
Billingham International Folklore Festival

Contributed by
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43rd Billingham International Folklore Festival
28th July - 4th August 2007

United Kingdom In the late 1950s and early 1960s Billingham U.D. Council had developed a new traffic free shopping centre. Traditionally Billingham residents went to the larger and established shopping centres of nearby Stockton & Middlesbrough. To attract shoppers the Council organised entertainment in the centre, which, because it was traffic free lent itself to such performances.

On one such Saturday an Irish Dance Troupe led by a Sunderland head teacher, Phil Conroy performed on the Town Square and attracted a large and enthusiastic audience. At the end of the show Mr. Conroy happened to mention that his group had just returned from the continent where they had performed at a week long folklore festival. He also remarked that the town centre would be an idea setting for such a festival. Councillors present liked the idea. So was the Billingham Festival born in 1965. Billingham then became a founder member of C.I.O.F.F., the international organisation of folklore festivals and Phil Conroy became its General Secretary, a post he held until his death. From small beginnings - only Austria, Estonia and Hungary were represented at the first festival -and now in its 43rd year, over the years the Festival hosted over 15000 performers from more than 90 countries and each year it hosts 8-10 groups with over 400 artists from abroad and presents the best, world of folklore dance and song has to offer at two venues - The Forum Theatre, the Festival Outdoor Arena in Billingham Town Centre. In 1999 the festival became an independent limited company and registered charity. It has also concluded a partnership agreement with Stockton Borough Council which guarantees its future. Official Festival site: www.billinghamfestival.co.uk