

QUIRKY ENGLISH EVENTS 2009

(Please check dates before publication)

New Additions to this year's list (not necessarily new events):

1. The world egg throwing competition, 28 June 2009
2. World toe wrestling championship, July 2009. Date TBC
3. The world gravy wrestling championships, 31 August 2009

JANUARY

HAXEY HOOD GAME

When: 6 January 2009 (the twelfth day of Christmas)

Where: Haxey, near Epworth, North Lincolnshire

Time: Fool's speech outside St Nicholas Church at 2pm and Main Hood thrown at 3pm on Hood Field, Cross Hill, Haxey, near Epworth.

PR Contact: Katie King, Media & PR Assistant, East Midlands Tourism, tel: +44 (0) 115 988 8539

Email: katieking@emd.org.uk

Web: www.northlincs.gov.uk/NorthLincs/Leisure/tourism/placestovisit/placesofhistoricalinterest/HaxeyHood.htm

To the spectator, this event is like a rugby scuffle, this is called the sway, in which a leather tube (that represents the hood) is pushed to 1 of 4 pubs where it remains until the following year's game. It is a tradition that dates back to the 14th century when Lady de Mowbray, wife of landowner John De Mowbray, was out riding one day and her silk riding hood was blown away. Thirteen farm workers in the field rushed to help and chased the hood all over the field. It was finally caught by one of the farm workers, but being too shy to hand it back to the lady he gave it to one of the others to hand back to her. She thanked the farm worker who had returned the hood and said that he had acted like a Lord, whereas the worker who had actually caught the hood was a Fool. She was so impressed by this act of chivalry and the resulting chase that she donated 13 acres of land on condition that the chase for the hood would be re-enacted each year. This re-enactment over the centuries has become known as "The Haxey Hood".

THE STRAW BEAR FESTIVAL

When: 9, 10 and 11 January 2009

Where: Whittlesey, Cambridgeshire

Time: 10.30am – 3.15pm

PR Contact: Brian Kell, tel: +44 (0)1733 208 245 or Janice Kent, East of England Tourism, tel: 01284 727 487

Email: info@strawbear.org.uk

Web: www.strawbear.org.uk

Teddy bears have a place in most children's bedrooms. However straw bears are a little more unusual. Once a year, at the Whittlesey Straw Bear Festival, visitors can see a real-life straw bear. He will be part of an elaborate parade around the town centre attended by a host of dancers and musicians including Morris Dance teams and

sword dancers. The bear is actually a man covered from head to toe in a straw costume. During the 19th century, straw bears - men or boys clothed in a layer of straw - were a familiar sight on Plough Monday (The first Monday after 6 January). The straw bear is said to be a throwback to Pagan times. The bear dances to encourage crops to grow in the spring. It was an uncomfortable costume, with lengths of tightly twisted straw bands prepared and wound up the arms, legs and body of the man or boy who was chosen. Two sticks were fastened to the shoulders and met at a point over his head. Straw was then wound round them to form a cone above the 'bear's' head. A tail was provided and a strong chain fastened around the armpits. The bear danced in front of houses and gifts of money or food or beer were given in return.

FEBRUARY

ST IVES FEAST AND HURLING OF THE SILVER BALL

When: 9 February 2009 (held on the first Monday after 3 February)

Where: Throughout the town of St Ives

Time: 10am – 5pm at The Guildhall

PR Contact: Jeremy Ward St Ives Town Council, tel: +44 (0) 1736 797 840 (no email address)

Web: <http://www.visitcornwall.com/site/st-ives-feast-hurling-the-silver-ball-p505483>

Hurling is one of the oldest forms of ball game and still takes place at St Ives in Cornwall on the first Monday after 3 February. The game is rather like rugby and the ball is made from apple-wood encased in sterling silver and weighs about 15 ounces (425g). In the past, the game was played in the town's streets and on the beach involving some 600 people including miners and fishermen. However, today the event is mainly enjoyed by schoolchildren. The ball is thrown from St Ives Parish Church wall at 10.30am and there follows a mad scramble for the ball. By tradition, the game was played for about an hour and a half. For the first hour the ball was kept within the town's boarded-up streets, but thereafter, the hurlers strived to break the silver ball away to the appropriate goal. The 'Town' goal was a small stone trough, in the base of an ancient Celtic cross a mile to the south-west, and the 'Country' goal was a similar distance to the north. The object of the game was to place the ball in the appropriate goal.

SLAITHWAITE MOONRAKING FESTIVAL OF LANTERNS AND LEGENDS

When: 14 - 21 February 2009

Where: Slaithwaite, West Yorkshire

PR Contact: Stuart Render, tel: +44 (0) 161 627 7218

Email: stuart901@btinternet.com or mrmoon@slaithwaitemoonraking.org

Web: <http://www.slaithwaitemoonraking.org>

Download the full program at <http://www.slaithwaitemoonraking.org/2009/brochure.pdf>

A week of fun and story telling starting with an opening Ceilidh dance on 14th February. Lantern and story telling workshops take place from Sunday until Thursday. The event's street procession and theatre take place on 21st February 2009, starting at 6.00 pm. The Moonraking Festival is based on a village tale about two 19th century smugglers who were collecting barrels of the illegal 'moonshine' drink from the canal. The smugglers hid the barrels and told the police they were trying to rake the moon's reflection out of the canal. Thinking they were fools, the police let the smugglers go and the 'moonraking' legend was born. The highlight of the festival is a long procession of 2,500 villagers with some 200 bearing colourful lanterns made of willow sticks and tissue paper. The lanterns vary from year to year, depending on the theme of the festival, and can be shaped like magic lamps, glass slippers, fairies, pumpkin carriages and castles. The lanterns are made in the week preceding the procession. The theme in 2009 is Moon landing Moonraking in honour of the 40th anniversary of the moon landing.

A moon-shaped lantern mounted on a float is towed along the canal before being "raked" out high in the air and placed on the bank, after which it is carried round the village, accompanied by jazz, carnival and brass bands. It follows a route along the canal bank, to Hill Top and down Crimble Bank back to the canal. At the canal there will be some more street performances with several men are dressed as gnomes, a woman as the moonraking fairy and two fancy dress policemen play the bagpipes. The women use rakes to help the lantern float along. A firework display completes the event.

OLNEY PANCAKE RACE

When: 24 February 2009

Where: Olney, North Buckinghamshire

Time: 11.55am race starts (family entertainment from 10am)

PR Contact: Tony Evans, Olney Pancake Race Committee, tel: +44 (0) 1234 71 1 392 olneypark@hotmail.co.uk

Web: www.sideburn.demon.co.uk/olney/pancake.html

The unique Olney Pancake Race literally stops traffic as energetic local ladies in traditional housewife attire (including skirt, apron and scarf), run through the streets of Olney. The 415- yard dash is run from The Bull Hotel in the Market Place to the Parish Church of St. Peter & St Paul in Church Lane. The race is started by the church warden at 11.55am using a large bronze 'Pancake Bell.' Pancakes are tossed at the start of the race and the winner is required to toss her pancake again at the finish. At the end of the race, the runners and townsfolk go into the Parish Church for the great Shrivng Service. The race has been run since around 1445 and since 1950, the contest has been an international event between Olney and the town of Liberal, Kansas in America. The race is run on a timed basis and the winner is declared after times are compared through a transatlantic telephone call from Liberal to Olney.

MARCH

WORLD POOH STICKS CHAMPIONSHIPS

When: 29 March 2009, 12pm midday

Where: Days Lock, Little Wittenham, Nr Abingdon, OX14 4RB (Oxfordshire)

PR Contact: Elizabeth Williamson, President of the Rotary Club of Oxford Spires, tel: 01844 351549 - drliz@doctors.org.uk

Email: drliz@doctors.org.uk

Web: www.pooH-sticks.com

When Winnie the Pooh and Christopher Robin first dropped a handful of sticks from a bridge into a stream and rushed to the other side to see which came under first, who would have imagined this would start an annual tradition? The 26th Annual World Pooh Sticks Championships organised by the Rotary Club of Oxford Spires is set to attract around 1000 - 2000 people. Individuals and teams of 6 compete in a knock-out style competition, with teams of six dropping different coloured sticks from each of the two bridges at the lock. The event is held in aid of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution and also Rotary charities.

APRIL

WORLD MARBLES CHAMPIONSHIPS

When: 10 April 2009 (held every Good Friday)
Where: Greyhound Pub, Tinsley Green, Crawley, West Sussex
PR Contact: Sam or Julia McCarthy-Fox, tel: +44 (0) 1403 730 602
Email: marblesam@hotmail.com
Web: www.marblemuseum.org

Marbles have been played in and around Tinsley Green for many hundreds of years. The tradition is said to date back to the time of Good Queen Bess when two men from Surrey and Sussex competed for the hand of a maiden from Tinsley, which is just on the border of the two counties. After being judged equal in all the major sports of the time such as archery and wrestling, one of them came up with the game of marbles and the tradition has continued ever since. The World Marble Championships date back to the 1930s. Some 20 teams from around world take part, and over the years, teams from Canada, the USA and Germany have taken part. The action is watched by hundreds of spectators. The game is played in a six-foot-diameter ring which is dusted with fine sand and set up in the Greyhound Pub car park. Some 49 marbles are then placed in the ring. There are six players in a team and each member has four marbles. The winner is the first team to knock 25 marbles out of the ring.

WORLD COAL CARRYING CHAMPIONSHIPS

When: 13 April 2009 (held annually on Easter Monday)
Where: Gawthorpe, Ossett, West Yorkshire
Time: 12.00 noon at the Royal Oak on Owl Lane, Gawthorpe and finishing at The Maypole on the village green
PR Contact: Susan Walshaw, The Gawthorpe Maypole Committee, tel: +44 (0) 1924 260141.
Email: susanwalshaw2@aol.com
Web: www.gawthorpe.ndo.co.uk/coal.htm

The World Coal Carrying Contest is a test of stamina and muscle. It is held every Easter Monday and lifts the village of Gawthorpe out of obscurity and into the headlines. The race involves men carrying 50kg (one hundred weight) of coal over an uphill course close to a mile long starting at the Royal Oak, Owl Lane and finishing at the Maypole on the village green. The ladies race follows the same route as the men's – ladies carry 20 kg of coal. The current world record holder is said to be David Jones of Meltham with a time of 4 mins 6 secs. The World Coal Carrying Contest dates back to 1963 when a local coal merchant and the president of the Maypole Committee were enjoying a pint together. A friend burst into the pub and bet that he could race them with a bag of coal on their backs. Not to let a good idea go to waste, the secretary of the Maypole Committee who was listening to the challenge, decided to set the race for Easter Monday.

BOTTLE KICKING AND HARE PIE SCRAMBLE

When: 13 April 2009 (Easter Monday)
Where: Hallaton, Leicestershire
PR Contact: Simon Gribbon, Leicestershire Promotions tel: +44 (0) 116 225 4000/4201
Email: simon.gribbon@l-p-l.com

In 1770, the Rector of Hallaton was allotted a piece of land on condition that he provided two hare pies, two dozen loaves of bread and a quantity of ale, which had to be scrambled for in public. The custom still survives today. On Easter Monday, a hare pie is baked using a 20-inch square tin and is paraded in a procession through Hallaton village from the Fox Inn to St Michael's Church. Slices are cut up, blessed and distributed at St Michael's Church gates by the rector. Immediately behind the pie in the procession are the bottles that are used for the Bottle Kicking match. The 'bottles' are actually three small wooden kegs. Two contain beer and the remaining one is coloured red and white. The Bottle Kicking Parade moves through the village to the top of Hare Pie bank where the Bottle Kicking match takes place. The competitors are teams from Hallaton and nearby Medbourne who kick and man-handle the three barrels in an attempt to get them across respective boundaries. The goals are two streams a mile (1.6km) apart, and the aim is to kick two of the three bottles across the team's respective stream. It

is a tough contest with the teams having to get the barrels across numerous hedges, lanes, ditches and even barbed wire to reach their touchlines.

MAY

WELL DRESSING

When: May through to end of September 2009

Where: All over Derbyshire – Tissington, Buxton, Buxworth

PR Contact: Bernadette Wainwright, Chesterfield Tourism, tel: +44 (0) 1246 345 779 / 775

Email: bernadette.wainwright@chesterfield.gov.uk

Web: www.visitchesterfield.info/events.asp

Derbyshire hosts this ancient ceremony that has undergone a revival recently with many towns and villages enthusiastically re-establishing the craft. Well dressings are mosaic pictures, built up from natural materials such as flower petals, seeds, leaves and berries pressed into clay which is held in a wooden frame. The shape of the frames vary depending on the choice of theme – most are usually of a religious nature although recently, more modern themes have been adopted. When the well dressing is at the site of the well it is blessed by the local clergy. Dressings last about a week depending on the weather. Well dressing is thought to have originated from Pagan times, a ritual performed to give thanks for the supply of fresh water. Another school of thought claims that the Romans introduced the custom into Britain and another connects the celebration with various outbreaks of plague.

ELY'S EEL DAY

When: 2 May 2009

Where: Jubilee Gardens, Ely, Cambs

Time: 11 am until 4 pm

PR contact: Tracey Harding, Tourist Information Centre, tel. **01353 662062**

Email: tic@eastcambs.gov.uk

Web: www.eastcambs.gov.uk/tourism

This slithery celebration brings to life the city's eel traditions with eel tasting, folklore and historical entertainment and displays.

CHEESE ROLLING

When: 25 May 2009, Bank Holiday Monday (always held on the second Bank Holiday Monday in May)

Where: Coopers Hill, Brockworth, Gloucestershire

Time: From 12pm

PR contact: Chris Dee, Gloucestershire Tourism, tel: +44 (0) 1452 425 657

Email: chris.dee@gloucestershire.gov.uk or info@cheese-rolling.co.uk

Web: www.cheese-rolling.co.uk

A passion for cheese is a must for this annual event, which involves daredevils hurling themselves down the steep, grassy slopes of Coopers Hill, near Gloucester, in pursuit of Double Gloucester cheeses. There are downhill races throughout the afternoon including ones for men and for women. The race starts with the master of ceremonies rolling a 7- 8 lb (4kg) Double Gloucester cheese down the hill. Dozens of competitors run, roll and somersault down the hill after it. It's impossible not to fall over due to the rough uneven slope with a 1:2 gradient. The winners take home the cheeses as well as a few cuts and bruises.

The event is very popular with international competitors, and nothing deters them – hot, cold, wind, wet or any other combination of British weather – in fact it all adds to the sense of spectacle. Hundreds of people gather to watch this unique event, which dates back to medieval times. Common theories about the origin of cheese rolling include the idea that it began as a pan festival celebrating the onset of summer, while others maintain the festival is related to ancient fertility rights and hopes for a successful harvest.

TETBURY WOOL SACK RACE

When: 25 May 2009, Bank Holiday Monday (always held on the second Bank Holiday Monday in May)

Where: Tetbury, Gloucestershire (On Gumstool Hill between The Crown Inn and Royal Oak pub)

Time: Afternoon (exact time TBC)

PR Contact: Chris Dee, Gloucestershire Tourism, tel: +44 (0) 1452 425 657 or Peter Martin, tel: +44 (0) 1666 503791

Email: chris.dee@gloucestershire.gov.uk

The Tetbury Wool Sack Race is a gruelling competition run between two pubs in Tetbury – The Crown Inn and the Royal Oak. The race has been given world record status and involves competitors running in pairs and fours up steep Gumstool Hill through the village of Tetbury carrying a large sack of wool. Men carry a 60lb sack on their backs and women carry a 35lb sack. The gradient in parts is 1:4, so it's heavy going for even the fittest competitor. The event attracts puzzled spectators from across the world and raises money for local charities. The race reflects the history of the area, when many of the Cotswold towns, including Tetbury, were noted wool towns. It's thought the race originally started when local drovers - egged on by drink and wanting to impress the ladies - raced each other uphill with heavy woolsacks.

ROBERT DOVER'S COTSWOLD OLIMPICKS (SHIN KICKING)

When: 29 May 2009

Where: Dover's Hill, near Chipping Campden, Gloucestershire

Time: 7.30pm

PR Contact: Chris Dee Gloucestershire Tourism, tel: +44 (0) 1452 425 657 or Francis Burns, event Secretary, tel: +44 (0)1384 274041

Email: chris.dee@gloucestershire.gov.uk

Web: www.olimpickgames.co.uk

The Cotswold Olimpicks (Olympics) were started by a local barrister Captain Robert Dover in 1612 at Dover's Hill, above Chipping Campden. The annual event attracts thousands of spectators and features some well-known countryside games such as tug-of-war, obstacle races and wrestling as well as a few bizarre ones - the highlight being shin-kicking. The shin-kicking competition involves two contestants who first fill their trouser legs with straw to help reduce the pain. The players then hold arms and kick each other using steel toe- capped boots until one of the contestants is so bruised that he cannot stand the pain and gives in. The festivities close with a huge bonfire and firework display followed by a torchlight procession to the town square of Chipping Campden where Morris dancing and other entertainment takes place.

The Olympics will be 40 years old when London hosts the 2012 Olimpicks. As hosts of the more senior event, the village of Chipping Campden (pop 2,500) wishes London success in hosting the modern Olympiad and would be happy to pass on any organisational tips.

JUNE

ANNUAL NETTLE-EATING CONTEST

When: 13 June 2009 (held annually on the second Saturday in June)

Where: The Bottle Inn, Marsham, Dorset

Time: 6.30pm

PR Contact: The Bottle Inn, tel: +44 (0) 1297 678 254

Web: www.thebottleinn.co.uk

An annual contest in which around 30 challengers are encouraged to eat more nettles than the current champion nettle-eater. Contestants are given two-foot long stalks of stinging nettles and have one hour to eat as many leaves as possible. The winner is the person with the longest length of empty stalk. The competition stems from a contest between two farmers in the mid-1980s as to who had the longest stinging nettles. A longest nettle night was established. One day, a contestant called Alex Williams brought in a nettle over 15-foot long and said if anyone had a longer nettle he would eat his. His nettles were subsequently beaten and he duly ate them giving rise to the annual nettle-eating contest. Now people come from all over Europe to watch or take part.

THE WORLD EGG THROWING COMPETITION

When: 28 June 2009

Where: Takes place between Helpringham and Swaton on the B1394 which joins the A52 and A17 Roads, Halfway between Boston and Grantham in Lincolnshire, NG34 0RF

PR Contact: Katie King, PR Assistant, East Midlands Tourism, tel: +44 (0) 115 988 8539

Email: katieking@emd.org.uk

Website: <http://swatonvintageday.sslpowered.com/Press.php>

Contestants have to construct a gravity-powered egg-hurling device to launch an egg to a waiting team member. To achieve points the team member must either catch the egg unbroken or get struck by the egg. As the egg can be traveling at speeds of up to 120 mph this is particularly tricky and relies upon a lob technique to reduce velocity. Distances to be achieved start at 30 meters but can be extended up to 150 in the knock out competition.

Another activity that takes place on the day is the Russian Egg Roulette where two participants select from five hard boiled eggs and one raw egg - and they have to smash them on to their own foreheads. In 2008, BBC's Tom Fordyce, Ben Dirs, Paddy McGuinness and Rory McGrath took part.

JULY

WORLD TOE WRESTLING CHAMPIONSHIP

When: July 2009 (annual). Date TBC

Where: Bentley Brook Inn, Fenny Bentley, Ashbourne, Derbyshire, DE6 1LF

Time: Wrestling begins at 1pm. £2.50 to enter; free to watch

PR Contact: Katie King, PR Assistant, East Midlands Tourism, tel: +44 (0) 115 988 8539

Email: katieking@emd.org.uk

Going way back to 1976, the World Toe Wrestling Championship started at a pub in Wetton, Derbyshire UK. The locals of 'Ye Olde Royal Oak Inn' thought it would be a great idea to hold a toe wrestling competition, where the contestants lock their big toes together, and attempt to force their opponent's foot to the ground. The organisers have big intentions for the sport, and applied in 1997 for it's inclusion in the Olympic Games. Unfortunately for crazy sports fans it was not accepted.

The Bentley Brook Inn in Derbyshire hosts the Ben & Jerry's World Toe Wrestling Championship - a feast of foot foolery, bad wrestling outfits and toeriffically treacherous puns. All proceeds from the event go to the Derbyshire charity When You Wish Upon a Star.

WORLD PEA SHOOTING CHAMPIONSHIPS

When: 11 July 2009 (held on 2nd Saturday in July annually)

Where: Village Green, Witcham, Cambridgeshire

Time: Starts 1pm

PR Contact: Ely Tourist Information Centre, tel: +44 (0) 1353 662 062 or event organiser, Steven Ball, tel: +44 (0)1353 777701

Email: tic@eastcambs.gov.uk or peashoot@witcham.org.uk

Web: www.witcham.org.uk or www.eastcambs.gov.uk/tourism

This international event brings challengers from as far as New Zealand and the USA to compete for the World Pea Shooting trophy. Accuracy, not distance, is the aim of this competition, with contestants shooting a pea through a 12-inch tube, 12 feet towards a 12-inch target. Competition is fierce and laser-guided shooters for specialists are not uncommon, taking pea shooting into the 21st Century. Pea shooters and peas can be bought at the event.

WORLD SNAIL RACING CHAMPIONSHIPS

When: 18 July 2009

Where: The Cricket Field, Lynn Road, Congham, Norfolk

Time: From 2pm

Email: info@snailracing.net

Web: www.snailracing.net

Ready, Steady, Slow! For more than 25 years, the World Snail Racing Championships have been held at Congham, near King's Lynn, in Norfolk. More than 300 snails slug it out for the title of 'Fastest Snail in the World' at the World Snail Racing Championships. Anyone with a snail can enter and a number of heats are held before the grand final. The winner receives a silver tankard stuffed with lettuce. The world record is held by a snail called Archie who completed the 13-inch course (set up on top of a table) in two minutes.

DOGGETT'S COAT AND BADGE RACE

When: July 2009 (always held in July – date TBC. The date is fixed according to the tides)

Where: River Thames, London Bridge to Cadogan Pier, Chelsea, London

PR Contact: The Worshipful Company of Fishmongers, tel: +44 (0) 20 7626 3531

Doggett's Coat and Badge Race started in 1715 by Irish actor and comedian Thomas Doggett in honour of King George I's accession to the throne. It is the oldest single sculling race in the world and is the oldest organised race in English history. In order that the race be continued, Doggett bequeathed money to the Worshipful Company of Fishmongers who still organise it. In his legacy, Doggett provided for prizes, including a splendid red coat and silver badge, which is awarded to the champion oarsman. The winner is especially fitted for the Doggett livery. The coat is a reddish orange colour and is tight-waisted, full-skirted and buttoned down the front. When the coat and silver badge have been made for the winner, he attends a colourful ceremony dating back many years at Fishmongers' Hall at London Bridge. He enters the banqueting room to a fanfare of trumpets and passes a guard of honour of previous winners who are also wearing their Doggett's livery. The course covers just over four and three quarter miles (7.24 km) and is only open to young watermen or women under the age of 26 on the day of the race. The race is watched by crowds of people on London's bridges as well as from boats moored along the route. Some 15-20 boats also follow the race down the Thames.

THE GOOSEBERRY ASSOCIATION SHOW

When: 25 July 2009

There are usually eight shows held on the last Saturday in July and the first Saturday in August in various locations in mid Cheshire.

Where: The Crown, Lower Peover near Knutsford, Cheshire
Victoria Club, Holmes Chapel,
The Crown at Goostery, Cheshire
Village Hall, Lower Withington, Cheshire
The Park Gate Pub, Over Peover, Cheshire
Davenport Arms, Marton, Cheshire
Swettenham Club, Swettenham
Drovers Arms, Allostock

PR Contact: The Crown pub, Lower Peover, tel: 01565 722074

Gooseberry growing is a serious business in Cheshire where the annual gooseberry shows are held. Eight shows are staged throughout late July and August to judge the heaviest single gooseberry, the heaviest 'gooseberry twins' (two berries on the same stalk), the heaviest 'gooseberry triplets' (three berries on the same stalk) and the heaviest plate of 12 (paper plate with 12 berries collected together). The championship plate can contain any combination of the four gooseberry colours - red, yellow, green and white and then there is a plate category for each of the four colours. Dating back to 1809, the shows generate a lot of local excitement and at their peak in 1815, there were more than 120 gooseberry shows held in the regions of Lancashire, Yorkshire, Cheshire, Derbyshire and Staffordshire. Today, the shows are limited to Cheshire and attract about 100 entrants. At the shows, the weight of each gooseberry is carefully recorded in pennyweights and grains. The largest gooseberry ever entered in the competition was as large as a goose egg and weighed in at around 39 pennyweights or 2.16 ounces. This was grown by Kelvin Archer of southern Cheshire who has produced the heaviest gooseberries on more than five occasions.

AUGUST

INTERNATIONAL WORTHING BIRDMAN

When: 22 and 23 August 2009

Where: Worthing Pier, from early afternoon onwards

PR Contact: Sharon Clarke Worthing Town Centre Manager

Email: Sharon@worthingtowncentre.co.uk

Web: www.worthingbirdman.co.uk

The Birdman is a flight competition for human-powered flying machines held each summer in the picturesque seaside resort of Worthing on England's south coast. Many flyers take part to raise money for charities, others design complex machines to aim for the distance prizes. A substantial prize of £30,000 is offered for the furthest flight in excess of the challenge distance of 100 metres. The event attracts contestants from as far away as Germany, Switzerland and the USA. The Birdman competition started in 1971 along the coast in Selsey and then spent 29 years in Bognor Regis before relocating to Worthing in 2008.

ISLE OF WIGHT GARLIC FESTIVAL

When: August 2009 (exact date TBC)

Where: Newchurch, Isle of Wight

PR Contact: Kellie Hodgson, Isle of Wight Council, tel: 01983 823113

Email: kellie@islandbreaks.co.uk

Garlic ice cream, jelly beans, fudge and beer are just some of the unusual garlic-based produce that can be sampled at the Isle of Wight Garlic Festival in Newchurch. The Garlic Marquee features the Isle of Wight's 'Golden Clove' including the popular oak-smoked variety. There are over 250 stalls and many tempting garlic-flavoured products for visitors to try including banana and garlic, and rhubarb and garlic pickles and chutneys, garlic mussels and other seafood, sausages and bread. The festival attracts 25,000 people and is a two-day event organised by

the Newchurch Parish Sports and Community Association. The idea for the festival came about after a visit to the Gilroy Garlic Festival in California and as garlic is grown locally in Newchurch, it was felt a festival to celebrate the garlic harvest was an innovative idea.

CUMBERLAND WRESTLING (GRASMERE LAKELAND SPORTS AND SHOW)

When: 24 August 2009 (Bank Holiday Sunday)

Where: Show Field, Grasmere, Cumbria

PR Contact: George Gale, tel: 015394 34637

Web: www.grasmere.com/events.htm and <http://grasmeresportsandshow.co.uk/>

Grasmere hosts the largest of the traditional Lakeland sport meetings, featuring Cumberland and Westmorland wrestling, hound trails (where trained hounds race after the scent of aniseed over the fells), mountain-bike races and fell races, including the English Hill Championship. There are also events, trade, crafts and antiques stands, refreshments and stalls.

THE WORLD GRAVY WRESTLING CHAMPIONSHIPS

When: 31 August 2009

Where: The Rose & Bowl Inn, Bacup, Rossendale.

Time: Start time 11:30am to approx 3pm.

PR Contact: Caroline Anchor, Lancashire and Blackpool Tourist Board, tel: 01257 226614 or Andy Holt, event organiser, tel: 01706 231029

Email: canchor@lbtbltd.com or : andy@rsireland.co.uk

Web: www.penninelancashirefestivals.com. The new site will be live in May 2009

This saucy event takes place as part of the Pennine Lancashire Festival of Food & Culture 2009. The Festival dates are 1st August - 4th September 2009. The Gravy Wrestling takes place on the second Bank Holiday Monday, 31 August. The teams competing for the title slip and slide about in luke-warm gravy. Team members win points for pinning the opposition down in the gravy.

This event was started in 2007 and brings out the crowds in force to laugh at the proceedings, while TV cameras and the press often record the event for audiences all over the world from Australia to America and Europe to the Far East. The winners will receive the glittering trophy and wallow in fame - if not fortune – as the World Gravy Wrestling Champions of 2009.

SEPTEMBER

WORLD BLACK PUDDING THROWING CHAMPIONSHIPS

When: 13 September 2009 (Second Sunday in September)

Where: Royal Oak, Bridge Street, Ramsbottom, Lancashire

PR Contact: Adrian Frost, Bury Metropolitan District Council tel: +44 (0) 161 253 5897

Email: a.frost@bury.gov.uk

Black Pudding is a type of sausage made from congealed pigs' blood with spices and lumps of fat, wrapped in a length of intestine - the dish is more appealing than the description suggests! The town of Bury in Lancashire is famous for the production of this regional delicacy along with tripe (cow's stomach) and elder (steamed cows'

udder). The aim of the Black Pudding Throwing Championships is to throw a black pudding that has been 'swaddled' or wrapped in a pair of ladies tights at a collection of Yorkshire puddings on a plinth 20 feet up a tower built in the middle of the main street in Ramsbottom. Whoever knocks down the most wins!

EGREMONT CRAB FAIR AND SPORTS (WORLD GURNING CHAMPIONSHIPS)

When: 19 September 2009 (always held on the 3rd Saturday in September)

Where: Baybarrow Sports Field, Orgill, Egremont, Cumbria

Time: The World Gurning Championships start at 6pm.

PR Contact: Nicola Hewitson, Cumbria Tourism press office, tel: +44 (0)15398 25020

Email: nhewitson@cumbriatourism.org

Web: www.golakes.co.uk

The town of Egremont in Cumbria celebrates crab apple time with a unique day of quirky events that are topped off with the World Gurning Championships. Contestants put their heads through a horse collar and have a set time in which to contort their faces in the scariest, most grotesque, silliest expression possible. False teeth may be left in, taken out or turned upside down if desired. The person who gets the most applause for their ugly face wins! The event attracts camera crews from all over the world. The Egremont Crab Fair dates back to 1267 to celebrate the time when the local Lord of the Manor wheeled a cart of crab apples through the village of Egremont as a goodwill gesture to the poor. Crab apples have a sharp taste and it is said the gurning competition originates from the faces the locals made when they bit into the sharp apples.

OCTOBER

WORLD CONKER CHAMPIONSHIPS

When: 11 October 2009 (second Sunday in October)

Where: Village Green, Ashton, near Oundle, Peterborough

Time: 10.30am – 3pm

PR Contact: John Hadman, Ashton Conker Club, Peterborough, tel: +44 (0) 1832 272 735

Web: www.worldconkerchampionships.com

The game of conkers has been a popular pastime of British schoolchildren for decades. The rules are simple. Each player is given a conker attached to a piece of string and takes turns in trying to break their opponent's nut using a swinging motion. The World Conker Championships are held on the village green in Ashton, Peterborough and attract over 300 competitors attempting to become the King or Queen of conkers. There are various categories for the knockout competition – ladies, men, teenagers and children. People can enter as part of a team of four or as individuals. The world tournament came about after a group of local friends had to cancel their annual fishing trip one year. While in the bar, they saw conkers falling onto the village green and went out and had a game. Since 1965, the championships have raised over £300,000 to help various charities for the blind.

HARVEST FESTIVAL OF THE PEARLY KINGS AND QUEENS

When: 12 October 2009 TBC

Where: St Paul's Church, Covent Garden, London

Time: From 10am

PR Contact: St Martins- in-the-Fields Church, Sheillah Fletcher tel: +44 (0) 20 7766 1126

Web: www.pearlysociety.co.uk

Every year in October, the Cockney Pearly Kings and Queens gather in London for a harvest thanksgiving festival, dressed in their traditional costumes of suits, dresses and hats. The elaborate outfits can have as many as 30,000 buttons sewn onto them and can weigh as much as 30 kg or more. The festival begins with a procession of the Pearly princesses who take fruit and vegetable produce to the church as thanks offerings. The tradition of the

Pearly Kings and Queens can be traced to London's street traders who used to elect representatives, known as 'Kings' in order to defend themselves against competitors and the police. The tradition of sewing pearls onto their clothes can be traced to 1875 when an orphan boy called Henry Croft wanted to help the poor of London. To attract attention to his charitable work, he made himself an entire suit covered in pearl buttons. He died in 1930 but his relations carry on the tradition of dressing in pearl embroidered outfits with stars, moons, suns, flowers and mystic symbols on them.

THE APPLE FESTIVAL

When: 17th October 2009

Where: The Parish Green, Ely Cathedral

Time: 10 am until 4 pm

PR Contact: Tracey Harding, tel. 01353 662062

Email: tic@eastcambs.gov.uk

Web: <http://visitely.eastcambs.gov.uk/>

A celebration of the great English apple with a variety of apple related food, drink and wares on sale. The event also features a wide range of apple games, competitions and activities.

NOVEMBER

CARRYING THE TAR BARRELS

When: 5 November 2009.

Where: Town centre, Ottery St Mary, Devon

Time: Starts 4pm

PR Contact: Ottery St Mary Tourist Information Centre, tel: +44 (0) 1404 813 964.

Email: info@otterytourism.org.uk

Web: www.otterytarbarrels.co.uk

On Guy Fawkes night, there is the ritual of carrying the blazing tar barrels, which dates back to 1688. Men carry the flaming barrels on their shoulders until the weight or heat becomes too much for them and another person takes over. This carries on until the barrels start to break up and then they are allowed to burn out. Preparation of the barrels and coating them with tar starts early in the year and some can weigh over 50 pounds (22.68 kg).

A gigantic bonfire over 30 feet (10 metres) high and crowned with Guy Fawkes himself, forms an impressive background to the occasion together with a fairground and many other attractions.

BRIDGWATER GUY FAWKES CARNIVAL

When: 6 November 2009

Where: Bridgwater, Somerset

Time: 7pm

PR Contact: Dave Croker, secretary, Bridgwater Carnival Committee, tel: +44 (0) 1278 421 795

Email: dave@bridgwatcarnival.org.uk

Web: www.bridgwatcarnival.org.uk

The procession takes place after dark and consists of over 80 brilliantly lit floats, with some containing 30,000 light bulbs. There are two different types of float - the 'Tableaux', in which the actors must stand completely still and silent until the procession is over and the 'Features' which involves non-stop music and dancing. When the procession ends at around 10pm there is a Squibbing Display. A long wooden pole is shouldered by various

participants to which a 'Bridgewater Squib' is attached. These are fireworks that are especially-made for the town and which burn with very high fountains of fire. The carnival is first held in Bridgewater and then the floats travel to the neighbouring towns and villages during the week.

BIGGEST LIAR IN THE WORLD COMPETITION

When: 19 November 2009 TBC (usually held on the third Thursday in November)

Where: Bridge Inn, Stanton Bridge, Holmrook, Cumbria

Time: 7pm (ticket only)

PR Contact: Kirsty Murdoch, tel: +44 (0) 1900 820 347 or Bridge Inn, tel: 019467 26221

Email: kirsty.murdoch@marstons.co.uk or info@santonbridgeinn.com

Web: www.santonbridgeinn.com/liar

The World's Biggest Liar Competition is a very popular contest to find the best 'tall-storyteller' and to award the title of 'The Biggest Liar in the World.' The ever-popular contest began in 1974 and continues to attract media attention from around the globe. Contestants travel great distances to pit their oral skills against an elite field of fibbers. There aren't many rules to the competition, however politicians and lawyers aren't welcome! Contestants must tell their 5-10 minute tall tales in front of the judges and the audience. Subjects vary from those based in reality, to being very silly and downright daft! In recent years the audience has learned facts about how the Lake District was formed – not from the ice age or volcanic action – but by large moles and eels. There are also tales of mermaids and kings and of the Pope water-skiing on the back of the QEII! The event is held in memory of Will Ritson, a Cumbrian publican in the 19th century with a gift for telling tall stories.

DECEMBER

THE GREAT CHRISTMAS PUDDING RACE

When: December 2009 (first or second Saturday in December -TBC)

Where: West Piazza, Covent Garden, London

PR Contact: Louise Selman t: 07918 608 499

Email: louise.selman@cancer.org.uk

Web: www.cancerresearchuk.org

London's zany, wet and wild Great Christmas Pudding Race attracts around 150 contestants each year. The race has taken place in Covent Garden every December since 1980. Teams from schools or companies– aged from 14 to 70 - race around a 150-metre course balancing a Christmas pudding on a flimsy paper plate. They have to navigate two slippery inflatables, balloons filled with flour, jets of foam and limbo poles. To complicate things even further, they do it all in fancy dress. Past entrants have included a team of nuns, a caterpillar, a Womble and a Smurf! The race has become part of London's Christmas events calendar and raises money for Cancer Research UK.

UPPIES AND DOONIES – THE BA'

When: 25 December 2009, Christmas Day and 1 January 2010, New Year's Day

Where: Kirkwall, Orkney Islands

Time: 1pm, Mercat Cross on the Kirk Green opposite the Cathedral

PR Contact: Charles Tait, tel: +44 (0) 1856 873738

Email: charles.tait@zetnet.co.uk

Web: www.bagame.com

On Christmas Eve, shopkeepers along Kirkwall's winding streets barricade doors and windows in preparation for the next day's traditional Ba' game. It is a game of mass football played with a ba' – which is a hand-made cork-filled leather ball. The boys and men of the town are designated 'Uppies' and 'Doonies' – an affiliation that

originally depended upon the place of birth. The aim of the game is to carry the ba' to their own territories at the opposite ends of Kirkwall. The Ba' is awarded after the game to a player in the winning side who has been a notable participant over a number of years.

FLAMING BARRELS

When: 31 December 2009, New Year's Eve

Where: Allendale, Northumberland

Time: 11.30pm to Midnight

PR Contact: Hexham Tourist Information Centre, tel: +44 (0) 1434 65 2220

Web: www.northern-pennines.co.uk/allendale.htm and www.hadrianswallcountry.org

The custom of men welcoming in the New Year by carrying pans of blazing tar on their heads is still kept alive in Allendale, Northumberland on New Year's Eve. The unique Pagan ceremony is held at midnight with a colourful procession through the town to the Baal fire. A team of local barrel carriers dressed in fancy costumes, balance flaming whiskey barrels filled with hot tar on their heads through the streets to the town centre. The barrels can weigh as much as 30lbs (15kg). The procession is timed to reach an unlit bonfire shortly before midnight, then each man in turn tosses his flaming 'headgear' on to the bonfire, setting it ablaze. On the stroke of midnight, all join hands and dance around the fire, singing Auld Lang Syne.