

About Goldhanger Past

a short summary of the background to the Goldhanger history archives and webpages

An informal local history group was originally formed in the 1980s with two objectives: to preserve the documented and pictorial history of the village and to organise history exhibitions. A paper based archive was maintained until the original archivist left the village in 2005 and a full-up four draw filing cabinet was passed on. It was recognised at the time that electronic records had many advantages over the paper based archive: the material can be easily organised and updated, much smaller storage space is required, copies can be easily made and distributed, leading to increased availability and greater security. So a PC based archive was created, initially by scanning the important material already held on paper. The paper archive has been kept however, and still grows as new paper material that is offered is scanned but not destroyed.

An early decision regarding the storage on a PC was that no special software would be used, and only minimal features of MS Windows be used to access the information, so standard file types only were (and still are) used: JPEG/.jpg for images and HTML/.htm internet style files for integrated text, images and hyperlinks. Both these file formats are international standards and not the intellectual property of any commercial organisations. The more complex features within the HTML language were also avoided to hopefully circumvent possible software compatibility issues now and in the future, and to ensure that the material can be viewed on a range of browsers. In the first 5 years approximately 80 CD/DVD copies were made and distributed to current and former residents of the village and copies were sent around the world.

The availability of the digital material meant that presentations using a laptop and digital projector were easier to organise than exhibitions, and in recent years many local history talks have been organised using the archive. To give the scale of the amount of material held in the digital archive to date, it is estimated that if all the text and two images per page were printed on A4 paper it would be about 3000 pages of paper. With hindsight, a log of the origins of all the material should have been maintained, but that has never happened, so it is not always possible to know the origins of items.

In 2009 a subset of the locally held digital archive was put onto the internet, and over the years the amount of material on www.churchside1.plus.com/Goldhanger-past has steadily increased as search engines have increasingly indexed all the material, and web-stats for the site indicate that the audience has steadily grown.

<http://www.churchside1.plus.com/Goldhanger-past/Site-map.htm> gives an indication of the scale of material currently on the web, which is perhaps one tenth of the total material in the archive. The site has been created and maintained with freely available PC tools without professional help.

In 2014 a short introductory video was put onto YouTube at...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4dKrrNyhDug&feature=youtu.be>
and by 2016 it had received over 140 hits.

An enquiry to Plus.com in 2014 about acquiring more web-space for the site revealed that they longer offer web-space to new customers nor additional space to existing users. Although the site has not filled all the space available, it raised the need for an alternative longer-term plan. At that time the simple solution was to put a back-up copy of the site onto Dropbox, and as Google did not seem to find this with a search, a small *gateway* was be constructed on *Google Sites* at...

<https://sites.google.com/site/goldhangerhistory/> ...search for: *Goldhanger history*

Furthermore, mp3 audio files, pdf documents and the scanned Benham and Mansfield book are held only in Dropbox, and the webpages in Plus.com pick access them to save the limited space in the Plus account.

In 2016 Dropbox declared that webpages could no longer be held on their site so another backup was then needed. An attempt was made to put a copy onto Essex County Councils www.essexinfo.net as the site offers free webspace to Essex based “community and voluntary groups”. However an enquiry to their support team on how to transfer the files resulted in the reply: “*your files are unsuitable for our site*” with no explanation given. So a single webpage was created at <http://www.essexinfo.net/goldhanger-history> with links to the plus.com site (and now to the PDFs described below).

A similar attempt was made to put the files onto *Google Sites* but they only seem to allow new webpages to be created using their special cloud based editor, which would be a major re-work for the 130+ webpages.

In mid 2016 a decision was made to revert to the original technique of offering copies of the entire material to members of the history group. This time, copies of both the website and the local digital archive were passed on to several members of the group on memory sticks, which can now easily accommodate all the material.

Also in mid 2016 a decision was made to create a printed book from of the web-based material. This was due in part to the knowledge that there are some enthusiastic readers of the articles placed in the Parish Magazine who cannot or do not ever look at the web, plus the increasingly conviction that the Plus.com website will cease to exist once it can no longer be supported or pay for (or any other similar personal webspace). The new book was created in PDF format which is surprisingly easy to upload, access and read from Google-sites, Dropbox and www.essexinfo.net, *plus* the book is particularly easy to access and read on tablets such as Ipads. So an alternative medium term solution to accessing the material has arisen, ie create more PDF files with the remainder the information that could not be included in the 150 page book and put these files onto all three sites. A PDF version of Maura’s book *Goldhanger – an estuary village* has also been added onto these sites.

The Google sites folder is set “public” and is at...

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0B5qdhG_2Ua58ZTgyeE1Qb0wteVk?usp=sharing
part of... <https://sites.google.com/site/goldhangerhistory/>

The www.essexinfo.net folder holding the PDF files is at...

<http://www.essexinfo.net/goldhanger-history/files/> part of...
<http://www.essexinfo.net/goldhanger-history>

The Dropbox folder is at...

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/5pr5b4udiab7yn5/AACiVWgh6nUAsmKP7mC8uNNUa?dl=0>

These cloud based folders are found with searches, but they can be accessed indirectly through the three websites found with a search for: *Goldhanger past or history*

Even though the PDF format is proprietary, it now seems that these files held on several free “cloud” file storage sites, plus locally distributed memory sticks with “everything” could be the best longer-term solution at this time. PDF files seem now to be so prolific that is hard to imagine that the readers and files could one day disappear, and they can be readily created by converted from other formats.

As YouTube goes from strength to strength under Google ownership there seems highly likely that it is also secure and here to stay, so a second video has been added entitled *Goldhanger street scenes from the past*, and is based on zooming in on old postcards. It can be viewed at...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N70FnWMXGNU&feature=youtu.be>

Perhaps it is appropriate to reflect on where we are at, and consider the future direction. . .
Paradoxically the greatest leap forward in accumulating and accessing local history has come about through computer technology, which could not have been foreseen by past

authors and historians. Fortunately their chronicles are now being recovered, collected, preserved and distributed with this technology.

One can't help having a special empathy with our past local authors through the combination of their words, their photographs and biographical details of them written by others. Furthermore, the ability of local authors, such as the Revd J C Atkinson, Ernest Mansfield, Lindsay Fitzgerald Hay, and Joe Canning to exploit the semi-biographical novel to reveal much about the places where they lived, their neighbours, themselves and their opinions is most notable. It is particularly interesting and somewhat perverse that Ernest Mansfield wrote (but then attributed it to Dr Salter) that it would be "too egotistical to write one's own biography"! While Crawshay Frost did not appear to write a book (at least that we have yet found), he did leave a legacy of many published letters, photographs, and newspaper articles (some attributed to others, but clearly heavily influenced by him), which is more than enough to earn him the accolade of a local author.

Historians inevitably have eyes to the future, as they come to realise that the largest audience for their work is not their contemporaries, but those who will study their efforts in the generations to come, so we all look to future as well as considering present day readers. Maura Benham's Conclusion on page-79 in her book *Goldhanger - an Estuary Village* which was written in 1977 was clearly not intended for the benefit of the residents at the time who were the purchasers of her book.

Despite ones natural instinct that the history of a small village must be finite, new information keeps appearing: new sources on the net, old books and newspapers recently digitised, old and different postcards appear, another attic cleared, another book with local content to add to the virtual library, etc. Not least, recent important local events and typical scenes all too soon become part of our past. The nature of the information is also changing, in the early days our emphasis was on buildings, the environment, and early pictures of the village, however progressively the fascinating and inspiring stories about our people have seem to grown in significance, and there seems to be no end in sight. Authors and artists from the past are of particular interest to historians and their work is given greatly deserved prominence in both in these web pages and in the local digital archive.

For today's web-based historians, worldwide distribution via the internet is just as significant as potential future local readership. From the statistics available we know that there are far more visitors to this site from outside the village that from within it, even taking into account search engines and other automated visitors. This encourages further development of topics that are of particulate interest to those from afar. These are perhaps relatives of those in the village, people who once lived here, or those who have just visited or plan to visit the village. The webstats tell us which pages have been most accessed over the last few years and are, in order of popularity: The Great War, The Chequers history, Spitzbergen, Salt Extraction, Smuggling, and Panoramic Scenes, all of which would be of interest to non-residents.

Today there is a recognition that owners of listed historical buildings are but custodians of a heritage to be maintained and passed on to future generations. Similarly, those who search out, catalogue and preserve our history are but custodians and facilitators of access to a heritage that could so easily be lost or overlooked. But who should undertake this role in a small village? - not it seems the nearest town museum or library, nor the county Records Office, even less national archives. These organisations have more grandiose objectives, so it must be up to enthusiastic local amateurs to take on the role.

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