

FRIENDS OF



NEWSLetter
WINTER 2026



Tell us your memories of the White Horse!
See Next Year's Exhibition Needs You below

One Friend to Another...



Jo Coad

HAPPY NEW YEAR to you all

This has been a very successful year for the Friends we have had so many opportunities to meet, starting with the launch of the Jane Austen exhibition *Pride and Patronage* when Lady Craven Smith cut the ribbon. This was followed by a series of talks with a splendid variety of topics. My favourite was show and tell with Sally Ann Spence. We then had the regency tea party, a first for us, and it was a wonderful afternoon with great support from you all. It did involve a lot of work and when I said first, I think it may also be the last, but time will tell. Finally, we closed the year with our Christmas get together in the museum at the end of November.

Running throughout the summer months of course Friends man the rota to keep the museum open each weekend. This involves a three-hour slot from 2pm to 5pm on either Saturday or Sunday afternoon. The season runs from Easter to the end of October and Verity emails the calendar of proposed names/dates well before Easter so that Friends can change inconvenient dates before the season begins. A reminder is sent each week so last-minute changes can be made. We would love to welcome some new members to the rota you may bring a companion if you wish. The most important thing whilst on duty is to smile and bid visitors welcome.

Instructions are always on the desk and training is available if you wish. Please consider joining the rota team for 2026, a New Years resolution maybe. We are so proud of our little museum and with your help we can keep it open for generations to come

AGM - TUESDAY 24TH FEBRUARY 2026. Please join us for the AGM in the Thomas Hughes Memorial Hall at 7pm, enjoy a drink while meeting new 'Friends'

Look out for an email with an exciting proposition which will be discussed at this meeting.

Curator's Report



Karen
Pilcher

It's a wrap!

As we reflect on another busy year, I would like to take this opportunity to wish everyone a Happy and Prosperous New Year. We welcomed nearly 1300 visitors to the museum only slightly down on the previous year and received lots of positive comments on the Jane Austen exhibition.

Our Regency tea party in October was well attended and thank you again to everyone who supplied cakes and sandwiches and to those who came to the party. A big thank you as well to Ria and Oliver from Timeless Tea Party who supplied the lovely crockery and cutlery for the event. They recently moved to Uffington, and we were delighted when they agreed to support us.

Over the winter months we have attended a number of Christmas Fayres to boost our funds and to advertise the museum and have been approached to give talks to groups in the local area in 2026.

In the museum, work has started on the new exhibition Myths, Monuments and Memory and we need to hear about your stories and memories – further details later in the newsletter. Still on the exhibition front, we have been successful in obtaining a grant from The White Horse Trust to update all the existing display panels so they look as professional as our annual exhibition. Thank you to the trustees of the White Horse Show for their generosity and to Simon at Falcon Signs who is magically creating our new boards!

Moving into 2026 we are changing our admin day from a Tuesday morning to Thursday starting at 9:30. As well as the weekly cleaning – there are always new cobwebs! – Steve logs new donations onto the computer, Jane works on the new exhibition and Caroline organises talks, visits and produces this newsletter. There are always other jobs such as stock takes, reviewing our collections and general maintenance so if you can spare any time it would be gratefully appreciated. We are also looking at succession planning – where we have more than 1 person who is able to complete a particular task as a contingency. Full training is provided so if you can spare a couple of hours a month, we'd be delighted to welcome you. Email me at uffingtonmuseum@gmail.com



Heritage, Culture & Creative Industries Symposium

In November Karen and I were invited to the Southern Oxfordshire and Vale of the White Horse Heritage, Culture & Creative Industries Symposium at Cornerstone Arts Centre in Didcot. The initiative aims to enhance tourism and creative businesses across our area - around 50 representatives were invited from local museums, theatres and other tourist venues such as

Didcot Railway Centre and Pendon Model Village. We were asked to share our experiences and ideas for improving local tourism, for input into the 2026 – 2030 Strategy.

We were shown findings from a previous survey outlining who are our priority audiences. Our part of the country has recently seen rapid growth, we have low deprivation, and a lower-than-average young adult population. A higher proportion of us volunteer compared to the rest of the country, and we have a much higher level of positive local sentiment – we enjoy living here and are proud to support our community!

This is great news for the museum, so how do we turn it into higher visitor numbers? Everyone in the room came to the same conclusion – we have brilliant places to visit in our area – our countryside, ancient monuments, market towns and country houses - but we don't have a stand-out attraction that 'brands' us as a memorable destination. The answer was to create a local brand and organise our attractions into themes. You can start to see this in the amazing work Southern Oxfordshire tourism is already doing on their website (which we post events to). <https://southernoxfordshire.com/things-to-do/>



Talks at the Thomas Hughes Memorial Hall

<https://www.uffingtonmuseum.co.uk/talks.html>

Steam – the New Wonder, 3rd Nov

This was our last talk of the year and Liz Derrington from the Richard Jefferies Museum in Swindon did us proud. The aim of talk was to take a look – based mainly on Jefferies' own words - at how Swindon was re-invented with the arrival of Great Western Railways. It was very well received, and we had a larger audience than usual, with quite a few train buffs making the trip to our village hall! Liz's talk was recorded and is available on our website if you missed it.

Our programme this year includes Uncovering Oxfordshire's 'Dinosaur Highway' in February (see below) and 'Black Wantage' in March – a look at the seamier side of the history of Wantage – and a romp through Oxfordshire's Highwaymen in July. You can see our programme of upcoming talks and recordings of past talks on our website.

Uffington Primary School Visit

Karen bravely introduced over 20 pupils of Ridgeway class to Victorian school life! The pupils were given a photograph from the 1920's and asked to describe what the differences were

between school life then and now. It was a fun morning starting with a talk on 'what Uffington was like a long time ago' followed by hunt the dragon and poems.

Christmas Party



Thank you to everyone who came to our Christmas Party - we were delighted to see so many of you there! We shared mulled wine, mince pies and a good old natter. The party was a thank you to the continuing support that the Uffington Museum Friends give us, taking their place on the rota and carrying out the behind-the-scenes activities that are so vital to keeping us open.

Upcoming Events

Uncovering Oxfordshire's 'Dinosaur Highway' with Dr. Duncan Murdock.

2nd February, 7:30pm at Thomas Hughes Memorial Hall

We're excited to share that our next talk will be a first-hand account of the discovery of hundreds of dinosaur footprints in Oxfordshire, the excavation of which was broadcast on BBC 2's 'Digging for Britain' and featured in Oxford Natural History Museum's exhibition 'Breaking Ground'. Our speaker Dr. Murdock was part of the original excavation team.

In a stunning find, the excavation uncovered a huge expanse of quarry floor filled with hundreds of different dinosaur footprints, creating multiple enormous trackways. Dating back to the Middle Jurassic Period (around 166 million years ago), the trackways form part of a huge 'dinosaur highway' and include footprints from the 9-metre ferocious predator *Megalosaurus*, and herbivorous dinosaurs up to twice that size.



Black Wantage with Sem Seabourne.

9th March, 7:30pm at Thomas Hughes Memorial Hall

Sem Seabourne is a local historian and folk musician in the Wantage area, known for his talks on local history and his involvement with the Icknield Way Morris Men.

His popular "Black Wantage" talk explores a time when the town was known as a "positive sink of iniquity full of drunks, murderers, and thieves". This was a specific period in Wantage's history (roughly 1790 – 1830) when there was an influx of canal workers to build the Wiltshire and Berkshire canal, and the town was cut off from effective law enforcement. Come to the talk to find out what happened next!



Next Year's Exhibition needs you!

We'd love to hear from you! Our new exhibition '**Myths, Monuments and Memory**' explores the myths and legends associated with the landscape of the Uffington White Horse, from St. George and the Dragon to the legend of Weland the Smith. Telling the story of how landscape reuse conveys meaning across centuries, it will highlight enduring beliefs and show how personal, family, and community events continue to enrich this evolving narrative. **If you have any stories to share, please contact Karen and Jane our curators at uffingtonmuseum@gmail.com.**

Have you taken part in a scouring of the White Horse, a commemorative event or a ritual at equinox? What legends associated with the local landscape do you remember hearing about growing up? From wishes coming true on the eye of the horse, to the tale of George and the Dragon, we would love to hear about these too.



Jubilee Bonfire on White Horse Hill, 2012

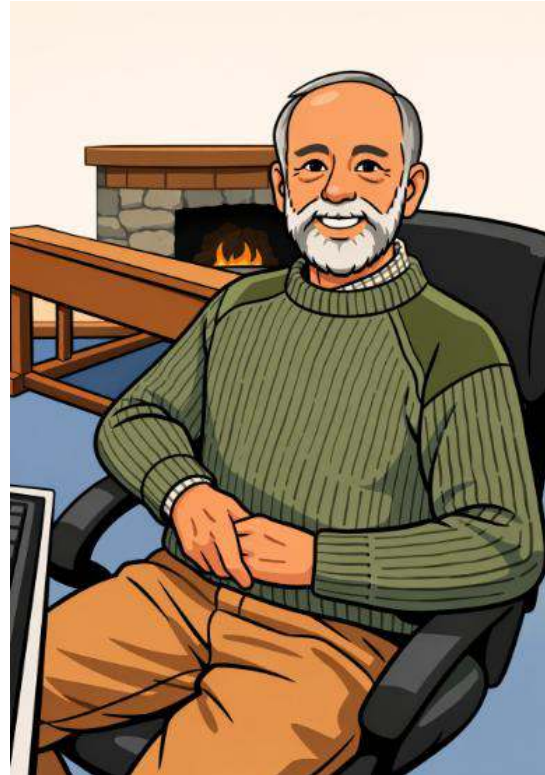
Meet the Friends

Each issue we'll invite you to meet one of our Friends – this month we're delighted to introduce **Stephen Cowlam**

What do you do for Uffington Museum?

I have been involved with the museum since moving to Uffington in 2016. Karen Pilcher had recently taken over after a period when the museum was without a curator. During that period there had been an accumulation of artefacts (books, photographs, documents, etc.) which had not been recorded. The job I took on was to record all of this on the museum's computer. It uses the same software (called MODES) used by museums both large and small, up and down the country. Several of us meet at the museum for a couple of hours every week with our various duties and, after five years, I am pleased to say that the records are now up to date, with just a trickle of new items coming into the museum.

I also serve on the Friends committee, meeting five times a year; and I have manned the museum during the seasons when the museum opens to the public.



Why do you volunteer?

I'm retired, so I have time to give. The museum is a great asset to Uffington and surrounding villages, and at the time it needed support to restore it to its previous position. On a personal level, it also provides me with material of local interest: the history of the Wilts & Berks Canal, Uffington Station and the branch line to Faringdon.

What has been a highlight for you?

The exhibition of 2024 about the crash of a Wellington bomber at Uffington in World War Two. This covered another of my interests. As well as material researched and assembled by Jane Golding, David and Verity Cavanagh arranged a guided walk to the crash site attended by thirty or so people, we had artefacts loaned by the Ridgeway Military & Aviation Research Group and an interesting talk by their chairman, and finally a workshop organized by Jane on other nearby aircraft crash sites.

What do you enjoy most about volunteering?

The team of Friends, each bringing their own particular expertise, and the happy band of Friends of Uffington Museum.

Do you know anyone who's thinking about becoming a Friend?

We'll be reaching out to everyone in Uffington in the next few weeks to see if any of our residents would like to join the Friends. Friends donate just £10 per year to receive the Newsletter, opportunities to join our trips and discounted entry to our Talks. Friends don't have to actively volunteer, but many welcome visitors to the museum for one afternoon a year – in exchange for a free membership! - or help with our support activities like cataloguing items, IT support and exhibition preparation. Whatever you enjoy doing!

Contact Us

We're looking forward to welcoming everyone back to the museum at Easter when we reopen. In the meantime, for anything museum related please email our curator Karen at uffingtonmuseum@gmail.com

And Finally....

To all our Friends, thank you for continuing to support us with your subscriptions - we're delighted to be able to keep them at £10 per annum for 2026. Look out for the email reminder in February!

