

PITSTONE LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 21 MAY 1998 AT IVINGHOE TOWN HALL

Present:-

Mike Sear (Chairman) Bob Rayner (Vice Chairman) John Wallis (Treasurer) Brenda Grace (Secretary)
Norman Groom (Farm Museum Manager) David Lindsey (Watermill Manager) Jeannette Wallis (Trading
Secretary) Val Rayner (Crafts Co-ordinator) and twenty members.

Apologies received from:-

Jean de Selincourt (Publicity Secretary) Sue Lipscomb (Programme Secretary) Corral McCormack
(Membership Secretary) Sarah Gray (Our Curatorial Adviser) Greta Brown, B.O Wright, Joan and Geoffrey
Legge, Helen Hickson, Les Laing, Ian Horn, Jon Horn and Moira Hegarty.

Minutes of the 1997 AGM were agreed and signed

Matters arising Nothing to report

Chairman's Report - Mike Sear

The Annual General Meeting has come round again, and I suppose it is a sign of getting older but it seems only a very short time since I made my last report.

During the past year the Society has again continued to progress in all its various activities. I will as usual begin my review of the Society's activities with our monthly meetings.

As you will recall at the last A.G.M. Greta Brown relinquished her position as Programme Secretary after many years of providing interesting speakers and events for the Society at our monthly meetings. However, we have been very fortunate in the appointment of Sue Lipscomb who has now taken on this job. She is a very worthy successor and has kept us supplied with interesting and entertaining speakers during the past year. There is always a very good attendance for our meetings with many non-members coming along after seeing our published programme. I am sure Sue would be extremely pleased if anyone could suggest speakers for future meetings. Sue has sent her report along as she is not able to be here tonight, but this you will hear later.

I would also like to thank the ladies who provide the refreshments at our meetings, in particular Mary Tyrrell and Mary Mountain, these refreshments are very much appreciated by everybody and make an enjoyable finish to the evening.

The Watermill which is the special interest of David Lindsey is continued to be maintained in good working order by him with some help from others, in particular John Wallis. I understand that he has now managed to obtain some additional help which is a great asset. David continues to be extremely enthusiastic for the watermill, and milling in general, and spends a great deal of time on Ford End business. It is true to say that the Watermill would not be in the excellent condition it is today without David's dedication. Further work is still being carried out and David will describe progress in his report later.

During last year Roger Hillier continued to produce our quarterly newsletter but unfortunately due to other commitments he has now had to give up this job. I would like to thank him on behalf of the society for the past five years of interesting reading. The latest newsletter was produced by me, with much help I hasten to add, particularly from John Wallis. I hope this will be just an interim measure as I would like someone to take on the post vacated by Roger as soon as possible. Please let me know if anyone would be interested? I would again make a plea for additional copy, so please if anyone could contribute an article, story from the past, or any comments on the Society, it will be gratefully received. This is your newsletter and it helps to keep the Society together and informs members what is going on.

The largest and most time consuming aspect of the Society's activities is of course the Museum. encouraged

by the enthusiasm of Norman Groom our Museum Manager who continues to take his job very seriously indeed. The faithful workforce at the museum continue to attend with one or two additions, some have taken on specific projects. Norman will give you more details in his report but the museum continues to improve visually which is one of the essential requirements to attract visitors on whom we rely for our income and continued existence.

Museum open days were again successful as during the past particularly the Activity Open Day when we had an increased income from admissions, but unfortunately the 'Museum Only' days were again not so successful. The problem we have is that there are so many events and attractions being held these days that we are all very much in competition with each other. Also the Sunday opening of Supermarkets and other large shopping areas does not help our cause. Any suggestions you may have to attract more people, such as special events etc. will be most welcome.

The Pitstone Local History Society has come a very long way since its formation in 1963. It probably has developed in a way that the originators could not have foreseen. From the collection of a small number of agricultural implements and some very enthusiastic members it has grown into what it is today with three main strands of activity. A tremendous amount of work has been undertaken during the past year by many people

1. Social activities. Monthly meetings, speakers, visits, outings etc.
2. Watermill
3. Museum

Some years ago we became a Charitable Trust with four named Trustees. Because of this we were able in 1979 to take on a 25 year lease of the Watermill in order to preserve and protect it. In 1991 the Society then took on a 99 year lease of the part of Pitstone Green Farm on which the Museum is located ensuring security of tenure for the collection.

Both the Museum and the Watermill are now individually registered with the Museums and Galleries Commission which in effect puts us on par with any other museum establishment in the country. All this success however brings legal responsibilities, not least of which is to work within our approved acquisition and disposal policy. It also brings financial responsibilities whereby we have to receive enough income to be able to at least cover all our expenses. This is one reason why at the museum in particular we have to undertake a programme of rationalisation of the collection in order to put our limited resources to the best use, and to make the museum as attractive as possible to visitors and try to provide something which is not available elsewhere.

We rely totally on the income from general visitors, school and special parties to the Watermill and the Farm Museum for our continued existence. We still require more volunteers to assist at these times to show people round and also for safety and security reasons. These sessions are interesting and very rewarding and you get to meet many people. There are a small number of people who do these duties at present but in order to spread the load we would like more assistance. So can I please ask for more help. You will not be on duty alone but there will be someone else there who knows the ropes.

A tremendous amount of work is carried out on a voluntary basis by many people in order for the Society to function as it does, and it would be wrong of me to pick out individuals, but they know who they are. However I must thank in particular John Wallis who not only keeps us on the straight and narrow financially but does many other things which are essential to the running of the Society. At times he probably wishes he did not live so close to the Museum. I would also like to thank the Officers, members of the Executive and Sub Committees, and all Society members who have helped in many different ways towards the running of our organisation.

Finally thank you for coming tonight and for supporting these monthly meetings and social activities. I trust the Society will continue to flourish in the forthcoming year.

Treasurer's Report for year ending 31 March 1998 - John W. Wallis

During the year the Society's funds have gone down by £790 overall. This figure is arrived at as follows:

General Fund	- 16.00
Museum Fund	- 2300.00

Trading Fund	+ 661.00
Watermill Fund	+ 865.00
Net over spend	- 790.00

Museum: Miscellaneous expenses included £110 for chest freezer, £44 for electronic cash register. Repairs and renewals included £1550 for the new front entrance road surfacing. On the income side donations were helped by the sale of wheat for £200 (this was the crop harvested during the making of Plotlands by the B.B.C.)

Trading: Museum sales down £241, probably due to schools not having time to visit the shop on their trips and less interest being shown at the main Craft Open Days. Watermill sales up £55 due to more occasions when mill is open and no other opportunities for spending e.g. refreshments, crafts, and tractor rides as at the museum. Another factor accounting for the increase is the sales made at Ivinghoe Youth Hostel when Mr Wright ('B') and the treasurer take the 'shop' to the children staying there after visiting the mill. As captive customers they are happy to spend, spend, spend!

We hope to look into the possibility of stocking the shop with some new lines this coming year 1998/99. The wind and watermill kits are now being produced on poor quality card and may have to be dropped if our supplier is unable to improve the kits.

Watermill: Notable increase in cost of advertising (+ 104) due to mill being more widely advertised now in some quality publications. Other fluctuations in the watermill fund will I am sure be detailed by David Lindsey later.

General Fund: Although the overspend was only £16, I believe the position will only get worse unless certain measures are taken to address the problem. The two main increases in expenditure were Mills Party + 59 and Speakers' expenses + 74. Whilst we can do nothing about speakers expenses now that the norm is £20/25 plus travel, we can in future charge the cost of the mills party to the watermill fund. If this had been done in 1997/98 there would have been a small surplus of £113. However, costs continued to rise and I think it would be prudent at this meeting to agree an increase in membership subscriptions for 1999/2000 to:-

Joint members from	£8.00 to £9.00	(+12.5%)
Single members from	£5.00 to £5.50	(+ 10%)
OAP's from	£3.00 to £3.25	(+ 8.33%)

It was further proposed by David Goseltine and seconded by Jeannette Wallis and carried that the subscription be increased for 1999/2000 to:-

Joint	£10.00
Single	£8.00
O.A.P's	£5.00

The final decision to be taken by the Society's Executive Committee if the results of the 1998/99 accounts show that the increase is necessary.

Farm Museum - Norman Groom

We again have had a reasonably successful year at the museum. Our income was slightly lower than the previous year but still acceptable, in spite of the reported fall off in museum attendance.

We have continued our policy of creating a safer and tidier site for the general public and completed two major building projects. Again our volunteers at the open days have come up trumps in providing refreshments, organising the craft stalls, setting up and running the shop, plus all the other activities and duties carried out on these days. The tractor rides have again been very popular and have helped

considerably towards the museum funds. I will not mention any names, you know who they all are and if I did mention names I would be sure to miss someone out.

Our construction and maintenance team have again worked wonders and two major projects have been completed this year, one being the new museum shop that should be operational by the first Special Open Day and the other is the clearing and the reconstruction of the covered area in the sheep yard. This area now houses our tractor and implement display. Jeff has made available his concrete workshop before the due date

and this has been cleaned and set up as a carpenters shop with all the relevant machinery in one place.

The museum shop doubles as a meeting room or for visiting parties at the museum and will also be available for some craft stalls on the Open Days. Two of our members have accepted the task of setting out suitable wall displays in the new shop whilst others have completely stripped, cleaned, painted and relayed out the display in the Cow shed. Some of the other rooms have also been reorganised.

We are still receiving help from members of the Beds and Bucks Engine Club in restoring some of the museum's engines and workshop equipment. We are hoping that the Potters Guild will be putting on demonstrations again this year. Following a meeting with them recently, they are looking into the possibility of building an enclosed storage space in the demonstration area in order to tidy up their site.

A great deal of the work this year has been to prepare the museum for our Phase II registration, although we have heard recently that this has been delayed until the year 2000. This has been a relief to us as it does give us time to sort all our problems out. Amongst the factors that we have to consider are safety, security, conservation, cataloguing together with the other requirements of registration.

In January this year we had a meeting with our Curatorial Adviser, Sarah Gray from Halton and Sophia Mirchandani from SEMS. This was Sarah's first visit to the museum and we gave her a brief tour of our problem areas. They expressed some concern over the condition, the storage facilities and size of the collection together with problems relating to the ownership. We are now looking into how we can resolve these problems.

We have at last gained possession of the brick grain bins from the Horticultural Machinery Club and this will hopefully be operational as a general science room by next open season.

In readiness for our Phase II registration we now have a proper management structure at the museum. This consists of five individuals, the Museum Manager, Treasurer, Business manager, Site Manager and our Archivist. Volunteers meetings are held as and when required, one of these was held recently with members who help to organise the open days.

Our first open day was held on the May Bank Holiday Monday. We had about 100 visitors, including children, and raised about £150, more than all the 'last Sunday' Open Days of last year.

To conclude the Museum report I will hand you over to Gill Arney our Archivist for details of her work at the Museum.

Report by Gill Arney - Archivist

The Society paid for a course on 'How to Display your exhibits' which was very useful and coordinated and improved the display of objects in the museum. I also attended a course on documentation which has taught me more about use of the computer in cataloguing. We have relabelled and recatalogued the cowshed and tidied the loft, now most items of value have acquired some kind of label. An appeal for volunteers - who are always needed!

Programme - Sue Lipscomb

The report was read out in her absence.

Following last year's A.G.M. Gill Arney gave us a fascinating talk about her discoveries relating to the 1923 plane crash in Ivinghoe. It was sub-titled 'the tabloid version' and gave us an interesting insight into the newspaper reporting of the day.

In June members of the Society met at Mentmore Towers and were taken on a conducted tour by Graham Woollecombe. Graham had lived there for some time and could therefore give us much background information.

The following month we visited Frithsden Vineyard for a conducted tour around the vineyard, an account of wine making there together with wine tasting. Having tasted the wine, lots of our members decided to invest in some bottles to take home.

August saw some of our members involved with a walk around historic Aylesbury, led by Roger Evans who is the County Council's Historic Buildings Officer. We concentrated on the area around St. Mary's Church, the County Museum and The King's Head. An extremely interesting tour.

Julian Hunt, the Local Studies Librarian at Aylesbury Library came in September to give an illustrated talk about 'Buckinghamshire Market Towns.' His tremendous enthusiasm for his subject was quite obvious and it proved to be a most informative evening.

In October, Michael Hardy gave a audio-visual slide show about Parish Churches of Mid and North Bucks. Some members of Cheddington Local History Society attended this particular evening.

The following month, Bert Foord the Weatherman talked about the weather and how it affects us all. His talk was followed by lively questioning and we all left with a better understanding of the vagaries of the British weather.

December's talk was shared by Jeff Hawkins, Don Levy and Tom Owen. Since this was almost Christmas we sipped sherry and ate mince pies whilst listening to a most interesting talk and slide show about the early days of the museum.

Graham Lucas is the Outreach Co-ordinator of Whipsnade Wild Animal Park. He came in January to give us a talk about the History of Whipsnade, sharing with us his obvious affinity for the animals who have lived there over the years.

In February we learnt about the history of food and cooking from Janet Dineen. Janet not only brought food for us to sample but she also demonstrated the preparation of some of the recipes.

Maureen Bellett proved to be a true enthusiast when she talked to us about her enormous collection of period costume. We all had the impression that she could have continued to talk about them for hours, and that we would still have been enthralled.

We rounded off the year's talks with Hugh Grainger and his 'Genuine Ghost Stories' last month.

I would like to thank our members for supporting these events during the year. Please do continue to give me your ideas for future evening's entertainment.

Watermill Report - David Lindsey

The Watermill seems to have settled into a routine - nothing really outstanding to report during the year. With just two working at the mill, we manage to keep it ticking over, BUT things may change during the coming year with additional helpers.

1. Visitors 1997

Unlike 1996, the season began poorly but picked up towards the end. Even so, we ended up with fewer visitors overall.

- (1) Sundays and Bank Holidays: twenty six 'openings' (including Easter Monday) drew 984 visitors, 11% down on 1996. Even National Mills Day was down from 147 to 126.
- (2) Adult parties: only two with forty seven visitors
- (3) School parties: again down by a massive 26½% to 1345, but 518 (38½% of total) came from Dell Farm.
- (4) National Heritage Day: - we had decided not to open this year.
- (5) Summary: total of all visitors to the mill down by 23½% to 2376.

Despite all our efforts, this was especially disappointing for the duty wardens and assistants.

The reasons for this poor result are many, but one of the principal ones is the competition from so many other local attractions. A glance at any of the tourist leaflets and brochures shows just how many there are.

- (6) Sales: despite fewer visitors, sales on Sundays and Bank Holidays increased by nearly 18%

- (7) 1998: in contrast to 1997 has started very well with a 33% increase already!

2. Milling

As ever, very popular and obviously gives a boost to numbers. The flour produced is in great demand.

We had seven demonstrations, producing 150 1.5Kg bags of flour, total 225Kg or 500lbs which sold for £112 giving a surplus of £66 after taking into account the cost of wheat, bags etc.,

3. Publicity

(1) Teachers' Leaflet: As mentioned last year, the leaflet sent out to Independent Schools produced no response. It was seen by SEMS Education Unit who were not impressed by it. I said that resources did not permit a re-write, but in truth we were discouraged. However John Wallis, B Wright and I went on a Day's Seminar organised by Beds Museum Services on "Working with Schools". This gave us a better understanding of what was wanted, and so filled with renewed enthusiasm we set about producing a new leaflet with much help from the Beds Education Authority's Humanities Adviser.

After much consultation and effort, and at a cost of over £100, 600 copies were printed and distributed to north and central Bucks, Milton Keynes, Beds and Luton, Harrow and Barnet. Result to date: not one school party has come as a consequence!

(2) Hudson's: We decided to risk an advert in this excellent, up-market publication.

4. Repairs, Maintenance etc.,

Until early this year, there has only been John Wallis and myself working at the mill on a regular basis. We have not been able to undertake large projects. Even so,

Whitewashing completed (back wall and behind hurst frame).

Rear lower shutter and frame painted Ashridge red.

Sleepers for old bridge replaced. (new ones donated by Quanton Railway Society)

Much time consumed on anti-rat measures and problem with meal residue in burr stone case - now resolved.

One big job was however completed - the treatment of all the weatherboarding with 50/50 mix bitumen and creosote. This was achieved in two days by a 'dedicated' team - Ron Ashurst, Jim and Sylvia Andrews, Bob Morgan, John Wallis and myself.

We have now been joined by Bob Simpson and son Patrick from Towcester, Mervyn Sillick from Markyate and Julie Crabb from Enfield. We can now look forward to more progress.

5. Sub-Committee

Two meetings have been held and minutes submitted to executive committee.

6 Disposal

The worm conveyor from Grace's Mill in Tring has been transferred to Charlecote Watermill, Warwickshire. A 'Brigden assessment' showed that the conveyor was of no use or display value to Ford End, and so, within

the terms of our Collection and Disposal Policy we could dispose of it. Charlecote gave us a donation of £10.

7. Thanks again to all who have helped at the mill during the year:

The Sunday and Bank Holiday volunteers

B Wright for School Parties

John Wallis and newcomers Bob Simpson and Patrick, Mervyn Sillick and Julie Crabb.

Despite fewer visitors and the slow down in restoration/maintenance work the mill continues to flourish and fulfil its mission statement.

8. The Future

The major and important matters which need addressing in the near future include:

(1) Re-negotiation of lease which expires in 2004.

(2) Complete renovation and rebuilding of mill dam and pond: massive undertaking which can only be done with Lottery funding. Absolutely essential, but cannot be started until/unless lease is renewed giving security of tenure.

(3) Repairs to hurst frame: rear sole plate and upstream rear post severely decayed and in need of repair. 70% grant available from PRISM fund (Museums and Galleries Commission fund managed by the Science Museum). We hope to go ahead during the winter months.

These major projects, together with many supporting smaller ones, should ensure a good future for the mill well into the 21st century.

Publicity - Jean de Selincourt

The report was read out in her absence.

For this season, we have free entries in the tourist leaflets 'Events in Aylesbury Vale', 'Discovering Bucks Countryside', 'Step Out Events in Aylesbury Vale', 'Dunstable Arts and Leisure and Days out in Bedfordshire Heartlands'. We are also mentioned in other magazines and newsletters and the watermill is listed in the Thomson's book.

We pay for the entries in the annual Aylesbury Vale Visitors Guide. Eight local papers are given details before Bank Holidays for their 'What's On' diaries and we pay for boxed advertisements in the Bucks Herald and Leighton Buzzard Observer before the Special Farm Open Days when the watermill is milling.

Pitstone and Ivinghoe village correspondent, Dave Sivers is giving us effective mention in the local papers 'Village Roundups'.

Press releases can be very worthwhile - David Lindsey did this for National Mills Day which not only brought visitors but excellent photos in the Herald and Gazette the following week.

We will try to get the Press to our first Special Open Day on 14 June. We also regularly inform local Radios and now also Teletext for 'events' listings. David has been recorded for 'Three Counties Radio' for this coming Bank Holiday weekend.

We have had an extra thousand and a half of the small leaflets printed this year as we are steadily finding more outlets for them. The Three Counties have distribution systems for their libraries and the leaflets are also held in eleven Tourist Information Centres. They have been taken or sent to nearly thirty other museums, boatyards, railways etc. and thirteen Open Farms. We do sometimes get their leaflets in return for us to display, which is a fair exchange, but we are always looking for more outlets - all suggestions gratefully received.

Modern technology comes into it too - we have pages on several web-sites now - the most recent is 'On line'

run by Leisure Information Company, while the Aylesbury Vale 'Net Index' is supposed to reach a world-wide audience of 100 million people. We don't think they will all come at once!

Election of Officers and Committee Members

This was voted en bloc. Proposed by Roy Curzon and seconded by Mike Morris and carried.

Mike wished to record a vote of thanks to the Executive Committee and Officers for their work during the year.

Chairman
Vice Chairman
Treasurer
Secretary

Mike Sear
Bob Rayner
John Wallis
Brenda Grace

Farm Museum Manager
Watermill Manager
Programme Secretary
Crafts co-ordinator

Norman Groom
David Lindsey
Sue Lipscomb
Val Rayner

Membership Secretary
Publicity Secretary
Trading Secretary

Corrall McCormack
Jean de Selincourt
Jeannette Wallis

Independent Examiner D J Hardwicke Proposed by John Wallis Seconded by David Goseltine.

Any other business

1. Jeannette Wallis thanked the team who had planned and constructed the 'Museum Shop' and said she was looking forward to working in it.

There are some pictures for sale which have been painted by the Beacon Art Group and these are displayed in the Shop.

2. Moira Hegarty plans to have a Plant Stall and also sell Herbs at Open Days in June.

3. Don Brooks brought up the question of the use of the sink for water in the catering area on Open Days by people other than the refreshment staff. This would not be approved of by the Environmental Officer.

Norman Groom answered by saying that this was an area to be updated on the schedule. In future we will make sure that people other than the refreshment staff do not use the sink in the refreshment area.

4. A member from the floor asked why at the monthly meetings were we not having talks about local history. He said he had moved into the area and thought by joining the Local History Society he would be hearing about the locality.

Mike Sear replied by saying over the last 30 years we have had many talks about local history.

Gill Arney, our Archivist also said that if the gentleman was interested in local history she would invite him to the Farm to see the Archives.

5. Norman Groom said he would like in the future for the Society to form a 'Friends of the Museum' group.

Following the conclusion of business Gill Arney showed us some of the 'Artifacts' from the Museum.