

Interview with Matthew Richardson

Weltneugier: *The Beltane Fire Society organizes the Beltane Festival. Can you tell us something about the historic background of the event? What should we, as non-experts, know about the festival?*

Matthew: *The festival was founded in 1988 with 3 main aims - to re-explore the traditions of Celtic culture and seasonal celebrations of the solar calendar; to give an outlet for performance and street theatre with the community of Edinburgh and Scotland; and to address some political issues regarding the rights of celebration, demonstration and activism within the political framework that existed within the UK in the late 1980s. Of these, while the last one is no longer a driving force, the former 2 are critical to our festival celebrations.*

The festival began with around 5 performers and an audience of around 30 people - while today it involves over 300 performers and an audience of many thousands. However, our performers and board are all voluntary, and we operate as a charity with the aim to promote the festivals and their history within the city.

Weltneugier: *There are surely a lot of expenses and costs to cover in order to organize the festival. How does the Beltane Fire Society finance the festival?*

Matthew: *In order to accommodate the costs of both the festivals, and the year-round fundraising needs of the society, we charge a ticket entry to the Beltane Festival (though this remains as low as we can manage).*

This income provides funds for the event itself, but also for the other festivals such as Samhuinn, which are free, and our year-round administrative and outreach costs. Of course, as a charity, we are not profit-making.

Weltneugier: *Are there any plans to organize the festival in other cities or even countries? Or will it remain a local event?*

Matthew: *At present we are firmly rooted within Edinburgh and the community within the city - however many of our performers have moved on to other places and taken some of the ideas and ceremonies with them to mix with celebrations elsewhere. While we don't have any current plans to organise our main festivals in other locations, it is one of our aims to work more with other locations in terms of cultural exchanges, inviting other groups to be involved in our festival, and our own performers being involved in theirs.*

Weltneugier: *Could you tell us a bit about yourself? Who are you and what is your part in the Festival and in the Beltane Fire Society?*

Matthew: *I am the current Chair of Beltane Fire Society - as well as a Blue Man - one of the more experienced performers who have a role in protecting the ceremonies, stories and history of the festivals and the society, as well as a practical role in performance skills, event management and procession on the night. I have been involved as a performer in the society for around 14 years, and hope to continue being involved for years to come!*



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