

May 2026 at the Willis Museum

Talks

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

21 May, 7.30pm: The History of Lasham Airfield by David Wickens

The airfield was an operational RAF station between 1942 and 1948. Afterwards, General Aircraft Ltd, continued to fly from the airfield. Today, Excel Engineering maintains jet aircraft there for various airlines. But from 1951, the main activity is as the home of the largest British gliding club and the Gliding Heritage Centre with a collection of vintage gliders and open to the public.

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:

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

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

31 May, 2pm - Sunday Afternoon Talk: Changing Seasons of the New Forest by Marcus Ward

Marcus Ward from Wild New Forest Guided Tours takes you on a journey through the year, exploring how the landscape changes and how different species of flora and fauna adapt and thrive throughout spring, summer, autumn, and winter. From iconic ponies and deer to hidden insects and birdlife, this talk offers a fascinating insight into one of the UK's most unique and diverse ecosystems.

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

<https://www.hampshireculture.org.uk/event/sunday-tea-talks-changing-seasons-new-forest>
- or drop into the museum.

Looking ahead:

Jun 28: Magna Carta

16 May, 2pm – Saving Basingstoke's Swifts: A Talk by Hampshire Swifts (Archaeology Gallery, second floor)

The South-East of the UK has lost an estimated 75% of its Swifts since 1994. Hampshire Swifts was set up in 2016 to address the decline of Swifts in the county. In this talk, Catharine Gale, a trustee of the charity, will first tell us all about this iconic bird species, and the reasons for its dramatic decline. She will then describe what Hampshire Swifts has been doing to try to reverse Swifts' decline and highlight the Basingstoke Swift Streets campaign which aims to

achieve an increase in the population of Swifts in the borough through the installation of multiple artificial nest sites. The talk will finish with recommendations for how we can help ensure these beautiful birds remain an essential part of our summer.

Talk is free but please book:

<https://www.hampshireculture.org.uk/event/saving-basingstokes-swifts-talk-hampshire-swifts>

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.

Looking ahead:

from July: The Nineties

Basingstoke Community Gallery (first floor)

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.

Bees! Bees! Hark to the Bees! Review by Jenny Fairweather

Charles Butler 400 Foundation has put together an exhibition which can deepen knowledge of the beekeeping world, companies and a charity which work to support and promote the importance of beekeeping in this country and abroad.

You can find information about the history of the Charles Butler Foundation itself which aims to educate and inspire in schools and communities to sustain the natural world.

Bees for Development is a charity supporting beekeeping for various worldwide projects. It raises awareness and trains new beekeepers in many areas where the natural world is threatened.

Manydown: there is an information board about the proposed housing development's plans for nature, biodiversity, play, walking and cycling.

There are sections on history, new hive technology and information from B. J. Sherriff, Thorne, and the Worshipful Company of Wax Chandlers, (companies providing supplies and clothing to beekeepers).

There is a mix of objects, information boards and leaflets and the exhibition complements the glorious Bees exhibition in the Sainsbury Gallery.

The exhibition has been mounted by the Charles Butler 400 Foundation with support from organisations and companies mentioned above.

23 May – 14 Jun: Nature's Tiny Miracle: An Exhibition by Great Binfields Primary School

Taking inspiration from our Bees! Hampshire's Hive of History & Nature exhibition, this collection of artwork has been created by pupils aged from 4 - 11 years. Using a variety of mixed media, the school have been focusing their work on the book 'Nature's Tiny Miracle' by Patricia Hegarty to help guide pupils in making their artwork.

Looking Ahead:

from Jun 20: Inclusion School Bee Exhibition

Holiday Activities

Monday 4 May 11am-3pm: May Day Pebble Painting

Pop in between 11am – 3pm to paint a pebble into your favourite pollinator or insect!

Pick up your pebbles from the cafe when you arrive by showing your ticket!

Every half hour between 11am and 3pm. £3 per participant. Suitable for ages 3+. All children must be accompanied and supervised by an adult.

Please book your place online in advance: <https://www.hampshireculture.org.uk/event/may-day-pebble-painting>

Monday 4 May 1-3.30pm: May Day Archaeology Pits

Visit between 1-3.30pm to hunt for some historical artifacts. Dig through our sandboxes to see what you find! Will it be an animal bone, a piece of roman pottery or even a coin!

Use the identifying sheets to find out about your discoveries; you'll need to put them back for the next archaeologist to find BUT we have a stash of Roman coins to give away (while stocks last).

Duration 30-60 minutes. Free (donations welcome!) but please book your place online in advance: <https://www.hampshireculture.org.uk/event/may-day-archaeology-pits>

For May half-term (25-31 May) activities please check the Museum's website:

<https://www.hampshireculture.org.uk/events?location=56>