Creating Characters

Carnival Characters

A key element of carnival is masquerade or 'mas', dressing up in costume. Through this participants can disguise their identity, meaning they can escape their everyday lives and become something or someone else. It also allows them the freedom to create characters that parody, satirise or mock. Carnival characters can represent different subjects and themes, which can then be used to tell a story. Look at the photographs in our archive to discover the variety of carnival characters.

In Norwich, the Lord Mayor's Street Procession originated in the late medieval period when mayoral processions were linked to the Guild of St George. The Guild would parade with St George riding on horseback and fighting the dragon. Snap, as the dragon became known, was a central figure of medieval pageants, originally breathing fire (with the help of gunpowder!).

Later, when the character of St George was no longer included, Snap remained, and would lead the procession and clear the way through the city ahead of the Mayor, accompanied by the other characters of Whifflers and Dick Fools.

Towards the end of the 18th Century mock-Mayoral processions were taking place in other areas of the city, along with their own 'Snaps'. The dragon helped to collect money along the procession route 'by chasing people with the intention of grabbing their hats or caps between its jaws and returning them only after a penny ransom had been paid. Young boys would taunt the dragon by running close by and chanting *"Snap, Snap, steal a boy's cap, give him a penny and he'll give it back."**

 *'Snap the Norwich Snapdragon', http://www.dragonglow.co.uk/snap.htm

Figure 1: Image taken from the
Norwich City Council Collection

Creating Characters Checklist

When creating your own carnival character, here are some things you may like to think about.

Name/nickname:

Human/animal/mythical:

Where comes from:

Description:

Personality:

Friends:

Enemies:

Likes:

Dislikes:

Strengths:

Weaknesses:

Purpose in carnival: