

President's Report AGM Feb 15th 2024

A warm welcome to you all, members and guests.

After the formal business of the AGM, we have "Ooh Matron!" an illustrated presentation about the Carry On films with Steve Dimmer; of course, of particular interest with our connection to Jim Dale. Welcome Steve.

It is Rowell Fair's 820 anniversary year - is it really 20 years since the Torchlight Procession and more? How time does fly.

During the year you may have seen that we found that a daffodil bulb had been bred and registered in the name of "Rowell Fair" by a local bulb expert from Kettering. We tracked down and bought 50 of these from Holland and planted them in the Town's Memorial Garden on Squires Hill. Keep an eye out, they will be showing for the first time this Spring.

We also had an article in the first Rothwell Town Council newsletter, both online and delivered to every household in the Town.

Our Halberdiers were in action at various events escorting dignitaries at different venues and Services.

Also, during the year Sue and I were invited to a Lord Lieutenant's service at Kettering Church and Frank was invited to the opening of Kings Lynn Fair just yesterday.

It is with sadness that we lost Zandra Powell in August last year. As you will know, as Lord of the Manor she was a great supporter of the Fair and it's traditions and her presence at the various events will be missed.

Her role is now taken by her daughter Louise Holborow who is keen to be fully involved. Good to see you here tonight and welcome Louise.

Sadly, during 2023 we also lost loyal supporter Richard Dexter, Norman Robinson (a founder Society member) and long serving Committee member Allan Marlow.

To members' evenings: -

A list of our recent members' evenings are on the reverse of the agendas on the tables.

I have commented previously that attendances were disappointing since re-commencement after Covid.

When the Society was formed, these meetings were introduced to keep the profile of the RFS high all year round. They revolved around local interest presented by local people, including as time went by general topics with specialist presenters.

We have tried to put on varied programmes over the years, but attendance has been dropping.

This is disappointing as there is no entrance fee with just a raffle. If the raffle prizes were not provided each time by the generosity of a committee member, the evenings would run at a greater loss.

Last year's lounge meetings averaged an attendance of 19 and, considering the RFS Membership is 254, is only a 7.5% take up.

Times, trends and habits inevitably do change. Therefore, we have taken the decision to hold just two meetings per year after this year's Fair. The AGM and Showmen's Evening. Our social media presence will continue to keep up our profile - more of this later. If you have any comments on this, please talk to a committee member.

We are continuing to hold our subscriptions at only £5 each. Of the 254 members on our records, 90 have not renewed their subscription last year despite constant reminders. We will watch this in case a trend is developing.

As you know, at the 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

1. Allen and Jane Eaton for many years of providing and leading the Horse for the Proclamation as well as providing his Steam Engines and ongoing support.
2. Clifford Clarke for many years of supporting our Fair.
3. Dean Sturgess for years of support as a halberdier and
4. Phil & Dee Bugden, who run the Charter Public House, for their general support and providing facilities for events including live music, vehicle show and facilities for dignitaries.

[Presentation to Dean]

Website - Since our relaunch, on the 8th July 2022 the website has received over 26,448 views. The most popular pages that were visited were (1) Proclamation Monday, (2) the Programme for 2023's Fair and (3) The Fair Dates (up until 2030!). These pages being the most popular by some margin.

In 2023 alone we saw 21,749 visits from 8,186 visitors - not just from the UK, but around the world, thanks to the power of the worldwide web!

The website was refreshed yet again after the Fair in 2023 with many new photographs. On Sunday February 25th we will launch a new webpage about the 'Blessing of the Fair' containing photographs spanning the years. What has been especially pleasing is that using social media, many people have helped us add even more information to each of these forthcoming photographs.

We also have plans to add 'members only' content and the option to pay the annual

subscription online.

We are also looking into digitising some older audio recordings relating to the Fair (currently on cassettes) for uploading and bringing the Fair's proud heritage to a wider audience online.

Social Media

Our Twitter account was closed on July 8th 2023 due to lack of followers but this has been compensated for, in part by an increase in our Instagram followers from initially ZERO to a healthy 58.

Currently, we have approximately 2,100 friends on Facebook and ideally we should convert them to 'paid-up' Members.

How you can support us

Currently, we continue to post across social media on a weekly basis (usually on a Sunday) promoting the Fair and Society. If you are not a regular user of the web, perhaps ask someone 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 "rowell fair".

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 his continued work and enthusiasm as we embrace the 21st century.

As a Town organisation, we are not alone when I say our Committee needs to be boosted. Most of us are, shall we say, "of an age". So, we need to be recruiting for fresh approaches and to secure the Fair and its traditions for the future.

Currently, the Society is looking for a Media Liaison and Marketing Co-Ordinator. to assist us to spread the word even further.

The ideal person? You will find the requirements on the table. [A4 advert] If

you can help or know someone who can, please let us know.

Last year's Fair was well supported, with reasonable weather. Frank, as usual, provided a great Fair and it was enhanced with the addition of Allen Eaton's steam engines running, working and providing a focal point.

Frank also managed well the reading of our Ancient Charter with "God save the KING and the Lord of the Manor".

Rowell Fair Week this year is Saturday 25th May to Saturday 1st June with Proclamation Monday being the 27th May. Which makes it, as I'm sure you are aware, a Bank Holiday. Always good for attendance and atmosphere.

The first weekend will include all the usual traditions: -

On the Saturday the Rowell Fair Tart competition is in the morning at the Arts &

Heritage Centre. We need more entries! Get Baking!

Allen Eaton's Steam Engines will be with us again over the weekend.

On the Sunday the Town Council Civic Parade at 1.30 to the Parish Church for the Civic Service at 2pm before the Parade makes its way to the Fairground for the 3pm Blessing of the Fair.

Street entertainment and music will be active in the Fairground prior to the Blessing including Jugglers and the ever popular Burton Latimer Ukelele Group. Our thanks go to Rothwell Town Council for granting us £1K towards enabling such entertainment to happen.

The Gretton Silver Band will, as usual be performing in the Methodist Church after the Blessing, A fantastic band and no entrance fee, do please try to attend. You can also have refreshments there as well as at the Parish Church.

The Sunday also hosts the ever popular and fascinating Model Exhibition right here in the Tresham Hall. Our grateful thanks go to Dave Arthur for organising the Exhibition.

Monday, of course sees our unique Proclamation at 6am. With the ability to reach more people through social media and the website we hope for a big turnout especially if the weather is kind. Breakfasts follow the Proc and along with music and entertainment, it makes a great day out.

There will also be some street entertainment on the Monday around 1pm before the Fair opens in the afternoon. As you know, on Proclamation Monday the town is full of music as ourselves and the Public Houses provide entertainment.

However, this year there is uncertainty as to whether the Blue Bell will be open, what the situation is at the Hotel and as Phil & Dee who run the Charter are retiring, we await to see the situation there regarding music and the vehicle show.

Rest assured the Red Lion and the Club will be active and the afore mentioned activities provided by us will go ahead. Bank Holidays don't coincide often so let's make it a good one attendance wise.

We are planning to have more memorabilia in this special year, zipped hoodies and tote bags. Watch out for them on sale.

The Fair will run for the rest of the week with opening times of 2pm on the Saturdays, 2pm on the Monday (possibly also in the morning.) and 6.00pm during weekdays as well as after the Blessing of the Fair.

I mentioned last year one project 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 town residents and visitors. It has taken a little longer than anticipated

but we hope this will be completed before this year's Fair.

Our thanks go to North Northants Council for part funding this project.

Another project we have in mind is to refurbish the Bailiff's Staff of Office that Frank carries during the Proclamation.

Thanks go to the Conservative Club for their continued support and generosity for not only hosting Members' meetings but also Committee meetings. Thanks to the Arts & Heritage Centre for their support as well.

Also, thanks to all who help behind the scenes. All help small or large is gratefully welcomed.

Thanks to Bill our Auditor and our hard working Committee members' for giving their time to support our unique tradition.

And finally thanks to you all.