



2025

IMPACT REPORT

V FOR VICTORY

Building on the momentum of 2024's D-Day anniversary and celebrating 10 years of the museum, in 2025 we marked 80 years since the end of the Second World War - VE and VJ Day. It was also a year of the museum engaging with, and expanding its role in the community. Beyond a leading role in our home town's VE Street Party, we continued our work with the Armed Forces and other communities, signing the Armed Forces Covenant and extending our programme of veterans' events. We started offering drop-in reminiscence sessions for older people, we forged closer links with local artists, and through collaborative arts projects, developed our relationship with Holocaust Museum Houston and expanded our Holocaust education programme.



A WIN FOR WINNIE

While Churchill had a prominent place amongst our VE80 events and exhibitions in 2025, we owed much of our success to another famous Winnie. The year saw the launch of the long-awaited *E. H. Shepard: Before and Beyond Winnie-the-Pooh* exhibition, and the beloved bear drew in the crowds. August, the final month of the display, set new footfall records for the museum - with more visitors in a single month than any other in the museum's 10 years of opening. Building a community around the museum also took the fore here, with a wide range of events for families and younger children who might not have thought their local military museum would have so much for them.

EXHIBITIONS

E.H SHEPARD: BEFORE & BEYOND WINNIE-THE-POOH

Building on a collaboration that began with a 'Lockdown Lecture' in 2021 by Chair of the Shepard Trust, James Campbell, 2025 saw the launch of the long-awaited exhibition of E. H. Shepard's illustrations at the museum.

The exhibition featured some of his original First World War sketches and cartoons side-by-side with early Winnie-the-Pooh illustrations, all on loan from The University of Surrey Archives & Special Collections. With an intergenerational appeal, we supported the exhibition with regular events, including talks, family workshops and even a Teddy Bear picnic.

The popular exhibition drew record numbers during February half term and the summer holidays at the climax of the display.



Like *The Art of British War Comics* before it, and the Lee Miller exhibition anticipated to open in 2026, it evidences the museum's ability to pull in higher-profile exhibitions with broad appeal, widening our audience and opening up the hidden treasures of our permanent collections to more people than ever before.

This was the first time many of the pieces had been exhibited outside of London, and the first time they had been on public display for a number of years - offering visitors a rare opportunity to see such a range of work from the man who drew Pooh.

EXHIBITIONS

LIFE LINES: ARTHUR & NAOMI

Featuring artwork inspired by the story of Holocaust survivor Naomi Warren and the Oxfordshire Yeomanry soldier that helped her reunite with family in the US, the exhibition was the first of several arts collaborations the museum would host. With the support of the Warren family and with links to Holocaust Museum Houston, artwork taking in numerous disciplines and media, from painting, sculpture and photography to performance and musical composition went on display on the Landing Gallery.

Featured artists drew inspiration from the act of kindness that ultimately saw Naomi start her new life in Houston, Texas. Arthur Tyler, serving with the Oxfordshire Yeomanry, wrote letters to her surviving relatives after she approached the British troops sent in to liberate the camp in April 1945.

Work from the exhibition also made a journey to Houston, with Ania Ready's piece featuring soil samples from key sites in their story, and Petra Goetze's *Shofar* installation going on display in Holocaust Museum Houston's own *Arthur & Naomi* exhibition in 2026.



EXHIBITIONS

FROM CONFLICT TO PEACE: CELEBRATING VE & VJ DAY

Marking the 80th anniversaries of Victory in Europe and Victory over Japan, this exhibition covered celebrations across Oxfordshire, telling the stories of the county regiments during the final campaign of the Second World War, as well as the roles they played in the aftermath.

It also profiled many of the people of Oxfordshire who had become Prisoners of War, and their liberation in 1945. Alongside objects from the museum's archives, we displayed a rifle bearing the signatures of over 130 men and women who had served during the Second World War. The rifle was on loan for the duration of the exhibition from The Lee Enfield Project.



OPERATION VARSITY CROSSING TIME

Crossing Time was the culmination of our collaboration with Outside In, facilitating their Curators course with an exhibition planned and installed by course participants.

Outside In's mission is to provide a way into arts and culture for people who face barriers getting their foot in the door - and this course was specifically aimed at veterans and members of the armed forces.

Appropriately, the group decided to cover the 80th anniversary of the Rhine Crossing in their exhibition, inspired by conversations with Oxf & Bucks veteran Philip Aucott who had served during Operation Varsity. Alongside historical artifacts and Philip's story, the display featured mixed-media artwork by those taking part in the course.



EXHIBITIONS

REMEMBRANCES OF WAR ART BY PAUL JOYCE

Running alongside our own VE & VJ Day exhibition was Paul Joyce's vibrant display of paintings inspired by his own memories of the Second World War. Renowned for his photography (with his work in The National Portrait Gallery, The Tate Gallery, V&A and many others) in recent years he has turned his hand towards art, producing vividly-coloured artwork informed by a mix of memory and imagination.

Paul grew up during the Second World, and cites Paul Nash and Eric Ravilious as influences, with the juxtaposition of pastoral scenes and military elements characterising this exhibition.

We supported the exhibition with a series of themed art workshops for adults and craft activities for children.



LETTERS FROM LIBERATION: RESPONSES TO THE END OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Continuing both 2025's theme of commemorating the end of the war in 1945 and the legacy of holocaust education through Naomi Warren's story, this exhibition was our first collaboration with Abingdon & Witney College since the pandemic. Inspired by Naomi & Arthur's story told in our permanent displays and *Life Lines* exhibition, art and design students presented an exhibition of art exploring memory, loss, hope, and resilience - offering a new generation's response to historic events. Pieces included examples of painting, comic art, sculpture, film, embroidery and digital art.



EVENTS

CELEBRATING VE80 IN WOODSTOCK

Commemorating the 80th anniversary of VE Day went beyond the museum's own events and exhibitions - for the first time the museum took the lead in organising our town's commemorative events. Woodstock's street party - a collaborative effort with Woodstock Town Council, Blenheim Palace, St Mary Magdalene Church and Wake Up To Woodstock - saw the town turn out in its 1940s finest. SOFO organised living history displays, military vehicles and musical entertainment with a little help from our friends! We were supported by a number of regular collaborators, including 156 Parachute Battalion Living History Group, North Cotswolds Military Vehicles Trust, Oxford Bus Museum, The Hot Jazz Vagabonds, and of course, our amazing volunteers.



ARMED FORCES DAY 2025

Of course, VE Day wasn't our only celebration in 2025. Our Armed Forces Day event, now an annual fixture, returned. We were joined by Oxford Veterans Group, Oxfordshire ACF, Glider Pilot Regiment Society and Royal Army Chaplains Museum alongside more living history and tabletop displays from volunteers. All were welcome, with free entry for veterans, members of the armed forces community and their families, with donations encouraged.

EVENTS

A TEDDY BEAR PICNIC

Before waving goodbye to the Winnie-the-Pooh with the end of our E. H. Shepard exhibition in August, we threw a Teddy Bear Tea Party packed with outdoor fun and games for younger visitors. We were also joined by Woodstock-based Oxfordshire Beekeepers Association for talks and demonstrations of how Pooh's favourite sweet treat is made.

The event was the perfect way to cap off the hugely popular exhibition, with a great turnout and wonderful weather. The event was more than a showcase for the museum's family offer, but a showcase for the skills of our team. Our Oxford University Summer Intern, Molly, had assisted across the museum with a focus on collections, but had also planned and delivered so many of the activities on the day.



TEDDY TEA PARTIES & FAMILY CRAFTS

The Teddy Bear Picnic followed a regular programme of activities which ran throughout the school holidays during the E. H. Shepard exhibition. Themed around Winnie-the-Pooh and his friends from Hundred Acre Wood, crafts included kite-making, puppet and animal headband crafting, as well as designing paw print stamps.

The Tea Parties offered younger children a chance to bring along their teddies and fire their imaginations with everything they needed for a tea party with Pooh, Piglet and Tigger too. These events helped make February half term and August the busiest weeks in the museum's history.



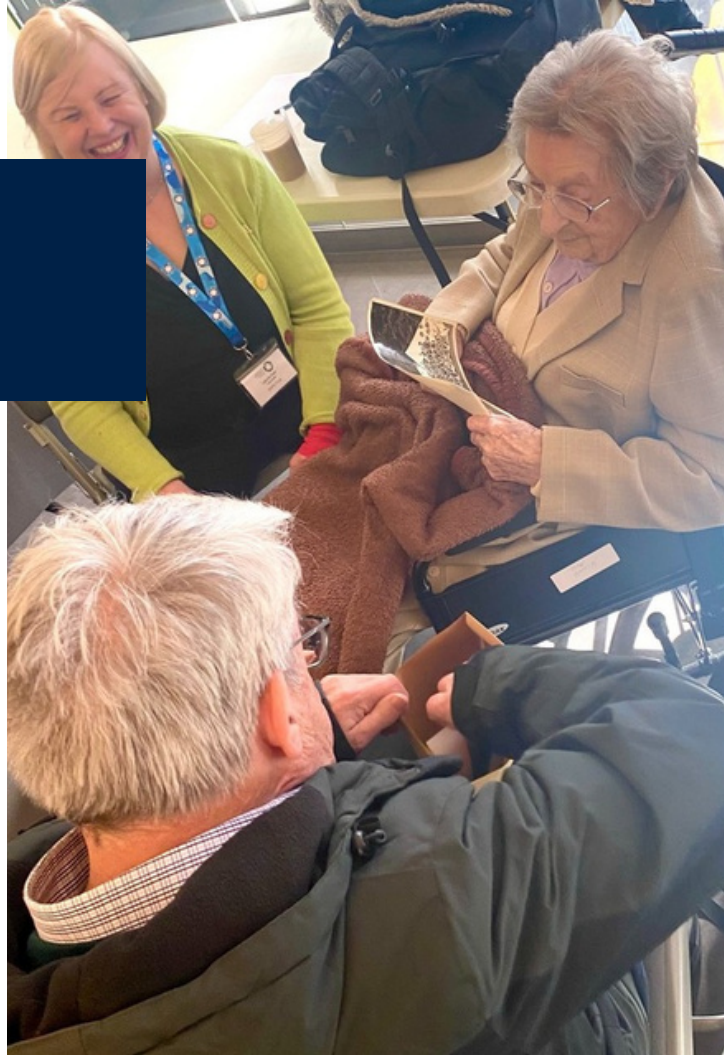
EVENTS

MEET ME AT THE SOLDIERS MUSEUM - LAUNCHING REMINISCENCE SESSIONS

In late 2024 our veterans events programme, including drop-in coffee mornings and therapeutic hobby sessions, became monthly features of the museum programme through support from The Veterans' Foundation. In 2025 we also started offering weekly drop-ins with a focus on reminiscence for older adults, veterans and non-veterans alike.

The sessions were backed by Oxford University Galleries Libraries and Museum and have already attracted regular groups from local care homes, in Woodstock and wider Oxfordshire, as well as a number of individuals as well.

Taking in music, object handling and simple crafts and a starting point for discussion, the sessions are completely free to users, including complimentary tea and coffee. With a renewed focus on wellbeing and community services like these, we aim to continue *Meet Me at the Museum* well into the future.



MONTHLY TALKS & THE TOM SHANNON MEMORIAL LECTURE 2025

Our monthly Friends talks programme continued with a variety of topics tied to our exhibitions programme, with talks from James Campbell on Shepard's War and a look at Winnie-the-Pooh's wartime origins from Ross King. Mike Tickner helped us mark the often overlooked VJ Day with a talk examining the aftermath of the Japanese surrender in east Asia. The programme was capped off with our annual Tom Shannon Memorial lecture, remembering our former Trustee.

This year's event took place at the museum but focused on Winston Churchill's connections to nearby Blenheim Palace and Ditchley Park, host to previous talks in the series.

EVENTS

RETURN OF THE WOODSTOCK FESTIVE FAYRE

After hosting the local community's annual Christmas Market for the first time in 2024, Woodstock Festive Fayre returned bigger and better in 2025 - finding room for more local craft and artisan gift stalls than ever before. For one weekend, our Cloister Gallery and Briefing Room were taken over by 20 traders, with everything from Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire's finest food and drink to Woodstock artists prints and cards on sale.

Many stalls returned to the museum having exhibited at last year's Fayre, and welcomed over 1500 visitors over a day and a half of trading. Not only has the Fayre helped put the museum on the map for many locals that had not found us before, but the museum has helped the town expand this annual event - now set to be a regular fixture in our calendar.



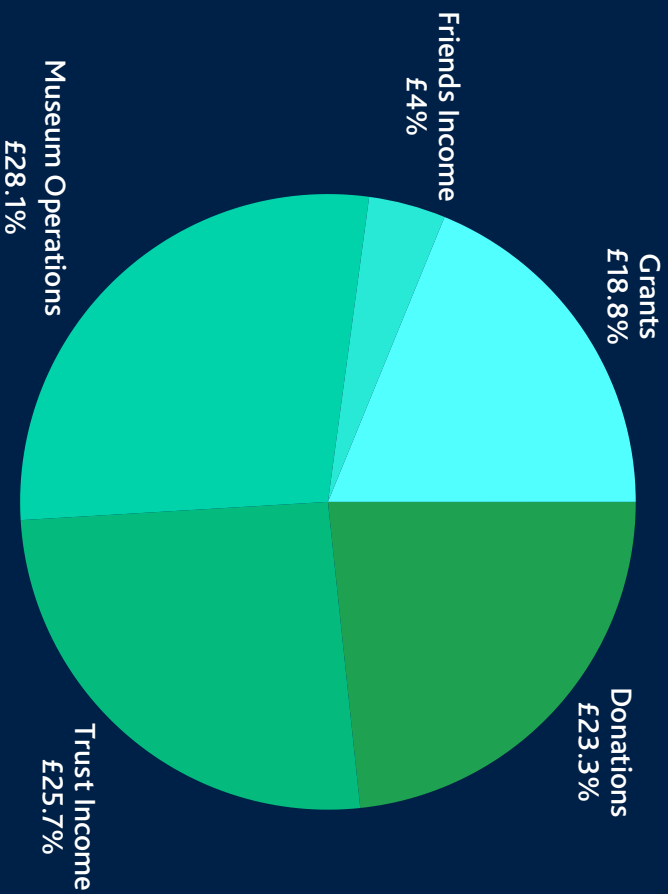
JAZZ IN THE BARN & THE WATERLOO BAND

2025 was a big year for music at the museum, with new and returning concerts filling out an already packed events programme. Following appearances at 2024's Wartime Christmas event, supporting Woodstock's VE80 celebrations and our Armed Forces Day events in 2025, The Hot Jazz Vagabonds played a fundraiser concert for the museum hosted at Towersey Manor Barn. Another now annual event in collaboration with St Mary Magdalene Church continued this year too, with The Waterloo Band and Bugles of The Rifles returning to Woodstock for another winter concert, playing a range of classics and more modern arrangements for the local community, with proceeds supporting both the museum trust and the church's roof fund.

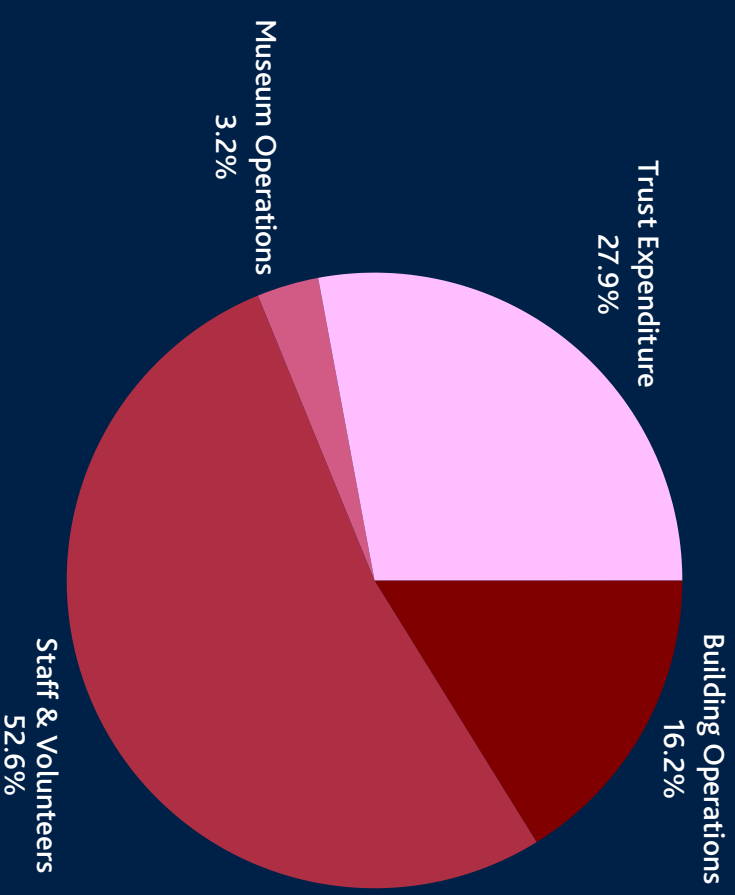


SOFO in 2025

Income



Expenditure



Donations: £45,582



Trust Income: £50,282



Museum Operations: £54,891



Friends Income: £7904



Grants: £36,769



Staff & Volunteers: £115,781



Trust Expenditure: £83,772



Museum Operations: £9,744



Building Operations: £48,496

MUSEUM NEWS

SPREADING THE WORD: PRESS DAY 2025

Following success with a press event in 2024 themed around the D-Day anniversary, 2025 saw us host a similar opportunity for local media and to raise the profile of the museum.

Taking place in May, the natural focus was the VE Day 80th anniversary - with members of our team of volunteers and individual experts that we have worked closely with on hand to cover a wide range of local interest stories from 1945.

While national coverage was more limited than for D-Day, the museum would once again feature on regional TV, radio, and web news as a result of the event. ITV Meridian featured interviews with volunteer Ingram Murray and Jay Hawkins of the Lee Enfield Rifle Project, while BBC Radio Oxford were excited to hear about our Second World War spy-themed escape room experience. Their Breakfast Show team returned to take on the challenge, recording parts of their attempt for listeners.



SIGNING THE ARMED FORCES COVENANT

Beyond outreach services for veterans and maintaining links with the armed forces and cadet forces locally, the museum has long valued members of the armed forces community as part of our team. In 2025 this commitment to recognising the contribution that service personnel, veterans, cadets and their families make to our organisation, our community and to our country was formalised by signing the covenant.

On Wednesday, 29 January 2025, the museum signed the Armed Forces Covenant in front of gathered members of the Armed Forces community and representatives. Trustee Mike Montagu, who served in The Light Infantry and then The Rifles, signed on behalf of the museum, alongside Lt. Col. Ged Hennigan RLC, Bicester Garrison Commander.



MUSEUM NEWS

CROWDFUNDING SUCCESS

We capped off the year with two Christmas crowdfunding success stories. Through *The BigGive Christmas Challenge* and a West Oxfordshire District Council-backed campaign on crowdfunding platform Spacehive, we raised a combined total over £30,000. The funds will be put towards improving and expanding our creative wellbeing and community outreach projects, building on the work we've already started with regular reminiscence sessions, veterans' coffee mornings, and intergenerational activities.

The Spacehive campaign, *Creative Bridges Across Generations*, aims to establish the museum as a local arts hub for young people, with more youth-led exhibitions such as 2025's collaboration with Abingdon and Witney College.



Meanwhile BigGive campaign *Creative Heritage Hunters* aims to improve the museum's outreach offering with a 'Cabinet of Curiosities', or mobile mini-museum, to take on the road as well as expanding our fledgling Victory Garden here at SOFO.

The focus here will be creative wellbeing activities, much like the *Models for Heroes* sessions we host, providing a therapeutic space through creative activities, or our *Meet Me at the Soldiers Museum* sessions promoting wellbeing for older adults through reminiscence.

The 2025 campaigns were our second and third crowdfunding campaigns, following 2022's effort which saw installation of our Anderson Shelter display, loved by regular visitors and school parties alike.

FEEDBACK

A FEW OF OUR VISITORS' REVIEWS & COMMENTS

'Went for an exhibition, found so much more!
The exhibition itself was brilliantly curated for
adults and children.'

- Joanna T, *TripAdvisor Review, August 2025*

'Loved it, very friendly staff, amazing displays
with interactive stuff too. Lots of weapons to
see, which my boys loved'

- Erin Moran, *Google Review, May 2025*

'Absolutely Fantastic :D'

- Naeem Ahmed, *Google Review, June 2025*

'Each visit I find out something new'

- Jon G, *Visitors' Book, June 2025*

'Loved the Anderson Shelter experience'

- Drayton Primary School, *Visitors' Book,*
November 2025



HOW YOU RATE US

Average TripAdvisor Rating: 4.6/5

Average Google Reviews Rating: 4.7/5



OUR AUDIENCE IN 2025

Over 9200 museum visitors

Over 55,000 active website visitors

Over 22,000 Google Search Clicks

Over 1700 newsletter subscribers

Facebook: Over 1600 followers, over 194,000 views

Instagram: Over 800 followers, over 27,000 views

Youtube: Over 5,200 views, over 1,600 hours
watched



SUPPORTING SOLDIERS OF OXFORDSHIRE TRUST

ENJOY *BUBBLES & BLOOMS* AT THE SOFO AND SSAFA GARDEN PARTY

Join us on Thursday 9 July 2026 for a joint event raising funds for Soldiers of Oxfordshire Trust and SSAFA, the Armed Forces charity. Drinks and canapés will be served throughout, with the opportunity to listen to jazz from the Waterloo Band and Bugles of The Rifles in the stunning Oxfordshire Museum Gardens.

Guests will also enjoy exclusive 'behind the scenes' tours of the SOFO archives, and our first ever flower show, *Silent Petals*, in our gallery spaces.



Of course, there will also be the chance to see the upcoming summer exhibition, *Lee Miller: A Woman at War*, featuring the wartime work of the renowned Vogue model, surrealist photographer and photojournalist.

Join us and celebrate,
6.30pm - 8pm Thursday 9 July 2026

GET TICKETS ONLINE





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