



One of the world's most spectacular events

The annual Bridgwater 'Guy Fawkes' Carnival is a night time illuminated procession that takes place every November in this Somerset town.

This Carnival is the spectacular culmination of many months of planning, preparation and building by each of the Carnival Clubs taking part.

The result sees some 80 huge, themed 'carts (floats)' passing slowly along a two mile route through the town.

Each will be lit by thousands of light bulbs, with many using hydraulically moving parts and all playing music to support the dance movements of the costumed *carnivalites* onboard or enhance the tableaux scene created.

Well over 120,000 people come to Bridgwater, from all over the UK and beyond, for what must be one of the most spectacular free 'shows on earth'.

From then on the carnival moves on to be staged in seven other towns throughout Somerset

The stunning images used here have been created by Craig Stone give and indication as to what is in store for those who make it to Bridgwater Carnival – or one of the others.

Ashley Gibbins
Commissioning Editor, AllWays Traveller





A stunning commemoration of Guy's foiled plot

By Ashley Gibbins

**Remember, remember!
The fifth of November
The Gunpowder treason and plot;
I know of no reason
Why the Gunpowder treason
Should ever be forgot!**

Nowhere is the sentiment expressed in this English folk verse of 1870 more passionately embraced than in the Somerset town of Bridgwater.

Now four hundred and eighteen years after the *Gunpowder Plot* and the townsfolk continue to celebrate the failed attempt at anarchy with one of the most dazzling carnival processions you will see - anywhere in the world!

The thwarted plot

Bridgwater Carnival stems from a failed attempt to blow up the House of Lords during the State Opening of Parliament on 5 November 1605

A group of 13 conspirators, led by Robert Catesby, thought this act would fuel national unrest and result in reigning King James 1 being deposed in favour of his daughter Elizabeth.

The role of lighting the proverbial 'blue touch paper' was allocated to one Guy Fawkes, who had considerable military experience.

However, following an anonymous tip off, a search of the cellars below the House of Lords was made around midnight on 4 November 1605.

Fawkes was found hiding among 36 barrels of gunpowder, the explosion from which would have resulted in the building collapsing.

And so the plot was foiled with those involved in it not faring well.

Catesby was one of five conspirators killed, while trying to evade capture, with the rest, including Fawkes, tried, convicted and sentenced to be hung, drawn and quartered.

An annual celebration

The relieved King and his Parliament then decreed that the foiling of the *Gunpowder Plot* should be commemorated annually with the lighting of bonfires throughout the kingdom.

Guy Fawkes quickly became the infamous focus of these celebrations with his effigy burnt on the bonfires.

Guy Fawkes Night (Bonfire Night), is still marked on or around the night of the fifth of November with bonfire parties and firework displays.

Though I doubt there are many that give more than a passing considerations as to the underlying reason for the fun that is had.

Bridgwater takes its celebrations to extreme

The then thriving river port town of Bridgwater was more patriotic than most in 1606 and somewhere with an unusually large number of ale houses - for good reason.

And so it is perhaps not surprising that its townsfolk were determined to make the very most of this opportunity for raucous, often ribald, and drunken revelry.

A huge bonfire was lit on the town's Cornhill, with the blaze fuelled by dozens of tar barrels, the odd small boat dragged from the river bank and anything else deemed suitable for burning.

Guys, made of straw and old clothes, were paraded through the town - and in and out of the ale houses by gangs of local youths before being tossed on the fire.

Others would make highly explosive 'squibs', which were strapped to long hand held poles called 'coshes' and let off to much cheering and - no little injury - among the crowd.

Carnival evolves over the years

Over the decades the annual Guy Fawkes celebrations in Bridgwater went from strength to strength.

The gangs, or 'groups of masqueraders', as they had become known, would dress in themed costumes and take to parading through the streets on decorated horse drawn carts.

The carts were then organised into a procession through the streets of cheering onlookers, with judging then introduced to determine the best of that year's efforts.

The bonfire was abandoned in 1925, and the guys have faded from view, but Bridgwater Carnival has grown to become one of the most spectacular events of its kind in the world.

Bridgwater Carnival today

The one-time carefree approach to Bridgwater Carnival has also long gone.

Each float in the procession in the procession will be entered by a Carnival Club, with names like the *Gremlins*, *Marketeers*, *Ramblers*, *Vagabonds* and *Griffins*.

These will have devoted club members and enjoy partisan support in the town.

The theme for a clubs carnival entry will often be agreed and submitted to the officiating committee up to 15 months in advance to obtain permission to use.

The detailed planning, preparation and fund-raising needed to produce each float will then start in earnest as soon as the previous carnival season has ended.



The entries

The mounted entries in the Carnival include the features, which have 'all singing all dancing' *carnivalites*, and tableaux's whose members are 'frozen in time' float to depict their theme.

The comic features are floats from clubs keen to get us laughing at their antics with outrageous cross dressing not unusual.

Slotted in between the mounted entries are collection floats, marching bands and majorettes and costumed walking entries from groups and individuals of all ages.

The Squibbing



The *Squibbing*, which is another tradition unique to Bridgwater, is the simultaneous firing of large fireworks or *squibs*, which are strapped to a cosh and held aloft.

An hour or so after the procession, some 150 Squibbers line two abreast along the town's High Street for this spectacular display.

Dates for the diary

Bridgwater Carnival is held the Saturday nearest 5 November, with the other carnivals in the Somerset series follow on sequentially.

Dates for 2019 are :

Bridgwater Carnival

Saturday 2 November 2019

Highbridge & Burnham-on-Sea Carnival

Monday 4 November 2019

Weston-super-Mare Carnival

Friday 8 November 2019

North Petherton Carnival

Saturday 9 November 2019

Midsommer Norton Carnival

Monday 11 November 2019

Shepton Mallet Carnival

Wednesday 13 November 2019

Wells Carnival

Friday 15 November 2019

Glastonbury Carnival

Saturday 16 November 2019

More information

www.bridgwatern carnival.org.uk
www.somersetcountycarnivals.com



A snapshot of some Bridgwater Carnival





The stunning images of Bridgwater Carnival were shot by Craig Stone.

Craig is a professional photographer who is always looking to get out and capture the moments that life brings us every second, every minute and every hour of every day.

Craig specialises in landscape photography and also covers events, such as Carnival, and attractions.

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