

# Turning full circle

By JOE WEBER

WILF Stead, 80, yesterday happily watched youngsters dancing around his village's maypole for the first time in his life.

He joined a crowd on the village green to see children skipping through the complicated dances as an ancient tradition was brought back to life.

The village of Middleton Tyas, near Richmond, lost its last maypole nearly 40 years ago, when it started to rot and it was hurriedly taken down.

But nearby cottages were still known as Maypole Row, and each year a Christmas tree decorated the spot where the maypole used to stand. Now a new maypole has been erected.

"I can remember the last one," said Wilf. "My mother told me the maypole was struck by lightning in 1895 and it shattered into pieces.

"After that they got a large larch tree from the wood nearby, and it was 100ft high. They put up a lightning conductor and a weathervane on the top.

"I can never remember a dance around it, and I have lived in the village since 1904. It was a real landmark, and if anybody could climb to the top and turn the weathervane, they got a shoulder of mutton.

"I could get halfway up, but after that I would have



**Wilf Stead stands by as children dance round the maypole**

to come down. There was only one boy who could climb up to the top and that was Tommy Wrightson. He was a sailor, and I think he was used to being up in the rigging.

"The pole had to come down before 1950 when they thought it was getting too dangerous, and another one was never erected."

But yesterday the seven dances that the children from the village school had been taught were enthusiastically performed

— with the help of music from a pewreful tape recorder.

"We have never done it before, and we thought it was the kind of thing that only happened in fairytales," said 11-year-old Fay Barker.

Andrew Rhodes, 11, said: "It's really good fun when you get the hang of it, but sometimes we get a bit mixed up."

Community Association chairman Jim Wilkinson said: "It's taken some effort, but we reckon it's

well worth it. We are reviving a very old custom in the village."

A maypole had to be found with the help of steeplejacks. Villager Stan Davison carved an elaborate top piece for the ribbons, and the steps of the dances had to be learned.

"The community association thought it was a good idea to start off the maypole tradition," said vice-chairman Peter Nimmons. "We hope it will now take place every year."