

Romsey Beggars Fair - Saturday 13th July 2013

Back in 1993 I was playing with the Romsey-based folk band Skimmington Ride who had a regular two-weekly spot at the Tudor Rose pub in the Cornmarket. In July of that year we got together with some other Romsey musicians to put on a few local acts outside the Tudor Rose as part of a short-lived Romsey Folk Festival. The following year there was no folk festival, but we carried on with our Cornmarket event and renamed it the Beggars Fair. Although we celebrated our 20th anniversary last year, strictly speaking this is therefore the 20th event actually named the Beggars Fair.

Since 1993 we've seen it grow to take in most of the town centre pubs, the Cornmarket and Church Place, parks, gardens and a couple of churches, around twenty venues in all. From the original half-dozen acts, we now include up to a hundred, spanning music from rock, soul and blues to folk, jazz, world and classical, and including dance displays, storytelling and street entertainers. We especially aim to encourage new acts and young performers, but also to give established acts access to a wider audience.

Despite becoming a big event we've made sure it remains true to its local roots, and to that original aspiration to show off the range and quality of music from the local area. All of the performers come from an area that is within around 30 miles of Romsey.

The Beggars Fair attracts an incredible amount of local support from performers, audience, businesses and we involve many community groups in the planning and organisation of the event with, for example, Romsey Youth Council taking charge of events for children and young people in the park. Every year people tell us that they come equally for the music and for the great atmosphere the Beggars Fair generates around the town.

Although the Beggars Fair doesn't aim to be a folk festival we do have a bias towards acoustic-based music, with folk, blues, jazz and classical featuring alongside the louder acts and Morris sides dancing at locations around the town. A few acts you may enjoy include Jigfoot, Contraband, Beggar's Belief, Saltwatersun, botyov1791, Southampton Folk Orchestra, Pete Gritton Storyteller, Family & Friends, Jero Férec Flamenco, Hermione Pepper, Melo-Daemons and Live Noise.

A folk session hosted by the Home Folk musicians gets going at the Old House at Home from midday and Southampton Ukulele Jam take over the back room at the Abbey Hotel for an afternoon of ukulele mayhem, which is not only lovely to join in and play with, but also just to come and sit and listen.

Events kick off at 11am on Saturday 13th July. Programmes can be purchased from Saturday 29th June at the Tourist Information and Heritage Centre, 13 Church Street, Romsey and from many pubs and shops around the town.

All the events are free and that must be about the best deal of any event of this type that you are likely to find!

For further information, including full details of all this year's performers, see the Beggars Fair web site at www.beggars-fair.org.uk.

Cath Watkins