

Three Marvellous Museums

Bridget Flanagan, from the Great Ouse Valley Trust, reminds us of our fascinating past, and where to see the evidence on display in the valley

For an area with such a rich heritage as the Great Ouse Valley it is no surprise that there is a string of superb, professionally-run museums in our market towns. These are not fusty, dusty old buildings with solemn displays of ancient exhibits, but lively, bright places that draw in and engage people of all ages. All the museums organise learning groups, talks, workshops and activities - both on site, in schools and in the community. History is not just about looking – it's for doing.

The river valley has been a conduit for people and trade over many millennia and every generation has left behind artefacts that evidence their existence: 5,000 year old flint tools of the Neolithic period; 2,000-year-old Roman jewellery; floor tiles of medieval Ramsey Abbey; photographs of 19th century basket-making; and a 20th century pocket calculator. Each object and image tells a story; together they contribute to the wider picture that gives us our context and explains our place.

The Cromwell Museum, in the former Huntingdon Grammar School building, is home to the best collection of items relating to the life and times of Oliver Cromwell on public display anywhere in the world. There are over 800 items, including portraits, clothing, arms and armour, copies of his death masks and even his hat!

The Norris Library and Museum in St Ives is the 'Museum of Huntingdonshire'. It was formed from the diverse collections of Herbert Norris – a local amateur historian. He left his whole estate in trust for a museum, and this charity is now administered by St Ives Town Council. The purpose-built Norris Museum, with its charming riverside garden, opened in September 1933, and in 2017 received £1.3 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund for an extension and re-development project. Just two examples of its large collections are a wonderful archive of Fen Skating, and many paintings of the local area by the colony of artists who lived and worked here in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

St Neots Museum opened in 1995 in the Old Court – a former police station and court building. It is managed by a board of Trustees and financially supported by the Town Council. The museum presents the story of St Neots - as an important staging post for 18th century coaches on the Great North Road, then adapting to the advent of rail in 1851, and now the largest, fastest growing town in Cambridgeshire.

All these museums have free entry to local residents. If you haven't already been, go and explore. And then go again, because there's always new displays and exhibitions. Enjoy our river valley heritage!

The Muddy Hoard

Opening
16 September 2023



9,274 coins
15 Roman rulers
1 previously undiscovered denarius



THE NORRIS MUSEUM
Wherever Your Curiosity Takes You

A must-see exhibition: over 9,000 Roman coins - the largest hoard ever found in Cambridgeshire
- is currently on show in the Norris Museum.

The Great Ouse Valley Trust promotes for public benefit the conservation, restoration and enjoyment of the landscape, wildlife and heritage of the Great Ouse Valley and environs in the county of Cambridgeshire. For more information about the Trust please visit www.greatousevalleytrust.org.uk



Great Ouse Valley Trust
Our landscape for life