



AllWays Traveller

Bridgwater Carnival, UK

When seeing is the only way to really believe

There are some festivals and events that just have to be seen to be believed.

Bridgwater Carnival the UK county of Somerset is one of these.

The word carnival may lead ones thinking towards Rio, Venice, Trinidad and Tobago or New Orleans.

But while these are indeed tremendous, the carnivals of Somerset, sits on a par - believe me.

On the other hand, don't believe me. If you are ever in the UK during early November see for yourself.

Ashely Gibbins

The International Travel Writers Alliance
www.allwaystraveller.com

Images by Peter J Nicholls Bridgwater :
www.peterjnicholls.co.uk



Bridgwater Carnival is the worlds largest illuminated carnival in the world.

The parade regularly attracts crowds of over 150,000.

The procession will be made up of 60 plus mounted entries, which take a full year to plan, design and be built by members of the respective carnival clubs.



A personal view

Guy's failed plot

by Ashley Gibbins



The roots of the carnival stem from 1605 and the thwarting of Guy Fawkes attempt to 'blow up' the British Houses of Parliament with a cellar full of gunpowder kegs.



But while Fawkes gets top billing and notoriety for this madcap attempt at anarchy, the true instigator was one Robert Parsons, a Jesuit priest living near to the historic river port of Bridgwater.

King James I and his Parliament decreed that the Gunpowder Plot should be commemorated annually with the lighting of bonfires.

The country took to the streets in a joyful (and largely alcohol fuelled) celebration that included burning effigies of Fawkes on large bonfires.

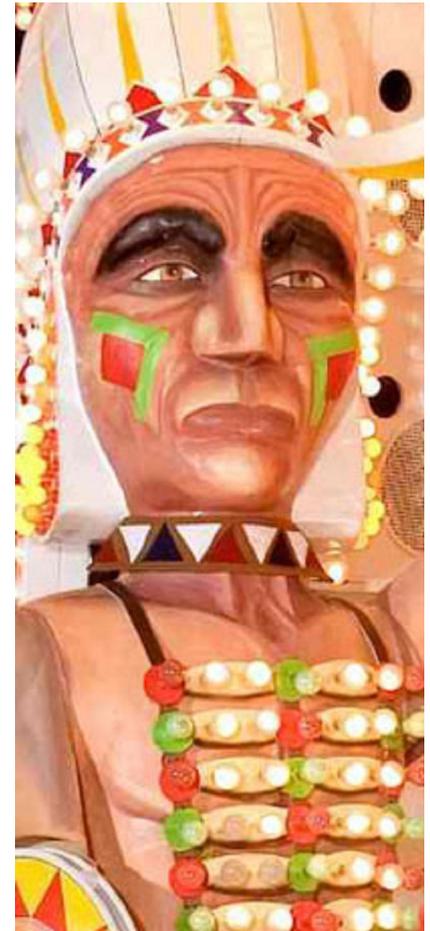
The chance to drink to the survival of democracy was too good to miss and has developed into the firework displays and parties now enjoyed throughout the country on or around 'bonfire night' (5 November).

The facts

The floats

In any carnival procession the 40 or so 'big' floats will be awesome affairs with every inch of their overall 30 metre length filled with models, moving parts and cast members.

They will be lit by upwards of 20,000 light bulbs and enhanced by appropriate musical accompaniment.



Real power

The generators towed behind the floats can provide over a megawatt of power, and will be used to power the lighting, music and moving parts.

Popular themes

Popular themes for the floats include the circus, pirates, ghosts and vampires and themes based on toys or cartoon characters.

Scenes from mythology, the American west or from space and science are also popular fiction are also popular.

A more patriotic place

In Bridgwater, a more patriotic (drunken) place than most, the citizens were reluctant to forgo an officially sanctioned opportunity for revelry. And so the townsfolk continued to make their bonfire the focal point for a night of high spirited jinks.



The blaze

The blaze itself consumed dozens of tar barrels, the occasional small boat from the river bank and anything else deemed suitable for burning.

The 'guys' were tossed aloft by local gangs after the straw filled 'victims' had been paraded through the streets (and from alehouse to alehouse).

While all this was going on some braver (or foolhardy) souls would let off home made and highly explosive 'squibs', which were strapped to long hand held poles called 'coshes'.

Groups of masqueraders



As the years passed, the gangs, or 'groups of masqueraders' as they had become known, began to dress in themed costumes.

They then took to being carried through the streets on horse drawn, decorated carts or floats.

Finally the carts were organised into a set route procession, judging was introduced and the 'carnival' would weave its way through cheering crowds, which is the basis for the carnival that continues to this day.



Dates for your diary

The Bridgwater Carnival procession is currently held annually on the Friday nearest 5 November and is the first in a series of a seven-procession circuit in the Somerset area.



From strength to strength



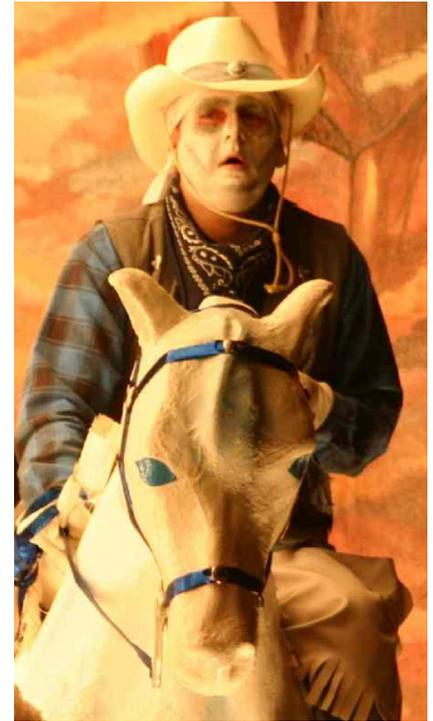
While the bonfire itself was abandoned in 1925, due to safety concerns, the Bridgwater Carnival went from strength to strength to become one of the most spectacular events of its kind in the world.

The squibbing

Following the procession itself, there is a mass squibbing display along the length of the town's High Street.



Links



Bridgwater Carnival :
www.bridgwatcarnival.org.uk

Somerset Guy Fawkes Carnivals :
www.guyfawkescarnivals.co.uk

North Petherton Carnival :
www.northpethertoncarnival.co.uk

Shepton Mallet Carnival :
www.sheptonmalletcarnival.org.uk

Glastonbury Carnival :
www.glastonburycarnival.co.uk

Weston-super-Mare Carnival :
www.northsomersetcarnival.co.uk

The International Travel Writers Alliance



AllWays is the consumer travel service from the International Travel Writers Alliance.

The International Travel Writers Alliance represents travel writers, editors, broadcasters and photographers worldwide

The International Travel Writers Alliance

Hampton House, 77 The Ridgeway, North Chingford, E4 6QW, London, UK.
Tel: +44 (0) 20 8524 4089
E: Ashley@itwalliance.com

Registered in England No: 6545647

Ashley Gibbins

Ashley Gibbins is a third generation journalist and travel writer.

He is also Director General of the International Travel Writers Alliance and Managing Editor of AllWays – the consumer travel service from the Alliance.

Born in Bridgwater he spent over 20 years in carnival clubs before travelling wider afield.