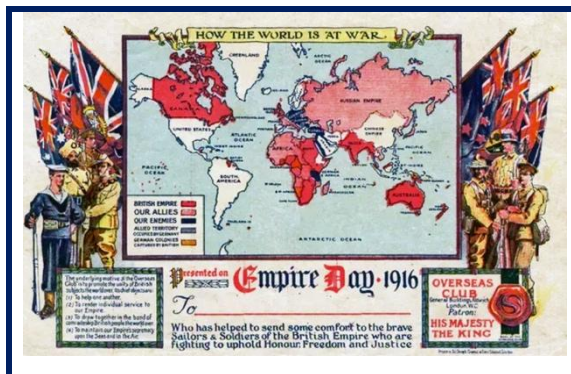




History:	
Topic:	Hargrave Children Celebrate Empire Day
Date of Record:	October 2026
Author:	Nicholas Newman
Notes:	A proudly celebrated event in the school calendar that would now be considered something of an anachronism.

Hargrave Schoolchildren Celebrate Empire Day

Celebrating Empire Day in the modern world would be considered anachronism, but for the first half of the 20th Century it was accepted as an important date in the school calendar. The idea was originally conceived in Canada as a national celebration of the British Empire, and an opportunity to educate children on their roll within it. However, presented as an idea to the UK Government it received a lukewarm response. Despite this reaction, it was first observed in Ontario on May 24th 1898, Queen Victoria's birthday, and then spread more widely on the same date even after her death, although it was not officially recognised until 1916.

The outbreak of World War One gave the celebration more jingoistic overtones, and it was observed particularly in schools, where those attending would sing patriotic hymns and songs glorifying the nation, before formally parading past the Union Flag. This would be followed by a free afternoon, although sometimes events would be organised on a wider community basis. Such gatherings were focussed on a greater understanding of the Commonwealth's achievements and its role in the world at that time.

In to the 1920's such ceremonies reflected more on the loss of life in the war, and celebrations became more sombre. It also became politicised with left wing groups protesting any observance of the date.

The event received something of a resurgence of interest in the mid 1930's and particularly with increasing tensions across Europe and further afield and then with the formal outbreak of World War Two. It was seen as a show of support for troops fighting abroad. Again after the cessation of hostilities, there was a rapid decline in interest and the UK Government eventually renamed the event as British Commonwealth Day in 1958 to reflect the move towards independence of many former colonies. The date also changed to Queen Elizabeth II official birthday June 10th. Then in 1977 it became simply Commonwealth Day and is now celebrated on the second Monday in March. This was chosen as a date with no political or historic connotations, but one which enable children likely to be at school to take part in.

Today the event is still celebrated by many of the 50+ voluntary associated countries in the Commonwealth, with divergent arrays of flags flown, remembrance wreaths laid and church services held. For those observing the day, it represents a commitment to promoting democracy, human rights, the rule of law, greater understanding of different cultures, and equality for its many citizens. In the UK the main service is regularly held at Westminster Abbey.

The following item was printed in the Bury Free Press on the 12th June 1915.

HARGRAVE

OVER SEAS CLUB - A communication of thanks has been received by the head-mistress for the remittance of 7 shillings to the Over-Seas Club Empire Day Penny Fund. The Committee also desire express their keen appreciation the splendid effort made by the school on behalf of the Fund.

(The Empire Day Penny Fund charity was launched in 1914 and raised over three million pennies. British schoolchildren each contributed at least one penny to buy care packages for overseas troops that contained tobacco, chocolate, fresh socks etc.)



The following item was printed in the Bury Free Press on the 2nd June 1917.

HARGRAVE.

EMPIRE DAY CELEBRATION, The celebration of Empire Day was observed at the School, when an interesting programme was carried out the children, who, with flags and wearing medals, assembled with their teachers the play-ground and saluted the flag. After the march past the National Anthem was sung, and the roll of honour was read out by the eldest scholar. Addresses were given the Rev. P. Wilson and the Head Teacher (Mrs. M. M. Todd). Patriotic songs were sung, including "Flag of Britain," "Rule Britannia," The Marseillaise, concluding with "God save our splendid men." Cheers were heartily given for the King, the Queen, the Prince of Wales, the soldiers, the sailors, and "the boys from this village." The National Anthem brought the proceedings to a close. The rest of the day was observed as a holiday.

The following item was printed in the Bury free Press on the 8th June 1918.

HARGRAVE.

EMPIRE DAY COLLECTION.--- The Empire Day Collection among the children and teachers, attending the day school, for the purpose of purchasing cigarettes and tobacco, for the soldiers, amounted to six shillings, which has been forwarded by the Head Mistress (Mrs. M. M. Todd) to the Organizing Secretary.

The following item was printed in the Bury Free Press on the 3rd June 1922.

HARGRAVE.

EMPIRE DAY was celebrated at the school. Assembling in the playground, the children marched past and saluted the flag. "God Save the King" was sung for the King and Queen and all the Roval Family. An address was given by the Rev. M, Hooper in the schoolroom. At the conclusion the children sang "Flag of Britain".

The following item was printed in the Bury Free Press on the 30th May 1936.

HARGRAVE.

EMPIRE DAY was celebrated on Friday at the school. The children assembled in the playground with their teachers. Miss Simpson (headmistress) and Miss Todd, and at the march-past saluted the Union Jack and sang the National Anthem. Various songs were sung, also Kipling's Recessional, while national poetry was rendered by Victor Murkin, Violet Harrod and the infants' class.

The following item was printed in the Bury Free Press on the 29th May 1937.

HARGRAVE.

EMPIRE DAY was observed by the school children. Patriotic songs were sung and talks were given on the history and growth of the British Empire. The Union Jack was saluted.

The following item was printed in the Bury Free Press on the 28th May 1938.

HARGRAVE.

EMPIRE DAY was celebrated on Tuesday at the School. The children assembled with their teachers (Miss Simpson and Miss Todd) in the playground, and at the march past saluted the Union Jack. Patriotic songs were sung, including Parry's "England" and "Jerusalem," also Kipling's "Land of Our Birth." The children were given lessons on the British Empire. the National Anthem brought the proceedings to close. Miss Todd presided on the piano.

The following item was printed in the Bury Free Press on the 1st June 1940.

HARGRAVE.

EMPIRE DAY was celebrated on Friday at the School. The children assembled, with their teachers, in the playground, and at the march-past, saluted the Union Jack. Patriotic songs were sung. The collection, to provide cigarettes and tobacco for H.M. Forces, amounted to £1.