

RCHC WEBSITE: INITIAL CONCEPTS & PRACTICES

DRAFT IV

INTRODUCTION

The Website was the first main activity to which the newly founded RCHC Working Group committed and was launched at the Village Fair in July 2016. The website is intended to offer a special experience; colourful, creative with some fresh ideas. We hope you enjoy and can benefit from using it.

The initial brief to the Web Designer was to develop a website which was to be 'different', to be colourful and visual rather than stylised and verbal. The use of a slider to take new arrivals for a short virtual walk 'through the Village and up the Valley', was offered as a quick introduction to Rowlands Castle and its attractive countryside.

Co-operation with the RC Photography Group has allowed RCHC to display the Group's annual calendars on the website – a bright visual introduction displayed in the 'Gallery – the first item on the lower toolbar.

OUR 'SHOP WINDOW'

The website was introduced as a first step because the Heritage Centre was not considered to be sufficiently well known or understood locally at the time when we were considering purchase of the model railway. So, it was intended be our 'shop window'. Furthermore, it was intended as a 'one-stop shop' to provide an introduction and pathways via hyperlinks to other websites which complimented RCHC.

As a 'window', the website carries information about the Trust as a registered charity: its 'constitution' with stated objectives agreed with the Charities Commission in September 2017: the names of its trustees, and a statement about 'volunteering in practice' with the Heritage Centre.

When registering with the Charities Commission, the idea of 'education' was offered as part of our RCHC goals, which we agreed would encourage us to interpret and present our work to the wider public and young people in particular.

The website also provided a quick way to demonstrate the archive that had already been accumulated through previous activities and donations.

MISSION STATEMENT

The website promotes a mission statement 'to preserve, record and prepare' the Village and its Community for the future.

'Preserving' may apply to anything associated with the past - buildings, people, artefacts and archive – to explain where and how our countryside and community have evolved. The idea of 'recording' may be less apparent but it will allow us to appreciate how and how fast our surroundings are changing. There are several ways we can do this including by interpreting ten-yearly national Census returns, by comparing photos of different dates (one of which under development is called 'Snapshot 1991'), particularly when we have a large collection arising from one year, or by comparing results from any questionnaire surveys such as that circulated for the Parish Plan 2005. So, recording and subsequently reviewing, this allows us to assess 'change'.

Following 'preservation' and 'recording', we can begin to anticipate the future. Local Government and Public service companies have forward plans which indicate changes that they are considering or planning. The website also contains a newsletter from Portsmouth Water Company, for example, which proposes creation of a reservoir on land long owned by the company for a winter storage reservoir within the Staunton Country Park. While the reservoir is intended to increase 'resilience' of water supplies during drier periods, it will also provide a new and different recreational amenity within the Parish and protect that land from further urbanisation.

PICTORIAL/VISUAL v VERBAL PRESENTATION

As already noted, the use of pictures or photos was considered an important part of the website, and intended to appeal to visitors and younger people alike

It has been achieved by introducing a 'slider' of photographs which take the viewer for a walk through the village, starting on The Green. Secondly, the first file on the lower toolbar is 'Gallery' in which a series of topics are only displayed as photos plus descriptive headings: collages seeking to capture the essence of the Village: calendars provided by the Photography Group showing features of the Village and community: 'Snapshot 1991' is a series of collated photos showing the Village as it appeared in 1991.

THEMES: CONCEPTS of CUSTODIANSHIP

On the website, two concepts have been used to differentiate between 'the Custodians of the Countryside' affecting the landscape or natural environment, and 'the Custodians in the Community' influencing groups of people as well as individuals who have lived here. The concepts emerged from earlier work in drafting both the Parish Plan of 2008 and the Local Landscape Character Assessment of 2012, which confirmed how dependent the countryside or landscape is upon the 'custodians' – farmers, estate or park officers and even ourselves with our own gardens - all managing their 'territories'. In recent years, for example, the only dairy herd disappeared from the hills above Finchdean, and only occasionally are beef steers seen migrating between fields. Similarly, some years have witnessed the reduction in numbers of sheep. With sheep too, is the example of farming being carried out by retired enthusiasts rather than more traditional farmers, with retired people running a flock of fifty or more sheep on four or five fields that they own or lease. Livestock make a difference to the landscape requiring fenced grass pastures rather than more varied cereals, rapeseed or 'cleaning' crops. Horse-grazing and riding has also become more popular and widespread.

THEMES: 'WARS'

RCHC purchase of the iconic model railway of the Village during military preparations for the 1944 D-Day – now on display at Stansted House – started a focus on 'War'.

The theme of 'War' also arose because of the 'King's Stone' in Manor Lodge Road was where King George VI took the salute from troops about to depart in the D-Day Landings, for the invasion of France. Research into the fates of those names appearing on the Village Memorial at St John's Church has been undertaken by the RC Historical Society.

It was also suggested that experiences of residents taking part in the Falklands Conflict should be recorded, many participants still being available to write about their involvement and their views. Three articles have so far been contributed.

THEMES: 'ESTATES, CHURCHES 'and 'CASTLES'

There were several themes or topics related to Rowlands Castle that quickly come to mind.

Three major historical estates in our neighbourhood, each with interesting histories, have shaped the landscape: Stansted Park where the Bessborough family has provided continuity, with the estate now made over to a charity to preserve its integrity: The Staunton estate, now much diminished, is managed as a country park by Hampshire County Council, with Sir George Staunton of the East India Company as its initial creator and General Fitzwygram, a noted cavalry officer and his family owning the land until World War II. Thirdly, Idsworth House relocated in the 1860s away from the new railway line onto the adjacent plateau was the home of the Clark-Jervoise family until the 1960s when it was sold separately as farms, woodland and houses.

There are five churches ranging from the oldest, iconic Saxon chapel of St Huberts in the middle of a field adjacent to the original Idsworth House, St John's Church and the 'Church on The Green' evangelical church in Rowlands Castle. There is a quaint small chapel in Finchdean built by the owner of the former iron foundry lastly, a historic chapel adjacent to Stansted House.

The parish boast five public houses, two of which are on The Green, and the fifth at Finchdean. Additionally, there is a fine modern doctor's surgery and pharmacy, a food store, a garden centre and a café, all on The Green.

There are the sites of two 'castles' from Norman times, one in the village in the grounds of Deerleap, and the other at Motley Copse in woodland of Havant Thicket, adjacent to the oil well to the north to the north of the Golf Club.

THEMES: 'BUSINESSES'

A former brickworks which closed in the 1960s, the remaining example of working local clays, but going back to the Romans making mosaics some of which can be seen at nearby Fishbourne Palace.

Similarly, a large iron foundry - called 'Cannings' - operated in Finchdean. It has been the subject of an article whose authors have allowed us to republish. Part of the original buildings have been incorporated into a more modern development of terraced properties, with the original smoke stack still rising above the development!

THEMES: TECHNICAL MATTERS:

When considering the setting up of the website, an informal meeting was held involving local recognised 'experts' - Graham Dale, Gillian Lovegrove, Richard Milton, Kevin Connell – to establish the appropriate software to use. Word

Press was acknowledged to be the most practical at that time, and would also allow an associated 'Archiving' system to be applied. Two candidates for web designer/installer were met, and Rachael Robinson was invited to join the project, providing the initial system (her work subsequently took her away to Dubai). Prue Amner has agreed to assist with loading articles and supervising development of the content, while Bernadette Lomas has developed our Facebook account. Alan Drinkwater, Editor, represents the Heritage Centre in taking the project forward. The group has for the most part, operated as a 'virtual group' rather than a formal committee. Low key, informal reviews of progress have taken place, and ideas implemented. An informal review has been undertaken in 2019 involving Prue Amner, Graham Dale and Alan Drinkwater, resulting in a number of improvements in presentation and management of website space (see appendix).

A questionnaire survey inviting residents views is being considered for a more formal review in 2020. Formation of a more formal 'working group' to supervise the overall project, has been considered.

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