

# Our Museum in a Digital Age

by Trevor Smith

To understand how we approach the development of a digital museum we must re-examine the main purpose of Emsworth Maritime & Historical Trust. Our purpose, declared to the Charity Commission, is “To advance the **education** of the **public** in the history of Emsworth and the surrounding area...”. Whilst the provision of a physical museum and the acquisition, restoration, and preservation of ‘articles, items, objects, artefacts, documents or memorabilia’ are vital to our purpose, a digital presence is becoming equally as important.

We all know that most web platforms have a global reach, so with a digital presence, our ‘public’ becomes the whole world at any hour of the day or night, not just the very small proportion of people who are able to physically visit our Museum when it is open. Fulfilling the purpose of ‘education’ means making as much of our valuable information available and accessible to the public in a form that is appealing and searchable and can be viewed on any size screen.

In planning for the future, we must ensure that the technology we use is scalable and secure. We must also ensure that we preserve our reputation for impartiality, give no offence to any of our worldwide public in what we publish and that we do not breach copyright.

We must therefore develop that digital presence in a fashion that is accessible, relevant, comprehensive, sustainable, moderated and secure.

Emsworth Museum has had a digital database recording details of our collection of items for many years. More recently, this has been based on a web publishing tool for digital collections and on-line exhibits called Omeka (Google it!). Since 2014, we have had a website providing information about the Museum, opening times, upcoming events and news. Many of our volunteers

have contributed to building Omeka and the website in the past and both have evolved tremendously.

## Sharing our Collections and Exhibits

I took over IT at the Museum in February 2022. I discovered that we had quite an extensive collection of digital assets, but that many were not available to the public (see Fig 1 below). We have been working steadily to make as much as possible publicly available, always respecting any copyright or confidentiality restrictions. We have also moved service provider and switched to WordPress as our website content management system. These changes have reduced costs and improved performance, ensuring pages are rendered far more quickly. The Omeka database has been maintained and updated, and

### Fig 1 – The Museum Digital Collections

There are digital records of more than 10,000 items held by the Museum, including:

- 170 videos
- 112 audio recordings, including oral histories
- More than 4000 photographs
- Photos of many of our physical artefacts

On the website we also have over

- 150 news articles, some now archived
- 57 issues of our newsletter
- 150 *Emsworth Echo* articles

There is also a growing number of on-line exhibitions.

Many of the documents held in our archive/research room, however, are yet to be digitised.

we have introduced the use of YouTube to host the extensive video collection, which avoids hosting costs but does mean users can be interrupted by advertisements. These videos in our collections are linked seamlessly into Omeka.

I have long been aware that our exhibitions in the David Rudkin Room take a great deal of work to produce by the curators and volunteers who stage them. For a valuable few weeks, they provide an additional attraction for visitors to the Museum and boost our footfall enormously. However, that work can be preserved for posterity by converting them into digital on-line exhibitions. So, we have been publishing many of the recent exhibitions in full on the WordPress website, in a format that is searchable and compatible with all devices, including mobile phones. Notable amongst recent exhibitions are ‘the Story of a Ship’ (40th anniversary of Falklands War), Emsworth Fire Brigade, and the 80th Anniversary of D-Day with more than 100 photos and a dozen personal accounts.

**Reaching a Global Audience**

We currently get more than 100,000 digital visitors per year, although many pageviews are very short (<30 seconds), typically 100 or more per month dwell on one page for at least 2 minutes and some for more than an hour. Much of the traffic to our website is brought by search engines; Google being the most used. With our worldwide public audience, visits come from a wide range of countries – see Fig 2.

The Google search engine is very powerful. For example, if you Google ‘historic photos of Emsworth’ from anywhere in the world, Emsworth Museum website will come up many times on the first page of hits. The text in our site is also input to many AI tools. Ask an AI tool such as ChatGPT or Copilot about Emsworth’s history and the source is likely to be our Museum site.

**Social Media**

Whilst the website, YouTube and the Omeka database are important, we must

not neglect social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram and TikTok. We have a page on Facebook, which has a community of followers, and we have been venturing into the use of Instagram. The social media presence requires support on at least a weekly basis, and as Trevor Davies mentions in his article, we are looking for a volunteer to help with this.

**Fig 2 – Website Page Views**

Month	Unique visitors	Number of visits
Jan-25	7,949	10,772
Feb-25	9,895	35,984
Mar-25	8,185	14,095
Apr-25	6,120	13,830
May-25	11,110	18,237
Jun-25	9,135	16,066
Jul-25	10,041	16,604
	<b>62,435</b>	<b>125,588</b>

Country	Code	Pages	Hits
Great Britain	gb	55,396	90,455
Canada	ca	8,902	9,265
United States	us	6,687	17,554
Australia	au	588	2,326
India	in	557	1,417
China	cn	426	1,355
Egypt	eg	333	530
Poland	pl	272	510
Ukraine	ua	201	487
Brazil	br	172	300
France	fr	157	742
Argentina	ar	151	265
South Korea	kr	137	729
Denmark	dk	136	537
Germany	de	131	537
Iran	ir	122	169
Russian Federation	ru	118	771
Bulgaria	bg	110	726
Latvia	lv	85	110
Netherlands	nl	84	732
Japan	jp	83	185
Vietnam	vn	73	97
Lithuania	lt	61	76
Angola	ao	60	157
Romania	ro	50	87