

THE SANDWICH MEDIEVAL TRUST



ANNUAL REPORT 2025

THE SANDWICH MEDIEVAL TRUST

Registered Charity Number 1178864

Patron: Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports, Admiral Sir George Zambellas GCB DSC DL

TRUSTEES: Dave Batchelor, Julia Baxter, Paul Damon, Steve Laslett, Bob Martin, Lynne O'Donoghue. Website: www.sandwichmedieval.org

The Sandwich Medieval Trust was registered as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) in June 2018 with the stated aim: *"To advance education for the public benefit on matters to do with the late medieval period, i.e., approx. 1330 to 1480, with a special focus on the heritage of Sandwich Town, Kent, in particular but not exclusively by providing a maritime and land-based crafts living museum"*.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Trust opened the Medieval Centre as a living history project in 2019. Since that time, it has been consistently successful and popular, making a vital contribution to the visitor experience in Sandwich.

Its popularity is evidenced by impressive visitor numbers and by the positive feedback left, with many comments such as:

"An absolute hidden gem. Will definitely come back again."

"The staff are very knowledgeable and fun to talk to."

"Definitely recommend if you are visiting Sandwich."

"An unexpected delight."

The success of the Centre as a visitor attraction and learning centre is entirely due to the continuing hard work and enthusiasm of our volunteers who give their time freely and keep the Centre open all year round.

The Centre is home to an ambitious project – we are currently creating a replica medieval ship, a full-sized cog called the *Nicholas*. The cog is a single-masted, square sailed ship, typical of the period. Surprisingly there is no replica anywhere in the UK. We are part way through this project. The following section of this report updates the progress made this year and our plans to install the stern castle in 2026.

The *Nicholas* is proving to be an important element of the visitor experience. It allows us to teach many important aspects of medieval boat-making by showing visitors progress to date. On board they will see close up the woodworking and metal working involved in making the capstan and winch; the anchor and remedial work involved in caulking the decking planks.

Our volunteers demonstrate a wide range of medieval crafts and skills as outlined in the main section of this report and offer workshops all year round which are very popular. Our resident blacksmith is kept busy and repeat bookings from schools including from overseas are an increasing feature of our programme.

The section of this report covering our events programme summarises an increasing number of occasions when other reenactor groups join us and the public can engage hands-on in an increasingly wide range of activities. The events are well promoted through social media, with the event created on Facebook for Le Weekend reaching nearly 20,000 people in the months leading up to the event as reported in the main body of this report.

The events contribute significantly to our income. Together with donations from the public they generate sufficient income to cover core costs of the centre. The financial summary presented in this report shows income exceeding expenditure for the year, leaving the Trust in a solid position financially.

The outlook for the Trust and for the Centre in 2026 is positive, again due to the hard work and tremendous efforts of our reenactor trustees and volunteers.

Steve Laslett

Chair of the Board of Trustees



The Medieval Centre on Sandwich Quay is busy all year round

MARITIME



The Nicholas moored on the Quay

The presence of *the Nicholas* on its mooring at Sandwich Quay continues to generate a great deal of interest in the project and in our work in the Centre. The hull is an asset to the quay area and will contribute to the development of the historic maritime ambience along the banks of the river Stour as envisaged by the Sandwich Heritage Harbour Group.

The main focus of our work during the past year has continued to be on *the Nicholas* project. The hull was laid up in a dry dock for essential repairs in Richborough for a period of eight months, returning to our mooring in mid-November 2024. From this point onwards, we have continued to carry out deck repairs, involving the replacement of the last remaining rotten/defective planks, caulking joints between planks where required and sealing with pitch. As part of this process, we have also replaced the last remaining rotten/defective deck beams. We have decided to finish the whole deck area with a coat of pitch, which would have been appropriate in medieval times. One of our younger volunteers, who has assisted us on a regular basis, will be moving on, in mid-January 2026, to attend a carpentry course.



Deck repairs have been ongoing throughout the year

All the above work has been carried out in readiness for the arrival of the stern castle oak framework. Our original plan had been to fabricate the framework ourselves but the size, 5 M width, meant that this could not be carried out in the Medieval Centre and the need to lay the whole structure out on a level area meant that this could not be carried out onboard the *Nicholas*. Accordingly, we have placed an order for this work which will start in January 2026 and we hope to have the structure installed on the hull towards the end of February this year.



Work on the stern castle has already begun

Our plan, from this point onwards, will be to install larch deck and side planking, cut using hand tools in the Medieval Centre. The stern castle will be decorated with painted shields which will also be fabricated in the centre.

We have installed the windlass and the capstan at deck level. Our blacksmith has continued the fabrication of a second anchor on the forge in the Centre and hopes to be able to forge-weld the anchor arms to the shank which will demonstrate the heating capabilities of a medieval forge.

The fabric cover installed on a temporary timber framework to protect the deck and hull from inclement weather continues to be a great success; it provides sufficient headroom for us to be able to work underneath it in all weathers thus increasing our productivity during the Winter and Spring months. We will continue to invite members of the public on board on Saturdays and Sundays when the weather is good, using our gangplank, to view our progress.

Our other aim during 2026 will be to modify the internal hull area to allow visitors to sample medieval life below deck. In time, we also aim to erect a section of mast in order that we can demonstrate how the rigging would have been configured and how the sail would have been raised and lowered using the windlass.

Paul Damon



SCHOOLS AND WORKSHOPS



Have-a-Go Calligraphy classes

Workshops took place throughout the year including Blacksmithing (continuing throughout some of the winter months), Bookbinding, Calligraphy, Illumination, Wheat Weaving, Circular Netting, Mead Making and Tablet Weaving. There still remains a lot of interest for workshops for future dates. We hope to have an additional workshop on Embroidery, to add to our list for next year, which will be tutored by one of our dedicated and skilled volunteers.

Have-a-go crafts including Calligraphy and Wheat Weaving ran very well during the Archery & Crafts weekend in July again this year with many children and adults alike enjoying themselves whilst gaining interest in the workshops offered at the Centre. The calligraphy tables were full both days with all ages, including those that have never tried but always wanted to and others that had enjoyed this craft as a child and now were delighted to have another opportunity. Quills were used to try writing a medieval book by hand whilst learning a little of the work of the scribes, aided by reproduction examples and material on display. Visitors were very excited to complete a corn dolly with the Wheat Weaver, who patiently led them through the various stages of making a plait and some visitors stayed for the next opportunity of completing a heart favour.



Painting Eggs for Easter

School Visits

Two returning schools from France visited the Centre twice in May for hands-on crafts in Calligraphy and Wheat Weaving, Medieval Board Games, trying on Armour and Blacksmith and Baking demonstrations.

The schools and students thoroughly enjoyed themselves, particularly learning about medieval life and culture in another language and have booked for 2026 visits already.

Children from St. Faith's School in Ash also visited in May for a couple of hours of demonstrations of our crafts and skills with 31 children.

We welcomed a small group of school children from Beech Grove School for an hour of demonstrations in November. They tried on armour and handled some weapons and arrived with many questions and remained very enthusiastic throughout which was very enjoyable for the volunteers.



The Centre welcomes all age groups to its workshops



Group Visits

We welcomed many booked groups throughout the year. One of these was a group of 15 adults, visiting from Lille in France. They were very happy with demonstrations by our Blacksmith, trying on armour, and we kept them informed about the relevant medieval battles and weaponry.

A small group, representing the Travel and Trade industry, linked to DDC and the White Cliffs project, visited and were welcomed in October. They were informed of our ongoing work and projects and what we offer visitors including the booked visits with demonstrations and hands-on experiences. They were generally impressed and keen to arrange future booked visits.

Julia Baxter



EVENTS



Medieval summer fun outdoors grows in popularity – Le Weekend still the biggest event of the year

We have seen record number of visitors on event weekends as well as half-terms and school holidays with average visitor number throughout the summer on non-event days around 100-120 per day. On event days the Centre has welcomed between 600 – 800 plus per day.

Being able to work closer with many local groups and organisations such as Bringing Alive Sandwich Heritage (BASH) Folk Lore Kent, Sandwich HOD organisers & Sandwich Town Council has allowed us to build on and deliver some of the best events Sandwich has seen, undoubtably boosting tourism both to Sandwich Town and the local area.

Hoodening and Wassail: This event grows in popularity every year and has become one of the most popular afternoon/evening events, starting the year off by attracting over 150 visitors to join in the wassail and hoodening.

Medieval Easter: Easter is celebrated at the Centre with themed crafts and activities for all to enjoy.

Mummers and Music for St George: This was a memorable April afternoon of medieval music by Rough Musicke and mumming performance by Trudgepig Folk Theatre which was very well attended and enjoyed by a huge crowd in the Centre.

Le Weekend: This is the biggest event of the year with record numbers of reenactor groups attending with living history, combat, music and theatre displays. This event attracts huge numbers of visitors to Sandwich Quay Green and the Centre which this year included a Saturday evening music session with medieval and folk musicians playing all evening in the tavern tent creating an incredible atmosphere.

Folk and Ale Tavern Evenings: For two evenings of the Sandwich Folk and Ale Festival in July, the Centre was turned into a medieval tavern with music by Rough Musicke and Ravenhymn entertaining a packed audience.

Archery on the Green & Have-a-Go Weekend: This was another very well attended event on the Quay Green with visitors able to have a go at a huge range of crafts including archery, axe throwing, calligraphy etc.

Toni Mount Book Launch: At the same weekend Toni Mount, who has been supporting the Trust for many years launched her latest book at the Centre.

Canterbury Gaming Convention: Volunteers from the Centre took some of our games tables to Canterbury to represent the Trust for a new event with lots of interest shown in the Trust and gaining some potential new volunteers.

Betteshanger Medieval Festival: This was yet another new event working in conjunction with Betteshanger Park to deliver a fantastic medieval experience in the forest school and surrounding area – a very special visitor attraction.

Heritage Open Days: ‘Thomas Becket arrives in Sandwich’. Working in conjunction with Sandwich HOD organisers, we called on some of our reenactor knights to recreate the arrival of Thomas Becket to Sandwich with narrated story and information.

We also did bloomery furnace and bronze casting – a brilliant 4-day experiment comprising building and firing our own bloomery furnace with some success. We will be recreating the experiment again when we can.

Medieval Christmas Market: Another new event with new traders joining us for a weekend in early December seeing over 400 visitors.

Medieval Christmas Feast Demonstrations: We finished off the year with a medieval party and a feast fit for a king. Many reenactors from local groups joined us for a huge medieval feast created by our resident food historians and cooks.

PHOTO GALLERY



Hoodening and Wassailing in a packed Centre





Rough Musicke has had a busy year in the Centre



George and the Dragon, Medieval Style



Betteshanger Medieval Festival



Folk and Ale Evenings at the Centre Tavern



Coin Striking with Frodi the Moneyer



A Medieval Christmas Feast fit for a King



Provided at the Centre



Enjoyed by the whole team.



Try-on armour – a 2025 addition

Among many new additions to the Centre was a full suit of reenactment armour for the public to handle and try on. This has been a great asset with visitors coming specially just to try it on.

We have also installed a contactless donation machine in the Centre allowing visitors to make card donations which has been a great success.

Plans are already well underway for a host of events and workshops for 2026 which promises to be another bumper year.



Trustees Julia Baxter and Bob Martin promoting the Trust at a Sandwich Event



Sir Roger Gale MP with Trustees and Visitors

(l-r) Paul Damon(trustee), Sue Chandler (KCC Cllr), Steve Laslett (Chair), Sir Roger Gale MP, Bob Martin (trustee), Deidre Wells (CEO, Visit Kent)

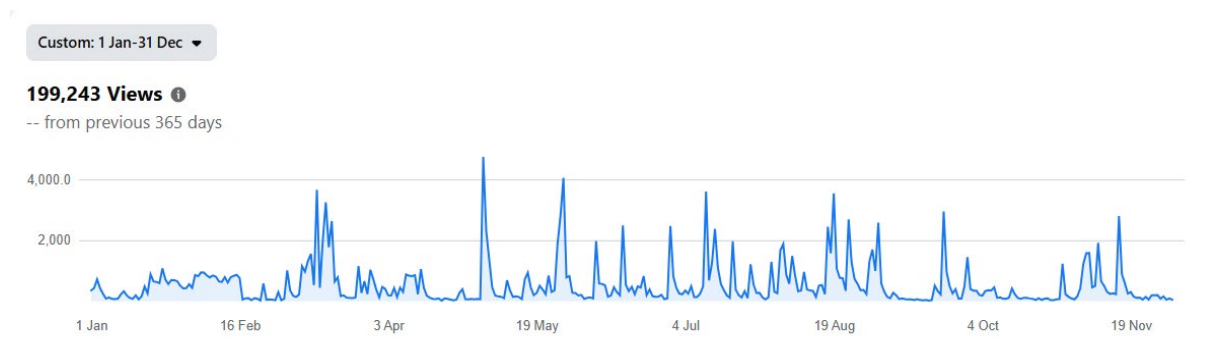
During English Tourism Week at the end of March 2025, local MP Sir Roger Gale, along with KCC Sue Chandler and the CEO of Visit Kent, Deidre Wells, paid a visit to the Centre. This is a seriously impressive attraction,” Sir Roger remarked, Explaining that tourism is worth a staggering £4 billion to Kent’s economy and accounts for over 77,000 jobs, Deidre Wells described the Centre as “a jewel in Kent’s tourism crown”. The visitors were particularly impressed with the enthusiasm, dedication and hard work of the volunteers without which, Sir Roger stressed, such an enterprise just simply would not happen. “It was also particularly encouraging to note that so many school children are taking part, even from overseas such as France and Spain,” Deidre Wells added.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social Media Stats

Facebook and Instagram are proving to be some of the most important tools for communicating with our audience, allowing us to promote events well in advance and share content with a huge audience. The event created on Facebook for Le Weekend reached nearly 20,000 people in the months leading up to the event.

The graph below shows the number of interactions with our Facebook page over the last year showing nearly 200,000 page views.



We have also seen a steady increase in followers to our Facebook page reaching nearly 2,500 followers in total.

Instagram has also seen a steady increase in followers taking our total to over 1,200 as seen in the graph below.



Dave Batchelor

FINANCIAL REPORT



Blacksmith's workshops are given all year by our resident blacksmith, Steve Batchelor.

The Trust received one grant in the Financial Year ending November 31st 2025 – £1000 from the Royal St George's Golf Club via the Kent Community Fund for which we are most grateful. Grants in previous years have been essential to fund the *Nicholas* reconstruction boat project but were not needed this year due to modest expenditure.

The most significant sources of income continue to be donations from the public (£5,637) and income earned by Trustees and volunteers at events (£5,803). Entrance to the Centre is free. Donations from the visiting public are encouraged but entirely optional. It is reassuring to see that income from donations exceeds the cost of insurance (£4,089) which is a good financial starting point each financial year.

The Trustees and volunteers put a great amount of time into annual events such as Le Weekend in June when the Quay Green is packed with colourful tents from visiting reenactors. It is one of the biggest medieval reenactor gatherings in Southern England and makes a most useful contribution to net income, a testimony to the overall good management by the organising team.

Volunteers engage in running workshops, including for visiting overseas students, which raised £2,986. Special thanks must go once again to our resident blacksmith, Steve Batchelor, who gives his time freely to deliver a steady stream of workshops all year round.

With a useful one-off making banners for other Sandwich-based organisations, income rose from £15,972 to £18,825 year on year.

Expenditure was down from £30,116 to £16,113. This was mostly because the expensive project to construct the cog the *Nicholas* is characterised by alternating high spend and low spend years. The previous year was high spend, due to much higher than anticipated dry dock costs to facilitate repairs. That was not needed this year. Next year will see another high spend year following a decision to commission the building of the eagerly anticipated castles by an external company. Not only will this speed up the project, but the Trust has become a victim of its own success. The workshop space originally earmarked for woodworking has been taken up by a range of other activities. These not only utilise the space, but they also bring visitors into that area, making large scale working impracticable.

Apart from insurance and the *Nicholas* project the Trust has modest expenditures. We have no salaries or wages and as always are indebted to our enthusiastic team of volunteers.

The funds available for next year start at £17,658. This is considered sufficient to continue working from a solid financial base but further grants will be sought to help fund further stages of the *Nicholas* project.

Steve Laslett
Treasurer



The Sandwich Medieval Trust

Summary Accounts 2025

Income

Grants

Kent Community Fund

1000.00

1000

1000.00

1000.00

Events

Including Sandwich Salutes the 40s,
Le Weekend, Folk & Ale, Festival,
Betteshanger Medieval Fair

5803.53

6812.87

Donations from BASH

0.00

1000.00

Donations from the public box

5637.02

4139.66

Sales after costs

107.04

217.89

Workshops (inc French students)

2986.87

1556.79

Heritage Visits

0.00

300.00

DDC Lotto

140.00

119.50

St Mary's Concerts Support.

963.88

825.44

Misc and Banners

2187.09

0.00

Total Income

18825.43

15972.15

Expenditure

(Net of VAT)

Web

195.00

165.00

Boat and Tools

6457.60

21038.71

Building Costs

27.06

0.00

Learning Centre

0.00

49.17

Equipment Total

1814.15

2245.12

Consumables

3019.79

1821.56

Professional Services

45.00

186.87

Insurance

4089.48

3818.83

AGM & Miscellaneous

195.00

316.45

Publicity

270.00

475.00

Total Expenditure

16113.09

30116.71

Net improvement

2712.34

-14144.56

Adjusted Balance brought forward

14946.18

29090.74

Available Funds

17658.53

14946.18

Represented by Current Account

16466.95

14266.18

VAT Account

1191.58

680.00