# Wickham Horse Fair faces uncertain future despite 750-year legacy



Dozens of travellers have converged on the picturesque village of Wickham in Hampshire as the annual Wickham Horse Fair approaches, a historic event now over 750 years old. Caravans have begun to populate a field near the village, particularly Greta Park in Hedge End, approximately six miles from the heart of the event. As preparations ramp up for this iconic fair, reports note that significant challenges may lie ahead for the traditional gathering.

Historically, the fair traces its roots back to 1269 when Roger De Syres received a royal charter from King Henry III, allowing for a weekly market in Wickham's town square. This event has since transformed into a vibrant fair where the travelling community can trade horses, reconnect with family, and celebrate their culture. However, while the horse fair has long been a cornerstone for the Romany and Traveller communities, recent concerns have emerged about declining participation. Vendors and traders have expressed worries over slow trade and diminishing turnout, as the landscape of public events continues to evolve, marked by more stringent regulations and changing consumer habits.

Spectators have commented on the decline in traditional amusements that once flourished at the fair, which some attribute to today's economic pressures. The 2019 event, which commemorated the fair's 750th anniversary, lacked the crowd-drawing entertainment of previous years, signalling a shift that has prompted calls for revitalisation. Despite these issues, there remains a spirit of optimism among some attendees, who cherish the occasion for socialising and upholding community bonds.

In anticipation of the upcoming fair on May 20, roads, shops, and pubs within the vicinity will close to prepare for the influx of visitors. Fun fairs, food stalls, and other vendors are set to line the streets, creating a bustling atmosphere. In past years, festivities included horse racing and public parades, though there have been incidents that marred the excitement, such as reports of animals in distress. The presence of organisations like the RSPCA underscores the seriousness of animal welfare concerns, providing necessary oversight during the event.

A crucial aspect of the Wickham Horse Fair remains its historical context; the 13th-century Wickham Square, with its original burgage plots, is one of the largest surviving market squares in England. It has served as a focal point for community gatherings for centuries. One longstanding tradition includes the 'King's Head' pub, named after Henry III, where it is said a horse traditionally takes the first drink at the event. This rich history continues to be a vital part of the fair’s identity, contributing to its cultural significance for both locals and visitors alike.

As this year’s fair approaches, local authorities, including Hampshire police, have indicated that additional officers will be deployed to manage the event effectively. These measures are designed to ensure a safe experience for all attendees and to address any issues that arise routinely within these large congregations.

While doubts persist regarding the fair's future longevity amidst a backdrop of changing economic and regulatory landscapes, the Wickham Horse Fair remains a cherished tradition. This gathering not only facilitates horse trading but also fosters a sense of community and cultural celebration that defines the travelling communities across the UK. Whether the fair can rejuvenate its prominence in the years to come remains to be seen, but its historical roots are firmly entrenched, making it an event of great significance.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1 and 2: (1), (4), (6)
2. Paragraph 3: (2), (5)
3. Paragraph 4: (1), (7)
4. Paragraph 5: (3), (7)
5. Paragraph 6: (6), (5)
6. Paragraph 7: (7)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14711311/Travellers-start-arriving-Hampshire-village-Wickham-Horse-Fair-event-dates-750-years-set-start-week.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.portsmouth.co.uk/news/people/historic-wickham-horse-fair-is-being-killed-off-by-slow-trade-and-low-turn-out-say-traders-972283> - Traders at the historic Wickham Horse Fair have expressed concerns about the event's decline due to slow trade and low turnout. The 2019 fair, believed to be the 750th, lacked past amusements, with some attendees attributing the decline to changing spending habits and increasing regulations. The fair, dating back to 1269, has been a significant event for the Romany and Traveller communities, offering a platform for horse trading and socializing. Despite challenges, some attendees remain optimistic about its longevity.
3. <https://wickhamhistory.org.uk/resources/qr-trail/wickham-square/> - Wickham Square, a 13th-century market square, is one of the largest surviving in England. The area retains its original 'burgage plots,' historically used for small-scale farming. The square has been central to Wickham's history, hosting markets and fairs since the 13th century. The 'King's Head' pub, named after Henry III, marks the fair's opening, a tradition that included a horse having the first drink at 'Greens' (then the Star Inn).
4. <https://thecoracle.com/horsefairs-wickham-hampshire-england/> - Wickham Horse Fair, held annually on May 20th, traces its origins back to 1269, making it one of the oldest horse fairs in the UK. The event attracts members of the Romany and Traveller communities, serving as a significant gathering for horse trading and socializing. The fair has evolved over the centuries, with attendees traveling from across the country to participate in this longstanding tradition.
5. <https://www.dailyecho.co.uk/news/15295299.wickham-horse-fair-dates-back-more-than-800-years-and-is-attended-by-traveller-communities-from-across-the-country/> - The Wickham Horse Fair, dating back over 800 years, is a significant event in Wickham, Hampshire. Attracting traveller communities from across the UK, the fair has evolved into one of the country's major horse trading events. The RSPCA and Hampshire Constabulary attend to ensure safety and animal welfare. Road closures are implemented to accommodate the large number of visitors, highlighting the fair's importance to the local community and its rich history.
6. <https://www.portsmouth.co.uk/whats-on/things-to-do/wickham-horse-fair-to-return-later-this-may-continuing-a-nearly-800-year-old-tradition-4633521> - The Wickham Horse Fair, a historic event in Wickham, Hampshire, is set to return, continuing a nearly 800-year-old tradition. The fair, held annually on May 20th, has been a significant gathering for the Romany and Traveller communities, featuring horse trading, racing, and a funfair. The event's return marks a revival of this longstanding tradition, attracting visitors from across the country to celebrate and participate in the festivities.
7. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cll172jn724o> - Thousands are expected to attend the annual Wickham Horse Fair in Hampshire, an event tracing its origins back over 750 years. The fair attracts members of the Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities. Hampshire police have implemented road closures and deployed extra officers to ensure safety during the event. The fair continues to be a significant cultural gathering, maintaining its longstanding traditions and community importance.