The Vengerberg Trust

Volunteer handbook

Vengerberg Museum and visitor information point

2026 edition, March 2026. Please keep this handbook and bring it to refresher sessions.
It replaces the 2023 edition.

Welcome

Thank you for volunteering with the Vengerberg Trust. About ninety of us run the museum, the visitor information point, the walks and the Lilac Fair, and between us we give the Trust about eleven thousand hours a year. The museum could not open without you.

This handbook tells you what you need to know to do your sessions safely and well. It does not replace your induction or the training for your role, and if anything in it is unclear, ask: the staff and the experienced volunteers would much rather be asked than find out later.

Janet Openshaw
Volunteer Coordinator

Who is who

Curator	Dr Fiona Kettlewell (Tuesday to Friday). Collections, exhibitions, the Study Room, anything about objects.
Visitor Services Manager	Lynne Swithenbank. The rota, the front desk, the shop, the information point, cashing up.
Learning and Collections Officer	Tom Ambler (Tuesday to Thursday). School visits and documentation.
Volunteer Coordinator	Janet Openshaw (volunteer). New volunteers, training, the handbook, expenses.
Safeguarding lead	Patricia Overend, Vice-chair of trustees.
Duty key holder	On the rota sheet each week. Any problem with the building out of hours.

Museum desk 01632 960184. Trust office 01632 960187 (Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10.00–13.00). The duty key holder's mobile number is on the rota sheet and on the board in the volunteers' room; please do not write it anywhere else.

1. The Trust in brief

The Vengerberg Trust is a registered charity. It owns the Old Grammar School, runs the museum and the visitor information point in it, puts on the Lilac Fair, writes and leads the heritage walks, and looks after the statue in the Market Square for the town council. It is not the town council, and you will often need to say so: we cannot help with bins, parking permits, planning or the Thursday market, but the information point has the councils' details.

The museum is free. We ask for a donation of £3, but never press anyone, and never say that it is an entrance charge.

2. Your sessions

The rota is made up by the Visitor Services Manager a month ahead and pinned up in the volunteers' room. If you cannot do a session, please swap with someone and tell Lynne, or tell the desk at least two days ahead. If you are ill on the day, telephone the museum desk before 9.30.

Each opening day needs at least two people on the ground floor, one of whom is a key holder, and one on the first floor when the Lilac Room and the Upper Gallery are open. If there are only two of you, the first floor is closed with the rope at the foot of the stairs and the sign "Upper floor closed for a short while".

Please sign in and out in the book in the volunteers' room. It is our fire register and it is how we count volunteer hours for the annual report.

3. Opening up

The key holder opens up at 9.30 (12.30 on Sundays). In this order:

1. Unlock the Sheep Street door and turn off the alarm at the panel inside within 30 seconds. If the alarm sounds, telephone the duty key holder.
2. Walk round every room, ground floor first. Look for water, broken glass, open cases and anything out of place. Write anything you find in the day book.
3. Switch on the gallery lights at the board in the corridor (switches 1–9; switch 10 is the Upper Gallery and is off this winter).
4. Read the temperature and humidity on the logger in River and Mill and write them in the day book.
5. Switch on the till and the card reader. Count the float (£80, in the bag in the safe) and sign for it.
6. Switch on the virtual tour tablet in the foyer.
7. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, if the Study Room has a booking, switch on the Study Room terminal (see section 9).
8. Open the garden gate and unlock the ramp door.
9. Put out the A-board on Sheep Street and turn the door sign to Open at 10.00 (13.00 on Sundays).

4. Closing down

1. At twenty minutes before closing, tell visitors the museum is closing and stop letting people in.
2. Check every room, including the toilets and the garden, for visitors and for anything left behind.
3. Close the garden gate and lock the ramp door.
4. Cash up with a second person: count the till and the donation box separately, fill in the cash sheet, and put the money and the float in the safe.

5. Sign the Study Room terminal out and switch it off at the wall.

6. Switch off the gallery lights, the tablet and the till.

7. Bring in the A-board.

8. Set the alarm and lock the Sheep Street door.

5. The front desk

The front desk is the first thing visitors see. Greet everyone, tell them the museum is free and where the galleries are, mention the donation box, and let them get on with it. A ground-floor plan and the family trail are in the rack by the desk.

Donations and Gift Aid

Donations can go in the box or be paid by card at the desk. If a UK taxpayer gives by card, offer a Gift Aid slip: it adds 25p to every pound. Slips go in the green folder. Never take a donation by writing down anyone's card details.

The shop

Ring every sale through the till. Members get 10% off with their card. Postcards are not discounted. In May, the cordial is sold only at the fair, not at the desk, except reserved members' bottles on the Monday after the fair.

Membership

New members fill in the yellow form. Take the payment, give them a card and the latest *Crest*, and put the form in the membership tray. Do not post forms or cards; the Trust office does that.

Questions you will be asked

- **Where is the toilet?** Off the foyer, on the left. The accessible toilet is the second door.
- **Is there a café?** No. Cafés on High Street, in the Market Square and at the Town Mill.
- **Can I park outside?** Only to set down. Sheep Street car park is 50 metres up the hill.
- **Is there a lift?** No. Offer the virtual tour tablet, and tell the Curator if a visitor would like an object from the Lilac Room brought down.
- **When is the Lilac Fair?** The third weekend of May. The dates for each year are announced in January.

Talking about the legend

Many visitors ask about the Lilac Sorceress. Tell the story as it is told in the Lilac Room, and point people to the statue, the crest, the window in the church and the Lilac Room. If you are asked whether she was real, the Trust's answer is that the flood is recorded, that the legend was first printed in 1897, and that the museum has found no record that names her. Please do not add to the story or guess at her name, and do not discuss the borough records with visitors: refer questions about them to the Curator.

6. The visitor information point

The information point shares the desk. The leaflets are in the rack; the folders behind the desk have bus and train times, places to stay, places to eat, the river levels and the councils' numbers. We give information, but we do not make bookings or recommend one business over another. Record each enquiry with a tally mark on the enquiry sheet; the totals go to the town council, which pays for the service.

7. Safety

Fire

If the fire alarm sounds, or you discover a fire: raise the alarm at the nearest call point; call the fire service on 999; and clear the building by the nearest exit, checking your area as you go. Do not stop to collect belongings and do not use the stairs to go up. The assembly point is on the pavement opposite the museum, outside number 15 Sheep Street. Take the signing-in book with you. Do not go back in until the fire service says so.

Visitors on the first floor who cannot use the stairs should wait with a volunteer at the half-landing refuge, by the fire door, and the fire service must be told they are there.

First aid

The first aid kit is under the desk and there is a list of first aiders in the volunteers' room. Call 999 for anything serious. Every accident or near miss, to a visitor or a volunteer, is written in the accident book, also under the desk, the same day.

Lone working

No one should open or close the museum alone. If you find you are alone, telephone the duty key holder and wait outside until someone arrives.

Difficult situations

If a visitor becomes aggressive, do not argue. Stay calm, keep the desk between you, and telephone the duty key holder. If you feel threatened, leave the building and call the police. Write down what happened afterwards.

8. Safeguarding

Children under 12 must be with an adult. If you find a child on their own, stay with them at the desk and make an announcement. If you have any concern about the safety or wellbeing of a child or an adult at risk, tell the most senior person on duty and the safeguarding lead the same day. Do not promise to keep a secret, do not investigate, and write down what you saw or were told, in the person's own words, with the date and time.

Volunteers do not take photographs of visitors' children, do not give personal contact details to young people, and are never alone with a child in a closed room.

9. Objects and the Study Room

Handling

Only objects in the handling collection, which have a yellow label, may be handled by visitors, and then only with a volunteer present. Never open a case, move an object on display or lift anything from the store without the Curator or Tom. If you find an object damaged, do not touch it: put a sign on the case, write it in the day book and tell the Curator.

Offers of objects

If someone offers to give the museum an object, take their name and telephone number and a description, and give them the Curator's card. Do not accept anything left at the desk, and never give an opinion on what something is worth.

The Study Room

The Study Room is open by appointment on Tuesday and Thursday mornings. Researchers sign the Study Room register, leave bags in a locker and use pencils only. Archive volumes are produced only by the Curator or Tom.

The Study Room terminal. Switch the terminal on at the wall and at the back of the screen. It opens the reading-room catalogue (vengerberg.org/museum/collections/reading-room/), which includes records that are not in the online catalogue. Sign in with the account **studyroom**. The password is the accession number of the Flood Bell, in lower case, with no spaces or full stops: the number is on the bell's label in River and Mill. Sign out at the end of every session and switch off at the wall. Researchers must not be left signed in on their own, and records marked as restricted must not be shown to them without the Curator's permission.

10. Personal information

Membership forms, Gift Aid slips, the Study Room register and the accident book contain personal information. Keep them in the desk drawer or the office, never on the desk while you are away from it, and never take them home. Do not give anyone's address or telephone number to a caller, even a member asking for a friend's. If you lose anything containing personal information, tell the Visitor Services Manager straight away.

11. Expenses

You can claim travel to and from your sessions at 25p a mile by car or the bus fare, and any agreed costs you pay for the Trust. Use the expenses form in the volunteers' room, with receipts, and give it to Janet by the end of the month. Most volunteers do not claim, and you do not have to say why you do or do not.

12. If you want to stop

Please tell Janet. You are welcome back at any time.

The Vengerberg Trust, The Old Grammar School, 14 Sheep Street, Vengerberg, VG4 1DS. Registered charity. Volunteers' enquiries: volunteers@vengerberg.org.