



QUIRKY BRITISH EVENTS FOR 2007

A compilation of major quirky annual events and traditions in England, Scotland and
Wales

(Please check dates before publication)

JANUARY

HAXEY HOOD GAME

When: 6 January 2007

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: Lydia Watkins, Lincolnshire Tourism, tel: +44 (0) 1522 561670

Web:

<http://www.northlincs.gov.uk/NorthLincs/Leisure/tourism/placestovisit/placesofhistoricalinterest/HaxeyHood.htm>

The Haxey Hood Game is a game of football traditionally played at Haxey in the county of Lincolnshire on the afternoon of 6 January. The game dates back to the 14th century and the 'hood' is a two-foot long leather cylinder which is used as the ball. Before the game begins, there is a ceremonial procession through the town. The hood is carried by the Fool, who has a blackened face. The Fool is accompanied by the Lord of the Hood, who wears a red jacket and top hat adorned with flowers. They are followed by the Chief Boggan who leads 12 redclad Boggans. Just before the procession arrives at the Mowbray Stone, the Fool makes an attempt at escaping. Then he mounts the Mowbray Stone and makes a speech before straw is set on fire under his feet. They then move to the nearby pitch. Some 100 people are involved in the game in which teams struggle to take the hood to an opposing teams' pub, where the landlord has to treat everyone to a drink!

THE STRAW BEAR FESTIVAL

When: 12, 13 and 14 January 2007

Where: Whittlesey, Cambridgeshire

Time: 10.30am – 3.15pm

PR Contact: Brian Kell, tel: +44 (0)1733 208 245

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

UP- HELLY- AA

When: 9 February 2007

Where: South Nesting

PR Contact: Michaela Hay, Visit Shetland, tel: +44 (0) 1595 693 434

Email: michaela.hay@visitscotland.com

The Up Helly Aa is a fire festival involving a torchlit procession, the burning of a Viking longship and a ceilidh which lasts late into the night. In Nesting and Girsta (South Nesting on Mainland) they believe that the festival heralds the end of winter and the beginning of spring. The burning of the Viking galley also commemorates the way a Viking warrior was cremated: by being pushed out into the sea in his trusty longship to drift to Valhalla.

ST IVES FEAST AND HURLING OF THE SILVER BALL

When: 5 February 2007 (first Monday after 3 February)

Where: Throughout the town of St Ives

Time: 9.30am start. Hurling starts at 10.30am at The Guildhall

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

Web: www.telematics.ex.ac.uk/realcornwall/sportsandgames

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.

OLNEY PANCAKE RACE

When: 20 February 2007

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 Shroving 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.

MOONRAKING FESTIVAL

When: February 2008 (note, no event planned for 2007)

Where: Huddersfield, West Yorkshire

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

Email: stuart.render@firstgroup.com or MrMoon@slaithwaitemoonraking.org

Web: www.slaithwaitemoonraking.org

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 1500 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 procession includes jazz, carnival and brass bands and follows a route along Hill Top and down Cimble Bank to the canal. At the canal, performers re-enact the moonshining tale. Several men are dressed as gnomes, a woman is dressed as the moonraking fairy and two fancy dress policemen play the bagpipes. They all tow a moon-shaped lantern mounted on a float along the canal before lifting it out. The women use rakes to help the lantern float along. The celebrations end with a firework display.

YELL UP-HELLY-AA

When: 24 February 2007

Where: Yell

PR Contact: Alec Nicholson, Cullivoe Up Helly Aa, tel +44 (0) 1957 744 244 or Michaela Hay, Visit Shetland, tel: +44 (0) 1595 693 434

Email: michaela.hay@visitscotland.com

Web: www.up-helly-aa.org.uk

Yell, the second-most northerly of the main Shetland Islands, hosts its own traditional Viking fire festival, the Up Helly Aa, at the village of Cullivoe, on the island's north-east coast, overlooking the island of Unst. Whether a greeting for spring, or a celebration of the returning sun, the tradition of Up Helly Aa - held by a number of settlements across the Shetlands during January and February - fills the darkness of a winter's night from dawn to dusk with fire processions, participants wielding great blazing briars, and always ends up with a party through the night.

MARCH**BRAE UP-HELLY-AA**

When: 16 March 2007 (3rd Friday of every March)

Where: Brae, Shetland Islands

PR Contact: Michaela Hay, Visit Shetland, tel: +44 (0) 1595 693 434

Email: michaela.hay@visitscotland.com

Web: www.visitshetland.com

Brae's Up Helly Aa Viking Festival is the last one of the season, and is the last opportunity to engage in sacrificial ship-burning and sun-worship until next year.

WORLD POOH STICKS CHAMPIONSHIPS

When: 18 March 2007

Where: Days Lock Island, near the Whittenham Clumps, River Thames, Oxfordshire

PR Contact: David Caswell, Organiser, Rotary Club of Sinodun, Wallingford

Tel: +44 (0) 1491 838 294

Email: david@dcaswell.F9.co.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 17th Annual World Pooh Sticks Championships is set to attract around 1000 people, many in fancy dress. Competing families and bears take part 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.

APRIL

WORLD MARBLES CHAMPIONSHIPS

When: 6 April 2007 (Good Friday)

Where: Greyhound Pub, Tinsley Green, Crawley, West Sussex

PR Contact: Crawley Visitor Information Centre, tel: +44 (0) 1293 846 968 or Sam or Julia McCarthy-Fox, tel: 01403 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 the world take part including Canada, the USA and Germany and 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.

BOTTLE KICKING AND HARE PIE SCRAMBLE

When: 9 April 2007 TBC (Easter Monday)

Where: Hallaton, Leicestershire

PR Contact: Simon Gribbon, Leicestershire Promotions tel: +44 (0) 116 225 4000 or Festival Chairman, Phil Allen, tel: +44 (0) 1858 555 310.

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.

WORLD COAL CARRYING CHAMPIONSHIPS

When: 9 April 2007 (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: susanwalshaw@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.

WELL DRESSING

When: Early April through to mid September 2007

Where: All over Derbyshire – Tissington, Buxton, Buxworth

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

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.

MAY

CHEESE ROLLING

When: 28 May 2007, Bank Holiday Monday (always held on the second Bank Holiday Monday in May)

Where: Coopers Hill, Brockworth, Gloucestershire

Time: 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 in pursuit of a giant Double Gloucester cheese. There are four downhill races in total including one for the ladies. The race starts with the master of ceremonies rolling a 7- 8 lb (4kg) Double

Gloucester cheese down the hill. Dozens of competitors including rugby players and Gurkhas run, roll and somersault down the hill after it. It is impossible not to fall over due to the rough uneven slope with a 1:2 gradient. The winner takes home the cheese as well as a few cuts and bruises. The event is very popular with international competitors including New Zealanders and Canadians and attracts lots of media interest around the world. Some four thousand 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: 28 May 2007 , Bank Holiday Monday (always held on the second Bank Holiday Monday in May)

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

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 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 is heavy going for even the fittest competitor. The event attracts puzzled spectators from across the world and raises money for local charities. The race dates back to the 17th century when Tetbury was a noted wool town. It is thought the race started when local drovers - egged on by drink and wanting to impress the ladies - raced each other uphill with heavy woolsacks.

JUNE

ROBERT DOVER'S COTSWOLD OLIMPICKS (Shin Kicking)

When: 1st June 2007 (always held on the first Friday after Whitsun which is the first Friday in June)

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.

ANNUAL NETTLE-EATING CONTEST

When: 16 June 2007

Where: The Bottle Inn, Marsh Wood, Dorset

Time: 6.30pm

PR Contact: Shane Pym tel: +44 (0) 1297 678 254

Web: www.thebottleinn.co.uk

An annual contest in which around 50 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.

MAN v HORSE RACE

When: 9 June 2007

Where: The race starts from the square in Llanwrtyd Wells, Powys (the smallest town in Britain) at 11.00 a.m. and finishes at approximately 1.00 p.m. at the Victoria Wells Forest Log Cabins.

PR Contact: Debbie Harniman, Green Events Press Officer, tel: +44 (0) 1591 610 265 or +44 (0) 1591 610 666

Email: debbieharniman@aol.com

Web: www.man-v-horse.org.uk

The Man v Horse race has been running for 26 years. The spectacular course is 22 miles long and involves farm tracks, footpaths, forestry roads and open moorland. Riders compete against runners to be the first to finish the course. In June 2004 - for the first time in the history of the race - 27 year old Huw Lobb (South of England cross country champion) crossed the finish line two minutes 17 seconds faster than the first horse home and claimed the £25,000 prize money. The Man v Horse Race is the brainchild of local pub landlord Gordon Green after a discussion over a pint about the relative merits of man and horse. Gordon Green is chairman of the Man v Horse Committee (tel: +44 (0) 1591 610 270).

JULY

WORLD PEA SHOOTING CHAMPIONSHIPS

When: 14 July 2007

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

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

This international event brings challengers from as far afield 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. £1 to enter (TBC).

WORLD MOUNTAIN BIKE BOG SNORKELLING CHAMPIONSHIPS

When: 7 July 2007

Where: Waun Rhydd peat bog, Llanwrtyd Wells, Powys, mid Wales

PR Contact: Debbie Harniman, Green Events Press Officer, tel: +44 (0) 1591 610 265 or +44 (0) 1591 610 666

Email: debbieharniman@aol.com

Web: www.llanwrtyd-wells.powys.org.uk/eventbogbike.htm

The World Mountain Bike Bog Snorkelling Championships are held in Waun Rhydd peat bog and attract about 30 riders. Started up by local man Gordon Green in 1998, competitors must cycle two lengths of a six foot deep trench which is 45 yards long on a special lead-weighted bike. They must also wear a weighted backpack. The 2005 record holder is Roger Heslop, whose time was 48 seconds. The winner takes home a glass engraved goblet.

WORLD SNAIL RACING CHAMPIONSHIPS

When: 21 July 2007

Where: The Cricket Field, Congham, King's Lynn

Time: 2pm for the heats. Final 4.30pm

PR Contact: Hilary Scase, Church Warden, St Andrews Church tel: +44 (0) 1485 600 650

Email: news@scase.co.uk

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. The championships are held as part of the Congham Fete which raises funds for the town's 13th Century St Andrews Church.

DOGGETT'S COAT AND BADGE RACE

When: 11 July 2007 (always held in July, but the date is fixed according to the tides)

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

Time: Starts at 11.30 at London Bridge

PR Contact: George Saunders, The Company of Watermen and Lightermen of the River Thames, tel: +44 (0) 20 7283 2373

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: 29 July 2007

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.

AMLWCH VIKING FESTIVAL

When: July 2008 (TBC) – the event is held every two years

Where: Anglesey

PR Contact: Arwel Hughes, tel: +44 (0) 7768 860 961

Email: arwel@madsoundandlighting.com

Web: www.amlwch.net/vikings.asp

Some 200 authentically equipped warriors and villagers recreate the early 10th Century political rivalry on the Island, leading to internecine treachery and the eventual Battle of Ros Meilion to expel the Vikings. Walk around a working 10th Century encampment, experience a Viking wedding, see the Vikings at work creating their original crafts, listen to their banter, soak up the atmosphere. Move on to the traditional craft stalls and enjoy a cut from the hog roast as you watch the spectacular display and battles.

AUGUST

SCOTTISH ALTERNATIVE GAMES

When: 5 August 2007. Held on the first Sunday of every August

Where: New Galloway Park, Castle Douglas, Scotland

PR Contact: Scottish Alternative Games, tel: +44 (0) 1644 420374

Email: info@scottish-alternative-games.com

Web: www.scottish-alternative-games.com

Not like traditional Highland Games, the Scottish Alternative Games take place in New Galloway Park every August. Gone are the caber-tossing and bagpiping. In their place traditional agricultural games allow everyone to join in. Things like gird and cleek racing, tossing the sheaf, hurlin' the curlin' stane, Balmaclellan skittles, snail racing, axe throwing, tractor pulling and - in common with the real Highland Games - the tug of war.

WORLD PIPE BAND CHAMPIONSHIP

When: 11 August 2007

Where: Glasgow Green, Greendyke Street, Glasgow

PR Contact: Glasgow City Council Press Office, Tel: 0141 287 2000, Email: pr@glasgow.gov.uk

The World Pipe Band Championships have been associated with Glasgow since 1948 and are a celebration of the very best of Scottish music, culture and dance. The event will see over 8,000 pipers and drummers from across the globe competing at Glasgow Green for the coveted title of World Champions 2007.

RACE THE TRAIN

When: 18 August 2007

Where: Tallylyn Railway, Tywyn

PR Contact: Mr Watson, race organiser, tel: 0788 78 00 284

Email: info@racethetrain.co.uk

Web: www.racethetrain.co.uk

Race the Train takes place alongside, as far as practicable, the route taken by the Tallylyn Railway on its journey to Abergynolwyn and back. In order to do this, all courses use a mixture of public roads, lanes, unmetalled roads, tracks, agricultural land, and rough grazing pastures. In the case of the Main Races (approximately 14.75 miles long) and 10km races, the route is much tougher as it crosses the faces of the hillsides, ascends and descends quite steep terrain and runs on narrow footpaths with little chance of overtaking. The terrain varies all the time and can be very wet and muddy in places, the routes also involve some steep hills. Often the train, or for many runners the track, is just over the fence and in many places if you coincide with the train any family or friends on the train will be able to shout encouragement.

ISLE OF WIGHT GARLIC FESTIVAL

When: 18 and 19 August 2007 (TBC)

Where: Newchurch, Isle of Wight

PR Contact: Rosemary Norman tel: +44 (0) 1983 863 566 mobile: +44 (0) 7817 899041

Email: info@garlic-festival.co.uk

Web: www.garlicfestival.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: 26 August 2007 (Bank Holiday Sunday)

Where: Show Field, Grasmere, Cumbria

PR Contact: Chris Lane, show director, tel: +44 (0)15394 32127

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.

WORLD BOG SNORKELLING CHAMPIONSHIPS

When: 27 August 2007 (Always held on the last August Bank Holiday Monday)

Start time: 11am (the event finishes at nightfall)

Where: Waun Rhydd Bog, Llanwrtyd Wells, Powys

PR Contact: Debbie Harniman, Green Events Press Officer tel: +44 (0) 1591 610 265 or

+44 (0) 1591 610 666

Email: debbieharniman@aol.com

Web: www.worldbogsnork.com or www.green-events.co.uk

The World Bog Snorkelling Championships is an international sporting event which takes place annually on August Bank Holiday Monday in Waun Rhydd peat bog on the outskirts of the smallest town in Britain – Llanwrtyd Wells in Powys, mid Wales. The aim of the championships is to swim two lengths (about 115 metres) of a peaty, murky trench, which has been dug out of the Waun Rhydd peat bog, in the quickest time possible. Competitors wear snorkels and flippers. Wet suits are optional but strongly recommended. Snorkelling across the smelly and dirty bog is popular with hardy individuals from all over the world. Competitors come from as far afield as Australia, America and Europe as well as from Britain for the pleasure of taking part. Some 100 people are expected to enter the competition in 2007. The snorkeller with the fastest time wins a small cash prize. Organised by 'Green Events', the novel event was originally thought up by a local pub landlord Gordon Green in 1986 in a bid to boost tourism to the area.

VICTORIAN FESTIVAL

When: 18 - 26 August 2007

Where: Llandrindod Wells

PR Contact: Mandy Davies, tel; +44 (0) 1597 823 441

Email: mandy@Victorianfestival.co.uk

Web: www.victorianfestival.co.uk

This popular festival is going from strength to strength. As Llandrindod was a thriving spa resort in the Victorian era it seemed natural to base the festival on the Victorian theme. Horses and carriages, Victorian window displays, townspeople and some visitors sporting a whole range of appropriate costumes help to create an atmosphere, the effect of which is nothing short of miraculous. At the end of the nine days, the proceedings are closed in the grandest of manners with the moving torchlight procession and fireworks display over the lake – a spectacle not to be missed.

SEPTEMBER

NATIONAL MUD FESTIVAL

When: 8 - 9 September 2007

Where: Llanelli, National Wetlands Centre

PR Contact: Jo Hicks, tel: +44 (0) 1554 741087

Email: info.llanelli@wwt.org.uk

Web: www.wwt.org.uk/visit/llanelli

The 'Mud Festival' has a number of activities on both days including well dressing (designing and decorating clay with organic matter e.g. berries, flowers), Mud Hut constructions, mud sculptures, cosmetic displays & a walk along the estuary to see the importance of mud. Also, there will be competitions for all the family in 'welly wanging' - throwing a welly as far into the estuary as you can – and 'Mud of War' (tug-of-war). Teams can be entered.

INTERNATIONAL BOGNOR BIRDMAN

When: 1-2 September 2007

Where: Bognor Regis

PR Contact: Paul Beckerson, Bognor Regis Town Council, tel: +44 (0) 1243 825 535

Email: paulbeckerson@bognorregis.gov.uk

Web: www.birdman.org.uk

The Birdman is a flight competition for human-powered flying machines held each summer in the picturesque seaside resort of Bognor Regis 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 £25,000 is offered for the furthest flight over 100 metres. The competition started in 1971 along the coast in Selsey but has become such a popular event with contestants from Germany and Switzerland that it had to move to the Bognor Regis pier.

WORLD BLACK PUDDING THROWING CHAMPIONSHIPS

When: 9 September 2007 (TBC)

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 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 on the side of the pub wall. Whoever knocks down the most wins!

EGREMONT CRAB FAIR AND SPORTS (WORLD GURNING CHAMPIONSHIPS)

When: 15 September 2007 (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: Derek Shutt, secretary, Egremont Crab Fair and Sports, tel: +44 (0) 1946 820 564

Web: www.cumbria.uk.com/cumbria/fun/gurner.htm

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

GOLDEN SPURTLE WORLD PORRIDGE MAKING CHAMPIONSHIPS

When: 7 October 2007

Where: Carrbridge, near Aviemore. Cairngorms National Park.

PR Contact: Linda Jolly, tel: +44 (0) 1479 841 211

Email: worldporridge@aol.com

Web: www.goldenspurtle.com

The annual World Porridge Making Championships is followed with interest by connoisseurs of Scotland's national dish across the world. Traditional porridge and speciality sections. Pipe band led parade of competitors and judges, official Toast to the Porridge. Also incorporating Cairngorm Farmers Market, stalls, product tastings and live music.

HARVEST FESTIVAL OF THE PEARLY KINGS AND QUEENS

When: 7 October 2007 (held on the first Sunday in October)

Where: St Martin-in-the-Fields, Trafalgar Square, London

Time: 3 - 4pm

PR Contact: St Martins- in-the-Fields Church, Sheillah Fletcher tel: +44 (0) 20 7766 1126 or Pam Harman, event secretary, tel: +44 (0) 1438 237 979. Address: 343 Jessop Road, Stevenage, Hertfordshire, SG1 5LU (no email address).

Web: www.pearlyociety.co.uk

Each 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.

WORLD CONKER CHAMPIONSHIPS

When: 14 October 2007 (second Sunday in October)

Where: Village Green, Ashton, near Oundle, Peterborough

Time: 9.30am – 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 around 400 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.

NOVEMBER

BRIDGWATER GUY FAWKES CARNIVAL

When: 9 November 2007

Where: Bridgwater, Somerset

Time: 7pm

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

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 whom a 'Bridgwater 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 Bridgwater and then the floats travel to the neighbouring towns and villages during the week.

CARRYING THE TAR BARRELS

When: 5 November 2007.

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@ottertourism.org.uk

Web: www.otterytourism.org.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.

BIGGEST LIAR IN THE WORLD COMPETITION

When: 15 November 2007 (always 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

Email: kirsty.murdoch@wdbbrands.co.uk

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 some 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 *Queen Elizabeth II* cruise ship! The event is held in memory of Will Kitson, a Cumbrian publican in the 19th century with a gift for telling tall stories.

DECEMBER**THE GREAT CHRISTMAS PUDDING RACE**

When: December 2007 (first or second Saturday in December -TBC)

Where: West Piazza, Covent Garden, London

PR Contact: Jacqueline Fitzgerald, Cancer Research UK tel: +44(0) 20 7438 5431

Email: jacqueline.fitzgerald@cancer.org.uk

Web: www.ukstudentlife.com/ideas/album/puddingrace or www.cancerresearchuk.org check

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 2007, Christmas Day and 1 January 2008, 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.

BOXING DAY WALRUS DIP

When: 26 December 2007, Boxing Day

Where: Pembrey Country Park, Carmarthenshire

Time: 11am at Cefn Sidan Beach, at Pembrey Country Park

PR Contact: Neil Perry, manager of Pembrey Country Park, tel: +44 (0)1554 833 913

Email: naperry@sirgar.gov.uk

Web: www.carmarthenshire.gov.uk/eng/index.asp

The event has developed into a popular spectator sport since the park threw open its gates to the public for the Boxing Day event in 1986. In the past, swimmers have come dressed as anything from bananas to fish and walruses. Some of the most popular costumes include people dressed up as wedding guests and cowboys and Indians.

STONEHAVEN FIREBALLING FESTIVAL

When: 31 December 2007, New Year's Eve

Where: Old Market Cross, Stonehaven, Kincardineshire, Scotland

Time: Midnight

PR Contact: Martin Sim, event organiser. Tel: +44 (0) 1569 762 300

Email: martinsim@talk21.com

Web: www.stonehavenfireballs.co.uk

Thousands gather at the Old Market Cross in the fishing port of Stonehaven for this fiery festival to welcome in the New Year. A traditional pipe band signals the start of the proceedings and at the stroke of midnight, fireballs are lit and participants whirl the baskets of fire around their heads as they march to the old cannon in the High Street and back to the harbour. This New Year festival has been celebrated for hundreds of years to literally burn the bad spirits of the past year and welcome in the new. The fireballs are baskets made of wire netting, stuffed with driftwood, pine cones and twigs and attached to a length of wire with a handle at the end. Before they are lit they are doused in paraffin.

FLAMING BARRELS

When: 31 December 2007, New Year's Eve

Where: Allendale, Northumberland

When: 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.

December 2006