival spirit even stronger. The article listed various events:

> … an Old English fete at Millbay Park decorated cars and motor cycles enjoyed by many thousands aircraft who cut silvery figures in flights over the town and the Sound Seven o'Clock Swimming Club who gave a humorous aquatic display on Hoe a cabaret show and dance on the Promenade Pier fireworks on the Hoe all outdoor sports and competitions a Pageant, by Mr C.G. Richards, one of the most picturesque events Plymouth Week Ball held in Guildhall which was decorated as a woodland glade and moorland in Plymouth Week's colours Plymouth's streets being decorated.[12]

[10] *Western Morning News*, 23 July 1927.
[11] *Western Morning News*, 13 June 1928.
[12] *Western Morning News*, 12 July 1928.

Looking back at Plymouth's 1928 Week, Mr E. Stanley Leatherby, presiding at the General Committee meeting to present Plymouth Week's financial accounts in the Council Chambers remarked that,

> I do not think we can over-emphasise that after all said and done Plymouth Week is not altogether a philanthropic institution but after taking some risk and committing ourselves to an expenditure of £4,000 we have come out with a balance in hand of £1.10s.1d.
>
> Our main object so far as Plymouth Week is concerned is to gain publicity for Plymouth which we have succeeded in doing.[13]

Empire Week

1929

In 1929 Plymouth decided to hold an Empire Week at Milehouse Tram Station. At a meeting of the General Committee of Plymouth Empire Week, Mr E. S. Leatherby reported:

> We are setting out with greater faith and higher expectations than in any previous year, we have succeeded in securing a better sense of unity than we have ever had before and those who were suspicious of our objects in the past now realize we have one great aim in view and that is the general prosperity of Plymouth. We have the support of the grocers' and drapers' associations, the Chamber of Commerce, Mercantile Association and the Rotary Club and many others. [14]

There were posters throughout Devon and Cornwall, advertising slides shown in Plymouth and district cinemas, strips affixed to the windscreens of motor cars, newspaper advertising, and 60,000 circulars, issued by members of the Plymouth and Devonport Drapers and Outfitters' Association, had been distributed throughout Devon and Cornwall. They found that this had been the means of bringing great crowds of excursionists to the city.

Mr E. Stanley Leatherby in his Plymouth Empire broadcast last from the Plymouth studio of the British Broadcasting Corporation said the committee had been concerned with fashioning a programme that would meet with a greater measure of approval than in previous years.

> Before we were purely for entertainment but that the entertainment had interfered with normal commercial conditions. This year whilst we still maintain and promote our primary subject that is the provision of these forms of relaxation generally looked for by the holiday seeker, at the same time we make a bid for trade, Empire Trade. I believe that Plymouth and the Empire are inseparably associated. There was no need to remind people that it was from our shores that Empire builders set sail to plant the flag in all corners of the world. It was fitting therefore that the first exhibition of Empire products in the West and the call to follow the flag in our purchases should be made within that area so closely associated with the Hoe. We want the world to know of the charms of our surroundings. The Colonies just love our old

[13] *Western Morning News*, 24 November 1928.
[14] *Western Morning News*, 26 June 1929.

> landmarks and revel in our historical associations but at the same time we cannot shut our eyes to the prosperity and financial possibilities these visitors bring.[15]

Empire Week's events included:

> … a circus with a variety of novel entertainments at Home Park. Firework display massed bands parade Empire pageantry display by Boy Scouts a children's fete and gala League football match on motor cycles, West Bromwich and Wolverhampton a ball decoration of houses with prize for best decorated house window-dressing with Empire goods.[16]

On 17 July 1929, the *Western Morning News* reported that 8,700 people were at the exhibition and in the exhibition hall the products from a quarter of the globe were gathered. Many stalls showed which part of the Empire various products come from; fruit and vegetables bearing the new national mark from the orchards and fields of Britain, as well as dairy produce, eggs, cream and other home products; dried and canned fruit and the new season's butter and eggs from Australia; minerals, maize, nuts, oranges and tobacco from Southern Rhodesia; foodstuffs from the Irish Free State; lamb, butter and honey from New Zealand; tea, rice and chutneys from India; fruit from South Africa; and a complete range of food products from Canada.[17]

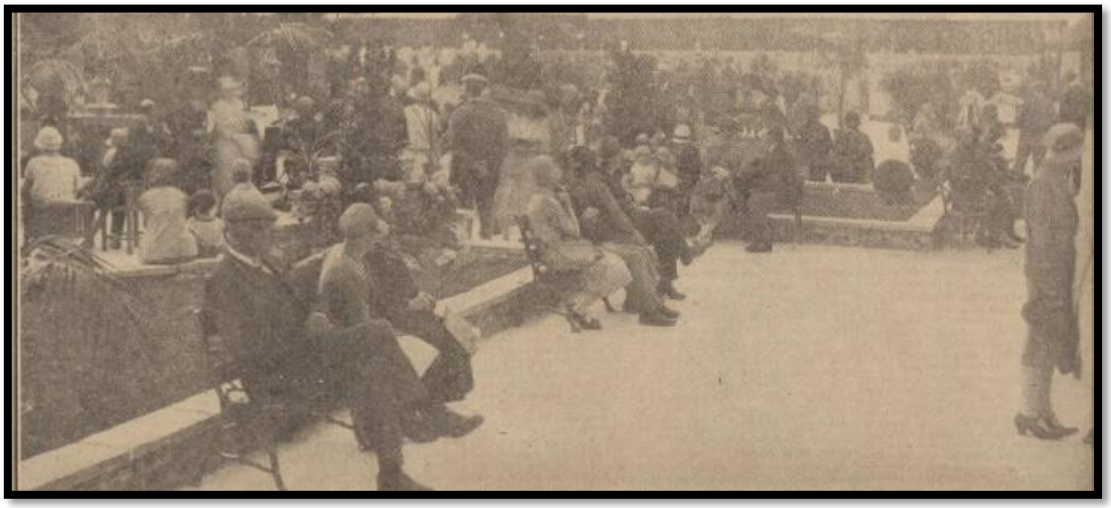

Figure 4: Plymouth Wembley: A general view at the Empire Marketing Board Exhibition at Milehouse.[18]

[15] *Western Morning News*, 28 June 1929.
[16] Ibid.
[17] *Western Morning News*, 17 July 1929.
[18] Ibid.

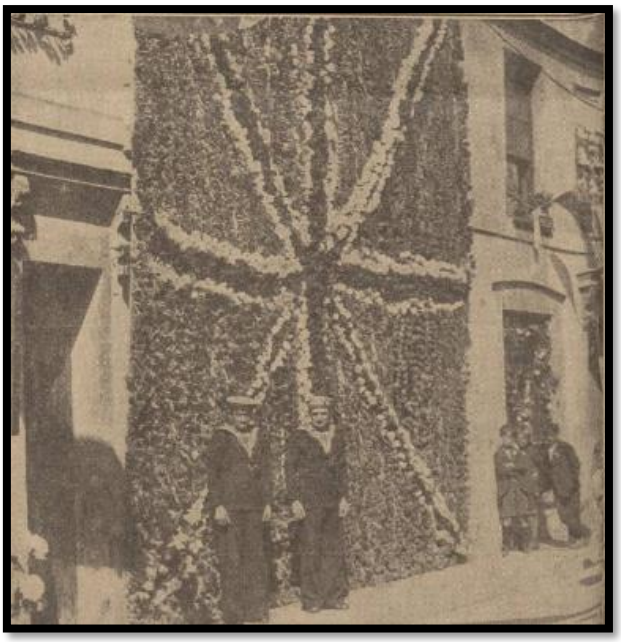

Figure 5: 13 Summerland Street, which won the first prize for the best-decorated house, and the two black-jackets responsible for the decorations.[19]

In July 1929, a reporter interviewed local businesses to see if it had served a definite purpose. They agreed that it had brought a large number of people into the city who would not otherwise have been attracted to it, and they believed that the shoppers they gained would induce them to return again.

The shopkeepers' views were as follows:

Mr A. P. Beasley of Spooner and Co, said:

> Our experience has been that we have had a very large number of customers in the stores daily, many of them being visitors to Plymouth, and the financial results have been well above the average.[20]

Sir Frederick Winnicott, manufacturing confectioner, commented:

> I think it has been a good advertisement for the city and has not only created a favourable impression of the shopping facilities of Plymouth, but has served a useful purpose in making visitors acquainted with the exceptional attractions of the Westcountry.[21]

Mr Ernest R. Underhill, bookseller and stationer, explained:

> From a publicity point of view I believe it has been a success in broadcasting the fact that there is a Plymouth, a city of no mean importance, down in the West of England. When "Plymouth Week" started three years ago, it was brought to the minds of many, how little the

[19] Ibid.
[20] *Western Morning News,* 20 July 1929.
[21] Ibid.

> claims of the city, as a centre for holiday and touring purposes, and also its claims from the commercial point of view were known, for instance, in the North and Midlands and out of that real beginning, the advertising of the city is now seriously taken.[22]

Mr E. Stanley Leatherby, draper, said:

> From a business point of view it has been a great success. It has brought a lot of people into the city, greatly stimulated interest in Empire production and it has given the citizens of Plymouth a jolly good week's entertainment. Many businesses have done very well indeed. The figures attending the exhibition are sufficient to indicate that the effort was worthwhile. [23]

On 22 July 1929, the *Western Morning News* reported the verdict on Empire Week, stating that more than 50,000 visitors attended the Milehouse Exhibition. They described the demonstrations in the model kitchen had proved very popular with lady visitors. 'It is clear from observation that many housewives had discovered and learnt many things with regard to using Empire products when cooking. There is little doubt but that Empire goods will be demanded when doing future shopping.' They also reported that the parties of school children had shown marked interest. 'They have not regarded the visit purely as a half-day away from school but have asked intelligent questions concerning the Empire.'[24]

Lord Astor, who distributed the cups to the successful window-dressers, and later the prizes won by street and house decorations, said anybody who had not seen the Dominions could learn a great deal by coming to the exhibition. It was satisfactory to know that not only the British Empire produced all those high-grade goods, but it was also satisfactory on going through the various sections representing Great Britain to find that the home products were able to hold their own in competition.

Plymouth Navy Week

1928

The first ever Plymouth Navy Week was held the Royal Naval Barracks, Devonport, between Tuesday 14 August 1928 and Saturday 18 August 1928. Servicemen in uniform were a comparatively common sight on the Hoe throughout the 1920s, as was the spectacular of a warship returning after a long commission or going out on sea trials or on exercise. On special occasions, like Navy Week, royal birthdays or Civic Week, the Sound was full of twinkling lights celebrating.

[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.
[24] *Western Morning News*, 22 July 1929.

Figure 6: The Fleet and Plymouth Pier lit up for Plymouth Civic Week in 1927, courtesy of Chris Robinson.

On 23 February 1928, *Western Morning News* reported that there was to be both a 'Navy Week' and a 'Plymouth Week':

> Plymouth would have advantage of a double measure of festivity as well as double publicity during the summer. Navy Week in summer will be a time when large crowds are drawn to Plymouth and the prospect of seeing something of the Navy at work and play will be an irresistible attraction to hundreds of the visitors from inland towns who come to Devon in summer. Plymouth Week will be over before Navy Week has begun so no rivalry between the two events. There will be Processions, dances, sports, a flower show and fireworks which will appeal to a variety of tastes, attracting crowds from far and near.[25]

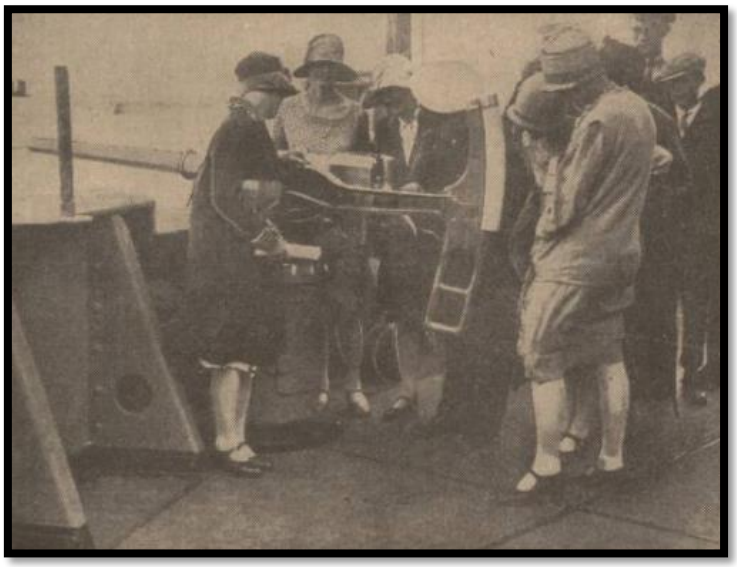

Figure 7: A marine demonstrating to a group of ladies how one of the quick-firing guns on HMS Hood is loaded.[26]

[25] *Western Morning News*, 23 February 1928.
[26] *Western Morning News*, 18 August 1928.

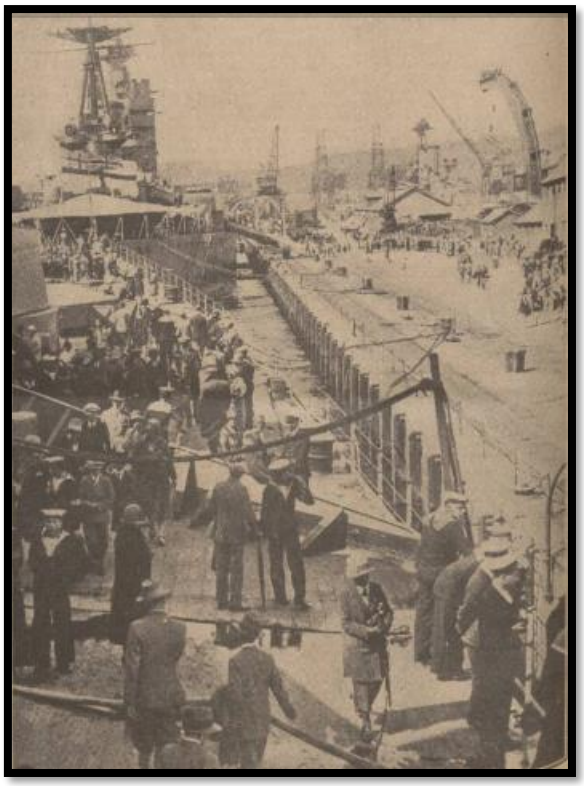

Figure 8: *HMS Hood* with *HMS Rodney* in the background.[27]

The *Western Morning News* reported that Plymouth and Devonport were invaded by thousands of people from all parts of the country:

> It was a day of many dialects. Many of the visitors were, of course, those who are now enjoying their annual holidays in the Westcountry but others travelled long distances by road and rail. Excursion trains and motors had brought them from all parts of the Western countries. There were people who had journeyed all the way from South Wales; there were hundreds of people from Bristol; people from the Midlands and one special train with about a dozen coaches, brought a big crowd from Ilfracombe and other North Devon resorts and about 14,000 people passed through the Royal Naval Barracks for yesterday's sight-seeing of warships and the Dockyard, thus making for the first two of the five days of Navy Week a total of about 26,000. The parade ground at the barracks might have been a motor show. There were cars of all types and sizes to the number of about 600 totalling 12,000 for two days. Inside the Drill Shed tea and light refreshments were served "at moderate prices". A lunch of cold meat, salad, roll and butter, fruit and cream cost just two shillings.[28]

HMS Hood, the largest warship in the world, and *HMS Rodney*, the world's newest warship, were on display alongside *HMS Adventure*, minelayer; *HMS Iron Duke*, which was being refitted; *HMS Devonshire*, cruiser, which was under construction; *HMS Glorious*, aircraft carrier, which was also under construction; and battleship *HMS Emperor of India*, and three submarines. The Floating Dock was even open to the public. Mines were on view, torpedoes were fired from *HMS Warwick* and divers could be seen at work.

[27] Ibid.

[28] *Western Morning News*, 16 August 1928.

At the end of Navy Week, there were comparisons by local traders between Plymouth Week and Navy Week as to which Week brought the most trade. Traders of Greater Plymouth had nothing but praise for Navy Week; this is particularly the case in connection with restaurants and cafes, while shops where handy souvenirs could be purchased also experienced a good week's business. Although drapers and outfitters declared they have found no marked increase in their turnover, theatres and cinemas enjoyed a good patronage. Devonport business people were in a jubilant mood over the Week and hoped for a repetition the following year. The *Western Morning News* sent a representative to interview the traders:

> "As far as I am concerned, I think it is one of the greatest advertisements Plymouth has ever had," remarked Alderman Solomon Stephens. "The people have patronized my shops and have certainly done my own trade good. I believe they have done the same for a great number of other traders in the town."
>
> Mr C. A. Goodbody said the effect of the Week on his cafes had been very favourable. He did not care to offer any comparison between Navy Week and Plymouth Week, remarking: "That it would be as well to compare Wembley with a small exhibition in the Drillhall."
>
> "According to my returns, the Week had helped my business very little", Mr Frank Leatherby stated. "Navy Week had undoubtedly brought a tremendous number of visitors to Plymouth and I have noticed different new faces coming into my shop. I do not think it has either improved or injured business. Advertisement for the town, however, was always good and the Week seemed to have had that effect."
>
> "Navy Week is all right, but Plymouth Week was better," observed the manager of one of the multiple shops, while an official of a large drapery establishment said they had done well, "but have all the people at Devonport".
>
> Comparisons between Plymouth Week and Navy Week were drawn by Mr Leonard Harris of Messrs Harris and Sons, George Street. "The Week has been distinctly beneficial to trade and has undoubtedly brought in visitors of quite a good class from Torquay and other places. Many visitors had made a day of it. They had visited the shops and made purchases before proceeding to the Dockyard. Navy Week had proved a real asset to the town."
>
> Messrs Tozer's have done, if anything, more than usual. They have had several parties of customers from the country districts, as well as from Cardiff, Bristol, etc. Messrs Boolds, too, have done good business, especially on Thursday, but are unable to say whether this will prove a record week or not until after today.
>
> On the whole, Devonport traders are well satisfied with Navy Week and its consequent result on trade in the town. Although there is apparently no very great increase in the business usually done by drapers' establishments and such shops, they have not suffered in any degree.[29]

[29] *Western Morning News*, 18 August 1928.

1929

Figure 9: This *Western Morning News* photograph shows crowds thronging on board the battleship cruiser *Renown* the Navy's beauty queen.[30]

It seems there were many fans of Plymouth's Navy Week. On 31 August 1929 a Florence Lilian Shore of The Rectory, Crediton wrote in admiration of Navy Week and Britain's Navy.

> Sir, May I express the delight which a few hours of Navy Week gave me. It was my first visit. I am a lifelong Conservative and was thrilled to have had a vote this year; but felt I understood Mr Hore-Belisha when he said, "Devonport first, Devonport last, Devonport all the time." Why there is not another Devonport in the world? And where another *H.M.S. Tiger*, with her scars of glory; another *H.M.S. Rodney* with the naval brains of 1,000 years behind her; *an H.M.S. Erebus*, who has made history on the Belgian coast? And last, but first men like the men of Britain's Navy? I would trust them first, I would trust them to the last and I trust them all the while.[31]

Her letter brought a response from F.L. (C.P.O.), Royal Navy Barracks, Devonport:

> Sir, May I express feelings of appreciation and thanks to the lady who wrote such a complimentary letter regarding "Men of Britain's Navy"? By the privileges afforded to the public through "Navy Week" they were brought in direct contact with "Jack" as he really is. To be courteous is his continuous motte. To assist he is never lacking and from his duty he never shirks. It is not often "Jack's" acts of chivalry are reflected or made public but being one of Britain's Navy, I can safely venture to say that whenever he is trusted that trust is never betrayed and it is with mixed feelings of gratitude and pride that we salute such ladies as Florence Lilian Shore.[32]

[30] *Western Morning News*, 24 August 1929.
[31] *Western Morning News*, 31 August 1929.
[32] *Western Morning News*, 4 September 1929.

Plymouth Shopping Week

1928

Plymouth first Shopping Week began in October 1928 with shop windows displaying their goods. During Shopping Week, the *Western Morning News* published a daily 'Shopping Festival Supplement' devoted entirely to the Week, with traders' interviews, adverts, competition results and more. Visitors travelled from different parts of the country and there was generally an excitement and buzz in the air.

A Shopping Week in Plymouth was first mooted in June 1922 when in an article by the *Western Morning News* reported that shopping weeks were becoming popular in the West:

> Their reporter asked the question, "Why should not Plymouth experiment in that direction?"
>
> "Broadly speaking", he said, "the idea of a Shopping Week is that by acting in concert the traders of the town endeavour, by means of advertising, general pushfulness and the arraying of their goods in the brightest possible way to make the town attractive and create a local boom in trade."
>
> With a view to getting opinions, the reporter found that the traders he saw were unanimous in their belief that a Shopping Week would be a good thing for Plymouth.
>
> Mr Solomon Stephens, chairman of the Mercantile Association, said he thought a Shopping Week for Plymouth would be a great boon to the shopkeepers. It would give them an opportunity of displaying their goods as to show that Plymouth was able to supply the best quality of goods as any shopping centre in the kingdom.
>
> Mr Hartnoll, secretary of the Plymouth Drapers' Association, thought that nothing but good could come of a Shopping Week scheme. It would bring people up from Cornwall and rural Devon and advertise the town. But he pointed out that the closest co-operation among the traders would be necessary for its organisation.
>
> Any legitimate means to promote trade are to be commended, commented Mr H. Floyd, chairman of the Chamber of Commerce. The success of such an effort would depend on proper organisation and adequate advertising. A Shopping Week should certainly bring additional trade to the town.[33]

But it took until 1928 to institute a Plymouth Shopping Week in 1928. The *Western Morning News* believed the first communal effort was on the part of the business houses and traders; since the elevation of Plymouth to the rank of a city, should be a movement to draw attention and prove that Plymouth was the best shopping centre in the West. As far as they were concerned the future of Plymouth depended on the reputation the city could secure for itself as the shopping and business centre of the West.

In September 1928 there was an article in the *Western Morning News* saying there was widespread support from local Mercantile Associations, the Chambers of Commerce and traders of all classes.

[33] *Western Morning News*, 3 June 1922.

It was decided to organise Shopping Week the week beginning 22 October, when business was normally slack, as this would concentrate public notice throughout Devon and Cornwall upon the value of Plymouth and Devonport as shopping centres. The *Western Morning News* was hoping that this invaluable boost would get Plymouth and Devonport noticed as the place to visit when shopping.[34]

Interest in the campaign was to be stimulated by a number of competitions and the *Western Morning News* was providing a number of valuable prizes in this connection, including a sum of £200, which was to be awarded for the best shop window displayed by advertisers.

Children attending schools in Devon and Cornwall were encouraged to enter a competition for essays on subjects like, 'Why I like to shop in Plymouth and Devonport', and 'The advantages of shopping in a big town'. There was a simple contest for children under eight, and balloons were given to the smaller children throughout the two towns.

The *Western Morning News* held a competition in which their readers were asked to guess the number of passengers carried by the trams during the Week. There was even a £10 prize for the best slogan for Plymouth and Devonport.

Railway and bus companies were providing special services from outlying districts during the Week.

On 22 October 1928, 'Chaperon' of the *Evening Herald* was on a quest to find out why Plymothians prefer to shop in Plymouth:

> I encountered a friend recently home from a motor run to London. "Well, how does the great city appear to you?" glancing at her ensemble inquiringly as I spoke. Chic, yet neat, as Madame la Mode decries for this season, it conformed to the ideals of most of the fashion journals, English, Continental and American."
>
> She answered, "No, my dear. As a matter of fact I went up to London with money in my pocket for the purchase of winter clothes, and I brought it back again, and spent it at…'s in Plymouth, with the result that you see and, I hope, approve. Of course, we visited the London shops but we saw nothing newer, in better taste or more original than we see in our own shop windows."
>
> Pursuing my quest, I interviewed a business lady of acumen whose opinion was impartial because her avocation is not that of selling clothes. "In strict confidence and as woman to woman, do you shop here or in London?" I asked.
>
> "Quite candidly, let me tell you that I shop in the town where I get my living; everything here is as good, as cheap or cheaper than in London; hats, frocks, shoes, lingerie, groceries, flowers, pastries, cakes, everything comes to me and mine directly and regularly from Plymouth houses or businesses."
>
> "London or Plymouth?" I asked of a prettily-gowned friend recently. "Oh, Plymouth of course! I got it at …'s," naming a popular rendezvous for keen shoppers. "It is never worth my while to buy out of our own town. They know me here, you see, and study my best and

[34] *Western Morning News*, 21 September 1928.

> varied points and are interested in finding for me just what minimizes a defect or emphasizes a …"
>
> "I like doing my half-yearly shopping in a city like this", said a country shopper. "We get reliable goods of every kind, from cheese to grand pianos, from a row of pins to a ball dress deluxe, or a baby's layette. The restaurants are excellent, too, offering rest and refreshment with music."[35]

At Plymouth Shopping Week there were all kinds of competitions for shopkeepers. The newspapers reported the results under different sections:

> "Things to Wear": Ladies, First Prize: goes to Spooners Ltd, for their Silks and Laces and Evening Gowns, Second Prize went to Imperial Fur House for their Evening Gowns and Third Prize to Madame Rita for her Evening Gowns.
>
> There were many other competitions like "Things to Eat", where grocers like Solomon Stephens and Risdon won second prize, "Household Effects" where the second prize was won by B Taylor and Co for their Wedding Breakfast display window and Earl and Son wining second prize for their "Artists' Colours".[36]

In November 1928, the winner of the suitable slogan for the city competition was announced. She was Miss Mary Short of Hartley whose slogan was: "Plymouth where Dartmoor Weds the Sea" Also in November, the paper announced that the prize essays for school children's views on city businesses and their favourite toys competition would receive new Bank of England notes to the extent of their prize money.

> The advantages of "To dress or furnish tastefully, simply pay your money, our shops will do the rest," is the axiom advanced by one Prizewinner. Another competitor goes as far as to suggest a slogan for Plymouth, her effort being "Come to our city and shop in comfort."[37]

Opinions strongly in favour of Shopping Week were given to a *Western Morning News* reporter by Plymouth traders. Several businessmen of the city spoke of the benefits they had received as a result of the 'Week' and of the increase in trade during the past few days.

> It was acknowledged by Mr T.J. Barber, of Barber's outfitters, in George Street, that the festival had inspired a certain amount of enthusiasm. "After the advertising I noticed a little more life in my letter-bag on Tuesday morning. I take it people had been reading that something special was happening and the mention of our name put the firm in their minds. Shopping Week appeals to me, because the idea is good and I hope it will continue as a move in the right direction. Now that the Western Morning News has given the venture a send-off I think the Chamber of Commerce and the various trade associations ought to back it."[38]

A few days later, the *Western Morning News* received a number of letters from trading firms in Plymouth and Devonport expressing appreciation of the efforts made in connection with the Shopping Festival, offering congratulations upon its success and voicing the hope that such a festival may be made an annual event.

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[35] *Western Morning News*, 22 October 1928.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] *Western Morning News*, 25 October 1928.

Extracts from some of the letters are given below:

> "Please allow us to congratulate you on the idea of the Festival Week and the successful organization and general arrangements which we consider have been very successful. It is our hope that the festival will become an annual event" Messrs Atwills, Russell Street.
>
> "We are glad to say that Shopping Week has been the means of spreading our name more than any other advertising effort that has been made previously." Messrs B. Taylor and Co., Mutley Plain.
>
> "I think your company should be congratulated on the bold step they have taken single-handed, as it must have meant an enormous amount of detail to carry everything through so satisfactorily." Messrs Underwood and Co., Bedford Street.
>
> "May I express my appreciation of the Western Morning News for the effective action taken to stimulate trade throughout Plymouth and Devonport. The trading community should be indebted to you for your valuable lead in booming the city as the main shopping centre of the West." Messrs J.C. Tozer, Fore Street, Devonport.
>
> "We must express our hope that the efforts you have made to advertise Plymouth as a shopping centre will be a great success to all of us and for the future of the city of Plymouth" Imperial Fur House, George Street.[39]

A *Western Morning News* reporter interviewed traders in 1928:

> There is no excuse for a person appearing dowdy today, even on a very limited income, and in a city which boasts of many fine shops holding out enticing attractions for a lady's personal adornment, we do not hesitate to point out the claims of Messrs Mayne and Co whose shops at 15 Ebrington Street and 7 Westwell Street have an atmosphere of distinction in the matter of gowns, blouses and frocks.
>
> The appeal of the ballroom become more and more irresistible as the winter evenings draw nearer and this popular firm are offering dancers special bargains in footwear. They have entered an attractive window full of dancers' shoes in the Western Morning News window-dressing competition. A special display is also being made of the latest development in arch supporting in ladies' shoes. With its exceptionally expansive window space, George Oliver's footwear store is one of the most attractive in the East End of the city.
>
> Artistic wallpapers are shown in great variety by Rose and Co of Tavistock Road. The ability to impart a pleasing and soothing atmosphere to a room is one of the advantages which a wisely chosen wallpaper possesses and Rose and Co claim to hold a stock which enables them to advise how to decorate the home with a minimum of outlay and a maximum of taste. Paints, varnishes, brushes and enamels are also sold by the firm. Purchasers during the Week are offered the opportunity of obtaining goods to the value of £2 in a stop-clock competition.[40]
>
> Messrs J. Baker and Son, Ltd, footwear specialists of 2 George Street sell good and substantial boots and their windows are filled with boots and shoes which anyone would be proud to wear. Dainty evening shoes are also shown in a variety of styles.
>
> Messrs R. Nicholas and Sons, the well-known naval and military bootmakers of Old Town Street are making a special display of "K" boots and shoes this week. Every kind of footwear

[39] *Western Morning News*, 31 October 1928.
[40] *Western Morning News*, 23 October 1928.

at prices ranging from 18s to £2.2s and patrons are invited to obtain the benefit of the advice of Dr Scholl's orthopaedic feet specialists free of charge. Specialists are in attendance daily to assist those suffering from foot troubles and a special cubicle is set aside for interviews and examinations.[41]

With new showrooms in which to display some exceptionally attractive wares, Madame Rita of Union Street, Plymouth, has synchronised her special opening display with the Plymouth and Devonport Shopping Festival so that patrons get the benefit of the importance lent to shopping this week by a double occasion so there can be no excuse for feminine dowdiness.[42]

Messrs Perkin Bros, outfitters, Bedford Street said the number of people inspecting their windows was very gratifying. There had been a crowd all day long watching the girl making pullovers with a machine. These garments are the product of the Devnit Work (Devon Knitting Co), Regent Street, Plymouth who have nearly 100 of these pullover machines in operation, besides electric power machines.

Their goods are sent to various parts of the world, including Australia and New Zealand, and, strange to say, some of Devnit's best trading accounts are in Nottingham and Leicester, the seat of pullover manufacture, which cannot produce an article of the class made in Plymouth.

Figure 10: A scene in the Devnit Works, where all kinds of woollen garments were made.

An original Shopping Week attraction has been devised by Messrs Oatway, the proprietors of The Bon Marche, the well-known drapery store at the top of Market Avenue, Plymouth and every afternoon this week living mannequins' parade in the windows displaying the latest styles in afternoon and evening frocks. Yesterday afternoon a special tableau was arranged, in which all six of the mannequins took part, some of them wearing evening gowns and others afternoon frocks.

[41] *Western Morning News*, 24 October 1928.
[42] *Western Morning News*, 25 October 1928.

Figure 11: Citizens parading the streets on 25 October 1928 were treated to a mannequin parade in the shop windows of Bon Marche.[43]

> No matter how perfectly one's house may be constructed, how perfect its furnishing; it cannot become 'the house beautiful' without those dainty articles which please the eye and the artistic sense. Miss B. Sanders, of 28 Old Town Street specialises in those forms of art needlework without which no house is complete and a visit to her establishment will amply compensate all who take a pride in their homes. With the vogue for knitted apparel, the selection of wool which is offered is such as to meet every demand.[44]

1929

In October 1929, Plymouth's and Devonport's Shopping Festival opened with bright autumn sunshine. From the early business hours to the close of the day, it was evident that widespread interest had been created in the project by the generous publicity received, with the enthusiastic co-operation of the trading interests of the city; and the principal shopping centres were thronged by citizens and a considerable sprinkling of visitors from various parts of the Western area.

Mr James Palmer, editor of the *Western Morning News*, remarked that:

> Every week is demonstrating that the increasing use of the improved travel facilities is bringing people regularly from an ever-widening area into Plymouth to shop. With the steady increase in the number of people who own motor cars, or can enjoy other expensive luxuries, the season for tourists who call at Plymouth is gradually lengthening each year. With cheap travelling provided daily by the railway and transport companies, there is no doubt that the number of people attracted to Plymouth will become increasingly large.

[43] *Western Morning News*, 26 October 1928.
[44] *Western Morning News*, 28 October 1928.

> Not only are older people doing their shopping but the younger generation are acquiring the habit of coming to Plymouth more frequently and we suggest that this is a trade likely steadily to increase and if properly cultivated to be of permanent and rising value.[45]

Mr E. Stanley Leatherby, chairman of Plymouth Shopping Week Committee, said:

> *Western Morning News* have given us as traders a unique opportunity of proving the advantages of Plymouth as a shopping centre. They have by their extensive publicity and with the help of the railways and road transport organisations, given Plymothians and the shopping public generally an opportunity of seeing for themselves that not only is the West best from the holiday point of view, but that from a shopping point of view Plymouth stands supreme.
>
> The smart and alluring window displays confirm the undoubted claims of Plymouth and Devonport as the greatest shopping centre of the West, and not only helped to dispel the illusion that if any article out of the ordinary were required the best policy was to go to London or elsewhere for it but established the fact that local firms can meet all needs and satisfy every taste at prices which are never greater but more often less than those charged in other places.[46]

Chaperon of the *Herald* was looking at the psychology of the shopper and remarked,

> Whether the psychological moment has arrived for the purchase of a motor car, a baby coach, a fur coat, a gown deluxe, a hat of distinction, a 100 guinea piano, or merely a new wireless set, Plymouth vendors await the prospective buyer with the modest confidence born of absolute readiness for a big week. Never have our shops looked more attractive. Never were they stocked with more beautiful and useful things effectively displayed.
>
> "I made my yearly holiday coincide with your Shopping Week last year and had no reason to regret it and in consequence have budgeted for three days in Plymouth this year for the purchase of personal and household requirements," confided a friend who lives remote from cities and prides herself on getting the most and the best out of a limited income. When you hear, "It is a pleasure, madam," you are not listening to a mere figure of speech; moreover, it is one of the Westcountry articles of faith that those who are well and truly served come again and again in ever-widening circle.
>
> The new music is invariably on sale at the music shops; also the last new book, "hot from the press", remarked a Plymouth librarian.[47]

A woman correspondent suming up Plymouth Shopping Week reported,

When judgement is passed on the second Plymouth and Devonport Shopping Festival it is to be the women one must tune for the verdict. The weight of their views on the jury of public opinion is considerable for they are, with the exception of the shopkeepers, the class most interested in the event.

> For one thing we ought to thank the *Morning News*. They have brightened Plymouth's streets. The ingenuity and variety of devices for calling attention to the goods inside have been the subject of many a delighted comment by shoppers, both male and female. Not alone have the ladies been catered for. The men have had their weaknesses carefully studied and men's wear

[45] *Western Morning News*, 15 October 1929.
[46] Ibid.
[47] *Western Morning News*, 16 October 1929.

> displays have been almost as colourful and varied as those designed to attract the fair sex. But shop window psychology apart, the Week has shown that inside the shops of our city there are to be found goods of a standard which gives a complete answer to the challenge of London competition. No longer do styles in the provinces lag behind those of the Metropolis, in our own city we can fin all the necessaries and most of the luxuries.
>
> One result of the Shopping Festival may mean the exercise of a little economy next week. It must not be thought that Shopping Festival is a plan cunningly conceived to coax money from the pocket. it is emphatically a sincere effort to give value for cash and with the worthy aim in mind of stimulating local loyalty in making purchases. And it is for this that the women of the city and of the countryside are grateful. They have discovered the hiding place of the "genuine bargain."[48]

Extracts from two *Western Morning News* traders interviews, from the many reported in 1929, the first from Axworthy & Co, the second from Messrs Parker and Smith:

> Many householders who will be installing electric lighting into their homes for dark winter evenings will doubtless find the special display offered by Messrs Axworthy and Co, of 106 Tavistock Road helpful and interesting. A range of lamps is shown depicting the history of the electric lamp from 1870 to today and they have many brilliant modern lamps to suit all purposes. Their most useful article is only 25s and consists of a bowl fire, with a kettle to fit, making it into an electric kettle. They have displayed an electric hair dryer at the extremely low price of 27s 6d.[49]
>
> "He who misses music misses much" is the slogan chosen by Messrs Parker and Smith, Bedford Street who have a cleverly-dressed window illustrating the slogan. The window represents a room in which is a gramophone with the lid raised on a table with some of the latest records and a cosy armchair awaits an occupant. The inference subtly conveyed is that the comfort and harmony of home awaits a man. Messrs Parker and Smith have a large stock of latest gramophone models and the newest records. Two additional audition rooms have been fixed temporarily in the shop.[50]

[48] *Western Morning News*, 19 October 1929.
[49] Ibid.
[50] *Western Morning News*, 25 October 1928.