

Dinton Bonfire Boys

The following articles are from [Fireworks mag](#) website (Used with permission from John Bennett –Editor)



From Faggots to Pallets: Dinton Bonfire Boys Celebrations span more than a Hundred Years

by Lake, Gordon in Fireworks , issue 30 , page: 12

From conversations I have had with the late Jimmy Baker, who followed his father, grandfather, and, possibly, his great grandfather as the village blacksmith, I have learned of many of the happenings in Dinton which occurred before my time.

Before the First World War, and for a few years after, the Dinton Bonfire Boys' celebrations were a great event. In the early years the fire was built almost entirely of faggots donated by local farmers and, after completion, a guard was employed to ensure that the edifice remained intact and that there was no pre-ignition! On at least one occasion the guard was plied with so much ale that - whoosh! - Bonfire Night was celebrated earlier than the Fifth of November.

The torchlight procession toured the village, led by the banner and Dinton's own brass band, along with two appointed clowns who were always much in evidence. After the village tour was complete, the parade trekked to Hurdcott House, took 'nourishment' and returned to Dinton for the bonfire.

It was on this return journey that Bill Pomeroy, one of the clowns (and always a bit of a clown), ran ahead of the procession and, with the aid of the on-coming lights, climbed a tree somewhere near the Baverstock Junction, presumably wishing to raise the level of his performance (!) The procession passed, the lights dimmed, and Bill couldn't see his way down from the tree. A search party later located and retrieved their missing clown.

Between 1930 and 1945, the Dinton Bonfire Boys seem to have been inactive. Encouraged by accounts of past celebrations told by Ern Jukes and Mrs Alice Winter (Aunt Lou), together with the discovery of the banner in the barn at Fitz Farm, a parade and fire was held in 1946. Fred Coombes, who lived in Orchard Terrace, dressed faultlessly as a G.I. bride, visited his employers, the Sladens at East Farm, minutes before the parade started and asked for lodgings; he was refused politely and he left without being recognised. He repeated the act later in the evening, calling on his own mother-in-law, and again was not recognised. Fred's contribution the following year was in the form of a giant, using several Home Guard gas capes and a broomstick, the result of which was superb, but, alas, he had the same effect on the small children in the Victory Hall as did the wolf in more recent times!

The writer's involvement with the celebrations started with the 1946 fire, and continued for twelve years, mainly in the fire-building operation. Alas there were no faggots for the fire (always built in the same spot) in those years.

The first task was to erect a pole, at the base of which was placed four or five wire-tied straw bales, covered with cast-off macintoshes to keep most of the rain out until the night. The bulk of the fire was formed with brush- wood collected by tractor and trailers from wherever available (often Fovant Wood) and stacked around the pole. A tunnel in towards the pole was always left.

While the fancy dress was being judged in the Victory Hall, a fellow who was a tighter fit in the tunnel than most would have been, was anointing bales with a mixture of sump-oil and T.V.O., and, even after a week's rain, this ensured a rapid - though rather smoky and stinky - blast off!

In 1983 the fire, built almost entirely of cardboard cartons, aided and abetted by a playful south east wind, showered much of the village with smouldering fragments and was terminated by a red vehicle from Tisbury to the boos of the children - and was still smouldering four days later! Recent fires have been built almost entirely with wooden handling pallets that have become unserviceable through long use.

Over the years the Bonfire Boys' celebrations have created much healthy activity, hilarity and entertainment. Remarkable really, that willing hands have always been available to do the donkey work. In short over a century of community spirit. Dinton - put a feather in your cap!!!

The Sad Case of the Damaged Banner

Article from [Fireworks mag](#) website - June 2005 (Used with permission from John Bennett –Editor)

The photograph below is of one of the original banners of the famous Dinton Bonfire Society. The date on the left is 1890 and illegible on the right is 1913. There is a picture in the village archives of another, also dated 1890, but no trace of the actual banner remains. The importance of saving the surviving banner cannot therefore be over-emphasised but, as can be seen from the photograph, it is in a sad state of disrepair.

Mike Glover, Secretary of the Society, having been in contact with Southampton University (who have a textile preservation department) with a view to salvaging what is left, has discovered that the cost could be up to £5000.

The Society is therefore seeking grant aid to save this important relic. Mike can be contacted by email if a source of restoration costs can be found.

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Going With A Bang , by *Glover, Mike* in *Fireworks* , issue 57 , page: 13

November 7th, 2009 saw the last show from the current Dinton Bonfire Boys who have been in existence on and off since at least 1890. Even back then the event was for charitable purposes and raised money for the local infirmary. In the early part of the last century, the Boys were very active but seemed to die out between the two world wars. Although there was usually a firework display in the village in the 1970s, it was being run by the village hall committee and the costs became prohibitive, so it was decided to stop the event in 1981, which is when the current group picked up the reins.

At that time it was a small local show fired beside the road. It attracted a crowd of about 300 people and many from surrounding villages abused the situation and watched from the road without paying or felt they had contributed by dropping ten pence into a collection bucket. In 1990, to celebrate the centenary, Richard Crouch and I persuaded the National Trust to allow the use of DintonPark for a much larger event. That first show attracted 1500 people and the event grew into the best show in the county. Over the following years, the crowd grew and the show raised around £20,000 for local good causes.

After twenty nine years too many of us have got old bones and none more so than 85 year old John Crouch who made all the set pieces, which were a major source of fun for everyone, so a decision was taken to make this year's event the final one. Because the Salisbury area is closely linked to the military, it was decided that all the profits would go to Help for Heroes. With the mass of publicity surrounding our last show a record crowd boosted takings and a donation of £5636 was sent to the charity.

Despite what some think is the way forward, for the old farts like us it is still best with a portfire. Electrical firing is all well and good in sunnier climes, but there is no buzz from pushing buttons. Now that we are finished, it is safe to say that we doubt whether those who try to follow us will be in a position to have three operators firing one hundred six inch shells singly and continuously followed by 18 tens for a finale!

Maybe, one day, another group of eager young men will take up the challenge and the Dinton Bonfire Boys will once again entertain the locals, but it will never be the same again.

