**THE BAMPTON SPAJERS.**

During the eighteen months or so of ‘Lock Down,’ a lot of newcomers have moved into Bampton with its ever-growing housing estates making more accommodation available. The Spajers Committee would like to welcome you and tell you a little about us.

As the longest serving committee member of the SPAJERS, I have been asked to explain what they are all about and what they do for the community. Let’s start with the name. The Society for the Preservation of Ancient Junketing. Now you really are puzzled. Well, it has been the backbone of Bampton life since 1953. It is quirky and does quirky things that are unique to Bampton, raising a lot of local and national newspaper interest in our activities. Like having our starting Pistol confiscated by the Police as in their opinion it could have been converted to fire real bullets. Or the time that I inadvertently left two people behind in Weymouth on our outing.

At the time of the Coronation of her Majesty Queen Elizabeth Second in 1953, just eight years after the end of the war, when some foods were still being rationed, every Town and Village in the country got involved in money-raising ventures to finance Coronation celebrations for their community. A committee was formed in Bampton to provide funds for a whole week of these celebrations.

Coronation Day was on Saturday 2nd June 1953 and one of the main events was a Shirt Race where competitors, pushing a Pram, raced in pairs through the Town from one end to the other, alternating with the drinking and pushing the Pram with their partner, going from one pub to another. There were eleven active Pubs in those days, but it was not possible to visit every one. The prize for these early events was a Barrel of Beer! Many places hearing of our success copied our format, so that is why ours is now called “The Original Great Shirt Race”

At the end of the week’s celebrations, the committee found they had a considerable amount of money left in the kitty, so they donated it to the local Hospital. The next year it was decided to run the event again. The committee under the direction of the Secretary John Quick, came up with the idea of forming an organisation that would promote and provide entertainment for the community whilst at the same time caring for our own Senior Citizens, after all, the money was raised by Bampton people having fun, so why shouldn’t it be used to enable our old folks to have fun? And so the SPAJERS was born.

John Quick was a fantastic ‘ideas man’, and dedicated his life to the cause. Preservation of Ancient Junketing, the name itself tells you so much about him, all the things that he organised had a hint of traditional Merrymaking. The annual Shirt Race was followed by an annual Chariot Race; these two events prior to the Covid problem, are still carried on to this day. In the autumn they would organise a ‘village hop’ which was just an ordinary dance for the locals. Whilst later on in the year the President, the late Major Robert Colville, who owned Weald Manor would allow the Committee to organise a Black Tie Ball in his Ballroom. This was extremely popular and was well supported bringing in a lot of money for the cause. Money wasn’t the only thing that was raised; the most important thing was the awareness of what the Spajers were trying to do and succeeded in, which was to create a community that we are all proud of.

Throughout the year the committee is responsible for the Great Shirt and Chariot Race, normally held on the Saturday of the Spring Bank Holiday. This year due to the Queen’s Jubilee it is being held on Thursday the second of June. The event is centred around the Town Hall. The Fancy Dress competition is something to behold, the judging taking at least 30 minutes to complete with prizes for all age groups.

The Donkey Derby, where Donkey’s are imported from the sands of Weston Super Mare for the children of Bampton to ride and race on, whilst their parents have a ‘flutter’ on the outcome. All part of the fun to make money for our Senior Citizens to have fun. This takes place in the grass field known as Sanford’s on the August Bank Holiday Monday. Two days later we treat all our Pensioners to an outing, usually to the Seaside as in Bampton we are as far away from the Seaside as it’s possible to be in England.

In November our tradition is to organise a Bonfire Night for the whole Community to enjoy, still within the principles of the Spajers, creating fun. During November one of our older Committee members holds a Raffle in the one of our remaining Pubs with a local Singer providing the entertainment. It is known as ‘Josie’s Draw’; she has raised several thousands of pounds over the many years that she has been running it.

Every Pensioner that is registered with us gets a monetary gift at Christmas. To comply with the registration rules, a person must be of the National Pensionable age and lived in Bampton or Lew for a minimum of six months. Registration must be done by the pensioner through our Registrar who can be contacted on 01993 850 643.

The Spajers are run by a very young and active group of volunteers who always welcome any extra pairs of hands that are available at their events. If you think that you would be able to comply with the Motto that John Quick gave the Spajers 70 years ago then the committee would welcome you to their ranks.

It is “DYNAMIC YET DISCIPLINED”.

*Don Rouse*