



The History of International Beatleweek

International Beatleweek celebrates the most famous band in the world in the city where it was born – attracting thousands of Fab Four fans and dozens of bands to Liverpool each year.

The history of Beatleweek goes back to 1977 when Liverpool's first Beatles Convention was held at Mr Pickwick's club in Fraser Street, off London Road.

The two-day event, staged in October, was organised by legendary Cavern Club DJ Bob Wooler and Allan Williams, entrepreneur and The Beatles' early manager, and it included live music, guest speakers and special screenings.

In 1981, Liz and Jim Hughes – the pioneering couple behind Liverpool's pioneering Beatles attraction, Cavern Mecca – took up the baton and arranged the First Annual Mersey Beatle Extravaganza at the Adelphi Hotel.

It was a one-day event on Saturday, August 29 and the special guests were Beatles authors Philip Norman, Brian Southall and Tony Tyler.

In 1984 the Mersey Beatle event moved to St George's Hall where guests included former Cavern Club owner Ray McFall, Beatles' press officer Tony Barrow, John Lennon's uncle Charles Lennon and 'Father' Tom McKenzie.

Cavern Mecca closed in 1984, and after the city council stepped in for a year to keep the event running, in 1986 Cavern City Tours was asked to take over the Mersey Beatle Convention.

It has organised the annual event ever since.

International bands started to make an appearance in the late 1980s, with two of the earliest groups to make the journey to Liverpool being Girl from the USA and the USSR's Beatle Club.

A Beatle Fringe Festival was introduced in 1990, a year which saw not one but two Conventions – the August original and an extra event in May that year marking a decade since John Lennon's death. And 1990 was also the year Merseyside Tourism Board recognised the Beatles Convention as the city's second most important annual attraction after the Grand National.

The first extended Mersey Beatle Festival took place in 1993 when the event ran from August 26-31 and spawned what would become the Mathew Street Festival, with the Convention's Bank Holiday Monday music programme including venues up and down Mathew Street and an open-air stage on a car park next to the Cavern which attracted 25,000 people.

In 1999 Beatleweek and the Mathew Street Festival staged a special celebration of Yellow Submarine, while 2003 saw a major Live Peace event in Chavasse Park.

Liverpool Cathedral joined forces with Beatleweek organisers to present a Peace, Love and Understanding concert at the landmark in 2010 which featured two stages, a giant screen and performers from every continent.

The final Mathew Street Festival took place during Beatleweek in 2012 before being replaced by the Liverpool International Music Festival in a new location, Sefton Park.

International Beatleweek continued, although with numbers attending becoming smaller each year.

In 2016, Monkee Micky Dolenz was among the line-up for the annual Beatlefest. But with numbers continuing to decline and costs increasing, there were discussions among organisers of the event about its future.

Cavern City Tours director Bill Heckle – who had masterminded the festival since 1986 – made the decision to step back following the 2017 Beatleweek and hand over the organisational reins to other team members.

A major change was made in 2018 when the Beatleweek programme was tightened from six core days to four – although the festival still features seven days of music at city locations.

The 2018 Beatleweek was a major success, and the 2019 event has become the fastest selling in the festival's history.

Over its 38-year history Beatleweek has taken place at a host of venues across Liverpool including the Cavern, State Ballroom, Olympia, Empire and Royal Court theatres, Alma de Cuba, Grand Central Hall, St Peter's Church at Woolton and Liverpool Cathedral as well as the Adelphi Hotel.

It has welcomed dozens of guests with special links to The Beatles and their era. They include:

The Quarrymen, Pete Best, Donovan, Johnny Gentle, Tony Sheridan, Bob Wooler, Allan Williams, Tony Barrow, Alistair Taylor, Tony Bramwell, Bill Harry, Denny Laine and Laurence Juber (Wings), Badfinger, Neil Innes, Brian Epstein's secretary Beryl Adams, driver Alf Bicknell, Mona Best, early promoters Sam Leach and Joe Flannery, photographers Robert Whittaker, Tom Murphy and Paul Saltzman, Ken Kesey, Monkee Micky Dolenz, Help! actor Victor Spinetti and Hamburg music figure Horst Fascher.

Family and friends including Charles Lennon, John Lennon's sister Julia Baird, Mike McCartney, Louise Harrison, Pauline Sutcliffe, Pattie Boyd, schoolmate Pete Shotton, art school friend and flatmate Rod Murray, Astrid Kirchherr, Klaus Voormann and May Pang and have also been contributors – with many of them attending on several years.

And the annual event has also attracted the world's best Beatles authors and biographers including Ray Coleman, Philip Norman, Mark Lewisohn and Barry Miles.