



# Mayday Chimney Sweeps Festival

*With a population of only 24,000, Rochester must be one of the smallest cities in England. Situated among the rolling green hills of Kent, in the south-east of the country, many tourists usually visit Rochester when they are on a trip to its more famous rival, Canterbury. Widely known for its architecture, the city also plays host to some quaint old English festivals.*

Rochester likes to think of itself as "the City of Great Expectations." There is always plenty going on there: Norman **archery** and **falconry displays**, the Charles Dickens Festival (he lived for a few years as a child in nearby Chatham), the Steam Festival, and a small annual Arts Festival. The most spectacular extravaganza, however, takes place on May Day bank holiday weekend, and is called the Sweeps Festival.

This event dates back to the 16th century and owes its roots to a unique tradition. For centuries, sweeping chimneys was a dirty and dangerous trade, and very often children called "climbing boys" were employed to do it. So when the much-welcomed holidays came, chimney sweeps celebrated with a procession through the streets of Rochester followed by dancing and singing. The tradition declined after Parliament passed "The 1868 Climbing Boys Act", which **outlawed** the use of children for such work, and the festival stopped at the end of the 19th century.

It was revived by Gordon Newton, a local historian who researched the subject for many years. The 18th century sketches and descriptive accounts by Charles Dickens provided a base for the recreation of the costumes, and in 1981 a small

parade was organized. The event was relatively **low-key** and continued almost unnoticed for a few years. Eventually, the City Council realized its potential and gradually become more and more involved in the preservation of this quaint tradition. By 1987, the event was **acclaimed** as the largest May festival in England.

## Strange men in hats

During the procession, the chimney sweeps, dressed in multi-coloured **beribboned** rag coats and with their faces blackened with **soot**, are accompanied by Jack-in-the-Green, a strange character who looks like a walking bush. They all dance noisily around to the music provided by the **clatter** of **shovels**. Throughout the festival, the streets are alive with a wide variety of street entertainment including concerts, street theatre, clowns and other children's entertainers.

One of the key ingredients of the festivities is Morris Dancing – a traditional English folk dance. During this time of year, Morris Dancing is quite often seen on village greens across England. There are references to these dancers in the writings of Shakespeare, and it is probably based on pagan traditions. Groups from different regions of England present

various costumes and styles. Some dance with handkerchiefs, bells and hats covered with flowers, others with long swords which are **interlocked** in various patterns. Some dance dressed in rag coats and with blackened faces.

The Rochester Sweeps Festival is a major event on the City's cultural calendar, and it is unlikely that the tradition will ever be allowed to die. It attracts many thousands of **revellers**, keen either to dress up and take part in the parade, or simply to watch and soak up the atmosphere. Rochester's ancient **cobbled** streets towered by the Norman Castle and the cathedral add their unique and memorable touch to the occasion. ■

## GLOSSARY:

- quaint** [kweɪnt] – interesting and attractive, old-fashioned (niezwykły, staroświecki)  
**archery** [ˈɑːtʃəri] – sport of shooting arrows from a bow (łucznicstwo)  
**falconry** [ˈfɒlkənri] – activity or skill of training falcons to hunt (sokolnictwo)  
**display** [dɪˈspleɪ] – performance that is aimed to entertain people (pokaz, popis)  
**(to) outlaw** [ˈaʊtlɔː] – make sth illegal (z/delegalizować)  
**low-key** [ˌləʊˈkiː] – without much reaction (cichy, kameralny)  
**(to) acclaim** [əˈkleɪm] – announce or proclaim with enthusiastic approval (uznać, okrzyknąć)  
**beribboned** [ˌberɪˈbaʊnd] – adorned with ribbons (przystrojony wstążkami)  
**soot** [suːt] – dirty black powder that is produced when you burn sth (sadza)  
**clatter** [ˈklætə] – rattling noise (szczęk)  
**shovel** [ˈʃʌvəl] – tool used for lifting and moving sth such as snow (szufla, łopata)  
**(to) interlock** [ˌɪntəˈlɒk] – join things together by means of parts that fit into other parts (połączyć, zązębować)  
**reveller** [ˈrevələ] – sb who enjoys themselves by dancing, singing, drinking alcohol (hulaka, amator zabawy)  
**cobbled** [ˈkɒblɪd] – paved with cobblestones (wybrukowany)



FESTIVAL MENU

- Chips + Peas £1.30
- Salad, Chips + Peas £1.50
- Salad & Salad £1.75
- Salad & Pineapple £1.90
- Kidney Pie £1.10
- Mince Pie £1.40
- Apple Pie £1.25
- Apple Pie £1.95
- Apple Pie £1.95
- Apple Pie

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