

WARWICK FOLK FESTIVAL

What do we like about Warwick Folk Festival? Just about everything really, especially the fact that dogs are not permitted on the site. Not everyone is a dog lover and we prefer cats.

It is usually the last weekend of July, and a fantastic way to start the school holiday period. We have only gone as visitors and not as performers, although we have been to other festival dancing with Wickham Morris. Warwick is a beautiful and inspiring venue with the castle, racecourse, impressive church and interesting shops available for exploration if you have family with you who do not want to be constantly folkling it. Festival goers camp on the Secondary School sports ground, with caravans in one area and tents another. The ground is flat and very well maintained (being the sports field is why dogs are not allowed) and school showers are within easy reach. A swimming pool is also available. The town centre is a short walk or free shuttle bus ride from the main venue, so if you prefer hotels or B&B, then this works too.

When the ground is waterlogged, alternative arrangements have to be organised, and hard standings at this and other schools have been commandeered in the past to take caravans.

If you want to, you can spend the whole weekend never leaving the school grounds. If you are not able to walk very far but want to get to other venues, there is a regular free bus service which will take you round the town. You are definitely in a win / win situation here. Within the grounds there is a large area devoted to stalls, excellent food outlets, and children's activities. In the middle of these is a performing area where dance sides show off their skills throughout the day. It is not a raised stage, and people sit and stand around as they wish. The main concerts are held within a large marquee on the sports field, which is great when the weather is good, but not so enjoyable when it's raining and windy. Another small downside is that groups sometimes gather with their drinks and chatter at the rear and this can be distracting. Other concerts happen within the school buildings, and venues around the town, so there is plenty of choice. One wonderful concert hall on site is reminiscent of the Turner Sims in Southampton, though somewhat smaller.

There are workshops within the school hall, as well as in the town, and ceilidhs in the hall each evening. We have twice attended Shape Note workshops, and then demonstrated our skills at a church service on the Sunday. Shape Notes are a music notation designed for congregational singing and have been used for over two centuries. There is often some folk dancing at the Festival Service too, and our current Dean of Portsmouth Cathedral was himself Vicar of this magnificent church before he came here, and was squire of a Warwick Morris side. While at Warwick we have enjoyed being able to have a rest from performing, and being able to focus on learning new skills, such as Rapper dancing, and attending music workshops without one eye on our dance schedules.

Dancing happens around the town and there is a fine procession on the final day, finishing in a beautiful park which has a refreshing paddling pool. The organisation is good, the performers are varied and top quality, the workshops cater for all levels and it's difficult to find a reason as to why you should not give it a try.

Bernard Brombley