



Okehampton Castle Newsletter 2026

On 1st April 2026, we opened the castle gates as a free to enter site. This means that there is no admissions charge for anyone who wants to visit the castle, with current opening hours Wednesday to Sunday, 10am to 4pm. For the summer (27th July - 4th September) these will change, with the castle open seven days a week, 10am-4pm.

This new way of opening the castle enables more local people and visitors to the area to be able to experience the benefits of engaging with this remarkable historic site. The new opening pattern is supported by a team of passionate local volunteers, who are crucial to our work as a charity in ensuring the ongoing care of Okehampton Castle. Thanks to each of the volunteers who open and close the site each day and ensure that it is safe and well-presented for our visitors.

Volunteer-led guided tours are available at the castle on the first full weekend of every month, and are proving to be popular so far. During the summer, extra tours on Wednesdays and Sundays will also be run and private tours are also available by request. We continue to support school education visits and Scout & Brownie trips at the castle and will be hosting several events during Heritage Open Days in September.

Our annual Bluebell Sunday event in May was a huge success - in spite of the great British weather we saw over 400 visitors!

Recently, we opened a [Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/EHOkehamptonCastle) for the castle, where we can share stories and details of what's on - take a look and give us a like to keep you up to date (<https://www.facebook.com/EHOkehamptonCastle>). Two social media volunteers will soon be taking the reins, which will increase the amount of posts we are able to share.

We are always looking for more ways to utilise the glorious spaces around the site, so if you are a local group, school or community organisation and have something you would like us to consider, then do get in touch!

Charlotte Willson,
Volunteer & Community Engagement Manager

Email: WestVolunteerEngagementTeam@english-heritage.org.uk

Telephone: 07823 966 467

What's been happening at the Castle?

Guided Tours are being delivered by a team of 7 volunteers on the first weekend of each month. These are offered at 11am and 1pm at a suggested donation of £5 per person and have been really well-received by our visitors. So far this year (since April 2026) these tours have helped us raise over £500.

So far this year we have welcomed over 200 children on **Education visits** at the castle, including visits from local schools and Scout & Brownie groups. We have more schools booked in for after the summer holidays.

We will also be delivering a Guided Tour to a Tour Group from France in August and have a number of tours, talks and activities planned for Heritage Open Days week, which runs from 11-20 September. For further details and to book on to these events, please visit the HODs website - www.heritageopendays.org.uk



**English
Heritage**

Sydney Simmonds’ family visit

On Wednesday 20th May, we welcomed six relatives of Sydney Simmonds to Okehampton Castle for an exclusive guided tour delivered by John, one of our Tour Guide volunteers.

Sydney Simmonds was an extremely important figure at Okehampton Castle, having bought the castle in 1911. At this time, the castle ruins were largely obscured by ivy and trees and Simmonds, a local businessman, paid for the ivy to be cleared and the ruined walls stabilised. In 1917 he gave the restored castle to the newly formed Okehampton Castle Trust, who employed a custodian and produced the first guide and map.

We were contacted early in the year by Nick, who was one of Simmonds’ 5x great nephews, regarding a visit he had planned with some of his relatives, enquiring as to whether they might receive a guided tour. We were, of course, delighted to oblige and Nick and his family enjoyed their visit with us in May.

Nick said *"We had a superb visit to the castle, received a warm welcome and then a most memorable guided tour of the castle by volunteer John. He proved to be extremely knowledgeable and pointed out a whole host of details which otherwise would have escaped us. Please can you convey our thanks to him for his time and trouble, he is obviously passionate about the castle and it's fascinating history."*



Tour Guide Volunteer, John (left) and relatives of Sydney Simmonds’ enjoying the grounds and sunshine at Okehampton Castle during their visit.

Volunteer Site Visit

On Wednesday 22nd April, Okehampton castle hosted a visit for 20 English Heritage volunteers from across our sites in Devon and Cornwall for a guided tour, delivered by Dr Nick Holder.

What a great way for English Heritage staff and volunteers to come together and share their enthusiasm for heritage.



Dr Nick Holder (centre) enthusiastically delivering his tour.



Looking to next year

Volunteers

We are always looking to recruit more volunteers at the castle - to help us deliver tours, open the gates for our visitors and monitor the site to ensure that it is safe. If you are interested in joining the team - then please get in touch.

Wildlife and Plants

We have a new group of wildlife survey volunteers who will be delivering talks and tours towards the end of the year. We are also hoping to expand this team, looking further into monitoring the wildflowers and plant species that we are so fortunate to have in the castle grounds.

Community Day at the Castle

We are looking to move our Annual Bluebell Sunday event to later in the year in 2027 (date TBC) in the hope we will have better weather for it. It will follow a similar format to previous years, with activities and demonstrations. As the castle is now free to enter and open from April, the bluebells can be seen by our visitors at any time in early Spring. If you would like to attend next year’s event to do a workshop or have a stall then please let us know.

Audio Tours

We are currently in talks with our digital content teams to look at the possibility of having some kind of audio tour available at the castle. This would be in the form of a scanable QR code which would take you to an online audio tour via Bloomberg Connects, which we have successfully used at various English Heritage sites across the country.

Stargazing Event for local children

Later in 2026 or early in 2027, we will be hosting an evening stargazing event, as part of our Norman Night Skys programme. Groups of children will be invited to take part in a workshop led by a local Astronomy Group, who will focus on Halley's Comet which appears in the Bayeux tapestry.

