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Fireworks 2017

We have had an abundance of fireworks this November. Gone are the days of buying tiny single or boxed fireworks and letting them off in the garden. That was hugely exciting at the time, as we were so close to the action, and almost on top of it when holding the sparklers. Those who still do so seem to favour the all-in-one firework that gives the whole show from one large box. Nowadays, we prefer the gigantic spectacle of communal displays held in the big open spaces by local authorities and organisations. We went to three public displays and enjoyed much more than our donation in the bucket could ever have bought.

The first was the municipal display held on Blackheath Common in south east London. We arrived in good time and spent an hour and a half walking round the funfair. It was a sea of noise and neon lights set amidst the almost blackness of the heath. My favourite is always the Dodgems, as I enjoy the music and also the nostalgia, as it is basically the same as it was when I was young, except that the metal floor is brighter and smoother, the lights are brilliant neon colours rather than just red and yellow ordinary bulbs, and the music amplification is better quality. But the deafening rumbling, the squeals of delight and the excited chatter and shouting are just the same as ever.

As the start time approached, we left the fair and wandered back over the heath to get away from the glare of the lights, so that it would not interfere with the photos and video. Everywhere children were waving their LED light wands in the shape of swords, whirling windmills, and illuminated fairies and butterflies. There was a countdown from ten to start the display, then followed eleven minutes of glorious pyrotechnics filling the sky. The special sighs of admiration came when one burst spread out in a cloud of sparkles gently falling like golden rain over the arena. There were plenty of

screamers and some glowing golden ones ascending in whizzing spirals, to then burst into showers of stars. I did manage to actually see it all with my eyes, as I held the camera aloft and as still as possible, otherwise it is easy to miss the real action whilst looking at the camera screen.

The second event we went to was the next day on the fifth of November, held at Victoria Park in Tower Hamlets, north east London. Although it is a built up area, the park is very large. We arrived early again and walked round to find out where the display would be happening, and what would be the best place to stand to get good pictures, and also to make a quick get-away at the end. This time we stood further back, to ensure all the action would be captured in the camera shots.

We enjoyed seventeen minutes of display, which this time was accompanied by music and sound effects. In the short pauses between segments, we could see the white clouds of smoke blowing over the almost bare park trees, with the moon behind it and intermittent airplanes gliding overhead on their approach to London Heathrow Airport many miles away. The residents of some of the tower blocks adjacent to the park had the best overall view, sitting in their living rooms, with drink and snacks to hand. I think I prefer to actually be out there in the dark amongst the crowds, seeing it all happening in the open air. The park was thick with people and no doubt the crowds were solid in the main viewing arena. As soon as it was over, we made for our planned exit, and found ourselves marching in a flood of people towards the train station. However, by the time we got there, the crowds had thinned out considerably, and we ended up being the only ones on our platform and had the train to ourselves. This was the opposite of what I had supposed it would be.

Fireworks 2017

The third event was the Lord Mayor's fireworks on the River Thames between Waterloo Bridge and Blackfriars Bridge, held the following weekend, as the culmination of the day's spectacular events. We saw some of the Lord Mayor's Parade and were delighted to see the golden coach going past, preceded by drummers walking along beating their giant kettle drums, which let us know the star of the parade was about to come past. After it was over, we spent some time in St Paul's Cathedral and then watched the river traffic whilst eating our sandwiches. Finally, as it grew dark, we took up our chosen place by the granite riverside wall on the South Bank and waited for the set time, watching river boats going past, until all we could see were lights reflected on the black water. There were more light wands on sale and also the novelty of hats set with flashing lights, which I just about managed to resist.

The display began exactly on time, with a lone red firework ascending to let us know to start recording. It quickly grew into a crescendo of bursts and bangs, and very forceful explosions that echoed around the area, reflecting off the surrounding high rise buildings and bouncing back within a half a second. The reverberating booms and bangs made us feel like ants at the bottom of an oil drum in a hailstorm. It was truly a display worthy of the principal dignitary of the most famous city in the world, with giant glittering starbursts in quick succession, in all sizes and colours. In the slight pauses between bursts, we saw glowing white, yellow and pink clouds of smoke, and at one point thick grey smoke, which we smelled but thankfully did not have to breathe as it dissipated quite rapidly. The unmistakable whiff of burnt firework chemicals brought back memories of the back garden bonfire nights, just as much a part of the experience as the intense light from the blazing fireworks themselves.

At the end there was a great cheer and shouts of appreciation from everyone, and then they all streamed away to their next destinations. Some would be going on to pubs, cafés and restaurants, and other entertainments in the city, and some like us making for home on the warm train, chugging towards our much quieter suburb, after an evening of open air entertainment on the riverside. (1083 words)
