

## **April 2026 at the Willis Museum**

### **Talks**

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

**16 Apr, 7.30pm: Spitfire Production in Tadley by Richard Brown**

*Did they really make Spitfires in Tadley? Why was the Spitfire aeroplane so important to Britain? Why was it produced in sheds and garages spread around central Southern England? Richard will tell us the intriguing tale that answers these questions.*

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 essential. Call in to the Museum or phone 01256 465902.

*Looking Ahead:*

*May 21: The History of Lasham Airfield by David Wickens*

*Jun 18: The Woman who gave Birth to Rabbits by Bob Clarke*

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

**26 Apr, 2pm - Sunday Afternoon Talk: Beekeeping Through the Ages by Chris Park**

*Chris Park, a founder of the Beekeeping History Trust, takes us on a journey through some of the mysterious and mellifluous history of bees and people. An entertaining saunter through our earliest honey hunting endeavours, to tree beekeeping and honey forests, log hives and bears, bee skeps and baskets, boxes and eureka moments, and all the imaginative ways we have bothered bees, and endeavoured to help them, so we might harvest some of their golden treasures to this present day.*

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

<https://www.hampshireculture.org.uk/event/sunday-tea-talks-beekeeping-through-ages>

- or drop into the museum.

*Looking ahead:*

*May 31: Changing Seasons of the New Forest*

*Jun 28: Magna Carta*

### **Special Exhibitions**

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

**Sainsbury Gallery (ground floor)**

**14 Mar – 28 Jun: Bees! Hampshire's Hive of History & Nature**

*Bees are extraordinary creatures. From buzzing gardens to golden honey, they connect us to the natural world in remarkable ways. This exhibition explores their world, how they live, work and communicate, sometimes even through dance! Discover the power of pollination and why our future depends on theirs.*

*At the heart of the story is local man Charles Butler of Wootton St Lawrence, a seventeenth-century vicar, musician and pioneering observer of bees. His groundbreaking 1623 book 'The Feminine*

*Monarchie' transformed beekeeping in England, popularising the idea of the queen bee and capturing the sounds, habits and hierarchy of the hive with extraordinary insight.*

*Step inside an immersive hive installation, see a newly commissioned mural by fine artist Dan Wilson, and take part in hands-on activities and bee-themed games.*

*This exhibition has been created with the support of the Charles Butler Foundation.*

### **BEES! Hampshire's Hive of History and Nature; Review by Shelagh LeMarechal**

This is a fascinating and interesting exhibition which amalgamates historical facts about bees with explanations about their remarkable lives.

The exhibition opens by telling us that there is evidence that bees were around in prehistoric times 8,000-2,500 BC and have been seen in Mesolithic rock paintings. By Neolithic times bees were part of daily life as beeswax has been found on pottery. The first beekeepers appear about 2,400 BC in Egypt on a stone relief showing clay hives. In ancient Greece bees were thought to have divine wisdom and intelligence.

Before the Roman Conquest, Silchester brewed mead and part of a Roman beehive has been found at Rockbourne Roman Villa. A straw "skep" basket hive was used until 1066 AD and there is one on display. Honey and wax were very valuable and there were high penalties for thieving. Christianity increased the importance of bees as beeswax candles (rather than tallow) were used in churches. A great deal of beekeeping knowledge was lost during the Dissolution of the Monasteries.

Rev. Charles Butler is known as the father of English Beekeeping. He was the rector at Nately Scures in 1593, later schoolmaster at the Holy Ghost School and became vicar of Wootton St. Lawrence where he started to study bees. In 1609 he published "The Feminine Monarchie" and it was expanded in 1623. It was the first beekeeping book and Butler was the first person to identify that the hive was ruled by a Queen and the existence of drones and "scout" bees. It was interesting to know that Rev. Gilbert White, the first person to study and write about Natural History, was Butler's great-great nephew. The modern hive was introduced in 1851 by Rev. Lorenzo Longstroth-another vicar!

There are 270 different species of wild bees and 92% of UK species are solitary bees, the rest being colonies of bumble and honeybees. The exhibition explains the anatomy of the bee which includes hearing with the whole body and smelling with its antennae. You have the chance to see as a bee sees-amazing! Bees are so clever – able to keep themselves cool in summer and warm in winter.

There are some lovely photos by Lauren McIntyre and Spray Paintings on Ply by Daniel Wilson. There is information about helping bees who are in danger from the parasitic mite, Varroa, the Asian hornet, climate change and pesticides and diseases by providing "wild" areas, nesting places and avoiding the use of pesticides.

It's a really interesting and unusual exhibition with activities for children and plenty to see and learn. Well worth a Visit!

### **In the shop**

When you visit the Bees! Exhibition, be sure to see the bee themed display of goods in the shop.

There's honey of course in 8 oz jars, honey stirrers, and beeswax, and polish and candles, plus "Grow Bars" to start a bed of nectar rich flowers for your garden, but that's only the beginning.

You will find tasteful bee-themed aprons, (2 designs), tea towels (several designs), mugs, coasters, note cards, glow pots, tea lights, vases, trays and jewellery, and for the young flick books and black and yellow striped pencils with attached bee-shaped rubbers.

Then books: Parson, musicologist, beekeeper, legacy and influence of Charles Butler (1571-1647) is a recently published collection of articles about or inspired by this local pioneer that the exhibition celebrates. It's profusely illustrated and includes directions for a "Butler walk" centred on Wooton St Lawrence. The Feminine Monarchie in a modern edition is his own seminal work on bees and beekeeping, and there are other titles on the same subject.

This beautifully arranged display of goods is an exhibition in itself.



### **Basingstoke Community Gallery (first floor)**

#### **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.*

### **11 Apr – 20 May: Bees! Bees! Hark to the Bees!**

*This exhibition by the Charles Butler Foundation complements the main exhibition downstairs. Enjoy learning about the evolution of bee suits from “bras and lingerie”, discover the bee story in Africa, look inside a beehive, and understand the efforts today to balance homes with sustainable parklands locally.*

### **Easter Holiday Activities**

Saturday 28 Mar – Sunday 12 Apr

#### **Bumble Bee Trail**

*There are bees buzzing all around the Willis Museum. Spot them all and get a prize!*

£2 per trail. Drop in. Pay at cafe till.

#### **Make a Clay Beehive Family Workshop**

*Get inspired by Roman beekeeping and make your own clay beehive!*

Wed 1 April 10.30am. £4 per child. Please book your place in advance. Ground floor, Sainsbury Gallery. All children must be accompanied by an adult.

#### **Brilliant Bees Activity Day**

*Visit our Bees! exhibition on Thursday 2 and 9 April to learn about these important pollinators and you'll be able to join the rangers and the green team, from @BasingstokeGov, and @NaturalBasingstoke who'll be here with free “bee-riliant” activities for all ages all about the wonderful world of bees and how we can help them thrive.*

*They will also be giving out free wildflower seed bombs, while they last - so don't forget to grab yours while you're here. They're perfect for creating your own mini pollinator-friendly patch in your garden.*

*We will also be joined by Ken Robson from the Charles Butler Foundation, who will be available to answer your questions about the history of beekeeping and the exhibition itself.*

Thurs 2 and Thurs 9 Apr 10-4. Free.

#### **Paint a Pebble Workshop**

*Let your creativity run wild and paint a pebble (or two) to decorate your garden for the summer!*

Mon 6 Apr 10.30am. £3 per child. Please book your place in advance. Ground floor, Sainsbury Gallery. All children must be accompanied by an adult.