



About Rye

Rye is a town with a unique historical character which lives on in its buildings and traditions. It is a distinctive place to live, work, study and visit and has a strong local identity, fine heritage and enviable cultural activity. Once surrounded by the sea and perched on a rocky sandstone outcrop, now topped by St Mary's Church, Rye benefitted from being highly defensible. In the 14th Century it had the privilege of becoming one of the seven head ports which harboured the ships and personnel who guarded the Sovereign and country from frequent assaults. By the 18th Century Rye had developed a lawless identity and became a prosperous haven for smugglers. Walking around the town today amongst the medieval buildings and cobbled streets it is easy to summon up a vision of Rye in times gone by and its colourful past. The present day Police and the team of community support officers, based at the station in Cinque Ports Street, no doubt have different problems to deal with than their predecessors. Though the sea has receded Rye still sits at the confluence of 3 rivers - the Rivers Rother, Tillingham and Brede - and due to its place on a hill it is visible when approached from all sides and makes its mark on the skyline for the surrounding villages.

Much of the town has a Conservation Area status and the oldest part of Rye is the Citadel which lies in an area once enclosed by the town wall. Residents of this area tend to be retired professionals who have bought and gentrified the houses once lived in by the native Ryers. Physical constraints of the town have meant that development of housing has largely been on the eastern and western fringes, notably Tilling Green, built on a flood plain in the late 1950s and Kings Avenue, built in the 1930s. These make up 40% of the dwellings in Rye. Many are now owned and managed by AmicusHorizon. Much of Rye is vulnerable to flooding, which is a key concern when building new properties. Rother District Council, the local planning authority, lists the improvement of flood defences as a priority and regularly consults with Rye Town Council, English Heritage and the Conservation society to ensure that the uniqueness of Rye is preserved. Within its Core Strategy it intends to deliver 450 new homes predominantly utilising sites with outstanding planning permission and unimplemented Local Plan allocations, including Rock Channel, the former Thomas Peacocke lower school site and the 'greenfield' land to the north of Udimore Road. There is limited availability of land for development in Rye; however the population has changed little over the last 65 years, hovering at around 4,500.

At the latter end of the 18th Century Rye connected to the Turnpike Trust system of roads taking passengers toward London or Hastings. Stagecoaches ran from Rye to London, greatly improving communications. Today Rye sits astride the A259 south coast trunk road which is of a poor standard and a cause of congestion. 1850 saw the arrival of the railway line, running parallel with the old town wall, and this opened up a market for new housing during the Victorian period at Rope Walk, Eagle Road, Bridge Place and Ferry Road. It is as recent as December 2005 that improvements to the railway line have been made with services now running between Brighton and Ashford, however, it remains single track and diesel powered and it is still necessary to change trains to travel onwards to London. The end of 2009 will see a high speed service from Ashford to London St Pancras, cutting the journey time to London by 25 minutes. Bus services travelling through and around Rye are operated by Stagecoach, Coastal Coaches and Rye and District Community Transport and their main drop off and pick up point is adjacent to the Railway Station. Many of the younger and older citizens rely on the bus services which can currently limit their access to some of the places and activities on offer in Rye and the facilities and leisure activities in the larger towns of Ashford and Hastings.

Rye does not have a cinema or theatre, bowling alley or roller rink but there are many clubs and associations organising social and cultural events. There is an enthusiastic tradition of music, drama, literary and art pastimes, with many creative people being drawn to live or gain inspiration in Rye. In 1971 the Rye Festival Council was formed offering a wide range of events during the first two weeks of September each year and attracting a number of renowned performers. The Rye Medieval Academic Festival is held bi-ennially, attracting lecturers from around the world. Unfortunately the Medieval Festival has not taken place in recent years but the well-established Rye Bonfire is celebrated each year by a procession of painted faces, drumming, spectacular fireworks and the lighting of the bonfire. There is a strong tradition of clubs in Rye, catering for most sports. Freedom Leisure, a not for profit organisation, operate Rye Sports Centre which has a 25m swimming pool, gym and sports hall. It hosts children's birthday parties and has recently begun offering free swimming to the over 60s. Rye is served by a small library in Lion Street, but there are plans for a new library and cultural centre to be built in the near future.

Thomas Peacocke School was founded after the reorganisation of secondary education in 1968 and was the first comprehensive school in East Sussex. Now known as Rye College, it has been awarded Arts and Enterprise status and has seen a recent upturn in the number of parents selecting it as their first choice for their children's education. September 2008 saw the opening of the new primary school in Rye, built on a raised platform above the highest predicted flood level and with environmental features such as a sedum roof, high levels of insulation and low energy lighting. The building of the new school meant the closure of both Freda Gardham and Tilling Green primary schools. Freda Gardham has been given a new name 'The School' and a new lease of life in the interim as a creative arts centre. Tilling Green school has been the subject of a film made by the older and younger residents of the estate to illustrate their need for a Community Centre and their desire that the empty school building be used for this purpose. In the meantime the Community Centre, in the town centre, established in 1973, is housed in a disused church building on Conduit Hill. Young people meet at Rye Boys Club in Mermaid Street and there are Cubs, Scouts, Brownie and Guide groups meeting in Rye and Sea Cadets, who have their HQ at Rock Channel. Older generations meet at Age Concern, Magdala House twice a week, where they enjoy home cooked lunches, painting and craft sessions, can have their hair and nails tended to and join in with a singsong. They rely on Rye and District Community Transport and volunteers to drive them to the centre and for organised days out.

Rye is home to many churches. The impressive St Marys was built in the 12th Century and the Nave acted as a community centre hosting meetings, social and theatrical events. The Friars of the Sack arrived in the 13th Century and the Augustinian Friars in 'the Monastery' in the 14th Century. The Reformation saw Rye becoming a very Protestant town but by the 19th Century Quakers, Methodists, Baptists and Roman Catholics were all worshipping in Rye, joined in the 1950s by Jehovah's Witnesses. Rye and District Churches Together was formed in the early 1940s and the congregations of many of the churches share events, fund raising and celebrate their faith together.

There are no Accident and Emergency facilities in Rye, the nearest hospital being the Conquest at St Leonards, but there is the Memorial Care Centre on the outskirts which re-opened in 1995 offering therapy to clients and respite for their carers. In 2007 the Postern Gate surgery closed and relocated to a new building in the grounds of the Memorial Care Centre. There is a community clinic at Ferry Road which also houses another doctor's surgery, and there are several dentists, opticians and complementary therapists in the town.

The local economy is largely dependent on the visitors to the town; tourism blossomed in the late 1960s (when Rye and District Hotel and Caterers Association was formed) making it the town's key industry. This led to some of the smaller 'everyday' shops being replaced by tea rooms and gift shops. Rye offers many places to stay from B&B to 'exclusive hotels'. Whilst visitors are drawn to Rye to view the ancient monuments and listed buildings, including the Grade 1 St. Marys church (the bell tower being the highest point in the town) and the Ypres Tower Castle, Rye remains a market town offering retail and other services to surrounding villages. It also boasts its own fishing fleet operating from the Rye Fish Quay, rebuilt in 2006 and one of only 11 registered fish landing sites in the UK.

Rye still retains many independent businesses: small shops selling antiques, bread, health food, meat, fish, stationary, some clothes and shoes. There are many restaurants, coffee shops and cafes in which to eat, none is a large chain. It is possible to find chemists, banks, accountants, estate agents and solicitors. You may choose to have your hair cut, book a holiday or acquire a tattoo in Rye. There is one supermarket serving the town, open Monday to Saturday. Rye Chamber of Commerce represents the views of the local businesses.

Rye Town Council, with quality status, own and manage the Heritage Centre and the playing field on New Road and, over the last few years, have installed some much longed for skate park equipment on the Salts. Rother District Council are responsible for planning, housing benefits and council tax, waste collection and street cleaning, environmental health, car parks, parks and open spaces, recreation, leisure, tourism and regeneration. East Sussex County Council holds responsibility for education, libraries, and social services, the roads and transport, strategic planning, waste disposal and regeneration. The challenge is to balance the needs of residents and visitors and create a diverse and sustainable economy, whilst protecting Rye's rich heritage.

