

## Memories of Northampton Carnival

The carnival was usually held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of June and was an important part of town life. I know it was used to be called the Cycle Parade and miles of crepe paper and cardboard was involved, which could prove disastrous if it dared to rain that evening!

I was taken there by my mother and grandmother in the late 50's, early sixties and, as was true for most folk, we always went to stand at the same spot. Ours was outside Adnitt's (now Debenham's) at the top of the Drapery. My early memories of the carnival were of the 'Big Heads', made of papier mâché, which absolutely terrified me. Over the years we began to see less decorated bicycles and walking entries and more and more trade lorries. These were blatant advertising and larger lorries gave more exhaust fumes/pollution which equalled less fun.

We started saving small change for weeks before the carnival and these were put into collection cans and buckets or thrown at targets on the lorries. Folks taking part in the parade often finished up sporting cuts and bruises from the badly aimed coins.

As all the money raised went towards the hospital, everyone chipped in towards the day. Transport firms, or anyone with a suitable vehicle, donated them (plus a driver) to the cause. Props and materials were begged or borrowed and the whole town came together to support the carnival.

I have asked many Northamptonians why they thought the carnival ended. Several folks came up with the memory of a youth being run over and killed by a lorry as he darted into the road to pick up coins and it was wondered if this marked the end of public interest, which was already waning due to changing attitudes, dissatisfaction at the length of the parade and inclusion of too many advertising floats.

The Pathology Laboratory had four entries that folks can remember.

?1966 German Beer Garden

?1968 Eastern Bizarre

1969 Paper Weights

1970 In a Monastery Garden

These entries took months of planning and lunch breaks were given over to making props and creating outfits.

'Monastery Garden' was the only entry I had any part in so I can only give details of the preparation for this one. I can remember working in Histology as a first year student and being part of the paper rose making team for the 'Monastery' float. We used to sit around the bench at the very end of the day to make them after all lab jobs were done and the wax had been scraped off the work surface. C.S. Butts provided the lorry, Mr Brierley (Gold Street) donated white bed sheets, to be dyed brown and black to make the costumes, and also the cardboard from carpet rolls for the pillars. The fire station lent us a bell and I'm sure two pretty girls wearing mini skirts were sent to charm the firemen into agreeing to the request. A whole sapling was dug up from the allotments adjoining the lab grounds and the roots were nailed to the floor of the lorry. The hospital owned the land to build the new hospital extension and as the allotments were left to grow wild they were considered fair game in the pursuit of artefacts to fill empty space on the lorry.

The float was a 1<sup>st</sup> prize winner and tins of beer hidden in the well were used to celebrate this achievement during the long parade.

The previous year 'Paper Weights' was an ill prepared entry and must have been bad as no photos are found of it. The participants, being young and inexperienced, went on to frequent a few pubs along the carnival route to drown their sorrows/embarrassment and were taken to task at work the next day. I think that is why so much effort was put into the following year's entry.