

President's Report AGM Feb 15th 2023

A warm welcome to you all, members and guests.

At last year's AGM we were emerging from the pandemic and had missed two fairs, hopefully that is all behind us now.

After the formal business of the AGM, we have a presentation entitled "Ghost Detective Work: 30 years of investigating, researching & writing about Northamptonshire." Sounds intriguing, a big welcome to our guest speaker Adrian Perkins.

Last year's Fair was more than welcome. All our traditional events returned and of course the proper readings of the Charter rather than just one outside the church that we had to contend with in the previous two years.

Attendances were good and it was nice to catch up with people.

Frank organised a great Fair and it was well supported; luckily with good weather apart from the final Saturday when heavy rain unfortunately caused a premature evening closure.

We were also able to resume our members' meetings. I have to say the attendances were a little disappointing at these meetings possibly a hangover of COVID; but maybe a trend is developing. We have therefore had to reduce the number of members' meetings until a clear trend emerges whether it's viable to continue. Thank you to all of you who have been supporting these meetings.

We ran 5 meetings last year the topics were

"A Day out at the Zoo" - with our Bailiff.

"The Victorian Fair" - Doctor Ann Featherstone

"Showmen's Night - with Alan Marks & significant films

"Post Boxes - all you want to know & more" - Helen Crabtree

Our Christmas meeting was an eclectic mix of a presentation from the High Sheriff, Crispin Holborow, on his role followed by entertainment from the Burton Latimer Ukelele & Drum Group along with festive nibbles. By the way Frank, Sue and I had the honour of attending the recent High Sheriff's Northampton Courts Service held at Rothwell Holy Trinity Church.

At the 2020 AGM, it was agreed that the Society's subscription should be raised to £5 each per year. This was not implemented due to covid and we did not charge subs for two years as little was happening. The new rate of £5 each will begin this year.

Please do encourage people to join the Society, the higher the numbers the more our influence. We currently have 314 members and need to boost our numbers.

At our AGM we award Honorary Life Memberships to those who have supported the Society and the Fair and traditions over the years. It is not so much the monetary value but the recognition of support.

This year we are awarding this honour to Wayne Woods who has always been a supporter and great help during set up and break down. Also, to one of our Showmen who has been coming to Rowell for many years - Charlie Appleton. Charlie also usually provides the location and PA system for the Blessing Presentation.

Rowell Fair Week is Saturday 3rd June to Saturday 10th June with Proclamation Monday being the 5th. Frank will as ever be hard at work not only organising a full fairground, but also tackling the huge amount of paperwork that has to be completed to ensure the week is successful.

The first weekend will include all the usual traditions:-

On the Saturday the Rowell Fair Tart competition is in the morning at the Rothwell Arts & Heritage Centre. Have a go at baking or come along to sample for a modest price and support the A&H Centre. Our thanks go to the A & H centre for their year-round support.

Allen Eaton's two magnificent Steam Engines are making a welcome return over the weekend. It is some years since they were last here. A great spectacle of sight, sound and smell!

The Sunday will again see the Classic Vehicle display at "The Charter".

The Town Council Civic Parade at 1.30pm to the Parish Church for the Civic Service at 2pm before the Parade back to the Fairground for the 3pm Blessing of the Fair. Street entertainment and music will be active in the Fairground prior to the Blessing. Our thanks go to Rothwell Town

Council for granting us £1K towards enabling such entertainment to happen.

The Gretton Silver Band will be performing in the Methodist Church after the Blessing and the Parish Church will be open for refreshments.

The Sunday also hosts the ever popular and fascinating Model Exhibition right here in the Tresham Hall. I would like to again thank Dave Springthorpe for all the years he has been organising this and as you probably know stood down last year. Our grateful thanks go to Dave Arthur who has taken over this role, assisted by Mick Reynolds.

The Fair will run for the rest of the week at normal opening times - that is 2pm on the Saturdays and 6.00pm during weekdays as well as after the Blessing of the Fair.

Monday, of course sees the unique Ancient Charter Proclamation, hopefully bustling with a huge crowd. Hope to see you there. One of our speakers last year was Doctor Ann Featherstone, a heritage Fair expert, who stated that our Charter Proclamation is the most unique in the UK! Praise indeed! And, of course, later in the year our Bailiff had the honour of declaring the accession of King Charles III.

We took the decision to increase our social media activity, beginning last year. We see this as an important part of ensuring that the Rowell Fair is promoted across as many platforms as possible over and above traditional paper-based marketing such as posters, leaflets etc.

With that in mind, we invited Steve Palmer to completely rebuild the website and set up social media accounts across Instagram and Twitter to complement our established Facebook presence.

Instagram and Twitter went live on Wednesday, 13 April 2022 and together with Facebook, we have been posting weekly (on a Sunday) ever since.

The refreshed website was relaunched on Friday 8th July 2022 with a lot of extra material over and above the site it replaced. It has become the one-stop shop for the history of the Fair - and its future, where again, we post to the Rowell Fair Blog almost every week about past/present and future activities including Members' Evenings.

We have further plans for the future of the website including investigating the viability of setting up a (paid) members only section where Members ONLY will be able to access additional material about the Fair. We also want to make it easier for those Members who wish to, pay their annual subscriptions direct - by adding an online payment option.

Since our increased social media presence went live, we have been closely monitoring the performance of each platform.

Facebook - continues to be popular with around 1.9k followers. There is some confusion amongst some of those 1.9K where they think they are automatically RFS Members -even though they don't pay a subscription - and we are currently debating with some urgency how we clarify the distinction.

Twitter - This has performed poorly. Since launch we have only accrued 12 followers and therefore the committee has agreed to consider closing this account post-Fair after further discussion.

Instagram - has performed much better. In less than a year, we have accrued 50 followers (as at January 2023) and the platform is a lot more active compared with Twitter, even though they contain much the same content.

Website - Since our relaunch, the website has received over 5000 views with the Proc Monday, page being the most popular by some margin. What's interesting is that most of our visits come from other social media sites and the major search engines - so it would appear that broadening our social media presence has paid off.

Going forward, we plan to continue boosting our presence across social media and we have plans to add even more content to the website after this year's Fair.

If you are not a regular user of the web, perhaps ask your younger family members to give you a tour around the website and our social media platforms. We think you'll like what you see. Our web address is rowellfair.co.uk and you can find us across the major social media platforms by using the search term "the rowell fair".

As part of this advance and due to the high cost of postage, the Newsletters will be posted on the website. Although we will ensure that



there are copies for collection at the A & H Centre should you prefer a hard copy.

So, it's been an active year and a huge amount of work undertaken by technical guru Steve to get us to this stage and I would like to thank him sincerely for helping the Society to be in the 21st century.

As a Society, we are justifiably proud of our Street Fair and associated traditions.

One project that we have had on our "back burner" is to place explanatory plaques at each proclamation point. This would keep the Charter Fair in view and be of benefit to both town residents and visitors. Rothwell Town Council has awarded us £2500 towards this project. We still need to raise more but we are aiming at different sources including the Northants Council - watch this space.

Regarding fund raising, if anyone has any ideas feel free to share with any committee member. One avenue we are exploring is if there are opportunities to share the preparation and therefore the rewards of a fundraising event with other town organisations.

I would like to gratefully thank the Conservative Club for their continued support for not only Members' meetings but also Committee meetings.

Also, thanks to all who help behind the scenes. Val Messinger has been particularly supportive by helping us to collect & record subscriptions. All help small or large is gratefully welcomed.

And finally, to Committee members' for giving their time to support our unique traditions.

Thanks to you all and I look forward to seeing you at as many events as possible.

Thank you.