Open Cambridge 2026: Evaluation report

Overview

Open Cambridge 2026 ran from Friday 11– Sunday 20 September and compromised of 79 individual events which ranged from exhibitions, film screenings, talks, performances, walking tours, garden tours and open sites with a mixture of in-person and online events.

Within the collegiate university 11 Colleges* and 14 University departments/institutions** took part this year. Open Cambridge also enables us to build and nurture relationships with civic and community organisations. This year, almost 22 external groups took part†, some for the first time including CAMYOGA, a Public Living Room hosted by Camerados, Queen Edith Chapel and the Woolf Institute (see appendix 1 for full list).

We thank everyone who contributed to the festival this year. Thanks to the support of the University of Cambridge and the national Heritage Open Days scheme.



Image: Public Living Room on the Downing Site, September 2026

Key highlights

- We held a Public Living Room on the Downing Site in its first collaboration with the University. Created by the Camerados movement, Public Living Rooms are free, welcoming spaces where people can spend time together, share conversation, or simply enjoy being around others.

- Old Library at St John's College saw record numbers of visitors while the Cambridge Buddhist Centre visitors were up 30%.
- American Cemetery in Madingley was back in the programme after an absence in 2025. They welcomed over 180 people on guided tours.
- The waiting list for tours of the Mullard Radio Astronomy Observatory grew to almost 1,500 for only 70 spaces. Both tours were fully booked within five minutes.
- The Cambridge Festival Community Quilt was put on display at the Centre for Computing History. The quilt was made as part of a project with a number of community groups and volunteers at the Cambridge Festival 2026.



Image: Guided tour of the American Cemetery, September 2026

Open Cambridge: In numbers

This year the programme included 79 events ranging from talks, exhibitions, workshops, open sites, guided and self-guided tours. We are continuing to see consistent participation from the Colleges and University departments/institutions and are seeing new community partners interested in taking part year on year. This year saw 25 University departments and Colleges (equal to 2024 and 2025) and 22 external groups (the highest number since 2023).

Open Cambridge 2025 received >10,000 public visits. It is hard to get an exact figure given the number of drop-in events and we rely on event coordinators collecting attendance numbers and asking people to fill out evaluation surveys. The Cambridge Buddhist Centre saw a 30% increase in visitors from 2025 while the Old Library at St John's College had a record number of visitors.

What did our audiences think?

We carried out visitor evaluation via an online survey sent out to those attending festival events. To date, we have had 267 responses which is in line with the 10% margin of error generally accepted to determine a valid sample size.

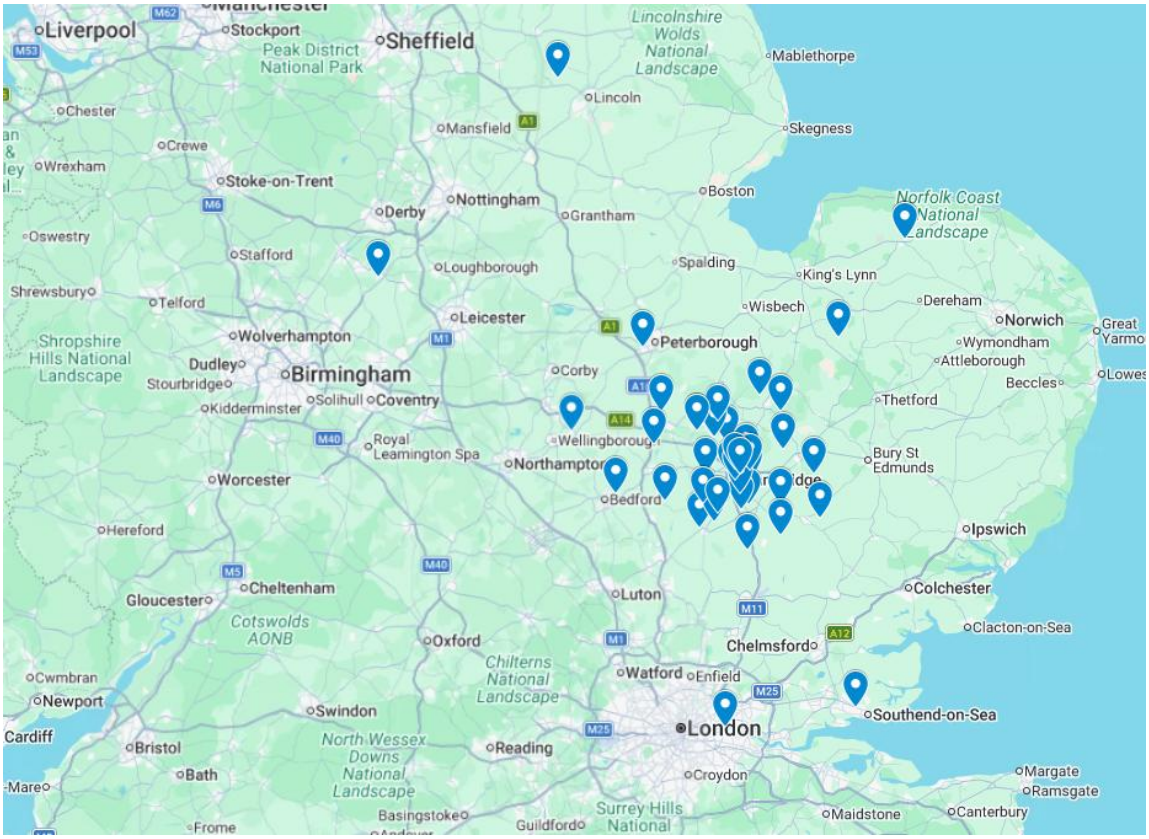
97% of people thought the event they attended exceeded or met their expectations (up from 95% in 2025) and 96% of people would recommend an Open Cambridge event to a friend. Open Cambridge was rated 4.7 stars out of 5.

Did you feel welcome in this space?

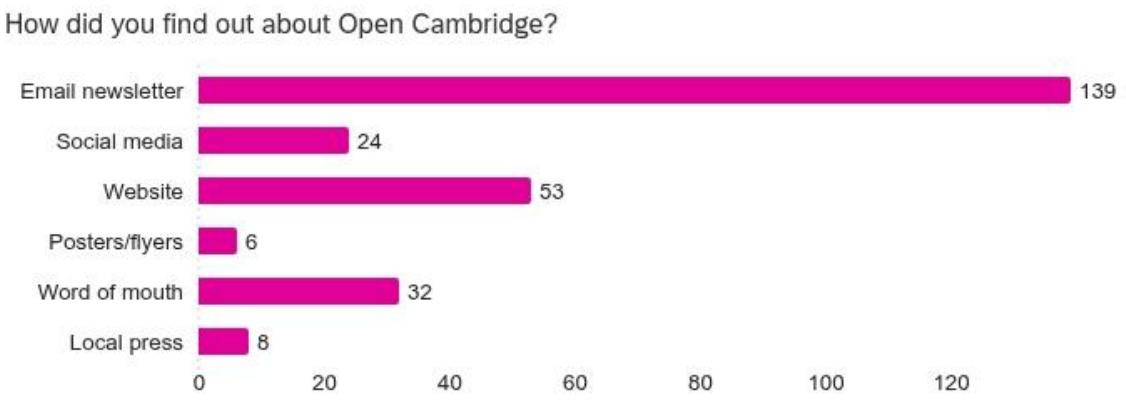


We asked people to indicate their location. This enables us to engage our local engagement in relation to further afield. An interactive map plotting this data is found here:

People travelled from Peterborough, London, North Norfolk, Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, Rushden, Bedford, and Southend. A full map can be found here: https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1tWtGvyX3Oopt24akOym7QwCfYEUCWdc&usp=sharing

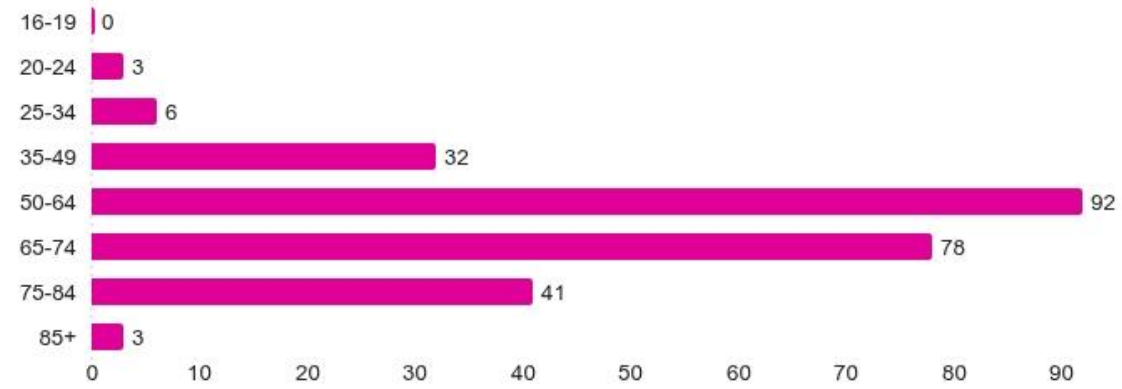


The two top ways people found out about Open Cambridge was via email (53%) and via the website (20%).

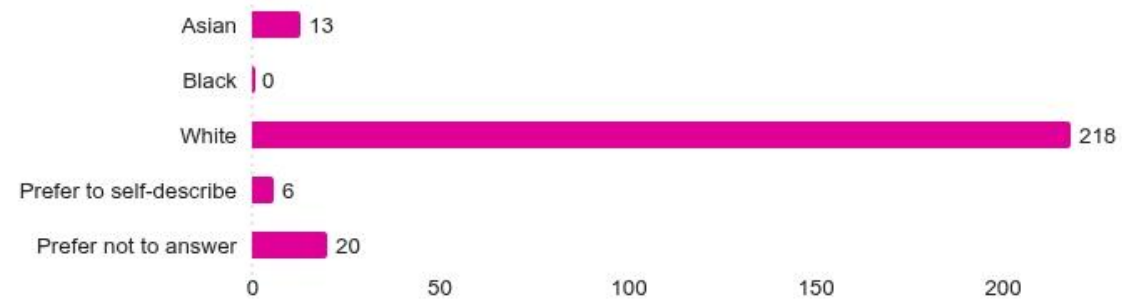


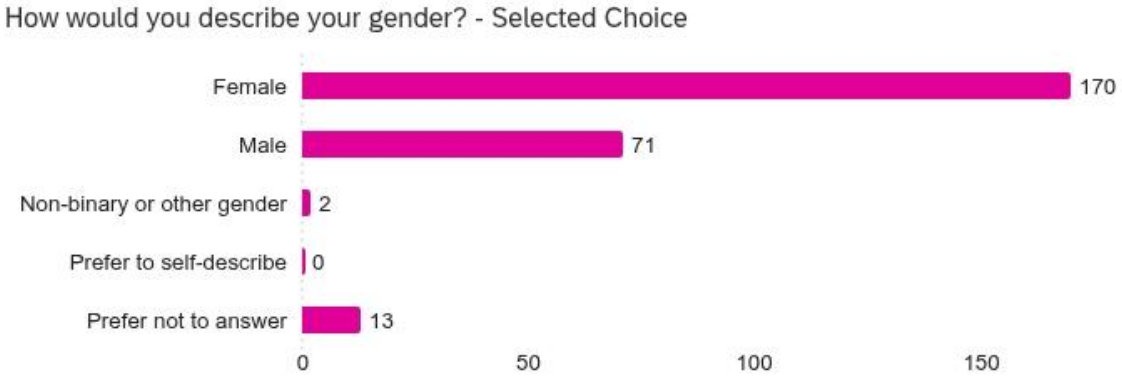
Demographic data

What is your age?



How would you describe your ethnicity? - Selected Choice





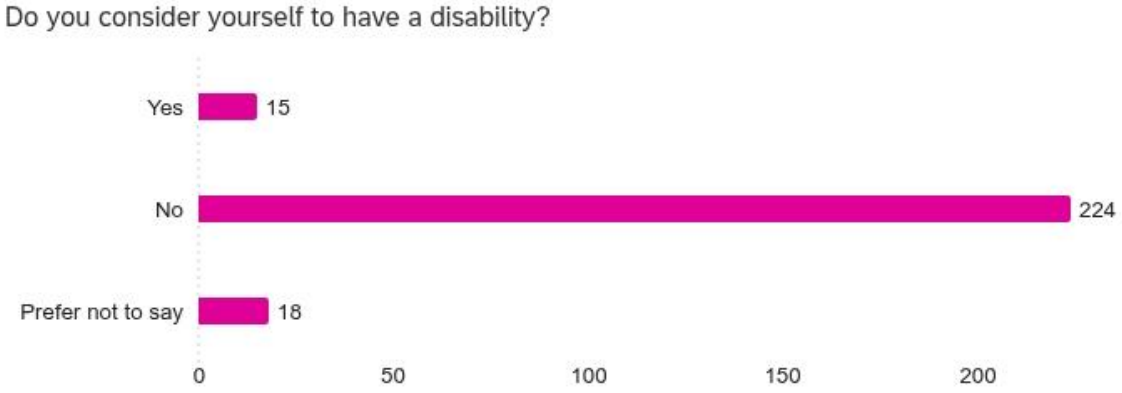




Image: Visitors in the Parker Library, Corpus Christi College, September 2026

Marketing and promotion

Social media

We used our social media channels as our main point of advertising. 174 posts were sent in total across Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn.

Data from 10 August – 21 September 2026 (compared to 11 August-20 September 2025):

Impressions: 344,188 (down 2.8%)

Engagements: 24,635 (up 57.3%)

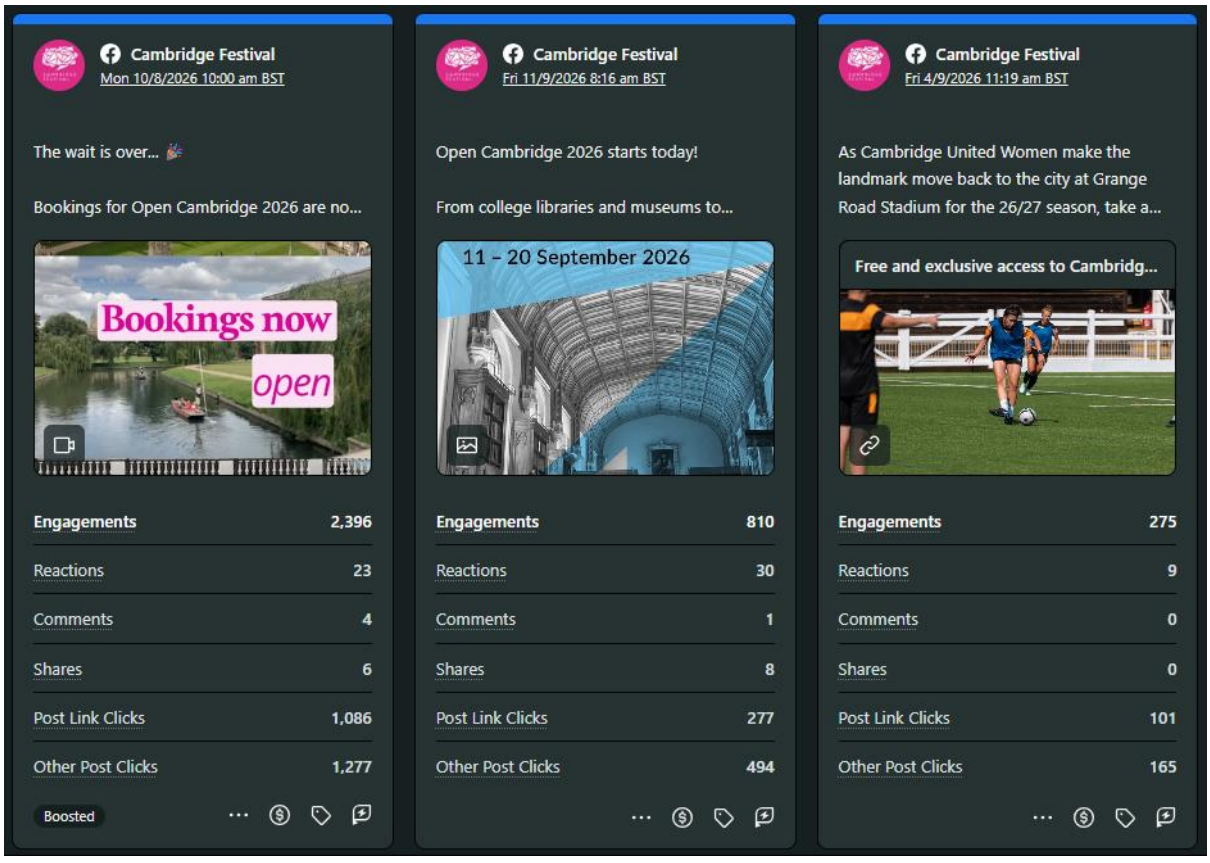
- LinkedIn engagements grew by 934% and registered over 17,000 engagements over the period. The most of the three platforms.

Link clicks: 18,981 (up 154.5%)

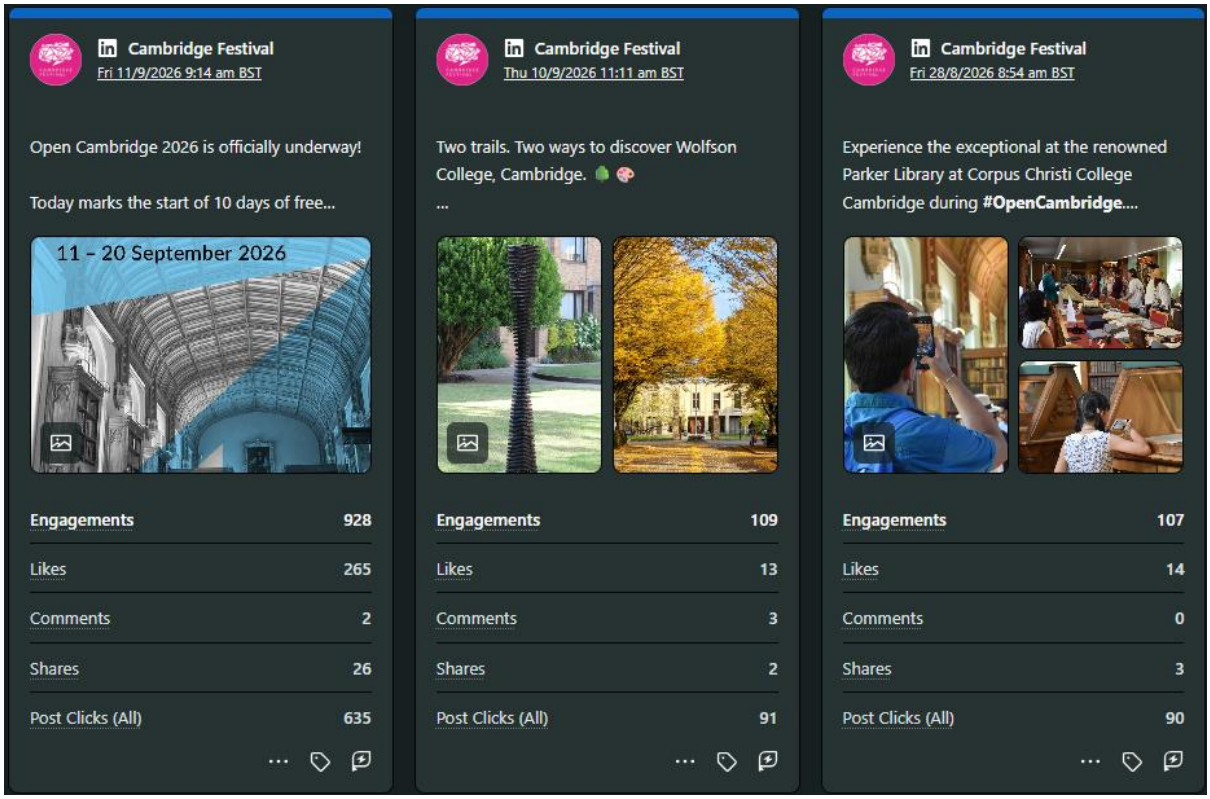
Engagement rate: 7.2% (up 61.9%)

Audience gained: 630 (up 27.8%)

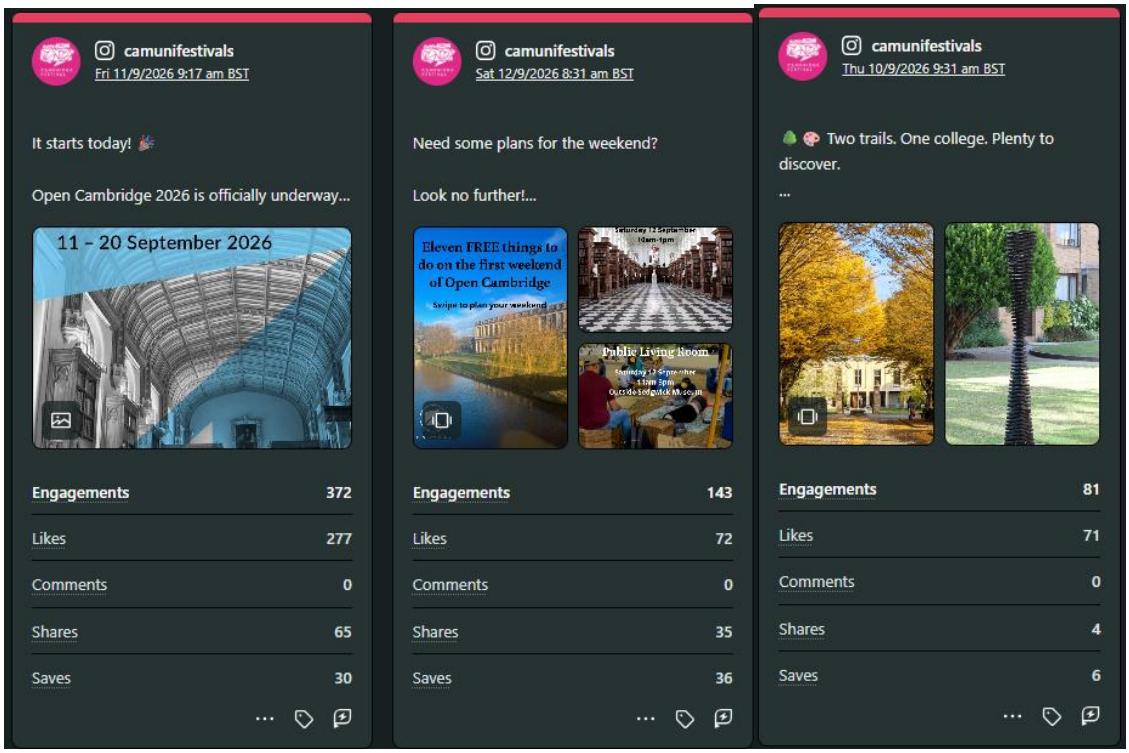
Top performing posts



View post View post View post



View post View post View post



View post View post View post

Paid social media

We ran two paid campaigns for 2026, however, due to the death of Professor Jason Arday, it was decided we pause (and not restart) the general Meta campaign.

The second campaign was run through Eventbrite on Meta to promote the Cambridge United Women's event.

General programme promotion:

Total spent: £68.41

Impressions: 28,138

Engagements: 6,813

Video views: 5,519

Clicks: 2,056

Cambridge United Women's event promotion:

Total spent: £99.88

Impressions: 56,618

Engagements: 1,184

Clicks: 1,695

Web conversions: 136

Full social media reports can be found in appendix 2.

Email marketing

The 2026 Open Cambridge email campaigns continued to achieve excellent deliverability, with a delivery rate of 99.73%, and showed improvements in unsubscribe rate and click-to-open rate. However, the unique open rate dropped from 65.18% to 56.01%, while the click rate declined slightly from 10.08% to 9.71%.

The results suggest that the priority for future campaigns should be turning recipient interest into measurable action, particularly event-page visits and bookings. The programme launch continued to generate strong click engagement, while launch-day and final-weekend emails offer opportunities for improvement.

It is important to point out that the number of emails which were delivered was less than 2025 due to using segments rather than the full list.

Press coverage

Press coverage was up on 2025 and included several radio interviews on BBC Radio Cambridgeshire and Cambridge Radio, online articles on the BBC, Cambridge Independent and The Times as well as print features in Cambridge Edition, Velvet Magazine, The Listing and Cambridge News.

There were 19 pieces of coverage in total. The full list of press coverage can be found in appendix 3.

Website

The Open Cambridge website was visited 147,513 times from 10 August – 21 September with almost 40,000 visits on launch day. There were 3,700 active users on launch day with over 22,000 users across the period.

Most people accessed the website via mobile device, followed by desktop and tablet. Full report available in appendix 4.



The Cambridge Festival Community Quilt on display at the Centre for Computing History, September 2026

What our visitors said

“As with every year have loved the opportunity to visit different venues, meet the custodians who are so knowledgeable and enthusiastic about their field of interest and learn more about our gem of a city Cambridge.”

“Huge thanks to all those who organise Open Cambridge. Greatly appreciated and enjoyed.”

“I can't wait until the next Open Cambridge!”

“It’s not every day that you can see the behind the scenes of a museum, a historic building or a historic place. There are values in passing on the knowledge and get the public interested in the work of others whom you may never have a chance to speak to otherwise. Very well done to all the organisers and speakers.”

“Open Cambridge comes but once a year, and I look forward to 2027!”

“I think Open Cambridge is great. A lot of the sites are open to the public anyway but many people don’t know that or take advantage of what’s out there. An organised tour makes things more accessible. Thanks for all your hard work bringing it all together.”

“Thank you to the team- Open Cambridge is brilliant! We are lucky to have these events each year.”



Image: Visitors at the Mullard Radio Astronomy Observatory, September 2026

Appendix 1 – list of participants

*The Colleges that took part are Christ’s, Churchill, Corpus Christi, Dowing, Girton, Pembroke, Robinson, Selwyn, St John’s, Trinity and Wolfson

**The University departments/institutions that took part are the Department of Physics (Mullard tours), Sedgwick Museum Collections Research Centre, Eddington, Sainsbury Laboratory, Senate House, Whipple Library, Whipple Museum, Cambridge Biomedical Campus, McDonald Institute of Archaeological Research, Isaac Newton Institute, Institute of Criminology Library, Museum of Classical Archaeology, Centre for Material Culture and Cambridge University Library.

†External organisations and groups that took part include Cambridge Quakers, Cambridgeshire Collection at Cambridge Central Library, Cambridge Tourist Guides, All Saints Church Cambridge, Mill Road History Society, Cambridge Buddhist Centre, Westminster College, The Woolf Institute, Cambridge United Football Club, Friends of Histon Road Cemetery, CAMYOGA, Keate Family Arts Trust, Cambridge Samaritans, Queen Edith Chapel, Cambridge American Cemetery, Museum of Cambridge, The Cambridge Association of Architects, the Centre for Computing History, Great St Mary’s Church, Uncomfortable Cambridge, Museum of Technology, and Rowan.

Appendix 2 – Social Media reports

Profile Performance 10/08/26-20/09/2026

Post Performance 10/08/26-20/09/26

Paid Performance 10/08/26-20/09/26

Appendix 3 – Press coverage

https://www.facebook.com/share/v/1D7cD6dGXw/

https://www.thetimes.com/life-style/property-home/article/britains-oldest-printed-wallpaper-masters-lodge-christs-college-open-cambridge-festival-srfzbn5zl

https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m002zq7z (from 36m 13s)

https://cambridge105.co.uk/breakfast-10-08-2026/

https://www.cambridgeindependent.co.uk/whats-on/open-cambridge-2026-to-offer-free-tours-hidden-spaces-and-e-9477247/

https://cambsedition.co.uk/lifestyle/past-meets-present-heritage-open-days-festival/

https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cvgylvy2vlpo

https://thelistingmagazine.co.uk/further-afield-herts-open-studios-heritage-open-days-open-cambridge/

https://eastangliabylines.co.uk/lifestyle/community/behind-closed-doors-discover-cambridges-hidden-spaces-this-september/

https://www.magzter.com/stories/newspaper/Cambridge-News/TAKE-INTRIGUING-DIVE-INTO-CULTURE-THROUGH-ANNUAL-OPEN-CAMBRIDGE

https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m0030vwz (from 3h 23m)

https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m0030l1z (from 2h 21m)

Cambridge News x3 in print

The Listing x 2 in print

Velvet Magazine in print

Appendix 4 – website analytics

