

Memories of Bonfire - Jon Mitchell November 2014

My first experience of Bonfire in Edenbridge was in November 1985, just after we had moved to the town. A few years later I got rather more deeply involved when I helped to design and build my first float for my Daughter's school. Batman and Robin (and a lot of tiny Robins, too) were in deep trouble when their broken down 'Batmobile' was towed away by the scourge of Gotham, the Joker himself (me, in make up!)

The Bonfire Society in those days used to make all their own fireworks and even hold a massive firework on a pole and set it off above their heads on the old Town Bridge. Brave and probably rather foolhardy boys!

One of my funny memories came a couple of years later, when I asked dear Reverend Mother Barnes of St Andrews Convent whether she thought it would be appropriate for the convent school (now sadly closed) to enter a float in the procession. After all, bonfire is about celebrating the failure of the Catholic plot of 1605 to blow up Parliament and all the Protestants within it. She had a very broad mind, a sense of humour and thought it would be good for the School. Our first float at St Andrews celebrated the opening of the new Dartford Crossing in 1991.

After that came a succession of floats and walking parties including the Election of Bill Clinton (with Leslie Dix dressed as the Statue of Liberty 20 feet up in the air), The Phantom of the Opera, Starlight Express (it was amazing to watch parents scabble to be in the team and learn to roller skate just so that they could take part in the procession), and Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory.

I remember us scouring carpet and fabric shops in Edenbridge and for miles around to find the dozens of pipes needed for the Phantom's giant organ – much to the annoyance of the Four Elms team who were also wanting cardboard tubes for their float that year. And then our dozens of little helpers (the children) getting rather more gold and white paint on themselves than the tubes.

My Daughter has never quite forgiven me for dressing her up as the huge 1metre diameter blueberry shaped and coloured Violet Beauregard for the Chocolate Factory float - built inside our house and so big that she couldn't initially get out through the front door without some severe squashing.

After our children had left St Andrews and moved to secondary schools, a few families came together once again for a final fling. Star Wars came to Edenbridge complete with Darth Vader, Luke Skywalker, Darth Maul, Princess Leia and a whole platoon of Stormtroopers. The owner of the Landrover that we borrowed didn't realise that his precious hard top 'landy' was deep inside our slick, low tow vehicle (we had taken off the whole roof to make a better fighting platform for Luke Skywalker and Darth Maul) We eventually put it all back together again and he did forgive us!

With my Daughter too old to be an excuse to take part and after a few years helping out as a procession marshal, Sue and Charles Laver finally twisted my arm to become a member of the organising Committee in [XXXX] and I have been closely involved every since, wanting to continue the opportunity for the following generations of children to take part and the bigger children, their parents!