

Moving Home Carnival 2010

"Lanterns"

The Moving Home Carnival Project involved well over a hundred local people in creating a human powered float and lantern procession for the annual Frome Carnival 2010. Flourish homes, the local housing association, funded the project and helped to publicise the event to their tenants and the wider community.

Lantern making workshops, run by artists Mel Day and Fiona Quinn, were held in various locations in and around Frome. These attracted many families who enjoyed working together on their own designs. In the two weeks leading up to the carnival the Silk Mill, an arts space in the middle of the town, became a base for activities.

People came to spend an hour or sometimes much more, working with the artists and members of the Home in Frome group. They made lanterns and shadow puppets and helped to build the float. It was a friendly and creative space, a hive of activity as word spread and more people came to help with preparations.

Throughout the process, ideas for the design of the float and procession were worked out through collaboration and experimentation with the support of the artists and other skilled individuals from the community. Designing the float involved a team of technically minded people taking the challenge of creating a twelve foot high construction which was light enough to carry but strong enough to hold together. Another challenge was to use low energy lighting to light the float which was successfully achieved.

The house-shaped float was modeled on the Cornish Build houses of Randolph Road and Singers Knoll with their distinctive mansard roofs. These are in the process of being demolished for the redevelopment of the area. Home in Frome have been documenting this process of change with the tenants of the houses through film and photography. The carnival project took this further by creating a float that reflected this theme of Moving Home.

In the early evening as people started gathering for the procession, lanterns were lit, shadow puppeteers got into position inside the house, the Frome Street Bandits, with flowerpots on their heads to create a garden effect, tuned up and began to play. The float was lifted by a team of willing volunteers to begin its journey through the streets of Frome.

There was applause as the Home float passed crowds of over 20,000, and genuine delight from children and adults alike as they watched the antics of the shadow puppets and saw the smoke rising from the chimney. There were also calls of appreciation as people recognised the house as a replica of those on Randolph Road and Singers Knoll where some of them used to live.

The Carnival Project was a great success bringing people together in creating and taking part in an enjoyable, meaningful and magical and celebration of Home in Frome.

Home in Frome Carnival 2010.

A write up by participant Tom Morley:

The obvious home-made-ness of the 'Home in Frome' procession, from the hilarious hats of the band at the front, to the jostling paper lanterns at the back, allowed everyone to breathe a sigh of relief. Here came a dedicatedly eccentric bunch of musicians announcing a candle-lit, six-foot storybook house, made of paper, sticks and glue. Borne aloft by people happy to shoulder the weight of their own creation, the sight of the house caused a ripple of recognition to run through the crowd. What were they responding too? The older people seemed to be reminded of nights around the hearth, their faces lighting up at the memories of warm family evenings. The younger ones were drawn to the antics of the puppets, nudging each other and pointing excitedly to each new cheeky discovery. It was like all going back in time together. We seemed to have conjured up an ancestral memory: our souls were called home, and even the teenagers responded with reluctant smiles.

'Home in Frome' was irresistible because, along with the comforting simplicity of the materials, came the sophisticated artistry of the silhouetted puppets, crafted with obvious care and expertise. Combined with the nonchalant excellence of the band, the onlookers were reminded of something they'd unconsciously been missing for years. Their delight at having it returned to them was tangible. Non-engagement didn't seem to be an option, their attention reached out, causing them to smile, laugh and applaud. The procession could be described as casually but knowingly generous, no pomp, no ceremony, just an exquisite example of how life can still be mysterious and fun when local imagination is set free to dance in the street.