

Malmesbury celebrates its rivers in a new festival

This year, with support from Malmesbury Town Team and the Town Council, Caerbladon is partnering with local community and environmental groups such as the Malmesbury River Valleys Trust and MAGIC (Malmesbury Area Green Impact Community) to commission artists, performers, writers and scientists to uncover stories, facts and unusual aspects of the river exploring how it has shaped our lives in terms of social, economic, historic and ecological impact. The programme is a key element of the public engagement remit of the Town Council's River Management Working Group, of which Caerbladon is a member.

Between 12 June and 5 July, there will be the inaugural Malmesbury River Festival featuring events, exhibitions and participatory activities across town that celebrate the river's cultural and environmental importance. David Drake, Caerbladon's Co-Director and Chair of Malmesbury Town Team explains:

“Malmesbury lies between the Sherston and Tetbury Avons, and it is here that the two rivers converge below St. John's Bridge and the River Avon proper begins. Our aim is to engage residents and visitors in activities that celebrate Malmesbury's wonderful river habitats and raise awareness of river health and mitigating climate impact.”

Festival highlights include *Waterpower*, a sound installation by Malmesbury artist Mike Hipwell, which uses the recorded sounds of the rivers and streams of Malmesbury, taking in the ebb and flow of the seasons, and *Troubled Waters*, a show by storyteller Corinne Harragin offering contemporary retellings of ancient river legend, folklore and myth. On Saturday 27 June there will be a Landscape Artist of the Year painting and drawing challenge on St Aldhelm's Mead, and an evening concert at the Town Hall by award-winning Welsh folk singer and cultural historian Owen Shiers and his band, Cynefin, who has created a musical map of his local river by travelling along its course and collecting forgotten songs.

On Friday 26 June, Malmesbury Stands with Ukraine invite the public to join them in Cloister Gardens for *Ivana Kupala*, an ancient Slavic midsummer festival honouring the elemental forces of fire and water, celebrated around the summer solstice to mark nature's peak. At the end of the evening, everyone walks down to the bridge over the Avon and throws their wreath into the river.

On Saturday 4 July there is a Riverside Sketch and Walk event, and in the evening a special screening at the Town Hall of the film *River*, a cinematic and musical odyssey that explores the remarkable relationship between humans and rivers. Written by Robert Macfarlane with narration by Willem Dafoe and music by Radiohead and the Australian Chamber Orchestra, the film follows rivers from source to mouth, emphasising the need for environmental stewardship and our shared fate with these waterways.

Finally, on Sunday 5 July, Malmesbury and District Natural History Society have organised a 'Bioblitz', inviting the public to help them record all the wildlife, plants, insects, birds or mammals in St Aldhelm's Mead by taking photos and notes on where they were found.

The timing of the festival is important, as the Town Council and various partners are acquiring the Daniel's Well land on the south side of the river and will be developing it for community benefit whilst ensuring that natural habitats are protected and that river health is maintained. The festival and subsequent public events will contribute to wider discussion of the future use of Daniel's Well as a public amenity in the context of the circular river walk and the town's sustainability commitment.

The Mayor of Malmesbury Cllr Robert Hastings added:

"Malmesbury is very lucky to be almost surrounded by two branches of the Avon River and with the purchase of Daniel's Well the river will become more accessible for everyone to enjoy. I'm looking forward to celebrating the River Avon and the opportunity to

both learn and appreciate the wonderful landscape created by this river.

Tickets and full information about the Malmesbury River Festival can be found at www.caerbladon.co.uk