

PRESS RELEASE

26 August 2026

The Bowes Museum celebrates Heritage Open Days with free weekend entry this September



Creative workshops in The Bowes Museum's Create Space on Heritage Open Days.

Everyday Histories come to life across two free days, with guided tours, hands-on workshops, Silver Swan performances and more.

Visitors are invited to step inside The Bowes Museum for free on **Saturday 12 and Sunday 13 September 2026**, as the museum joins Heritage Open Days — England's largest festival of history and culture — with a packed weekend of themed activities and experiences for all ages.

This year's national theme, **Everyday Histories**, invites visitors to explore the museum's galleries, collections and remarkable history through a new lens: the everyday lives and work of the people and communities who shaped the past.

Discover the secrets of the Collection

A series of **guided tours** across the galleries and parkland will uncover fascinating stories of working life through the ages and the jobs and trades of times gone by. For an exclusive look behind the scenes, visitors can explore the **Vault Tours** to hear the hidden histories behind some of the museum's most intriguing pieces.

Families can pick up the new **Everyday Histories Trail** from the entrance hall — created by the museum's own Young Volunteers, the trail draws playful connections between their favourite objects and the everyday histories they tell, making for a fun shared journey through the museum.

And with **three performances of the celebrated Silver Swan each day**, there's plenty of opportunity to catch this mesmerising 18th-century automaton in action.

Hands-on Activities for All Ages

Visitors wanting a more hands-on experience can drop in to one of two **Artist Maker Workshops**, where museum artists will guide participants in creating their own piece of art to take home. At the **Object Handling Table**, budding historians can get up close to the collection, holding and investigating remarkable objects from across the centuries.

Step into the World of Norman Cornish

Heritage Open Days are the perfect opportunity to discover **Norman Cornish: A Life in Sketchbooks**, a celebrated exhibition dedicated to the artist who devoted his life to capturing the everyday lives and labour of Durham's coalfield communities. The exhibition offers a poignant window into recent history, its people, places and communities.

Alongside the exhibition, a **Cornish Sketchbook Station** invites budding artists to pick up a pencil and try their own hand at sketching, fully equipped with materials and guidance.

Relax at Café Bowes and Browse the Museum Shop

After a morning of exploring, visitors can enjoy a bite to eat and a well-earned break at **Café Bowes**. The **Museum Shop** offers a wide range of books, gifts and souvenirs — including a Silver Swan soft toy, the perfect memento of this iconic automaton.

No booking is required for the event or activities — simply head to the entrance hall to enjoy the full programme of creative and cultural activities, suitable for all ages.

Special Offers This Weekend

- **25% off museum membership**, giving visitors unlimited admission for 12 months. To claim the discount, visitors must present a Heritage Open Days brochure from The Bowes Museum at reception and purchase their membership by 30 November 2026
- **Early bird Winter Market tickets** available for **£7.50** (before 7 December; £9.00 thereafter)
- **Under 18s, full-time students and carers always go free**

Find out more about Heritage Open Days at The Bowes Museum here:

thebowesmuseum.org.uk/whats-on/heritage-open-days

Event details:

- **Dates:** Saturday 12 and Sunday 13 September
- **Admission:** Free, no booking required
- **Location:** The Bowes Museum, Newgate, Barnard Castle, County Durham, DL12 8NP

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PRESS IMAGES can be found [here](#)

www.thebowesmuseum.org.uk

About The Bowes Museum:

The Bowes Museum is a charity managing a Grade 1 listed accredited museum and Grade 2 listed parkland in Barnard Castle. Founded by Joséphine & John Bowes 150+ years ago, this purpose-built museum brings together an extraordinary, designated collection of European fine and decorative art as a cultural resource for the people of Northern England, where today we celebrate artists, designers and makers.

The Bowes Museum receives funding from Durham County Council and, as a National Portfolio Organisation, receives support from Arts Council England. Arts Council England is the national development body for arts and culture across England, working to enrich people's lives. [artscouncil.org.uk](https://www.artscouncil.org.uk)

The Bowes Museum is a member of the Discover Durham partnership of attractions, whose commitment is to promote Durham as an exciting and vibrant group travel destination and to provide the travel trade with a professional and knowledgeable service. [discoverdurham.co.uk](https://www.discoverdurham.co.uk)

Year-round admission to The Bowes Museum is £25 for local members (residents of County Durham and Darlington), £28 for members (residents elsewhere), £20 for a day ticket, and £22 for a day ticket including Gift Aid. Under 18s, full-time students and carers are free. As a registered charity (number 1079639), The Bowes Museum needs to generate more than half of its income each year to care for the historic collection, buildings and parkland. Your donations are vital to that work. Visit thebowesmuseum.org.uk/support/ for more information.

About Heritage Open Days:

Heritage Open Days is England's largest festival of history and culture, bringing together thousands of local organisations, communities and volunteers each September to celebrate the places, traditions and untold stories on their doorstep. All events are free to attend. Find out more at [heritageopendays.org.uk](https://www.heritageopendays.org.uk).