

Newsletter Winter 2025/2026

Happy New Year to you all. I am sure you will agree that 2025 was a very successful year for the Museum. Now that 2026 is upon us we have the new schedule of events to look forward to, details at the end of the newsletter.

At the AGM in October 2025, it was proposed and agreed that Roger Griffin, who has done so much for the Museum over the years, should be made Honorary President. Roger has now stepped back from formal involvement as a Trustee, so we wish him a happy retirement! We hope to see him at our events for many years to come.

Image Bill Reed



It is nearly 40 years since Roger founded the Friends of Athelstan Museum, he was on the North Wiltshire District Council committee before that and was Chair, on and off, for over half that time. We owe him a huge debt of gratitude for laying the foundations for what has become an exceptional local museum. He oversaw the creation of the current museum within the Town Hall when it was renovated in 2008. Along with Angela and Bill Sykes he was also a key instigator of the Rausing Building project in 2018/2019.

Roger's knowledge, experience and commitment have been key to the development of the Museum.

Roger has kindly made his picture archive of Museum activities available and these will be featured in a new "From the archives" feature starting towards the end of this newsletter. Editor

Annual General Meeting 2025

It was great to see so many of you at the Annual General meeting. The success of the Museum relies on the support of its members and volunteers and a big thank you for all the hard work carried out in the previous year.

We were reminded by Campbell Ritchie, as shown, of the excitement of the Athelstan 1100 activities in 2024 in which the Museum played a major part. A legacy is the Athelstan Pilgrim Way which I know some of you have started to enjoy.

There may be more of Athelstan's story to tell in the future!

Image Bill Reed



Bronze Age Gold



Images: British Museum

Athelstan Museum had exciting news from Wiltshire's Finds Liaison Officer (FLO) in the summer. A 'hoard' of three gold bracelets from the late Bronze Age had been discovered by a metal detectorist near Malmesbury and there was the opportunity to acquire them for our collection.

Two had been deliberately folded. This is found with other archaeology, although the meaning is uncertain.

A short time later we were informed that, extraordinarily, yet another Bronze Age bracelet had been found separately and was also available for purchase, should we be interested.

All these items count as Treasure, because of the gold content. Such items, when discovered by responsible detectorists, are declared to the County FLO and enter the Treasure process, hosted by the British Museum. The Treasure Valuation Committee; a group of independent experts in their fields; meet quarterly to review objects presented and allocate a value. The hoard and the individual bracelet were allocated their respective values and the Athelstan Museum Trustees decided to express interest in the purchase of both. Grant applications towards the necessary funds are in train.



There are currently no Bronze Age items in our collection, and these finds take the evidenced age of Malmesbury and District even further back beyond the Iron Age hill

fort. Additionally, they are fascinating and attractive items in themselves that, well presented in context, should help bring in even more visitors into the museum.

Members will be kept informed of progress with fund raising for these items, (hopefully) their acquisition and any plans for display as this information comes available.

Malmesbury Late Night Shopping 2025



Although the weather was dreadful everyone enjoyed Malmesbury Late Night Shopping and trade in the Museum shop was brisk and the mulled wine went down very well.

A big thank you to everyone who helped out.

Image Bill Reed

Loan to Chippenham Museum

From August to November this year our colleagues at Chippenham Museum ran an exhibition entitled Threads; Clothing, Memory & Identity

They approached Athelstan museum to ask if they could borrow one of our Georgian jackets, or waistcoats, that were used by the Lovell family of Cole Park. Chippenham Museum has nothing of that age in their own collection.

We were pleased to be able to help, as this also allows for a wider viewing of one of the most attractive items in our museum. We advised them of our other 18th century clothing, and they also borrowed a pair of court shoes.

Janet Casselden and Geraldine Gould lead the costume side of the museum, and they and Deborah Clogg were invited to a private view of the Chippenham exhibition. Both items were beautifully presented, as you can see in this photograph from Deborah.



A fruitful relationship has developed; Janet and Geraldine borrowed children's mannequins for the current World War Two exhibition in Athelstan Museum, and other items have also been loaned relating to one of Athelstan's upcoming children's History Club events about Moving Pictures.

Linolite Records

Over the 8 years of the Linolite project, the “Voices” who have contributed have given me a number of photographs, brochures, newsletters and other documents related to the company. I would like to thank Gary Warner, Brian Dike, June McElroy, Dick Stanger, Peter Beuttell and many others.

These have now been added to the 8 boxes of Linolite records already held in the archives of the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre in Chippenham.



My thanks to archivist Tom Plant for his help. We are photographed at WSHC with my final box on November 25th 2025.

Athelstan Museum still holds some documents and photographs, and of course Linolite products are on display in the cabinet on the ground floor.

Text and image Bill Reed

Cotswold Canal update

Following Mike Howarth's excellent tea time talk on the history and revival of the Cotswold Canal system, a group of us enjoyed a visit in October to see the work in progress on the Stroudwater section. Mike led the guided walks explaining in detail the work completed and underway starting at Stonehouse Court Hotel and heading west to the "missing link" before looping back to the start. A huge project is underway to replace bridges, dredge the existing canal and - in time - open the currently land locked section up to the wider canal network. A vast army of volunteers are undertaking most of the work learning new skills along the way and providing or improving natural habitats for both wildlife and people.



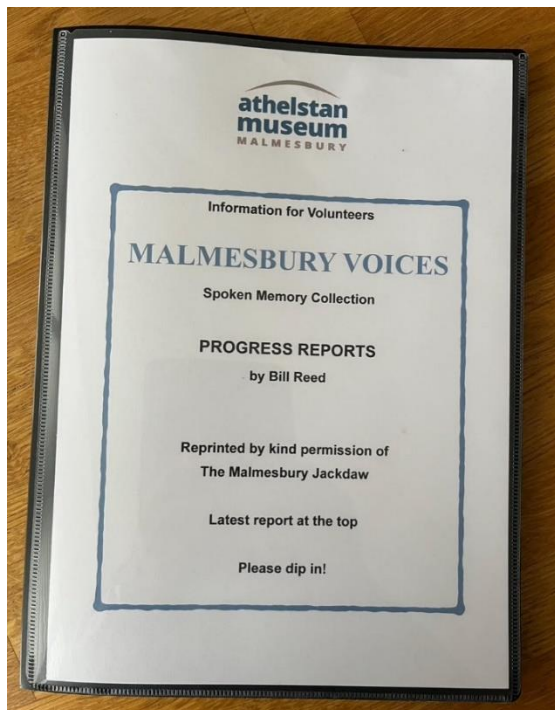
Canal Trust volunteers then took us on a restored Trow - the name for working canal boats - on a short trip up to Ryeford and back explaining the project from the water and pointing out interesting features. Huge thanks to all the Trust volunteers who helped organise and host our full day visit.

Since our trip, news has come through that £6 million Heritage Lottery Fund money has now been allocated to enable the "missing link" to be restored under the existing M5 motorway bridge to connect this section to the UK network - hopefully by 2029.

We plan to invite Mike back to provide us with an update in a couple of years time.

Text and image - Marie-Clare Brind - Events Team.

Malmesbury Voices



The "Malmesbury Voices" spoken memory project is now ten years old and The Malmesbury Jackdaw has been publishing regular updates for a number of years. I have collected these in a new folder which is at the volunteer desk. Volunteers and Museum members are invited to dip in. Peter Holland, the Museum volunteer who keeps the Voices collection up to date, flags all new items on the screen. 23 stories are currently highlighted NEW in yellow. Or you can type NEW in the Search box and the list will come up.

Text and Images Bill Reed

Exhibition visitors

In November the Malmesbury and District U3A Local History Group visited the Malmesbury in WW2 exhibition. The exhibits sparked lots of discussions. Several members had visited the Easton Grey PoW Chapel with murals and others recalled family stories of Italian PoWs working on local farms.



From the Archive

In 2007 improvement of the Town Hall meant the Museum vacating the building and moving to temporary premises nearby in Cross Hayes. In August 2007 the old museum closed its doors only to re-open in the temporary premises a week later after a herculean effort by the volunteers. The temporary premises were known as "Athelstan's Attic".

Pictures from Roger's archive below.



EVENTS 2026

For further details please see: <https://www.athelstanmuseum.org.uk/events/>

Please note

HISTORY CLUB - NOW SUNDAY AFTERNOONS

1.30 - 3.30 pm in Rausing Building

January

Thurs 8 January - **Lace Making Day** - 10.30-12.30 & 1.30 - 3.30 - Rausing Building

Fri 16 January - **Evening Talk** 7.30 TOWN HALL - Athelstan & the Birth of a Kingdom - David Woodman **SOLD OUT**

Sunday 25 January - **History Club** - Moving Pictures

February

Fri 13 February - **Quiz Night - 7.00pm** - to include light supper.

Thurs 19 February - **Lace Making Day** - 10.30-12.30 & 1.30 - 3.30 - Rausing Blg.

Sun 22 February - **History Club** - Malmesbury at War

Weds 25 February - **Teatime Talk** - Julia Bowen - What has Town Twinning ever done for us?!

March

Weds 18 March - **Teatime Talk** - Tony McAleavy - Story of Queen Matilda: Malmesbury's Forgotten Royal Patron

Sun 22 March - **History Club** - Eilmer

April

Weds 15 April - **Teatime Talk** - Anne Goodyer - Malmesbury's History as a Border Town from Wessex/Mercia to WW2

Sun 26 April - **History Club** - Railway in Malmesbury

May

Fri 8 May - **Evening Talk - Julian Richards - A Career in Ruins**

Weds 20 May - **Teatime Talk** - Bill Reed & Mike Lewis - Napoleon after Waterloo & The lock of his hair in our Museum

June

Wed 3 June - **Evening Talk - Ronald Hutton - Did King Arthur Exist?**

Weds 17 June - **Teatime Talk** - Susan Mockler - Malmesbury Union Workhouse: Why? Where? When? Who?

July

Weds 15 July - **Teatime Talk** -250 years of American Independence - details tbc.

TEMPORARY EXHIBITIONS

Malmesbury in WW2 – on now

250 years of American Independence – Date and title to be confirmed.