

THE CHICHESTER SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



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Chichester's East Street on a busy day.

Photo by Brian Henham

CHICHESTER'S REGENERATION STRATEGY

Helen Marshall, who recently joined our Executive Committee and was Chair/CEO of Chichester BID (currently remaining as Chair), recently alerted me to a 2024 document: *Chichester Regeneration Strategy*. I had no idea it existed and, since you may not either, it's been placed on our website (find 'Planning' and look under 'Visions for Chichester').

This informative publication lists 16 'Interventions' and 9 'Remaining Interventions', so 25 in all. Some are large *'Living an accessible and attractive city centre'* with 15 'Supporting Initiatives' and some smaller: *'Undertake a hotel market assessment to determine and qualify the unmet demand for hotel accommodation within the city'*. These initiatives, even if half the major ones happen, would make a considerable difference to the city in which we live.

Intervention 15 is *'Work with key stakeholders to create a brand and marketing strategy for the city'*. Adrian Moss (Leader of CDC) has invited your Society to join a steering group to oversee this intervention. The idea is that a brand could help with local pride, raise Chichester's profile, highlight our assets, publicise local opportunities, help attract investment, support existing businesses and organisations. This is a significant and challenging task. We are glad to have been invited. We will be keeping you updated of course.

This could be the moment to address some worryingly negative perceptions about your Society, as we get behind regeneration activities that enhance our city and, by doing so, living up to our own brand: *'Preserve and enhance Chichester'*. As a past governor of schools and present governor of Chichester Free School, a governor's task is to support and challenge the head teacher and staff. We want to be less known for challenge and become better known for support.

CHISOC ANNUAL FORUM REGENERATION IN THE CITY

Monday 29 June

6.00 – 8.00 pm

At the Assembly Room, North St

Note this in your diary now!

ChiSoc members will be contacted by email on how to book a place + details on the programme and speakers

Monitor your email inbox!



AN ASSEMBLY ROOM CONCERT THAT HONOURS CHICHESTER COMPOSER JOHN MARSH

Lynden Cranham provides the background

Chichester's period instrument ensemble, The Consort of Twelve, begins its 2026 season on **Saturday 18 April at 6.00pm** in the Assembly Room. We're delighted that the director will be violinist Julia Bishop. Our inspiration has been the rich musical life of Chichester's gentleman-composer John Marsh. We arranged the concert date unaware of the coincidence that on 16 April 1787 Marsh was staying at the Dolphin in Chichester, overseeing arrangements for moving with his family into their new home in the Pallants. On 17 April he 'took complete possession' of the house and would live there until his death in 1828.

Discussions have been greatly facilitated by Lucy Cox, our soprano soloist, and by local historian Alan Green - particularly for his excellent suggestion that we present the concert at the Assembly Room, which has many Marsh connections. Alan also lent me *The John Marsh Journals, The Life and Times of a Gentleman Composer*, a series of fascinating Jane Austen-like accounts of Georgian Chichester, with descriptions of walking through the 'Broyle coppice and the green lanes of Graylingwell', locally-based military bands, visits to 'take a dish of tea' and dancing at assemblies. Although the 'old' Assembly Room in the Pallant was still used when Marsh arrived, the 'new' Room in North Street had been completed by 1783. In October 1787 Marsh played violin in the first subscription concert to be held there. He subsequently became manager of these subscription concerts. A great organ enthusiast, John Marsh was involved in decisions concerning the installation of a music gallery and an organ. When pieces of the instrument arrived by wagon he immediately unpacked them and started arranging the pipes on the Assembly Room floor.

Wherever John Marsh went he collaborated enthusiastically in concerts and was a keen chamber-music player. Our programme incorporates repertoire by composers he particularly admired. For example, Marsh frequently played Mozart 'quartets', and enjoyed Boccherini's two-cello quintets so much that he adapted the first cello parts for the viola in case '2 good violoncellos could not be had!' We will play a Mozart string divertimento; Lucy will sing his famous *Exsultate Jubilate* and also Boccherini's beautiful *Stabat Mater*. Marsh described hearing part of an organ voluntary by English composer John Garth, and I will play one of Garth's cello concertos. Marsh's own compositions are also represented: his string quartet in B flat and a Prelude and Fugue for harpsichord duet, played by David Gostick and Richard Barnes. Roger Parker will read extracts from Marsh's *Journals*.

Alan Green adds: On the afternoon of the concert, I will be leading a guided walk entitled *On the Trail of John Marsh*, which will explore the contribution that this true polymath made to Chichester by visiting many of the sites associated with him. What's more, the opportunity will be taken to eavesdrop on the rehearsal for the evening's concert in the Assembly Room. Places are limited to 25. The walk will start at Pallant House at 2.00pm



A recent image of the Consort, taken at St John's Chapel during the 2025 Festival of Chichester.

Photo by Carlien Murray

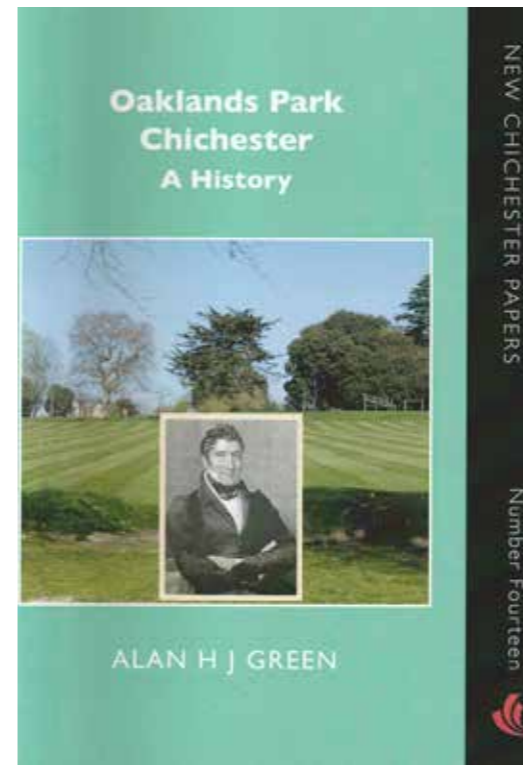
Cellist Lynden Cranham is a member of the Consort of Twelve.

Tickets for the concert are £20, £5 for students and £1 for children; and £5 for Alan Green's walk. They can be obtained online at consortoftwelve.co.uk; by cheque payable to Consort of Twelve, with an SAE to

Sonia Schofield,
103 Stubbington Avenue,
Portsmouth PO2 0JE
023 9399 0073

Phillip and Philip Hairdressers, Drapers Yard,
16 The Hornet, Chichester
PO19 7JG

On the door - unless the concert is sold out beforehand.



OAKLANDS PARK CHICHESTER; A HISTORY BY ALAN H J GREEN

Richard Childs recommends a new publication that describes how this park came into being

For a small city of some 30,000 people, it is often said that Chichester punches above its weight. Establishments such as Pallant House Gallery and Chichester Festival Theatre are facilities of national repute. In the case of the latter, its creation would not have been possible without Oaklands Park. In turn, Oaklands Park would not have been possible without its creator, James Bennett Freeland.

Freeland, the son of John and Betty Freeland, was born in Singleton in 1782. In 1798 he was articled to Edward and William Johnson, solicitors of Chichester. In the 1830s he is recorded as living at 22 West Street but by the time of the 1841 census he was living at a property listed under Spitalfields Lane, (this latterly became Oaklands House). In 1845 he became private secretary to the Bishop of Chichester and personal secretary to the Duke of Richmond. He was also High Bailiff of Chichester City Council, Deputy Recorder, Vice President of the Mechanics Institute, Secretary to the Cathedral Library and Clerk to the Magistrates. Following an operation for cancer, he died on 31 October 1852

Library and Clerk to the Magistrates. Following an operation for cancer, he died on 31 October 1852

In this booklet Alan Green explains how between 1819 and 1852 Freeland progressively acquired the freeholds or leaseholds of the many fields to the north of the city that he needed to create his own country park. The park subsequently became the largest public open space in the city and one of its greatest assets. Without Freeland's consolidation of the variously owned plots of land (ultimately purchased by Chichester City Council in 1939), it is probable that today we would not have a Chichester Festival Theatre or Chichester Rugby, Football or Archery Clubs. Coincidentally, last year the Chichester Society successfully applied to the City Council for a blue plaque commemorating James Bennett Freeland to be erected on 22 West Street. This will happen shortly.

The publication is well illustrated with a series of maps of the park estate, and photographs of Oaklands House during its ownership by Colonel Arthur Henty. It's available (price £5) from the Chichester Local History Society at <https://chichesterlocalhistory.org.uk/> or from West Sussex Record Office or the Novium Museum.

Richard Childs is a member of the Society's Executive Committee

MONTHLY TALKS WITH COFFEE

CHISOC Members and their friends are invited to a series of fascinating talks by knowledgeable guest speakers on a range of subjects.

Where? Friends Meeting House, Priory Rd

Time? 10.00 with coffee and tea available

Cost? £5 each, cash (no cards)

Parking Priory Road, or Northgate car park

Speakers: Talks begin promptly at 10.30

16 April: Andrew Green, Chief Executive, Chichester College Group

21 May: Hilary Bartle, Chief Executive, Stonepillow

18 June: Tony Toynton, Chairman, Sanctuary in Chichester

Tip! Allow enough time to park, pay for admission and obtain refreshments before the 10.30 start



PLANS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM WILL AFFECT CHICHESTER

Readers should be aware of the imminent changes described by Sean McHale

Local Government Reform may not set the pulses racing but the changes in how we are governed in the next couple of years have important implications for the amenities and services we enjoy here in Chichester – and what we pay! Because Local Government Reform excludes parish councils (and Chichester City Council is classified as a Parish Council), duties and responsibilities may soon fall on the City Council that it does not have at present. For example, the average householder may have to pay an additional £3 per week, or £150 annually, to the City Council in a couple of years' time. Read on to get a better understanding of what is going on.

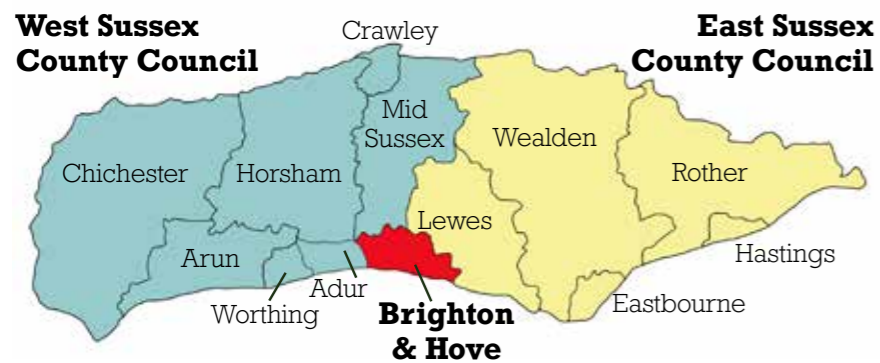
Devolution

Within six months of the 2024 general election, the new government published a paper on local government reform. The reform has two strands, both of which will affect us as residents of Chichester. The first strand is *devolution*. This is the movement of power and finances from Westminster to our area. For the purpose of devolution our area will be a merger of West Sussex, East Sussex plus Brighton and Hove. This area will be overseen at a strategic level by a new, elected mayor of this 'combined county authority'. There are currently 14 mayors of combined county authorities in England. Some of them are urban eg Greater Manchester and some mixed rural and urban eg York & North Yorkshire.

In our area, the mayoral position will have responsibility for a population of 1.7 million people covering 17 Parliamentary constituencies. The mayor's responsibilities will include highways and transport, housing, public health, skills and employment, environment and net zero, public safety and economic development. Elections for this mayor were to take place in May 2026; however, last December the Government announced these elections would be postponed until 2028. The job, which will command a six-figure salary, will be hugely important for influencing how our services are planned across the whole of Sussex. Let us hope that the new appointee has a good knowledge of Sussex as we need to make sure that our representations from rural areas are not drowned out by those from the urban parts.

Reorganisation

The second strand of local government reform that was announced in December 2024 is a *reorganisation of councils*. We in Chichester have two principal councils. They are Chichester District Council and West Sussex County Council. In areas of the country such as ours that have these two-tier councils, the government has initiated a process by which the two councils will be combined into one *unitary authority* or council. In West Sussex all the seven district councils that make up the county of West Sussex namely Adur, Arun, Chichester, Crawley, Horsham, Mid-Sussex and Worthing, as well as the West Sussex County Council, will not exist after May 2028. They will be replaced by a unitary authority. Currently, the government is considering the best size for this new council. The options are firstly, one large West Sussex unitary authority which will replicate the footprint of the current West Sussex County; this unitary council will have responsibility for 900,000 residents. Secondly, this large unitary council or authority is split into two smaller unitary authorities each with about 450,000 population. In our area, Chichester would be combined with Adur, Arun and Worthing. Thirdly, another proposal from Brighton favours five unitary councils covering the whole of Sussex. Each of these would cover a population of 300-400,000. In this proposal, Chichester District would be combined with Crawley and Horsham. The government will decide which is the best structure for a unitary council or authority in our area this spring. Elections for this new unitary authority will take place in May 2027 and it will then act in a shadow capacity until taking over formally in 2028 with the dissolution of West Sussex County Council and all the seven district councils within West Sussex.



None of these County Councils and District Councils will exist after May 2028. They will be replaced by 'unitary authorities' whose areas are to be defined. This map is based on one prepared by Adur & Worthing Councils using Open data and is subject to Open Government license.

The highlighted benefits for this new arrangement are firstly, the simplification of responsibilities by only having one council. This should make it easier for residents to deal with their local authority and make accountability explicit. Secondly, there will be money-saving opportunities because of 'unitarisation' such as reductions in front-office staff, back-office staff, council elections, councillor expenses and council buildings. It's hoped that monies saved will be reinvested into local services!

Opportunities and challenges

Chichester City Council is concerned about our parks, open spaces and public conveniences. We know that the new unitary authority will have considerable pressure on its budget owing to the expense of adult and child social care, housing and special educational needs. These responsibilities are *statutory* in nature which means that the new authority will be obliged to fund them. This is likely to mean that less money will be available for a new unitary authority to spend in a non-statutory manner. This is called *discretionary spending* and could mean the care Chichester District Council has taken of our parks and open spaces may not be as readily provided by the new authority. This has been the case in other areas of the country that have undergone 'unitarisation'. As an example, a new unitary authority was established in Somerset in April 2023. Within seven months, it had declared a financial emergency and transferred responsibility for parks and libraries to parish councils. For example, Bridgwater Town Council had to raise its income from council tax by 400%!

Parks in Chichester

The Chichester perspective is to maintain and enhance amenities which are important to residents and visitors. Chichester City Council developed a five-year plan published in 2024 to support the city as a thriving and inclusive place for residents, visitors, and workers alike, while honouring its unique character and rich historical legacy. As part of our commitment to protecting Chichester's heritage, the City Council has expressed an interest in taking responsibility for Florence Park, Oaklands Park, Priory Park and Bishop's Palace Garden. Priory Park was given to the city in 1918 by the Duke of Richmond and Gordon, as a memorial to the fallen of World War I to be enjoyed by the residents of Chichester. Oaklands Park was bought by the City Council in 1939 but was transferred to the newly formed Chichester District Council at the time of the last local government reorganisation in 1974.

Council Tax increases?

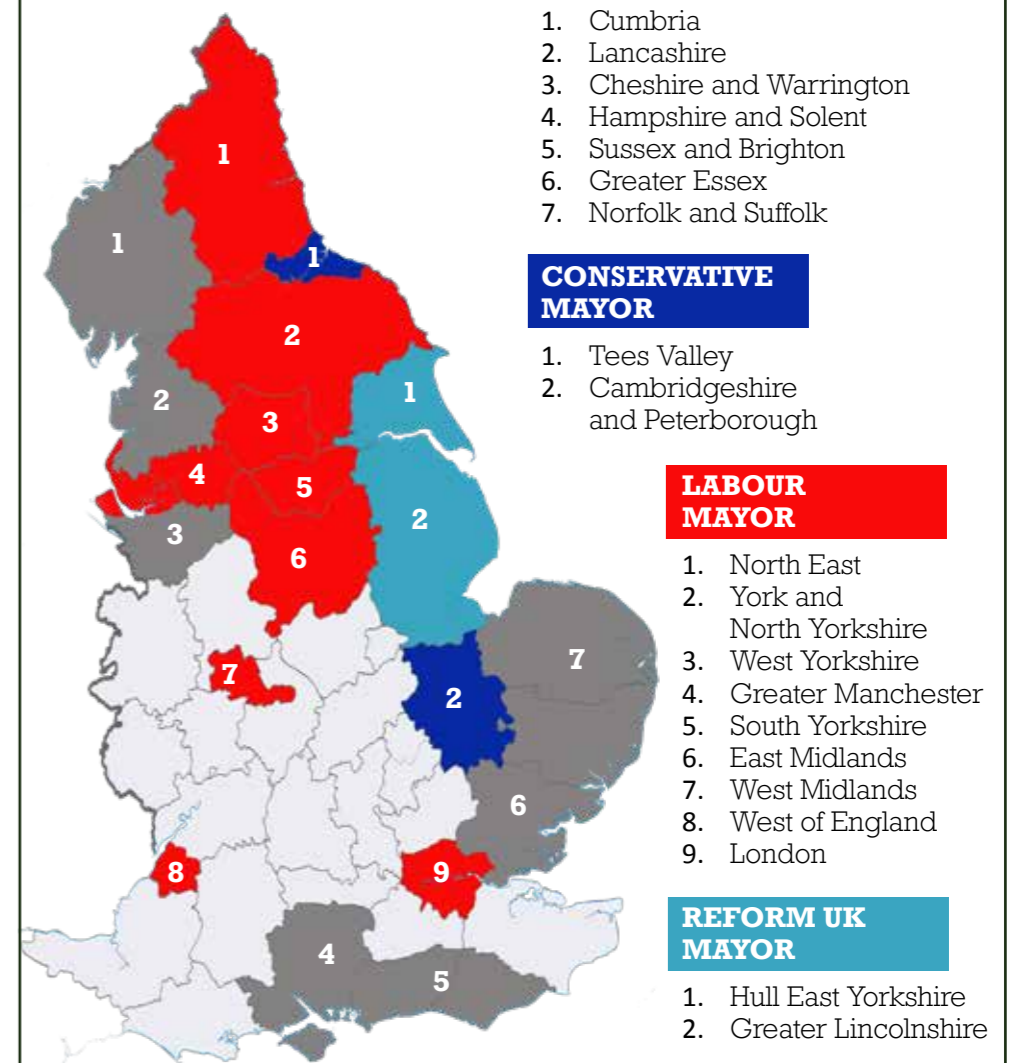
Currently 86 percent of our total council tax bill in Chichester goes to either the County Council or the District Council. Of the remaining amount, 11 percent goes to the Sussex Police and 3 percent to the City Council. What this means is that for a Band-D council tax property within Chichester, the City Council charges £78 a year. This compares with Midhurst at £168 a year, Bognor at £140 and Selsey at £168. The City Council is at the early stages of discussion about transferring parks and open spaces. The state of local government finances indicates that transferring parks and open spaces to the City Council will indeed happen but will not be associated with the transfer of extra money to cover costs. This could mean that the City Council will need to increase the proportion of council tax by as much as £3 a week for a Band-D household. These are interesting times and the City Council's motive is to do what is best for the residents of Chichester both in the short and long term.

Sean McHale is Mayor of Chichester

REGIONAL MAYORS IN ENGLAND

Sept 2025

Source: Institute for Government



MARKING THE WEALD & DOWNLAND LIVING

MUSEUM'S 55TH BIRTHDAY

Clare de Bathe invites readers to join a campaign for improving accessibility to the Museum's 40-acre site

Singleton's Weald & Downland Living Museum was proud to celebrate its 55th anniversary in 2025 which continues during 2026. We are celebrating over half a century of preserving rural heritage and championing craftsmanship. Since opening in 1970, the Museum has become a centre for historic buildings and traditional skills. The open-air site across 40 acres of the South Downs features over 50 reconstructed buildings from early medieval halls to working farmsteads and a Victorian school. Each offers an immersive glimpse into the architectural and cultural history of southeastern England.

Educational heartbeat

Today the Museum offers one of the country's most respected ranges of lifelong learning opportunities; from its part-time MSc courses in Building Conservation and Timber Building Conservation, to an extensive schedule of short courses and craft workshops designed for adults seeking to develop traditional skills and deepen their connection to rural heritage. Young learners also play an essential role in the Museum's mission. Thousands of schoolchildren visit every year for curriculum-linked programmes, family-friendly events, and its much-loved monthly toddler group.



There is an enormous store for a myriad of historic artifacts



The Weald and Downland Living Museum's Open Day in 1970

An accessibility initiative

To mark this milestone year, the Museum has embarked on a new fundraising campaign called *Accessible to Everyone – 55 for the 55th*. Our goal is raising £55,000 to improve accessibility across the entire site. While millions have enjoyed the Museum's historic buildings, landscapes, and collections over the decades, the rural terrain can pose challenges for visitors with mobility needs, families with pushchairs, and those requiring additional accessibility support. The new campaign aims to change that, and funds raised will go directly toward:

- New paths to support users of wheelchair and mobility-aids and families with buggies.
- Inclusive play areas designed for children of all ages and abilities.
- Improved signage and interpretation.
- Better navigation, enhanced visitor comfort, and sustainable travel measures.

As we mark our 55th year, this campaign gives us a vital opportunity to make the Museum more accessible, more inclusive, and more welcoming for all communities. Every donation, big or small, will help us shape a better future for visitors for generations to come.

Donors to the campaign will have the chance to enjoy experiences created especially for the anniversary.

These include:

- A Woodland Myth Walk for £55
- A Behind-the-Scenes Tour for two
- Afternoon Tea in the historic Whittaker's Cottage
- A Repair Shop Experience
- The chance to learn how to brew your own beer in the Winkhurst Kitchen
- Opportunities to sponsor a historic building, an inclusive play area, or attend a Tudor Banquet in the iconic Bayleaf House



Brewing at the Museum's Winkhurst Kitchen

Clare de Bathe is the Weald and Downland Living Museum's Director. Illustration(s) with thanks to the Museum. Readers interested in donating to the accessibility campaign are encouraged to visit [crowdfunder.co.uk/p/accessible-to-everyone](https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/accessible-to-everyone)



Titchfield Market Hall in the Museum's early period

LITTLE COWDRAY - A NEW FARM SHOP HAS ARRIVED IN CHICHESTER

Located at Fernleigh, a building with lots of history. Matilda Reid sets the scene.

For the first time, Cowdray has expanded its business beyond the boundaries of its estate, with the opening of *Little Cowdray at Fernleigh* in Chichester. Open seven days a week, Little Cowdray is a new-concept farm shop, deli, butchery, and lifestyle destination where visitors can enjoy the best of what Cowdray offers in the distinguished surroundings of Fernleigh, the fine Georgian building located on North Street, just a few minutes' walk from the Cathedral. It's staffed by an experienced and knowledgeable team from the main farm shop in Midhurst who are on hand to welcome customers.

Fernleigh has a long history. Its original building was owned by William Cawley, MP for Chichester, in 1648. This earlier building was demolished to make way for the Georgian townhouse built in 1807, which stands today. Noted for its flint and brick construction and classical architectural details, Fernleigh is now a community-focused hub with food, drink, events, and shopping. *Little Cowdray at Fernleigh* showcases quality produce from the Estate and from select suppliers. Within the building there are also a bar, café, flexible meeting spaces as well as a studio and a gym. Richard Main, Managing Director of Cowdray's Farm Shop, has been pleased by the reception that *Little Cowdray* has received since its launch in 2025. He commented:

"There was a lot of excitement about our opening event in November, and since then we have had amazing feedback from current customers of Midhurst, new customers from Chichester as well as from the business community. We are delighted to partner with the Fernleigh team, who are equally passionate about high-quality local, artisan and British produce and our plans for 2026 include hosting experiential events and collaborations with various suppliers."



The entrance to Little Cowdray at Fernleigh

The deli counter

Little Cowdray has a particular focus on the award-winning deli counter, with a selection of butchery favourites including venison, lamb and beef from the Estate, freshly baked goods from the kitchen and a selection of the best Farm Shop produce. Cowdray Kitchen is also available, which is a range of, high quality frozen meals, sides, and puddings created by Cowdray's talented chefs. There is also a Lifestyle shop with homewares, gifts, fashion and seasonal products. A range of Cowdray products are displayed including the newly launched cookbook *Seasons: A taste of Cowdray*. Richard Main observed:

*"It has been fantastic to be able to tell the stories of our products to some customers who really didn't know Cowdray before. For example, Cowdray Home Farm produce Wagyu, Aberdeen Angus and Dairy Beef, venison comes from the Estate and lamb is reared by a tenant farmer which graze the southern area of the Estate on the South Downs. A selection of meat from the Estate is sold in the butchery depending on the time of year. Throughout the seasons, we also work with respected local producers such as **Nutbourne Tomatoes**, grown in a nursery just outside Pulborough, **Eds Veg** from Liphook who doesn't use any pesticides, herbicides or chemical fertilisers and **Cowdray Kefir**, making kefir from Cowdray's dairy cows on the Estate."*

Just 12 miles away is the Cowdray Farm Shop plus café and lifestyle shops, thriving businesses at the heart of the Cowdray Estate. Located adjacent to polo fields - the Lawns - within easy walking distance of the picturesque ruins, the Farm Shop & Café attracts visitors from far and wide as well as catering to loyal regular customers. It is a popular destination, which acts as a window to the Estate, this being one of the reasons that the team were keen to expand their audience within Chichester.

Victoria Hilditch of Fernleigh observes:

"We are delighted that Little Cowdray at Fernleigh has been such a success, and that our two brands which focus on high quality products work so well together. At Fernleigh, we set out to create a community hub which provides something different and special for the people of Chichester. The aim is for visitors to browse at Little Cowdray at Fernleigh, enjoy our café in the day, bar at night as well as going to the on-site gym. We were also pleased to welcome The Little Botanical in February, bringing the brand's collection of British-grown, peat free houseplants into the heart of Chichester. Fernleigh hosts events in collaboration with Cowdray including a wreath workshop at Christmas and a cheese and wine tasting evening celebrating some of Britain's finest cheese. There are also plans to contribute to Chichester's Festival of Flowers and the Chilli Cheese Festival as well as into the Autumn and Christmas."

We are keen on collaborative events enhancing the overall experience for Fernleigh customers. In what is a challenging time for British high streets, it is great to bring people into Fernleigh who come for one thing but stay and enjoy the other things on offer. We are excited about the future and aim to provide something different and special and are very pleased to have the Cowdray team on board."

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Matilda Reid is the Cowdray Estate's Marketing Manager who provided the photos. *Little Cowdray at Fernleigh* is at 40 North Street, Chichester and open Monday to Saturday from 9am to 5pm, and on Sunday from 10am to 3pm. Readers wanting further information should go to **cowdray.co.uk/little-cowdray**



Looking through the entrance to Little Cowdray at Fernleigh in Chichester



The team at the Cowdray Estate's new farm shop on North Street Chichester



Little Cowdray in Chichester

**Spring Lambs
in the Lavant Valley**

Photo: Brian Henham



PEREGRINE FALCONS HAVE BEEN MASTER OF THE SKIES HERE FOR AT LEAST 25 YEARS

David and Janet Shaw describe the return of raptors whose presence gives Chichester an international status

Perched high above the streets of Chichester, where the medieval stone of the cathedral meets the open sky, a dynasty has quietly ruled for centuries. Pilgrims and tourists may come for the architecture but ask almost anyone lingering in the shadow of the spire and they'll mention the Peregrines. Long before live-streaming cameras and social media brought them global fame, these spectacular raptors were almost certainly nesting on the cathedral for hundreds of years. Some relics inside the building even hint at their ancient presence.

Beginning again in 2000

The modern chapter of the Chichester Peregrines began in 2000, when Graham Roberts installed the first nest box. A dedicated group of volunteers managed the project until it passed to the RSPB, and then, in 2018, to David and Janet Shaw whose long-standing passion for these birds had already placed them at the heart of this story. Their involvement began in 2001 with a camera, a long lens, and a stubborn determination to photograph a small, fluffy tennis ball-like chick perched high on a pinnacle. Their equipment improved year by year, their images sharpened, and eventually their blog and website became essential hubs for anyone following the Peregrine family. When the RSPB stepped back from the project, they were obvious successors. Since then, far more has been done than simply 'look after' the birds because they have sponsored the cathedral's webcams, run open days on the lawns, maintained an ever-growing online presence, and most importantly, helped thousands of people meet these Peregrine Falcons up close through telescopes, screens, and stories.

Legendary characters

Over roughly 25 years, Chichester Cathedral has hosted at least five female and six male Peregrines. Between them, they've successfully fledged around 80 chicks, an extraordinary achievement for a species that came perilously close to extinction in Britain. The first successful brood hatched in 2001, and every year since, bar one, has seen chicks fly from the spire. Watching a tiny down covered nestling become a master of the air in just six weeks never loses its wonder. Some individuals have become local legends. The cathedral's first long term female reigned for more than a decade, raising over 30 chicks. Then came Maverick, the fearless male whose acrobatic flights and colourful backstory inspired an entire book. Rescued as a youngster after a dramatic fight atop a Brighton high rise, hospitalised, and eventually relocated, he spent four and a half unforgettable years in



It takes two to tango. Two juveniles playing tag on top of the cross



Dad sitting high up on one of the pinnacles

Chichester, thrilling onlookers with his daredevil antics. This has inspired a new book, a story of resilience, healing and finding a home. It's called *The Falcon with a Broken Heart*, to be launched 6 June this year with proceeds to the British Heart Foundation and Chichester Peregrine Project. We were present for some remarkable moments but few as memorable as the early morning phone call from a Chichester builder who reported a juvenile Peregrine sitting atop a skip. Racing to the site, we found the bedraggled youngster exactly where expected. A blanket, an old Post Office sack, and a carefully negotiated trip up the cathedral spire later, and the young bird was safely resting in the lantern. By the next morning, she was back beside her siblings, perched confidently on a turret.

Global interest

The arrival of live-streaming cameras transformed the project. By 2020 during the stillness of lockdown more than 60,000 people across the world were watching the Chichester Peregrines in real time. Classrooms tuned in, teachers paused lessons when feeding time began, and families kept the nest stream open in the background like a window into another world. Visitors now travel from Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and beyond, drawn to Chichester not just for the cathedral, but for its falcons. Locals, too, feel a deep connection. Some wander past daily just to check in, while others are astonished to learn that such formidable birds live above their city centre at all. Not long ago, such scenes would have been unthinkable. After the Second World War, Peregrine numbers plummeted; the post war spread of DDT caused eggshell thinning, infertility, and widespread failure of nests. By the 1950s and '60s, the species teetered on the brink in the UK. Their recovery is one of conservation's great success stories. With the banning of DDT, active protection, and the growing number of nest sites provided by volunteers, organisations, and urban buildings, the UK population has rebounded to more than 2,500 birds. Cathedrals, churches, and city towers have become reliable homes symbols of how wildlife and urban life can flourish together. Chichester's open days offer something rare: a chance to see a thriving apex predator living above an ordinary city. Newcomers are invariably surprised, while longtime residents express pride almost ownership of the cathedral's feathered tenants. It's community conservation in its purest form.



A fast exit. Mum leaving the nest turret with purpose

Looking Ahead

We hope the Peregrines will remain for decades to come. With a secure nest site and a thriving urban ecosystem, the odds are in their favour. Advances in technology promise deeper insights into their movements and behaviour; already, the team records weights, chick numbers, and dispersal patterns, tracking young birds as they establish territories across the UK. And then there is the photography. What began with a single small camera has grown into an archive of more than a million images - an astonishing testament to devotion, obsession, and love. Through these photographs, the legacy of the Chichester Peregrines isn't just preserved but celebrated. There is a photographic



Brother and sister juvenile peregrines showing great affection for one another

exhibition on the walls of Cloisters Cafe for all to see as testament to the images that have been taken over the years. As long as the cathedral stands, the falcons' silhouettes will almost certainly grace its sky. And thanks to those who watch, document, and care for them, their story will continue to inspire future generations with an enduring partnership between stone, sky, and one of nature's most extraordinary birds.

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David and Janet Shaw created Chichester's Peregrine Falcon project at Chichester Cathedral as we experience this today. Photographs for this article are by David Shaw.

A THOUSAND MILES PER HOUR OVER CHICHESTER

David Coxon tells the story of Fairey Aviation's 1956 world airspeed record attempt

In March 1956 Peter Twiss broke the world airspeed record flying a Fairey Delta 2 (FD.2) aircraft at an average speed of 1,139.2 mph and thus became the first pilot to exceed 1,000 mph in level flight. Three years later he decided to retire from test flying and moved from Westland Aircraft to Fairey Marine with responsibility for development and sales of the company's day-cruisers. In 1963 he appeared in the James Bond film *From Russia with Love* at the helm of a Fairey Marine speedboat and in 1969, helming the Fairey Huntsman *707 Fordsport*, he took part in the first Round Britain Powerboat Race. Peter Twiss OBE DSC and Bar died, aged 90, on 31 August 2011.

The Fairey Delta 2 was a British supersonic research aircraft produced in the early 1950s by the Fairey Aviation Company in response to a specification from the Ministry of Supply for an aircraft to investigate flight and control at transonic and supersonic speeds. The design was a mid-wing tail-less monoplane, with a circular cross-section fuselage and engine air-inlets in the wing roots. The engine was a Rolls-Royce Avon RA.14R with an afterburner. The aircraft had a long tapering nose which obscured forward vision during landing, take-off and taxiing on the ground; the problem was resolved by a drooping nose design (a design later used on Concorde). Two aircraft were built, the first, WG774, made its maiden flight on 6 October 1954, flown by Fairey's test pilot Peter Twiss. On 28 October 1955, the FD.2 achieved supersonic flight and following this success, despite a cool reaction from the Ministry of Supply, Fairey Aviation announced their intention to attempt the world air speed record set in 1955 by an American F-100 Super Sabre.

War service

Peter Twiss was born in July 1921 in Lindfield, Sussex. Son of an army colonel, he was educated at Sherbourne School and was working on the family farm near Salisbury when war was declared. He was accepted as a naval airman at the outbreak of war and after initial pilot training was posted to the Royal Naval Air Station Yeovilton for operational training on Gloster Gladiators and Blackburn Skuas. After periods of flying at the School of Army Co-operation, Andover and on the Orkney Islands, Twiss served as a pilot on a Hurricane equipped Catapult Merchant Ship (CAM). During the Malta convoys in 1942 he was awarded his first Distinguished Service Cross (DSC) flying Fairey Fulmers from *HMS Argus* and later that year flew Supermarine Seafires from *HMS Furious* during the Operation Torch landings in North Africa. His second DSC was gazetted in March 1943. Twiss later flew long range intruder operations from Ford in Sussex where he joined the RAF's Fighter Interception Unit, to develop night fighter tactics that were later to serve him well. During 1944, flying a de Havilland Mosquito, he shot down two enemy Junkers Ju 88s. Later in 1944 he was posted to the United States to the British Air Commission to enable him to test American prototype aircraft and evaluate radar equipment.



Fairey Delta 2 accompanied by a de Havilland Venom equipped with specialist altimeters to check altitude

Painted by Paul Couper GAvA

Fairey Aviation Test Pilot

In 1945 Twiss attended the Empire Test Pilots' School at Cranfield and a year later joined Fairey Aviation as a test pilot. After flying many Fairey aircraft including the FD.1 and Rotodyne he worked for two years testing the FD.2. On 17 November 1954, his FD.2 aircraft suffered a catastrophic engine failure. In spite of having no hydraulics, Twiss managed to glide his stricken aircraft back to Boscombe Down where he made a safe forced landing. For this feat he was awarded the Queen's Commendation for Valuable Service in the Air. By January 1956 all obstructions had been cleared for the FD.2 record bid. The *Fédération Aéronautique Internationale* (FAI) rules had changed and no longer required the aircraft to be flown at a low level. The new regulations for a world air-speed record attempt at a non-restricted altitude required the aircraft to fly over a 15-25 kilometres course once in either direction in level flight. Fairey decided to base the aircraft at Boscombe Down and make the record at 38,000 feet over a course between Chichester and Ford. To time the aircraft, a camera-chronometer method was used. In this, the aircraft had to be photographed on each timed run, at the beginning and end of the course by two cameras – the time interval between the two photographs being recorded by an electronic chronometer. However, obtaining photographs required visual identification of the aircraft by the camera operators on the ground. RAF radar units assisted in this, but it still proved difficult to achieve with a fast-moving small jet aircraft at 38,000 feet. The solution was to fly the aircraft at an altitude that produced a condensation trail. As in Neville Duke's record attempt three years earlier, RAF Tangmere's No 29 Squadron Meteor night fighters were again used, this time to determine each morning the best trail-making altitude. Camera sites were set up away from the public gaze at Royal Naval Air Station Ford and at Apuldram sewage works, near Chichester. It was also necessary to calibrate the aircraft's altimeter and to do this Fairey enlisted the help of a de Havilland Venom aeroplane from Boscombe Down equipped with two special sensitive aneroid altimeters.



Lieutenant Commander Peter Twiss
Photo: Public domain

Success!

On the morning of Saturday 10 March 1956 a flight was conducted at eight o'clock but tracking system faults thwarted Twiss. Later that morning, another attempt was made. Twiss took off at 1122 hours – all seemed to go well, and he landed back at Boscombe at 1145 hours, after only deviating in height over the course by 98 feet. After the photographic plates had been developed it was found that the Apuldram camera showed the start of the contrail (beginning immediately behind the aircraft) but not the aircraft! However, the judges agreed that the attempt was a record which was announced the next day. Not everyone was pleased with this success; market gardeners across the south were annoyed as the sonic boom broke the glass windows in their greenhouses, one even threatened to sue Twiss for £16,000!

David Coxon is an Honorary Vice President of the Tangmere Military Aviation Museum



Fairey Delta 2 on the apron at Boscombe Down

Photo: Fairey Aviation

OXMARKET CONTEMPORARY – CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF ART IN CHICHESTER

Louise Myles reviews the Gallery’s contribution to this city’s life

Tucked away behind East Street, reached by two narrow twittens, the Oxmarket Centre of Arts – now Oxmarket Contemporary – is one of Chichester’s hidden treasures. Long before it became a gallery, this building was a church, standing proudly for nearly 800 years. St Andrew’s Oxmarket was so called due to its proximity to the Beast Market, which thundered around East Street before moving to the Cattle Market in the late nineteenth century. The church, originally constructed in the 13th century from stone and flint with later additions in the 14th, 15th and 19th centuries, holds significant historical value as a Grade II* listed building. Monuments to notable figures, such as the poet William Collins, buried here in 1759, and 16th-century parishioners, the Royse family, are still retained within the building. The church was badly damaged by nearby bombing in 1943 and had to be abandoned before officially closing in 1953, lying empty and derelict for years. Founder of art therapy and war artist Adrian Hill painted the sorry state that the church was left in, immortalising this sad chapter in its history.



St Andrew’s showing bomb damage. The photographer is not known

A new life begins

It was rescued in the early 1970s by a small group of passionate art lovers — led by Doris Wilson and John Rank but including Antiques Roadshow’s Bernard Price, playwright Christopher Fry, Keat’s Biographer Robert Gittings and Dame Patricia Routledge— who all saw possibility where others saw ruin. Thanks to their vision and determination, this medieval church was transformed into Chichester’s first art gallery. In deep gratitude for the tireless work of Doris Wilson and John Rank, the galleries today are named after them. On 25 June 1976, the doors opened — and a new chapter began. New life was breathed into the building and with it came exhibitions in the form of Arts and Crafts fairs, carol mornings, a modern ship show, art tableaux, jazz sessions, an exhibition by the Vietnamese Boat People, and a Costume in Retrospect show as part of Festival '79 that was opened by none other than actress Hayley Mills.



St Andrew’s Church after a bomb fell nearby during WW2, painted by Adrian Hill. Photo: Lauryn Lockyear, 2025

New cultural hub

Over five decades, we have welcomed tens of thousands of visitors and hosted thousands of exhibitions and events. Each year, more than 40 exhibitions fill our galleries with paintings, ceramics, sculpture, textiles, printmaking, photography and mixed media. We are especially proud to support emerging and regional artists, offering affordable exhibition space and opportunities to sell their work. From Chichester University’s annual Fine Art degree show to collectives such as Chichester Art Society, Emsworth Printmakers and Artel, Oxmarket Contemporary is a place where creativity is nurtured and celebrated. As part of our 50th celebrations we will be holding a Retrospective exhibition featuring artists and makers who have exhibited and supported the gallery over the last 50 years.

Art for all

We believe art should be for everyone — not just a few. That’s why we actively encourage community engagement through educational programmes and targeted initiatives. Our schools programme offers free visits to Chichester primary schools, helping children discover creativity, build confidence and experience the positive impact art can have on mental wellbeing — especially those who may never otherwise visit a gallery. Our artist *Meetups* bring local creatives together to connect, collaborate and grow professionally. Supported exhibitions with organisations such as Stonepillow provide a platform for artists of all abilities, encouraging personal development, confidence and opportunity. Art has the power to change lives. We see it every day.

Looking Ahead

We want the next 50 years to be even more inspiring — and we need readers’ help to make that happen. In 2026, we aim to raise £50,000 to expand our support for artists and our local community. Each year for the next five years, we plan to showcase and support a new group of young artists, designers and makers through a special ‘Beginnings’ exhibition — helping them take their first professional steps. We want to grow our community programmes, offering more free workshops, discussions and gallery visits so that even more adults and children can experience the health and wellbeing benefits of engaging with art. Together, we can shape the future of creativity in Chichester.

Louise Myles is Chair of the Oxmarket’s Trustees



The Wilson Gallery today during an exhibition. Photo: Steve Bicknell

Readers who are interested in finding out more can do so at Oxmarket.org

Help to the Gallery can be offered in several ways:

- Become a Friend for £25 annually
- Make a donation
- Support our *Arts in the Community* campaign: 100 local businesses are being invited to donate £100 each to ensure everyone has access to the benefits of art.
- Become a regular visitor – for which there is no charge! Oxmarket Contemporary is open Tuesday to Saturday from 10.00 am to 4.30pm and on Sunday from noon to 4pm.



The Rank Gallery today at Oxmarket Contemporary after substantial restoration

Photo: Niall Clutton

INSPIRING YOUNGER CHILDREN TO READ IN THE SMART-PHONE ERA

An idea that began in Chichester has grown to be part of a national movement. Penny Tomlinson explains

With the Government naming 2026 as the National Year of Reading, the conversation around children's literacy has never felt more urgent - or more important. For *Children's BookFest*, this national spotlight is an opportunity to deepen the work we already do across Chichester and to play a meaningful regional role in addressing the country's reading crisis. Since founding *Children's BookFest* in 2019, my hope has always been to make reading exciting, accessible and truly joyful for every child. But with national reading enjoyment now at a 20-year low, according to the National Literacy Trust, our mission has taken on a sharper, more pressing significance. Only one in three children say they enjoy reading in their free time - a statistic that should concern every one of us. And so, as 2026 unfolds, I am more certain than ever that *Children's BookFest* has a vital part to play - not just as an annual celebration of books, but as a determined regional force supporting a national effort.

What 2025 taught us

Last year was transformative for *Children's BookFest*. Across Chichester, Bognor Regis and neighbouring communities, our team - powered by extraordinary volunteers, dedicated teachers and the generosity of supporters - delivered our largest programme to date. Thirty-six local schools have welcomed authors, illustrators and poets directly into their classrooms. More than 5,800 signed books were handed to a child aged five to twelve. A further 2,200 books reached families through local foodbanks, ensuring that reading flourishes even where financial pressures are greatest. These numbers matter, because book ownership remains at the heart of our mission. Too many children, especially those receiving free school meals, still do not have books of their own, even though we know the impact ownership has on confidence, motivation and attainment. For many of the children who received one of the 8,000 books we gifted in 2025, that signed copy was the first book they had ever been given to keep. That moment is not merely symbolic - it is foundational.



Sir Michael Morpurgo and Kate Mosse at Chichester Cathedral October 2025
Photo: Karen Bornhoft



Author JB Gill at Jessie Younghusband School, December 2025

Photo: Sam Stephenson

Beyond our schools' programme, eight public events brought more than 1,000 people together. We welcomed much-loved creators including Liz Pichon, Sophy Henn, Nick Sharratt and Joseph Elliott, and hosted memorable evenings at Chichester Cathedral with acclaimed authors Michael Morpurgo, Kate Mosse and Kevin McCloud. These events did more than raise funds; they demonstrated the appetite within our community to support children's literacy. Yet for all the joy and momentum of 2025, the national picture casts a long shadow. The sharp decline in reading enjoyment cannot be ignored. It tells us that our work must go deeper, not simply wider. It tells us that our wonderful *Children's BookFest* festivals, while inspiring, are only one part of a bigger picture. And it reinforces why the National Year of Reading must be seized as a moment for meaningful change.

Stepping forward to 2026

The Government's National Year of Reading, *Go All In* - delivered in partnership with the Department for Education and the National Literacy Trust - aims to increase reading for pleasure and encourage families to embed reading into everyday life. We wholeheartedly welcome this initiative. But for it to succeed, it will require organisations like *Children's BookFest* to act with clarity, ambition and deep local understanding. This year, we will:

- Co-ordinate a city-wide response to the *Go All In* campaign.
- Work more intensively with primary schools in areas of highest need.
- Expand into secondary schools with *BookFest YA*.
- Deliver a new creative writing project.
- Launch a reading-for-pleasure outreach pilot with Chichester Cinema.
- Expand our Foodbank Bookshelf with access to children's books.

An annual £60,000 books bill!

One of the great privileges of running a charity in this city is witnessing how much people care. Chichester has always understood the importance of culture, education and opportunity. Its generosity has shaped *Children's BookFest* from the start, and in this pivotal year, that support becomes even more essential. At present, it costs around £60,000 each year simply to sustain our existing delivery. Most of this funding goes directly towards the purchase of thousands of brand-new books that we place into children's hands. Book gifting is the heart of everything we do. Without the ability to buy books at scale, our festivals, school visits and outreach programmes simply cannot happen.

Demand from schools continues to rise, and we currently have more schools waiting to be involved than we are able to support. Any growth in our reach - whether that is working with additional schools or expanding our wider literacy initiatives - is entirely dependent on the continued generosity of those who donate. To meet this need, and to ensure West Sussex plays a leading role in the National Year of Reading, we are asking our community - individuals, businesses and philanthropists - to stand with us. Every donation helps us buy more books, reach more children and ensure that no school seeking support is turned away.



Author Simon Philip at the Chichester District Food Bank, December 2025
Photo: Bec Hopkins



Author Ramzee at Rumboldswyke School, October 2025

Photo: Sam Stephenson

My hope

As *Children's BookFest* founder, my wish is that we continue not only to deliver our mission, but to strengthen Bookfest's voice - to be recognised as an authoritative force within the country's wider reading crisis. We have seen what is possible when a community rallies behind literacy. We now have an opportunity to build on that momentum and demonstrate what true, locally rooted leadership looks like. If the National Year of Reading is to be more than a headline, it will be because organisations like ours - and communities like ours - decide that every child deserves the chance to experience the joy of reading.

Penny Tomlinson founded *Children's Bookfest* in 2019. Readers who want to know more, or to donate, are encouraged to visit childrensbookfest.com

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www.consortoftwelve.co.uk/concerts

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