

Our project and the initiative behind it

We were delighted to be awarded a LHF grant in April 2021 to develop and launch the Ropley History Website and digital archive to support the growing interest in our local history

In 2019, inspired by the success of our recently formed Village History Network, its Steering Group planned, with the grant support of the Lottery Heritage Fund of £10,000 to develop and launch a website and digital archive to store and make available content from our existing village archive and new donations. We also wanted to document the evolving nature of life in our rural village which has changed from, historically, generations living and working in and around the village to what we have now, a mix of commuter and local residents. Also to share that change and its impact with new arrivals that are keen to learn about their local area and heritage.

Our plan to build and launch the website and online archive

Delivering a successful outcome for the project would allow the local history network to grow by encouraging individuals from the community to meet, physically or virtually, to share and discuss their areas of interest and bring together other villagers who have a common interest in a subject of study. People of all ages, were to be involved, share and learn. Local residents had already come together in a number of separate research projects, but the project's Website and digital archive would enable

this network to grow, be flexible, resilient and responsive to environmental factors, eg. COVID₂ and other restrictions. It would also be open access and free of charge to use around the world

The project's Steering Group, who with experience in heritage research, management and local knowledge, were looking to encourage and engage new and existing residents to volunteer and participate in local history on an informal and voluntary basis, conserving and digitising archives, supported with equipment secured by the Lottery Heritage funding and from some other local grants

It also intended to promote a wider local and global audience with its existing communication network. Channels that were in place before the award of the LHF grant would continue to support and promote the website and online archive during its build and after its launch₂.







The intention was also to expand and improve links with the local school, community and other local heritage groups, to improve and encourage learning and recording more about local history for all ages

Late 2019 – Some of the Steering Group at the Hampshire Records office on a training day, learning skills in archiving and recording oral history, in preparation for the application to the Lottery Heritage Fund for a project grant. We also had the opportunity to meet other history groups to discuss planning a funded project.

How we intended to measure the progress and evaluate the outcome of our project

By digitally recording, not just the large existing physical archive, but other contributions and collections, the project would be able to preserve, protect and promote interest in the history, environment and character of Ropley and the local area.

To measure the learned knowledge and skills of all volunteers, community spirit and wellbeing of those who participated, the Steering Group continually evaluate the project using the devised model below collecting data and observations throughout the project. Early on, one of our Steering Group members – a local heritage expert - helped guide and support this process to make sure the model would help monitor the progress and achieve the intended outcomes.

1. Inputs	2 outputs		3 Outcomes – impact		
	Activities	Participation	Short	Medium	Long
Volunteers resource time Cash from Heritage Lottery Grant Cash from other Local Grants	Digitised and catalogued archive records Volunteer training Social media engagement and mailing list publicity activity Public open sessions Working group workshop sessions Steering Group meetings Launch meeting Meetings with stakeholders and partner organisations e.g. school Website Training Research projects	For each, numbers of each activity held Number of people participating Hours spent	New skills developed in in cataloguing and archiving Increased awareness of local history Increase in numbers of people involved in their local heritage	 improved accessibility of archive content increased numbers of people actively involved in researching their local history Increase in quantity of items stored in the archive oral histories collected and made accessible Links created to archives from other partner organisations and local history groups	   Improved wellbeing and participation from local residents
4. Assumptions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Current physical archive held in the village is digitised, catalogued, and made available on line Other materials of historic interest are donated to add to the archive Project brings local people together to Explore, Record and Share Local residents, stakeholders and partner organisations continue to “support the archive and local projects giving it an ongoing “life” 			5 External factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Willingness of volunteers to get involved Impact of the Covid 19 pandemic Lack of funds for local public activities Support within the community fails to materialise as the project progresses 		

For further details on Lessons learnt see Appendix 6.1 of the End of Project Report

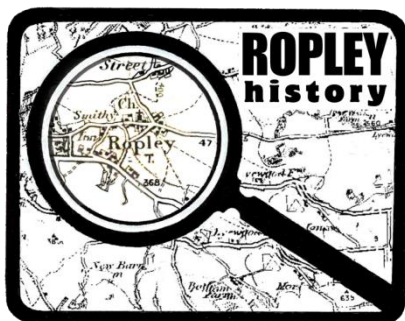
Building our Website and Archive

In early summer 2021, the Steering Group were able to -move forward with planning and building of the website with Communitysites, their preferred website designer, who were employed specifically for their experience in building heritage websites.

With guidance from Communitysites, the Steering Group focused on the image we wanted for the project, developing a site that is easy to use and accessible. Group training began in navigating and populating the website with the initial media for the website pages with an in- person training session and the rest -held via Zoom.



Keeping the momentum going - Publicity and Social Media effect and influence



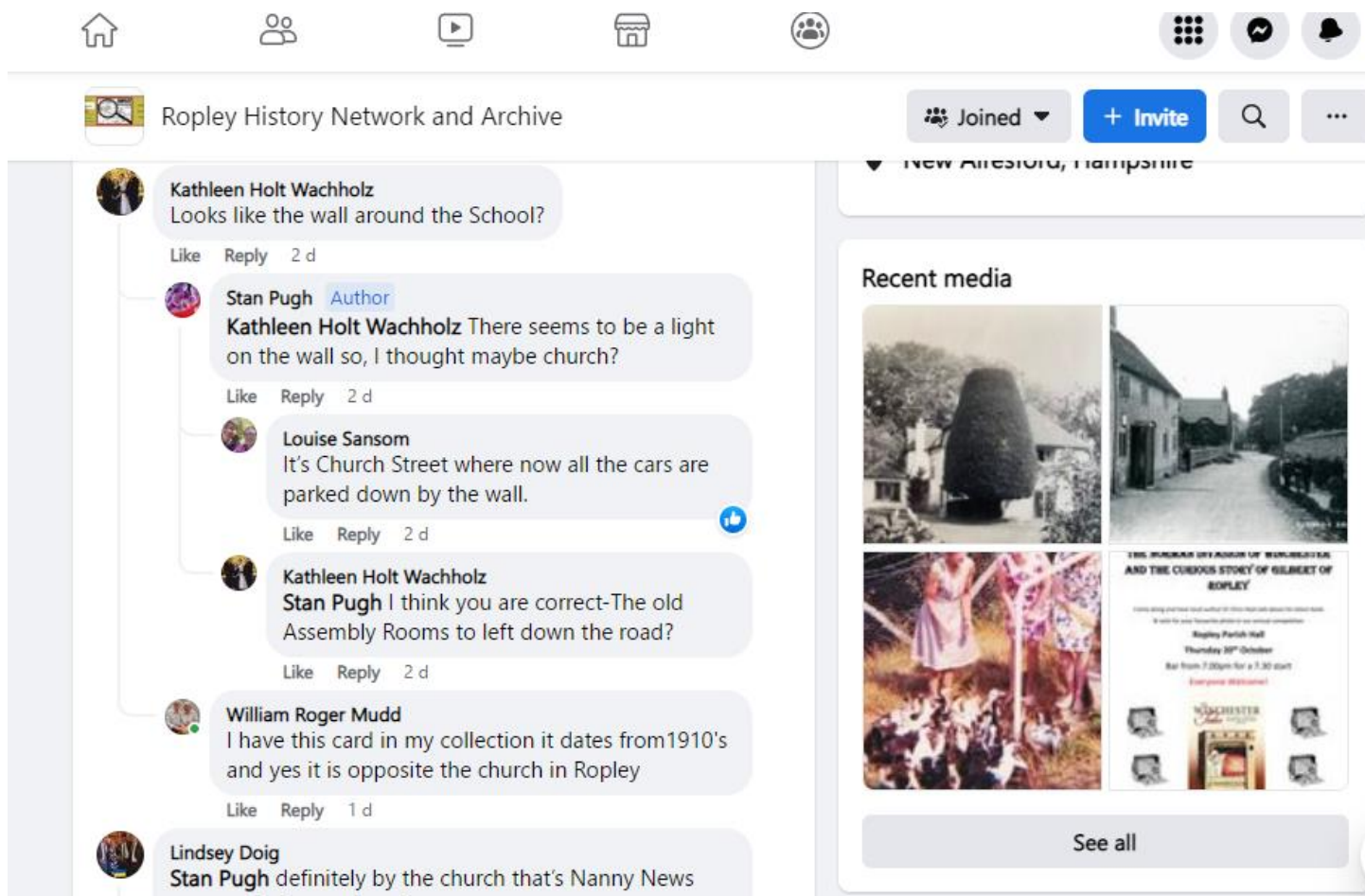
Early on in the project, we recognised the need to have a distinctive logo to support the new website and publicity and a local graphic designer volunteered to produce a suitable design.

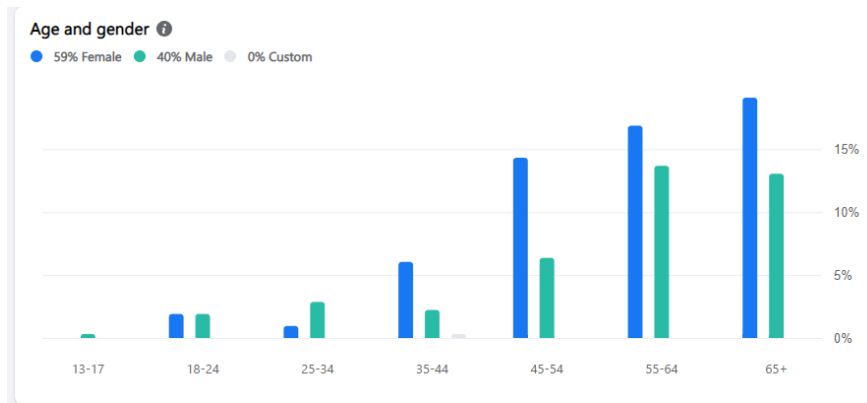
Posts on Our Facebook page, enabled us to post our articles and newsletters about the upcoming website and what it has to offer including other local pages and those focusing on local heritage and history that also generated significantly more interest.

Our posts encouraged followers to share and engage anything from reminiscence about a past event or perhaps new information about a historic building. We continually observe people making new connections and sharing memories and adding to the richness

of material on our archive (see example of conversation below). Interest was and is high and we are able to continually measure community spirit and wellbeing, at this time, by levels of participation or engagement on the Facebook page. We personally responded to each new contact or comment with a welcoming invitation to become involved.

We also reasoned that due to the wide age demographic accessing social media sites, a number of younger members of the public interested in Ropley's local history would hopefully come forward and become involved with the project. This proved to be a successful outcome as one of the younger followers of the page, provided information and publicity for the network while another, an local archaeology student studying in Germany, actually joined our Steering Group, supporting the project with IT support, graphic design and shared his extensive local knowledge of ancient history of the area. He has also transcribed the local 1839 Tithe Map and produced posts for the website





Top countries		Top towns/cities	
United Kingdom	302	New Alresford	130
United States	7	Alton	42
Australia	3	Winchester	27
Canada	2	Southampton	9
Japan	1	Petersfield	6
Ireland	1	London	5
France	1	Eastleigh	4
New Zealand	1	Waterlooville	4
Hungary	1	Yuba City, CA, US	3
		Redruth	3

Data taken from Facebook October 2022

The website has been developed with an 'Add Comments' function inviting views to leave any historical information they would like to share to the site. The Editors respond to any such comments to encourage further participation.

Example of Comment

"In this month's Village magazine there is a request for info about the village ponds.

There is a small dew pond at the top of the wood at little down. I do not know much about it but have always understood it to be there where the clay cap covers the chalk geologically and it was made where there was an old drovers road for the animals being driven to Alresford market. Until fertilizes in the 2nd world war improved the ground, the area around Lyeway was too poor for crops and was only used for animal grazing." Nov'22

During the project we kept and increased visibility and interest in the project and History network by using our existing platforms, of email newsletters, Facebook, existing village websites and the local village magazine. This proved to be an invaluable tool in keeping everyone engaged and feel involved, in the short term, and helping to grow the network and reach to the public. Now and for the future we are able to keep it current, relevant and responsive, especially during difficult periods like the Covid 19 pandemic lockdowns, directing people to the website with prompts about our newly added archives, the mystery page and various articles written by the volunteers.

Re-engagement Event in the Coffee Rooms post COVID lockdown – September 2021

By late summer 2021, as Covid 19 restrictions eased, the Steering Group planned to re-engage local volunteer and public involvement in the project with an evening and daytime session invite to the local Coffee Rooms, a local meeting space.

Displayed information about potential projects, maps, advice on genealogy and local research were enthusiastically received and there was healthy interest and engagement, with approximately 60 people attending with people signing up for cataloguing, projects and mailing lists with offers of additional donations of archive materials for the future. New introductions and contacts were made, including a local archaeologist and author of local history.



We also became aware of some extensive collections of archives – mainly photographic, – that their owners wanted to share on the website and were also keen to be involved in the digitization and cataloguing process.

With the LHF funded equipment and professional support from a local BBC producer and a technician to help with advice and training, a number of visitors expressed interest recording oral history of memories from the community.



Archive workshops and training our volunteers



With the website build complete and the Steering Group competent in cataloguing, we began to train new volunteers how to scan, catalogue and populate the website with documents and photographs from the existing village archive. Afternoon archive workshops took place, at the Ropley Coffee Rooms, with regular attendance of a group of mixed skilled history enthusiasts of between 6 - 11 attendees weekly.

Early on in the training, the Steering Group became aware that the volunteers had very different levels of technical ability and access to varying types of equipment or none at all. With our aim to train our volunteers to be able to catalogue and research at either the archive working groups workshop or at home, the inability to support some of the volunteers in this was concerning and could have impacted confidence, wellbeing and ultimately may have dissuaded participation in an activity they clearly wanted to be involved in.

Very quickly we accessed a local government grant to purchase a new laptop and then also benefited from a newly reconditioned laptop and two monitors that were donated. This greatly improved the engagement for some of the volunteers at the workshops and they were able to borrow the equipment if they wanted to work elsewhere. The editors also supported the volunteers with occasional IT training at their homes greatly assisting them with skills.

Webmaster and Editor Skills improved with the last few training sessions from the website designers who were helpful with questions and resolving some technical issues. So while the new volunteers catalogued the online archive, continual improvements to the presentation of website were made, with posts and articles being preparing for the anticipated launch of the website in spring 2022.

Frustratingly it became apparent that, yet again, COVID would affect the planning of the official launch and the event was moved from March to May 2022.



During the workshops sessions, it was realised that the supplied Website training manuals were not sufficiently detailed and would have to be re written to find the right level of accessibility for the volunteers – at all levels of ability. The new version proved immediately beneficial to the whole group and ensured that volunteer training in cataloguing would be quicker and more independent in the future. But it had been extra work for the pressed steering group members that had not been anticipated.

We also found that not all the volunteer’s contribution were the same. While some come to the archive workshop to learn new skills, others come for the sharing and exchange of knowledge and to enjoy the social interaction. Valuable, social, geographical and historical information is discussed, shared and recorded making engagement immediate positive experience encouraging long term participation.

“I also really enjoyed the archiving sessions where there is a very productive atmosphere and it feels like we really are making a major difference to the local record’

Also our young Steering Group member and archaeology student interacted with older volunteers, shared enthusiasm and knowledge. The sense of appreciation and enjoyment was immediate, enabling them to work on joint project or help on points of interest.

Training continued into 2022 with volunteer numbers remaining consistent. Oral history recordings and two interviews followed with more planned for the future as local names were continually offered as subjects. With the Pandemic preventing interaction with many of the elderly, our intention to capture memories was understandably delayed. Some recordings and editing took place but not as many as originally hoped for, though some experience had been gained in recording and interviewing techniques up to this point.

In 1921 the occupier is Albert Broad. Albert Broad at the previous census was the farmer at King’s Farm in Lower Wield. Also living at King’s Farm was James Lailey who was related by marriage to Broad’s wife Edna.



Mounted Photo of North Farm, North Street, Ropley taken before the side extension shown on the sale documents

The census returns have told us who was living at the farm but we have no indication as to who owned the farm until we get to 1937 when we have documentation of the farm’s sale by the Shorter family. Harold James Shorter is listed on the Register of Electors in 1930 and 1931 and in 1939 we find that the Wright family were in residence.

Volunteers gradually began to have more clearly defined roles in website contributing and cataloguing and at their own pace, and choose to work from home or at the archive workshops.

The Steering Group mainly oversee the more highly trained roles of Webmaster and Editor with most of the other volunteers generally acting as cataloguers - though two have become skilled enough to be promoted to editors. Contributors tend to offer archives, information or comment to the website, while some of our cataloguers enjoy focusing on a particular archive, collection or local subject producing research documents that are posted on the website such as the Mayhews of North Farm. (see box)

[North \(Street\) Farm Particulars and Conditions of sale. Eight images of a booklet. Mixture of particulars of sale and some photos, including a map](#)

Interestingly, posts and articles on local history websites and social media attracted other non-local volunteers to join the group hoping to learn new technical and research skills, but primarily they want to support our project because of a lack of support for a history project like this near to where they live.

Consent forms have been devised to ensure that all donated contributions are correctly recorded, and copyright requirements followed. As planned, once digitized, the archives are either returned to their owners or will be stored for the future, for example at the Hampshire Records Office. Ropley History intends to only retain archives that would be useful for further research or exhibited in displays.

Post launch we moved to monthly archive workshops, as the initial rush to populate the new archive was past and the will of the team, while still continuing to digitized archives, was to further their own projects. There was also a lack of funding to cover the cost of the weekly room hire, as some expected support was not forthcoming, though fundraising is planned for this in the near future.

Project Event – The Official Website Launch - 12th May 2022

On the evening of May 12th at Ropley Parish Hall, there was an enthusiastic turnout of about 80 people who gathered for the official launch of the new Ropley website and online archive.

After the welcome speech thanking the Lottery Heritage Fund, its players and other supporters and the audience heard a talk by Councillor Tim Day who holds the existing village archive collection explaining its origins and the state of the collection today. This was followed by an entertaining presentation from [local](#) historian Dr Chris Heal .



Details of ongoing history projects were on display along with the new website and archive which gave the visitors the opportunity to discuss in detail the project with the volunteers involved.

Visitors were eager to try searching for records and were surprised in the volume and range of the records already uploaded.

Many showed interest in future involvement in projects with real enthusiasm and appreciation for what had been achieved with the promise of support in the short and long term with new contact information being exchanged, successfully increasing our mailing list





There was clear and grateful acknowledgement in the presentation of displays, of those who had funded and supported the project, including nationally the LHF and locally.

Local advertising had attracted other local history groups who were interesting in building a project similar to Ropley's .

We realised, that for the future, more time at similar events needs to be allowed for the obvious interest by the public to discuss the project and archives with the volunteers



Local School Partnership – The History Detectives

The local school and other local community and heritage groups had enthusiastically offered to be involved in our project.

After early positive discussions in June 2021, with the headmistress of the local primary school, we had problems with establishing contact with school due to the school's schedule and COVID repercussions. Eventually, we were able to liaise in more detail with the school history coordinator and established that any collaboration would be restricted by planned syllabus topics and timetable already set in place for the school year. The plan that would need to fit in with or compliments their school syllabus and it was agreed a weekly lunchtime history session would begin in September 2022 of the new school year.



The children would be working in small groups of 6-8, researching a local building, landmark or person and be introduced to maps, genealogy and other resources to enable them to learn about their local history. They would be learning to follow evidence found in their research, navigate research websites and plan the next part of their investigation which would result in a project they would prepare for a display in the school and also on the archive and website. A decision was also made to study the Old Forge, conveniently situated near the school, as a KS2 project – expanding the whole theme, for a display at the school. This is planned for the spring term of 2023.

‘If the children can move on to Year 7, at Senior school, with extra research skills in subjects not usually covered by the curriculum, this can only further aid them in independent research’ – parent of one of the children



The sessions have initially been organised by a steering group member, experienced in genealogy resources, and a new volunteer - a newly retired history teacher, who would assist in the planning and teaching of the children.

These projects were the children’s choices, clearly voicing their opinions of what they wanted to study. Carefully guided by the volunteers, they were encouraged and given the freedom to investigate and see where it leads them. Lesson planning and adaption based on how much the children are able to absorb each session had been more time consuming than expected, though this will be beneficial for the following terms.

Currently the children are using maps, physical and online, to research their own houses and are gaining an appreciation of how the land and residential developments that have changed their local landscape over the years and are clearly fascinated. They are also using learning to use a genealogy research websites to investigate a local man’s burial, his family and their profession by follow historical evidence. All new skills that will benefit their learning at senior school

“History club is really interesting; we research and find out about our homes and local History which is fun. We’ve learnt about the cobbler who’s buried in the churchyard.”

“The big maps of Ropley are great - the club has made me enjoy History even more.”

“It’s personal to us so we want to learn more.”

Other Partnerships

We already share links with various local history groups websites including those with Facebook pages, and will continue to encourage involvement by linking websites to ours. Many links can be found on the website's resources page.

The Impact of Covid 19.

By late spring of 2022 there were concerns that whilst we had made good progress on most of our approved project purposes insufficient progress had been made in oral History, local projects and though in hand, the partnership with the school had yet to begin. This led us to complete, in July, a formal Grant End Date Review and request a 3 month extension moving our Project End Date from August to November 2022.

Further community involvement and beyond the project year

Jubilee Exhibition and Children's Coin Trail - Harnessing the enthusiasm from the launch event and to participate in the national and local celebrations for the late Queen's Platinum Jubilee, the Steering group also planned, at the local Coffee rooms, two low key 'drop in' events to compliment the other many activities and events [taking place in the village held locally](#). A simple exhibition of donated items that celebrate the Jubilee's past and present, intended be an opportunity to engage with some of the older members of the community, to enjoy and reminisce about the Coronation and hopefully locate some who would be interested in recording their oral history. It was [also](#) an opportunity to ~~also~~ display information about the Website and demonstrate the accessibility of the archive. As we had hoped, new contacts were made and we were able to reinforce the message that the website was now live.



Pre project there had been discussions and interest locally for a heritage walk. The idea of a short test walk, focusing on local buildings built in various reigns of the monarchy, many of them listed, aimed at engaging the younger members of the locality seemed a sensible project to build on. Also, it was hoped to be a fun alternative

family activity to take part in while learning something about their local history. Though the preparation for the original quiz, map and trail instructions was extensive and required much research, the response was positive and supported the idea to devise a longer heritage walk in the future.



Archaeology talk – Our next public event focused on a talk by a local archaeologist . Promoted widely, this was a very well attended evening , supported by an exhibition of our ongoing project, emphasising the need for a diverse range of history on the website and local events .

Evening sessions – Always aiming to improve the opportunity for the local community to engage with the history group, especially those of working age, the steering group took the opportunity to join in at the village sports club social night, once per month, hoping to also recruit new volunteers.

The website and archive - Recognising that need to keep the website constantly refreshed – especially the front page - and to ensure users remain interested, the Steering group took the decision that post the official launching in May we should move into managing the look and feel and content of the front page of the website in a “Business as usual” mode. We developed and put in place a plan to refresh the mystery archive topic (a significant driver of interest and new traffic to the website) on a monthly basis and other front page topics and pages (all of which are website posts) on a bi monthly basis. By December 2022 we will be on our 4th iteration of these important sections of the website

The Legacy of our project

The archive and website, fully delivered by this funded project, has become the foundation for the ongoing development of the local history research whilst in addition leaving Ropley with an important legacy which can now continue to grow and flourish for the foreseeable future. The project has, by its very nature, provided a platform for a wider range of people to continue to engage, learn and research remotely about the local heritage and will therefore be resilient and sustainable in the face of any environmental challenges.

For further detail see our End of project Report and Lessons Learnt in its Appendices.

‘It has possibly been one of the most enriching experiences in recent memory for me. I have adored working with other local historians and learnt so much from locals. I would love to encourage more people to become members of our group and to expand our reach, maybe to incorporate research from neighbouring West Tisted, Four Marks and even Bighton . The open evenings and talks we have organised have been amazing as we were able to speak to members of the public and to show our works.’