



Briefing note: 27

February 2007

Chinese New Year 2007 - Year of the Pig

For review: Jan 2008

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Executive Summary

- Plymouth's largest ethnic minority group, the Chinese community, will open up their new year celebrations to the general public for the first time this year.
- The main event will take place on Sunday 18th February at Plymouth Guildhall, there will also be an event at Plymouth Museum on Saturday 17th aimed at young people.
- This briefing note also provides some further information about the origins of the Chinese New Year Festival and the Chinese communities traditions and beliefs.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 February 18, 2007 is the first day of the Chinese new year. The current year is Year 4704 by the Chinese calendar. 2007 is the Year of the Pig (boar) it is also known by its former name of Ding Hai.
- 1.2 The Chinese community is statistically Plymouth's largest BME community. The Office for National Statistics estimated that there were around 1300 Chinese People living in the city in 2004, the most recent year for which statistics have been published.
- 1.3 The first Chinese people came to the Westcountry in the 1950's and in 1975 a group got together and organised the Devon and Cornwall Association which is now a registered charity.

2. Devon & Cornwall Chinese Association Celebrations in 2007

- 2.1 The Devon and Cornwall Chinese Association and Plymouth and District Racial Equality Council are inviting everyone to join in the New Year festivities on **Sunday 18 February**. For the first time ever, members of the public will be able to enjoy the colourful lion dance, which will be performed at the Sundial at 11.30am.
- 2.2 The main event is being held in Plymouth Guildhall, with stalls showcasing Chinese calligraphy, painting and jewellery making, hairdressing demonstrations and kung fu performances, as well as a Chinese supermarket selling traditional Chinese food and a chance to sample some tasty Cantonese cuisine.
- 2.3 Tickets cost £3 and can be bought in advance on 01752 224555 or at the Guildhall on the day. There will also be an animal mask making session at the Museum on **Saturday** from 10.30am to 12.30pm, where youngsters can transform themselves into the animal of their own birth year from the Chinese zodiac.

3. Chinese New Year – Origins and Beliefs

- 3.1 According to legend, in ancient China, *nian* ("Nyan"), a man-eating beast from the mountains, could infiltrate houses silently to prey on humans. The people later learned that *nian* was sensitive to loud noises and the color red, so they scared it away with explosions, fireworks and the liberal use of the color red. So *guo nian* actually means surviving the *nian*. These customs led to the first New Year celebrations.
- 3.2 The Chinese New Year is determined by the Chinese calendar, a lunisolar calendar, which is also used in countries that have adopted Taoist and Confucian traditions or have been influenced by the Chinese, notably the Koreans, the Japanese, the Tibetans, the Vietnamese and the pagan Bulgars. Chinese New Year starts on the first day of the new year containing a new moon and ends on *Yuan Xiao Jie* fourteen days later.

- 3.3 A reunion dinner is held on New Year's Eve where members of the family, near and far, get together for celebration. The venue will usually be in the home of the most senior member of the family. The New Year's Eve dinner is very sumptuous and traditionally includes chicken. Fish *yú* is included, but not eaten up completely (and the remainder is stored overnight), as the Chinese phrase *nián nián yǒu yú*, which means "may there be surpluses every year", sounds the same as "may there be fish every year."
- 3.4 On the days before the New Year celebration, Chinese families give their home a thorough cleaning. It is believed the cleaning sweeps away bad luck and makes their homes ready for good luck to arrive. All brooms and dust pans are put away on New Year's Eve so that good luck cannot be swept away.
- 3.5 Some people give their homes, doors and windowpanes a new coat of red paint. Traditionally, red packets are passed out during the Chinese New Year's celebrations, from married couples to unmarried people. Red clothing is worn throughout the Chinese New Year, as red will scare away evil spirits and bad fortune. Also, people typically wear new clothes from head to toe to symbolize starting anew in the new year.
- 3.6 The following is a list of beliefs that vary according to dialect groups / individuals.
- Buying a pair of shoes is considered bad luck. The word "shoes" is a homonym to the word for "rough" in Cantonese.
 - Buying a pair of pants is considered bad luck. The word "pants" is a homonym to the word for "bitter" in Cantonese. (Although some perceive it to be positive as the word 'pants' in Cantonese could be a homonym to the word for "wealth".
 - A hair-cut is considered bad luck. The word "hair" is a homonym to the word for "prosperity". Thus "cutting hair" could be perceived as "cutting your prosperity" in Cantonese.
 - Talking about death is inappropriate for the first few days of Chinese New Year, as it is considered inauspicious as well.