

Oxford Centre of the National Trust

Newsletter February 2026

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<https://oxfordcnt.co.uk>

Closure of the Oxford Centre

Over the past two years or more we have been appealing for volunteers to help strengthen our Committee and fill roles vital to the efficient running of the Oxford Centre. While we are most grateful to Liz Humphreys and Margo Boore for coming forward to arrange the Lecture programme and to Carol Smith for returning to the Committee to organise Visits, we have been operating without a Chair or Vice-Chair since the 2024 AGM and after the March 2026 AGM we will have no Treasurer, Membership Secretary or Newsletter Editor as the current holders of these roles are retiring. Despite our efforts and appeals, no-one suitable has been found to fill these positions and, as we pointed out in the November 2025 newsletter, without a Treasurer we cannot continue to function. It is therefore with regret and sadness that **at our recent meeting on 15 January the Committee took the decision to dissolve the Centre** and, in accordance with our Constitution, to put forward a resolution to this effect at the AGM, the wording of which will be found on p. 2 and the enclosed Agenda.

We realise this will come as a great disappointment to both new and longer-term members. The Centre was started in the 1960s and has been operating for well over 50 years supporting the National Trust, organising social activities for its members and raising money for local Trust properties, and many members will have happy memories of visits, holidays, talks, walks, lunches and other social events. The Centre has benefited from loyal and devoted service from many of its members giving their time, experience and expertise in running these activities and serving on the Committee over the years and we are most grateful to them all. While closure is regrettable, we want to keep members fully informed of how this will come about, and to highlight there is one more visit to look forward to as well as other possible options for the future.

The date for the dissolution of the Oxford Centre has been set for the end of April 2026 and the current Committee has agreed to continue in office until then. This means that members have the opportunity to join one final visit on 14th April to Salisbury, kindly organised by Colin Gammon. Full details are given on p. 3 and a Booking Form is enclosed, and we hope many of you will come along in support.

The additional time following the AGM also gives Felicity, as Treasurer, the opportunity to finalise the finances and close the bank accounts. The Constitution clearly states that 'Any assets remaining after the payment of any proper debts and liabilities shall promptly be given to the National Trust' – so please be assured that all remaining funds will be passed on to the Trust and we will inform you of the final amount. You will see on p. 6 that we have also been able to offer financial support to local Trust properties from our funds at the end of 2025.

For those of you who would like to continue supporting the National Trust through a local group and joining visits, talks and other social events, there are a number of supporter groups in Oxfordshire and adjacent counties which would welcome new members and further details can be found on p. 5.

Enclosed with this mailing is the Agenda for the AGM on 17 March, plus the minutes of last year's AGM. We hope as many of you as possible will be able to attend and take part, as well as enjoy our final lecture. May we take this opportunity to thank you for your support for the Oxford Centre over the years and to wish you all well for the future.

From the Committee

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2026

Magdalen College Auditorium at 10.45am on Tuesday, 17 March 2026

(immediately before Lecture: 'Collections and Conservation at Basildon Park, Greys Court and Nuffield Place' by Josh Watkins)

Please make a note of the date and time of our AGM

(Join us from 10.20am for coffee or tea beforehand)

The Agenda is enclosed with this Newsletter along with the Minutes of the 2025 AGM.

We have tried repeatedly to fill a number of key vacancies on the Executive Committee over the past few years, and with the stepping down at this year's AGM of the Honorary Treasurer, Membership Secretary and Newsletter Editor as well as the continuing vacancies for our Chair and Vice-Chair, and with no new nominations to fill these vital positions, the current Executive Committee reluctantly feels that the OCNT can no longer continue to run. **It is therefore with great sadness that I must inform you that the AGM includes a Resolution, to be voted on by Members, to close the Oxford Centre from 30 April 2026.**

The Resolution is:

"RESOLVED that, given the lack of candidates for key Executive Committee positions to run the OCNT fully and effectively, the OCNT shall close completely from 30 April 2026 and that the current Executive Committee shall continue in role until the OCNT has closed."

To be agreed by a two-thirds majority of OCNT Members present at the AGM.

We really hope you can join us at the AGM – please come along if you are able.

Thank you!

David Hodges, OCNT Secretary

Message from the OCNT Treasurer and Membership Secretary

Members who pay subscriptions by standing order

Assuming that the sad closure of the Oxford Centre is finalised at the AGM on 17 March, we must then ask members who pay their subscription by standing order to **cancel their standing order** please. This will stop any future attempts by your bank to make a payment into the OCNT account.

Please note that we cannot cancel your standing order for you. You will need to do this yourself by contacting your bank, or, if you have online banking, you should be able to do this yourself online.

What happens to the money in the OCNT bank account at the point of closure?

The OCNT constitution states that any assets held by the OCNT at the time of closure must be paid over to the National Trust. The Committee will ensure that all funds in our bank account are donated to the National Trust in a timely manner. The final accounts as at 30 April will be audited and signed off by the Auditor and members of the Committee, and then be available for members to inspect, if they wish. A copy will be sent to the National Trust when the closing balance is remitted. The advice from the Trust is to keep all financial records for 6 years (so the papers will be in my loft! – Felicity)

Membership records

All electronic membership records held by the Committee will be deleted and any paper records will be destroyed.

Thank you to our members for *all* your support over the years.

Felicity Peacock, Treasurer and Louise Hodges, Membership Secretary

VISITS

Tuesday, 14 April 2026: VISIT TO SALISBURY

We visit the 13th- century historic medieval city of **Salisbury**. The cathedral boasts the largest cathedral spire and has one of only four surviving original copies of the Magna Carta, drawn up in 1215, and also the world's oldest working mechanical clock. We have a tour of the Cathedral at 11.00 am, including the Magna Carta (but not the tower).

Access: The cathedral is fully accessible with easy-to-use ramps beside any short steps.



After the tour you may linger in the cathedral, seek lunch refreshment in the café there, or spend time in the city which offers a wealth of attractions, heritage, shopping and dining.

You may wish to visit the Queen Anne **Mompesson House**, a National Trust property and garden close by the cathedral, which also has a café. Free admission with your NT Card.

We leave for home about 3.45 pm.

Coach pick-up times are a little earlier than usual as we have to arrive in time for the 11.00 am tour.

Cost: £43 **Booking deadline: Friday, 20 March 2026** **Leader: Colin Gammon (01865 779417;**
for use on 14 April ONLY: 07726 772 915)

Departing: **** Wheatley, Plastows Depot 7.25 am** **Wheatley, Ambrose Rise 7.30**
 Headington Shops (outside Iceland) 7.45 **Cunliffe Close 8.00**
 Oxford Playhouse 8.20 **Redbridge P&R 8.45**

**** Before choosing this boarding point, please phone 01865 872270 for permission to park your vehicle here as space is limited.**

Future Visits? – a message from Carol

As you will see on p. 5, Abingdon and District National Trust Association arrange day trips and have the following planned to Trust properties: Hinton Ampner, Charlecote Park, Buscot Park and Mottisfont. At the moment there are two pick-up points, Hales Meadow Car Park and Stratton Way, both in Abingdon but, having discussed this with the Abingdon Association, they are willing to be flexible and possibly introduce an additional pick-up point at the Redbridge P&R if there was enough demand. They use Plastow's Coaches.

In addition, I'm going to see if there is another local organisation, e.g. Oxford u3a, which would be interested in me arranging coach trips on their behalf.

As mentioned on p. 2, once OCNT closes, everyone's contact details will be deleted from our membership database and elsewhere, so if you would like me to keep in touch to let you know if I make any progress on arranging coach trips, please email me at carol.smith1591@outlook.com

If you don't have email, then please phone/leave a message with your name and phone no. on 01865 769277. (NB I'll be away 12th to 23rd February.)

OCNT Winter Lectures

17 February 2026: *Oxford Preservation Trust: a Tour of our Work* – Stephen Dawson

For nearly 100 years OPT has been looking after Oxford's heritage and green spaces, guiding change to ensure we keep the best of the old and encourage the best of the new. In this talk we will discover more of how they achieve this and why their work remains crucial to the future of the city and its green setting and world famous views of the dreaming spires.



Stephen Dawson joined the OPT Team in 2016 and, as Heritage Director, looks after the day to day running of the Trust with a particular focus on their heritage projects, green spaces and historic properties as well as fundraising. Prior to joining the Trust, he worked on various fundraising projects including turning his local church into a village hall as well as an endowment campaign for the Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust. In his spare time, Stephen loves being outdoors and is quite the expert on chickens! He volunteers for various community and charitable organisations including the Churches Conservation Trust and is a Trustee of The Friends of Dorchester Abbey. He also serves as a churchwarden for his local church at Stadhampton.

17 March 2026: *AGM plus a lecture: Collections and Conservation at Basildon Park, Greys Court and Nuffield Place* – Josh Watkins

Josh Watkins has been with the National Trust for around seven years, working in a variety of roles in conservation across the UK, including properties in the North East, Midlands and Northern Ireland, and has now been Collections & House Manager at Basildon Park, Greys Court and Nuffield Place (pictured below) for just over a year.



The talk will cover a brief history of the properties in the Thames Valley Group and the work Josh carries out in his role as Collections & House Manager and will include a discussion of the preventative conservation carried out by his team to care for the individual items within the collection as well as the structure of the buildings themselves. He will also explore some of the future conservation challenges facing each of the properties and how the team can respond to these.

Liz Humphreys and Margo Boore

OCNT Coffee Mornings

Please join us for our final three informal coffee mornings at the Cosy Club at 20 Cornmarket Street, next to TG Jones. It is on the 1st floor, but there is a lift. Please come along for a social catch-up and enjoy a relaxed cup of coffee or tea in comfortable surroundings.

There is no need to book in advance. Just come along any time between 10.30 and 11.30am on: **Tuesday, 25 February, 25 March, and 29 April 2026.**



Alternative Local National Trust Supporter Groups

While the Oxford Centre is closing there are a number of other local supporter groups in the area organising similar activities which some of you may like to consider joining depending on where you live in the county. In Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Berkshire there are groups, for example, in **Abingdon, Aylesbury, Beaconsfield, Newbury, Reading and Wycombe** and a full list can be found at the following website: <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/oxfordshire-buckinghamshire-berkshire/supporter-groups-in-oxfordshire-buckinghamshire-and-berkshire>

For members living to the north west of Oxford, there is the **North Cotswold Association**, which holds its talks in Broadwell, near Stow-on-the-Wold, and for those living to the south west the **Upper Thames and Ridgeway National Trust Association** (UTRNTA - <https://www.utrnta.co.uk/>), which holds its meetings in Cirencester, Lechlade and Highworth, might be of interest.

Abingdon and District National Trust Association and its Chair, Ruth Weinburg, in particular would welcome anyone from the Oxford Centre who would like to join them. Their talks are held once a month in the Autumn/Winter on a Tuesday afternoon at 2.30 pm and the venue, the Abingdon United Football and Social Clubhouse, Northcourt Road, has plenty of free parking and is on a regular bus route from Oxford (X2 and X3, alighting at the Boundary House stop).

The Abingdon Association also arranges visits, and destinations in the months ahead include: Hinton Ampner & Winchester, Charlecote Park & Chipping Norton, the Oxford Bus Museum & Buscot Park, and Mottisfont & Andover. In addition they organise holidays and there may be 2/3 places still available on their holiday to Norfolk in March this year and Oxford Centre members are welcome to apply (see details in box below).

Further information about the Abingdon group and how to join can be found on their website: <https://abingdonnatrust.chessck.co.uk/> or email: membership@abingdonnt.org.uk

Or you may like to attend the talk at 2.30pm on the afternoon of **Tuesday 17 March – ‘Discovering Avebury – Landscape and People’, by Dr Nick Snashall**. It is not necessary to book ahead, but they appreciate a donation of £4 per non-member. Everyone is welcome and there is an opportunity to join the Association on the day, enabling free entry for that talk. To find out more please email: talks@abingdonnt.org.uk

Holiday to Norfolk arranged by Abingdon and District National Trust Association Monday, 23rd to Friday, 27 March 2026

Includes staying at the **Mercure Hotel in Norwich** on a bed, breakfast and evening meal basis, coach hire and driver's tip and visits for NT members. Those not members of the NT would need to pay entry fees at the properties.

Pick-up points: Plastows Depot in Wheatley (probably about 8.15am) and later in Abingdon.

Itinerary:
Mon 23rd – Oxburgh Hall NT
Tues 24th – Bure Valley Rail Trip and Boat Trip on the Broads
Wed 25th – Sutton Hoo NT
Thurs 26th – Blickling Estate NT and Kentwell Hall
Fri 27th – Norwich Cathedral and Ickworth Estate NT

Cost: £660 per person in double rooms. £790 single rooms. £50 deposit required.

They may have 2/3 places left, which could be singles, twin or double. If interested in these, or going on a waiting list in case of a cancellation, **please contact Dawn at Greatdays Holidays Ltd on 0161 9289286, tour ref: Abingdon NT UDU A 117709, URGENTLY.**

A Note from the Treasurer about Donations to Local Properties

We were delighted to be able to donate at the end of 2025 a total of £6,000 to projects at local National Trust properties. These funds are raised by members from a number of sources during the year, including the 200 Club, subscriptions and donations, the surplus from bookings for successful outings such as to Wimpole Estate and Kenwood House, the Raffle at the AGM etc.

The OCNT Committee agreed the allocation of funds to:

Greys Court – £1,000 for projects within the house

Basildon Park – £1,000 for picnic benches

Nuffield Place – £2,000 towards conservation of the robes of Lord and Lady Nuffield

Chastleton – £1,000 for tree planting in the Parkland

Coleshill Rural Skills Centre – £1,000 towards Craft & Training equipment / the Saturday Club for young people to learn about heritage skills

Many thanks to members for making these donations possible.

Felicity Peacock, Treasurer

Memories of the 50th Anniversary Lunch of the Oxford Centre ...



RIP

It is with great sadness that we bring news of the deaths of long-term members of the Oxford Centre, **Joan Howse** and **Philip James**. Joan died on 26 December 2025, just after her 89th birthday, and Philip followed a month later on 28 January 2026 aged 94. Joan was a founding member of OCNT and Philip joined the Centre shortly afterwards. They were both enthusiastic and active members leading visits and holidays over many years. At the 50th anniversary of the Centre Joan was asked to cut the celebratory cake (pictured above). When they eventually retired and moved to a care home, they were both made honorary members of OCNT in recognition of the significant contribution they made to the Centre. They are fondly remembered.

A Message from the West Oxfordshire Portfolio

The restructure of the National Trust, while challenging, is giving us an opportunity to do things differently in the West Oxfordshire portfolio. Our focus is on **Restoring Nature**, something that we have been doing for several years now. Our ecology volunteers will continue surveying wildlife building on last year's data. Highlights have been seeing more lapwings and egrets on the River Cole. The hunt for elusive hazel dormice continues too.



Lapwing at Coleshill ©Martin Trehella



Blacksmiths at the Heritage & Rural Skills Centre

In October 2024 we started our first **Saturday Club**, the second cohort started in October last year. The first cohort had such a positive impact on the young people that three of them have returned this year as volunteers for the programme. This year's group have worked with a blacksmith, learned weaving from a professional weaver and tried paper marbling. Linking with our Restore Nature focus, the group have been hedge laying at Coleshill and Chastleton. Coming up is silversmithing, wood carving and lime plastering, all with expert tutors.

Saturday Clubs are a free, national youth programme for 13–16-year-olds to learn new skills and have fun. The National Trust Club at Coleshill follows the theme of Craft & Making, linking to the Heritage & Rural Skills Centre.

Continuing with the **Heritage & Rural Skills Centre**, 2026 courses and workshops are selling well. Exciting new courses this year include leather and rope work, marbling techniques, repairing conservation stone and a 5-day woodcarving summer school with the theme of misericords.

[Details of the varied courses on offer can be found at:

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/oxfordshire-buckinghamshire-berkshire/heritage-and-rural-skills-centre/events>]



Teaching studio at the Centre

On behalf of the whole team, I would like to end with a huge thank you to OCNT members for being such wonderful supporters of West Oxfordshire over the years. I am sure the decision to close was a difficult one. It has always been a pleasure to welcome your members to our properties and your donations have been gratefully received and used wisely. Please keep an eye on our events pages and come back to see us. With thanks and best wishes on behalf of the West Oxfordshire portfolio,

Sarah Hannis, Community, Participation & Volunteering Co-ordinator

Final dates for your diary ...

FEBRUARY	
Tues, 17th	Lecture: Magdalen Auditorium, 10.30am coffee, 11–12 noon, ALL welcome. Stephen Dawson, 'Oxford Preservation Trust: a Tour of our Work'
Tues, 24th	Coffee Morning at The Cosy Club, just drop in 10.30 to 11.30am
MARCH	
Tues, 17th	Magdalen Auditorium, 10.20 coffee, 10.45 AGM immediately followed at 11.10am by Lecture: Josh Watkins, 'Collections and Conservation at Basildon Park, Greys Court and Nuffield Place'
Fri, 20 th	Booking deadline for Salisbury visit (14 April)
Tues, 31st	Coffee Morning at the Cosy Club, just drop in 10.30 to 11.30am
APRIL	
Tues, 14th	*Visit to Salisbury, including tour of Cathedral
Tues, 28th	Coffee Morning at The Cosy Club, just drop in 10.30 to 11.30am
Thurs, 30th	Closure of the Oxford Centre of the National Trust

Note: *Members need to have booked a place for this event, see p.3 & Booking Form

OCNT's 2025–26 Executive Committee

President: Dr Nick Brown, Principal, Linacre College, Oxford

Chair: *Committee vacancy*

Vice Chair: *Committee vacancy*

Hon Treasurer: Felicity Peacock treasurer.ocnt@gmail.com 07975 678475

Hon Secretary: David Hodges secretary.ocnt@gmail.com

Membership Secretary: Louise Hodges membership.ocnt@gmail.com

Newsletter Editor: Margaret Lipscomb editor.ocnt@gmail.com

Visits/Events: Carol Smith

Bookings Secretary: Rupert McNeile

Lectures: Liz Humphreys & Margo Boore

Supporting Roles

Visits: Colin Gammon

Proofreading: Janet Redfern

Auditorium helpers: David Hodges, Fran Billington, Hilary Whitehouse

Website Manager: Ashley Castelino – from the USA

Members' Contact at Pegasus Grange: Val Gould

We would like to thank all the Volunteers who have generously given their time to help run our activities over the past years. We couldn't have continued for as long as we have without you. Thank you!

When you applied for membership of the Oxford Centre of the National Trust you gave us contact information so that we could keep you informed about forthcoming activities and invite you to take part in our events. This information is used solely for the purposes of running the Centre and its activities. It may be exchanged among members of the Committee but will not be shared with any other organization other than the printers who are supplied with postal addresses of members who receive their newsletter by post for mailing purposes. Your details will be kept securely, and you have the right to opt out of our communications at any time and to request to see what information we hold about you. When the Centre closes on 30 April 2026, all personal records will be deleted from every list held by members of the Committee electronically, and any paper records destroyed.