

27. Trading at Glastonbury Festival

“Legend tells of the enchanted city that appears for just three days a year at midsummer in the flowering meadows of the Vale of Avalon. And ‘tis said that there may be found entrancing music, amazing spectacle and wonders beyond compare....”

The market areas present both the browser and the impulse buyer with an embarrassment of riches. Given a month it might be possible to sample all the delicious world cuisine, ethnic crafts, clothing and goods on offer. But for most of us the three days and nights of festivities afford precious little opportunity to do more than dip a toe into this exotic amalgam.

Since 1998, Glastonbury has received some four applications for each of the trading opportunities available. On average the Festival receives the best part of five thousand enquiries to trade, which allows the strictest quality control standards to be employed. Caterers are required to submit menus and price lists – and we talk about whom we propose to invite with the local Environment Health Officers before we offer any food stall a site. Every effort is made to vet craft stalls and those that import third world goods to make sure they adhere to ethical trading standards. Glastonbury markets have a reputation for quality and variety while reflecting that wonderfully elusive, indefinable ‘Glastonbury Spirit’.

As you wander down the market’s pathways, you will find eating places and takeaways offering a range of delicacies unmatched in this country. Philippine bitter stew soup, West Indian curried goat, Oriental tempura, Jamaican jerk chicken, Japanese noodles, Creole gumbo, Mediterranean falafels, organic and traditional British dishes are all there – not to mention an unparalleled choice of vegetarian options. Recent unique additions include barbecued swordfish, barbecued tuna, ostrich steaks, organic trout, beef and stilton ‘Square Pie’, haggis, tarte a flete and Yorkshire Pie and peas. These can be washed down with elderflower wine, real ale, hot mulled wine, hot spicy cider, Jamaican punch, freshly squeezed fruit juice or a fresh fruit smoothie according to taste. But if you prefer burgers, fish and chips or a pizza followed by a lager, you will find them too.

Once refreshed you may want to: try out a Mexican hammock; slip on some handmade shoes; wonder at some of the delicate carvings, pottery, and hand made jewellery; check out the merchandised goods from the different stages; laugh at some of the amazing hand made hats; investigate the club, surf and designer gear available or buy a slippery executive lizard or some aromatherapy soap. Anything is possible. Little surprise really that some view Glastonbury as an excuse to shop till they drop. Christmas shopping is extremely popular!

There are other important aspects of the markets.

Many different charities are represented frequently using Glastonbury as a forum to launch their campaigns. Internationally known bodies such as Oxfam (promoting their 'Make Trade Fair' campaign, Amnesty International, Greenpeace (Save or Delete campaign) and Water Aid (with their 'Give Water, Give Life' message) all high profile. However, beyond this, a plethora of smaller campaign and charity groups operate in the markets..... Future Forests, South West Children's Hospice, The Samaritans, Sense, West Pennard and Kilmersden Primary School PTAs to name but a few.

It is Festival policy to give as many trading opportunities as possible to charitable organisations even when it would be financially considerably more beneficial to offer the same site to commercial organisations.

The level of trade is so high that caterers are constantly needing further supplies, be it bread, fresh fruit and vegetables, calor gas, frozen chips or soft drinks. To meet that need a wholesale market operates with articulated lorries ferrying in bulk essential supplies in the early hours of the morning. These goods then have to be distributed around the site before there is too much pedestrian traffic around the site.

The work involved in providing the markets with water and electricity is colossal. Each market has several stand pipes and in addition there are some 150 direct connections to caterers. Basically the markets electrical needs are met by some 1250 kVa generators in synchronised pairs on articulated trailers. The cost is enormous. To bring more mains water to the site in 1997 cost some £90k. At the same time over £30k of cabling was buried on site to link up to the generators. Thereafter each of the stalls have different electrical requirements and all need to get the supply they have ordered and paid for. Little wonder the electrician is prematurely white haired.

Following two muddy years a massive operation was undertaken to improve land drainage and walkways to improve facilities for festival goers and to meet with the licence requirements. The majority of the drainage was put in around the main markets and the main arenas and there is now a hard standing for the wholesale markets.

There are 200 toilets with integral wash hand basins for market traders. To service these toilets there is a team of 8 providing 24 hour cover, going around, cleaning, disinfecting and filling the cisterns. They work in conjunction with a separate team, also providing 24 hour cover, who pull tanker and pumps round with a tractor to empty the reservoir under each loo. These are thankless but essential tasks if the festival is to meet the hygiene standards set in the licence.

The breakdown of the market stalls is:

Food	Non Food
Vegetarian 33	Imported goods/clothes 93
Alcohol 20	T-Shirts 24
Non-Alcohol Drinks 21	Surplus/recycled clothes 15
Festival Stores 7	Hats 6
Other General Food 38	Dance/Street Gear 13
Caribbean 11	Other Clothes 32
German/Dutch 4	Papers/Books/Posters 9
Crepes 11	Craft Stalls 76
Baked Potato 9	Candles 10
S F Chicken 4	CDs/Records 5
Fish and Chips 6	Camping Accessories 4
Roast Meat 13	Charity 54
Kebab/Greek 3	Jewellery 9
Speciality Fish 5	Amusements/temporary tattoos 11
Coffee/Tea Tents 10	Incense/Crystals 8
Pizza 4	Merchandising 5
Sweets/nuts 15	Information 4
Doughnuts etc 12	Others 20
Baguettes 15	Total 398
Burgers 13	
Speciality British 9	
Ice Cream/Yoghurt 40	
Fresh Fruit 4	
Philippine/Malay 3	
Indian 5	
Thai/Chinese/Japanese 10	
Creole 5	
Italian 6	
Mexican 4	
African 3	
Wholesalers 14	

Total 357 Grand total of stalls – 755

In the Green Futures field, in conjunction with the field co-ordinators, market staff arrange for some fifty different small groups to have a presence from Tat for Tibet to the Rain Forest Foundation, from the Citizenship Foundation to the Ecologist. As with the catering and craft traders, the range is extensive.

Market Organisation

To select, plan and facilitate the markets operating successfully requires painstaking, detailed organisation. In effect what is being done is converting a green field into a small town for a weekend – providing facilities for 140,000 people and meeting all the requirements of Local Authority Environmental Health Officers, the Fire Service, Health and Safety regulations, the Environment Agency, Trading Standards etc. Indeed when it is all in place apparently it is the largest town in Somerset.

By November each year, work towards agreement with sponsors is well under way. Application forms are sent out to all those who previously traded and those who have asked to be put on the database.

Applications are required to be returned in early January. Designing each market area demands time and effort to ensure a diverse and complimentary mix of stalls along each pathway – and to ensure they all fit in. At this time the major concessions (ice cream, cigarettes, soft drinks etc) are being negotiated.

Offers of a trading place are made in late February, with payment due by 1st April. Stall prices are determined by their function (e.g. a fast food caterer is charged much more than a craft stall), the size of the frontage, the location, the number of staff passes and the services they require. During the offer stage the festival works closely with Mendip District Council.

By February orders for tentage, portacabins, materials and services are confirmed with the Site Manager and the Infrastructure Manager. By March all the arrangements for 'contra deals' to feed staff are finalised. During April the site wholesalers are confirmed and the traders who have not paid up are pursued. If they do not pay immediately then the sites are reallocated. Detailed scale maps of the markets are needed in May by everyone from the Ambulance Service to the Recycling Team, from the Environmental Health Officers to the Plumbers. By the end of May the last communication goes out to traders before the festival, sending out passes, parking details and so on.

In June we anxiously watch the weather as the grass is cut for silage before market staff can move on site. Ideally market managerial teams have three weeks on site, before the public arrive, to mark out sites, fence off any vulnerable areas, to site traders and ensure all services are working. When the traders arrive the management team check that traders pass a Health, Safety and Hygiene check and make certain the markets are secure.

This is when the detailed 'town planning' is validated. Do the stalls all fit? Do stalls that ordered direct water connections have water? Does the water pass the strict quality regulations? Is the extent and the integrity of electrical service secure? Are all the waste water and loo cleaning arrangements in place? Are the internal and external telephones working by the agreed time? Are similar stalls too close to each other? Scores of questions have to be addressed and

irrespective of the detail and accuracy of Festival planning, problems will arise: traders bringing different sized units than stated in their applications; traders having faulty electrical equipment causing circuits to short out; traders having underestimated the numbers of staff they will need to trade 24 hours a day and so on. Even without bad weather there is a degree of crisis management as the show gets underway.

Each market has a manager, a team of practical personnel to mark out and settle the traders in, and a team of gate staff who keep an eye on security during the event. In addition there are 28 uniformed security guards on duty at any time in the markets, and a team of plain clothes security, acting as eyes and ears for the uniformed security, to protect the public, traders and concession holders.

After the festival the site has to be decommissioned. This takes some time. Then all the paper work has to be finalised, problems and complaints handled and the event reviewed with the Licensing Authority before the markets can be 'put to bed'. Normally every thing is cleared before the end of August, and then on to October when the cycle begins again, updating the database, redesigning the application form and so forth.

“The markets are a performance in themselves, adding colour and light to an already intense experience. The variety is incredible – you can spend your entire visit exploring their secrets”

Performance is an integral part of the markets. Street theatre spills over from the theatre field and you never know what you will encounter when you turn a corner in the markets be it Tea Ladies on Tour or the Red Devil's Formation Team or a couple of Kangaroos. The way the traders go about their business influences our decisions about who to invite. The Australian Steak Sandwich stall is always likely to get invited back, what with their staff wearing hats hanging with corks, singing along to the music system and engaged in cheeky banter. This all contributes to the ambience of the event. Apart from the performance cafes which are venues in their own right, such as the Avalon Café, the market team organises The Bandstand which is an open air, acoustic, stage in the centre of the main markets. There are chill out tents with 'wicked sounds', including The Crown, The Café in J market and stalls with excellent sound systems. Then of course there are workshops run by traders. In the markets you will find juggling, drumming, didgeridoo, guitar, dream catcher workshops and many others – not to forget Norman's Mouth Organ Emporium!

Market History

The early organisation of trading at the festival looks rather random in retrospect – with few invited traders, many gatecrashers and hundreds of ‘fly pitchers’. By the mid 1980s there were two well established markets, the main one being at the top of Big Ground, above the Pyramid Stage. By 1987 a third market was introduced, as was a ban of public vehicles on site.

In 1989 the markets changed shape with the stalls sited close together and in a circle so security could be tightened. It was likened to wagon trains in the American West forming a circle when attacked! Beyond the security aspect this made the markets self contained with water, electricity and toilets being kept separate for (catering) traders, with obvious hygiene benefits.

The main market – the red market was in the middle of the site between the Main Stage and the Meeting Point, the Brown Market was at the top of the site near Worthy Farm itself and the Blue Market between the Meeting Point and the Theatre and Circus Fields. There were also a few stalls (the Yellow Market) near, what was then, the NME Stage. In 1992 there were two main stages. The market at the traditional site at the top of Big Ground was moved to the middle of the site leaving a solitary burger van for site office staff, medical staff and campers. As the number of traders increased a more sophisticated organisation was established.

In early years there used to be a klondyke type of rush, with traders queuing up early until the site was opened and racing down to get the best pitches. Now each site is marked out by markets staff and pre-sold. The method of identifying markets and sites was changed from colour coding to naming each market with letters and numbers. Since that time the markets have increased slowly in size in line with the increase of licence attendance figures.

The most important change was the opening up of Silverhayes Road between the Pyramid and the Other Stage and the development of the J market which has proved to be a strong trading area even in adverse weather conditions. Also campsite cafés were developed in the different camping fields which, apart from being sound trading ventures, proved to be essential in 1997 and 1998 when the miserable weather conditions soaked people through. Having 24 hour provision of hot tea and coffee in the middle of the campsites kept people’s spirits high. To give an idea of the current venture, 1995 saw 671 stalls in total with 518 in the main markets and 153 in the Green Markets. By 1998 the totals had risen to 755 in total, with a split of 612 and 143 – these figures have remained fairly constant until the current day.