

THE ROSEMARY GODDARD CENTRE: A HISTORY

This edited version of the story of The Rosemary Goddard Centre combines the history of the first 20 years written by Rex Roberts, who had been involved from the start both as chairman and then as organiser, with that of the subsequent 10 years. Rex Roberts died peacefully 20 November 2016 aged 89.

THE FIRST TEN YEARS

It all began back in around 1987 when Rosemary Goddard, the much loved and dedicated resident District Nurse in Mere at that time, sought to provide some variety and outside interests for the elderly, often housebound and lonely, local residents. To achieve this she enlisted the support of a number of people resulting in a very well attended meeting on 15 October 1987, this was chaired by the then vicar of St Michaels Parish Church, Rev Ben Elliott. There proved to be unanimous approval of the idea and it was agreed to press ahead immediately. As a result, and with the invaluable assistance of Age Concern in Salisbury, under whose auspices the Mere Day Centre, as it was originally known, came into being. Salisbury District Council also contributed funding.

Lady Jo Benson, President of Age Concern, officially opened the Centre in early February 1988 at the Community Room in Lynch Close, where it is still held. Originally the only meeting day was on Mondays, but numbers attending increased very rapidly and it was not too long before the capacity of twenty four per session was exceeded. The excellent lunches were provided by Five Courts Care Home. The enduring memory of those originally involved, in spite of the hard work it all undoubtedly was, is of laughter and fun, there was a tremendous sense of camaraderie prevailing, looking back it is debatable who enjoyed themselves more, the helpers or the guests.

The centre was greatly saddened to learn of the death of Rosemary Goddard, both from their own point of view and that of Mere as a whole, she had been much loved throughout the district, always making untiring efforts to improve the lot of those particularly in need, even when her own health was fast failing. To perpetuate her memory it was unanimously decided to rename the Centre after her, so The Rosemary Goddard Centre came into being in March 1994, when the Centre also became a Registered Charity.

THE SECOND TEN YEARS

The second decade began with Mrs Frances Dark as Chair and Mrs Kantharia and Mrs Hitchcock as organisers, together with a high proportion of the original and faithful helpers. There were subsequent changes with her place was taken by Mrs. Elizabeth Montgomery. During her period of office she proved both tireless and totally dedicated in ensuring the welfare of the centre was maintained. During Mrs Montgomery's tenure Mrs Rachel Welch joined the committee. Her contribution has been, and remains, extremely valuable. When Mrs Montgomery vacated the Chair her place was taken by Mrs Welch who remained as Chair until late in 2007. Both these ladies were unstinting in their

support, which included most generously opening up their homes for fund raising events. So began a long and stable period; the programme of activities did not change greatly. It did become increasingly difficult to fund some items, and rising costs, set against a more or less static income, created problems. To this the ever increasing bureaucratic demands, covering health and safety and myriad other points, were a growing headache for everyone, particularly Mrs Jean Thomson as treasurer, and balancing the books, coupled with more and more paperwork, proved more and more arduous.

Mrs Jean Kantharia, covering the eleven years she served as organiser has provided a most comprehensive record of this time. This is published in its entirety in the full version of RGC's history.

Mrs Durkee, Mrs Bryan, Mrs Thomson and Miss Tanner all decided to depart the Centre in January 2008. Jointly they had given an amazing well over fifty year voluntary contribution to it, so no one could say that their retirement was not well and truly earned, thus bringing to an end the second ten years

THE THIRD TEN YEARS

The third decade saw some big changes in the way the Rosemary Goddard Centre is governed, as local authorities increasingly sought to partner with the voluntary sector to deliver community services. This meant that prospective partner organisations needed to become registered charities in order to be eligible for grant support from the local council.

After Rachel Welch stepped down as Chair at the beginning of 2008, together with four of the trustees, the secretary, Caroline Cook, and one other trustee, Annie Leece, held the fort until Lenka Stokes was recruited as the new Chair. John Churchill, who had been checking RGC's accounts for several years, agreed to step in as treasurer. After a few years John resigned and Trevor Lucas took over. Lenka's work experience and professionalism was invaluable in dealing with the changes that were needed to meet the challenges ahead. The governance documents which trustees were required to produce began to proliferate, and her high standards, and clear ideas about what was needed put the day centre on a firm footing by the time she stepped down in 2013. Trevor was also invaluable for his clear system of presenting accounts and his advice both on financial policy and other governance issues.

After Lenka stepped down, in 2014 Chris Dillon, who had come to the Centre as a session volunteer and subsequently joined the team of trustees, was elected Chair. Like Lenka, she was a highly professional and capable leader of the trustee team for the next six years. During her tenure, Trevor continued as Treasurer until handing over to Alison Beall in 2019. In March 2021, Chris stood down, and was replaced by Jane Mason, who had been vice-chair during Chris's tenure. Jane also brings valuable experience of social care and charity governance to the role. In August 2021, Alison handed over financial control to the new Treasurer, Andrew Thomas, who is a chartered management accountant.

In 2008, Lynette Elliott was the Centre Organiser, bringing energy, enthusiasm and a lot of fun to sessions. Her health problems precipitated her resignation in 2011, when Sandie Hawkins

took over the post. The organisational skills required have become more demanding over the years as government requirements have been implemented, and Sandie has dealt with the increase in paperwork and other regulatory requirements with competence and efficiency. Even more important is the high standard of caring and supporting for guests she has maintained. Sessions have been full of fun and laughter, and there is a varied programme with a whole range of activities which the guests enjoy and which keeps them active. Jean Rodriguez has been an able and supportive deputy throughout this time.

Fundraising has been an important responsibility of the trustees who have been very grateful for the reliable support of the local community for our events. It is not just individuals; Mere organisations have also been very supportive and include Mere Lecture Hall Trust, Mere Forest and Allotment Trust, Mere Bowls Club, Shreen Harmony, Mere Film Shows, Mere Co-op and Asda and Waitrose supermarkets.