



# Welcome to The MERL

This picture guide will help you find your way around The MERL. This is a special version which shows the main changes with our

[Radical Rural Gallery Trail](#) (14 February – 24 May 2026)

We also have a [sensory map](#) available that highlights sound, light and touch in the galleries.

There are useful tips for activities you can do and a bit of information about the different objects you may see in the galleries. There is also information on the facilities available, including seating areas and toilets.

This is the Museum of English Rural Life (also known as The MERL). It is a free museum and open Tuesday to Sunday. It is usually closed on Mondays, except for special events.

You will arrive at the museum through one of two entrances into our small carpark. Information about parking can be found on our [website](#) or by asking a member of staff inside. Sometimes you need to display a permit and this can be collected from the staff at our front desk. It's always a good idea to check.



From the car park, a gateway leads into a courtyard towards our main entrance.



The courtyard has a push button at the entrance for wheelchair access or you can just pull the door (it is quite heavy!)  
In our reception you will be greeted by a member of staff. As you enter, the shop will be on your right.



The staircase or lift on your left, will take you to the **Community Case, The Nook, the toilets and The Staircase Hall**.



In front of the **Community Case** you can sit on the sofa to view the latest exhibition.

We can explain more about this area later.

For now we will head towards the **Welcome Space cafe and galleries**.





The door on the right will take you to the **Learning Studio**. Sometimes this room is in use or closed. At other times, you can do activities and workshops, like our 'Farming Cycle' brass rubbing. Ask our staff for more information.

This is the **Welcome Space** where you will find more of the shop and a **Café**. You can sit with a drink or snack, and we have a variety of options available for you to buy from our shop.



From the café you can go through a door to the garden or a door to the galleries. Sometimes we have a volunteer at the gallery entrance who can help you.



In the garden, there is more seating and there is also lots of space to walk around and play in.



We have a **Shepherd's Hut** where you can sit and relax or read a book.



We also have chickens and there is a tractor to play on, though we do ask you 'drive' carefully.





From the bottom of the garden, you can walk along our “woodland path,” look back at the building, have a picnic, play or relax. To go back into the building, you will need to use the same door you came out of, where the café is.

To enter the galleries, go through the glass sliding door from the cafe.





There is an activity trolley at the entrance to the galleries. When available, there's a Welcome Volunteer here who can tell you more about what you can see and do in the galleries. You can help yourself to trail sheets and leaflets as well as our Sensory Backpacks. You can collect a **Radical Rural** Gallery trail, which includes a map, from the trolley or at the front desk.

## Shaping the Land Gallery

This gallery is usually quite dark and small with a bright animation/sound projected onto the wall. The sound can be quite loud. The large banner is part of the Radical Rural display.



## A Year On The Farm Gallery

You will see lots of objects here, including mannequins and a model of a slaughtered animal in this gallery.





You will also find a sheep with a woolly jumper and our touch screen interactive game and jigsaw puzzles which you are more than welcome to play with. At the far end of this gallery you will see “Old Crockern”. This a very large artwork:



**Town and Country Gallery**

At the entrance you will see our wicker model of a horse and further down a larger steam engine!



There are more interactive touchscreens in this gallery too.



At the end of this gallery, you will see a glass panel displaying a large print of a map (through the glass you will also be able to see the **Model Farming** gallery).



## Making Rural England Gallery

This gallery includes some objects relating to hunting and more of the Radical Rural exhibition.



You will also see some domestic items You will also be able to see into a vardo (wagon/caravan).



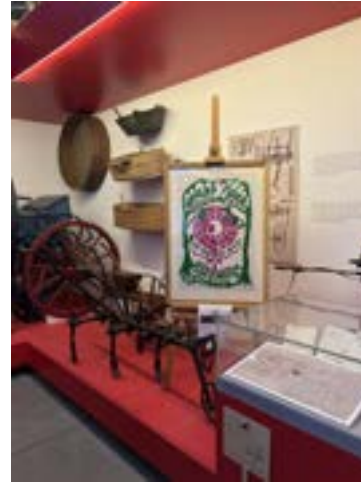
## Model Farming Gallery

This gallery is our Model Farming gallery showcasing our amazing toy collections. This exhibit also includes a farm table that visitors of any age can use.



## Forces for Change Gallery

You can see some more modern machinery here.



You can also choose a film to watch while sitting on the bench.



There is another set of toilets at this end of the gallery and a fire exit for emergencies only.



You will also find the lift upstairs to the **Digging Deeper** and **Ladybird Gallery** but there are also stairs leading from the **Model Farming area too**.

It has user notices on the door. If you need further help, please ask at the front desk.



## Our Country Lives Gallery

This gallery has dimmed lighting. In the centre is a bright, large interactive table where you can play games. You will also see our wicker model of King Alfred.



Around the corner is the **Wagon Walk**.

This is very long and narrow and one way. You may hear other people walking along the walkway above you as you look at the wagons through history.

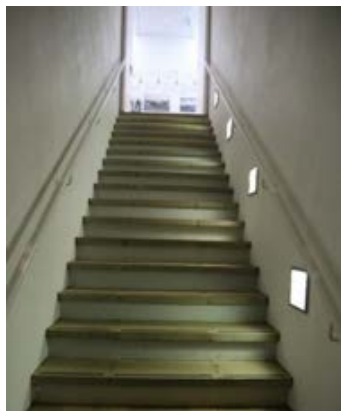
There are several screens with films along here and you can see some other items in cases along the wall. There is also a large artwork which is part of the exhibition. It looks like fencing.



When you reach these wheels, you are nearly at the end of the **Wagon Walk**, which takes you back to the shop, café and Welcome Space.



At this end, you will find a quad bike, which you are welcome to sit on. Take care!



From the **Welcome Area** you can follow the stairs up to the **Digging Deeper** and **Ladybird Gallery** on the upper floor. The upper floor is called the **Mezzanine Level**.

(Alternatively, you can use the lift seen in the galleries near **Forces for Change** or the stairs near **Model Farming** to access these spaces).



It is very long and narrow and with the gridded path you can see the floor below.

On one side you will see a variety of cabinets with objects from lamps, to mouse traps, to clothes.



On your other you will see ploughs... and more ploughs.



You can continue past the staircase towards the back of the museum, and you will be able to view the galleries below on either side, here for example, milk churns and wagons.





At the end you will find the **Ladybird Gallery**.

The **Ladybird Gallery** overlooks the gallery below, with a 'book corner' immediately to the right of the door.



To exit, head back through the doorway, and you will see this view of the **Mezzanine**.



Follow the path along with the ploughs on your left and objects on your right until you return to the first set of stairs on your right.

Here is what they look like from the top of them.



These Stairs will take you back down to the ground floor of the museum.

You will be facing the **Model Farming** section of the galleries and from here you can exit through the galleries.

To access the **Mezzanine Level** with lift access, you will need to make your way through the galleries to the lift by following the route from **Shaping the Land** to **Forces for Change** to reach the lift at the end. Once in the lift there are instructions showing you how to operate it.





You will arrive by the **Ladybird Gallery**. From here this will be your view.



You can choose to either explore the **Ladybird Gallery** or you can see the collections along the **Mezzanine**.

To exit the Mezzanine and return to the ground floor you can use the stairs at the front of the museum that lead to the reception area, the stairs halfway along that lead to the **Model Farming** gallery, or the lift, close to the **Ladybird Gallery**.

**The Nook and Staircase Hall** (located up the steps at the main entrance and reception desk). Through the door on the left, **The Nook** offers comfy seating and a quiet space to relax in.



Turn left through this exit for the toilets including baby changing and accessible facilities.



Turn Right here for the Staircase Hall. You will go through two glass doors and one wooden door that are usually propped open.



The Staircase Hall has changing displays of museum, library, art and university collections.



From the Staircase Hall there are doors leading to our [Reading Room](#) (a quiet study space for research), and the [Art Study Room](#). The large staircase leads up to art displays, meeting rooms and offices.

As you exit the museum, feel free to explore the **Welcome** space and shop more or visit the café or garden. You will exit through the courtyard, the same way you entered.



We hope you enjoyed your visit with us. We look forward to welcoming you back!

If you have any questions or feedback for us, please email [merlevents@reading.ac.uk](mailto:merlevents@reading.ac.uk)

Thank you.