

Albury Bonfire Boys originated in 1887 through the efforts of Mr. William Barber, a plumber and blacksmith employed by Poulterers, the blacksmiths of Albury.

His daughter, Ethel Barber aged 4 years, underwent a serious operation for the removal of a large gallstone, this being unusual in such a young child. This operation was performed at the R.S.C.H. Guildford. Wishing to show his gratitude to the Hospital he made a sealed money-box in which he placed all extra gratuities received by him for the shoeing of horses. At that time, horses being very numerous, there was quite a queue waiting down the street for the services of the Blacksmiths. When the box was full it was opened and the money sent to the R.S.C.Hospital.

The local press, hearing of this, printed an article stating that Mr. Barber had received an unexpected financial windfall. This being quite untrue the Hospital apologised for this misleading statement.

At that time the Hospital depended a great deal on voluntary support, he then decided to try to raise money on a larger scale. So with the help of his family and others he set about doing this. He and his son Jim Barber built a model of the Hospital which was pushed round for exhibition on a three-wheeled truck.

Vegetables were collected and sold from a horse-drawn coaster cart and a Fancy Dress Torchlight procession took place in November and so the Albury Bonfire Boys were launched. Mr. William Barber took an active interest in the "Boys" until his death in 1942 at the age of 95. These facts were given to me by his daughter, Mrs. Bullock of Farley Green now aged over eighty years, who is our guest here this evening.

The Bonfire Boys were to go on for more than 50 years. In the early days many of the members were employed at the Chilworth Gunpowder Mills which proved to be the main supplier of cotton waste for the torches as shewn (a replica). Also the Powder Works provided the meal and blasting powder used in the illicit manufacture of a particular type of firework known as a "Mover" for which the Parish of Albury was renowned. The procession was headed by the local Constabulary, the Albury Brass Band, also the Albury Drum and Fife Band and a banner emblazoned with the words "Our Motto is Law and Order".

In the early years some of the boys' activities such as the rolling up and down the street of open ended Burning Tar Barrels were not appreciated by the Law, and other events such as the attempted burning of an effigy of a very unpopular local police officer caused the Riot Act to be read from the steps of the Black Horse Gomshall, the effigy was then smuggled away and put into a railway goods wagon and taken to Chilworth where it was publicly burned on the green in front of the station at a later date. The officer was subsequently removed to a distant village.

The Association was postponed during the 1914-18 war, resuming again in the 1920s as the Albury, Blackheath and Chilworth Bonfire Boys.. Interest quickly revived and the torchlight procession now visited all three villages with permits to collect at houses en route. Members dressed in fancy dress, or as guys with collecting boxes

now made of cocoa tins etc. with lids soldered on. The torches were now made from used carbide tins stuffed with sacking soaked in paraffin.

The Albury Band and the Friary Brewery Band attended for many years.

Later the members made up a Jazz Band, finally a Mouth Organ Band, was formed with drums which, in spite of very sore and swollen lips, proved quite melodious and successful.

The coster carts - which were now lorries supplied by F.H. Woods and F. Holt & Sons - loaded with fruit and vegetables donated from many sources was manned by the coster Capt. and his helpers who sold them on the routes.

Potatoes were baked in the bread ovens by Kings the bakers and sold along the way by Mr. William King from his motorbike and sidecar.

The Surrey Standing Joint Committee issued permits for the procession to take place on three separate nights over a period of two weeks.

The final procession round Farley Green, Brook and Albury Heath, ending at the mammoth bonfire on the Heath near the William IVth. The material for this fire being given and built by the Albury Estate under the supervision of the Head Forester Mr. Bruce.

The grand finale of these efforts was a Whist Drive and Fancy Dress Dance held in Albury Village Hall which was packed to capacity and the event of the Winter season.

The Raffle was drawn at this dance, which often included more than 100 prizes, donated by local people and tradespeople and business houses in Guildford and Dorking etc. on one occasion two pictures were donated by H.M. Queen Mary.

Preparations began for the events several months beforehand including making the torches, collecting boxes, committee meetings etc. These meetings taking place at the Albury Working Men's Club and the William IVth.

Over the years many well known names come to mind associated with the hard work of the Bonfire Boys in all weathers including Mr. Jim Barber son of the founder right through to the final meeting also

Arrows	Grovers	Osbornes
Brownes	Harrison	Sherlocks
Bullen	Haywards	Small
Cooper	Holts	Smith
Cumpers	Killick	Tugwells
Davis	Knapps	Woods
G. Etherington	Miles	and countless others.
Gadds	Newmans	

I must emphasise the great part the women took in the activities of the Bonfire Boys. Notably Mrs. Jim Barber, Mrs. Herbert Woods and Miss Nellie Poulter

who was known as the Albury Bonfire Girl. She was the first holder of the "Cadgers Cup" presented by Captain Allee who lived at Sherborne Farm.

Miss Poulter was at one time Vice Chairman of the Association. Mr. William Dyson, the Headmaster of Albury School for many years, was the Chairman. He was affectionately known as "The Gaffer". The moneys collected were donated to the Guildford Hospitals and the Surrey Convalescent Home at Worthing.

My grateful thanks go to Mr. Vic Woods, the last Chairman of the Albury Bonfire Boys, for the Records which he so ably kept recorded to which I have had access.

Formed	-	Approx. 1887
Disbanded	-	27/3/1947.

This talk was given to the Albury History Society by Mr. Jack Browne.