



President's Report AGM Feb 12th, 2025

A warm welcome to you all, members and guests, to our 56th AGM of the Rowell Fair Society.

After the formal business of the AGM, we have Susan Copperwheat presenting "From Strawbear to Squirt" – quirky traditions past and present. Welcome Susan.

On the tables there should be an Agenda, Treasurer's Report and the Society's revised Mission Statement and Aims. The latter has been brought up to date to describe the role of the Rowell Fair Society.

Last year's Fair was of course the 820th anniversary as the first Royal Charter was granted in 1204.

The Fair went well and was well supported. Being a Bank Holiday Monday meant a good attendance for the Proclamation with a great atmosphere all day. Our complimentary Rowell Fair Tarts given away on Trinity Sunday went down a treat!

We also received positive feedback about the Fair Week overall both locally and from the NNC.

Preserving and promoting the Proclamation of our Ancient Charter supporting our Fair was of course one of the key reasons for the Society to be formed in 1968.

Rowell Fair Week this year is Saturday June 14th to Saturday June 21st with Proclamation Monday being the 16th.

The first weekend will include all the usual and welcome traditions: -

On the Saturday the Rowell Fair Tart competition is in the morning at the Arts & Heritage Centre. We are seeing a steady rise of entrants each year, especially in the juniors but more entrants would be welcomed. Get baking!!

We also are planning to sell memorabilia based on last year's successful slogan "It's only Proc n Rowell but I like it".

Hopefully Allen Eaton's Steam Engines will be with us again over the weekend but this is yet to be confirmed.

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 will be active in the Fairground prior to the Blessing. Our thanks go to Rothwell Town Council for granting us £1K towards enabling the weekend entertainment to happen.

The Gretton Silver Band will, as usual, be performing in the Methodist Church after the Blessing. A great Band, well worth a visit. Refreshments are available here as well as at the Parish Church where there will be a Flower Festival over the weekend with the theme "Celebrating Books". Our entry may well be "Vanity Fair".

The intriguing Model Fair Exhibition organised by Dave Arthur will be here in the Tresham Hall.

We are hoping to have the Vehicle Rally supported by entertainment at The Charter, yet to be confirmed.

As you know Monday sees our unique Ancient Charter Proclamation at 6am.

You may have attended many times but please come along and keep the custom supported. Encourage others to get up too! Attendance numbers at the Proclamation is one of the main measures of the success of what we do.

As I said last year, our superb website and social media exposure has allowed us to reach a wider audience, but it is the interest and attendance of Rowellians, Townsfolk and visitors that will ensure its continuance.

As usual Breakfasts follow the Proc in many establishments around the town. The phrase "use it or lose it" comes to mind about our Fair Week and its associated traditions.

You may remember from last year 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 they were in the Town's Memorial Garden on Squire's Hill. The garden during the year has been much improved and we donated more bulbs so hope to have a good display this year.

You may also recall from last year that we have had to review the number of members' evenings as low attendances were making them unviable to run. The current format is to run the AGM and Showmen's Evening only unless a demand occurs.

To remind you, when the Society was formed, these meetings were introduced to keep the profile of the RFS high all year round.

Times change and these meetings which helped to renew the interest in the Fair and traditions have served their purpose. We can reach a much wider audience through Social Media and the website.

And this is where I hand over to our expert! Steve Palmer.

Thank you Paul.

Good evening everyone. For those that don't know me, I'm Steve Palmer and I look after Communication & Marketing for the Society.

I have served on the Committee since March 2022. When I first joined, I was encouraged to help the Society look for ways to integrate technology into its practices and processes.

My first job was to completely rebuild the RF website. The Website relaunched 4 months later in July 2022.

My short session tonight is to report back on how the website (and our social media activities) have been performing in the past 12 months.

Website – *In the past 12 months, the website has welcomed almost 29000 visits (28882) and over 12000 (12428) visitors. That's an increase of 33% and 51% respectively compared with the same period in 2023 – and we continue to grow!*

It's clearly a testament to the popularity of Rowell's heritage and traditions – in particular, the Rowell Fair.

Maybe not surprisingly, 'Proc Monday' continues to be our most popular web-page followed by 'Fair Dates' (until 2030) with 'Trinity Sunday' in third place.

And it's not just the UK that's interested in the Rowell Fair! In 2024 alone we saw visitors to the website not just from here, but the USA, Ireland, Germany, Sweden, Australia & France!

The website was updated yet again after the Fair in 2024 with many new photographs and during the past 12 months we also launched the following new content:-

Blessing of the Fair Page launched on 25 February 2024 saw 126 visits in its first month

Flower Festival Page launched on 15 September 2024 and saw 116 visits in its first month

What has been especially pleasing is that using social media, many people have helped us add even more information to each of these launches by commenting on the content and in some case providing extra photographs.

*For Daffodil lovers, we also launched the **Rowell Fair Daffodil** page in October 2023 after I was part of the team that tracked down a supply of these rare bulbs in the Netherlands. As many of you know, these are already planted (and have been topped up) in the Memorial Garden.*

But wait! There's more! We have two important announcements in the continuing expansion of our website content.

*Thanks to some extensive research by our current Bailiff, Frank, aAs of RIGHT NOW, we have added a new page to the website entitled **'The Bailiffs'** and it's now available to view on the Rowell Fair website. This piece is our biggest yet, but is very much 'work in progress' WITH YOUR HELP. If anyone here has particular recollections of past Bailiffs, photographs etc, or simply more detail we can add to what we have already published, please get in touch – we'd love to hear from you and make this a real collaborative piece.*

<< New Page Handout>>

New Functionality

Additionally, as announced at last year's AGM, we are proud to launch more new features.

What I'm about to announce firmly brings us into the 21st century with the ability to make payments to the RFS online.

*This includes **annual subscriptions**. Not only that, we have added the facility to **make a donation** OR ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO DO SO. In fact, thanks to the hard work of our volunteers, this payment facility is flexible enough, if there is enough demand, for us to consider **selling Fair-related items** via the website in the future. As you can appreciate, this will all help with our continued efforts to fundraise.*

Best of all, apart from the processing fee charged by the company that manages it all – it costs us nothing to run

This works hand-in-hand with the current method paying by card/cheque or cash at the Arts & Heritage Centre.

If you'd like to try it out, I'll be around after tonight's events and will walk you through how to pay subs or make a donation online. If not, here's a handout that explains it all...

<< Donation/Subscription Handout>>

As mentioned at last year's AGM, we still have plans, for Members like you to add 'members only' content to the Website although this is taking longer than expected to plan and design.

Additionally, due to a lack of resources, also promised here last year, we have not been able to digitise 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. It's work in progress, but depends on whether we can attract more committee members with the right skills to assist us with this.

Social Media

Turning to Social Media. We currently have **Facebook** and **Instagram** accounts and a **weekly Blog**

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 **58** last year at this time to a healthy **82**.

The significance of Instagram should not be underestimated as it attracts a much younger audience than say Facebook, and if we are to 'handover' some of the wonderful heritage to the 'next generation', this is ONE way of helping that handover.

Currently, we have approximately 2500 'friends' on **Facebook** an increase of around 300 people, year-on year. It's good to have so many people interested in the Rowell Fair, but ideally, we should continue to convert them to 'paid-up' Members, like many of you here tonight.

I'd like to finish by...

How you can support us

Currently, we continue to post across social media on a weekly basis (usually on a Sunday) promoting the Fair. If you are already on FB or Instagram and follow our Blog Posts – THANKYOU.

If you are not a regular user of the web or social media, 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** where there's a facility to 'subscribe' FREE so you are kept in the know. All you need is an email address. You can find us across the major social media platforms by using the search term "rowell fair".

More visits means more popularity, that in turn means we move UP the list when people are searching for Rowell Fair on the Internet.

Thank you for listening and just a reminder that **I will be here afterwards** to answer any questions and also for anyone who'd like to donate to our cause or pay their annual subscription 'online' using a debit/credit card - or would just to learn more about our website.

Thank you. Back to Paul

Talking about payments and donations.....

We continue to hold our subscriptions at only £5 each.

You can, of course pay tonight, Val is willing to take your cash. (Thank you, Val, for your ongoing support).

Or you can pay and donate online through the website.

During the year we sadly lost Ian Pratt.

Ian served on the committee several times, often in role of Secretary. Ian was always a keen supporter of Rothwell and especially the Fair and the Society. He will be sadly missed. I think he mischievously coined the phrase “and the President sat down to thunderous applause!” when reading the previous year’s minutes at the AGM.

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 one to Les Voss, who for many years served as a loyal Halberdier not only at the Fair, but also at many Civic occasions.

As a Town organisation, we are not alone when I say our committee urgently needs to be boosted. Most of us are, shall we say, “past the first flush of youth”. We need to be recruiting for fresh approaches and to secure the Fair and its traditions for the future.

We need people not just to attend meetings but to take on responsibilities and actions. If you can help or know someone who can, please let us know.

More immediately we need to find a new treasurer as Paul Cottell, who has done a sterling job, is moving away from the area.

In recognition we are also awarding Paul with an Honorary Life Membership.

I mentioned last year one project we have had on our “back burner” is to place explanatory plaques at each Proclamation point. Regulatory problems have delayed this further, but it is hoped we shall complete before too long.

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

Details like this keep us moving forward and in the public eye.

A few thanks:

To our Bailiff Frank for not only his dedication and knowledge of all things Fair related but for also tackling the ever-increasing legislative documentation. Including Event Management Plans and Risk Assessments for both the Fair and Proclamation as well as the Road Closure permissions. Our thanks go to Jo Garner (Town Clerk) for her time and support in completion of this essential documentation.

Thanks go to the Arts & Heritage Centre for their yearlong support as well.

Thanks go to the Conservative Club for their continued support and generosity for not only hosting Members' meetings but also Committee meetings.

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

Finally, thanks to Bill our Auditor and our hard-working Committee members for giving their time and effort to support our unique tradition.

Thank you for attending tonight and I look forward to seeing you at Showmen's Evening and as many events as possible over the whole of Fair Week.