FORDINGBRIDGE MUSEUM

NEWSLETTER
AUTUMN 2026

HISTORY • PEOPLE • PLACES

Stories from our past and news from the Museum

Discovering the heritage of Fordingbridge and the surrounding villages



There is a story behind every familiar place. In this newsletter we explore the people, buildings and objects that connect today's Fordingbridge with its fascinating past.

IN THIS NEWSLETTER

A stone from the Great Bridge

A broken gravestone and a remarkable mystery

Christmas at the museum



Come and see us in the museum for drinks and nibbles

Friday 27 November 2026 | 5.30 to 8.00 pm

Pop in during the town's Christmas lights celebrations.
We look forward to seeing you!

Sandleheath Brickyard bricks

Only a few left

Thank you to everyone who has taken home some of our original Sandleheath Brickyard bricks at local fairs. Your generous support has helped raise funds for Fordingbridge Museum.



These characterful old bricks make lovely plant pot stands, garden edging, rustic garden features and decorative displays.

Suggested donation £5 for four bricks

The fair season may be over, but the remaining bricks are available directly from the museum while stocks last.

To arrange delivery, please email
info@fordingbridgemuseum.co.uk

Every donation helps us care for and share our local history.

FORDINGBRIDGE MUSEUM

News from the 50/50 Club

Our 50/50 Club is very much still running, with around 85 subscriptions. Last year it contributed **over £600 to museum funds** and is on course to match or improve on that this year.

Draws now take place quarterly, allowing us to offer larger prizes without increasing the annual subscription. Although you hear about the draws less often, your support continues to make a real difference.

Join or add a subscription

Each subscription costs £12 a year. You can have more than one, or hold subscriptions on behalf of family members.

Please set up a regular annual payment with your bank:

Account name: Fordingbridge Museum 50/50 Club
Sort code: 20-72-37
Account number: 23375617

Please let me know when you have arranged payment:

Email: sp6sg@yahoo.com **Text:** 07765 765813

The Christmas draw

The next draw will be in the weeks leading up to Christmas, and I hope to hold it in the museum on the late shopping evening. Every paid subscription will be included. There will also be an extra prize: the Annual Christmas rollover.

Thank you to all our subscribers for your continued support over the years.

Stuart Grant

FORDINGBRIDGE MUSEUM

Become a Volunteer Steward

A friendly welcome makes all the difference at Fordingbridge Museum

Do you enjoy meeting people and having a good chat? We are looking for volunteer stewards to help welcome visitors and make their time at the Museum enjoyable. You don't need to be an historian — just friendly, curious and happy to talk to people.



Visitors enjoying the Museum's Sandy Balls display.

Choose a shift to suit you

Our stewarding season runs from April to October, with two short shifts each day:

MORNING	**11.00 am – 1.30 pm**
AFTERNOON	**1.30 pm – 4.00 pm**

You don't need to know it all

Your role is to greet visitors, help them feel at home and enjoy the conversations that our displays inspire. If someone has a specialist question, you can always pass it on.

Meet people, hear stories

You'll meet local families, visitors from across the country and people with their own memories of Fordingbridge. Every shift brings new stories and friendly faces.

Be part of something special

Stewarding is a lovely way to make friends, feel part of the Museum community and help keep local history alive.

COME AND JOIN THE MUSEUM TEAM

A couple of hours of your time can make someone's visit. Pop into the Museum for a chat, or email **info@fordingbridgemuseum.co.uk**

FROM THE COLLECTIONS • AUTUMN 2026

The Great Bridge: a stone and a thousand stories

From medieval travellers and Forest deer to smugglers and modern traffic, Fordingbridge’s most familiar crossing has a remarkable past.



A piece of the Great Bridge, removed after damage caused by an HGV and now preserved at Fordingbridge Museum. The stone is believed to belong to the bridge’s later, nineteenth-century work.

A large, weathered stone has recently arrived at Fordingbridge Museum. It may look an unassuming object, but it once formed part of the town’s Great Bridge. After a vehicle collision damaged the bridge, the stone was removed and has now been saved for visitors to see. Its arrival offers the perfect excuse to look beyond the familiar seven arches and discover some of the people and stories associated with this crossing.

A bridge that gave the town its name

Fordingbridge was recorded as “Forde” in the Domesday Book of 1086. A ford across the Avon preceded the bridge; by 1252 a bridge was already important enough for repairs to be supported by a grant. The stone bridge that survives today has a medieval core dating from the fourteenth or fifteenth century. Its seven arches carried travellers, traders and livestock between the town and the countryside beyond.

The gateway to the New Forest

Fordingbridge stands on the western side of the New Forest, and the Great Bridge was an important crossing for those travelling into and out of it. For centuries, this route connected the Forest and the Avon Valley with roads leading towards Salisbury and the west. Near the eastern approach once stood a medieval hospital dedicated to St John, associated with the care of poor travellers: a reminder that crossing the river was part of a much longer journey.

The bridge once guarded against poachers?

One of the most intriguing traditions concerns deer taken unlawfully from the New Forest. Writing in the nineteenth century, John R. Wise described the lord of the manor keeping watch at the bridge during the Forest's "fence months", stopping travellers suspected of carrying venison away. These were periods when deer and their young were especially protected under Forest law.

It is a wonderful image: a guard at the Avon crossing, watching for escaping poachers. But Wise admitted he could not verify the source, though a similar local tradition survived. It is best enjoyed as a story recorded in the 1860s, not as a proven duty.

An old bridge, repeatedly renewed

The Great Bridge has never stood unchanged. In 1841 it was widened on both sides to accommodate growing traffic, encasing its smaller medieval arches within later stonework. It was refaced in Chilmark stone in 1901, and a cantilevered pedestrian footway was added around 1960. Today it is both Grade II* listed and a Scheduled Monument, recognised as nationally important.

Our rescued stone is believed to come from the nineteenth-century work, rather than the medieval arches. It is an ordinary-looking survivor of an extraordinary structure, and a reminder that the history of Fordingbridge is still being collected, one object at a time.



Repairs to Fordingbridge's Great Bridge, circa 1900 - Neaves Collection

BEFORE 1252	1841	TODAY
A bridge is documented	Widened for traffic	Protected & preserved

RESEARCH SOURCES

• Historic England, list entries 1301381 & 1003452; Fordingbridge Town Council; Old Hampshire Gazetteer.
• J. R. Wise, The New Forest (1867), ch. XI, note 145; C. G. Harper, The Portsmouth Road.
• Poole History, "Custom House Raid" (1747); West Sussex Record Office, Goodwood MSS 155; The George, "History".

Sandy Balls during the Great Depression

The extraordinary story of Grith Fyrd — an "Army of Peace" beside the River Avon

As the Sandy Balls display comes down, we revisit an unexpected chapter in its past. In the 1930s this familiar holiday destination offered unemployed young men work, community and hope.



Woodland huts at Sandy Balls. From the Museum display.

From a woodland school to a "Peace Army"

In 1919 Ernest Westlake acquired Sandy Balls for the Order of Woodcraft Chivalry, a movement that valued outdoor life, practical skills and fellowship. His son Aubrey carried on the idea, and a Forest School opened in 1929.

When unemployment soared, the movement established Grith Fyrd — usually translated as "Peace Army" — on the estate at Godshill. In March 1932 six unemployed men set about building their first log cabin. They included an engineer, a cabinet-maker, two laboratory assistants and a former accountant. By September around 25 men were living there.

A working community in the woods

The men built huts, worked with wood and woven materials, tended goats, cooked and shared skills. They also sang, danced and swam in the Avon. Some contributed part of their unemployment benefit towards the camp.

It was neither a conventional holiday camp nor simply a training centre. The aim was to restore confidence and purpose through cooperation when so many young people had little prospect of work.

A story caught on film

Grith Fyrd attracted national attention: Aldous Huxley visited, the BBC broadcast from the camp and British Pathé filmed it in 1933. The silent film It's a Great Life (1934) offers another glimpse.



A drawing from the Sandy Balls brochure. Scanned copy from UCL Forest School Camps archive.

From camp to holidays

The Westlakes also developed Sandy Balls as a place for affordable family holidays. Simple cabins among the trees and brochures promising a "beauty spot" helped establish the destination still familiar today.

See the original films

Army of Peace (1933) — British Pathé

It's a Great Life (1934) — BFI

RESEARCH & SOURCES John Field, "An Anti-Urban Education? Work Camps and Ideals of the Land in Interwar Britain", Rural History 23 (2012); BFI Replay; New Forest Archive / British Pathé; UCL Forest School Camps archive; Fordingbridge Museum Sandy Balls display.

Yesterday's Future

From the telephone dial to the digital age — a new display at Fordingbridge Museum

Our former air-raid-shelter display has made way for something a little closer to living memory. This new collection celebrates the everyday technology that once seemed so modern — and that many of our visitors still remember using.



The Museum's new technology display.

A mobile phone revolution

1973 Motorola engineer Martin Cooper makes the first public handheld mobile phone call.
1985 Britain's first cellular phone call. Early mobiles are bulky, costly luxuries.
1992 The world's first text message says "Merry Christmas".
2007 The iPhone helps bring touchscreen smartphones into everyday life.

Music and maths, too

Remember cassette and CD players, pocket calculators and mechanical adding machines? Before smartphones, music, arithmetic and phone calls usually needed separate gadgets.

What do you remember?

Which was your first mobile? Can you remember texting with number keys or memorising phone numbers? Come and share your stories with us.

COME AND SHARE YOUR MEMORIES

The gadgets may be changing, but the stories are part of our history. Visit the new display and tell our volunteers which familiar objects you recognise.

Sources: BBC Bitesize, "A history of mobile phones and smartphones"; Vodafone UK (1985 and 1992 milestones); Apple (2007 iPhone).

AN UNEXPECTED LINK TO BRITAIN'S SOCIAL AND LABOUR HISTORY

A broken gravestone and a remarkable mystery

Could a local stonemason's failed first attempt have survived beneath the streets of Fordingbridge?



The Collections Team of Fordingbridge Museum, and the unfinished memorial to Robert Standfield.

A discovery beneath the Greyhound

A broken gravestone, long ago reused as a cover for a well, has brought an unexpected piece of national history into Fordingbridge Museum. It was recovered from the former Greyhound and Albany Hotel site between Salisbury Street, Bridge Street and the River Avon.

There were excavations in both 1989 and 1997, but the gravestone was recorded in Trench 1 during Wessex Archaeology's 1997 work. A brick-built well (feature 1068) had been capped by part of a memorial to Robert Standfield, dated 1832. The stone had not weathered and its inscription was unfinished. Archaeologists Phil Harding and Anthony Light suggested that it had broken during manufacture.

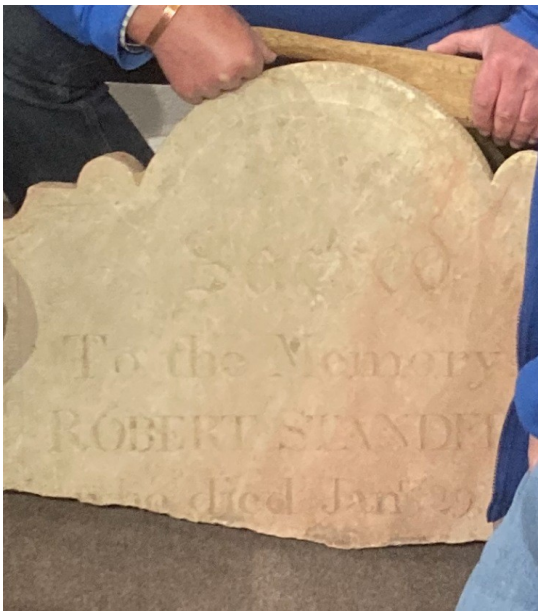
A name with a remarkable connection

Robert was the father of Thomas Standfield and grandfather of John Standfield — two of the six Dorset agricultural workers remembered as the Tolpuddle Martyrs. The stone was never used to mark his grave, yet it connects Fordingbridge with a turning point in the history of working people.

THE SAME MAN, TWO STONES

Two stones, one name

Photographs of Robert Standfield's completed gravestone in Verwood reveal a striking resemblance to the unfinished stone at the Museum.



THE MUSEUM STONE
Unfinished and never erected.



THE VERWOOD GRAVESTONE
Still standing at St Michael and All Angels.

Was this the first attempt?

Both memorials have a broad central arch, two smaller rounded shoulders and much the same overall outline. Perhaps a mason began carving Robert's stone, it broke before the lettering was finished, and another was cut to a similar pattern for the burial in Verwood.

This is a plausible hypothesis, not a proven sequence of events. The shape was not unique to one workshop, and the stones have yet to be compared closely for size, material and lettering. The broken piece may also have travelled before it was reused at the well.

Was the maker working in Fordingbridge?

Its discovery near the Greyhound makes a local workshop a tempting possibility, but a mason's identity — or even the place of manufacture — cannot be established from the find alone. The unanswered question is part of the appeal of the object.

Why was Robert buried in Verwood?

Robert was buried in the churchyard at Verwood on 2 February 1832, aged 76. Elizabeth Standfield was subsequently buried in the same grave in 1854. Although Robert was described as a yeoman of Arne, near Wareham, in an 1818 document, his reasons for being in Verwood by 1832 have yet to be established.

Records do show a continuing Standfield presence there: the 1841 census lists William Standfield as a farmer in a household including an elderly Elizabeth Standfields, James and Richard. In 1851, William is recorded farming 200 acres and employing ten labourers and two boys. These entries make Verwood a promising subject for further family research, though exact relationships require checking against original records.

THE FAMILY BEHIND THE STONE

From Tolpuddle to Fordingbridge

Behind one discarded memorial lies a story of faith, rural hardship and the campaign for fairer treatment of agricultural labourers.

Robert Standfield and the Methodist chapel

In 1808 Robert leased a house and land at Tolpuddle. By 1818 he was living at Arne, where a deed described him as a yeoman. That year he arranged the transfer of land for a Wesleyan Methodist chapel at Tolpuddle; its trustees included his son Thomas Standfield and George Loveless, both future Martyrs. The chapel opened in 1818 and remains an important reminder of the families' religious and community life.

From the Swing Riots to the Tolpuddle Martyrs

The Swing Riots swept across southern England in 1830 as agricultural labourers protested against low wages, uncertainty and the loss of work to threshing machines. The Fordingbridge area experienced its own disturbances, and severe punishments followed. Yet hardship continued.

In 1833 six men in Tolpuddle, including Thomas and his son John, formed the Friendly Society of Agricultural Labourers to seek better wages. They were convicted in 1834 for administering an unlawful oath and sentenced to seven years' transportation. The Swing Riots form part of the background to their decision to organise; there is no established evidence that the six men had personally taken part.

The families left behind

The consequences extended well beyond the convicted men. Wives and children lost their principal earners. When the women sought parish relief, assistance was refused. Thomas Standfield's wife, Dinniah (also recorded as Dianah), was among those denied support. Campaigners later raised money for the families, and a national protest eventually secured the Martyrs' pardons. Their experience reveals the imbalance of power between rural labourers and the authorities who governed their lives.

An unfinished stone, and a story still unfolding

One memorial was completed and placed in Verwood; another, perhaps an unsuccessful first attempt, survived as an ordinary well cover in Fordingbridge. Phil Harding later brought the broken stone to the Museum, where it can now be seen. The resemblance between the two stones invites further investigation — and reminds us how a seemingly discarded object can preserve extraordinary history.

Research and further reading

P. Harding and A. Light, “Excavations in Fordingbridge, 1989 and 1997”, Hampshire Studies 58 (2003), pp. 130–176, especially p. 150.

Tolpuddle Old Chapel Trust, historical research and 1818 chapel deed; Tolpuddle Martyrs Museum, “Meet the Martyrs”.

Verwood Historical Society, Old Churchyard Memorial Inscriptions (2007); Verwood 1841 census and Cranborne/Verwood 1851 census transcriptions (Dorset OPC).

The Methodist Church, “From Labourers to Martyrs” (2023). Photographs supplied for the Museum article.

80 years ago
a competition was launched

Fordingbridge's Memorial Gardens

Eighty years ago, in 1946, Fordingbridge launched a competition to design a memorial garden in the Recreation Ground. The Second World War had ended only the year before, and the town wanted a lasting tribute to those who had lost their lives.

The Recreation Ground itself had been established in 1923 through public donations after the First World War. Now the community was being asked to build on that legacy. The War Memorial Committee's appeal captured its ambition: "Commemorate the past by building for the future."

There was work to do. In October 1946, the parish council discussed the War Memorial Grounds and felt they were not receiving the attention they deserved. The proposed garden offered a fresh focus for remembrance.



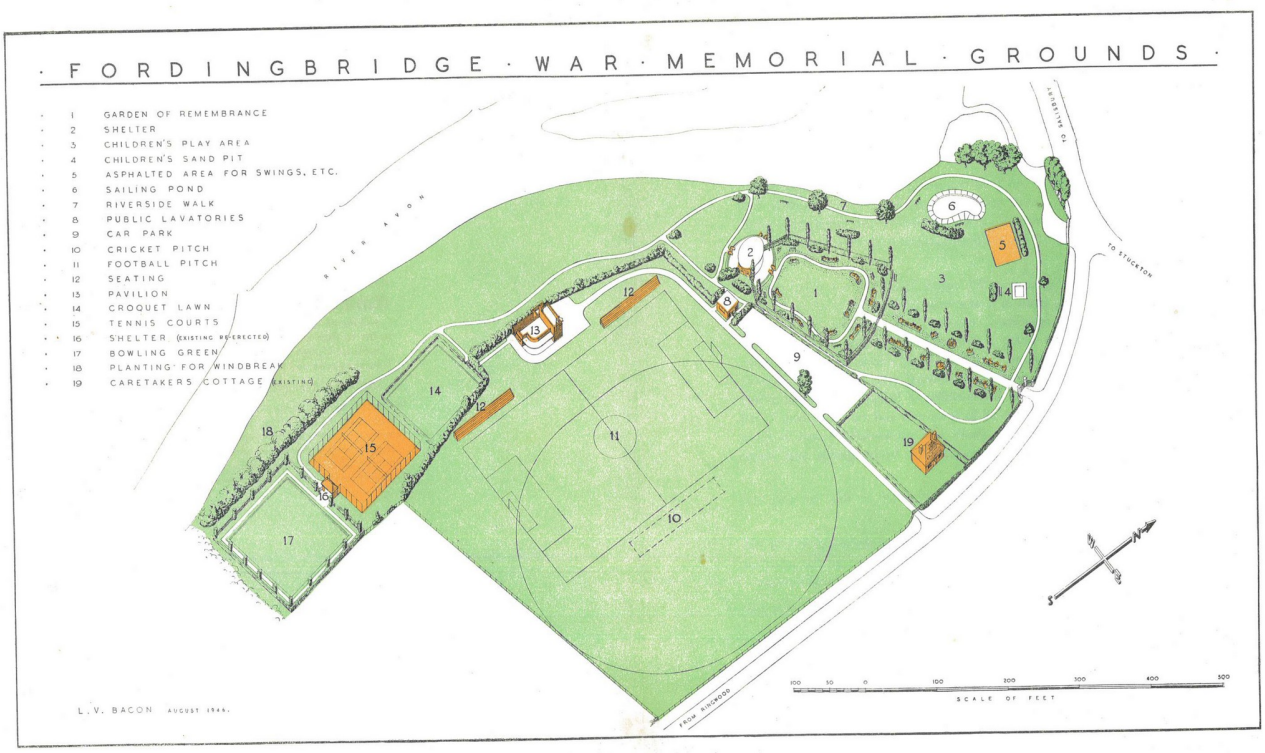


Then and now • The historic postcard and recent aerial view show the garden across the decades.

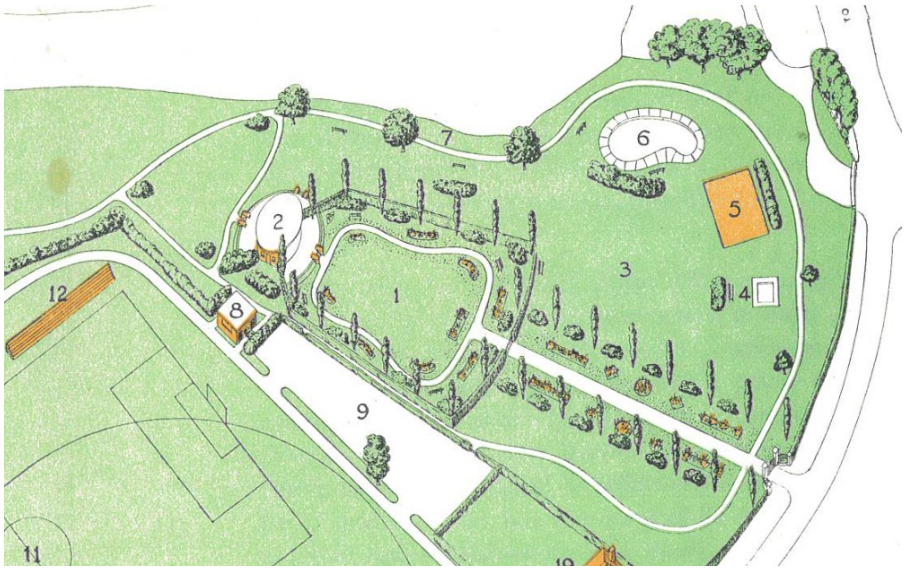
The winning scheme extended beyond the memorial garden, bringing together places for remembrance, children's play and sport. The drawing on the next page shows the scale of that ambition.

The winning design

Fordingbridge War Memorial Grounds • L. V. Bacon • August 1946



The full scheme combines the Garden of Remembrance with play areas, sports facilities and a riverside walk.



Enlarged detail • The Memorial Garden is numbered 1, beside the shelter numbered 2. The riverside walk is numbered 7.

When enthusiasm got the better of them

Fundraising soon became a town-wide effort. In August 1947, more than 4,000 people attended the opening day of Fordingbridge's first carnival. A procession made its way through decorated streets to the memorial ground, with a military band, decorated vehicles, fancy dress and a Carnival Queen. The purpose was to help lay out the grounds as a fitting memorial to those who had fallen in both world wars.

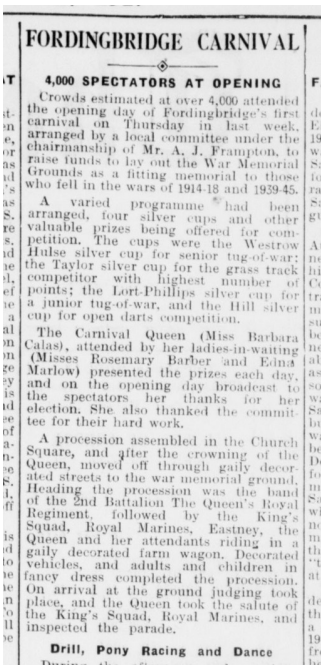
Then enthusiasm got the better of the organisers. A Derby draw, intended to raise further funds, brought them before the magistrates in 1948. Sixpenny tickets had been sent around the country. The association claimed about 18,000 members, on the basis that everyone buying a ticket automatically became one. That arrangement did not make the lottery lawful.

The newspaper reports make clear that this was a well-meant venture. The defence said that none of the organisers stood to make a penny personally. The court heard that about £1,000 had already been raised for the memorial: £600 had been spent on the Garden of Remembrance, £200 on land, and a further £200 was being spent preparing a riverside walk.

Four members of the entertainment sub-committee were each fined £3, with 10 shillings costs. The printers were fined £2, also with 10 shillings costs. The remaining summonses were dismissed, with costs, and around £60 was confiscated.

The magistrates acknowledged the good work being done for the memorial but said the organisers should have sought proper advice. It was an embarrassing setback for volunteers whom the defence described as public-spirited and acting in the town's interests.

The garden outlasted the controversy. The old postcard and recent aerial photograph show that its distinctive outline remains recognisable today. Next time you pass, spare a thought for the townspeople who raised the money and helped create it—and whose enthusiasm occasionally ran ahead of the rules.



FORDINGBRIDGE CARNIVAL

4,000 SPECTATORS AT OPENING

Crowds estimated at over 4,000 attended the opening day of Fordingbridge's first carnival on Thursday in last week, arranged by a local committee under the chairmanship of Mr. A. J. Frampton, to raise funds to lay out the War Memorial Grounds as a fitting memorial to those who fell in the wars of 1914-18 and 1939-45.

A varied programme had been arranged, four silver cups and other valuable prizes being offered for competition. The cups were the Westrow Hulse silver cup for senior tug-of-war; the Taylor silver cup for the grass track competitor with highest number of points; the Lort-Phillips silver cup for a junior tug-of-war, and the Hill silver cup for open darts competition.

The Carnival Queen (Miss Barbara Calas), attended by her ladies-in-waiting (Misses Rosemary Barber and Edna Marlow) presented the prizes each day, and on the opening day broadcast to the spectators her thanks for her election. She also thanked the committee for their hard work.

A procession assembled in the Church Square, and after the crowning of the Queen, moved off through gaily decorated streets to the war memorial ground. Heading the procession was the band of the 2nd Battalion The Queen's Royal Regiment, followed by the King's Squad, Royal Marines, Eastney, the Queen and her attendants riding in a gaily decorated farm wagon. Decorated vehicles, and adults and children in fancy dress completed the procession. On arrival at the ground judging took place, and the Queen took the salute of the King's Squad, Royal Marines, and inspected the parade.

Drill, Pony Racing and Dance

Salisbury Times
29 August 1947

"Raised Money by Wrong Method"

The Salisbury Times headline,
15 October 1948.

Sources

Salisbury Times: 18 October 1946; 29 August 1947; 15 October 1948.

New Milton Advertiser: 16 October 1948.

Fordingbridge War Memorial Committee appeal and design leaflet; historic postcard and recent aerial photograph.

Winning design: L. V. Bacon, August 1946.

THE DAWN

A First World War government commission — and a new acquisition for Fordingbridge Museum

A NATIONAL COMMISSION

Fordingbridge Museum has recently acquired an original 1917 lithograph of The Dawn by Augustus John. Purchased directly from the Imperial War Museum and accompanied by a certificate of authenticity, the print forms part of a remarkable wartime art project. In 1917, the British government commissioned a powerful art project titled Britain's **Efforts** and **Ideals** in the Great War.

This historic collection consists of **66 lithographic prints** created by the country's leading artists of the era.

The ambitious project was managed by Thomas Derrick, the Art Editor at Wellington House—the official government department responsible for using literature and art to aid the war effort. By capturing these striking images of wartime life and industry, the government aimed to boost public morale both at home and across allied nations during a crucial moment in the conflict.



Augustus John, *The Dawn*, lithograph, 1917.

A MESSAGE OF HOPE

The Dawn belongs to the series' twelve Ideals prints. While the **Efforts** works depicted practical contributions to the war, the **Ideals** portrayed the principles for which Britain claimed to be fighting.

In John's dramatic scene, a woman looks towards a new sunrise amid ruins, grief and death. Behind her is the figure of Death; in the foreground, a child builds with stones from the wreckage. The image suggests that hope and renewal might emerge from the destruction of war.



Augustus John, photographed in later life.

The Power of Print: Why Lithography?

During the First World War, governments and artists favoured **lithographic printing** because it allowed them to mass-produce high-quality images quickly. This technique became a powerful tool for spreading political ideas and wartime messaging.

These striking wartime prints reached the public in many different ways, including:

- **Mass Media:** Printed directly inside popular newspapers and journals.
- **Everyday Items:** Scaled down into postcards or enlarged to create dramatic street posters.
- **Collectibles:** Sold to art enthusiasts as limited-edition portfolios.
- **Public Events:** Featured in their own dedicated art exhibitions.

FROM WARTIME TO THE MUSEUM

The exhibition first opened to the public at the Fine Art Society **in London on 6 July 1917**. Following its successful London debut, the artwork toured Britain's major cities before crossing the Atlantic to be showcased in **New York and Los Angeles**.Unsold original impressions passed into the care of the Imperial War Museum, which has recently made surviving prints available to collectors and museums.

SOURCES & FURTHER READING

Imperial War Museums — the Dawn by Augustus John

Amgueddfa Cymru – Museum Wales — The Great War: Britain's Efforts and Ideals; The Dawn, Collections Online (museum.wales)

Augustus John: the statue that won't stand still

From a quiet corner of the Recreation Ground to the Great Bridge — and an April Fool in the High Street

Did you spot Augustus John on the High Street mini-roundabout? An April Fool posted on Facebook prompted plenty of interest. The statue, of course, had not moved — but its real journey around Fordingbridge is an intriguing story of art, controversy and changing opinions.

A celebrated artist — and a controversial memorial

Augustus John (1878–1961), the internationally known portrait painter, lived at Fryern Court near Fordingbridge from 1927 until his death. He was admired for his art, but his unconventional private life divided local opinion.

A memorial was proposed after his death. The sculptor Ivor Roberts-Jones created the expressive bronze figure, unveiled by Lord Mountbatten on 1 October 1967. Securing a location had not been easy: Historic England describes the arrangements as lengthy and contentious.

Out of sight in the Recreation Ground

The statue originally stood in the Recreation Ground behind the Victoria Rooms, beside the Avon. Local recollections suggest it was not especially welcome there. One often-told story has children using it to dry their swimming costumes after a dip in the river! Whether it was deliberately placed out of sight because of John's reputation is harder to establish.

A move into public view — 1999

The Southern Daily Echo of 19 March 1999 reported a five-year campaign by the Fordingbridge Society to move the statue to a more visible setting. Purbeck Developments offered to carry out the relocation in connection with a new housing development at Riverside Place.

The statue was moved that March to the east bank of the Avon beside the Great Bridge. Its new position, visible from the bridge, gave the artist a far more prominent place in the town.

Could it move again?

The sculpture became Grade II listed in January 2016. There has recently been talk locally, including among members of Fordingbridge Art Club, about finding another location. No confirmed relocation plan has been established. Whatever happens, the statue continues to inspire conversation — rather like the artist himself.



APRIL FOOL! A playful photomontage placed Augustus John on the High Street mini-roundabout. The statue has not actually moved.

A long association with art

Fordingbridge Art Club was founded in 1946 by a group of artists including Augustus John. The club still celebrates his connection with the town and awards an Augustus John Trophy.

Did you know?

Roberts-Jones portrayed John in old age, striding barefoot with an impatient energy. The bronze figure stands about 1.9 metres high.

The real statue stands at Bridge Street and Riverside Place, where it is accessible to the public.

SOURCES Historic England, National Heritage List 1431368; Southern Daily Echo, 19 March 1999, p. 2, "Statue set to come home"; Fordingbridge Art Club history. Local recollections are identified as such.

FORDINGBRIDGE
MUSEUM

Thank you for visiting Fordingbridge Museum

The Museum closes on
Saturday 31st October
until next Easter.

You can follow us on Facebook
and on our website

www.fordingbridgemuseum.co.uk