

Minutes of Directors Board Meeting

Date of Meeting: 16th April 2026

Time of Meeting: 1.30pm

Place of Meeting: Foreman's Office Combe Mill

Purpose of Meeting: Scheduled Board meeting of Combe Mill Society

Distribution: Directors, Noticeboard, Website Members 'page

Present: Tony Simmons, Peter Trowles, Nigel Evans, Rose Ralphs, Margaret Gruber, Bob Wheeler, Lorna Gale (mins)

1 Apologies: Richard Stone

2 Minutes of previous meetings

Minutes of last meeting held on 12th February 2026 – request for rewording of point 7.1 to read – *We have one year left for our application (museum status) and the museum accreditation is an integral part of the Forward Plan.* Minutes were confirmed as a true record of the meeting.

Correction 4.2 Should read Stonesfield clock not Otmoor.

3 Matters arising from previous minutes

3.1 Frank Collingwood from Oxford Bus Museum requires 'text' describing Combe Mill.

PT will provide a description.

Action PT

3.2 Philip Hawtin's family are coming on Sunday 19th April 2026 to present a clock left as a legacy. The presentation will be at 9.30 in the Foreman's Office.

The plaque in the wheel room also requires rewording to include Philip's name.

PT to propose wording for the plaque.

Action PT

3.3 Alan and Mary will not be returning with their owls.

4.1 Sarah Menary (museum accreditation mentor) has sent a report which will be included in the appendices.

4.3 Safeguarding policy still under discussion. Linda (BBQ) has offered to help. The intention is to amend our policy to reflect our current activity.

10.4 RW still to edit interview with Jeff Broxholme

Action RW

4 Correspondence

4.1 Work experience request dealt with outside of meeting.

4.2 There has been an offer of display material from Tony Thurlby's family – NE to speak to family at funeral tomorrow.

5 Acknowledge reports of DRS, Treasurer, Head of Operations and Activities

Safety report – no formal safety report as a safety meeting has not been possible since the last Board meeting.

Steve Mullinger is to be asked to take Nigel's place in the Safety Group. He has been a safety manager for the last 10 years and is IOSH certified. PT to make Steve aware of any T&Cs necessary for the insurance.

Head of Operations report - NE has prepared and will deliver the Chairman's report for AGM. The Head of Operations report is similar and included in appendices.

Treasurer's report

Report will be sent with AGM minutes.

Propose to include raffle/tombola and retail on an individual line in AGM report. Overall we were very close to breaking even in 25/26 despite the expense of replacing the fire alarm system. Expenditure on road signs and electrical work in the previous year had been much less expensive.

RR asked if we can reduce any costs anywhere.

6 Actions arising from reports

Covered above.

7 Review of progress on strategic issues

7.1 NE proposed a 10 minute headline review of the forward plan and the museum status at every meeting. Further work on both of these topics to be taken forward through a series of separate meetings. There is one year left for museum accreditation and suggest submission in the autumn.

PT has responded to the Charity commission who had asked further questions regarding a proposed amendment to the articles.

7.2 Publicity and marketing needs urgent attention. Alan Burch, MG and PT to be approached to form a marketing subgroup with an agreed budget.

7.3 Dinosaur hunt will run over the school summer holidays.

8 Review of governance issues

8.1 Stuart Bridger has been nominated to join the Board at the AGM. If Stuart is elected what would his role be on the Board. Need to agree at the next meeting individual roles and responsibilities.

9 Review any major operational issues

9.1 Training – NE would like to see formal training schedules introduced for every area and signed off by Head of Area. Board in favour.

9.2 Activities – propose to stop all toddler children’s events except dinosaur hunt and Santa’s grotto. As an alternative we should consider purchasing wooden outdoor games such as giant Jenga, Connect 4 and Quoits (AIM 2 Forward plan) Board in favour.

9.3 Recruitment – make adverts specific

Reintroduce regular recruitment sessions (monthly, starting May 26th)

Identify critical roles where no successor can be identified.

Develop structured training schedules

Request each Head of Area uses training schedules to bring at least 2 members to a proficient level,

9.4 Fundraising – awaiting Blenheim bursary,

Need to have ready a list of capital projects in case we recruit a fundraising volunteer,
definitive list to be compiled for June Board meeting **Action all**

10 AOB

AGM logistics – chairs and refreshments

Next meeting: 1.30pm 18th June 2026

Minutes Secretary
Lorna Gale

Appendices

Museum Accreditation

Mentor report template

Mentor name: Sarah Menary

Mentored museum:

Combe Mill

Mentored museum Accreditation number:

Date of report: 25/03/2026

Date of previous report: N/A (This is my first report as a mentor for this museum.

Mentor agreement was signed on 19/11/2025)

Previous Accreditation outcome and any Required Actions or Areas for Development identified: N/A (Museum is applying for Accreditation for the first time)

(Note: If your museum's assessment was some time ago you may find that Areas for Development are called Areas for Improvement in the outcome letter.)

Mentor engagement with the museum

How many times have you visited or met with the museum since your last Mentor report?

N/A

For each site visit or meeting since the last Mentor report, please provide the date with the name and role of museum representatives in attendance

23/09/2026 – Site visit with Tony Simmonds (supported by Philip Claris, Accreditation Advisor, MDSE)

27/6/2024 – online meeting with Peter Trowels

Please provide the date of each meeting of the governing body that you have attended since the last Mentor report. I have not attended one yet as I have only been the museum's formal mentor since 19/11/2025.

Have you been provided with papers for every meeting of the governing body during this time?

No (see above)

What other engagement with the museum have you had since the last Mentor report?

Please summarise e.g. meetings or email correspondence and which roles in the museum you have engaged with (e.g. staff, Trustees or volunteers) I have been in contact with the museum by email on an ad hoc basis for some time in my capacity as Oxfordshire MDO.

Since I have become their mentor I have spent some time preparing the chair of trustees and volunteers in charge of operations, health and safety and café functions to help them prepare their Accreditation submission.

Your summary assessment of the museum's performance against the Accreditation standard since the last Accreditation return:

1. Organisational health

In your opinion, does the museum meet the Organisational health requirements of the Accreditation standard?

Yes

Outline any significant achievements since the museum's last Accreditation return in terms of governance and management, forward planning, risk management. Examples might include: governance reviews; a refresh of the business plan; resolution of occupancy issues, security upgrades... Where applicable, focus in particular on progress towards addressing Areas for Development listed in the museum's last Accreditation award letter. The museum has made some significant strides towards becoming Accreditable. They have amended their statement of purpose and developed their charitable objectives with the Charities Commission.

The museum has documented their significant experience with health and safety and written a forward plan.

They have also developed their security procedures.

Outline any particular challenges currently facing the museum in terms of its organisational health, the actions you believe the museum should take to address them and how you plan to help them to do so. Include Areas for Development listed in the museum's last Accreditation award letter but not yet addressed.

The museum's unique set up requires a set of robust policies around health and safety as so many aspects of this working museum have risks attached (such as the water wheel, close proximity to water, a working forge and operating saw mill machinery).

Whilst I have no current concerns as the museum is well prepared for these risks, succession planning does need to be in place to ensure that the good knowledge they currently have is not lost as volunteers come and go.

I will support the museum to develop succession planning into their longer-term forward planning.

Do you have any significant concern about the ability of the museum to address these Organisational health challenges, between now and its next return? N/A

2. Managing collections

In your opinion, does the museum meet the collections management requirements of the Accreditation standard?

Yes

Outline any significant achievements since the museum's last Accreditation return in terms of collections management, documentation and care. Examples might include: improvements to collections development policy; implementation of Spectrum primary procedures; improvements to storage...

Where applicable, focus in particular on progress towards addressing Areas for Development listed in the museum's last Accreditation award letter. The museum has developed a suite of collections care documents and has taken advice from Philip Claris, Accreditation Advisor for MDSE.

The museum has also networked with other museums with large working collections – such as Didcot Railway Centre, though the Oxfordshire Museums Council network.

Outline any particular challenges facing the museum in terms of its collections management, the actions you believe the museum should take to address them and how you plan to help them to do so. Include Areas for Development listed in the museum's last Accreditation award letter but not yet addressed.

This is a working collection in a historic property with close proximity to fast flowing water. Environmental monitoring can be challenging but the museum has discussed passive monitoring and volunteer patrols/condition checking with me.

Do you have any significant concern about the ability of the museum to address these Collections management challenges, between now and its next return? N/A

3. Users and their experiences

In your opinion, does the museum meet the Users and their experiences requirements of the Accreditation standard?

Yes

Outline any significant achievements since the museum's last Accreditation return in terms of how it makes its collections accessible to the public, understands and develops its audiences and engages with people to give them a better experience. Examples might include: improved access arrangements; community consultation; relevant workforce training.

Where applicable, focus in particular on progress towards addressing Areas for Development listed in the museum's last Accreditation award letter. The museum has written a set of audience development policies for their Accreditation submission.

They have also taken some time to consider the most effective ways to reach their visitors and non-visitors by utilising visitor books, social media, local leafleting and open days that target new visitors.

Outline any particular challenges currently facing the museum in terms of Users and their experiences, the actions you believe the museum should take to address them and how you plan to help them to do so. Include Areas for Development listed in the museum's last Accreditation award letter but not yet addressed.

The museum's building does make physical access challenging. However, the museum has given serious thought to how they can support visitors with access requirements. They have taken advice from myself and Philip Claris on how to develop accessible resources.

Do you have any significant concern about the ability of the museum to address these Users and their experiences challenges, between now and its next return? N/A

Any other comments? The museum has worked incredibly hard to develop their Accreditation submission, and have a long history of good engagement with Museum Development and local networks.

Submit your completed Accreditation Mentor report by the museum's Return deadline. You can:

- Upload it to the online form via Grantium

Or

- Email it to:

Scotland Museum Galleries Scotland
accreditation@museumsgalleriesscotland.org.uk

Wales The Welsh Government
MuseumDevelopment@gov.wales

Northern Ireland Northern Ireland Museums Council

devofficer@nimc.co.uk
England Arts Council England
accreditation@artscouncil.org.uk

Head of Operations report

As the Board has been without a Chairman for some time, I will be presenting this report to the AGM. The purpose of a Chairman's Report is to provide a brief overview of the organisation's activities during the past year, highlight notable events and achievements, and look ahead at the challenges and opportunities of the year to come. This report seeks to do just that.

Review of the Year: 2025–26

Over the past twelve months, the range of activities and achievements has been both broad and encouraging. On the positive side, we again succeeded in opening every Wednesday throughout the season. In addition, we ran eight successful Sunday steaming events, along with a well attended Christmas Fayre.

Visitor numbers have been variable across the year, but as with most visitor attractions we are experiencing cost of living crisis, and we have to accept that we cannot compete with larger events such as the Ducklington Steam fair. But our standout steaming day was the Military Vehicles event held on Easter Sunday, which achieved the highest footfall of the season. Our Christmas fayre was well attended and raised over £2000. The 8 steaming days and the Christmas Fayre need to be well supported as they are essential as they generate our main source of income. Income is used to cover our fixed costs that have significantly increased in 2025 because of hikes in insurance premiums and utilities, so it is important that every pound received as a result of these events, is spent wisely and effectively.

Last year's report focused strongly on filling key roles within our organisational structure. This proved valuable in the second half of the 25-26 session, when a comprehensive list of over 150 winter jobs was compiled by the HTAs across the 18 areas of Combe Mill. These tasks ranged from essential repairs, through to restoration projects, to general improvements aimed at enhancing the visitor experience. The vast majority of these jobs were to be carried out by our regular active members, whose commitment and practical skills continue to be the backbone of the Mill. Over 50% of these jobs have been completed and as a result of their efforts, it is now a real pleasure to show visitors around the site. I would like to place on record my sincere thanks and appreciation for the hard work and dedication of all those involved.

The Board has continued to fulfil its strategic, operational, and—most importantly—governance responsibilities, including ensuring legal and safety compliance, company returns, insurances, certifications, fire risk assessment, and food hygiene checks. A capital investment of a new fire alarm system has been installed which has replaced our rapidly failing system. In addition, weekly meetings took place in the autumn months in getting the Society ready to meet the documentary requirements of becoming a recognized Museum. Further work is still required, with the aim of meeting the approval deadline this year.

Looking Ahead

Recruitment and Succession

Many of you may have read that the UK museum sector is facing significant challenges, with 3 out of 5 small independent charities such as ours expressing concern about potential closure, mainly due to finances. We are fortunate in that our financial position remains

sound and in line with budget expectations, and details will be provided in the Treasurer's report after this report.

However, no organisation can afford to stand still. Despite the progress made, we remain somewhat exposed due to our inability to adequately staff every area of the Mill. While we have welcomed a number of ,very keen, new members during the year, both membership growth and visitor numbers have fallen short of the ambitions set out in our Forward Plan for the year.

At present, there are over fifteen defined roles that still remain unfilled, with the responsibilities associated with them being covered on an ad hoc basis by a small number of 'stretched' individuals. This is not a sustainable position in the long term, and addressing this challenge will be a key priority for the year ahead.

We also face the realities of a very experienced and committed, but ageing, workforce and the future loss or ill health of valued members. We sadly lost Tony Thurlby, a humble master craftsman who gave much to Combe Mill with his time, knowledge and dedication and so will be sorely missed by many of us. It is a pleasure to see that Derek Goddard and Richard Edwards, who both survived life-threatening episodes at the end of 2025, are recovering well we are pleased to see them slowly returning to active involvement. I am also aware that there are a number of current active members are bearing significant major health challenges. Therefore, recruitment will be a major priority, especially those who have particular skills in social media, IT, promotions, sales and outreach along with practical skills.

Training

Few active regular members are trained to operate in more than 1 of the 18 areas of the mill's environment. This lack of flexibility is a weakness, but easily rectifiable. We will put plans in place to ensure that all existing and new members are properly trained and documented in all the safety procedures and operation of areas and equipment. I would like to see improved cross training across the Mill to improve flexibility on steaming days .

Other

I stated that organisations cannot afford to standstill. The Forward Plan for the Mill which includes becoming a museum outlined last May is progressing, though not as quickly as projected. Please read the Forward Plan and any member who can offer support then please see any member of the Board. If you have a good idea on how to improve the fortunes of the Mill, then again speak to any member of the board or drop me an email. The best ideas do not start with ' why don't you do XYZ' but do start with 'I have been developing this idea, will you support it, '

In closing, I would like to thank everyone—volunteers, members, trustees, and unseen supporters—who have contributed to keeping Combe Mill operating and improving over the past year. With continued commitment and renewed focus on recruiting and supporting active members, I am confident we can build on this progress in the year ahead.

Thank you

Nigel Evans

Director and trustee, Combe Mill Society

April 2026