

Crowborough Carnival & Bonfire Society

It's a spectacle that has been entertaining the town for many years and for those who have not grown up in and around the Sussex area, it really is something different. I could only be talking about the Crowborough Carnival which takes place annually on the second Saturday in September. I met up with Nigel Cassford, Chairman of the Society (for 13 years), to find out more about this local tradition.

The Crowborough Carnival & Bonfire Society was reformed in 1948 after a break during the war. It's not known exactly when the tradition first started here but there are pictures of the society from Victorian times although it's not known the exact year it started.

Crowborough forms just one part of the 25 Carnivals and Parades that take place from September to November each year and is number two in the Calendar Schedule (following Uckfield).

As soon as one carnival comes to an end, fund-raising activities begin for the following year. It costs about £10,000 to run the event each year so as well as grants from the Town Council (they fund about 10%), the Society need to raise the remaining 90% to be able to keep this long-standing tradition running. All the money raised on Carnival day is collected for the chosen charity of the society but all other activities organised throughout the year are to raise money for the event.

If you're new to the area you might wonder why it's the Carnival and **Bonfire** Society when the main event is held in September. I know I was confused by this. There is actually a Sussex Bonfire Council who meet to ensure that each local Society is prepared for their set date in the year to hold their Carnival and Parade and in order to fit in all 25 parades, which are spread from the 1st Saturday in September to the 4th Saturday in November. All the Societies support one another in turning up to the events and helping out in any way they can. I mean, they can't all hold a major Bonfire Parade on the same night.

This year there were about 8 floats and a number of walking groups in the parade. The number has started to increase again which is great for the society. Some of the regulars who participate are the local football and rugby clubs, scouts and guides and Rotary clubs. Nigel remembers as a child growing up there would be over 30 floats participating in the parade. It would be wonderful to see such vast numbers again.

So, how can you support the society to ensure this long-standing tradition remains in Crowborough? The society are always looking for new volunteers to join the group - whether it's marshalling on the night or helping organising fund-raising events throughout the year. Or maybe you'd like to become a donor? Or possibly dressing up and walking in other Carnivals with the society throughout Sussex? Get in touch with the Society now by contacting the Secretary, Mrs S Maynard on 01892 662 524.

