# Travellers and authorities clash over shop closures at historic Wickham Horse Fair



At the heart of the picturesque Hampshire village of Wickham, the annual Wickham Horse Fair has once again stirred tensions between local authorities and the travelling community. This historic event, which celebrates over 800 years of tradition in horse trading, witnessed a significant presence of travellers who expressed their discontent regarding restrictions placed on local businesses by the police and council.

The recent fair, held on March 20, saw hundreds of travellers converging on Wickham, bringing with them a vibrant atmosphere steeped in cultural legacy. However, as shops and pubs were ordered to close for the day, many in the Romany and Traveller communities voiced strong objections. Jessy Goddard, a prominent horse trader, conveyed his frustration when he stated, “If they don’t let us run the fair our way, they’re gonna get problems.” His sentiments echoed those of many attendees who felt that shutting down local businesses not only challenged their ability to participate in the fair but also misrepresented their community’s reputation.

Historically, the Wickham Horse Fair has been enshrined in law since the 13th century when a royal charter was granted by King Henry III. This charter allows for the trading of horses, a practice that has evolved but remained integral to the identity of the travelling community. Goddard emphasised this historical right, asserting, “They can’t stop it; there’s no way they can stop it.” However, the police's recent insistence on maintaining order through closures has ignited concerns about public perception and the portrayal of travellers as inherently problematic.

Local law enforcement, while expressing the need to ensure public safety, acknowledged the complexities inherent in managing such an event. A local superintendent police officer noted the challenge of balancing the needs of the community with safety, highlighting a lack of central organisation among the travellers which complicates police efforts. In a bid to prepare for the influx, Hampshire Police implemented extensive road closures and deployed officers throughout the area, leading to a heavy police presence that some attendees felt was unwarranted and prompted tension.

Despite the restrictions, the event itself saw no reported incidents, indicative perhaps of the community's desire for peaceful cohabitation. Both police and members of the Traveller community acknowledged the misunderstandings and prejudices that often plague interactions. Many within the community advocate for greater understanding and connection with the non-travelling population, challenging stereotypes while insisting on their legal and cultural rights.

Elder members of the traveller community, such as 78-year-old Nelson Scott, voiced their longstanding struggles against discrimination. He denounced the fear and distrust directed toward travellers, remarking, “We feel persecuted because we feel they don’t trust us.” This sentiment reflects a broader narrative of prejudice that has historically surrounded the Romany and Traveller communities. Scott pointed out misconceptions about criminality, urging people to instead focus on the positive contributions that travellers bring to local economies during events like the fair.

Moreover, there is a prevailing belief among locals and traders that the fair represents an untapped economic opportunity. Some shopkeepers, defying police advice, chose to remain open, attracting businesses from the traveller community. This was supported by others like Stanley, who noted that ignoring the fair would leave local businesses missing out on substantial revenue. “Our kind would spend more in one day than their kind does within a year,” he said, challenging local perceptions.

As Wickham Horse Fair continues to navigate the delicate balance between tradition and local authority, it remains a focal point for discussions about cultural identity, safety, and co-existence. The fair, true to its chartered roots, not only serves as a commercial hub but also as a platform for reflecting on broader societal attitudes towards the traveller community.

In a time when misunderstandings can easily escalate, the event represents an opportunity for dialogue and community building. As expressed by Mr Goddard and others, the hope remains that local and travelling communities can find common ground, steering towards a future where both cultural celebrations and local business thrive side by side.

**Reference Map:**

1. Paragraph 1: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14735117/Wickham-Horse-Fair-travellers-slam-authorities-ordering-pubs-shops-shut-warn-dont-let-run-fair-way-theyre-gonna-problems.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
2. Paragraph 2: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14735117/Wickham-Horse-Fair-travellers-slam-authorities-ordering-pubs-shops-shut-warn-dont-let-run-fair-way-theyre-gonna-problems.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
3. Paragraph 3: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14735117/Wickham-Horse-Fair-travellers-slam-authorities-ordering-pubs-shops-shut-warn-dont-let-run-fair-way-theyre-gonna-problems.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
4. Paragraph 4: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14735117/Wickham-Horse-Fair-travellers-slam-authorities-ordering-pubs-shops-shut-warn-dont-let-run-fair-way-theyre-gonna-problems.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
5. Paragraph 5: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14735117/Wickham-Horse-Fair-travellers-slam-authorities-ordering-pubs-shops-shut-warn-dont-let-run-fair-way-theyre-gonna-problems.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
6. Paragraph 6: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14735117/Wickham-Horse-Fair-travellers-slam-authorities-ordering-pubs-shops-shut-warn-dont-let-run-fair-way-theyre-gonna-problems.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.hampshire.police.uk/news/hampshire/news/news/2023/may/advise-issued-to-motorists-and-visitors-to-wickham-horse-fair-2023/)
7. Paragraph 7: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14735117/Wickham-Horse-Fair-travellers-slam-authorities-ordering-pubs-shops-shut-warn-dont-let-run-fair-way-theyre-gonna-problems.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cll172jn724o)
8. Paragraph 8: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14735117/Wickham-Horse-Fair-travellers-slam-authorities-ordering-pubs-shops-shut-warn-dont-let-run-fair-way-theyre-gonna-problems.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[6]](https://www.dailyecho.co.uk/news/12940484.Police_prepare_for_Horse_Fair_after_previous_violence/)
9. Paragraph 9: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14735117/Wickham-Horse-Fair-travellers-slam-authorities-ordering-pubs-shops-shut-warn-dont-let-run-fair-way-theyre-gonna-problems.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.hampshirelive.news/whats-on/whats-on-news/wickham-horse-fair-road-closures-8453602)
10. Paragraph 10: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14735117/Wickham-Horse-Fair-travellers-slam-authorities-ordering-pubs-shops-shut-warn-dont-let-run-fair-way-theyre-gonna-problems.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[5]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-hampshire-22573597)

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14735117/Wickham-Horse-Fair-travellers-slam-authorities-ordering-pubs-shops-shut-warn-dont-let-run-fair-way-theyre-gonna-problems.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.hampshire.police.uk/news/hampshire/news/news/2023/may/advise-issued-to-motorists-and-visitors-to-wickham-horse-fair-2023/> - Hampshire Police issued guidance ahead of the 2023 Wickham Horse Fair, advising motorists to plan for road closures and potential delays. The Square in Wickham was closed to traffic from 12pm on Friday, 19 May, until 10am on Sunday, 21 May. The A334 was closed between Blind Lane and the A32 roundabout from 5am to 8pm on Saturday, 20 May. Horse boxes were arranged to park on the east side of the A334, and temporary parking restrictions were implemented to maintain traffic flow. Residents and businesses were provided with a dedicated contact number for emergencies. Acting Chief Inspector John Stribley emphasized the focus on public safety and the collaboration with local authorities to ensure a safe and enjoyable event for all communities.
3. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cll172jn724o> - The BBC reported on the Wickham Horse Fair, highlighting its historical significance dating back over 750 years. The event attracts members of the Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities annually on 20 or 21 May. In 2023, Hampshire Police implemented road closures, including the A334 and the village center, to manage the influx of attendees. Extra officers were deployed to ensure public safety. The article also noted that in 2021, despite the event being canceled due to COVID-19 restrictions, hundreds attended, leading to police intervention to manage the situation.
4. <https://www.hampshirelive.news/whats-on/whats-on-news/wickham-horse-fair-road-closures-8453602> - HampshireLive provided details on the road closures and police travel warnings ahead of the 2023 Wickham Horse Fair. The Square in Wickham was closed to traffic from 12pm on Friday, 19 May, until 10am on Sunday, 21 May. The A334 was closed between Blind Lane and the A32 roundabout from 5am to 8pm on Saturday, 20 May. Temporary parking restrictions were introduced to maintain traffic flow on local diversion routes. Motorists not attending the fair were advised to consider alternative routes around Wickham. The article emphasized the importance of planning ahead due to the expected large turnout and associated traffic disruptions.
5. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-hampshire-22573597> - BBC News reported on the road closures and traffic disruptions during the Wickham Horse Fair. The Square in Wickham was closed to traffic from 5am to 8pm, and the A334 Winchester Road was also closed between Blind Lane and the A32 roundabout junction. The A32 southbound at Hoads Hill was used for parking, with vehicles in unauthorized places being removed. Arrangements were made for horse boxes to park on a section of the east side of the A334. Officers emphasized the importance of maintaining a safe environment for visitors and residents during the event.
6. <https://www.dailyecho.co.uk/news/12940484.Police_prepare_for_Horse_Fair_after_previous_violence/> - The Daily Echo reported on police preparations for the Wickham Horse Fair, noting that thousands were expected to attend the traditional event. The fair had been marred by violence in previous years, including a mass brawl and a head injury from a marble fired from a catapult. In response, officers in high-visibility uniforms were deployed throughout the event to address any issues. The article highlighted the historical significance of the fair and the increased police presence to ensure safety.
7. <https://www.winchester.gov.uk/news/2023/may/advice-issued-to-motorists-and-visitors-to-wickham-horse-fair-2023> - Winchester City Council issued advice to motorists and visitors ahead of the 2023 Wickham Horse Fair. The Square in Wickham was closed to traffic from 12pm on Friday, 19 May, until 10am on Sunday, 21 May. The A334 was closed between Blind Lane and the A32 roundabout from 5am to 8pm on Saturday, 20 May. The council emphasized the importance of planning ahead due to the expected large turnout and associated traffic disruptions. Residents and businesses were provided with a dedicated contact number for emergencies.