

Starting at the main entrance head down the path to the Village Green, the main hub of the museum and village life.

On the way you'll pass the Friends of the Museum shop in Maidenhead Pavilion, and Northolt Barn. Why not stop and take a look around?



Thame Vicarage Room

Before it came to COAM, people used Thame Vicarage, number 14 on the map, for many things. It was a place to hold meetings, have social events and eat cake! We have set it up as a Victorian schoolroom for our education programme.

When you have entered the building, look to your left. Here you will see an original Victorian blackboard.



Victorian School Blackboard

This mobile blackboard used to be in the Reading Room of the Chalfont St Giles Parish Church.

In 1880, the government passed a law that all children between the age of 5 and 10 had to go to school. The most important piece of equipment in the classroom was the blackboard. Lessons focused on reading, writing and arithmetic (maths).

Children would sit at iron-framed desks all facing the blackboard. For most lessons, the teacher would write on the board and the class would have to copy the work. Children would usually use slates to write on because these could be wiped clean and used again. Older children would write in a workbook, known as a copybook, using pens dipped in ink. Other lessons had the class chanting facts until they remembered them perfectly. Can you recite your 12 times table?



Head out of the building, turn left and walk past the lime tree on the Village Green.

Haddenham Cottage

Our next unmissable object is in Haddenham Cottage, number 16 on the map. This is the white two-storey home to your left as you leave Thame Vicarage.

Haddenham Cottage is special as it was made from a material called wychert. This building material can only be found in a small area around the village of Haddenham.



Toby Jug

In the front room of Haddenham Cottage, you will see a small window above a writing desk. On the sill sits a Toby Jug.

Staffordshire potters first made Toby Jugs, sometimes called a Fillpot or Philpot, in the 1760s.

Like this one, they are pottery jugs made to look like a seated person. He is usually a very happy looking man holding a mug of beer and a tobacco pipe. He is often wearing 18th Century clothes and a tricorn hat. On his back is a handle so you can easily pour the contents from the front lip of his hat.

The name Toby Jug has several possible origins. Some believe that they are named after Sir Toby Belch from Shakespeare's Twelfth Night. Others think they were inspired by a poem called The Brown Jug by Francis Fawkes published in 1761.

The poem tells the story of the drunkard Toby Fillpot who spent his days puffing on his pipe and drinking ale with friends. The poem is said to be inspired by Henry Elwes. He was a well-known drinker from Yorkshire in the 18th Century and locally known as Toby Fillpot.



Leave Haddenham Cottage through the kitchen door and rear garden. Head towards the small, red chapel, number 12 on the map.



Henton Mission Room

The entrance to the chapel is through a metal gate and down a short path lined with apricot coloured roses. These are known as Roald Dahl roses.

The chapel was a prefabricated building where locals could attend a service once a month. Inside the chapel, you will see a black painted harmonium. This is our next unmissable object.



Harmonium

Our harmonium is an American reed organ made by F. Estey & Co. of Brattleboro, Vermont. But how did it find its way here?

Jacob Estey founded The Estey Organ Company in 1852. Their organs quickly gained popularity across the world. In 1869, they were producing over 300 instruments a month. By 1889, the company were manufacturing 13,000 organs a year!

However, business declined in the 1950s as the new electric organs became more popular. Estey tried to produce their own but were unsuccessful. The company finally went out of business in the early 1960s.

Estey made many different types of organs, from small cottage organs to large instruments. Our organ is a chapel organ, designed for smaller spaces and venues. Perfect for Henton Chapel.

During their most successful years, Estey designed and sold special organs. For example, during WWII every US Army chaplain was issued with an Estey field organ. These were small, simply constructed, and painted battleship grey. They were designed to be folded up and stowed in the back of a jeep.



Heading back out the chapel gate, turn left towards Leagrave Cottages.



Leagrave Cottages

This building started life as a barn but the owner converted it into cottages in the late 1770s.

We've displayed these cottages throughout its time as a home, showing life in both the 18th and 20th Centuries.

Before you head around the front of the building, have a look at the first window on the path down the back. Here you will see a piece of glass with a circular pattern known as a roundel, which tells us all about how these windows were made.

Window Roundel

Did you know that all glass, including glass used in windows, used to be blown?

A glass blower used the crown method to make the glass in this window.

The glass was blown into a globe shape and then split in half leaving a bowl. The glass blower then reheated the bowl and spun it very quickly on a rod, called a pontil, until it became a flat circular piece of glass.

The glass on the outer edge would have been incredibly thin and used to make high quality products. The glass in the middle was much thicker and used to make inexpensive products. The pontil would have to be broken off; leaving the bullseye effect you can see on the window glass here.



Our next unmissable object is inside the 20th Century area of the cottages. You can enter this part of the cottage by heading around the front of the building and through the red door. You can see our next object on the wall above the dining table – three WWI medals mounted in a frame.



WWI Medals

These medals were awarded to Mr H. W. Hodgson for his service in WWI.

On the left is the British Victory Medal (1914-1918). Every Allied country had their own version of this medal. The ribbon represents all the colours of the Allied nations and the rainbow symbolises the calm after a storm.

To be awarded this medal, you had to have entered an area of active fighting, not just served overseas. This medal has actually been mounted backwards! The front shows the winged figure of Victory.

In the middle is the 1914-15 Star. These were issued to anyone who served overseas between 5th August 1914 and 31st December 1915. An estimated 2.4 million of these medals were issued. You could not receive just this medal, it was only ever issued alongside the other two medals.

On the right is the British War Medal (1914-1920). These were awarded to anyone who served in an active fighting area or overseas between 5th August 1914 and 11th November 1918. Around 6.4 million of these medals were issued, showing the true scale of the war. Later the medal included those who served in Russia, Siberia and other places up to 1920.

When the medals were issued in the 1920s, the Daily Mirror ran a comic strip with the characters Pip the dog, Squeak the penguin and Wilfred the rabbit. These names have been linked to the medals ever since. Interestingly, our medals have been mounted in the wrong order. They should be displayed and worn in this order: 1914-15 Star, British War Medal, and Victory Medal.



When leaving the cottages, head through the garden and turn right towards the green garage. Following this path will take you to our post-war prefab, number 8 on the map.



Amersham Prefab

These prefabs were the perfect homes for new families and those who might have lost their homes during the Blitz. We are lucky to know the family who moved here in 1948, the Brants.

Inside, the last room on the left belonged to the children Carol, Joan and Robert. We have furnished it with books and toys from the 1950s. It is in here you will find our next unmissable object, a handmade doll's house.

Handmade Doll's House

Arthur Flack made this doll's house in the 1950s for his daughter Jill. They lived only 3 miles from the Museum. Arthur used materials that were readily available in post-war Britain. The exterior walls are plywood which Arthur then glued sawdust to and painted to make the amazing pebbledash effect.



Jill continued to receive doll's house furniture as Christmas and birthday presents from friends and family for years. This explains the many styles and types you can see throughout the house. They range from plastic to wood and are often mismatched sizes.



The doll's house had been well loved over the years, passed from mother to daughter. When it came to COAM it needed a little TLC.

Read Jonathan's blog about his time spent repairing the doll's house in 2022 on our website.

Walking back up the garden path you will see two Nissen Huts opposite.



Sewell Nissen Hut

We have displayed this hut as a WWII RAF briefing room. Aeroplane crews gathered in briefing rooms to receive their instructions, information about targets and hold meetings.

If you look under the desk, you will be able to see a WWII kit bag, our next unmissable object.

WWII Kit Bag

This kit bag belonged to Walter Fredrico Hawkins, known by his friends and family as Wally. He was born in Argentina in 1918 where his father had fled to avoid WWI. Sometime between the wars, Wally returned to England and changed his name from Fredrico to Fredrick. Wally served on the Home Front during WWII.

Work on Britain's Home Front covered anything from making munitions in factories to being an Air Raid Protection (ARP) Warden whose aim was to help keep people safe during an air raid.

Kit bags usually held all sorts of useful things for the soldiers. They included toiletries, clothing, personal items, rations, first aid kits and more.



Our next stop is at our traditional farm. Head left out of Sewell and follow the path back between Leagrave Cottages and Henton Mission Room. Once you get back to the main pathway, turn right and head further down the site, then take the next right into our traditional farmyard.



Hill Farm Barn

Hill Farm Barn is the largest building on the farm, number 24 on the map, it will be on your left once you reach the main area. This was the first building we dismantled for the museum and may have been built as early as the 14th Century.

Walk inside the building and look up, can you see the ginormous ladder attached to the beams? This is a cherry picking ladder.

Cherry Ladder

This ladder stands at a whopping 18m and was used for picking cherries. Fruit trees and orchards, including cherry, apple and plum, used to be a very common sight in the Chilterns. We believe that most orchards are from the 18th and 19th Centuries. However, due to changes in how we use the land, orchards are now a much rarer sight. The orchards that do remain have often been left untended. This may lead to extinction of heritage varieties.



Local villages such as Holmer Green and Seer Green were centres of the industry. In the early 20th Century, Seer Green was known as Cherry Pie Village. Some of the orchards became small tourist spots for people wanting to admire the blossom. The best part of the growing season was Cherry Pie Sunday or a Cherry Pie Supper. There were festivals celebrating the harvest. The entire village would take part. They would pick the cherries, bake them into pies, and gather for a concert followed by cold cherry pie with tea.

COAM has its own cherry orchard with over twenty heritage varieties. These include Prestwood Black, Prestwood White and Smokey Dun. You can see our orchard and learn more about cherries near the Amersham Prefab, number 8 on the map.

Continue out of the farmyard following the path past Rosway Granary, the large white building. When you get to the High Wycombe Toll House, number 26 on the map, turn right and head towards the area known as Wood End. You will see a large green building ahead of you. This is our final stop.

High Wycombe Furniture Factory

James Elliott and Sons owned this chair-making factory from 1887 until the firm closed down in 1974.

Head down the cobbled slope and turn left, first entering the factory through the door next to the slope. This was the factory office.





Elliott & Sons Lath-backed Chair

You will have seen lots of chairs in many of the exhibit buildings during this tour. However, in the display case on the right and tucked just behind the door is the most important chair in our collection. It was made here, in this very factory. Amazingly, the donor rescued this chair from a dump in Lymington and it was given to the museum in 1997.

High Wycombe was famous for furniture making. In fact, it was a major centre of chair manufacturing in the 19th Century, including lath-back and Windsor chairs.

Elliott and Sons factory focused on putting the chair parts together for selling. Chair manufacturing actually started in the surrounding woodlands. Here skilled men known as bodgers “turned” wood to make chair legs and spindles.

Bodgers used a piece of equipment called a pole lathe to turn the wood. A pole lathe is a foot-operated pedal with string or a wheel attached that spins a piece of wood quickly. The bodger would then hold a sharp chisel against the spinning wood to shape it smoothly.

If you are interested in bodgers or woodworking, you can find out more in our bodgers area. Look for number 19 on the map, where we have a pole lathe and other bodgers tools.

Once assembled, the chairs were stamped with a maker’s mark. The stamp we have on display says “Elliot & Son” but the maker’s mark seen on our unmissable object in the photograph below says “Elliott & Sons”. Both versions of the makers mark have been found on other examples of chairs made at this factory.



For our final unmissable object, you will need to leave the office. Turn left and head into the workshop next door.



In this workshop, chair makers would use a tool called an adze to hollow out the chair seat. This process carves the seat into a comfortable shape to sit on.

The final object is a Certificate for the National Scheme for Employment of Disabled Men. You can see it hanging on the back wall.

National Scheme for Employment of Disabled Men Certificate

This framed certificate is for the National Scheme for Employment of Disabled Men. The government awarded it to Messrs James Elliott and Sons on 26th February 1926.

There were around 100,000 disabled men out of work due to injuries gained in WWI. Finding work for these men was thought to be vitally important. As such, the government started the National Scheme for Employment of Disabled Men in September 1919. Even though the scheme was thought to be vital, companies were never made to take part.

The government tried to encourage companies to sign up through adverts. It was shown as a way to honour those who had served in the war. The aim was for companies to have 5% of their workforce made up of disabled ex-servicemen. When a company signed up to the scheme they were entered onto the King’s National Roll. This meant they could display the royal crest, but it had no other real perks.

There are mixed views on how successful the scheme was. Some argue that it achieved its goals and paved the way for future reform. After all, the 1944 compulsory Disabled Persons’ Employment Act replaced the scheme. Others think companies only gave work to those with minor disabilities. This left the worst affected out of work.



We hope you've enjoyed learning about the unmissable objects around the museum. As you head back up site, make sure you stop in some of the buildings we haven't seen, such as Garston Forge and the Iron Age Roundhouse.

Why not stop off for a treat in Skippings Barn? It's the perfect spot for a hot drink and a slice of something yummy.



Chiltern Open Air Museum in Buckinghamshire was founded by volunteers from the Chiltern Society in 1976, and opened to the public in 1981.

The Museum is a charity that rescues threatened historic buildings, which would otherwise be demolished, rebuilds and preserves them in a traditional Chilterns landscape.

For more self-guided tours and information on all of our heritage buildings, please take a look at our website.

www.coam.org.uk

Chiltern Open Air Museum, Newland Park, Gorelands Lane, Chalfont St. Giles, HP8 4AB.

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