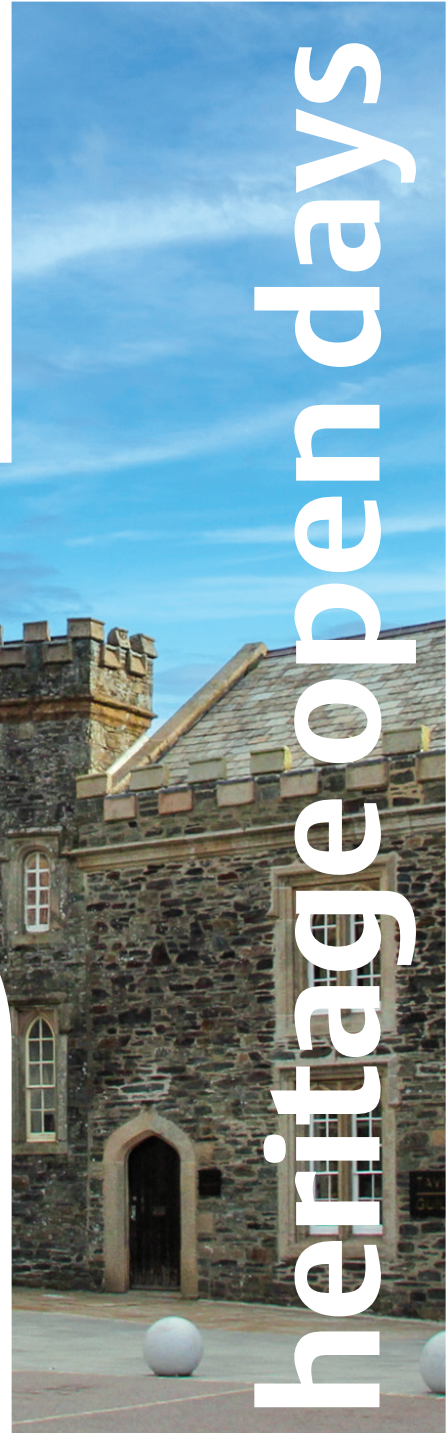




Tavistock Heritage Open Days
11th – 20th September 2026

**YOUR
GUIDE TO
40 FREE
EVENTS**

Heritage Open Days is England's largest festival of history and culture.

Over ten days, Tavistock's historians, heritage organisations, community groups and volunteers will present over 40 free walks, talks, tours, open days and family activities celebrating more than a thousand years of local heritage.

The 2026 national theme is Everyday Histories. Many events explore the experiences of ordinary people, while others reveal the kings, queens, abbots, miners, traders, architects, craftspeople and community leaders who shaped Tavistock and West Devon. The programme ranges from early Christian stones and Anglo-Saxon power to mining, policing, faith, music and family history, with special opportunities to enter buildings and places not normally open to the public. Join us for A Thousand Years of Tavistock in Ten Days.

Throughout the Festival - September 11th – 20th

Windows in Time | Tavistock Town Centre

Follow a self-guided trail through Tavistock's shopping streets. Historic photographs and stories in dozens of modern shop windows reveal how familiar premises once looked, what they sold and the traders, shopkeepers and families who shaped the town over the past 200 years. Created by Tavistock BID using research by local historian Linda Elliott, the trail can be enjoyed at any time during the festival.

A Window in Time - The Residents Of Westbridge Cottages in the 1850s | Tavistock Library

Who lived in the cottages in the 1850s? What was the accommodation like and what sort of jobs did the residents do?

Did they stay at Westbridge or did they leave?

Everyday Lives | Tavistock Library

A Tavistock Local History Society display explores the people who shaped the town, complemented by books, photographs and other resources from the library's local studies collection. Visitors can discover new ways to research Tavistock's past and their own connections with it. A bookable Family History Research Session will also be held during the festival; date to be confirmed.

Everyday Lives | Tavistock Museum

Rarely seen objects, historic photographs, Edge Players character performances and displays on mining, local trades, family life and women's work in the home bring former townspeople vividly into view. The historic kitchen and courtyard may also be open, subject to completion, offering another glimpse into domestic life in earlier generations.

Friday September 11: 09.30 & 13.30

Early Christian Stones

Vicarage Garden

Dr Geri Parlby leads this rare guided visit to three early medieval inscribed stones, normally hidden from public view in the Vicarage Garden. Dating from the fifth to seventh centuries, they preserve names and cultural connections from more than 1,400 years ago. Discover their inscriptions and importance to Tavistock's earliest Christian story.

Booking essential. Scan QR code.



Friday September 11: 10.00 – 16.00

Tavistock Subscription Library Open Day | Court Gate

Read books from the 17th to 21st centuries and discover writers of Dartmoor and the Tamar Valley, quiet rebels and women from many backgrounds who campaigned for reform.

Friday September 11: 11.00 – 16.00

Museum of Policing | Court Gate

Explore how a day in the life of a police officer has changed, enjoy a police-themed children's craft and perhaps meet a historic policeman.

Friday September 11: 16.00 – 17.30

Mount Kelly Tour | Parkwood Road

Tour the beautiful grounds and historically significant buildings, meet some of the pupils and discover how a school founded in the 19th century serves its community today.



Friday September 11: 18.30

Official Opening | Tavistock Guildhall

The Mayor of Tavistock, Anne Johnson, opens the festival.

Friday September 11: 18.35 – 19.35

Earldorman, Lord and Queen

John Fletcher | Tavistock Guildhall

Meet Ordgar, first Earldorman of Devon; his daughter Ælfthryth, England's first crowned queen; and his son Ordulf, founder of Tavistock Abbey. Set against Viking raids and the emergence of England, this talk reveals the family behind Tavistock's beginnings.

Booking essential. Scan QR code.



Saturday September 12: 10.00 – 16.00

Tavistock Subscription Library Open Day | Court Gate

Read, learn and discover books, writers, reformers and campaigners from the 17th century onwards.

Saturday September 12: 10.00 – 16.00

Sausages, Cider & Steam | The Robey Trust, Pixon Lane

Experience Britain's steam-powered past with four to six full-size engines and miniatures, meet the volunteers who restore them and discover the engineering that powered industry, agriculture and everyday life.

Saturday September 12: 11.00 – 15.00

Our Lady of the Assumption Catholic

Church Open Day | Callington Road

Visit Henry Clutton's distinctive church, commissioned by the 8th Duke of Bedford for the Catholic miners who came to Tavistock to work at Devon Great Consols. Parishioners will be on hand to welcome visitors and share its story.

Saturday September 12: 11.00 – 16.00

Museum of Policing | Court Gate

Explore policing history and enjoy a family craft activity.

Saturday September 12: 11.00 – 15.00

Tavistock Museum

Discover rarely seen objects, photographs, live performances and displays about mining, trades, family life and women in the home.

Saturday September 12: 14.00

Where Demons Fear to Tread

Meet at the Visitor Information Centre

Join Sue Spackman for an informal walk between some of Tavistock's most historic places of worship, from the Abbey church to Clutton's 'Miner's Cathedral'. Hear how faith shaped the town and where people worship today.

Booking essential. Scan QR code.



Saturday September 12: 18.30

Tempress, Murderess, Mother and Patron

Dr Geri Parlby | Tavistock Guildhall

Following John Fletcher's opening talk, Dr Parlby turns the spotlight on Ælfthryth. Was England's first crowned queen a pioneering ruler, a ruthless operator or the victim of character assassination? Explore royal power, intrigue and the death of Edward the Martyr.

Booking essential. Scan QR code.



Sunday September 13: 10.00 – 16.00

Sausages, Cider & Steam | The Robey Trust, Pixon Lane

A second chance to experience full-size and miniature steam engines, meet the volunteers preserving Tavistock's engineering heritage and enjoy the convivial combination of sausages and cider.

Sunday September 13: 11.00 – 16.00

Museum of Policing | Court Gate

Discover changing police work, enjoy a children's activity and meet characters from policing's past.

Sunday September 13: 14.30

Plymouth Road Cemetery, Chapel of Rest and Old Mortuary

Chris Bellers leads a tour of the cemetery and usually closed Chapel of Rest. Sue Spackman explores Henry Clutton's architecture, with a special demonstration of the chapel's acoustics by Rosemary Turner.

Numbers limited. Booking essential. Scan QR code.



Tuesday September 15: 10.00

Tavistock Town Centre Burial Grounds Walk

Meet outside the Guildhall

Tony Vigers traces around 1,500 years of Tavistock's story through the places where its people were buried. From evidence of early Celtic settlement to medieval and later churchyards, the walk shows how burial grounds record changing beliefs, communities and the growth of the town.

Booking essential. Scan QR code.



Tuesday September 15: 18.30

A Pair of Shoes for a Poor Child

Dr Sue Andrew | Tavistock Guildhall

Follow three generations of a West Devon family from 1762 to 1903 as they move from agricultural life to Devon's towns and cities. Stories of poverty, illegitimacy, education, work and early policing bring Everyday Lives vividly into focus.

Booking essential. Scan QR code.



Wednesday September 16: 11.00

Bannawell: A guided walk through the street that made Tavistock

Meet outside the entrance to St Eustachius Church

This quiet, unassuming street has seen Vikings, monks, miners and dukes come and go and has a wealth of stories to tell. Come and listen to extraordinary tales of filth and fortune as you travel between the landmark viaduct and former workhouse guided by residents and historians.

Booking essential. Scan QR code.



Wednesday September 16: 14.00 – 16.00

The Hidden Wharves of Tavistock Canal Guided Walk

Stephen Docksey explores five largely hidden wharves once busy with copper, tin, arsenic, limestone, timber, coal and everyday goods bound for Morwellham Quay. A gentle, predominantly flat walk.

Maximum 20 places. Booking essential. Scan QR code.



Thursday September 17: 14.00

Rediscovering Tavistock Abbey: From Abbey to Guildhall | Guided Walk

Explore Tavistock Abbey from its Anglo-Saxon foundation and medieval prosperity to the post-Dissolution town and the Guildhall, which incorporates surviving monastic remains. Look inside and outside the Guildhall and hear about Betsy Grimal's Tower, archaeology, conservation, community involvement and plans to reveal more of the Abbey's story.

Booking essential. Scan QR code.



Friday September 18: 10.00 – 16.00

Tavistock Subscription Library Open Day | Court Gate

Read, learn and discover books, Dartmoor writers, quiet rebels and women campaigning for reform.

Friday September 18: 16.30 – 17.30

Mount Kelly Tour | Parkwood Road

Explore Mount Kelly's historic buildings & landscaped grounds, meet pupils and gain an insight into the realities of life in a modern independent school.



Friday September 18: 18.30

The Fair Arm of the Law | Simon Dell

Former police officer and historian Simon Dell tells the story of the pioneering women who overcame ridicule, prejudice and resistance to shape modern policing. Their history is closely linked to the Suffragette movement and the development of policing in Devon and Cornwall.

Booking essential. Scan QR code.



Saturday September 19: 10.00-11.00, 11.15-12.15, 13.00-14.00 and 14.15-15.15

Working Life in Tavistock Through the Ages Guildhall Courtroom

Primary-aged children can pan for 'tin', search a mining tunnel, design a Tudor-inspired shop or market stall and carve a soap 'stone' masterpiece. Led by the Tavistock Heritage Trust Discovery Team. Maximum three children per accompanying adult.

Free, but booking essential. Scan QR code.



Saturday September 19: 10.00 – 12.00

Tracing Your Family History | Tavistock Library

Explore your ancestors and their everyday lives with support from the library team. Develop your own Who Do You Think You Are? skills.

Saturday September 19: 10.00 – 14.00

Characters from Tavistock's Past | Heritage Quarter

Meet historical characters brought to life by Tavistock Players and hear snapshots from the everyday lives of people who once walked the town's streets.

Saturday September 19: 10.00 – 16.00

Tavistock Subscription Library Open Day | Court Gate

Enjoy the atmosphere of Tavistock's heritage library and explore books spanning four centuries, including works connected with Dartmoor and the Tamar Valley.

Saturday September 19: 10.30 & 15.00

Guided Tours of St Eustachius' Church

Discover 700 years of history and some of the parish church's most important artefacts.

Saturday September 19: 11.00 – 15.00

Our Lady of the Assumption & St Mary Magdalene Open Day

Visit Henry Clutton's remarkable Catholic church on Callington Road and discover its architecture, mining connections and continuing life as a place of worship.

Saturday September 19: 11.00 – 16.00

Museum of Policing | Court Gate

Hands-on family activities inspired by policing history.

Saturday September 19: 11.00 – 16.00

Tavistock Museum

A full programme of children's activities alongside the Everyday Lives displays.

Saturday September 19: 14.00

Medieval Dancing | Guildhall Square

Music and dancing with Tavistock Players. Audience participation encouraged.

Sunday September 20: 14.00

The Superintendent's Letters

Tavistock Guildhall

Tavistock Edge brings Police Superintendent Mitchell back to life to recount misdemeanours, tragedies, accidents and curious incidents from the everyday lives of Tavistock and West Devon in the late 19th century. Suitable for families.

Booking essential. Scan QR code.



Sunday September 20: 19.00 – 21.00

God's Work: Music from Haydn's Creation

St Eustachius' Church

The Tavistock Heritage Chorus performs extracts from Haydn's joyful choral masterpiece, inspired by Genesis and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The evening closes Heritage Open Days 2026, with a brief address from Mayor Anne Johnson.

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