

# Bishop's Stortford History Society launches new book, The Bishops' Castle, as lasting tribute to heritage of town

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10:47, 11 September 2025

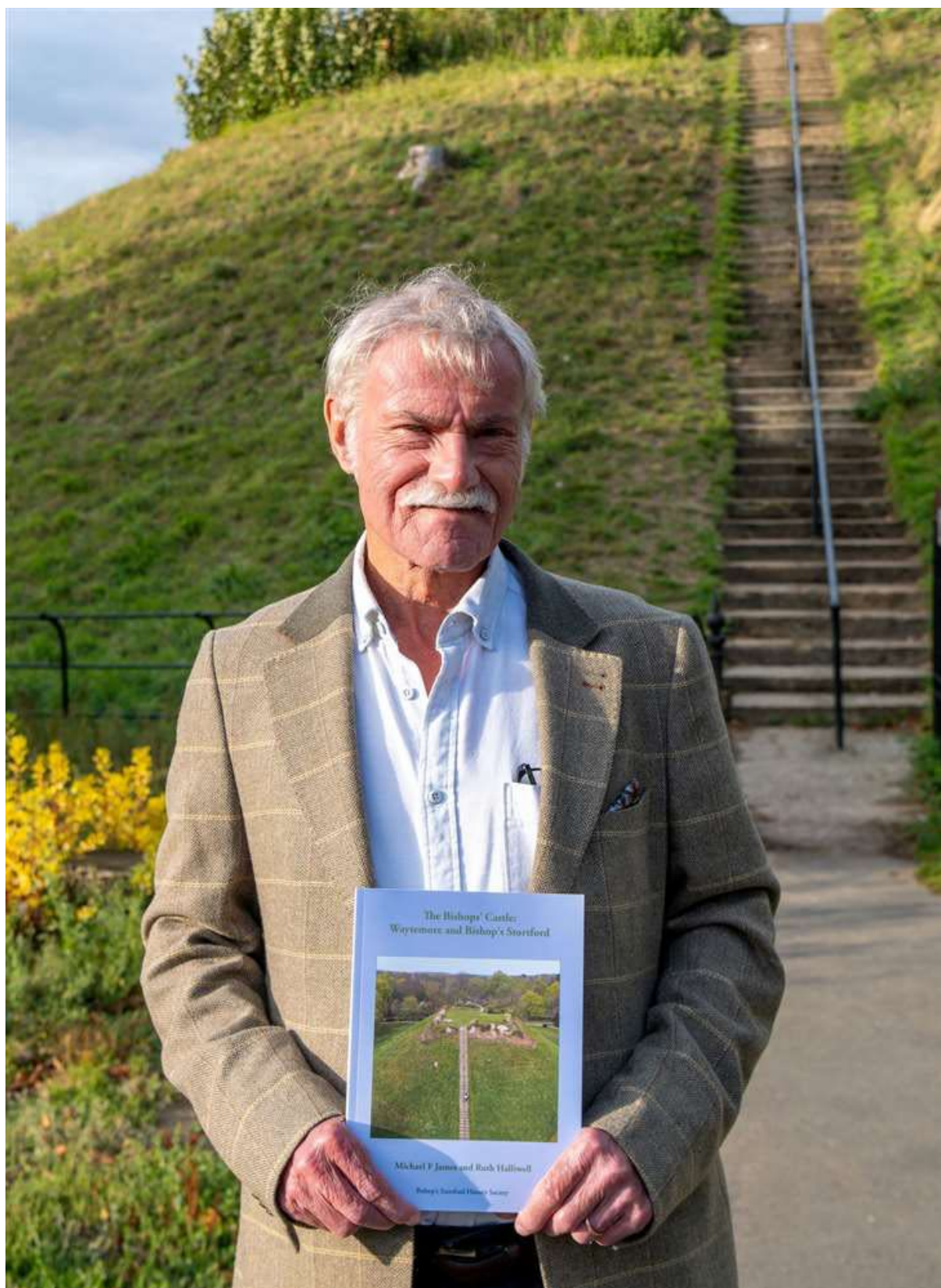
**updated:** 12:15, 11 September 2025



**Bishop's Stortford History Society has marked its 70th anniversary with the publication of a new book unlocking the secrets of its most intriguing landmark.**

*The Bishops' Castle: Waytemore and Bishop's Stortford* was a labour of love by Dr Mike James, who has volunteered at the town's museum since 2009.

His work helping to catalogue nearly 50,000 objects fuelled his interest in the town's development.

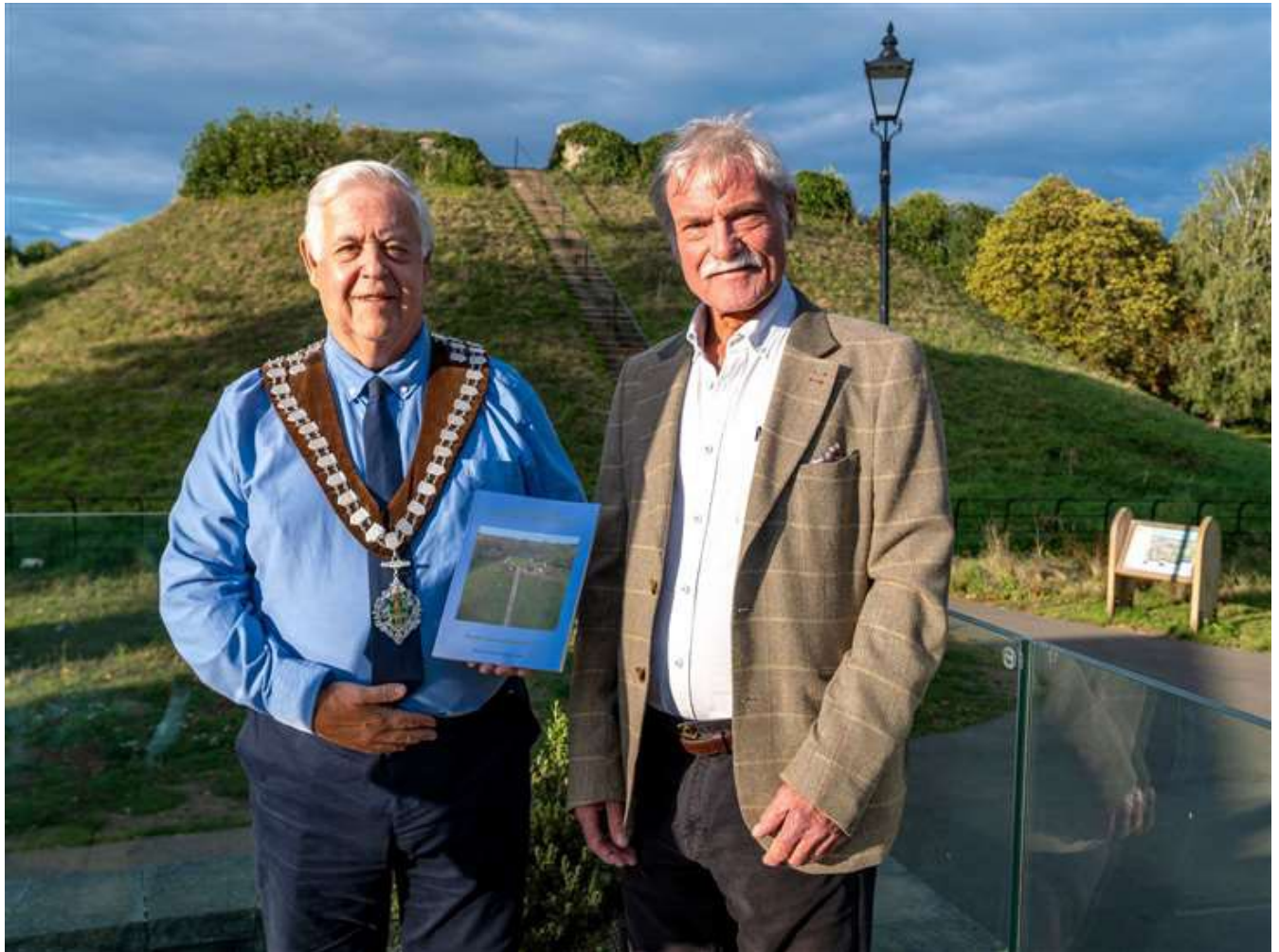


Dr Mike James in front of the Waytemore Castle mound, which inspired his new book

When he realised that almost nothing had been written about Waytemore Castle since JL Glasscock investigated the mound at the turn of the 20th century, he decided to fill the gap.

He worked in collaboration with archaeological geophysics expert Ruth Halliwell.

Their joint effort was officially unveiled by the mayor, Cllr Richard Townsend, at a book launch at the Terrace Park Café & Kitchen, in the shadow of the mound at the heart of Castle Park.



The mayor of Bishop's Stortford, Cllr Richard Townsend, with Dr Mike James, author of *The Bishops' Castle: Waytemore and Bishop's Stortford*

Society chair Tim Howard-Smith welcomed guests, including subscribers who helped to finance the publication, along with sponsorship from the Nineveh Trust.

Then vice-chair Rob Francis, who led the publishing project, explained the society's mission.



"We are aiming to leave a legacy – a lasting tribute to the heritage of the town. Marcus Garvey, the Jamaican political activist, said that 'a people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without its roots'."

He said that the society aimed to encourage public interest with a series of publications inspired by Dr Emily Cole's report on the Water Lane United Reformed Church Hall, commissioned by the town's civic federation.



Bishop's Stortford History Society chair Tim Howard-Smith welcomes guests to the book launch. Left is vice-chair Rob Francis

Mike's book is the first result, and a volume on the Corn Exchange will follow later this year or early in 2026.

Mr Francis said: "We are also planning to install **five blue plaques** later this year around the town to celebrate the contributions that individuals have made to the Bishop's Stortford that we know today.

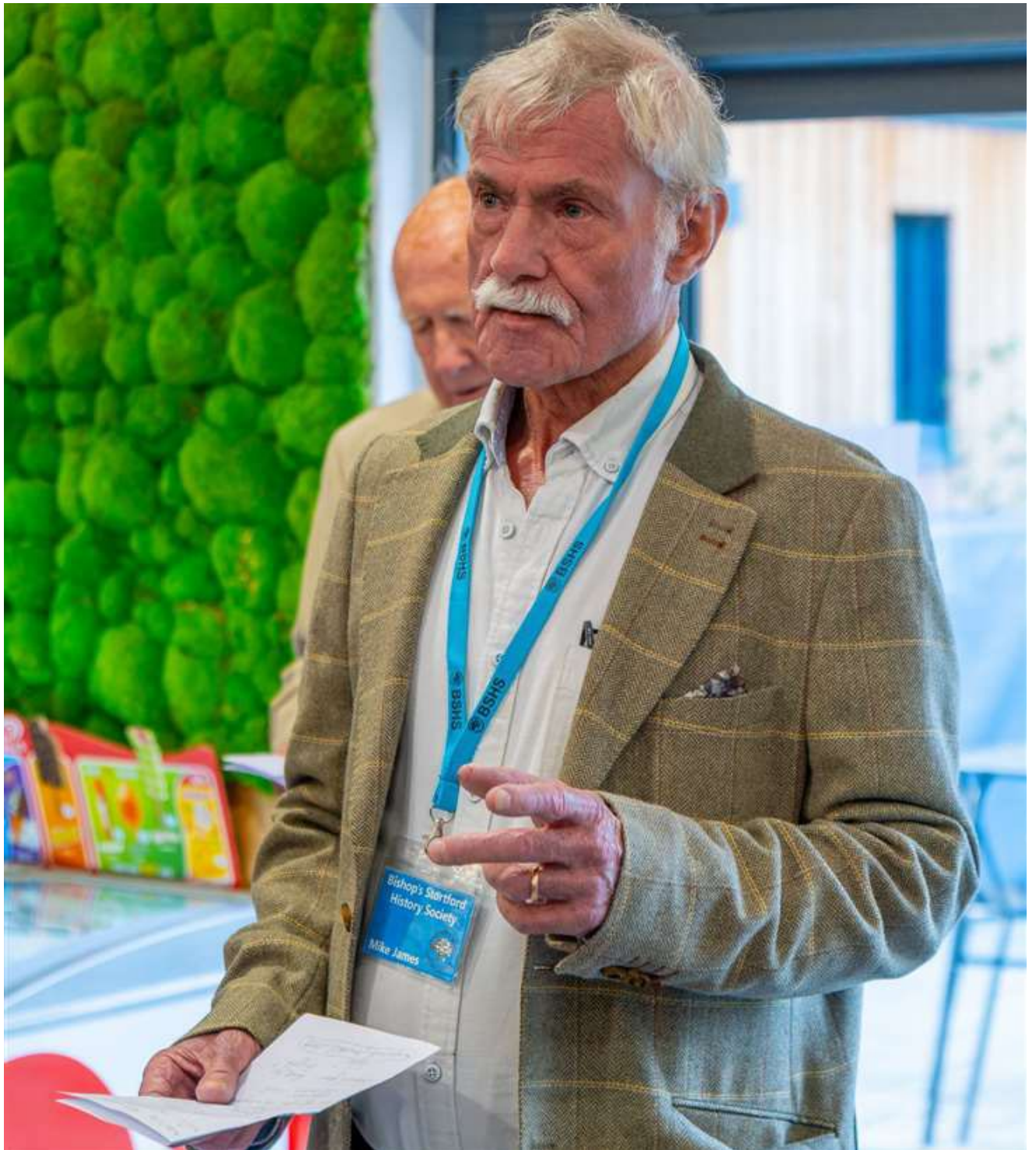
"These publications and plaques provide a permanent record of key elements of Stortford's history and the people who contributed so much.



Rob Francis, who led the publication project, introduces author Dr Mike James "In the digital and ephemeral world in which we now live, we believe that such physical evidence is even more important to our heritage."

He said that *The Bishops' Castle* epitomised that aim, and Mike had been a model author.





Dr Mike James introduces his new book, *The Bishops' Castle: Waytemore and Bishop's Stortford*

Waytemore Castle was probably built around 1070 by William, the Bishop of London and is unusual as an episcopal fortress.

In the preface, Mike explains: "Climbing the steps of Waytemore Castle mound for the first time provides a fresh view of the town. It forces a realisation of the immense labour invested in the castle mound's construction - there clearly has to be a very good reason.

"It also became obvious, researching what was known of it, that the sources were often obscure and the current knowledge out of date.

"Indeed, despite the explosion of research in castle studies, the [Waytemore] Castle is rarely mentioned, even in passing.



Waytemore Castle mound

"Yet its history shows it was a participant in major events, remaining in business for nearly six centuries, thus long outlasting many other Norman castles."

His aim in researching and writing the book is to stimulate new thinking about Stortford's foundations.

Copies of *The Bishops' Castle: Waytemore and Bishop's Stortford* cost £25 and are available from Waterstones in South Street and the Tourist Information Centre in Market Square.

Copies will also be on sale at **meetings of Bishop's Stortford History Society** with a 10% discount for members.