

Upton Folk Festival

This is the third article on Festivals (following Chippenham and Towersey) and further contributions would be welcomed if you have a favourite.

Folk Festivals each have their own character and their own appeals. This Festival at Upton-upon-Severn is primarily based around Morris dancing so if you enjoy dancing or watching Morris, pub singing and music sessions, then Upton is for you.

It is held every year over the May Bank Holiday weekend, so this year it will run from Friday 1st through to Monday 4th May. The town is not large so it is easy to walk everywhere. For campers, they open up the rugby field, which is towards the edge of town but still an easy walk to everything. The field suffered from the floods a couple of years back – as did much of the rest of the town – and last year they were still rebuilding the Clubhouse so the showers were limited. But it should be fine again this year. If you prefer to stay in a hotel, then there are several that are bang in the centre of things, so you can simply stroll out of your room and down to the sessions in your hotel bar, or out of the front door to the folk market and dancing.

The town is on the Severn, of course, and the dancing mostly takes place along the Waterside. There is a central dance point opposite the King's Head pub, where a succession of sides perform to an organised timetable. Others spread along in both directions, choosing their spots and thus creating a mass of colour, movement and sounds for visitors as they walk along the riverside, enjoying tune after tune, albeit with drumming from the next side, inevitably to a different time signature, interposing! Having got your toes tapping, you can keep them moving at the free Ceilidh which is offered under the bridge around 4pm each afternoon.

Also to be found along the river front are stalls selling hats, musical instruments, clothes, food, plants and all manner of other trinkets, several pubs and spontaneous street acts.

This year the Festival is celebrating its 20th Birthday and their flyer and website promise that there will be lots of concerts, ceilidhs, dance displays, folk clubs and workshops, plus special Birthday events, though while these things definitely occur, they are more of an evening extra than the main course. In 'normal' years, there are usually a choice of evening dances on offer, a Concert Marquee offering both afternoon and evening shows with some excellent guests and pubs hosting sessions of music or singing in addition to the more organised Folk Club.

All in all, it has a lovely atmosphere and it is great to join in a session, have a drink, wander off for a meal and on to another event. But the Morris dancing and a long Procession down the main street on Sunday, after the Folk Service at the Church, are the main attraction (but then as a Morris dancer, I would say that, wouldn't I?!) There are always a lot of sides taking part - as many as 50 one year, I'm told. Sadly, I missed that one.

This year, with the festival starting on May Day, Wickham Morris will, as usual, dance at dawn in Wickham Square, then, while a vanguard head for Upton, others will be touring locally during the day and hosting our Evening of Dance from 6.30pm to dusk back in the Square before heading off next morning to join the festival ourselves.

Hope to see you at both!

Yvonne Wheeler