

Mid Summer's Eve Bonfire



Liskeard Mayor, Christina Whitty, lighting the Old Cornwall Society's Mid Summer's eve bonfire last Friday evening, 23rd June with Rev Becca Bell, Vicar of St Cleer officiating. The Mayor's Consort, Terry Whitty and Councillor Jane Pascoe were also attending the ceremony.

Similar ceremonies were held throughout Cornwall, originally as beacons that could be seen from one hilltop to the next for the length of the County, from Camborne to Bodmin, Bury Down (Lanreath), to St Cleer, Kit Hill and Rame Head. Today such bonfire are held at Redruth, St Column, Liskeard and Kit Hill sponsored by their local Old Cornwall Societies.

In ancient times such ceremonies were associated with the longing for a prolonged summer to ensure a bountiful harvest. Such bonfires held great significance with dance and feasting, even the purging of any village evils and witches. Any suspected wrongdoers would be brought before the bonfire and expected to take a burning brand from the fire and quench the flame with their own saliva spitting at the flame until extinguished, should they fail, it was proof of their guilt.

The Liskeard Old Cornwall Society were re-enacting this ceremony as early as 1929 with over one thousand supporters venturing out from the town to St Cleer Downs in a shuttle of four charabancs, (open air buses with an individual door for each row of seats). At these ceremonies, a herbal wreath in the form of a sickle and witches hat were thrown onto the pyre.

In 1932 it is recorded that the Liskeard Old Cornwall Society held their Midsummer's Eve Bonfire supported by the Town Band and held such activities as the Furry Dance and served an abundance of tea, pastys and saffron cake.

