

Midsummers Eve Bonfires

The origins of the Midsummers Eve Bonfires are lost within the realms of time, although always closely associated with the Sun and looking to the continued warmth of summer into the autumn.

In ancient times such ceremonies were associated with the longing for a prolonged summer to ensure a bountiful harvest. Such bonfires held great significance with dance and feasting, even the purging of any village evils and witches. Any suspected wrongdoers would be brought before the bonfire and expected to take a burning brand from the fire and quench the flame with their own saliva spitting at the flame until extinguished, should they fail, it was proof of their guilt.

The Liskeard Old Cornwall Society were re-enacting this ceremony as early as 1929 with over one thousand supporters venturing out from the town to St Cleer Downs in a shuttle of four charabancs, (open air buses with an individual door for each row of seats). At these ceremonies a herbal wreath in the form of a sickle and witches hat were thrown onto the pyre.

In 1932 it is recorded that the Liskeard Old Cornwall Society held their Midsummer's Eve Bonfire supported by the Town Band and held such activities as the Furry Dance and served an abundance of tea, pasties and saffron cake.

The 2017 celebrations are to be held at Bolitho Farm, Maudlin, Liskeard, PL14 3ER, courtesy of Mr James Moon, from 6.30pm Fri 23 Jun 17. with their principal guest Her Worshipful Mayor of Liskeard, Cllr Christina Whitty with Rev Becca Bell, Vicar of St Cleer officiating.

Similar ceremonies were held throughout Cornwall, originally as beacons that could be seen from one hilltop to the next for the length of the County, from Camborne to Bodmin, Bury Down (Lanreath), to St Cleer, Kit Hill and Rame Head. Today such bonfires are held at Redruth, St Column, Liskeard and Kit Hill sponsored by their local Old Cornwall Societies.

D.P.M.