

CRACKER NIGHT

Most baby boomers would remember cracker nights held in the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s with great fondness. Initially the event was held on 5 November (Guy Fawkes Day) and then on 24 May (the Queen's birthday). It became known as Empire Day, then 'British Commonwealth Day' in 1958 and 'Commonwealth Day' in 1966. The date was moved to the Queen's Birthday weekend, early to mid-June each year.

Prior to the great day, anything that could be burned was collected and a bonfire constructed. Pocket money was saved and spent on the fireworks – tom thumbs, penny bangers, jumping jacks and throw downs - and, if you had enough money, skyrockets and catherine wheels. Usually an effigy (with a paper-bag head and old clothes) was on top of the bonfire. The fire was lit when the sun went down and the crackers let off with skyrockets and catherine wheels providing the grand finale. It was great fun.

Eventually, in 1972, cracker night was banned for safety reasons. Details of the banning and the arguments for and against can be found in the papers of Wal Fife (who was the Minister for Mines at the time) in the Wal Fife Room at Mt Erin.

