

Handwritten shorthand for 'Fireworks Display' (row 1, column 1)

Handwritten shorthand for 'Fireworks Display' (row 2, column 1)

Handwritten shorthand for 'Fireworks Display' (row 3, column 1)

Handwritten shorthand for 'Fireworks Display' (row 4, column 1)

Handwritten shorthand for 'Fireworks Display' (row 5, column 1)

Handwritten shorthand for 'Fireworks Display' (row 6, column 1)

Handwritten shorthand for 'Fireworks Display' (row 1, column 2)

Handwritten shorthand for 'Fireworks Display' (row 2, column 2)

Handwritten shorthand for 'Fireworks Display' (row 3, column 2)

Handwritten shorthand for 'Fireworks Display' (row 4, column 2)

Handwritten shorthand for 'Fireworks Display' (row 5, column 2)

Handwritten shorthand for 'Fireworks Display' (row 6, column 2)

Handwritten shorthand symbols for 'Fireworks Display'.

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Handwritten shorthand for 'The fireworks display'.

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Handwritten shorthand symbols on a blue-lined background.

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Fireworks Display

Last Saturday was Fireworks Night here in the UK. Instead of hugging the radiator and rushing to the window to see nearby garden fireworks rising over the trees and roofs, we travelled to Blackheath in south east London to see the firework display to be held on the heath. The weather forecast was quite reasonable for an evening out in the open and possibly standing around waiting for things to begin. It is not my habit to go out in the evening and seeing the lighted windows of houses whilst standing at the bus stop and train station did make me wonder whether the display would be worth the chilly journey. But I was well wrapped, ready with calorific snacks in the bag and camera to hand, determined to swap the radiator for a radiant display, to be enjoyed first hand rather than odd twinkles of far-away rockets in the gardens over yonder, and often gone before I can get the camera out.

With no rain or great cold, the event was going to be well-attended. As we changed trains, so did hundreds of other passengers, all going the same way as we were. We squeezed onto the second train, and then everyone poured onto the platform at Blackheath. The exit is a short tunnel-like alleyway and everyone shuffled up the slope. Some people on the right hand side had stopped walking and were just standing chatting, and the rest of us continued on slowly. The reason became clear as we passed the alleyway cash machine near the top! The village was packed with people, and those not congregating outside the pubs and cafés were walking along and eating on the move. We had an hour to spare and so made our way to the heath to see what was happening there.

We left the bright village shops and roads, and entered the blackness of Blackheath. The name means dark coloured heathland, in past centuries a wasteland of gravel pits and workings, a dangerous area where stage coaches and riders travelling across it could be attacked by robbers and highwaymen. The flat grassy heath is now surrounded and criss-crossed by roads, but the lights on these had little effect on the blackness and we strained our eyes to see where we were walking. There were a number of carts selling flashing LED wands in the shape of swords, windmills and stars, so everywhere we saw lines and circles of light being waved about by the children, without being able to see much of the owners at all. We passed the long queues at the row of food vans and I was amused to see for sale "Foot Long Frankfurters" that could easily feed two people, one starting at each end! Health food this was not, but I would say guaranteed to keep the eaters stoked up and warm.

In the distance we saw the funfair in full swing and we headed for that, feeling rather like moths in the dark, attracted to the brightest lights. Funfairs nowadays are best seen at night, and like everywhere else it was full to capacity, with noisy crowds and excited children, and the riders' screams and squeals were drowned out by the music and sound effects of the rides. One of my favourites to watch is the Dodgems, less fierce than some of the others but still fun for all ages, and it seems there is more colour as the shiny metal floor reflects the neon lights, and the cars seem to be gliding on a neon-lit mirror.

Fireworks Display

It was time to make our way to the firework arena. The surrounding barrier fence was hidden behind the crowds but we navigated by skirting round the people who were lining its edges. We waited patiently in the dark, surrounded on all sides by the illuminated wands and a few people waving real sparklers. Eventually the announcer said it would start in five minutes, to good-humoured boos from the crowd, as it was already five past eight. At last, everyone was invited to join in the countdown, and the show started with spectacular bangs and starbursts. In the middle there were some gentler more sparkly explosions. Rising curtains of fireballs shooting upwards with smoky trails produced loud cheers. At one point there was a large soft burst of falling stars that spread outward and seemed to cover us like a giant white lacy parasol, which produced oohs and aahs from the spectators. The screamers made fiery spirals skywards, amidst showers of sparkling white specks.

The moment the display ended, everyone around us had the same idea as we did, get back to the village, the railway station or bus, and get home. People quickly filled up the village's main streets, which are laid out in the shape of a letter Y, so two streams of people converging into the narrow part at the bottom of the hill made for gridlock. Fortunately, this was entirely under the control of the myriad of police officers, who had closed off the ends of the two roads with barriers and were letting people through alternately in an orderly manner. We all moved along patiently, stopping and starting, flowing round the litter bins and trees. When we were finally through, we decided to walk to our second station and by the time we arrived half an hour later the crowds had dispersed. We were glad at last to be sitting on the platform with our chocolate biscuits, then the relief of the cosy train ride and the friendly warm bus, depositing us almost at our door. It was definitely worth the effort of venturing out into the night and the next time we see it will be on the television watching my video of the event, and certainly close to the radiator this time. (973 words)