



Bardfest

in the Bride Valley

Bardfest is an annual celebration of the 'Bardic Arts'—poetry, storytelling, singing, drama, and music. Founded by author and academic, Dr Kevan Manwaring, with early versions of the annual gathering of Bardic friends going back to 1999, a year after he became Bard of Bath, he held the first one in Bridport in 2022, when he moved to the town. Initially a single evening event, Bardfest has now become a four-day programme, held over the August bank holiday weekend, 28-31 August, in the village of Puncknowle. Centred around Puncknowle and Swyre village hall, there are also events taking place in the beer garden of The Crown on Church Street, and in the surrounding area.

The programme starts on Friday 28th August with the Welcome Concert, running 7pm-10pm in the village hall. The evening features Prog-Rock by Frome-based guitar wizard James Hollingsworth, Americana by Simon Andrews, and enchanting poetry and storytelling local wordsmiths Izzy Darkwood and Monica Ciriani. Refreshments will be available by donation. There will be books and CDs for sale. Guests are invited to bring cash. Tickets are £15 in advance or £20 on door.

On Saturday, 29th August there will be the 1st Wessex Book Fair (featuring local authors and small presses) and an Art Exhibition, taking place 10am-1pm and 2-4pm in the village hall. This will be free to enter. There will be the first Lunchtime Concert: 'The Fairies' Bazaar—magical storytelling and poetry by Izzy Darkwood (1pm-2pm, £10 on the door); and a Teatime Concert: Healing Waters—storytelling and poetry exploring holy wells and sacred rivers by Kevan Manwaring (4pm-5pm, £10 on the door). In the evening the Bardic Cabaret will be held in

the beer garden of The Crown. This will comprise music, storytelling and poetry in aid of the Dorset Wildlife Trust. It will take place between 6.30pm-10.30pm. Bring a blanket if staying after sunset and cash for donations. Hot food and drink will be available from the bar.

On Sunday, 30th August, the second day of the Wessex Book Fair & Art Exhibition will take place (10am-1pm; 2-4pm, free entry) The second Lunchtime Concert will take place, this time featuring the sublime sitar of Ricky Romain (1pm-2pm, £10); and the second Teatime Concert, featuring Bards of Dorchester, Peter Roe and Rebecca Katya Danicic, with their show Giants & Kings, which celebrates the history and legends of Cerne Abbas (4pm-5pm, £10). The day ends with a Sunday Sing 'n' Strum in the beer garden of The Crown, Puncknowle (5-7pm, free). All welcome.

Bardfest '26 ends on Monday, 31st August with A Folk Song Walk (Puncknowle) with folksinger Alastair Braidwood. Meeting outside The Crown at 11am, this 2 hour walk explores the local landscape via folk ballads. Participants are asked to wear suitable footwear and clothing, and to bring water and a packed lunch. Tickets are £12 in advance. Accompanied children go free. Well-behaved dogs on lead are welcome.

***There are discounted advance tickets available:
Gold Weekend Ticket: £50 – entry to all events;
Silver Ticket: £25 – entry to 3 events; and Bronze
Ticket: £10 – entry to 1 event. These can be
purchased direct via Paypal: kevanmanwaring@
yahoo.co.uk For individual bookings, book via
Eventbrite (booking fee).***

