

Newsletter Summer 2026

Summer certainly started with a bang, the opening of our new exhibition, Malmesbury and the American Connection on 2nd June. Many thanks to those of you who attended the preview evening in torrential rain! Thank you as always for your continuing support.

Malmesbury and the American Connection exhibition

Our new exhibition opened on 2nd June and will run until the end of 2026. We were very pleased to welcome new Malmesbury Mayor, Robert Hastings to open the exhibition.



Susan Mockler, Exhibition Team Lead, first welcomed everyone and thanked the team and contributors for all their hard work.

The Mayor then spoke warmly about his enjoyment of visits to the Museum.

Some team members are shown here enjoying the evening comprises from left to right, Anne Goodyer, Tony McAleavy, Sue Poolman, Deborah Clogg, Susan Mockler, Janet Casselden and Celia Norvill.



The exhibition traces connections between Malmesbury and America. It starts with the earliest settlers in New England and Virginia in the 17th century and continues with the later migration of more than six hundred people to Pennsylvania and Ohio.



Stories are told of individual families and their photographs really bring the exhibition to life.

The exhibition "poster" picture left gives a good idea of what is on display. It shows three young men on the verge of a new life.

Left to right: James Exton, Jim Pike and Fred Lee/Lea. This was undoubtedly sent back to reassure their families in Malmesbury.

I am sure you will enjoy reading about their lives in America.

We are very lucky to have been loaned a collection of American coins from the era covered in the exhibition from Nonnans.

Noonans is an auction house based in London that specialises in coins and that has have supported our exhibitions in the past.



The Hanks family have also generously supported the exhibition with the loan of items from their family collection.

The portrait shown left is of Stedman Wright Hanks. He was one of the leaders in the movement against the evils of intemperance and the liquor traffic that gained such headway in the middle of the nineteenth century.

Many thanks to Peter Holland who has updated the small interactive tablet upstairs with images of emigrants and a list of their names. A leaflet will also be available free to visitors listing family names of emigrants which may raise some family history questions.



There is much more to enjoy as these attendees above at the preview evening found but you will have to visit the Museum to delve deeper.

Shortly after the preview evening we were delighted to also be able to display the Washington Silver Communion Set kindly loaned for the exhibition by All Saints Church Garsdon PCC. The set is shown right but a visit is needed to read its story and appreciate the craftsmanship at close quarters.

The exhibition has had some great publicity Susan and Sue were interviewed on BBC Wiltshire Radio's Sue Davies show at 11.45am on 15th June. It also has an entry on the BBC Wiltshire news website.



Malmesbury Magical History Tour 10th -12th July



Malmesbury Magical History Tour is a series of events including talks and street theatre. It is organised via Malmesbury Town Council. More information at

<https://www.malmesbury.gov.uk/what-s-on/magical-history-tour>

The Museum is hosting two events, the first on 11th July a Lace Making Day. A hands on workshop for for people to come and try their hand at a traditional Malmesbury skill under expert guidance. Then on 12th July the Museum History Club hosts an interactive workshop for children, inviting them to become a pupil at a Victorian Ragged School.



Three members of the museum are also participating in the 'Malmesbury's Greatest Rogue' debate on July 11th – Susan Mockler, Philip Norvill and Tony McAleavy.

Another example of the museum's commitment to participating in community events

Full details at <https://www.athelstanmuseum.org.uk/events/>

Events

The 2026 Events have got off to a great start with very well-attended Tea Time Talks and evening talk, two of which are reviewed below.

Julian Richards

The wonderfully enthusiastic and engaging Julian Richards came back to Malmesbury to tell us about his "A Career in Ruins". And what a fascinating career he has had as both archaeologist and TV presenter - including the series Meet the Ancestors. Last time he was here he was presenting the programme about Abbey House - this time he told us about his brand new YouTube channel for all things Stonehenge - which had launched the same week. Do have a look, it is free to view - so much has been revealed but there is so much more being discovered every year! LiDar scanning, DNA analysis and forensics are just some of the ways we can learn new details. This is the first of 11 films in the pipeline. We are hoping to invite Julian back again soon to tell us more about Stonehenge and new ways to present and share our fascinating history with new and younger audiences.

<https://www.youtube.com/@julianrichards1483>

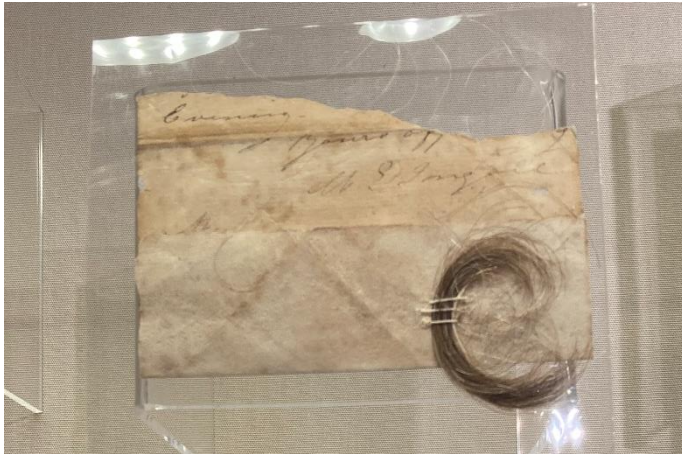
Professor Ronald Hutton

Another history superstar pictured with Museum Trustee Paul Overton, was able to fit us into his busy schedule. Professor Hutton gave us a most engaging overview of the scant evidence for King Arthur - historical figure or pure legend? We were left to make up our own minds but there must be something in it to have kept so many busy theorising, writing, using in art and literature - and now films! Why, for example, is there a 12th century arched doorway - Porta della Pescheria (Fish Market Gate) at Modena Cathedral in Italy with some of the earliest artistic depictions of the King Arthur legends anywhere in Europe?



The most exciting news from Ronald Hutton was that there is clear evidence of such a figure in the north of England - an area which has not been well explored to date. Tintagel may be involved - but so may also these northern realms which still have much to reveal about our early history.

An unusual item from the Collection



In support of the recent tea time talk by Bill Reed, Will Taylor and Mike Lewis, the lock of Napoleon's hair is still on display upstairs in the Museum. It was first catalogued on our existing system in 1978, there is no information as to how and why it came to be in the Museum.

The wording on the original accompanying documents is:

Lock of hair of Napoleon I. This lock was given by Sir Hudson Lowe, Governor of St Helena, to Lieutenant Colonel Ingoll, who sent it to Captain Hudson Gage, 15th Regiment, who gave it to his niece, Mrs Norton, who gave it to Mr Gebbie, Netherfield.

The lock of hair is on display at the time of writing but will soon go back into safe storage so waste no time in paying it a visit.

From the archive

The final set of pictures from Roger Griffin's archive showing the mammoth effort needed to move the Weight clock out of the Museum to St Paul's belltower in 2007. It is still well looked after there. I saw it a few weeks ago.



History Club

The March History Club meeting was an interactive workshop featuring Eilmer the Flying Monk. There were some very inventive Eilmers produced as shown below. Please check the Events list at the end of the newsletter for the dates for future History Workshops. Images Bill Reed.



Podcast update from Bill Reed

I have recorded two podcasts with Dan McAleavy at Flying Monk Radio.

They are now available online.

One is an update on the Malmesbury Voices collection, here:

<https://www.mixcloud.com/FlyingMonkCommunityProjects/malmesbury-voices-update-april-2026-with-bill-reed/>

The other is an interview about the Harry Neal story, here:

<https://www.mixcloud.com/FlyingMonkCommunityProjects/bill-reed-the-true-story-of-the-murder-of-harry-neal/>

The photo shows me being interviewed by Dan in the Radio Shed.



In the news

Local History News, the magazine of the British Association for Local History, has published Bill Reed's article "Ten Years of Malmesbury Voices" in its May 2026 edition. A copy of the article will be put in the Voices folder at Museum reception.

Also in the news, congratulations to Hector and Melissa Cole who have both been honoured by the Worshipful Company of Blacksmiths.

EVENTS 2026

For details on all our events please see:

<https://www.athelstanmuseum.org.uk/events/>

Temporary Exhibition – Malmesbury and the American Connection to 20th December

Please note

HISTORY CLUB - NOW SUNDAY AFTERNOONS

1.30 - 3.30 pm in Rausing Building

July

Weds 1 July **Tea Time Talk** - Sue Poolman - The Malmesbury Emigrants: in pursuit of the American Dream

Sat 4 July - **Members Only Tea** - hosted by Angela Sykes.
Rausing Building has been booked as wet weather option.

Weds 8 July - **Evening Talk** - Ben Kane - A Land Aflame – Second Punic War but no Hannibal

Sat/Sun 11/12th July - **MAGIC MALMESBURY**

Saturday - Lace Making - 2 sessions.

Sunday - History Club - Victorian Ragged School - 4 sessions.

August

Carnival Talks – Evening talks

Tues 18th August – Malmesbury Characters

Tuesday 25th August – Malmesbury Pubs

Tuesday - 1 Sept – Walter Powell MP

September

Weds 16 Sept - Oaksey Church Murals - **tea and talk**, visit at the Church

Sun 27 Sept - History Club - Making IN Malmesbury

October

Sun 25 Oct - **History Club** - Making OF Malmesbury

Monday 26 October **AGM** - Rausing Building

November

Weds 18 November – **Teatime Talk** - Charles Boundy - The Bayeux Tapestry: Embroidery or Fabrication?

Sun 29 November - **History Club** - A 1950's Christmas.