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Blackpool Illuminations history

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The beginning of the Illuminations

Holidaymakers first tripped the lights fantastic in Blackpool in 1879 when just 8 arc lamps bathed the Promenade in what was described as artificial sunshine...

But the sheer scale, style and professionalism of today's fantastic free show reveals just how much Blackpool's Illuminations has developed as one of the iconic annual British events.

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Gone are the days when the lights went out as the tide came in because water leaked into the cast iron wiring pipes on the seafront! In May 1912, lights were erected on Princess Parade to mark Blackpool's first royal visit – Princess Louise officially opened this new section of Promenade.

They were so impressive that the council staged them again in September and thousands of people visited the resort and the commercial potential was tapped the following autumn.

A break for hostilities

The First World War called a temporary halt to the display in 1914, but by 1925 the Lights were back with giant animated tableaux being added and extending the Blackpool Illuminations to almost six miles from Squires Gate to Red Bank Road.

The Illuminations were halted again when the Second World War broke out and did not come on again until 1949 when Anna Neagle pressed the switch.

More than 3.5 million visitors flocked to Blackpool to see the Illuminations last year

The current display

An army of staff including artists, electricians, joiners, mechanics, painters and engineers work throughout the year to ensure the display is ready for the big switch-on.

Altogether 65,000 staff hours are used on maintenance, preparation, erection, operation and – when it is all over – dismantling the feature, fixtures and fittings.

The Lights' cable and wiring stretches more than 74 miles and there are more than 400,000 lamps of various types and styles.

Electricity consumption has been reduced by nearly half in recent years with the introduction of the latest technology low-voltage neon, lamps and micro processor controls.

Top designer and television personality Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen has been drafted in to the Illuminations team and created its acclaimed "Decodance" and "Venus Reborn" features

Blackpool Council

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