

THE CASE study

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Locking up noise in Lancaster Castle

It's pretty unusual for any noise consultant to be asked to monitor noise levels at a dance music event held within a medieval castle but it's even more unusual when the revellers are all housed in a converted prison wing inside those ancient walls.

That was exactly the challenge that faced noise consultant Chris Selkirk of 'Sustainable Festivals', when he was asked to take on a noise monitoring project within the imposing walls of Lancaster Castle in Lancashire.

The medieval castle dates back 1,000 years and has been a key historical site over the centuries, including in the English Civil War, and the infamous Pendle Witch Trials of 1612. Its uses and importance have varied but in the mid-19th Century it was converted into an imposing debtors' prison and then adapted to house 'Category C' low risk prisoners until relatively recently.

In 2011 the ancient building was deemed too expensive and inefficient and was closed as a prison, leaving a headache of what to do with the rather unusual Grade 1 listed building - the site itself is part of the Duchy of Lancaster estate, being owned by HRH the Queen.

However, since then, the castle has enjoyed a new lease of life as a major tourist attraction and music venue. The castle has hosted an outdoor music concert in the impressive courtyards with 5,000 people attending over the weekend of the Lancaster Music Festival. In the former prison, guests get to party within the original

wings and cells occupied by convicts of decades gone by - these are known as the 'A Wing' club nights and sell out with hundreds attending.

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Very challenging

“Imagine the set of Porridge with the cells, staircases and the Victorian mezzanine and that’s what you have here,” said Chris. “It is totally unchanged from when it was used as a prison but now it’s a club venue.”

“You would think that the castle walls would be able to contain any noise produced by the dance nights. They are incredibly thick and over 20m high but noise still manages to get out over the top and the nearest residential dwellings are less than 30 metres away, making things very challenging.”

Chris hired the Cirrus Invictus noise monitor and stationed it near the properties to take continuous LAeq readings at 15 minute intervals throughout the event, with the Noise-Hub² software allowing him to see the live measurements on his i-pad. Should the need arise this would allow him to react instantly by reducing the noise level.

Everyone was happy

“I was ensuring the noise levels reached didn’t breach the licensing conditions of the premises on behalf of the organisers,” he explained. “At this event they didn’t so everyone was happy, particularly the dance guests who certainly didn’t want the music turning down.”

“Being able to hire the Cirrus equipment is ideal for me as a consultant,” he added. “I have access to the best equipment I need for a specific job but don’t have to invest the money for what might be a one-off.”

“For example, when I did the outdoor Alchemy Festival in Lincolnshire last year I needed 4 full Invictus kits and an Optimus[®] Green and that can add up to tens of thousands of pounds. By hiring I get just



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Win, win situation

Cirrus Environmental General Manager Craig Storey, added: “It’s great that the introduction of Invictus rental has enabled SME businesses and consultants to access the latest generation of high quality equipment, so they can fulfil a contract without any large outlay or delays – it’s a win/win for them and their clients.”

Chris is a very familiar face working on behalf of many local authorities as well as event organisers; monitoring noise levels in every conceivable festival environment including fields, car parks, warehouses and purpose-built venues. He can now add medieval castles and prisons to that expanding list.



Cirrus products used in this case study

- Invictus CR:247 Portable Noise Monitor
- Noise-Hub² Noise Monitoring System Software