

Bonfire Night reflections...

Dc on Tue 5th November 2013 at The Blue Mugge

1. Bonfire Night – any memories and reflections. Burning effigies has a long history. Actually Bonfire Night celebrations have long been quite detached from any cruelties and prejudices. Do we agree on this?
2. Death by burning also has a long history - Wikipedia gives much detail on this but there is no need here to rehearse the unspeakable cruelties involved. Our main concern is with 'Man's inhumanity to Man'. Why such cruelty - punishment for: heresy (a hard religious heritage); rebellion; criminal activity; adultery...
3. Consider witchcraft and witch-hunts. There were many executions of witches in the 300-year period of European history when condemnation of witchcraft was at its height. Most condemned were women, of course.
4. Hilary Mantel's recent novels about the Tudor period portray the terribly cruel attitudes of Saint Thomas More, sanctioning torture and executions. In that period few people were against burning (some) people at the stake.
5. Public executions of all kinds have been almost universal for much of human history. Was there something in human nature and the human psyche which determined this?
6. The last public execution in Britain took place in Lichfield in the mid-C19. Since then in Britain and most other countries not just public executions but any executions have been banned by law. More recently cruelty to animals (of certain kinds at least) has also been banned by law.
7. Today most of us would refuse absolutely to attend or witness for 'pleasure' any public execution – or cruelty to animals.
8. On the other hand - we may positively watch and enjoy *Joan of Arc* (knowing the end) in the theatre and cinema, or *King Lear* and other dramatisations of human cruelty. Contemporary crime and horror films are often extremely violent. 'She loves a good murder' has been said of many an elderly lady.
9. Also, recent and contemporary war situations with fire-bombing (the use of napalm); terrorist acts; the use of Drones involves awful suffering.
10. What does all this tell us about human nature and culture