



Gloucester History Festival

17th-19th April 2026



gloucesterhistoryfestival.co.uk



RICHMOND
VILLAGES

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Welcome to the Spring Weekend 2026

This Spring I can't wait to welcome you back to Blackfriars Priory, to gather within its ancient walls with Britain's finest historians ready to debate and reflect on the past and where we stand today. Our 2026 theme, Power and Protest, invites us to journey across centuries hearing voices past and present, meeting those who have held authority and those who've challenged it, those who shaped events from thrones and those who changed the world from the streets. And with our events now live-streamed, join us wherever you are!

Janina

Prof Janina Ramirez
History Festival President

Welcome to the Gloucester History Festival

Spring Weekend



This is going to be a very special year for the Festival. In Spring we explore the stories beneath our feet here in Gloucestershire while reaching far beyond, uncovering extraordinary people and pivotal moments that shape our world. We'll be back in September with one of our biggest Autumn Festivals yet, bringing history to the heart of Gloucester. And this year we want more young people than ever to enjoy our free ticket scheme. Visit the website to find out more. So do book now for Spring and save the dates for this year's Autumn Festival from 5th to 20th September.

Andrew

Andrew Pitt
Chair of the Gloucester History Trust

gloucesterhistoryfestival.co.uk

Visiting the Festival



Join Britain's leading historians and speakers for a feast of compelling events in the magical medieval setting of Blackfriars Priory.

Both Livestream and in-person tickets available. Enjoy the Festival from wherever you are.

Mary Beard



Edward Stourton



Bendor Grosvenor



Pam Ayres



How to Book

Book tickets: gloucesterhistoryfestival.co.uk

Book by phone: 07834 406228

Tickets available in person at:

Museum of Gloucester, Brunswick Road, Gloucester. Wednesday to Saturday 10am-4pm (closed Sunday-Tuesday).

During the festival on site at Blackfriars Priory 9.30am-8pm daily.

Festival Venue: Blackfriars Priory, Ladybellegate St, Gloucester GL1 2HN.

Book signings: take place at the Waterstones Festival Bookshop after each event.



Livestream Programme

Britain's top historians are livestreamed from the Priory all weekend. Viewing links are sent out two days before each event and you can view again until 25 May. All livestream tickets: £7.

More at: gloucesterhistoryfestival.co.uk/digital

Festival Passes

Grab one of our great value Festival Passes. They always sell out quickly!

Spring Festival Pass

£160 offers in person entry to all 18 Main Hall events, Festival lanyard and the same reserved seat throughout saving 20%.

Digital Festival Pass

£50 allows access to three days of livestream events. Watch again until 25 May.

Gloucester & The 1926 General Strike

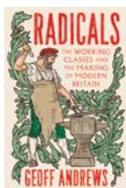
Tony Conder 10-11am £10 / £7 Livestreamed



Gloucester stood at the crossroads of industry and coalfield, with links both to the Forest of Dean and the national drama of 1926. Often characterised as a Communist plot, the General Strike was seen as a missed opportunity by the left. The Labour Party and TUC largely ignored it or retreated from it as soon as possible. The King was delighted no one was shot and Joseph Stalin used it to consolidate his position in the politburo. Little of this concerned Gloucester strikers, who took it as a comradely adventure. Leading historian **Tony Conder** explores the strike in Gloucester alongside both the national background, and the more bitter miners' strike in the Forest of Dean.

Radicals: Chartists, Suffragettes and Strikes

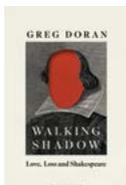
Geoff Andrews 12-1pm £10 / £7 Livestreamed



Acclaimed historian **Geoff Andrews'** new book *Radicals* is a vivid and passionate journey through working class protest and struggle. He explores the Chartists and Peterloo, the bold experiment at Snigs End Chartist Colony, north of Gloucester, the courage of the Suffragettes, the hardships of the Jarrow March and the struggles of the Tolpuddle Martyrs. Join him for a fascinating exploration of dissent that shaped modern Britain and which still resonates today.

Greg Doran

Love, Loss and Shakespeare 2-3pm £10 / £7 Livestreamed



A globe-spanning detective story and a love letter in one, award-winning theatre director **Greg Doran** talks about his memoir, following his electrifying hunt for Shakespeare's surviving First Folios, from great libraries to hidden collections, piecing together the real, historical man behind the legend. Alongside a moving portrait of life with Antony Sher and their unforgettable work at the Royal Shakespeare Company, it is a gripping tale of passion, history and theatre. Chaired by **Vernon Harwood**.

'Deeply Enjoyable.' (Dame Harriet Walter).



Edward Stourton

The Dark History of Trump's America 4-5pm £12 / £7 Livestreamed



Is Trump a shocking aberration or the product of a long, turbulent American tradition? With the current conflict in the Middle East, BBC broadcaster and former Today programme presenter **Edward Stourton** delivers a gripping re-examination of President Trump and the forces that shaped him. With forensic insight and masterful storytelling, he traces the deep currents of power, protest and populism in US history, revealing how the past continues to shape America's present moment. Chaired by History Extra's **Dave Musgrove**.

In partnership with History Extra.

Pam Ayres

Doggedly Onward 6-7pm £12 / £7 Livestreamed



National treasure and Britain's best-loved poet **Pam Ayres** brings her trademark wit and warmth to a life well lived. From stories of a rural Oxfordshire childhood to Royal Command performances, her heart remains in the Cotswolds countryside - muddy lanes, loyal dogs and village life. By turns hilarious and deeply touching, her reflections on family, fame and fortitude create a vivid social history of modern Britain, resilient, eccentric and full of laughter. In conversation with fellow Cotswold-lover **Mark Cummings**.

Waldy & Bendy's Adventures in Art: The English Civil War

Bendor Grosvenor & Waldemar Januszczak 8-9pm £12 / £7 Livestreamed

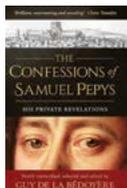


Bendor Grosvenor, top art historian and star of BBC4's Britain's Lost Masterpieces and Fake or Fortune? joins **Waldemar Januszczak** for a dazzling evening of Art Adventures. Expect great masterpieces under the microscope, bold opinions and brilliant storytelling as they look in depth at the artists of the English Civil War. Beautifully illustrated and gloriously entertaining, this is art history at its liveliest as Bendy and Waldy lock swords in a special live recording of Britain's favourite art podcast.



The Confessions of Samuel Pepys

Guy de la Bédoyère 10-11am £10 / £7 Livestreamed



We may think we know Samuel Pepys as Restoration England's most celebrated chronicler, living through the Plague and the Great Fire of London. But the truth is far darker. In a revealing and sometimes shocking new transcription of Pepys' coded diary, bestselling historian **Guy de la Bédoyère** uncovers passages long obscured or omitted in earlier editions, revealing Pepys' assaults on women and the ways in which he exploited his position and power. He discusses Samuel Pepys in the light of these discoveries.

This event is suitable for adults only.

The Battle of the Imjin River: 75 Years On

Robert Dixon, James Daniel & Nicola Nash 12-1pm £12 / £7 Livestreamed



This April marks 75 years since the battle that became a defining moment in the Korean War. Outnumbered by Chinese forces, the 1st Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment held the line buying vital time for UN troops. Many were killed or captured, enduring harsh captivity in Chinese POW camps.

Robert Dixon, former Commanding Officer of the

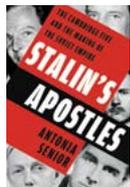


Glosters, Brigadier **James Daniel** from the UK's Strategic Command and top 'battlefield detective' **Nicola Nash** explore the battle, the mission to identify the fallen and whether, with the current state of the Army, we could commit such an expeditionary force today?

Chaired by **Vernon Harwood**.

The Cambridge Five: Stalin's Apostles

Antonia Senior 2-3pm £12 / £7 Livestreamed



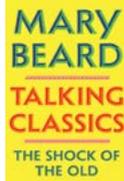
This year marks the 75th anniversary of the 1951 defection to Moscow of Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean, the moment that first exposed the Cambridge spy ring and sent shockwaves through the Cold War world. In *Stalin's Apostles*, **Antonia Senior** revisits the infamous Cambridge Five, including Kim Philby and Anthony Blunt,

revealing new facts, showing how their betrayal reshaped global politics and offering urgent lessons for understanding Russia's complex relationship with the West today.



Mary Beard

Talking Classics: The Shock of the Old 4-5pm £15 / £7 Livestreamed



What's exciting about a piece of bread 4,000 years old? Or some pots of paint abandoned in the eruption at Pompeii? One of Britain's best loved historians and presenters **Mary Beard** invites us to rediscover the ancient world in Talking Classics: The Shock of the Old, where surprising connections leap from ancient to modern. With lively stories, curious facts and a lifetime of wisdom, she shows why the art, literature and lives of Greece and Rome still matter to our world today. Join her for an irresistible and hugely entertaining celebration of the ancient world. Chaired by **Janina Ramirez**.

Cleopatra: Life & Legend

Lucy Hughes-Hallett 6-7pm £10 / £7 Livestreamed



In this compelling talk, top historian **Lucy Hughes-Hallett** returns to the real woman behind the legend. Cleopatra, last ruler of the Ptolemaic dynasty, forged alliances with Caesar and Mark Antony, defended Egypt's independence and ruled as a formidable, multilingual monarch amid Roman expansion. From Chaucer and Shakespeare to Elizabeth Taylor, discover how she became one of history's most powerful and enduring icons. Introduced by **Janina Ramirez**.

Great Gloucestershire Women

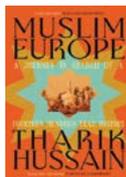
Janina Ramirez, Mark Cummings & Helen Timlin 8-9pm £10 / £7 Livestreamed



From warrior queens to literary legends, reformers to record-breakers, discover the women who shaped Gloucestershire and helped change the world. From Anglo-Saxon warrior Queen Æthelflæd, ruling from Gloucester, to Beatrix Potter, inspired to write The Tailor of Gloucester, from suffragette pioneer Dorothea Beale to national treasure Jilly Cooper, our panel tonight debates their lives and legacies. Join historians **Janina Ramirez, Mark Cummings** and **Helen Timlin** to hear about their Gloucestershire heroines and then cast your vote! Chaired by **Jo Durrant**.

Muslim Europe: In Search Of A 1400 Year History

Tharik Hussain 10-11am £10 / £7 Livestreamed



Join prize-winning historian **Tharik Hussain** for a revelatory journey across a continent as he uncovers Islam's deep European roots, from the splendour of Spain's Alhambra to Cyprus' forgotten Sufi temples and the cultural brilliance of Muslim Spain. Far from a sideshow, Muslim civilisation helped shape Europe's art, science and medicine for over a millennium and in his beautifully illustrated talk he 'uncovers a world of which few are fully aware' (Colin Thubron).

'This is a book I've been longing for someone to write and Hussain is the man to write it.' William Dalrymple

Revealing the Real King Offa

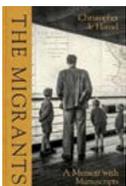
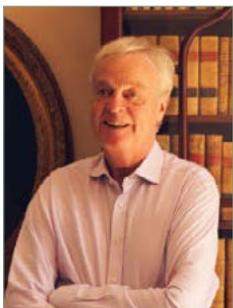
Rory Naismith 12-1pm £10 / £7 Livestreamed



Before King Alfred and the dream of a united Anglo-Saxon kingdom, there was Offa. Best remembered as the builder of Offa's Dyke, he was far more than a frontier king. Ruling Mercia from 757 to 796, Offa dominated southern Britain, strengthened his realm and reshaped kingship itself. In a compelling new talk, top Cambridge historian **Rory Naismith** reveals an ambitious, image-conscious ruler who changed the course of English history.

Christopher de Hamel

Meetings with Remarkable Manuscripts 2-3pm £10 / £7 Livestreamed



Christopher de Hamel, one of the world's best-known manuscript lovers, invites us into the candlelit world of the Book of Kells, the St Cuthbert Gospel and Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, bringing history's greatest manuscripts thrillingly to life. Intriguing and enthralling, he reveals these treasures as living witnesses to faith and ambition. In his new memoir, *The Migrants: A Memoir With Manuscripts*, he reflects on a lifetime's journey through books, borders and belonging.



Medieval Queens at War

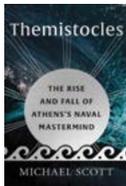
Alison Weir 4-5pm £12 / £7 Livestreamed



Alison Weir brings her acclaimed England's Medieval Queens series to a riveting close with *Queens at War*, weaving the lives of five fifteenth-century queens into the tumult of the Hundred Years' War and the Wars of the Roses. Expect vivid storytelling, meticulous research, and captivating portraits of Joan of Navarre, Katherine of Valois, Margaret of Anjou, Elizabeth Woodville and Anne Neville as they navigate love, loss and power in perilous times. Chaired by **Jo Durrant**.

The Rise & Fall of Athen's Greatest Star

Michael Scott 6-7pm £10 / £7 Livestreamed



The ancient Athenian statesman and naval commander Themistocles was called 'the most illustrious Greek of his time'. In a dizzying rise to power he masterminded victory over Persia at Salamis, helping to preserve Greek freedom, yet his life was a rollercoaster of dazzling brilliance and catastrophic misjudgement. In this electrifying talk, top historian **Michael Scott**, presenter of BBC1's *Rome's Invisible City*, uncovers the drama of his rise and fall and offers a vivid insight into the turbulent world of ancient Athens.

The Tragic Tale of the Berkeley Pioneers

Mark Horton 8-9pm £10 / £7 Livestreamed



Top archaeologist and BBC Coast presenter **Mark Horton** tells the tragic story of the 38 settlers from Gloucestershire's Berkeley Vale who sailed to America to found a colony on the James River. They're credited with the very first American thanksgiving, but by 1622, the surviving 22 settlers were attacked and murdered and the colony destroyed. Over 400 years later Mark returned to Virginia and used archaeology to locate the original site. He shares their fascinating story and reveals new discoveries about their tragic fate.



Follow the signs to the Scriptorium, part of Britain's oldest surviving library building. Enjoy free events, relax with a coffee and choose a book from the Little Library. Open 9am - 8pm.

Forest of Dean Miners: The General Strike John Bassett 1.15-1.45pm / Free

In this special performance from Spaniel in the Works theatre company, meet two Forest of Dean miners who have both taken part in the General Strike of 1926. Harry Jackson is a miner who stayed out in the hope of a decent settlement whilst Davey Wilkes is a strike breaker who returned early. Join them to hear the reasons behind the General Strike, the hardships incurred and two views about 'the best thing to do'.

Breaking Bread: How Baking Shaped Our World David Wright 2.30-4pm £12



Award-winning third-generation baker **David Wright** traces the story of bread from the first cultivated grains of the Fertile Crescent in c.8000 BC to the rise of industrial sliced loaves in the 1960s and today's sourdough revival. What role did bread play in ancient Egypt and Rome, the Great Fire of London, the Peterloo Massacre or conflicts today in Ukraine and Gaza? And what does the future hold for the humble loaf?

The talk is followed by an artisan bread and pastry tasting in the scriptorium from 3.30-4pm.

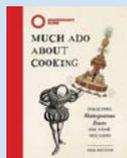
Life Lessons from History Janina Ramirez & Dave Musgrove 5.15pm-5.55pm / Free

Join us for a live History Extra podcast recording as **Janina Ramirez** and **David Musgrove** explore the power of history to change lives.

Del: Becoming A Voice for Young People Delroy Ellis 7.15-8pm / Free



Join youth worker and campaigner **Delroy Ellis** as he discusses his powerful new memoir, *Del*, charting his journey from adversity to leadership. It is a story of resilience and belonging and of one man's determination to transform opportunities for young people in Gloucester and beyond.



Lunch with Shakespeare Much Ado About Cooking! Sam Bilton

1-2.30pm £20 inc buffet lunch

Step into Shakespeare's world through taste. Leading food historian

Sam Bilton has worked with Shakespeare's Globe Theatre to discover what the Bard really ate and the dishes, from banquet pies to sweet tarts, that graced his plays. Join her to savour history yourself at our delicious Shakespearean lunch which may include: salmon pasties, beef chewits, Elizabethan sticky gingerbread and Tudor shortbread!

Catherine Drew: The Forest Poet 3.15-3.45pm Free

Born in 1784, poet Catherine Drew offers a remarkable window onto the Forest of Dean in an age of industrial change. Through her verse we glimpse Cinderford's growth, working-class lives and the cost to landscape and tradition. Dean Heritage Centre's **Roger Deeks** and **Jason Griffiths** join **Jo Durrant** to explore Catherine Drew's Forest world.

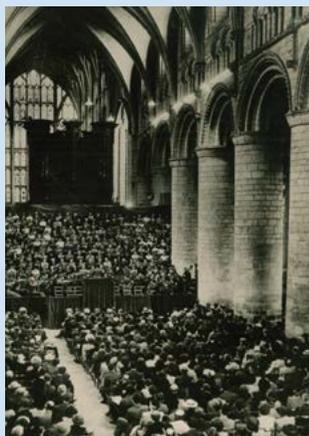


The Three Choirs Festival in Gloucester

Adrian Partington, Simon Carpenter & David Francis 5.30-6.15pm
Free but ticketed

Discover the remarkable history of the Three Choirs Festival, the world's oldest music festival, founded in Gloucester in 1715. Here, giants such as Ralph

Vaughan Williams premiered *Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis* in 1910 before a packed cathedral nave that included Edward Elgar, while young Ivor Gurney and Herbert Howells looked on. From the first BBC live broadcasts in 1925 to moments of wartime uncertainty, 2026 Artistic Director **Adrian Partington**, archivist **Simon Carpenter** and Chief Executive **David Francis** reveal triumph, turbulence and tenacity across three centuries of Festivals in Gloucester.





'Lunatics, Cripples & Incurables' Jemma Fowkes 11.15-11.45am / Free

Disability was so often hidden, obscured or misunderstood in the past. Today we uncover the lives of individuals living with disability, find out about the challenges they faced and on a lighter note, ask why the Gloucestershire Archives has a photograph of a dog playing Bingo... This talk uses historic language and covers upsetting themes.

Gloucestershire's Blue Plaques Andrew Meller 1.15-1.45pm Free

From the inventor of the vacuum cleaner to the inspiration for Long John Silver, join historian **Andy Meller** to hear the tales of some of the extraordinary people awarded that coveted blue plaque.

Tudor Music with Bygonz 3.15-3.45pm Free

Enjoy Tudor music with Rob and Gillian Guest, and hear about the history of the instruments that create it.



Most events are free. Just drop in and let history surprise you!

The Festival Shop



Our official ceramic mugs and stylish tote bags feature the Festival logo and timeless design, perfect for everyday use or thoughtful gifts. Every purchase helps fund our free tickets for schools scheme, keeping history accessible and inspiring for the next generation of curious minds.

Get them now by post as you book your tickets, or at the Blackfriars Box Office in April.



Take a piece of Gloucester History Festival home with you!



Festival Tote Bag £11

Festival Mug £11

Discover the magic of Blackfriars Priory

Relax in the Courtyard Cafe & the Medieval Scriptorium

Open 9am - 8pm daily

The pop-up café returns to the courtyard, serving delicious breakfasts,

lunches and suppers with tea, coffee and irresistible cakes.

Step into the Priory's ancient scriptorium for free talks, music and storytelling in Britain's oldest surviving library.





Gloucester History Festival

Become a Member

Enjoy a special early booking period, advance programme information and join President Janina Ramirez at the annual Friends Breakfast.

Donation: £30

Become a Patron

Choose your seats first with an exclusive early booking telephone hotline, enjoy the Patron's gathering,

VIP access to the Festival Writers' Room and a whole host of special benefits. **Donation: £500**

Become a Sponsor

Support our mission by joining our growing number of Festival sponsors, large and small, who enjoy a range of bespoke benefits tailored to their requirements.

Where To Find Us



Main Festival Venue

Blackfriars Priory, Ladybellegate Street, Gloucester GL1 2HN

Parking 24 hour parking is immediately opposite Blackfriars Priory. The Longsmith Street Car Park is 2 minutes walk away. Gloucester Docks Car Parks are 10 minutes by foot

Train and Bus Blackfriars Priory is 10 minutes walk from Gloucester bus station and Gloucester railway station through the historic city centre and Gate Streets.



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Thank you



Thank you to everyone who has helped make the Spring Weekend a success. Particular thanks to Andrew Pitt whose especially generous financial and strategic support has again been integral to our success. And our warmest thanks to our Festival Founder and former Chair Richard Graham.

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We acknowledge all of our Patrons ahead of each Blackfriars Talk and also on our website.



Gloucester History Festival

SATURDAY 5 – SUNDAY 20 SEPTEMBER 2026

Britain's favourite historians and broadcasters return to the historic heart of Gloucester for our most exciting programme yet. Booking opens in July.



gloucesterhistoryfestival.co.uk