

# SOUTH DOWNS NEWS

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SOUTH DOWNS  
NATIONAL PARK

## WORK AND PLAY IN YOUR NATIONAL PARK

This month:

- **Every picture tells a thousand words** Get creative this spring and summer and enter our photo competition for the chance to win up to £250!
- **Vital placemaking plan** Have your say on the National Park's new Local Plan.
- **Secrets of the Saxons** Learn more about a large Saxon cemetery found in the South Downs.
- **WIN A COUNTRY ESCAPE!** Enter our competition for the chance to win a hotel getaway.

As always, please send your comments and ideas to us at [newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk)

## So green and serene! Win up to £250 in competition

The heartwarming serenity of the South Downs National Park will be the focus of this year's annual photography competition.

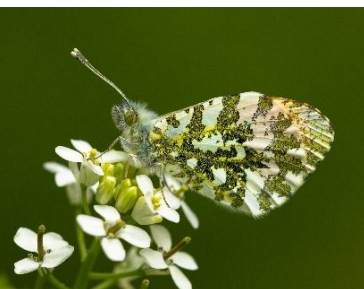
Life in 2026 is so hectic and the National Park's incredible landscapes, woodlands and heritage offer an opportunity to escape the hustle and bustle and find stillness in the wonders of nature.

The theme of this year's photo competition is "**Serene South Downs: Back to Nature**" and judges will be looking for breathtaking images that celebrate the National Park's serenity and those moments of slowing down and taking stock.

The judging panel will include acclaimed photographers Rachael Talibart, Finn Hopson and Carlotta Luke, alongside Claire Blow, Deputy Editor of *Outdoor Photography*, together with Vanessa Rowlands, Chair of the National Park Authority, and Jan Knowlson, the National Park's Biodiversity Officer.

The prizes for the competition will be £250 for first place, £150 for second place and £75 for third place.

As always there will be a separate wildlife



category, with a £150 prize for the best shot and £100 for the runner-up image.

For the first time, there will also be a special monochrome category, supported by Rachael Talibart's f11 Workshops, and the top prize will be £100.

The youth competition returns this year for budding young photographers – with categories 10 years and under and 11 to 17. The prize for 10 years and under will be a family ticket to Bird World, while the winner of the 11 to 17 category will win a GoApe adventure for two.

Rachael said: "In troubled times, solace may be found in the natural world. I am looking forward to seeing photographs that capture the serenity that comes from connecting with nature in our National Park. We are so lucky to have this special haven in the South of England. I'm hoping for photographs that convey a real connection,

## Ancient trail gets makeover



**A beautiful medieval route with an intriguing history has been given a new lease of life in the South Downs National Park.**

There were cheers as the local community gathered to celebrate the improvements to the ancient West Burton to Bury Coffin Trail, in West Sussex.

For almost 1,000 years, before motorised transport, the deceased were carried by hand or on a horse-drawn cart along the path from West Burton to Saint John the Evangelist Church in Bury. Historically, West Burton did not have its own consecrated burial ground or church and, under ecclesiastical law, residents were required to be buried in the graveyard of their “mother church” – in this case Saint John’s in Bury.

A much-needed makeover of the path has been completed by Bury Parish Council, with the support of the National Park Authority.

Accessibility has been improved with the replacement of stiles with kissing gates, as well as new fingerposts and waymarks to help tell the story of the route. The 1.3-mile route runs through the quintessential chalk downland of the South Downs and offers glimpses of streams, woodland, hidden vales, historic buildings and incredible views.



Richard Champness, Chair of Bury Parish Council, said: “We really appreciate the support of the South Downs National Park Authority, and indeed West Sussex County Council, in helping us improve and put the wonderful historic walks in our parish ‘on the map’, as well as enhancing the health and well-being opportunities for our community.”

Ben Bessant, National Trails and Countryside Access Officer, said: “It’s been fantastic to work with the local community on this makeover. The improvements have made the route far more accessible to more people, and I hope many people from both the local community and further afield, enjoy this really scenic walk.

“Heritage and local stories are a big part of the National Park Authority’s work.”

story and mood that goes beyond the merely picturesque.”

Finn, who is based in Brighton, said: “I’m hoping to see unique, original pictures that stop me in my tracks. The kind of photographs that make you want to pause, take a deep breath and enjoy a moment of calm in a busy part of the world.”

Carlotta, who is based in Lewes, said: “This is a perfect subject for our stressful world of today. We all know that immersing ourselves in nature can calm our nerves. As a judge, I want to be able to feel, through a photograph, the serenity the photographer experienced. I have my own favourite places in our beautiful South Downs. I’m interested to see where others go to find serenity.”



Editor Claire Blow

Claire said: “In the South Downs National Park we are spoilt for choice for places to escape to where we can relax and immerse ourselves in nature. I’ll be looking for images that capture peaceful moments in the landscape and the sense of mindfulness that comes from slowing down and breathing in our surroundings.”

The deadline for entries will be midnight on **Saturday, 31 October 2026.**

The winners will be announced in January 2027 and there will be a public vote for the People’s Choice winner with a prize of £100.

Enter the competition and find terms and conditions at [www.southdowns.gov.uk/care-for/photo-comp/](http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/care-for/photo-comp/)

## Dazzling shot gets your vote!



**A dreamy night-time shot of the expansive Milky Way over the Cuckmere Meanders won the People’s Choice award in the astrophotography competition.**

Since the Dark Skies Festival in February, the public have been voting for their favourite astrophotography image out of a shortlist of 25.

Taking the top spot was a breathtaking image of the Cuckmere meanders and the immense starry sky above it.

The photographer, Daniel Richards, who lives in Bickley, London, has won £100.

Daniel said: “This was my first dark moon outing and I had always wanted to capture the stunning Cuckmere River as it meanders down to the sea to meet the Milky Way. And wow it didn’t disappoint!”

# Have your say on important placemaking plan for Park



## People are being encouraged to have their say as the South Downs National Park's Local Plan goes out for public consultation.

The National Park Authority is preparing a new Local Plan to guide how and where development takes place in the National Park over the next two decades, replacing the current Local Plan adopted in 2019.

The goal of the Local Plan is to address vital issues such as the need for affordable housing, quality development, restoring nature, climate action, a flourishing rural economy and helping local communities thrive.

The proposed Local Plan has been shaped by a consultation last year that involved almost 2,000 people and organisations, who submitted more than 3,700 comments on proposed policies, sites and evidence.

The new consultation launches on 12 May and runs until **23 June**. The National Park Authority is asking for people to share their final comments before the proposed Local Plan is submitted for examination by an independent Planning Inspector.

Vanessa Rowlands, Chair of the National Park Authority, said: "This is a hugely important time for the South Downs as we plan for the future of this vibrant and much-loved National Park.

"We recognise places need to evolve and respond to local needs, as well as wider issues the nation faces amid changing, and potentially uncertain, times.

"This is an opportunity to protect and enhance the things we all love most – our landscapes, communities, cultural heritage, dark skies, wildlife, water courses and much more.

"I'd like to thank each and every person who has helped shape the Local Plan and we're really keen for even more participation in this current consultation. Please do have your say and help ensure we can make the National Park an even better place in the coming years and for future generations."

## SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Tim Slaney, Director of Placemaking for the National Park Authority, said: "We want to create special places inspired by this nationally-important landscape, with well-designed homes, buildings and spaces for local communities and visitors, and a thriving rural economy that supports climate action.

"The goal is to grow sustainably within the context and capacity of the landscape – so that both people and nature can flourish together."

Among some of the key proposed policies in the new Local Plan are:

- Landscape-led – so conserving and enhancing the South Downs landscape is considered strongly with any planning application that comes forward.
- A total of 58 policies on core issues, including landscape, design and heritage, nature recovery, water and pollution, housing, the economy, green, blue and community spaces and transport and infrastructure.
- A total of 77 site allocations spread across the National Park, delivering 3,559 new homes, including affordable homes, as well as employment and gypsy and traveller pitches. Sites chosen include brownfield sites and those in and around existing settlements.
- An overall housing provision of 6,735 homes between 2024 and 2042. This includes existing planning permissions and allocations from neighbourhood plans that have been developed with local communities. This would meet the National Park's housing need of 323 homes per year and would support more than 2,000 new jobs.
- Key strategic sites for development such as North Street Quarter, in Lewes, and Shoreham Cement Works. Shoreham is earmarked as a potential mixed-use development of residential, commercial and community spaces with the capacity to support up to 400 homes and significant employment opportunities.

The Local Plan will be submitted for examination by a Planning Inspector in the autumn, along with a list of proposed modifications to address any issues raised by the consultation.

The Inspector will consider these and make recommendations about any changes to the Local Plan that are needed to make it 'sound'.

There will then be a further public consultation on any major modifications to the Local Plan before the Inspector's final report is made.

After completing all the required stages, it's hoped that the new Local Plan will be adopted in 2027. From then on, all planning applications will be considered against policies in the new Local Plan.

To see the proposed Local Plan and make a comment visit [www.southdowns.gov.uk/planning-policy/new-south-downs-local-plan/](http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/planning-policy/new-south-downs-local-plan/)

## A new sanctuary for wildlife



### A new sanctuary site for nature has been secured near the beautiful River Meon in Hampshire.

Following a public fundraising appeal, Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust has acquired Court House Meadows, a water meadow alongside the river.

The 8.66-hectare site, just south of West Meon village, will be managed to support wildlife, restore the river's natural floodplain, and enhance one of the National Park's rarest chalk stream habitats.

The acquisition was supported by £150,000 funding from the National Park Authority, alongside £50,000 from the South Downs Trust, the charity for the National Park.

Nick Heasman, Head of Natural Capital for the National Park Authority, said: "Chalk streams and their wider environments are incredibly precious for people and for nature, the much-loved River Meon is one of these special places, and by enabling the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust with the tremendous support from the community, the South Downs National Park Authority successfully secured this magical place, for nature, forever."



Court House Meadows will offer a haven for mammals including endangered water voles, overwintering wading birds such as snipe, amphibians including newts, insects including dragonflies, and aquatic life such as brown trout. The open grassland and river corridor will also support a diversity of meadow plants.

As a sanctuary site, Court House Meadows will not be open to the public, ensuring that the sensitive habitats and vulnerable species can thrive with minimal disturbance

John Durnell, Senior Director of Operations at HIWWT, said: "Securing Court House Meadows is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to protect an ecologically important site in the heart of the Meon Valley. With restoration work possible on both the land and the River Meon, this rare chalk stream site will be able to flourish."

## The healing power of nature



### Every year scores of people benefit from green social prescribing in the National Park to support their mental and physical health.

Often referred to by NHS and social prescribing link workers, local authorities working with families, and carer organisations, the participants take part in a range of nature-based activities. They include gentle nature connection walks, making and creating sessions, and some gentle conservation activities.

It's such an important aspect of the National Park Authority's work, says Kate Drake, Health and Wellbeing Officer for the National Park.

"As we mark Mental Health Awareness Week this May, we want to celebrate the tremendous role that National Parks play as the 'natural health service'", she says.

"A wealth of studies show that nature plays a critical role in our physical and mental wellbeing. Some of the testimonials from people who have taken part in sessions in the South Downs are truly inspiring and show the really positive impact of these initiatives."

One woman, who wishes to remain anonymous, took part in a making and creating project inspired by the cultural heritage of the National Park. The scheme was supported by the National Park Authority, led by artist Mandie Molyneux from Artscape.

She said: "They gave me such confidence and the belief in myself that I could create something to be proud of. I met new people and have been close friends with one of the participants. It was all so relaxing. It's a great thing to do to build, confidence, improve self-esteem, be mindful and to be in the moment. Art is so good for the soul!

"You not only facilitate, but you gently encourage and help to inspire confidence in people. I was in a very dark place when I met you (Kate) and Mandie and I know that the work that I did with you both, helped me enormously."

Find out more about our health and wellbeing work [here](#). Follow this link to find out more about health and wellbeing travel grants, which are open to community groups to help cover travel costs to and from the National Park.

## Step into a time machine!



A statue at Charleston House

**To celebrate National Walking Month, we're shining a spotlight on some amazing guided walks in the South Downs that really are like stepping back in time!**

The "In Their Footsteps" walking tours celebrate some of the many great writers, poets, artists, musicians and naturalists who have drawn inspiration from the beautiful landscape and wildlife over the centuries.

And the best part about the guided tour – it's totally **free** and you can enjoy it at your own pace on your mobile phone!

Why not begin your time-travelling adventure by walking the path trodden by one of the global pioneers of natural history, Gilbert White?



The Gilbert White walk incorporates a 5.6km/3.5 mile loop around the naturalist's house in the picturesque village of Selborne and the countryside he walked. It was those observations of the natural world on White's doorstep that led to *The Natural History of Selborne* in 1789 – a title that remains the fourth-longest constantly-in-print book in the English language (after the *King James Bible*, the *Complete Works of Shakespeare* and *The Pilgrim's Progress*).

The tour includes fascinating audio clips and a mixture of photos and archive images, as well as written content that can be displayed in 19 different languages, to help bring the story to life.

Meanwhile, over in the eastern half of the National Park, you could explore the story of the Bloomsbury Group, a circle of radical artists, writers and thinkers from the 20th century who sought retreat at Charleston, the home of Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant.

The tour begins at Charleston Farmhouse and journeys through some stunning countryside, finishing at Berwick Church. This month is the Charleston Festival from 13 to 25 May, so is a perfect time to try out the walk (entry fee applies for access to house).

Download the app for free on Android or Apple by searching for "In Their Footsteps".

**NEXT MONTH:** Flora Twort and Petersfield Museum

## Rangers' favourite walks



**Rangers play an important role in maintaining the 3,300km of trails, footpaths and bridleways across the National Park. Their jobs can include fixing a fence or fingerpost to leading guided walks. For National Walking Month we asked some of our rangers for their absolute favourite walk in the South Downs. Read on to find out more! 😊**

Fay Pattinson, a Ranger for the Eastern Downs, said: "One of my favourite walks is to head up to **Chanctonbury Ring**. It's one of the most iconic landmarks in this area of the National Park, clearly identifiable by the hilltop clump of trees first planted on it in the 1760s by Charles Goring, heir to the Wiston Estate. Comprised of the remains of an Iron Age hill fort, there are also Bronze Age features and the remains of a Roman temple contained within its ramparts. The views from here are stunning on a clear day, and there is so much history and intriguing folklore associated with this ancient site. There are often red kites soaring overhead, the sound of skylarks filling the sky and during the summer months many beautiful downland flowers to be enjoyed on the nearby north-facing escarpment."

Paul Bushell, a Ranger for the Western Downs, said: "The **Selborne walk** is a fabulous walk that takes in history, a quaint Hampshire village, a tea room, museum, pub and some breath-taking landscape. What more do you need, I hear you cry? The icing on the cake is to tread in the footsteps of Gilbert White (quite literally - especially the zig zag path) looking out for iconic species including small mammals, birds and butterflies.

"All of this beautiful countryside is linked with a network of hedges, meandering streams, ponds, woodland, wildflower meadows and the surrounding farmland. Each season is suitably catered for. Spring and the emerging leaf and wildflowers, through to enjoying the butterflies dancing through the summer meadows, then on to the autumnal colours on the trees and the mammals and birds feasting on nature's bounty, followed by the winter skeletons of the fabulous woodlands and the frosted meadows. It really is a wonderful walk!"

For more walk ideas and downloadable leaflets check out our walking hub at **[www.southdowns.gov.uk/get-active/south-downs-walks/](http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/get-active/south-downs-walks/)**

## History special: Apple Down



**Anooshka Rawden, Cultural Heritage Lead for the National Park, delves into the history of a Saxon cemetery buried for many centuries in the chalk hills until its excavation 40 years ago.**

Apple Down stands among the most significant Saxon period discoveries in England. Its excavation in the 1980s revealed a cemetery featuring mixed burial rites and rich grave goods, revealing the compelling and human story of the early medieval period in Britain.

Apple Down sits in the parish of Compton, with the wider landscape dissected by dry valleys and a patchwork of pasture, arable and woodland. The earliest burials at Apple Down date from the late 5<sup>th</sup> and early 6<sup>th</sup> centuries. The official withdrawal from Britain by the Romans is associated with the AD410 letter of the emperor Honorius telling the British people to look to defend themselves. Some of the earliest graves at Apple Down may be from as early as AD490, so Apple Down represents a transition – between the end of the Roman world and the beginnings of a new one.

Apple Down was the resting place of men, women and children and the original excavation team estimated that at least 253 individuals were buried there, giving a snapshot of a community bridging the transition from the post-Roman to early Medieval world over a period of around 200 years.

We know from the archaeological excavation that some of the graves would have been covered with earth mounds, or marked by an upright post. A number also evidently had roofed timber structures around them, forming houses for the dead that sheltered mourners and the grave itself, and marking the plot as a home for the departed. There is also some evidence for bodies having been buried in graves that were left open for a time after deposition, as insect larvae were discovered behind brooches, which suggests bodies open to decomposition before having been covered over. This may have given time for the completion of burial rites, and the time needed by the living in mourning the dead.

The archaeological finds from Apple Down include the beautiful and unusual. From amber beads with their origins in the Baltic, swords from Scandinavia, Germanic brooches, Roman coins that had been pierced and worn possibly as amulets (with unpierced Roman coins discovered in Saxon graves possibly reflecting a continued belief in payment to Charon to cross the river of the dead), ivory rings which had been part of bags. Some graves included personal care sets, such as tweezers, files and sheers and decorated combs.

Apple Down is also full of stories. Each object placed in a grave tells a story of both society and the individual. Examples include research in 2011 that has suggested burial 152, a young man aged around 20-25 with the accoutrements of a warrior – shield, spear, knife – died of venereal syphilis. The disease had resulted in wasted limbs meaning the young man had probably required care for periods of his life, provided by the community, before the disease may have taken his life. Care is a thread through many stories at Apple Down, including that of burial 120, a woman who (possibly as a result of a severe ear infection) had a large cavity in the bone behind her ear, destroying the mastoid process (the bony projection behind the ears) and which likely caused severe pain, headaches, hearing loss and fatigue, while burial 60 was a young person aged 15-17 years who was possibly paralysed. Each graves tells a story of care, in this life, and in readiness for the next.



The remains of individuals buried at Apple Down are cared for by The Novium Museum at the Collections Discovery Centre, Fishbourne Roman Palace. They continue to add value to our understanding of settlement in Britain. In 2022, new genetic research, which included samples from Apple Down, concluded that around three quarters of the early Medieval population in eastern England was comprised of migrants with DNA links to the continent, and that rather than the assumption that the majority would be men, these immigrants were families. New settlers melded with the existing local post-Roman populations, with integration occurring to varying degrees and timescales – at Apple Down, almost 50% of those buried had continental ancestry, with distinctly different burial styles in terms of orientation, location and artefacts based on whether individuals were from the post-Roman existing population or from the continent, which might suggest a longer lasting social separation but also possibly the retention of core beliefs and rites.

The significance of the downland landscape in connecting communities of the living and dead cannot be underestimated. They enabled people to continue to commune with those lost – burial mounds, houses for the dead, posts and other markers which may have left no traces in the archaeology, created focal point within a downland that sustained communities in life, and which held them in death.

## Sustainability high on agenda



**Creating sustainable communities where nature and people look after each other is one of the focuses of the upcoming Great Big Green Week.**

Greening Arundel, a passionate alliance of individuals and organisations dedicated to driving environmental change, has a bumper line-up of events in store, with themes around food, water and biodiversity.

Among the activities will be learning about Arundel's new Community Allotment and plans to create a Forest Food Garden and a Children's Forest.



Around water, people can get an update on what river guardians have been doing, as well learn how to create a wildlife pond in their garden.

You can also join a nocturnal walk in Arundel Park to appreciate the importance of dark skies and learn how to identify moths and bats.

All events are ticketed through [Eventbrite](#). Starting on 6 June, most events are free or at a discounted cost. Donations are always welcome and will be put to good use.

Katrina Murray, Chair of Greening Arundel, said: "Great Big Green Week is about caring for nature and each other. It provides an opportunity for us to come together to celebrate, express concern, deepen understanding, change perspective, learn new skills, take action and enjoy nature as a community."

Meanwhile, Petersfield Climate Action Network, an environmental charity set up by residents, will be hosting a free public screening of *People's Emergency Briefing* film at the Studio, The Petersfield School, on 21st May at 7pm.

The 50-minute film looks at the UK's exposure to climate and nature risks and will be followed by a community discussion with guest speakers including Damian Hinds MP.

PeCAN chair Greg Ford said: "This topic concerns everyone; we invite residents to come along, look at the evidence, and join a conversation about what climate change could mean for our community – and how we can respond."

Tickets are free, but capacity is limited. Book [here](#).

## SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

## Win a stay at stunning hotel!



**In the picturesque village of Bramber is the perfect countryside escape – The Castle Inn Hotel.**

This **charming 20-bedroom hotel** offers a warm welcome, cosy interiors, and a relaxing base for exploring the South Downs National Park.

You can enjoy delicious dining in the restaurant, unwind with a drink in the bar or soak up the surroundings on the beautiful terrace.

Step outside and you'll find the South Downs Way just moments away, along with the tranquil River Adur and the historic ruins of Bramber Castle.

Take a walk by the river and make the most of the National Park's Miles Without Stiles route. The walk is designed for those with limited mobility, families with pushchairs or wheelchair users and follows a linear path of just over two miles.

We've teamed up with the hotel to offer a one-night stay for two, complete with dinner and breakfast.

People signing up to the newsletter during May will be automatically entered into the draw to win the stay. Those who are already signed up can email "The Castle Inn Hotel" to [newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk](mailto:newsletter@southdowns.gov.uk) before midnight on 31 May. Sign up to the newsletter [here](#) and see competition T&Cs [here](#).

### **Exclusive Offer for South Downs News Subscribers**

You can still escape to the Castle Inn Hotel with a unique offer for South Downs National Park subscribers only!

Stay in one of the hotel's charming double bedrooms on a bed and breakfast basis for just **£100 per night**.

*This special rate is available for stays until 30 June 2026, valid Sunday to Thursday, and subject to availability. **Book online using the unique code: SDNP***

### **Prize Terms & Conditions:**

The prize is based on two people sharing a double room at The Castle Inn Hotel. Dinner is included with an allowance of £30 per person. The prize is valid for stays Sunday to Thursday, subject to availability, excludes Christmas and New Year. Check-in is from 2:00pm and check-out is at 10:30am. Prize must be booked within 2026.

## Things to do in the South Downs this May

Please follow the links as booking may be necessary. Find these and more events across the National Park and submit your own events at [southdowns.gov.uk/events/](https://southdowns.gov.uk/events/)



- Are you a young photographer or visual storyteller passionate about people and nature? Young creators aged 18–35 are being invited to submit mobile photos or short videos capturing how communities and ecosystems coexist in one of the 784 UNESCO Biosphere Reserves around the globe. The Sussex Biosphere is called The Living Coast UNESCO Biosphere and stretches from Worthing to Seaford. Selected participants will receive awards and global recognition, as well as professional equipment to support their work. Submissions close on 31 May. Find out more [here](#).
- Head to Seven Sisters Visitor Centre on 17 May for a pop-up **Spring Fair**, featuring 15 local artists and makers.
- Head to **Spirit of the Downs Distillery** in Bolney on 24 May for an afternoon of funky, soulful house beats from founder Mick Yeoman plus Steven James, and guest DJs. They will be serving a fantastic selection of drinks, including draft local pilsner, bottled and canned premium IPA, plus a range of local and international wine.
- Steyning Festival kicks off on 22 May with an action-packed line-up of events, including comedy, music and drama. Check out the amazing schedule [here](#).
- Join a fascinating walk on 28 May entitled “The Countess and The Crown”. Walk in the footsteps of a remarkable Tudor noblewoman whose life bridged the Wars of the Roses and Henry VIII’s Reformation – few periods in English history were more dramatic. **The walk** covers a beautiful stretch of downland between Havant and Walderton.
- CPRE Sussex will be celebrating the joy and value of trees across two weekends on 29 – 31 May and 6 –7 June. There will be a range of guided walks to explore different varieties of trees, exhibitions and arts sessions. Check out the full programme [here](#).

### Pic credits:

P1 Tim Kahane; P1 (Butterfly) Thomas Moore; P2 Anne Purkiss; P3 Chris Gorman; P4 left Chris Fairhead; P4 right Alex Bamford; P6 The Novium Museum