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Report compiled by Back Row and Whitchurch  
Folk Festival Committee  
Photos by Oliver Davis  
Report Design by Cut the Mustard

# Welcome from the Directors

It has been both heartening and extremely valuable to hear and read the full scope and variety of feedback from the 2024 festival. It was our hope that the evaluation project would help us learn more about our audiences, through the data and responses collected. In particular we wanted to assess the appeal to younger audiences of different elements of a future festival, including the interest in ticketed performances, workshops and ceilidhs, as well as the free dance/performance, fringe and family events.

The data collected through this project has provided a good sample to help us towards our aim of a fully inclusive community-led celebration of traditional music and dance, with interest, appeal and easy access for all ages.

It was important to us to ensure the festival programme effectively reflected the local community and groups that are often under-represented on festival line-ups. We strived and will continue to ensure that women, young people and those within the LGBTQ+ community were well represented on the festival line up, and that the event is welcoming and accessible to all.

Providing a mix of free and ticketed events suitable for all ages was a vital part of the vision for the festival, and it was especially wonderful to see so many multi-generation families enjoying the free events on offer.

The original decision to re-launch the festival, driven by the sudden passing of Paul Sartin, was built on a firm foundation of a demonstrable interest from the Whitchurch community in celebrating traditional music, dance and local customs. This interest had been growing for a number of years and was shown through;

- The continuing success of *Whitchurch Folk Club* which presents regular concerts and is both run by and enjoyed by members of the local community;
- The *Whitchurch Wassail* held at the community orchard in 2022 where an all-age group saluted the trees through song and dance;
- The *Paul Sartin Tribute Concert* in October 2022 which included live performances, community folk singing and dance performances by renowned Morris groups.

The inclusive and joyful atmosphere on the day; the very positive feedback received on the day and since, and the strong community participation and engagement in the planning of the festival beforehand and on the day, are all factors that further reinforce our confidence in a sustained interest from the local community and wider folk community for an annual folk festival in Whitchurch.






# Dedication

Following Paul Sartin's tragic passing in September 2022, the impact of his loss was deeply felt by many. His friends, family, and admirers came together to honour his legacy, transforming the dream of a revived festival into reality and giving significant donations in support.

Paul Sartin was a renowned English folk musician, known for his exceptional skills as a singer, oboist, violinist, composer, and arranger. As a member of Bellowhead, Faustus and Belshazzar's Feast, not to mention the musical director of the Andover Museum Loft Singers, he was a key figure on the British folk music scene.

While Paul had a significant national profile, he was a leader in building community through music – for example through supporting local choirs and young artists. He lived in Whitchurch for two decades. He was not just a musician; he was a mentor, a friend, and a pillar of the local community.

Paul's legacy continues to inspire and resonate within the local community as well as the wider folk and music communities. The revival of the Whitchurch Folk Festival, an event that Paul so eagerly wanted to happen, serves as a tribute to his memory and his enduring influence on the town's cultural heritage.



**WHITCHURCH FOLK FESTIVAL**  
**7-8-9th SEPT 1979**  
**TICKLERS JAM**  
**GEOFF & PENNIE HARRIS**  
**PACKIE BYRNE & BONNIE SHALJEAN**  
**JOHN DOONAN & DAVE BULMER**  
**TICKLERS FOLK CIRCUS**  
**SHEPHERDS RACE \* HAMPSHIRE HOGS**  
**THE NAVVIES**

Chris Shaw Pete Twitchett Max Phillips Blackondros Oak  
 Sue Rampton Farnborough Mummers

**MORRIS \* LONGSWORD \* RAPPER**

TICKETS AND INFORMATION FROM BOOKINGS SECRETARY  
 49 MONTSERRATT RD BASINGSTOKE HANTS RG 24 9PF

PHONE BASINGSTOKE 23854

## About the Festival

Whitchurch Folk Festival 2024 marks the inaugural relaunch of a well-known and cherished tradition in the Hampshire countryside.

The festival first took place in Whitchurch in 1979, continuing through to the early 1990s. Longstanding residents and attendees of the festival recall it being a rich shared experience with community, art and music. Local folk musicians, Paul Sartin and Jon Wilks breathed new life into the Whitchurch Folk Club in 2017 and the seed for relaunching the festival was born. Sadly, Paul passed away in 2022, and the loss was felt deeply by the community. In honor of his leg-

acy, Paul's friends and family united to turn the dream of a revived folk festival into a reality. The Whitchurch Folk Festival aims to be a celebration of folk music and dance and the enduring spirit of the community. The festival, held as a one-day event on the 11 May 2024 provided fertile ground for piloting a refreshed approach to the festival, engaging with audiences and considering future festivals. The Whitchurch Folk Festival committee aims to keep the focus of the 2025 festival in the town centre to celebrate the rich and vibrant local community.



## About Funding

Whitchurch Folk Festival received a small project grant from Arts Council England for the 2024 relaunch of the festival. The grant was used specifically to encourage youth voice, support the long-term sustainability of the festival and ensure robust evaluation was undertaken to build a strong case for support. The Supporting Grassroots Live Music Fund (SGLM) is a time-

based priority area within Arts Council England's funding. The fund acknowledges the need for support for the UK's music ecosystem of people and places to support musicians, test new approaches and understand audience's needs. The fund supports bringing live and electronic music to the public and supports the development of talent.



## Whitchurch Folk Festival Committee

The committee and key people involved in the planning and organisation;

**Jon Wilks**, Co-Director. Folk musician, writer and marketing professional

**Claire Patterson**, Co-Director. Folk Music Booking agent and freelance festival administrator

**Caroline Maynard**, Treasurer. Folk Club Organiser and folk and festival enthusiast

**Helen Santer**, Urban regeneration professional

**Nina Smith**, Young graduate and folk musician

**Richard Banks**, Project management professional

**Jennie Bailey**, Childcare professional

**Juliet Offner**, Folk Club Organiser

**Claire Isbester**, Folk Club Organiser

**Angela Sartin**, Folk Club Organiser

**Emi Wilks**, Folk Club Organiser  
**Carol Barwick**, Folk Club Organiser

**Amanda Kane-Smith**, Educator and story-teller

**Lizzie Wild**, Educator and Forest School Practitioner

**Doug Bailey**, Sound Engineer of local folk-specialist recording studios Wild Goose Studios

**Emily Hayward-Smith**, Hampshire based full-time wheelchair user and our Accessibility Advisor

**Tom Gregory**, Morris Dance Adviser & Coordinator and Director of Folk Active Hampshire

**Wendy Horder**, local resident active in community music

**Dave Alexander**, Folk enthusiast and retired Project Manager

**Frank Kenny** Local resident and active in local choir, Andover Museum Loft Singers

**Keith Bell**, Organizer of the Whitchurch acoustic sessions

## Evaluation Brief and Methodology

Back Row was appointed to evaluate Whitchurch Folk Festival to ensure a holistic and independent review. Led by a female team of researcher-practitioners, Back Row specialise in creating robust and meaningful evaluation frameworks to understand the value and impact of the arts.

Working in collaboration with the Whitchurch Folk Festival Committee, the aims of the evaluation were:

- To identify learning and outcomes of the implementation of the one-day festival from audience, artist and volunteer perspectives.
- To inform Whitchurch Folk Festival 2025 planning, providing recommendations to strengthen audience engagement, make the festival inclusive and accessible, support young folk artists, and promote the event to a wider demographic.

The evaluation strategy was implemented on 8 May- 5 June. Our methodology included:

- Baseline data analysis of existing material provided and dis-

cussions with the Whitchurch Folk Festival Committee.

- Audience Survey- distributed via QR code and paper copy at the festival and via an online link following the festival (until 15 June 2024). Surveys were completed by 122 attendees of an estimated 400.
- Volunteer survey- distributed to 43, with 13 respondents
- Artist survey- distributed to 44, with 5 respondents
- Observations of the event, undertaken by a team of 7 (2 lead evaluators and 5 young evaluators)
- Informal discussion with attendees
- Interviews with 3 performers
- A post-it notes board in the shape of a Green Man, which collected feedback from children and families after their participation in workshops
- Reflective discussions with the Whitchurch Folk Festival Committee
- Review of notes / observations gathered by volunteers at the festival
- 5 reflective chats and written feedback with the young evaluators.



## Place and Activity

The 2024 Whitchurch Folk Festival was held within the town centre. The Committee fully embraced creative place-making principles in the planning and delivery of the festival, resulting in the mobilisation of music and culture within the heart of the community. The festival added value to the local area, enhancing enjoyment of local people and those visiting from further afield, raising the visibility of arts and culture so that many more people can participate in future festivals, and opening up creative opportunities for young performers.

The festival programme was organised into 4 parts:

### Main events (ticketed)

**Workshops (free and open for booking for targeted audience)**

**Children's festival (free and open to all families)**

**Fringe festival (free and open to everyone)**

The festival took place in eleven official venues throughout the town, all within walking distance. The committee created a *Festival Accessibility Guide* to encourage a more inclusive and welcoming environment for a wide range of audiences. The Information Centre & wristband collection was located at the central Town Hall and the Festival Hub (food and merchandise stalls) was located close by. Both were easily accessible and visible for the festival audience.

A short video with highlights of the day can be found [here](#).



### Main events (ticketed concerts and ceilidhs)

All Hallows Church  
Methodist Church  
School Theatre Hall  
School Sports Hall

### Workshops (most free, two ticketed)

Parish Hall  
Festival Hub  
Silk Mill Lawn

### Children's Festival (free)

Baptist Church

### Fringe Festival (free)

Kings Arms  
The White Hart  
The Bell



## Festival Tickets and Attendance

Festival Tickets gave access to the main line-up of indoor concerts, ceilidhs and some workshops. Tickets were available to purchase from 26 January 2024. Over half the tickets were sold within one month, reaching the target of 350 by April when an additional 50 tickets were released. The full allocation of 400 tickets were sold out a week before the festival and a waiting list was in operation. Ticket pricing was researched and bench-marked against other one-day folk festivals and those in the South East. Pricing fell into bands: £49 for Adults (26 yrs and over), £39 for 18-25 year olds, £26 for Under 17s, £130 for a family group (2 adults and 2 Under 17s), £136 for a group of 4 18-25 yr olds.

Total Festival tickets sold were **394**. The breakdown of ticket types was:

Adults (26+): **331**

18-25 yr olds: **16**

Under 17s: **47**

Complimentary tickets issued: **6**

### Attendance at free events

To encourage attendance by

**THIS SATURDAY!**  
**ALL OVER TOWN**  
 INCLUDING OVER 20 FREE EVENTS  
 FULL PROGRAMME AT WWW.WHITCHURCHFOLK.COM

**MUSIC**  
 LISTEN OUT FOR THE CHURCH BELLS TO START THE FESTIVAL ON SATURDAY MORNING  
 Jackie Oates Trio - Nick Hart & Tom Moore - Maggie Lane - Frankie Archer - Sam Sweeney & Louis Campbell - James Delaney & Saul Rose - Ellie Gomers - Benji Kirkpatrick - Norfolk Breads - Maddy Morris - Coracle - Miranda Ratner & Rob Hartman - Good Habits - Pankaj - Anna Tiddahs Trio - Folk Active Youth Ensemble - Teesbourne Folk Club - Andover Museum Loft Singers - Southampton Folk Orchestra

**MORRIS DANCING & MUMMING**  
 Ben Morris - Mayfly Morris - Bampton Morris - The Winchester Morris Men - The Longparish Mummers

**CEILIDHS**  
 BUY CEILIDH TICKETS ON THE DOOR!  
 Family Ceilidh with Out of Hand and Aiden Hamill - Evening Ceilidh with Jigfoot and Ian Nichols

**WORKSHOPS**  
 FREE, OR BUY TICKETS ON THE DOOR  
 The Folk Songs of Whitchurch - Maypole Dancing (for kids) - Morris Dancing - Southern Step Dancing - Husky Decorating - Mini Folk (for toddlers) - Political Songwriting - Harmony Singing - Interactive Storytelling & Craft - Shoes on Theatre

**STREET FOOD AT KUDOS LIVING**  
 Cope Britain - Thai Bites - Vegan Street Diner - Garden Restaurants

**PLUS...**  
 Fringe Stage at the King's Arms - Tunes sessions at the White Hart - Singersounds at The Bell - Test Valley Tales - Longlog Brewery

Big thanks to The Bell and The White Hart for hosting our main sessions and singersounds, to Kudos Living for lending us their car park, to the King's Arms for hosting the Fringe Festival Stage, and to Longlog Brewery for running the bars at all venues. Thanks also to Testbourne Community School for the use of their buildings, all Hallow Church, Whitchurch Baptist and Methodist Churches for being wonderful music venues, the Town Hall for being the Festival Hub, and the Whitchurch Museum for the use of their car park. Whitchurch V&A Mill for the use of their space, the G&P Northampton Centre for being our Festival Fish. The Whitchurch Parish Hall for being our workshop space, the Whitchurch Cricket Club for use of their parking area. Also, to the people of Whitchurch. We're not sure you realise what a great town you live in, but we're really grateful.

families and new audiences, many events were free of charge and open to everyone, including the Parade, Morris dancing, Fringe Festival and Children's Festival (see poster).

The free events attracted an estimated 300 further people to the festival. Given the festival's free-flow nature, and spread throughout the town, with members of the public moving between venues and spaces throughout the day, the exact number of attendees is not known.

Drone footage did provide a method of estimating number of people attending the outdoor

free parts of the festival, and evaluation staff were able to do a count of those viewing the Jack in the Green Parade.

Attendance figures and estimates are given below.

### Attendance figures and estimates (\*) at the free and fringe activities were:

400\*-Jack in the Green Parade  
 500\*-Morris dance displays at the Silk Mill and Festival Hub throughout the day (see photos below)

225\*-Fringe festival stage at the Kings Arms

64 - Songs of Whitchurch workshop

20 - Children's Maypole dancing workshop

40 - Storytelling in the pub for all ages

12- Youth Morris dancing workshop (plus 15 family members watching)

15 -Children's Morris Hankie Decorating

90 - Children's Craft & Nature drop-in activities

60 - Family storytelling sessions linked to the theme of the craft activities

34 - Mini folk music session for very young children and their parents

35 - Children's Theatre workshop







## Festival Activity

### Performances on the day

- 17 Ticketed Concerts
- 2 Ceilidh Band Performances
- 5 Morris Dance Sides
- 6 performances on the Fringe stage at the King's Arms

### Artists, performers and workshop leaders

- 64 artists/performers performed as part of the Ticketed Concerts
- 63 artists/performers took part in the dance displays and workshops (Morris, Maypole and Hampshire Step Dance)
- 20 artists/performers took part on Fringe Festival Stage.
- 10 artists contributing to further workshops and opportunities

### Taking Part Sessions

By 'Taking Part' we mean engaging in an activity outside listening / viewing performance

- 1 Inclusion in the Jack in the Green Parade
- 2 Singarounds
- 2 Ceilidhs
- 2 Traditional Music Sessions
- 1 Organised Walk
- 3 Southern Stepping Workshops
- 4 Craft and Storytelling work-

shops

- 1 Folk Songs Workshop
- 2 Storytelling and Craft Workshop
- 1 Mini Folk Workshop
- 1 Drama Workshop
- 1 Political Song Writing Workshop
- 1 Maypole Dancing Workshop
- 1 Harmony Singing Workshop

**The Main programme** consisted of ticketed **concerts** delivered in the three main venues. There were 6 concerts delivered in All Hallows Church, 5 concerts delivered in The Methodist Church and 6 concerts took place in Testbourne School Theatre. In addition, two Ceilidh bands performed at the Testbourne School Sports Hall.

The Festival hosted 10 **workshops**, targeting different audience groups, from children and young people to adult audiences interested in engaging with different aspects of folk music making. The workshops allowed the audience to explore some of the intersecting topics emerging from folk music tradition. For example, the Jack



in the Green Workshop in the Baptist Church, targeted for young audiences (3+), used folk music (vocal and instrumental) to discuss climate change and the importance of nature. Reaching an older audience group (ages 14+), Maddie Morris delivered a Political Songwriting Workshop for ticket holders to explore crafting lyrics that reflected personal and political views, encouraging self-expression and passions to run free.

This was further reflected in the **Fringe programme**, particularly in the Jack in the Green Parade, successfully bringing together performers, the local population and the festival visitors. The Parade started at the Festival Hub (Kudos Living Car Park) finish-

ing at the Silk Mill Lawn, a 19th century water mill that continues to produce English silk fabrics using 19th century machinery. At this important heritage venue, the audience enjoyed refreshments and performances of the five visiting Morris Dancing Sides. The Fringe programme also included Singalongs in The Bell, which were well attended and nurtured the important tradition of audience performers singing traditional songs and tunes from the Irish, English, Scottish and Manx traditions. The two Tunes Sessions in the White Hart, brought together over 30 folk musicians. The sharing of music was testament to how important pub session tunes are for maintaining the English traditional music scene.



Festival Attendees and reporting

- Questionnaires were completed with 122 attendees of an estimated 700 (17%).
- The statistics used within this report are derived from those surveyed.
- Of the 122 respondents\*, 50% lived within 25km of Whitchurch, with 20% living in Whitchurch itself. 17% were from within a 26-50 mile radius and 30% travelled from 50+ miles of Whitchurch. There were six people that travelled over 200km to the festival, demonstrating the festival’s reach.
- The majority of respondents were from a White background

(91%), with 4% selecting Other Mixed / Multiple Ethnic Back-grounds, and 2% Asian Back-ground, 2% preferred not to say and 1% Mixed White and African.

The audience age range saw 63% over the age of 45, with 16% in the range of 35-44, 6% in the 25-34 age range, 4% aged 18-24 and 10% under 18.

*\*Many families attended, with one family member answering the survey for the group or when completed with a young evaluator, children answered with permission of their parents/guardians.*

Distance from Whitchurch	Number of people	%
< 5 km	28	28.3%
5 – 25 km	24	24.2%
25 - 50 km	17	17.2%
50 - 75 km	16	16.2%
>75 km	14	14.1%







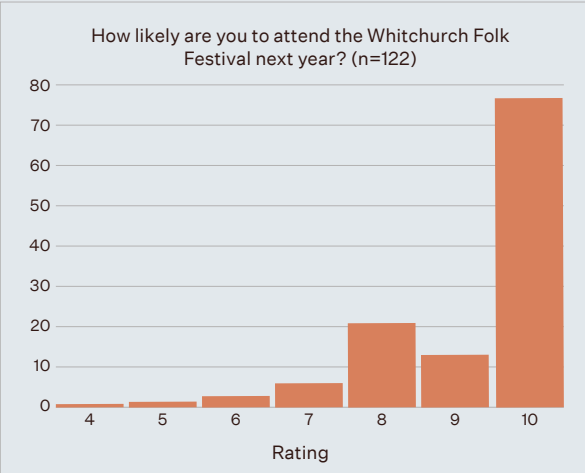
Key findings /  
learnings



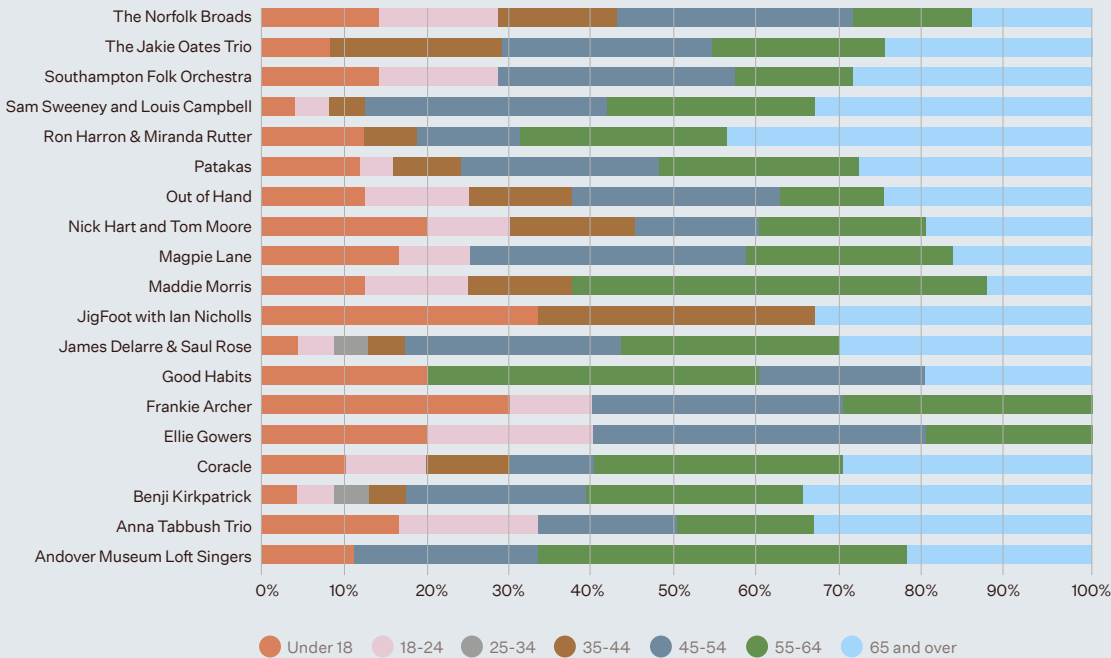
Attendees enjoyed the event, with 96% suggesting they would return to the festival

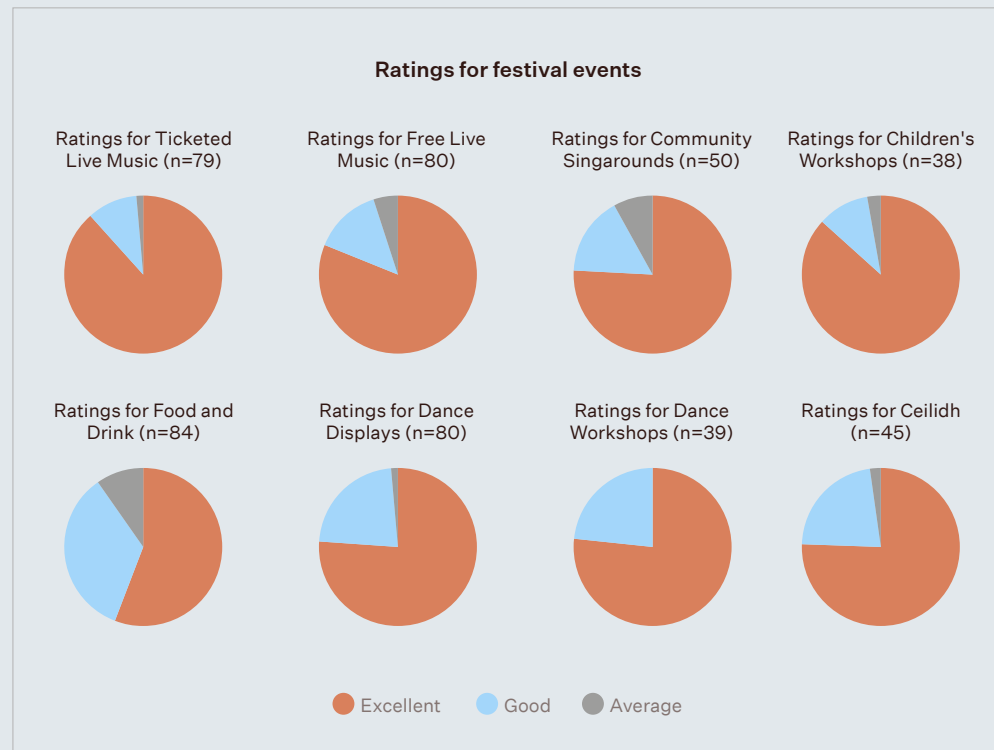
Audience

Attendees enjoyed the event, with 96% suggesting they would return to the festival (scoring between most likely and extremely likely).



- The top three things that attracted people to the festival were: 1) Live ticketed music; 2) Free music and 3) Dance Displays and workshops. Followed by Community Singarounds, the Jack in the Green Parade and Children’s Workshops.
- The ability to share and take part in live music, dancing and folk was welcomed by the audiences surveyed.
- Audiences engaged with a wide range of performances. The below graph explores age range of audience members to the varied performances.





- As described in the graphs above- audiences valued the varied aspects of the festival, with most areas rated as excellent.



## A well organised and friendly event

- From attendees, artists, volunteers and young evaluators there was a repeated refrain of how well organised the festival was. Indeed, the care and consideration that was put into the planning was evident throughout the day from the friendly and genuine greeting of event stewards, the comradery of those taking part in workshops, and enthusiasm and feeling of community felt throughout the day.
- Volunteers, artists and performers felt well supported and given ample guidance of what to expect on the day. This then ensured audiences felt well supported.

*Being welcomed by name at the prepaid car parking was ❤️ when you arrive on your own! Thanks to that friendly person.*

Event attendee

*The general community vibe - it felt really folky and welcoming and generally great. Lovely to see all ages attending as well.*

Event attendee





## A sense of community

Many attendees commented on the Festival being an opportunity to catch up with people they hadn't seen in a while. One audience member noted that with fewer Folk Festivals held each year, these opportunities become hard to find.

- For some attendees from the local area, it was uplifting to see Whitchurch come to life with singing and dancing.
- For those coming from further away, they felt welcomed to the town.

*Seeing so many people turn up on the pavement for the parade. The community and free bits. One of the loveliest events I have ever been involved in.* Volunteer

*Travelling down from London, spending the day in a lovely village with folky things happening all over the place. Loved seeing Boss Morris again! Coracle were a lovely discovery. It was all great.* Event Attendee

*Exploring Whitchurch and spotting friends along the way! What an amazing way to discover more of this fabulous town!* Event Attendee

*I loved discovering new artists, feeling part of a community and having a good singalong.* Event Attendee

## Activities and engagements

- Performers and attendees alike noted the good use of venues for the festival. Feedback was mostly positive, with good acoustics, adequate seating and staging.
  - The music at the Silk Mill Lawn was at times difficult to hear due to it being an open-air performance space, for example the performance from the Southampton Youth Orchestra.
- The space in some indoor venues such as the pubs, was not always adequate for the size of the workshops and sessions, due to high demand, making engagement with the audience somewhat difficult.
- Feedback from volunteers highlighted a need for further protocols around attendee safety by the river. As it was a hot day, there were many children playing near and in the river. Stronger guidance for volunteers and signposting would be useful.
- The Jack in the Green Parade was well attended and a highlight of the event for many. The Parade moved down the pavement, which worked well

although proved challenging in places where the pavement narrowed. A short road closure to allow the Parade to move safely down the road would enhance the overall experience and impact of the parade.

- There were some full-to-capacity events which is testament to the quality and interest in the Festival, but inevitably led to some attendee disappointment at not being able to get into their first choice events. Booking of concerts and workshops ahead of time could help to manage expectations in the future.
- The Ceilidhs were not as well attended as the Committee would have liked. Feedback suggests that there may have been various reasons for this:
  - The afternoon Ceilidh was marketed as a 'Family Ceilidh', which could have suggested it was not open to all.
  - The location was slightly outside the town, meaning that attendees needed to be sure they wanted to attend and make the walk over.
  - The Ceilidhs were scheduled at the same time as

other ticketed concerts that festival attendees wished to see. Indeed, whilst the many opportunities on offer were welcomed and helped to keep numbers in venues realistic, some attendees found it difficult to choose between all the interesting options on offer.

- The Maypole workshop was well attended by children and families, but some of the children did not stay for the display performance to show what

they had learnt afterwards. This could have been in part due to being tired in the heat of the day, a need to eat lunch, or join in with other activities or not understanding that they were requested to return and be a part of the display.

- The Festival Hub was very lively with people purchasing food and watching Morris displays. A larger space for the hub would ensure easier movement and enhanced enjoyment.



## Appeal and activity for children and young people

- There was a variety of activities focused on children, especially in the morning and early afternoon sessions. These were well attended by families with Morris, Maypole and Step Dancing workshops well attended. Additionally, the storytelling and drama workshops and craft making sessions saw many families taking part.
- One young evaluator commented: 'A lot of the workshops and things were in the morning ... as the day went on, there were fewer and fewer children and young people, which kind of implies to me that they'd run out of things to do almost. So, they'd seen everything they wanted to and had left. That might just be because they were worn out from having a lot of stuff in the morning.'
- The young evaluators and young people in attendance who were interviewed suggested that more specific activity for young people, aged 12-18 would have been nice to see (in addition to the Youth Morris workshop). A dedicated area that was just for young people to hang out was also suggested.

### Engaging young people aged 13-25

Music plays an important role in the lives of many people across the UK. For young people, the ways they consume music has changed exponentially over the past 20 years. Indeed, 75% of young people report listening to music on their own via a phone or tablet, with 76% of those stating that listening to music is usually done whilst doing something else, not as an activity in itself (Youth Music, 2019).

- Whitchurch Folk Festival selected folk artists of varied ages and stages of their careers. They recognise that young people's music consumption has evolved and engagement with folk music is often niche within the ages of 14-25.
- Younger folk singers/songwriters such as Ellie Gowers, Frankie Archer, Patakas, Good Habits and Maddie Morris were particularly programmed with the intention of appealing to younger audiences and increasing the number of younger attendees.



- The survey responses saw some attendees aged under 30 attending these artists' concerts, with the most popular being Patakas, Frankie Archer and Good Habits. Also well-attended by this age group were Nick Hart and Tom Moore, Magpie Lane, The Jackie Oates Trio, Rob Harbron and Miranda Rutter.
- Although perhaps not borne out by the data from the questionnaires undertaken, but observed by both volunteers and evaluators, a wide range of ages were in attendance at all events.
- In future, strengthened observation collection of age at the varied events may help to understand attendee interests and motivations. It is also important to highlight that as surveying happened throughout the day, many opted to nominate one family member or group member to complete the form, making full analysis difficult.



## Accessibility

The festival was accessible and well considered. The festival organisers were committed to ensuring an inclusive and accessible environment for all involved.

- Hampshire-based young musician Emily Hayward Smith, a permanent wheelchair user, volunteered her time and expertise as Accessibility Advisor. Emily discussed accessibility matters of all kinds with the festival directors and helped shape a photographic 12-page [Festival Access guide](#). The guide provided descriptive information about the venues and spaces where events took place. There were also videos of the venues and of the journeys between various venues and a map to accompany the guide. This was made available on the festival website in advance, so both performers and audience could plan their festival day and could feel more confident

in what to expect.

- The main programme was also an excellent source of further information, aiding event attendees in planning their routes. Attendee feedback highlighted the need for further signage to accompany the map on the roadside. Additionally, a small, printed running order of the day per venue was requested by some respondents who found the whole-festival running order across multiple locations difficult to use.
- Accessible seating was provided at venues and audiences directed to these areas as required. For most venues this worked well, although as venues became more crowded, ensuring accessible seating became more difficult, for example the accessible seating area at the Silk Mill Lawn was difficult to spot once the venue became crowded.

*Thanks so much for having me at Whitchurch folk festival, it was a really special festival. Also, a huge personal thank you for reading and taking my access [requirements] into account, it had such a huge effect to be able to see the spaces and have a better idea of what to expect... Artist*

... Everything seemed to run smoothly and the atmosphere was lovely. I didn't get to traverse the various sites and events as I kept bumping into friends and familiar faces, which was great!

Performer

## Artists & Performers

157 Artists / Performers took part in the festival.

The festival brought together a rich community of folk music performers: professionals and well-established musicians, as well as creating a space for amateur performers and young musicians.

As part of the Main Programme, a selection of well recognised folk musicians from the region

and UK were programmed in the three venues, including Jackie Oates (celebrated widely as a 'national folk treasure'), Anna Tabbush Trio (featured on BBC Juice) and Maddie Morris (socially engaged musician who highlights marginalised stories in her work).

*On behalf of Bampton Morris can I say thank you for inviting us to Whitchurch Folk Festival, it was so well run and we really appreciate all the organising that went into it.*

Performer

As part of the Fringe programme, there was an exciting mix of local and regional Morris Dance troupes, including the Bampton Morris Dance (with a century long tradition) and Boss Morris (a female focused Morris troupe celebrated for their progressive Morris style). Also, as part of the programme, there was a focus on upcoming local youth musicians and initiatives: The

FolkActive Youth Ensemble (based in Southampton, vibrant group of musicians aged 11-19); and Testbourne Folk Club (local group of young musicians that play together weekly in the town's school hall). Finally, the Free Stage at King's Arms beer garden offered an opportunity for local musicians from any genre to perform to a wider audience.



## Supporting artists and performers

- Artists on the main programme were paid for their performances and workshop sessions, plus given small stipends towards subsistence. Payment was made promptly upon invoicing.
- Morris dancers were given stipends towards subsistence and free entry to an evening concert or Ceilidh.
- Young performers such as the Southampton Youth Orchestra were given free entry to the evening Ceilidh.

*It was a very friendly and welcoming festival. I felt happy and safe and enjoyed performing.* Performer

- Artists reported feeling well supported with ample information provided ahead of the event and on the day.
  - Those arriving by train appreciated being collected.
  - Having the opportunity to say hello to familiar faces and meet new people at the pub the night before added to the feeling of belonging and welcome to Whitchurch.
- Performers were asked for their access requirements, and these were met with care and consideration from the team.

*It had such a huge effect to be able to see the spaces and have a better idea of what to expect and I have no doubt this takes a lot of time and resource to sort so thank you for taking the time.*

Artist

- The Artists Hub provided a place to rest, rejuvenate and meet up with other artists. This was welcomed by the artists/performers.

*The artist hub was fantastic, and really useful to have a (cool) place to leave instruments and equipment. The food & drink allowance was a nice touch.* Artist



## Volunteers

*What a feat to carry off a Festival so successfully. The organisation at the concert venues and across the whole festival site was really impressive. Everywhere I went throughout the day I saw and met happy people enjoying the atmosphere and fun of the day as well as the myriad entertainment, workshops, concerts and events.* Volunteer

The Whitchurch Folk Festival enlisted 40 volunteers from the local area and further afield. Volunteers engaged in a variety of aspects around event planning and implementation. And the (volunteer) Committee itself is made up of people dedicated to promoting folk music and the rich heritage of folk music within the local community.

*Excellent day. Proud to be part of it. Huge amount of work from the organisers. They are to be thoroughly congratulated.* Volunteer

Volunteer Roles on the day of the festival included:

- Venue Managers and Stewards at each venue and festival space
- Volunteers to run the information centre & wristband collection stands
- Serving refreshments at the bars
- Car park stewards
- Supporting children’s workshop leaders
- Stewards for the Jack in the Green Parade
- Running the festival merchandise stall.

### Volunteer ratings of statements

**9 of 13** respondents **strongly agreed** to feeling appreciated in their role, with 3 agreeing and 1 slightly agreeing.

**100%** of volunteers felt there was a **strong sense of community spirit** on at the Festival. (12 Strongly agree, 1 agree)

**100%** agreed the Festival provided an **opportunity to engage with local people**. (10 Strongly agree, 3 agree)

Volunteers reported that **engagement with those outside the local area** was also present (**9 strongly agreeing**, 2 agreeing, 1 slightly agreeing and 1 disagree)

The length of **volunteering duty on the day** (**6 strongly agree**, 1 agree, 2 slightly agree, 2 neither agree nor disagree, 1 disagree)

**Felt confident in their role on the day** (**8 strongly**, 3 agree and 2 slightly agree)

- The time commitment for each volunteer varied, from 2 hours to the full day. Having flexibility in shifts was valued by the volunteers. Some volunteers reported feeling tired following their volunteering but that the ‘great atmosphere’ was worth it.

*The day was wonderful - there was such a lovely atmosphere and I felt that people really appreciated the volunteers.* Volunteer





- Echoing responses from the artists, the volunteers valued the night before the festival get together and the 'shared excitement'.
- The careful planning prior to the event and engagement with the volunteers allowed

for a relaxed and enjoyable experience, although volunteers highlighted that in the fortnight prior to the festival there was need for clearer communication as it 'became more fragmented'.

*I was very impressed with the organisation of the volunteers. I felt fully briefed and supported throughout*  
Volunteer

*Because of the planning we'd done in advance, nothing went awry on the day. It was calm and enjoyable (albeit tiring).*  
Volunteer

*I volunteered to steward evening concerts at All Hallows. This freed me up in the day to be a participant in the festival as well as a performer (AMLS) which I really enjoyed, and it was good to experience the festival from both 'sides'.*

Volunteer

- Volunteers appreciated the flexibility of scheduling their volunteering roles with two noting this allowed them to take part as volunteers and as performers.
- Volunteers reported enjoying sharing their skills and developing new skills.
- One volunteer reflected on the set-up and management of the traders' stalls at the Festival Hub. The small footprint of the space meant there was not much room for traders to set-up and bring vehicles on-site. Some arrived late, which in hindsight was helpful as it allowed a staggered approach to getting the space prepared.
- Strengthened management of breaks and changes in shift to ensure all volunteers were given adequate breaks. Whilst volunteers all were given a break, overrunning sessions and people coming to replace them, meant that in some instances these breaks were not as fulfilling as they could have been.
- More allocation of shorter shifts where possible to fit different interests.
- A centralised location for attendee wristband collection to avoid confusion.

A Committee debrief and reflective session was held after the event. The following observations and recommendations to enhance the volunteering experience and smooth running of future festivals were put forward:

- Volunteers were asked to use a clicker system to tally the number of people entering the venues. One noted that 'physically counting audience when inside was the only way to be sure we were not exceeding our limit'. Further guidance for volunteers on capacity would be helpful.



## Traders (food, drink and merchandise)

- A committee volunteer reported that the traders were easy to work with and had a good day at the festival.
- Traders reported good sales and suggested seating area near the food area would be helpful to encourage people to linger and shelter from the weather.
- The evaluation team spoke with traders as well and there was a good flow of people entering the area, purchasing food and merchandise.
- Audience and young performer feedback highlighted a need for extended food and drink options, especially for 'younger tastebuds', and for food to be more readily available in different parts of the festival (e.g. the school) and for extended hours.
- The Festival merchandise stall was popular and several specific suggestions were received in relation to ideas for future items and how to improve the experience for shoppers. Use of the sum-up machine proved a little difficult, with only one volunteer's phone connecting to it properly. Further training on this aspect would help in the future.
- There was also a suggestion for a central stall for Artist CDs and merchandise, in addition to artists selling their products in venues at the end of their performance.
- Local food and drink establishments benefited from the festival, with events happening at three of the pubs and an influx of business for the Silk Mill Cafe and other local shops. Indeed, the Kings Arms reported an 86% rise in a normal Sunday takings. Kudos Cafe, a local coffee shop also saw good trade but sales in the homewares shop were down.



## Engaging Young People in Evaluation

Whitchurch Folk Festival was keen to include young people in the evaluation process to more fully connect with youth voice and to consider how to best encourage further engagement with young people. The five recruited young people added value to the evaluation process and their astute insights were beneficial to the overall evaluation.

- Young people were recruited by word of mouth and a call out through the Southampton Folk Orchestra. A total of 7 young people responded, with 5 committing to the role.
  - The 5 young people were aged 15-21. 3 females and 2 males. All had some connection to the area and/or knew someone taking part.
  - This local knowledge and interest in folk music, community engagement and place were valuable and enabled them to evaluate from a place of ownership and enthusiasm towards the work.
- The young people were paid for their time, including training, assistance at the festival, a

reflective discussion and reviewing sections of the collated feedback.

- The 60-minute online training provided an overview of what evaluation of a festival entailed and the varied methods that would be employed. The young people were given the opportunity to ask questions and help shape how they would implement the varied activities.
- Each young person committed to five hours of evaluating at the festival comprised of observations, informal discussions, interviews and surveying.
  - *All young people met the goal of collecting 20 surveys and completing 3 or more observations.*
  - *3 young people additionally undertook interviews, 2 with young performers taking part in the Morris Dancing Displays and 1 with singer/songwriter Ellie Gowers.*
- A reflective online discussion was held with each young evaluator in addition to a debrief at the festival to

more fully understand their experience of the Festival itself from a young person's perspective and to provide time for feedback on how to enhance the evaluation experience in 2025.

- *All five young people reported enjoying the experience and would undertake the same role in future.*
- *The opportunity to expand skills in interviewing, observation and encouraging people to engage with surveys both in paper and QR codes was welcomed by the young evaluators.*
- *Evaluating can be difficult at events, where people are there to enjoy their time and at times can find surveying to be an intrusion. This was not the case at Whitchurch Folk Festival, where most attendees were welcoming to the young people's questions. or politely suggested that they would complete the form following the festival.*
- *The young evaluators*

*were asked to complete 5 hours of evaluation. All felt that this was 'about the right' about of time. 11:00-17:00. There was a bit of a drop off in the crowd from 16:00 and the young evaluators felt they had exhausted who they could speak to.*

- The young evaluators provided astute observations and reflections of the Festival. All commented on the feeling of community and celebration on the day. They appreciated the many different workshops, venues, artists and approaches. They especially enjoyed seeing young people taking part in activities and young people taking an active role in leading, with the Youth Morris Dancing Workshop as an example, led by two teenage members of the local Whitchurch Morris group (with support as required from adult members).
- The young evaluators also provided suggested recommendations for future festivals woven into the recommendations in this report.

Most importantly, they cited a need to appeal to younger audiences through the artists selected, workshops specifically for young people aged 13-18, an area that felt like it was 'just for them', and stronger social media marketing in the lead up to the Festival.

- One young evaluator from Southampton who had a genuine interest in folk music and actively sought to attend festivals, noted that she had only found out about the festival via her sibling who had an invitation to perform as part of the Youth Folk Ensemble. She highlighted that

*a stronger pre-festival presence on Instagram would have helped her to find out about the event, and that regardless of family connection, she would have attended.*

- The festival website and social media was established in November 2023, which limited the time to build a robust following.
- The young evaluators also commented on the need for things to do during the 'down time' around 4:00-6:00pm as they felt the younger audiences disappeared around that time with free activities finishing.







# Recommendations

'The lovely community feeling – it was so good to be right in the heart of Whitchurch and feel like the town itself was part of the festival.'

Event Attendee

## Nurturing Partnership Working

- Organisers worked in partnership with local venues, charities, heritage organisations and local traders. This creates a considerable strength in the quality and reach of the festival programming. As well as providing access to expertise, venues and resources, it opens doors to working with communities and audiences who would otherwise be hard to reach.
- Organisers greatly valued the collaborative relationships which were built through organizing and delivering the event. Relationships with local partners were developed and maintained by those individual members of the Organising Team who already had connections and were best placed to fulfil these roles.
- For the future, some resource perhaps in the form of a dedicated role on the organising team responsible for partnership communications and local liaison is worth exploring, potentially supported by some funding.





## Developing new audience

- According to the Report into the impact of folk festivals on cultural tourism, Folk Festivals are a proven way of developing new audiences. As a high-profile showcase of folk music, Whitchurch Folk Festival can attract more attention than small-scale local events.
- With this in mind, and bearing in mind the results of this evaluation project, the Organisers are considering the best proportion of ticketed versus free events on offer for next year's festival, with a view to further strengthen and widen the free, family and fringe provision that was so well received by members of the Whitchurch community.
- Also being considered are ways of making the ticketed parts of the festival more easily accessible and appealing in all respects to those who might be 'folk-curious' (as opposed to established folk/roots music fans who may already have a good idea of what to expect).
- Also part of developing new audience is having a clear identity for the festival – a big part of that identity is the community element running through everything, plus the carefully curated and balanced programme of high quality and interesting professional folk artists - the quality of which festival attendees can consistently rely on and introduce friends and family to the festival with confidence that the experience will be high quality and well organised.



## Website & Social Media

- The website aims to provide a central hub for buying tickets and finding out information including line-up, artist biographies, terms and conditions, festival contact details, accessibility information, links to venue details.
- The website launched in late 2023, built and maintained by members of the Organising team, and using ticket-buying software that had been thoroughly researched (Ticket Tailor supported by Stripe payments). The ticketing system worked very well, with no issues reported by ticket buyers.
- A review of the website functionality, navigation and search functions will be undertaken following the first festival cycle, and improvements made in response to feedback received.
- Now that the first festival has taken place, a new function of the website will be to provide a comprehensive archive of past festivals and events, including official photographs and videos (including the short festival video produced this year using drone and other video footage). This will be a good way of highlighting the wonderful community aspects and the calibre of the programme. Having an appealing pictorial record of what was experienced at previous festivals can encourage new people to attend.
- The festival launched its Instagram, Facebook, X and TikTok profiles in late 2023. As highlighted by the young evaluators, social media is integral to reaching new audiences and providing validation that it will be an event they'd want to attend.
- The organising team has the skills and personnel to conduct effective social media marketing campaigns and understands the importance of utilising social media channels as much as possible both before and during the festival.
- Some feedback from young evaluators expressed that more social media presence would be beneficial; and one idea proposed was that interested young people are invited to act as guest content creators in the lead up to the Festival – along with on-the-day socials. And perhaps young people could help devise a social media strategy.

## Event management / Operations

- Engaging young people to develop an offer of 'youth-led' or 'youth inspired' activities for the Festival. This might be a dedicated youth zone that is run by young people.
- In response to the feedback and experience of the festival, ways are being looked at to consolidate the events in a geographically smaller area of the town, and to adjust the total capacity of events across the town and the ticketing structure, in order to limit risk and gain some certainty on attendees at each event, to aid with planning.
- Investment in equipment to improve the WIFI network available for organisers and attendees, via a WIFI mast and network for example, could reduce some unpredictable aspects of the event (SumUp Payment machines used by the food traders and merchandise stall suffered from poor connectivity at times) and allow the festival to respond flexibly to changing trends in event ticketing and point of sale technology.
- The Organisers are keen to support and develop the community/fringe stage, perhaps with the provision of some proper staging, lighting, and increased volunteer presence and marketing to ensure local musicians hear about opportunities to turn up and add themselves on the programme to perform a slot during the day and evening.



## Sustainability

- It is now important to build on and develop the significant investment of time and resources that have gone into the successful re-establishment of the Whitchurch Folk Festival. This can be achieved in many ways including through enhancing local involvement and community ownership, through funding and through further collaboration with regional folk organisations that have similar aims of strengthening opportunities for folk and traditional music and dance in the UK and in particular the South East of England (for example English Folk Dance and Song Society, other folk festival organisers in Hampshire, local folk clubs, dance organisations etc).
- Also important is for the festival organisers to continue to engage with the wider national debate about access and diversity of all kinds in the folk music sector, and to look at collaborative approaches that aim to increase diversity e.g. in the age profile of people accessing the festival.
- Working closely with festival venues and sharing resources with them will help to deepen financial sustainability of the event whilst furthering some of the festival aims in relation to diversity and access to music. For example, the committee are considering a reciprocal arrangement whereby the festival purchases sound and lighting equipment for the Fringe stage at the Kings Arms. The idea would be for the pub to store and use the equipment throughout the year to support other music events that will encourage community participation in live music, and provide a platform for local young musicians to perform.
- Training people on the use of the Sound and Lighting equipment could also form a key part of ensuring the festival's sustainability, whilst also providing opportunities for young people to acquire and develop technical skills and be involved in the running of an event.
- Purchase of equipment that can be used year on year (e.g. collecting tins) is an important part of the plan for any sustainable event. Going hand in hand with this is a mechanism



for long term storage of festival resources and equipment – this is an area that the committee are keen to look at.

### Environmental Sustainability

- The committee spent time and care considering use of vendors, merchandise, etc. to ensure that the festival was as

responsive to the local environment as it could be. There is still work to be done in this area, with volunteers highlighting more need for reusable glasses and/or recyclables.

- Consider the principles set out in [Festival Safe](#) and other helpful guides to encourage even more approaches to environmental sustainability.

*Loved seeing that the town was immaculate on Sunday morning. Volunteer*

## Evaluation Recommendations

### Evaluation Design and Delivery

- Additional questions are needed to understand dwell time in the town for visitors. As a full day festival, it was expected that numbers would ebb and flow. Observations suggest peak times between 12-4pm.
- Further observations of sessions to assess number of people and 'type' (e.g. young people,

families, friends, groups, etc.).

- Dedicated session with young evaluators to create evaluation activities including more hands-on and creative methods.
- Continued engagement with young people as evaluators with refinement to methods – more focus on the observation and informal feedback at the event

Next year's festival will take place on Saturday 10th May 2025. Thanks to all who have taken part in the feedback and evaluation project which has been extremely valuable. There are many recommendations and actions that come from the project which we are confident will help ensure the future success of the festival.

For further information please drop the Organisers an email at: [info@whitchurchfolk.com](mailto:info@whitchurchfolk.com). Or visit our website [www.whitchurchfolk.com](http://www.whitchurchfolk.com) or YouTube Channel [Whitchurch Folk – YouTube](#)

