

## Opening of Emsworth Museum — 29<sup>th</sup> July 1988

As a long time former resident of Emsworth I well remember the events that surrounded the formal opening of Emsworth Museum in 1988. I was active with the Emsworth Residents' Association for several years and inevitably there were residents who were involved with the creation of the Museum, as well as being members of both EMHT and the Residents' Association, such as John Briggs and myself.

It had been a struggle for David Rudkin and his stalwarts, particularly Michael Kennett and Strahan Soames, to find premises and funding with which to create the Museum, following their frustration at failure to preserve *Echo II*, the last of the Emsworth oyster smacks, the remains of which had been visible in Emsworth harbour for many years. Bruce Doxat-Pratt, in his article for the thirtieth anniversary of the formation of EMHT in the Emsworth Echo of May 2005, described the efforts to save *Echo II* and the substantial help received from the Chichester Harbour Conservancy, amongst others, only for the project to run out of time! But it was this which resulted in a change of direction for the Trust and led to the intent to create a Maritime Museum instead.



And so it was with great relief and congratulations all

round that most of the key players assembled at the new museum on 29<sup>th</sup> July 1988, the premises having been made available by the Havant Borough Council and with funding from a variety of sources including IBM, the then locally-based computer company.

I had been involved with a number of communications projects in the area and so it was that I was asked to record an audio tape of the formal opening proceedings. A copy of this tape, which is now regarded as an important milestone in the history of the Museum, forms part of the Oral History collection to this day.

Lord Bessborough, who was appointed President of the Trust, headed the formal unveiling of the plaque which can still be seen on the landing of the first floor of the Museum, in the presence of the then Mayor of Havant, Councillor Peter Osborne and the Lady Mayoress. He acknowledged the work carried out by the founders as well as referring to his own connection with Emsworth and that of his family before him.

David Rudkin and Michael Kennett also made moving speeches, paying tribute to those who had worked so hard and determinedly to bring the museum project to life. Other key players present at the formal opening were local councillors including Tessa Daines, who later belong the long term and tireless administrator of the Museum, Ian McKay (of Chichester Harbour Conservancy), John Saunders and Peter Whitham. John Glanville, the well known local solicitor who had given the Trust very helpful legal advice, was there in his role as a Trustee.

Also present was Joan Rutherford, the first administrator of the new museum, and other members who had volunteered to become stewards, such as Rena Boutell, also active with fund-raising, and Celia Regan-Simpkin. Although David Rudkin, our founder, and Michael Kennett have both since died, Michael at an unfairly early age, it is pleasing that David's son (also named David) still takes an active

interest in the Museum and wrote a definitive biography of his father in the special issue of the *Emsworth Echo* in May 2005.

And, of course, many other people were present who had been part of those early days, some of whom still work with the Museum today. I well remember seeing Monica Warrick, the first Secretary of the Trust, with the tenacious and loyal Dorothy Bone (still Secretary to the Trust) with husband John, Bruce Doxat-Pratt, resourceful long serving Trustee, and Roy and Sheila Morgan, who have done an outstanding job as archivists from early days. Also Pam Clayton who made many of the Oral History recordings and, with Angela Macmorland, edited the *Emsworth Echo* until recently.

Many other trust members joined the crowd for the formal opening although several have since died, but I have had news of two who are still very active in Emsworth today. The first is Harold Groom, long time town resident and one time professional estate agent and auctioneer, who had suggested at the AGM in 1982 the inclusion of the word 'Historical' in the Trust's name to broaden its scope. This vital change enabled the Trust to include the preservation of Emsworth's total history and not just its maritime links. Harold also rallied in the fund raising efforts, even after the Museum was open, with such memorable occasions as the auction held in the Methodist Church hall with himself as auctioneer, which raised some £1,200 of much needed money. It has to be said that a large part of this was due to David Rudkin's generosity in donating personal family possessions which fetched excellent prices. My wife and I had great fun working with Harold on the collection, cataloguing and display of the items for sale at the well attended event.

The other early Trust member is Trustee and photographer John Saunders, one time treasurer, whose own memories include climbing on the deck of *Echo II* with David Rudkin and realising the hopeless task of trying to save her. He also recalled with horror the loss of hundreds of title deeds when Land Registry rules changed and a rubbish tip was seen outside a Queen Street solicitor's office full of discarded property records! Thus we lost valuable Emsworth historical information which would have delighted Roy and Sheila Morgan. This highlighted our need for a museum of local history. John also became an honorary member of the Royal Marines Officers' Mess at Eastney and



through this was able to acquire two unused display cabinets for the museum. Later, I too was also able to help further by building and donating two glass topped and illuminated display cases which, I believe, are still used in the museum today. And yes, my wife Pam and I housed bits of *Echo II* in our Emsworth home at Oaklands, until they could be accommodated in the Museum.

Much else has changed, developed and improved since those early days and the contributions of the many faithful volunteers must not go unrecorded, 'above and beyond the call of duty' such as Angela Macmorland and Monica Warrick who cleaned the Museum regularly. Incidentally in 1992 a video film was made called *Emsworth, the Harbour Town*, embracing aspects of the Museum, which was to be shown at the annual Horndean Road Horticultural Show and adding to membership numbers, which was the prime aim.

Yes, it's been a busy and memorable 20 years since that wonderful opening day but with the Rudkin Room and the interest still shown by David Rudkin's son and daughter Cathy (who lives in Emsworth), we can be sure that the memories of our founders with their commendable foresight are not forgotten. I am sure that they would have applauded the recent refurbishment and modernisation within the Museum which should attract visitors old and new.

*Keith Stoneman, August 2008*