

CHALKE FESTIVAL FOR SCHOOLS 2026

The Chalke History Festival for Schools combines inspiring talks, live-action displays, and hands-on experiences to help your students to see, hear, and feel the past in unforgettable ways. Discover our current programme below.

TALKS AND EVENTS

Our programme of talks and events is designed to engage and entertain students, whilst enriching their curriculum knowledge. Make sure you head to the talks tent in plenty of time to get seated before the talk starts!

MOOT	FORUM	HENGE
<p>10:00-10:45 14. THE SURGEON, THE MIDWIFE, THE QUACK: HOW TO STAY ALIVE IN RENAISSANCE ENGLAND Alana Skuse Bloodletting? Leeches? A hacksaw and a prayer? Is that really the full story of Renaissance medicine? Historian Alanna Skuse invites us into the surprisingly vibrant and innovative world of sixteenth and seventeenth-century healthcare. Far from being an age of pure superstition, this was a time of experimentation, discovery and fierce debate; when surgeons refined their craft, physicians formalised their training, and new remedies arrived from across the globe. Step into a bustling medical marketplace filled with travelling practitioners, apothecaries and midwives. Meet</p>	<p>10:00-10:45 15. WE HAVE COME TO BE DESTROYED: GROWING UP IN COLD WAR BRITAIN Laura Tisdall What did the Cold War look like from the back row of the classroom? Historian Laura Tisdall invites us to see modern Britain not through prime ministers and policy papers, but through the eyes of its young people. In the newly affluent decades after 1945, adulthood was idealised and childhood tightly controlled, yet teenagers and children were far from silent. From nuclear disarmament marches to private anxieties about sex, conformity and the future, Britain's youth questioned, resisted and reimagined the world they inherited. Their letters, diaries and activism reveal fears of atomic</p>	<p>10:00-10:45 16. WRITING OR RIGHTING HISTORY?: HOW STORIES ABOUT THE PAST SHAPE OUR WORLD Kate Vigurs History isn't just a list of dates and events—it's a story people choose to tell. But what happens to the stories that don't get told? Join Dr Kate Vigurs as she explores the difference between writing history (recording what happened) and righting history (fixing gaps, misunderstandings, or unfair versions of the past). Discover how certain voices have been left out of historical records, and what today's historians, communities, and young people are doing to bring those missing stories back into view.</p>

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<p>trailblazers such as herbalist Nicholas Culpeper, pioneering midwife Jane Sharp and courageous plague doctor George Thomson. Encounter household healers, bold innovators and, yes, the occasional charlatan. This is a fresh look at how people really tried to stay alive in Renaissance England.</p>	<p>destruction, frustrations with authority and bold hopes for change. By placing young voices centre stage, Tisdall offers a fresh, poignant perspective on the welfare state, the sexual revolution and the shifting politics of the late twentieth century, proving that to understand Cold War Britain, we need to listen to those who were still growing up within it.</p>	
<p>10:45-11:00 THE SHERMAN TANK IN ACTION James Holland The Sherman tank was a crucial component of the Allied armoured forces during the Second World War. Head to the arena to watch the Sherman tank and the half-track, an armoured personnel carrier, in action.</p>		
<p>11:00-11:45 17. POET, MYSTIC, WIDOW, WIFE Hetta Howes & Eleanor Janega Medievalist and broadcaster Hetta Howes explores what life was really like for women in the Middle Ages; from questions of sex and marriage to faith, power and independence. Through the remarkable voices of Marie de France, Julian of Norwich, Christine de Pizan and Margery Kempe, Howes reveals how women challenged misogyny and carved out space for themselves in a restrictive world. Lively, insightful and richly immersive, this talk brings us face to face with the thoughts, ambitions and inner</p>	<p>11:00-11:45 18. THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION: THE MYTH VS REALITY Zack White w. Shalina Patel & Jackson van Uden The American Revolution is often hailed as a landmark moment in history: a 'David vs Goliath' clash in which a people unified by ideas of liberty and equality threw off the oppressive chains of imperial rule. Yet much of what people think they know about the American War of Independence is wrong. In this wide-ranging talk, award-winning historian and broadcaster Zack White separates the myth from the reality of the United States's origin story. Exploring the conflict's causes and controversies, a</p>	<p>11:00-11:45 19. DIVE INTO HISTORY Visit Malta Malta's seabed reflects thousands of years of history. From a 700BC Phoenician Shipwreck to World War 2 ships, planes and submarines – both the variety and quality of these sites make Malta's Underwater Cultural Heritage an important resource that is global in nature. Come 'Dive into History' and find out how the team behind Heritage Malta's Underwater Cultural Heritage Unit discovers, records and shares these incredible historic sites.</p>

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<p>lives of medieval women in their own words.</p>	<p>very different picture emerges. Far from being unified, divisions between American 'loyalists' and 'patriots' make this revolution look more like a civil war - a war that was only won thanks to the intervention of Britain's enemies. Exposing the propaganda and hypocrisy of both sides, this talk promises to make you think again about America's 250th anniversary.</p>	
<p>12:00-12:45 20. FEMINIST HISTORY FOR EVERY DAY OF THE YEAR Kate Mosse A story of courage, creativity and defiance for every day of the year. We're thrilled to welcome back Kate Mosse to Chalke for a celebration of extraordinary women across the centuries. From warrior queens like Boudica to cultural icons such as Taylor Swift, from pioneering thinkers like Mary Wollstonecraft to modern trailblazers including Malala Yousafzai, Mosse shines a light on household names and unsung heroines alike. Spanning continents and millennia, she reveals stories of resilience, rebellion, artistry and leadership that continue to shape our world. Prepare to be fiercely inspired, this is history as it should be: inclusive and illuminating.</p>	<p>12:00-12:45 21. THE LONG DEATH OF ADOLF HITLER Caroline Sharples A fascinating exploration of why Hitler's death was only confirmed in 2018. Historian Caroline Sharples unravels the strange, unsettling afterlife of one of history's most notorious figures. Adolf Hitler has taken a long time to die. With no public body, no independent witnesses and a rapidly collapsing regime, the events inside the Führerbunker created a vacuum in which rumour, propaganda and conspiracy could thrive. As governments and intelligence agencies scrambled for answers, myths of survival flourished across Europe and the Americas. Sharples offers a gripping investigation not just into a death, but into the making of modern myth; a compelling exploration of how history is pieced</p>	<p>12:00-12:45 22. DIGGING INTO HISTORY: HOW TO BE AN ARCHAEOLOGIST Students from the University of Liverpool w. Jackson van Uden Thinking about studying history at university? Wondering where it might take you? Find out what it's really like with our panel of students from the University of Liverpool as they discuss their experiences in the world of archaeology.</p>

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	<p>together, distorted and, ultimately, confirmed. A thought-provoking and timely examination of truth, evidence and the stories we choose to believe.</p>	
<p>12:45-13:15 FALCONRY DEMONSTRATION Paul Manning shares his extensive knowledge of the history, care and training of these magnificent birds. UNESCO has classed falconry as an example of intangible cultural heritage, as it was traditionally practiced all over the world by many different cultures. However, today it is seen as quintessentially British and has been enjoyed by some of the most powerful people in Britain, including King John, King Henry VIII and King James I.</p>		
<p>13:15-14:00 23. COLLAPSE: A GLOBAL HISTORY OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR, 1931-1941 Jonathan Fennell Between 1931 and 1949, a series of crises broke out that threatened collective security, world order and the internal cohesion of states across the globe. At the heart of these crises was a world war that shook the foundations of global power. Through exciting new sources from over 50 archives across the world, Professor Jonathan Fennell examines the first part of this "long war", from 1931-1942, and explores what it really meant to live through this violent time. Using an innovative approach which explores the personal alongside the political, the global alongside the local, he shows how</p>	<p>13:15-14:00 24. ASSASSINS VS TEMPLARS: THE HIDDEN WAR OF THE CRUSADES Steve Tibble w. Jackson van Uden The Assassins and the Templars are two of history's most legendary groups. One was a Muslim religious sect, and the other a Christian military order created to defend the Holy Land. Violently opposed, they had vastly different reputations, followings, and ambitions. Yet they developed strikingly similar strategies—and their intertwined stories have uncanny parallels. Historian of the Crusades, Steve Tibble discusses how the fanaticism of these two organisations changed the medieval world and describes how their legacy lives on into the twenty-first century.</p>	<p>13:15-14:00 25. UNCOVER THE SECRETS OF THE ARCHIVES The National Archives The National Archives hold an incredible treasure trove of over 11 million historical records, from photographs and maps to personal letters and government papers. But how do we decide which records are important for us when we're researching the past? Sharpen your detective skills with Rosie Morris from The National Archives and track down those special documents you need to uncover the secrets of the past.</p>

<p>a world that many considered civilised collapsed into barbarity.</p>		
<p>14:15-15:00 26. THE MIRROR OF BRITAIN: JAMES VI AND I Clare Jackson w. Jackson van Uden Professor Clare Jackson tells the story of one of Britain’s most fascinating and misunderstood monarchs, James VI and I. The first ruler to unite the Scottish and English crowns in 1603, James helped shape the idea of a British monarchy while navigating plots, religious conflict and political upheaval; from the Ruthven Raid to the Gunpowder Plot. Intellectual, writer and controversialist, he was as absorbed by theology and witchcraft as by diplomacy and display. Drawing meticulously on James’s own publications, manuscript musings, topical verse and private correspondence, this richly detailed talk offers a deeply researched and nuanced portrait of a highly unusual king.</p>	<p>14:15-15:00 27. THE GREAT RESISTANCE: THE 400 YEAR FIGHT TO END SLAVERY IN THE AMERICAS Carrie Gibson Acclaimed historian Carrie Gibson explores the extraordinary 400-year struggle of enslaved people across the Americas to win their freedom. From the first recorded revolts in the sixteenth century to the Maroon Wars of Jamaica and the revolution that secured Haiti’s independence, Gibson uncovers a powerful history of resistance, resilience and defiance. Spanning North America, the Caribbean and Brazil, Gibson reveals how countless acts of courage helped end the slave trade and slavery itself - a tribute to the persistence of the human spirit to overcome even the darkest of circumstances.</p>	<p>14:15-15:00 28. IT’S ALL IN THE TEXT! On Cue Theatre Company In Shakespeare’s time, actors did not rehearse in the way we do today. They had no director and often did not have a full copy of the play, only the lines they needed to learn and short cues. And they put on a new play every two weeks! To create exciting, dynamic and truthful performances, they had to be highly skilled at using the clues in Shakespeare’s text and be free to respond to their fellow actors’ choices. Join On Cue Theatre Company’s Callum Coates, to discover how.</p>

HISTORY'S MAID

12:45-13:15	LEE MILLER: WAR CORRESPONDENT Breaking glass ceilings was far from the minds of the female war correspondents who reported back on the events that swept across the world during the 1940s. From Claire Hollingworth, who witnessed the invasion of Poland, to Lee Miller bathing in Hitler's bathtub, discover the amazing, daring, and sometimes dark world of the war correspondents.
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WIZZO'S RIP-ROARING HISTORY

Wizzo's Rip-Roaring History is an old-time circus sideshow where the stars are the props and extraordinary stories. Abs 'Wizzo' Wisdom brings his excitement for history front and centre to you! Think Heath Robinson meets Chitty Chitty Bang Bang and throw in a generous helping of audience participation and Crystal Maze eccentricity. Colourful? Yes. Educational? Certainly. Rip-roaring? Absolutely!

10:45-11:30	GUARDIAN EAGLE We are all familiar with the Christmas truce of 1914, but an even more remarkable story unfolded in the skies above Germany during the festive season in 1943. It's a story of loss, avenging anger, vulnerability, compassion and ultimately friendship, set against the icy blast of a daylight bombing raid gone badly wrong, and the American flyers who witness a Christmas miracle unfolding in the unlikeliest of circumstances.
12:45-13:30	LAST STAND AT GRAVENEY MARSH The last pitched battle on British soil? The bloody fields of Sedgemoor in 1685? The Jacobite cause undone at Culloden in 1746? How about the Battle of Barking Creek? A crashed German bomber crew fancy their chances and shoot it out with the British army in the summer of 1940? Wizzo takes a look at this extraordinary field of battle that starts on the marsh, and ends down the local pub!

IMMERSIVE HISTORY

Visit our living history encampments throughout the day, where our expert living historians will be demonstrating the tools, skills, and lifestyles of societies from the Neolithic age to the Second World War. Drop-in activities will start on the hour during the day. Please be aware, some activities must be booked in advance. Once you have requested your bookings, you will receive a schedule with your booked activities for the day.

<p>THE IRON AGE CHARIOT Remaking History</p>	<p>Join our Remaking History team as they work together to reconstruct an Iron Age Romano-British chariot, combining archaeological evidence with practical craftsmanship.</p>
<p>NEOLITHIC AND BRONZE AGE Prehistory to Present</p>	<p>Step into prehistory and discover what life was like from the Palaeolithic to the Bronze Age, from clothing and food to flintknapping and shelters. Students will have the chance to get stuck into a range of interactive activities, including creating a gold sun disk, grinding grain, making cordage, and trying on Stone Age clothing.</p>
<p>MUSIC THROUGH HISTORY Here Be Flagons</p>	<p>Explore the role of music across history, from musical language to the evolution of musical instruments and their importance in ancient and modern culture. Students will have the chance the feel the textures and materials of the instruments, as well as getting hands on in an interactive drumming circle.</p>
<p>RAMESES' KITCHEN NIGHTMARES Hearth of Science (must be pre-booked)</p>	<p>Discover how archaeologists use texts, art and science to understand how food shaped ancient Egyptian life, from daily staples to feasts and festival treats.</p>

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TIME TEAM (must be pre-booked)	Join environmental archaeology Time Team specialist Naomi Sewpaul and Penny Lock from Time Team as they show the skills required on a 3-day dig.
LIFE IN THE IRON AGE Pario Gallico	Step into our Iron Age village and meet artisans, farmers, and dwellers going about their daily lives. Students will have the chance to get stuck into a range of activities, including learning how pots were made and fired, discovering Iron Age food, and helping to make a wattle and chalk daub wall. This interactive session offers a unique insight into how people dressed, ate, worked, played, and lived before the Romans arrived in Britain.
THE IRON AGE FORGE Heritage Blades	Join our Iron Age blacksmith in his traditional pit forge as he investigates a simple but important question: why did prehistoric people move from bronze to iron? Discover how metals were made and used, what differences this made to everyday life in prehistoric Britain, and how technology affected farming, warfare, and trade. By seeing, touching, and questioning the technology, students are encouraged to think critically and make up their own minds about whether bronze or iron was the better choice.
TIME TRAVELLERS KITCHEN	Explore the history of Pompeii through its food, trade, and entertainment, brought to life with cooking demonstrations and interactive discussions.
ROMAN ENCAMPMENT Legio Secunda Augusta (must be pre-booked)	Step into a Roman military encampment and discover what life was like in the Roman military, from training to engineering. Plus, learn to be a Roman soldier with interactive drills and formations.

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<p>VIKING CRAFTS Castle Hill Heritage Skills (must be pre-booked)</p>	<p>Step back in time and experience the Viking world with Castle Hill Heritage Skills. Explore a traditional Viking home and see history in action, from cooking and dyeing over a firepit to producing textiles using traditional weaving looms. Get hands-on with history by testing your skills at board games, handling authentic weaponry, or trying your hand at traditional textiles.</p>
<p>LIFE AFTER THE NORMAN CONQUEST Chanz des Reis (must be pre-booked)</p>	<p>In 1066, Duke William of Normandy invaded England and claimed the English throne after defeating King Harold and his army at the Battle of Hastings. Join Chanz des Reis to discover what life was like in the aftermath of the Norman Conquest, from military training to civilian life.</p>
<p>THE ENGLISH ARCHER Nowstrike Archery (must be pre-booked)</p>	<p>Experience life from the perspective of a working-class archer in the 14th century. How did they train, compete, and get selected into the king's armies? Discover how professional military archers turned the feudal system upside-down as they stood shoulder to shoulder with kings, changing the face of warfare to come.</p>
<p>THE HISTORICAL SAILMAKER (must be pre-booked)</p>	<p>Without sails, history would be vastly different. Being able to travel across the sea using wind power has given rise to exploration, trading, wars and travel. Meet the Historical Sailmaker and discover what it was like to live and work as a sailmaker in the 17th century. Students will have the chance to get hands on with interactive activities including reefing a sail, sewing seams, designing symbols, and learning to tie knots.</p>
<p>NELSON'S NAVY</p>	<p>Discover how the Georgian Navy became a leading maritime power, what it was really like to be onboard a Ship of the Line, and how developments in seafaring impacted society more broadly. Students will have the chance to get hands-on with an interactive cutlass drill.</p>
<p>JANE'S HISTORICAL KITCHEN (must be pre-booked)</p>	<p>Discover the history of chocolate through time, from its Aztec roots to the Georgian chocolate house.</p>

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<p>WIMBORNE MILITIA (must be pre-booked)</p>	<p>Step into a 17th-century harbour town and meet its inhabitants, stall holders, and military defenders. Students will stop in at the Quartermaster, who will check their papers, the Customs office to learn their trade and pay their duty and the gentleman's quarters to meet the Governor. Visit the tavern to hear live music of the period, enjoy the aromas of the coffee house and spice traders, before finally a tour of the harbour defences and cannon where students will learn the training and skill required to be a soldier in his Majesty's Port Garrison.</p>
<p>THE HISTORY MAKER (must be pre-booked)</p>	<p>Discover the amazing, true story of the daring British raid on Taranto harbour, based on interviews with Lieutenant Commander John Wellham D.S.C., Pilot of Swordfish E5H of 824 Squadron, Fleet Air Arm.</p> <p>In late 1940, Italy had the largest, most modern fleet in the world, moored in Taranto harbour, the largest, most heavily defended harbour in the world. Taranto provided an excellent base for the Italian Navy to hide whilst still being able to attack crucial and vulnerable shipping supply routes. How could the British neutralise the Italian fleet? Taranto harbour was too shallow for a submarine attack, too well protected for close bombardment by the Royal Navy and too far from any airfields for the RAF to be able to bomb. The only option was an attack from aircraft carriers by the Fleet Air Arm. The only aircraft capable at the time, was an antiquated bi-plane, the Fairey Swordfish.</p>
<p>ROYAL NAVY BEACHHEAD COMMANDOS</p>	<p>Discover the history of the Royal Naval Commandos and their crucial role on the invasion beaches of the Second World War. Plus, get stuck into signalling with morse code lanterns and semaphore or get ready for action in original kit.</p>

<p>THE TRENCH EXPERIENCE (must be pre-booked)</p>	<p>Step back in time and experience the sights, sounds, and smells of the Second World War.</p> <p>Cassel is a town perched on a rare hill in Flanders and from its summit one can see hundreds of towns and villages and on a clear day all the way back to the coast and Dunkirk. It was also the same hill the Grand Old Duke of York marched up and down back in the 18th Century. But on 27-29 May 1940, this was where the Ox & Bucks and Gloucesters made a defiant stand, holding off the German onslaught and buying time while more British troops fell back to Dunkirk and were evacuated to England. It was a heroic stand, in which most of the 145th Brigade were lost - either killed, wounded or captured. Some, though, did manage to escape but only a few.</p> <p>This year, our trench re-enacts a scene from this vital battle. The first German attacks have been repelled but the defenders know the time will come when ammunition will run low and the sheer weight of enemy numbers will overwhelm them. It's the shortest of straws they've drawn but all know that they have a vital role to play: with every passing hour and day, more men of the BEF will be able to get to Dunkirk and then be safely lifted home. And if that happens, the British Army can live to fight another day and not all will be lost.</p> <p>Please be aware, there will be smoke, loud noises and the sound of gunfire during the experience.</p>
<p>SOE TRAINING CAMP (must be pre-booked)</p>	<p>Our hugely popular SOE Training Camp is back for 2026! This unique experience is the perfect opportunity for students to learn the skills and techniques of espionage from the Second World War. During the camp, they will be put through their paces as they learn self defence, codes and signals, explosives training, and weapons handling.</p>
<p>HISTORIC GAMES Thimblerig Games (must be pre-booked)</p>	<p>Discover the history of games in this fun and fascinating workshop with Thimblerig Games. From the Roman tactical game Three Men's Morris to the medieval dice game Riffa, students will have the chance to learn and play a selection of historical games.</p>

<p>DIVE INTO HISTORY 360 (must be pre-booked)</p>	<p>The Maltese territorial sea holds within it a number of historic sites, ranging from a 2,700-year-old Phoenician shipwreck to a number of ship, plane and submarine wrecks dating to World War I and World War II. Located at depths that are beyond 50m, underwater cultural heritage sites are invisible and inaccessible for the majority of people. With Dive into History 360, you can now experience these historic wrecks using Virtual Reality (VR). Come take a virtual dive with us, Heritage Malta’s Underwater Cultural Heritage Unit, and discover the history that lies on our seabed!</p>
<p>SUTTON HOO SHIP'S COMPANY</p>	<p>Join the Sutton Hoo Ship’s Company on an Anglo-Saxon journey back in time to 625AD, when the Anglo-Saxons dragged their 27.5m ship from the River Deben half a mile up to Sutton Hoo as a burial chamber for King Raedwald with treasure, weapons and coins. Discover how the ‘grave ship’ was found by Basil Brown at Sutton Hoo in 1939 on Edith Pretty’s land, and how the Sutton Hoo Ship’s Company is now reconstructing the Ship in Woodbridge, using replica tools that would have been used in 625AD. Students will be able to handle artefacts such as oak, rivets, replica axes and smell the caulking mixture as well as see the tools being used, such as the froe and spoon auger.</p>