

History of Men's Sheds

February 2018

Where and when did it all begin?

The concept of the Men's Shed movement originated in Australia in the 1990's, where a number of issues were raised about the physical and mental health of elderly and usually retired men. It was found that men retiring from work slipped into a pattern of lack of exercise, heavy drinking and lack of self esteem. Such a void can also occur when, for example, a loved one is lost.

A conference in 1995 proposed the concept of the Men's Shed to promote social interaction and reduce depression. The first actual Men's Shed was setup in Tongala, Australia on July 26, 1998. Since that date, the number of Men's Sheds has increased massively to the point where there are now over 1000 sheds in Australia.

The Men's Shed movement has now become one of the most powerful tools in addressing health and wellbeing and helping men to once again become valued and productive members of our community.

Men's Sheds are designed to appeal to men in ways which traditional "community groups" don't. Men generally like to get involved in practical tasks and get to know people by working alongside them, rather than sitting down face to face. Men's Sheds feel familiar and welcoming.

With their origins in Australia, the Men's shed movement was seen as a way for "blokes" to feel good about themselves, be productive, contribute to their community, connect with friends and maintain an active body and mind. All of these things within an atmosphere of old-fashioned mateship.

Sheds in the UK

The concept spread to Ireland in the early 2000's and then to the UK where the first Shed was setup in Westhill, Scotland in 2005.

The first shed in England was set up by Age Concern Cheshire at Hartford in 2009. Four more staffed Sheds followed before the first Community Men's Shed was formed in London in 2011. These user-led Sheds now form the vast majority of the (almost) 400 Sheds open in the UK, with nearly 100 more in planning. That's around 10,000 or more Shedders, as we call them, benefiting from regular social interactions, new and improved skills, and regular,

active participation in activities they enjoy. The rate of growth of Men's Sheds is between six and nine a month.

Sheds vary from full-time projects in substantial premises to groups meeting in village halls and community centres for only a few hours a week. Some Sheds are in villages, most are in small towns but considering their populations there are relatively few in large cities. Most Sheds have been started by their users with local support, donations of tools and premises being given, borrowed and used often in exchange for repair work.

The UK Men's Sheds Association

The Association was formed on the 15th March 2013 by 17 of the 26 open Sheds or Shed planning groups. A Steering Group was elected consisting mainly of Shed leaders. They promote the movement by every means including arranging public events, and support its growth by linking up interested people to form new groups or signposting them to open Sheds, and by sharing experience, arranging sponsorship, forming partnerships and helping to build the community of Sheds regionally, nationally and internationally.

In June 2015 the Association successfully registered as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation reg. no. 1162409.

What's going on in Romsey?

The Romsey Men's Shed group was formed by Graham Gowman in October 2015. The group grew initially to a Committee of four and then following an open meeting in March 2016, another 10-12 members joined the group. The Committee initially looked for a ready-made building that could be adopted for the Men's Shed but eventually decided that such a building was not available within walking distance of Romsey Town and therefore the only option was to build one ourselves.

Luckily, the Romsey School offered us both a weekly meeting place and a site on which we could erect a shed.

During 2017 we obtained planning permission from Test Valley Borough Council and raised sufficient funds to complete the construction of our shed. We had the topping out ceremony in January 2018 and during the next few months will be fitting out the shed with workbenches and power tools for a full launch at Easter 2018. We now have over 30 members with 15-20 of us meeting on a weekly basis but with the completion of the shed we hope to see a lot more join us.