

Title:

A Brief History Of The Fairground Industry

Word Count:

444

Summary:

A brief history detailing the development of the fairground industry in the United Kingdom

Keywords:

fairground, funfair, history, amusements

Article Body:

Fairs in this country have a long and ancient history, deeply rooted in tradition.

The word fair is derived from the Latin 'feria', meaning a holiday and at one time the Romans were credited with the introduction of fairs.

It is now generally accepted that their origins are from pagan customs of the people who first settled this land; their seasonal gatherings held for the purposes of both trade and festivity, contained within them the essential elements of the fair.

The Romans did much to promote fairs by improving trade and communications throughout the country.

During the centuries following the departure of the Romans, many fairs and other festivals were incorporated into the calendar of the growing Christian Church.

Charters granted by the sovereign gave the fair legal status and an increasing importance in the economic life of the nation.

Merchants and traders from Europe, the Middle East and beyond were drawn to the great chartered fairs of the Middle Ages bringing with them a wealth of goods.

The sheer number of these fairs, no fewer than 4860 were chartered between the years 1200 and 1400, drew not only merchant but entertainers as well: jugglers, musicians and tumblers - the ancestors of today's showmen.

The Black Death of 1348-49 brought about a new kind of fair.

In order to stem the rise in wages caused by the shortage of workers, Edward III introduced the Statute of Labourers.

This compelled all able bodied men to present themselves annually for hire at a stated wage.

These gathering or hiring fairs were held mainly around Michealmas, the end of the agricultural year.

By the early eighteenth century the trading aspects of the charter fairs had waned and most fairs consisted almost entirely of amusements, acrobats, illusionists and theatrical companies all plied their trade on fairgrounds.

Around this time the first fairground rides began to appear, small crudely constructed out of wood and propelled by gangs of boys.

In 1868, Frederick Savage, a successful agricultural engineer from Kings Lynn, devised a method of driving rides by steam.

His invention, a steam engine mounted in the centre of the ride was to transform the fairground industry.

Freed from the limitations of muscle power, rides could be made larger, more capacious and more heavily ornamented.

The showman's demand for novelty was matched by the ingenuity of Savage and other engineers.

In the wake of the steam revolution an amazing variety of new designs and rides appeared.

These rides were the forerunners of today's amazing thrill rides, over time innovations such as electric lighting, electric motors, hydraulics etc. allowed rides to evolve into the amazing devices that are seen today at any local fairground.