

February 2026 at the Willis Museum

Talks

Hosted by the Friends of the Willis Museum (Archaeology Gallery, second floor)

12 Feb, 7.30pm: The Last Days of Charles I by Alan Turton

Alan Turton takes us through the final days of Charles I, the King who faced Civil Wars, was overthrown by parliament and executed in January 1649.

Doors open 7.10pm, raffle and refreshments available. Free to members, visitors £5 at the door. Some "first come, first served" seats have been reserved for non-members. Booking is essential. Call in to the Museum or phone 01256 465902.

Please note the earlier than usual date for this month's talk - on the second Thursday of the month.

Looking Ahead:

Mar 19: The Life of Edwina Mountbatten by Richard Anderson

Apr 16: Spitfire Production in Tadley by Richard Brown

Hosted by the Museum Management (Archaeology Gallery, second floor)

22 Feb, 2pm - Sunday Afternoon Talk: The Story of the Basingstoke Workhouse by Barbara Large

The complete story of Basingstoke Workhouse from building in 1835 to demolition in the 1970s. Why was it built, along with hundreds of others all over the country? What happened to the people, both residents and staff? What was life really like in the workhouse? How did it change over the years? Hear how the setting up of the New Poor Law Union system went on to change local government for ever.

Barbara Large is a local historian, resident in Basingstoke for over 15 years, who has written a book on the subject, "Basingstoke Workhouse and Poor Law Union", involving five years of detailed research. She is a volunteer for the Victoria County History of Hampshire project, currently working on the 18th century poor records for Old Basing.

£7 (£6 for Friends) including tea, coffee and cake. If able, please book online at:

<https://www.hampshireculture.org.uk/event/sunday-tea-talk-story-basingstoke-workhouse>

- or drop into the museum.

To obtain the £1 discount for Friends, put FOWMTT1 in the box requiring a code. If you prefer to book in person at the museum, please make sure you let the team member serving you know you are a member of the Friends, so they can apply the discount.

Looking ahead:

Mar 29: *Around the World in Fifty Birds* by Keith Betton

Apr 26: *Beekeeping Through the Ages* by Chris Park

Special Exhibitions

Weds to Sats, 1000 – 1700, Suns 1000-1600

Sainsbury Gallery (ground floor)

12 Nov – 1 Mar: Beyond the Bonnets: Working Women in Jane Austen's Novels

Jane Austen (1775-1817) remains one of Hampshire's most famous working women, giving us memorable heroines such as Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse. But what of the world of work that surrounded Austen and the less often noticed women in working roles who are incidental characters in her stories?

Beyond the Bonnets is a unique exhibition, specially created for the landmark 250th anniversary, which explores these lives lived in the background. Discover the true stories of working women from Austen's Hampshire and further afield and find the parallels between fact and fiction. Follow the precarious lives of real Georgian women navigating limited opportunities and rights through their roles in domestic service, trade, education and childcare.

Through Austen's works, her letters, archival documents, historic objects and an absorbing, immersive soundscape, encounter the women who were footnotes in the narrative, but whose roles were fundamental to everyday Georgian life. These include Susannah Sackree (1761-1851), nursemaid to Jane's brother, Edward, who was such a faithful and beloved member of the household that, unusually, a portrait was commissioned of her. Mrs Mary Martin of Basingstoke (1730-1823) also features - she ran an inn and organised public balls, then a draper's shop with a lending library, before sadly declaring bankruptcy.

Looking ahead:

From 14 Mar: *Bees! Hampshire's Hive of History & Nature*

Basingstoke Community Gallery (first floor)

17 Jan – 8 Feb: In Her Nature

Kristin Rawcliffe, Rae Mason, Susan Cunningham, Caroline Streatfield

This exhibition showcases work by four Hampshire artists that seeks to reconcile humans as part of the natural world and in doing so to recognise the importance of women as protectors of nature. In Her Nature aims to communicate this zeitgeist by producing art sustainably, using materials that can be repurposed or transformed.

Review of “In Her Nature” an art exhibition by four women artists, by Jenny Fairweather

It is well worth making some time to see this uplifting contemporary art exhibition by four women artists from Reading, Hampshire and Oxfordshire. It's in the Basingstoke Community Gallery on the first floor. The artists are Kristin Rawcliffe, Rae Mason, Susan Cunningham and Caroline Streatfield.

The exhibition “seeks to reconcile humans as part of plants, animals and natural phenomena”. The exhibition also wants to show in different ways how women are connected with nature and are protectors of it.

Each artist works in an individual way, and the colourful show includes a variety of work; wall hangings woven from old prints, sensitive portraits, landscape painting, sculpture and a tablecloth made of recycled paintings. The artists aim to produce work sustainably and the show features the re-use and recycling of old canvases and boards, one of the artists even making her own paints.

There are short statements from each artist detailing their aims and describing their pieces on show so that viewers can understand the works more fully. Links are provided to their websites and Instagram accounts for more information. I found it a thought-provoking and interesting exhibition that celebrates women's creativity and these artists' attention to nature.

The paintings and drawings are for sale and are priced on a separate sheet in the gallery. The show runs until 8th February 2026.

28 Feb – 5 Apr: TRACES

An exhibition by ten + women artists from Basingstoke, Newbury and surrounding areas who work in varied media. This includes drawing, painting, sculpture, pottery, mixed media, collage, print and photography. Two of the artists are volunteers at The Willis and all have attended Experimental Drawing classes at The Base, Greenham Common.

You can expect to find many different ideas explored within the broad TRACES theme. There is a diversity of approach by the artists, and all are open to experimental ways of working.

Rebecca Aldridge, Hilary Arnold-Baker, Diana Barraclough, Gwen Earl, Mair Edwards, Jenny Fairweather, Sally Haynes, Liz Jones, Susan Line, Charlotte McClelland, Alison Willis.

February Half Term Activities

Saturday 14 Feb – Sunday 22 Feb

Willis Doodle Room: History By Design

Get inspired by our displays and draw on our specially created doodle walls during half term!

Children and grown-ups alike can:

- *Draw, doodle, and decorate walls with scenes and people from the past, such as a Roman soldier or a Regency lady.*
- *Create lasting memories together in a relaxed, family-friendly environment.*

Whether you're a budding artist or just love to get creative, this is your chance to celebrate history while making your mark in our shared doodle room. All materials are provided, just bring your imagination!

Please note – this activity is taking place on our 1st floor, which must be accessed via stairs only. For further access information, please check our website or get in touch.

History by Design: Arts and Crafts Through the Ages

Join us for a week of fun half-term activities for all ages, inspired by our collections and exploring arts and crafts of the past.

At the Willis, we'll be focusing on the times of Jane Austen. You can either make a regency love token or a fortune teller!

Take the Litter Picker Challenge

Wed 18 Feb 10-3.30

As a part of our Keep Basingstoke and Deane Clean campaign, we're bringing a high-stakes challenge to town! Join ranger Annie at the Willis Museum for a fast-paced, family-friendly event that turns cleaning into a competition.

See how you rank on the leaderboard.

Learn more about our borough's wildlife and how it can be affected by littering.

Free entry, open to all ages

Regency Zine Workshop

Wed 19 Feb 11am-12pm, 1pm-2pm

Make a mini book on your favourite subject.

£4 per person – materials and instructions included.

Recommended ages 6+.

Let's Glow! Arts & Crafts

Wed 19 – Sat 21 Feb

*Get ready for Love Basingstoke's Let's Glow event by making your own glow in the dark craft.
Make your own:*

Glow in the dark friendship bracelets

Paper bag lanterns

Kaleidoscope

£2.00 per craft pack (paper bag lanterns donation only)