

Chariots on fire as chaotic collection of costumes navigate village



The Bampton Shirt Race 2019 included this spooky vision of a team of ghosts driving along through the streets, while Ghostbuster in hot pursuit



The race was an opportunity for people to don their most startling costumes

All pictures: James Wildman



Lemur look for the Bampton Shirt Race 2019.

Picture: James Wildman

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HIPPIES, Mr Men and even The Simpsons family tore through Bampton in a surreal evening of racing.

The village hosted its 67th annual Shirt Race on Saturday evening, as competitors dressed in magnificent costumes rode a range of spectacular chariots through the streets.

As always, the tradition attracted some weird and wonderful entries and it took organisers half an hour to judge the competition for the best fancy dress.

It was then down to business, as participants raced prams and guided chariots through the village, while drinking half a pint of liquid at each of the eight stations along the route.

Race coordinator Don Rouse recalls the first race in 1953, when the event was part of the celebrations to mark the Queen's coronation.

With an estimated 700 people lining the streets on Saturday, the 82-year-old said the race was as popular as ever.

He said: "Serious racers keep their attire to the minimum and build their prams like racers. But the costumes have become the biggest part. Some people start designing their chariots at Christmas."

"The crowd was tremendous. The whole community works together in an incredible way."

Excitement grew as hundreds of people gathered for the fancy dress parade at 6.45pm, with the prizes awarded to the Wizard of Oz and Crash Bandicoot teams in the senior and junior categories respectively.

For the race, competitors are traditionally expected to don nightshirts, which gives the event its name.



Grumpy or Happy? These Mr Men probably encountered a few Bumps along the route

They lined up in prams and chariots on the start line, before hurtling through the streets, via eight pit stops.

These were divided up among four pubs and other sites along the course, with beer on offer for adults and soft drinks for children.

James Barber and Arnie Tomlins won the senior race and were rewarded with the honour of being Shirt Race champions 2019, plus eight cans of beer.

Matthew Waite and Ben Wannell won the intermediate category, for ages 11 to 18, while Elias Easterbrook and Thomas Passey emerged victorious in the under-11 junior race.

Mr Rouse praised the 30 volunteers,

all Bampton residents, who ensured the smooth running of the race, which is run by the Bampton SPAJERS.

The name stands for the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Junketing, which 'loosely translates as creating fun in Bampton to raise money to provide fun for our senior citizens', the race coordinator explained.

The organisation puts on activities for elderly residents, including days out and shopping trips at Christmas.

The amount raised from this year's shirt race has not yet been added up, but Mr Rouse confirmed that 'every single penny' would go to the village's senior citizens.

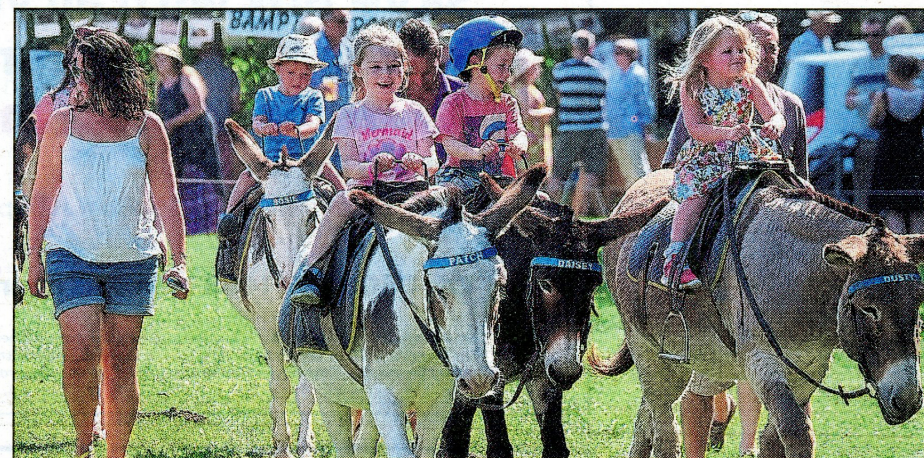


Bampton Shirt Race saw the comfortable arrival of the Simpsons cartoon family riding along on their mobile sofa

Children take reins as village's bonkers bank holiday fun returns



FAITH Graham, six, tries her hand at archery



EDDIE Evans, 10, led from the start in the second race of the Bampton Donkey Derby Pictures: Ric Mellis



NEVAEH East, two, has her face painted

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CHILDREN raced donkeys around a field as their parents cheered them on in one of Oxfordshire's most unusual bank holiday traditions.

The annual Bampton Donkey Derby returned to the West Oxfordshire village on Monday, as jockeys as young as eight faced off in scorching temperatures.

The endearing event was as popular as ever as volunteers and villagers gathered together to raise money for Bampton's senior citizens.

Organiser Don Rouse was pleased to see a strong turnout after fears that a road closure at the north end of the village due to roadworks would impact the number of attendees.

He joked last week that SPAJERS volunteers had been praying the works would finish in time and their wish was granted when the closure was lifted by Saturday.

Mr Rouse, who has been involved in the donkey derby since it was formed in the late 1960s, said: "It's obvious that the SPAJERS committee went to church, as the road was open. When I found out, I even said that now I believe in the power of prayer."

Families flocked to Sanford's Field for the much-loved event, which also featured activities including crockery-smashing, skittles and Aunt Sally.

Youngsters saddled up for a series of races throughout the afternoon, with only those aged eight and above and weighing less than eight stone eligible to ride.

Jockeys also had to be Bampton residents, but there was no shortage of enthusiastic children keen to try their



TEA ladies Christine Palsey, Maggie Miller, Suzy Macpherson and Angela Money

hand. Each winner received a prize of £2, while parents were able to place bets on each race, which Mr Rouse revealed sparked chaotic scenes.

He said: "It's absolute turmoil – they wait to see what number their child is riding and tear off to the tote."

The event is run by Bampton's Society for the Preservation of Ancient Junketing (SPAJERS), which was formed in 1953 and also runs the village's shirt race that takes place in May.

SPAJERS raises money for Bampton's elderly residents and the proceeds from

this year's donkey derby will pay for two summer outings for pensioners. Some residents have already enjoyed a trip to Buscot Manor, near Faringdon, while others have tomorrow's traditional trip to Weston Super Mare to look forward to.

A group of about 30 volunteers ensured the smooth running of the event and even erected 14 marquees between them.

Mr Rouse paid tribute to the team, adding: "I know there are great volunteers throughout the country, but it's very true here in Bampton."



JESSICA Cooper, seven, tries her luck at the hoopla

Dracula and Gandhi were among the star attractions at the annual Bampton Shirt Race on Monday.

This year the race was judged by a special guest of honour, David Titmus, from Wisconsin in America, who was visiting with his morris dancing team for the bank holiday celebrations in Bampton.

The first race was for juniors over a slightly shorter distance. First home were Floyd Curtis and Paul Biles who made it in 5min 18sec, knocking two seconds off the course record.

In the senior race it was obvious that some pairs meant very serious business — costumes and vehicles being of the lightest possible while the more decorative or amusing pairs served as entertainment for the crowds lining the roads.

Once again Richard Buckingham and T. Coles reached the finishing line first (the third time in a row for Buckingham) John Pearman and Bob Ellis came second and Anthony Collett and G. Blackwell a very close third.



Keith Mitchell, as Dracula, and Ronda Peacock in the Horror Machine.

Pictures: Rob Judges



The Gandhi Flyer, propelled by Martin Barber and James Smith, ready

Sale on at garages

BAGS of bargains will be on offer as more than 40 homes in Bampton host a garage sale, before several open their gardens to raise community funds.

The bi-annual village-wide garage sale will run on Sunday, from 10am to 2pm, and maps are £1 from Market Square and raise funds for Bampton Library.

It will then be followed from 2pm to 5pm by the Hidden Gardens of Bampton, with proceeds going toward Bampton Community Archive.

Tickets are £3 from Market Square.



JIMMY Bamsey of T. Vincent Donkeys takes some children for a ride



WILLIAM and Izzy Owens put on their safety helmets watched by mum, Jennie



Pictures: Jon Lewis **DONKEYS** enjoy a feed

Donkeys are under starter's orders for annual derby races

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THE thundering sound of hooves rang through West Oxfordshire on Monday when children raced donkeys as part of a decades-old village tradition.

Youngsters from Bampton took to Sanford's Field in the afternoon when the madcap donkey derby returned to the village.

The noble beasts – which are brought in specially from the beaches of Weston-super-Mare – went head-to-head in races throughout the afternoon as villagers gathered to place bets on their favourites.

Don Rouse, who has been involved in organising the event for nearly 50 years,

TRADITION: Lovely weather for annual fundraiser

said: "It was absolutely brilliant. It was a lovely day and there were loads of people out. It all went extremely well.

"The children all loved the racing. It's a real Bampton competition – with the children racing and the parents betting."

He added, jokingly: "The odds are quite good. Someone won £5 from a £1 stake."

Hundreds of people from Bampton and further afield came together in the sunshine for their day at the races with a twist.

There were eight races over the course of the day, which ran between 2-6pm.

With tongue firmly in cheek, Mr Rouse set the competitors off on each of the races, with many laughs to be had along the way.

What tends to be the case, the 80-year-old said, is that the donkeys shoot off from the starting line at speed but then slow down when the end is in sight.

Occasionally, one of the mules will stop to nibble on a blade of grass.

The event has evolved over the years, not least for reasons of health and safety.

Mr Rouse said the animals used to be wild and ridden with no saddles, often by adults.

These days the event is much tamer, with no rider above eight stone and the donkeys well looked after.

Mr Rouse said: "The man from the donkey welfare association told me he'd never seen donkeys in such a good condition."

The event is held by the

Society for the Preservation of Ancient Junketing (SPAJERS), which raises funds to take the village's elderly residents on a day out.

The derby hopes to raise enough money to send two coaches of the village's senior citizens to the seaside. This time they will head to Weymouth.

Bampton's annual donkey derby is just one of the quirky events to take place in the village.

One other such event is the Bampton Shirt Race, also organised by Spajers, which sees teams of two racing one another around the village in makeshift 'chariots' while stopping along the way to down beer.

Earlier this year people took to the streets of Bampton for the 65th annual race.



LEFT: Ethan O'Keefe leads the second race



August 30th 2017

Donkey Derby will see children saddling up

AUGUST 21st 2019

CHILDREN will take the reins as a bank holiday tradition returns to Bampton.

The West Oxfordshire village hosts its annual Donkey Derby on Monday, with parents placing bets as jockeys as young as eight race around Stanford's Field.

Don Rouse, who has been involved in the event since it was formed in the late 1960s, admitted his only fear was ensuring people could get to the village on the day.

Sewer connection work has shut part of the A4095 at the north end of the village since August 12, with the closure expected to be in place until Friday.

Mr Rouse said: "At the moment, all of the

SPAJERS committee are going to church and praying the roadworks will be finished by next Monday.

"We're all geared up and ready to go."

The jockeys must be from the town and at least eight years old, but weighing under eight stone.

Winners receive a prize of £2 and parents can place bets on each race, while there will be a variety of stalls and other activities.

The event is run by Bampton's Society for the Preservation of Ancient Junketing (SPAJERS), which was formed in 1953 and also runs the village's famous shirt race that takes place in May.

That sees competitors dressed in magnificent costumes ride a range of spectacular chariots through the streets.

The society aims to benefit the village's senior citizens, with the proceeds from this year's Donkey Derby going towards a choice of two summer outings for the elderly.

Traditionally, SPAJERS organises a trip to the seaside in Weston-Super-Mare on the Wednesday after the derby, but those who prefer to stay closer to home can go to Buscot Manor, near Faringdon.

The first race at this year's Donkey Derby begins at 2pm.

April 1st 2020

News



Historic shirt race tradition cancelled for the first time in 67 years

THE organiser of one of Oxfordshire's most beloved traditions has expressed his sadness at having to cancel the event for the first time in 67 years.

Don Rouse, 83, was bracing himself for his final Bampton Shirt Race, after being involved in it since 1970.

The shirt race traditionally sees competitors dress in nightshirts and race through the village in prams and chariots and was due to take place in May.

Mr Rouse is a former chairman of the SPAJERS (Society for the Preservation of Ancient Junketing), which organises the event every year.

This year, there was special plans in place as Dutch band Amigo - from Oxford's twin city Leiden - were set to perform at the race, the Westgate shopping centre and the Ashmolean Museum.

At the museum, temporarily closed, there has been an exhibit of Rembrandt's work, who was born in Leiden.

The race has its origins in 1953, the year of the Queen's coronation.

Mr Rouse said that many towns and villages raised a lot of money to celebrate, and in Bampton, festivities included fancy dress cricket and a football match between Bampton men and women. Since then, the SPAJERS have organised a shirt race every year, with the money raised going towards the elderly in the village.



Young competitors in the Bampton race

Picture: James Wildman

● Racers dress to impress

WACKY racers sped through the streets as competitors gathered for this year's Bampton Shirt Race. The annual event has ventured far from its origins and costumes this time included inspired recreations from popular culture, including a family of Simpsons complete with their sofa and a famous tank engine, Madagascan wildlife, Mr Men and ghosthunters. See Page 20 for more pictures.