



## Spectacular sights on dark November nights

The annual *Somerset Guy Fawkes Carnivals* are a series of night time illuminated processions in eight West Country towns every November.

With the first staged in Bridgwater, the original home of the *Guy Fawkes Carnival*, it provides the spectacular culmination to many months of planning, preparation and building by each of the Carnival Clubs taking part.

The Carnivals annually awe spectators with 50 huge, themed 'carts' (floats) passing slowly through each town along a planned route.

These will be lit by thousands of light bulbs, with hydraulically moving parts and musical support for the costumed *Carnivalites* on each float.

Well over 120,000 people will line the streets in Bridgwater with many thousands more opting for one or more of the other Carnival's in the series.

It makes for one of the most spectacular series of 'free' 'shows on earth'.

The stunning images used here have been created by Craig Stone give an indication as to what Guy Fawkes Carnival in Somerset is all about.

[www.bridgwatercarnival.co.uk](http://www.bridgwatercarnival.co.uk) and [www.somersetcountycarnivals.com](http://www.somersetcountycarnivals.com)

**Ashley Gibbins**  
Commissioning Editor, AllWays Traveller





# A stunning celebration 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 are the words in this English folk verse of 1870 more passionately adhered to than in the Somerset town of Bridgwater.

Four hundred and nineteen years after the infamous *Gunpowder Plot*, the townsfolk here continue to celebrate the failed attempt at anarchy with one of the most dazzling carnival processions anywhere in the world – with seven more to follow.

## 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.

The plot failed following an anonymous tip off and search of the cellars below the House of Lords 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 firework parties and displays.

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



*Curse of the Kraken* the winning entry presented by the Gremlins Carnival Club  
[www.gremlinscarnivalclub.co.uk](http://www.gremlinscarnivalclub.co.uk)



# Activities in Bridgwater go to great extreme

The then thriving river port town of Bridgwater was more patriotic than most, back in 1606, and offered residents an unusually large number of ale houses.

And so, ready for any reason to drink, the townsfolk were determined to make the very most of this opportunity for raucous, often ribald, and drunken public revelry with a royal seal of approval.

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.

High explosive 'squibs', made often illegally in garden sheds, were strapped to long hand held poles called 'coshes' and ignited to much loud cheering by those crowding the streets.

## Carnival evolves over the years

Over the decades the celebrations in Bridgwater went from strength to strength.

Local 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 cheering onlookers, with judging finally introduced to determine the best of that year's efforts.

The bonfire was abandoned in 1925, and *guys* have faded from view, but Bridgwater Carnival has become a stunning and unique spectacle.

## Bridgwater Carnival today

The one-time *throw it all together and let's get drunk* approach to Carnival here has also long gone. It's now a very serious undertaking.

The floats, costing many thousands of pounds, will be entered by Carnival clubs, with names like the *Gremlins*, *Marketeers*, *Ramblers*, *Vagabonds* and *Griffins*.

Each will have highly loyal club members who are either on float or working avidly behind the scenes. These are supported by passionately partisan supporters in the town.

The theme for a club's carnival entry will often be agreed and submitted to the officiating committee up to 15 months in advance, in order to get the requisite permission to develop it.

Then begins the painstaking planning, detailed preparation and considerable fund-raising effort needed to build each float.

All of this starts in earnest as soon as the previous carnival season has ended.



Bad Guys by the Marketeers Carnival Club



Ghost Riders : Westonzoyland CC



Iron Works : Harlequin Carnival Club





## The entries

The mounted Carnival entries comprise 'all singing all dancing' features and tableaux whose members are 'frozen in time'.

Comic features come from clubs keen to get us laughing at their antics with outrageous cross dressing not unusual.

And 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 takes place after the procession, is another tradition unique to Bridgwater and sees several hundred *squibbers* lining the High Street and firing of the large, specially produced *squibs*, which are strapped to coshes.

## Dates for the diary

Bridgwater Carnival is held the first Saturday in November, with the other carnivals in the Somerset series following on sequentially.

Dates for 2020 are :

### **Bridgwater Carnival**

Saturday 7 November 2020

### **Highbridge & Burnham-on-Sea Carnival**

Monday 9 November 2020

### **Weston-super-Mare Carnival**

Friday 13 November 2020

### **North Petherton Carnival**

Saturday 14 November 2020

### **Midsommer Norton Carnival**

Monday 16 November 2020

### **Shepton Mallet Carnival**

Wednesday 18 November 2020

### **Wells Carnival**

Friday 20 November 2020

### **Glastonbury Carnival**

Saturday 21 November 2020

## More information

[www.bridgwatercarnival.org.uk](http://www.bridgwatercarnival.org.uk)  
[www.somersetcountycarnivals.com](http://www.somersetcountycarnivals.com)



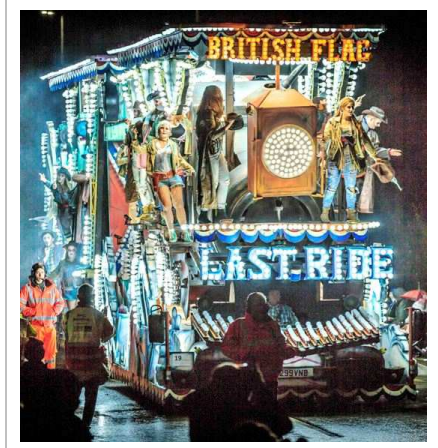
Ghost Riders : Westonzoiland CC



Last Ride : British Flag CC



Shout : Griffins CC











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.

[www.craigstone.me.uk](http://www.craigstone.me.uk)  
Craig Stone at email@craigstone.me.uk



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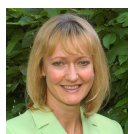
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**Ann Mealar** is a professional travel writer and photographer and Managing Editor of *AllWays Traveller*.

*AllWays Traveller* is the consumer travel magazine from the International Travel Writers Alliance.



**Ashley Gibbins** is a professional travel writer and photographer and Managing Director of the International Travel Writers Alliance.

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