

We'll be seeeing orange

Will printers
get the pip
when they
go into battle
with Italians?

By Barry Leighton
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WHEN employees from a printing firm set off for a team-building weekend in Italy this morning, few had any idea of what they were letting themselves in for.

Instead of a spot of mounting biking or hiking followed by a leisurely stroll around the fashionable streets of Milan, they will be taking part in the Battle of the Oranges.

Throughout tomorrow members of the 50-strong group will be hurling thousands of oranges at coachloads of tyrannical Italian nobles in a bizarre annual ritual, the origins of which date back to the 13th century.

They in turn will be facing equally severe bombardments of the citrus fruit from their targets and their legions of strong-armed soldiers.

Some 340 tonnes of oranges are used during the combat which takes place all day in the usually sleepy, backwater town of Ivrea, some 30 miles from Turin.

And the unsuspecting staff of Trowbridge-based Cromwell Press will make history when they become the first Brits to take part in the conflict.

It's going to be a sticky day

The employees, more usually engaged in publishing academic, technical, legal and religious books, will join one of the nine teams which each comprise several hundred orange-throwers.

They have been given the go-ahead become members of the Chess Piece team after the company linked up with specialist tour operator, Tastes of Italy.

Yesterday, Cromwell Press director Allan Hicks, 54, one of three staff in on the secret, said: "Every year we take them abroad for a team building weekend.

"We never tell them where we are going or what we are doing. When we arrive at Gatwick at 5.30am they'll discover they're flying to Milan.

"But they won't have a clue of what



exactly they'll be doing until tomorrow night when we break the news.

"Personally, I can't wait. This is a completely crazy event, by anyone's standards."

Each team will gather in its own piazza and do battle with a cavalcade of horse-drawn soldiers.

Mr Hicks said: "The oranges will be flying non-stop. Once you're in the midst of it, it's open season. It's going to be a sticky day."

The event harks back to 1266 when a milkmaid named Violetta resisted the feudal rights of the local ruler to deflower her.

She cut off his head, prompting fellow peasants to raze the ruler's castle to the ground. In those days they threw rocks instead of oranges.

Early in the 19th century locals decided to commemorate their priceless piece of folklore with a three-day



Taking aim: Allan Hicks, director of Cromwell Press in Trowbridge, has his oranges at the ready. Left, a previous Battle of the Oranges in Ivrea, Italy

carnival, culminating with a fruity re-enactment of the rebellion.

Tastes of Italy director William Goodacre recently made a plea to the council of the Chess Piece team to let the English demonstrate their bowling prowess in this year's free-for-all.

He said: "There is a long history in the Middle Ages, of English mercenaries in the employ of the Italian states.

"I saw an opportunity to re-establish this relationship and seized it. None of the other teams know about us yet. It'll be a surprise for them to

find the Brits in the middle of it all."

Chess Piece costumes have been made for the 30 men and 20 women of Cromwell Press, only theirs will bear the cross of St

George and the Union Flag. Mr Hicks added: "We've never done anything remotely like this before. But we'll do well. As West Country lads and lasses we're used to throwing turnips."

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