

Witham Friary timeline

293	Hoard of 52,503 Roman coins buried
680	Saxon named Witta settles in the area (maybe...)
1086	Domesday Book records 21 households in Witham which lies at the heart of Selwood Forest, a royal hunting ground.
1179	Hugh from Chartreuse becomes prior and significantly develops the priory, about one mile from the present site of the village where the lay brothers reside.
1300	Dovecot built.
1348	The Black Death devastates the local population.
1539	Witham Priory dissolved. Buildings and land pass to Ralph Hopton, a servant of Thomas Cromwell.
1638	Witham passes to a distant descendant, another Ralph Hopton
1642	Hopton sides with Charles I in the Civil War and becomes a leading Royalist general, the 'King's man in the West'.
1672	Witham passes to the Wyndham family.
1717	Witham house remodeled
1762	Witham acquired by Alderman William Beckford. Work starts on a new mansion but is abandoned in 1771.
1771	First recorded use of 'Friary', a corruption of 'frérie' or brotherhood.
Late 1700s	Friendly Society established. It still exists and is one of the oldest in the county.
1813	The Duke of Somerset acquires Witham
1830s-60s	School built 1838. Railway comes to Witham 1856. Seymour Arms built 1866. Pop. c600. Employment includes farming, railway workers, tile & brick makers, servants, cordwainers.
1914-45	11 local men die in WW1. Two die in WW2. GIs stationed locally.
1951-55	The Duke of Somerset sells properties in the village.
1960s	School closes in 1965 and became the village hall. Railway station closes 1966. The village has a Post Office, shop & petrol station.

Visit www.withamfriaryhistory.com for more information and a PowerPoint history of the village. Free short history leaflet also available in pub.

About Witham Friary History Society

The Witham Friary History Society was set up in 2011 to promote interest in the history of the village and the surrounding area. It is a small charity run by a group of trustees elected annually by its members.

Become a member

Membership of the society is free and we're always looking for new ideas for future programmes. Email at withamhistory@gmail.com us for an application form.

Trustee meetings 2025-2026

Oct 13 2025 Annual General Meeting
Jan 12 2026 Trustees' meeting
Apr 6 2026 Trustees' meeting
July 6 2026 Trustees' meeting

All trustee meetings start at 6pm in the Seymour Arms and members are very welcome to come along. We will email members if these dates change.

Trustees

Chair: Geoff Sheppard
Secretary: Roy Featherstone
Treasurer: Michael Gorman
Events: Chris Featherstone

Contact us

withamhistory@gmail.com

Website

www.withamfriaryhistory.com

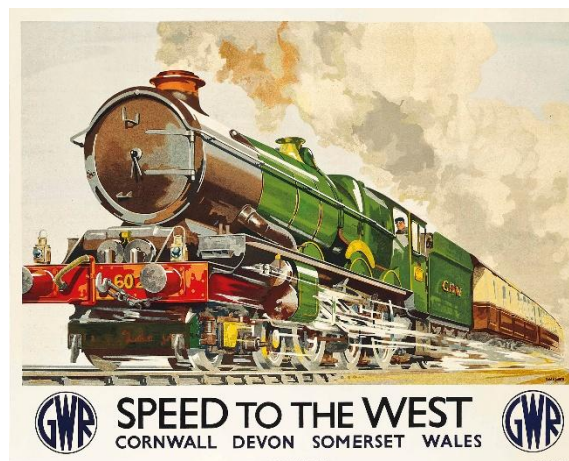
Find out more about Witham Friary

 Follow Witham Friary Village

Cover illustration: Charles Mayo, *Speed to the West*, 1939

Witham Friary History Society

Programme 2025-2026



Witham Friary and the surrounding area has a fascinating agricultural and industrial history, with links to Roman times, St Hugh of Lincoln, Henry II and Thomas Becket and the English Civil War.

Come along and enjoy free local history talks and join in our fundraising events.

Everyone welcome!

www.withamfriaryhistory.com

Thursday 25th September.
The life and times of a kenspeckle man:
Peter Forbes Lees 1898 – 1968
Ian Messider

Ian's talk covers both world wars and also events from the seventeenth century, the oil industry, central Scotland, social changes and the first aircraft and space flight. Village Hall 7.45pm.



Thursday 16th October
The history of Maiden Bradley
Celia Blay

Celia will talk about the early history of Maiden Bradley, which takes its name from the leper hospital for maidens founded in the 12th century, and about Margaret Bisset, daughter of the founder of the Priory. Village Hall 7.45pm.



Maiden Bradley church

Thursday 20th November
The Golden Age of Posters in Britain
Dr Graham Twemlow

Poster art in Britain during the 1920s and 1930s was a thriving industry enabled by enlightened clients such as Shell-Mex, the London Underground and the four railway companies. Graham is a decorative arts historian and will talk about poster artists of the time, including Tom Purvis, E. McKnight Kauffer, Paul Nash and Frank Newbould. Village Hall 7.45pm.

Friday 12th December
Christmas quiz

Our traditional annual evening of seasonal fun for everyone. Not at all serious! Village Hall 7.30pm. Entrance £3 per person. Raffle (donations welcome). Please bring your own refreshments.

Thursday 22nd January
Pictures out of darkness
David Heath

A welcome return of popular speaker. An intriguing story about Alice Seeley Harris, a missionary who lived for many years in Frome. Her photography and campaigning helped expose the atrocities in the Congo Free State run by the King of the Belgians, Leopold II. Village Hall 7.45pm.

Thursday 19th February
4000 years of plague
Mike & Marcia Gorman

What links skeletal remains found in a cave at Charterhouse Warren on the Mendips and a grainy photograph taken in India around 1900? Mike and Marcia will recount the history of plague over time and the extraordinary story of the search for a vaccine. Village Hall 7.45pm.



Flagellants scourging themselves, 1349

Friday 20th March
Bumper spring quiz

Put a spring in your step at our annual March quiz. Everyone welcome! Village Hall 7.30pm. Entrance £3 per person. Raffle (donations welcome). Please bring your own refreshments.



Brutal justice followed the 1685 rebellion

Thursday 23rd April
The Monmouth Rebellion
Gary Kearly

In the summer of 1685 Somerset found itself at the centre of the Duke of Monmouth's attempt to take the throne of England from his uncle James II. This illustrated talk by local historian and author Gary Kearley will lead the audience through the rebellion and its grizzly aftermath with particular emphasis on Somerset's involvement. Village Hall 7.45pm.

NB: All event details accurate at time of going to press but please check village noticeboard and Witham Friary Village page on Facebook nearer the time to confirm.