OXFORDSHIRE LOCAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION (OLHA)

HEALTH AND WEALTH

AUTUMN STUDY DAY

Saturday 14 November 2026

AFTERNOON PROGRAMME

Activities 1–3 meet at 2pm at the locations listed below. Activities 4–5 are available throughout the afternoon; the Abingdon County Hall Museum closes at 4pm. Activity 3 includes a weather-dependent rooftop visit and access restrictions, described overleaf.

ACTIVITY 1: WALK ON THE THEME OF THE INDUSTRIES OF ABINGDON

Led by Martin Buckland

Meet outside the main entrance to Abingdon County Hall Museum on the Market Place at 2pm
Starting in the Market Place, this walk explores the trades, crafts and industries that shaped Abingdon over the centuries. At the confluence of the Thames and Ock, Abingdon grew around its wealthy Benedictine abbey into a major medieval centre for agriculture and commerce, fuelled by the wool and cloth trades. The construction of Abingdon Bridge and its causeway in 1416 greatly improved regional travel and trade. By the 17th century, the town's regional importance was reflected in its magnificent County Hall (Berkshire). The Wilts and Berks Canal arrived in the early 19th century, followed by a branch railway line in 1856. The 19th century saw the town transition into a significant manufacturing hub driven by brewing and malting, leather and tanning, textiles, carpets and clothing production, printing and bookmaking and most famously in the 20th century, automotive manufacture.

ACTIVITY 2: A WALK IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ST EDMUND TO ST HELEN'S CHURCH

Led by Anne Dodd

Meet at the former Abbey gate on the east side of the Market Place at 2pm
This walk follows in the footsteps of St Edmund from St Nicholas' church and concludes with a guided tour of St Helen's, the town's principal church. Discover the life of St Edmund, one of Abingdon's most eminent sons, and visit the sites that featured in his life. Born in the town in about 1174, Edmund was educated at the University of Paris and lectured at Oxford before becoming Archbishop of Canterbury. He died in France in 1240 en route to Rome and was canonised in 1246. St Helen's Church, surrounded by three sets of almshouses, is Abingdon's principal church. Renowned for its unusual shape, being much wider than it is long, and for the restored (1980s) late 14th-century paintings that adorn the ceiling of its Lady Chapel. Probably founded in the late 7th or early 8th century, it was largely rebuilt in the 13th century with further extensions in the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries. Its magnificent spire was rebuilt in 1634 and again in the 1880s.

ACTIVITY 3: FROM CELLAR TO ROOFTOP

Guided by an OLHA committee member

Meet at the entrance to Abingdon County Hall Museum on the Market Place at 2pm
We will split into two groups: one will visit the Little Basement Museum in East St Helen's Street first, while the other climbs to the roof of the Museum, weather permitting. The groups will then swap so everyone takes part in both activities.

The **Little Basement Museum** is being opened by special appointment. This unique museum is housed in the cellar of 4 East St Helen's Street, a Grade 2 listed building on one of the town's oldest thoroughfares. The museum showcases thousands of artifacts recovered during the excavation of a former rubbish pit/site by retired shop owner Mike Russell. They span 2,000 years, and include Iron Age Pottery and Roman and Saxon items, as well as medieval material including carved stones, rare coins, fishmongers' tokens, and about 2,000 clay pipes.

Accessibility note
Access to the Little Basement Museum features a narrow corridor, steep and narrow steps, uneven pavement and low lighting. There is no seating, so please make sure you are comfortable standing for up to 30 minutes. Please wear appropriate footwear.

The **roof of the Abingdon County Hall Museum** offers a 360-degree panoramic view of the town, Market Place and the surrounding countryside.

Access note
Reaching the roof involves climbing over 120 steps with shallow treads; there is no lift to the gallery or rooftop levels.

ACTIVITY 4: VISIT THE ABINGDON COUNTY HALL MUSEUM AND THE CROSSLEY ENGINES IN THE BASEMENT

Throughout the afternoon you will be able to make independent visits to the County Hall Museum (open until 4pm). The galleries currently house the *Warneford 200* exhibition, which relates to our morning talk by Jane Freebody and John Hall. The basement of the museum houses the Crossley engine, which once pumped water to the town's residents, where our morning speaker, Ruth Weinberg, will be on hand to share her knowledge of, and enthusiasm for, the engines and other aspects of the history of Abingdon.

Access note
The County Hall Museum basement is accessible by lift, but the galleries are accessible only by stairs.

ACTIVITY 5: HISTORIC PARISH DOCUMENTS FROM ST HELEN'S CHURCH

Throughout the afternoon there will be an opportunity to see some historic documents from the parish archives held in the church's collection. These reflect the parish's central role in the community over many centuries. They will be displayed in the upstairs room at the St Helen's Parish Centre (venue for our morning lectures).