

# *Watchet Carnival Club*

## **The History (So Far)**

For many years there has been a Carnival held in Watchet, records from the local papers dating back to the late 1800's tell of torch light processions held around the 5<sup>th</sup> November to mark Bonfire night.

During the 70s, 80s and into the 90s Watchet Carnival was a one day event held on the 1<sup>st</sup> weekend of July consisting of a colourful parade with many "float" and walking entries from not only the local groups in Watchet but from surrounding towns and villages such as Carhampton and Nether Stowey. A wonderful Carnival fete was held afterwards on the Memorial ground with many attractions, fun for all, games and arena displays.

Watchet unlike other local Carnivals always had more float entries due to there being two commercial transport companies based here. These being Streets Transport and A.A Griggs, they always supplied the trailers and rigs to pull these marvellous floats which were built just for this one magical day in Watchet's social calendar.

It may have been the closing of the working docks and the departure of one of these Haulage companies that was to blame for the decline in the traditional Watchet Carnival, as during the mid 90s it unfortunately started to dwindle with entries getting less and less each year.

After the event in 1998 there was an emergency meeting held by the committee stating that they were not prepared to organise the following year's Carnival without extra help or a new committee taking over. Like most meetings of this kind not a great deal of local people actually attended but in amongst those that did were some of the organisers of the entertainment team that put on bands etc for the towns V.E and V.J day 50<sup>th</sup> year celebrations. It was these particular people who with some outside help from other like-minded people (8 in total) took on the Watchet Carnival programme.

A completely new Carnival committee was formed in late 1998 and plans were drawn up with a very low budget, the difference being that these people had more determination and enthusiasm than was needed in planning an actual major military campaign!

In 2000 the name changed from Watchet Carnival Committee to Watchet Carnival Club! It is a fact that more people would happily join and help a club rather than a committee!!!

From the off - fund raising plans were put into place i.e. skittle/darts evenings and safari suppers were a few of the events organised. But more importantly these events were used to introduce the new crew running Watchet Carnival. The date was changed to the last weekend in July to coincide with the local schools breaking up for the summer and to appeal to holiday makers to incorporate the Carnival into their annual holiday.

The original one-day Carnival was changed to a 3-day event and the name the “ *Watchet Carnival Festival Weekend*” was born. The main objective was to organise a weekend of fun and live musical entertainment for the town, with no admission charges to any of the weekends events all of which were centred around the Carnival procession itself. Most of all we wanted to cater for all age’s young and old and do what Watchet does best – that is enjoying itself!!!

The venue for the evening events over the last nine years has been the East Quay which has housed the stage for the bands, the Carnival run (highly successful and our biggest fundraiser) bar, fairground rides, caterers etc.

The bands that we have had entertaining us have been from Brass and Steel Bands, Pop and Rock Bands, Soul acts to Jazz Bands, Local traditional acts to Gospel singers. Our aim each year is to cater for all tastes and to bring different acts to the Carnival weekender in order to keep its appeal fresh and alive and to attract an even wider audience!

The Carnival parade has grown from strength to strength with more entries each year and an increase in guest acts. Joining the carnival procession in 2002 we saw a whistle blowing, drum beating Brazilian Samba band in the parade which gave the streets of Watchet a real “ Rio Carnival atmosphere” Watchet Carnival 2002 saw over 5,000 people lining the streets to watch the parade and attending the fete afterwards. The Carnival fete is held on the Memorial ground and the main focus is on the “young and young at heart” with many sideshows stalls and inflatable rides. It is here that the Carnival parade results are announced and the trophies awarded. It’s always an extremely hard choice for the judges to choose the overall winners because at the end of the day every entry is a winner in their own right!

Each year the local churches get to hold a Carnival “ Songs of praise” after the afternoon fete on Sunday and before the last of the weekends bands take to the stage. We have seen in recent years at these performances songs from Gospel singers / dancers and a local Christian band.

To mark the end of the event we always finish with a spectacular firework display that has become a major part of this unforgettable weekend.

The cost of putting on such an event is extremely costly exercise especially as we keep it a free event. This would not be possible without the support of the Companies that sponsor the weekend with donations ranging from £50 to £5000. In return we promote their business in programmes and on posters not just over the weekend but also beyond that. Thank you all - you know who you are! Each year the attendance gets greater 1998 on the Sunday evening saw 200 people attend the event, 2006 had an evening attendance of an estimated 6000+

After 9 years of the use of the area next to the Marina known as the East Quay was finally up for redevelopment and West Somerset Council informed the Watchet Carnival Club have had to find a new venue with at one point the 2006 Carnival Festival Weekend looked like it would be the last, however only two weeks before the weekend a local farmer came up with an offer of a 10 acre piece of land that Watchet Carnival Club could rent yearly

Each year it is the aim of the Club to make this event bigger and better than the previous year so if you have any items or ideas that you would like included then please contact us. If you would like to know more about the weekend, whether you just wish to visit and enjoy the Watchet carnival, or you want to enter the procession, maybe to book a stall at the fete, or even to become a sponsor of any part of the weekend or with an offer of help then please don't hesitate to contact us: -

E-mail

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