

The First Carnival

Someone asked me whether carnivals happened when I was a nipper. Oh my goodness, yes they did! In fact, as I recall I was present at the very first carnival ever held in the county, when I was ten. It was between the wars in 1930, and of course you didn't smile too much in those days, in case they thought you were a spudshover.

Me and Tommy Nobkin had spent most of the afternoon picking redlumps (raspberries to you clever people) from the nuns' allotments behind the bushes next to the goose pond. Tommy was an unlucky boy; he'd lost one of his ears in a ferreting accident and had to have his spectacles tied to his head with one of his mother's old stockings. Mind you, that never stopped him going on to make the stool that the Prince of Wales fell over, but that's another story.

Anyways, me and Tommy had just finished 'topping up the pond' as we called it, when we heard a dinging sound in the distance. Well, I heard it first to be fair, Tommy was facing the wrong way. We ran down Lumpy Lane towards the sound and were surprised to see Bessie Goodbust holding a bit of bent shiny metal on a string. She was striking it with a nail and it produced such a lovely sound that me and Tommy were soon in tears with delight.

She marched off towards the village and we marched behind her. Of course we didn't have any fancy musical instruments like Bessie, so I slapped the back of my head as I marched and Tommy made an odd hooting noise.

By the time we passed the church, we had a huge crowd of people behind us. There must have been more than twelve I reckon. Even Old Albert from the ditch joined in, although he'd forgotten to put his breeches on again and got shouted at. Some folk said that Old Albert had once killed a man after an argument over a drawing of the moon. All I know is that he smelled awful and made tiny statues out of goat business and spit, which he placed in a line by the village pump every other Tuesday.

We all marched as far as the gibbet at the crossroads, where we stopped. Most people wandered off, but greasy Mr Guffer asked Bessie if she'd like to help him collect a few sticks for his aunt and they headed into the thicket. Me and Tommy followed a little way behind because we knew his horrible aunt had died months ago. We could hear Bessie giggling and climbed a tree to see what was going on. Guffer seemed to be fumbling for something in Bessie's dress, and we thought it was very funny because she

always kept her sweets in her pinny.

We decided to head home as we were hungry and Tommy said it was faggot night at his house.

Everyone enjoyed the march so much that they decided to do it again the next year. Tommy had a drum by then, which was left behind by one of the soldiers that used to visit his mother of an evening. I had a brightly coloured piece of rag on a stick, and Bessie had a new baby.