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Epsom’s silent firework display seeks public home

4 November 2026



Epsom radio founder hopes vintage fireworks will spark a museum

Thousands of vintage British fireworks collected by Epsom-born Radio Jackie founder Tony Collis could one day help preserve the history of a once-thriving British industry.

Tony, who still lives in Epsom, has spent more than 30 years assembling a collection stretching from the 1920s to the 1990s. Behind it are memories of childhood Bonfire Nights, when his father turned the family’s back garden into the setting for one of the highlights of the year.

“I remember Bonfire Night being a big feature of the year. My father thoroughly enjoyed it, and, as kids, my brother and I would be taken to the bottom of the garden, where there was a bonfire. Back then, the fireworks were very small, but because we were small and they were let off in close proximity, they always looked bigger!”

The celebrations extended beyond the family garden.

“It was a magical time. We’d have potatoes cooking on the bonfire to eat afterwards, and the whole street seemed to join in. The gardens were laid out in a line, with a bonfire at the end of each garden, so the atmosphere along the street was electric, really fabulous.”

From garden memories to glass cabinets

Speaking to World of Collecting, Tony explained how those memories inspired him to begin collecting in the early 1990s. Most of his thousands of items date from the 1950s and 1960s.

Manufacturers represented include Standard, Brock’s and Pains, the latter having a local connection through its manufacturing base in Mitcham.

The collection is arranged by manufacturer and type, with much of it displayed in glass cabinets away from sunlight to protect the colourful paper designs. A recreated shop-counter display, complete with stock boxes, recalls childhood shopping trips with his mother.

“I also have a short counter display, like the sort you might have seen in a newsagent, with stock boxes of fireworks.”

Among his favourites are air bombs, remembered for their noisy contribution to garden celebrations in the 1960s.

A museum ambition

Tony hopes the collection will eventually find a permanent home where the designs and history of British fireworks can be appreciated by future generations.

“I’d love people to learn a bit more about them, so ideally I’d love my collection to go into a dedicated museum about British firework making through the ages. I understand that people can be wary of fireworks, but a museum could help them appreciate the designs, colours and history of the industry.

“I’d also like the museum to be dedicated to the ethos of Bonfire Night, which I feel is slowly being wiped out at the moment.”

A member of a Sussex Bonfire Society, Tony previously organised large displays himself. These days he attends the celebrations in Lewes, valuing the communal traditions of gathering around a fire as well as the fireworks.

Appeal for forgotten fireworks

For Tony, collecting is about preserving something he loves rather than pursuing a financial return.

“My collection isn’t about making money. I collect these things because they interest me, and I enjoy showing them to people.”

He hopes anyone discovering old fireworks will contact him rather than set them off.

“This is part of an appeal: If anyone comes across old fireworks, particularly examples with blue touch paper, I’d ask them not to set them off and to give me a call on 07956506300. I’d be happy to collect them.”

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The full interview and photographs of the collection appear on the World of Collecting website.

Lionel Blackman

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Image credit Tony Collis

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