



Christopher - The Salisbury Giant

In medieval times any town of note had its Pageant Giants - huge human statues that would be carried at the head of parades on high days and at celebrations. Then came the Reformation, and with it the idea that enjoyment was politically incorrect, and all the English Giants were destroyed. Except the one belonging to Salisbury.

There are vague reports of a Giant figure in Salisbury around the beginning of the 1500s, but when the Reformation came in 1545 it all went quiet. The first report after that was in 1570, when he was apparently old and in poor repair. From that time on he made regular appearances, and the original Giant was in use until 1981 when he made his final journey to his current home in Salisbury Museum in the Cathedral Close.

By about 1700 he had become known as St. Christopher, and there are old paintings of him in some Wiltshire churches. St. Christopher is generally thought of these days as the patron saint of travellers. In Wessex there was a strong belief in him as a good luck charm - an old rhyme goes "The day Saint Christopher thou dost see, That day no harm will come to thee".

The original Giant was a popular local character and was sadly missed after his retirement. A new Giant was built, but he suffered mechanical problems and ended his days invigilating exams at the Technical College. We now have St. Christopher III who goes out occasionally - if you visit Salisbury for the festival of the Riding of the George in April, nearest to Saint George's Day, you may well see him.

Christopher III, when he is not out and about, lives in the Salisbury Arts Centre and keeps a benevolent eye on the proceedings. Since the Arts Centre is also home to Salisbury's annual CAMRA Beerex festival, perhaps Christopher is helping it to remain a success!

Hobnob - the Giants Companion

Christopher the Salisbury Giant has for a long time been associated with a hobby-horse called Hobnob. Nobody really knows why.

Hobby-horses are a very old part of the Morris dancing tradition, and perhaps the Giants attendants were drawn from the local dancing sides.

Hobnob accompanies the Giant on his outings and is usually very popular. He is extremely frisky and enjoys baiting spectators. It is rumoured that for a while he had nails for teeth and would bite any spectators who came too close to the Giant, thus helping to secure safe passage through the crowd. The current Hobnob is not so vicious but has inherited all of his forebears (or should that be forehorses?) sense of anarchy and mayhem.

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