

Surrey Festival: Winnie-the-Pooh, refugee histories and music-making machines and more...

23 October 2026



How did a Surrey town help people fleeing the Nazis? What can Winnie-the-Pooh's woodland tell us all about belonging? And what does a mechanical piano teach us about music in the age of AI?

The University of Surrey is inviting the public to explore these questions through ten free events during the Being Human Festival, running from 5 to 14 November 2026. Held across Guildford, Dorking and Compton, its programme brings archives, performances and hands-on activities together under this year's theme, 'Crossroads'.

At Refugee Voices from World War II, visitors will discover how ordinary people in Dorking helped those escaping the Nazi regime. A pop-up exhibition at Dorking Museum on 7 November, 10am-4pm, draws on the Dorking Refugee Committee's archive from 1938-1949, documenting both the difficulties refugees faced and the support they received. Visitors can explore a new website developed by Surrey academics and speak with historians, curators and teachers about this local history of solidarity.

On 8 November, 11am-4pm, Into the Hundred Acre Wood: Queering Space in Children's Literature offers a different perspective on some of Britain's best-loved fictional landscapes. At the University's Library, Dr Amy Louise Morgan will explore how children's literary spaces open up possibilities for imagination and transformation through queer theory. Visitors will receive guided access to archive materials relating to E. H. Shepard, illustrator of Winnie-the-Pooh and The Wind in the Willows, before creating their own literary worlds in a workshop with award-winning author Ally Sherrick. The event is for ages 16 and over.

The relationship between human creativity and machines takes centre stage at The Evolution of Musical Creativity, at the Guildford Institute on 11 November, 7pm-8pm. Composer and music technologist Milton Mermikides will trace a history stretching from ninth-century programmable machines in Baghdad to today's AI-driven music. Historical demonstrations and musical examples will explore how technology has repeatedly changed the way people compose, perform and listen.

Dr Lucy Ella Rose, Lecturer in Victorian Literature and event lead at the University of Surrey said:

"These events show how stories from the past speak directly to questions we face today: how we welcome people seeking refuge, who feels a sense of belonging and what happens when machines become part of the creative process."

"We're inviting people to get close to the archives, meet the researchers and try things for themselves. Whether you come for Winnie-the-Pooh, wartime history or a live performance, there's an opportunity to discover something unexpected about Surrey and the wider world."

Elsewhere, families can explore Lewis Carroll's Surrey connections through immersive Alice in Wonderland storytelling, performance and 'imagination stations' at the Guildford Institute on 7 November. Dorking Museum will also host refugee-history zine-making workshops that day.

Music events include a live pianola concert with Rex Lawson on 5 November, an online player-piano exhibition throughout the festival and an interactive schools' session on 9 November.

Another event, Older LGBT+ Housing and Care at a Crossroads and Beyond, explores how housing and care can better support LGBTQ+ people in later life. Taking place at the International Longevity Centre in London on 5 November, 5pm-7pm, the event combines a short animation, conversation and an interactive theatre workshop inspired by Surrey's Life House Project. Open to anyone aged 16 and over, no theatre experience is needed.

Creative writers can explore Turner's life and art at Watts Gallery on 13 November, while a family concert celebrating composer Richard Stoker at Guildford United Reformed Church on 14 November will bring together opera, literary song settings and music from Pirates of the Caribbean.

Explore the full programme and booking details. Advance booking is required for most events.

Surrey University



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