

Towersey Village Festival

Having returned for a second year at the 2007 Towersey Festival, I thought it might be worth putting some thoughts down as to what is good (or otherwise) about this festival, what goes on, how it feels and so on. I hope that over time, we might get some other festivals described in a similar way and so learn which ones are recommended. If you would like to write a piece on a festival you know about, please feel free, it would be much appreciated.

So let's start by saying that Towersey is a great festival. It is well organised, full of happy smiling people, everyone seems to find lots of interest and all the events are well supported. I thoroughly recommend it.

Towersey is a small village near Thame in Oxfordshire. The whole festival is self contained, which is to say that events occur either on the campsites or in the village hall, pub, church etc. Towersey is some miles from any town (Thame is a couple of miles away) with any pubs, restaurants, hotels, B&B's etc. So if you are not one for camping, then it will mean that you have to travel in by car or bus each day. The event takes place over the August bank holiday, so from the Thursday or Friday arrival to Monday night.

The main area is on the village playing field. Here is campsite 1, on which there are no cars (you pitch camp and then move your car away to a field car park for the duration) and lots of closely packed tents. Everyone arrives early, grabs a spot and it seems every blade of grass gets filled. But having pitched, you could stay on this one field all the weekend, and within a hundred yards is the Ceilidh tent, a large marquee for concerts, an arena with tiered seating, the children's marquee and the showground which has a craft fair, large bar, lots of places to eat and even more stalls and shops selling anything from pond furniture to fancy dress.

There are two more campsites (equally full) about a hundred yards down the road. These are farmers' fields and so have some bumps and dips. My detective skills deduced that they had been used previously for grazing cattle. The only difference between the sites is that campsite 3 is designed for the noisier late night crowd and is deliberately on the far side to allow others a bit more peace and quiet at night. though it has to be said that the noise from the last event of the night is pretty loud over the campsite anyway. In this location is another large venue which hosts louder bands and has a large area for dancing, plus a marquee called The Hive for the Shooting Roots ie the 12 – 25 year olds. Plus showers, a grocery shop, more places to eat and drink and a large car park for those coming for the day.

All age ranges come to Towersey. There are lots of children, it has very much a family atmosphere, lots of young people, but also lots of people from all the other age ranges. There are several workshops each day, this year including yoga, Morris dancing, Rapper, Basque and Scandinavian dancing, West Gallery and Harmony singing, percussion, clogging, contra dancing and I expect I've forgotten others. There are sessions for people to get together and play, and small groups spring up all over the showground, sitting on the grass or in the bar and start to play.

Some great acts come to Towersey, this year I recall The New Rope String Band, Tim Van Eyken, Nancy Kerr and James Fagan plus Kate Fagan, Oysterband, The Demon Barber Roadshow, John Tams and Barry Coope, Seth Lakeman but this is only a small subset – see www.towersefestival.com for a more complete list. In addition there are half a dozen good Morris sides doing displays, processions and floor spots. This year The Outside Capering Crew and Berkshire Bedlam Morris put on a super show called the Big Caper.

I especially liked the sequence of a Beginners dance workshop, followed by a Beginners ceilidh dance on the Friday to help those starting out. Like every other event, these were well supported. Lots of people going from absolute beginner to waltzing round the floor. Later there were more advanced ceilidhs, but it should be noted that all the dancing is called barn dance style. So while there is contra dancing and lots of other lively dances, there are not the more sedate Playford style dances.

So what didn't I like at Towersey? Almost nothing is the answer. The only gripe is that the toilets on the campsite are a bit short in number and elsan in their flushing method and so get smelly and nasty, despite the excellent cleaning crew who tirelessly sort things out. The trick is to learn which other toilets are on mains water or less frequented and use those, but it is inconvenient.

Though I admit that I was involved as a steward and so may be biased, the event is well policed. There are enough stewards and everyone wears a wrist band that is checked at each event. There are a few who try and break the rules, but at least some are found out and barred entry. Likewise anyone making a nuisance of themselves at the campsite gets warned, then evicted.

I hope this festival goes on and on and I intend to go back again next year. I hope to see you there.

Dennis Wheeler