

PITSTONE LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY



Newsletter September 1999

Editorial

Since the last Newsletter the Society has held its AGM in May. Following a decision taken at that meeting, it was decided it would be better for those members that were unable to attend to be informed of any important decisions taken in the next Newsletter rather than to wait 12 months for the minutes to be issued prior to the next A.G.M.. Individual reports (e.g. Museum and Watermill) will not be given as the relevant details will have been reported in the Newsletters throughout the year.

We are very short of interesting articles to print in the Newsletter, I am sure there are many people with local knowledge who could contribute an article. We would of course welcome letters for publication offering constructive comments or ideas relating to the Society and its activities. I am sure you are all bored with the constant appeal for help in running the society but things are getting desperate

We require a newsletter editor! Both myself and Mike, our Chairman, have stood in as a temporary measure but our commitments both at the museum and elsewhere are making it difficult for us to find the time required. Jean de Selencourt also has to give up the post of advertising manager next year so again we are looking for someone to take over that post. David Lindsey is unable to commit the time and effort he has given to the Watermill in the past and he must have help especially with the administration. All these tasks mainly require spare time evening work from home and access to a computer would help. If you can offer your services please contact a member of the committee.

Committee meetings are held four times a year with reports being given to the meeting by the various members. Some of the matters raised and discussed at the last meeting were as follows:-

-- I had suggested that the Society should purchase a second hand photocopier to reduce our printing cost and that I had located a suitable one. The committee agreed to proceed. (the Society now has the copier which is available for small volume printing to other persons or organisations at 4p an A4 copy. A3 and reductions and enlargements can also be carried out).

--Jean de Selencourt stated that we have reduced the number and size of paid advertisements this year in an attempt to increase our profits on the open days.

--Val Rayner has arranged for a free adult ticket to the museum in Marsworth, Cheddington and Ivinghoe local newsletters.

--It was reported that David Goseltine, Mike Sear and Ron Ashurst attended the Little Gaddesden Show with artefacts from the museum and a working stationary engine of Ron's. Museum leaflets were handed out.

--Jeanette Wallis, our trading secretary reported that the model gliders in the shop were selling like hot cakes and that she would order a further 4 boxes (48 per box).

--We decided to abandon our attempt to put on an Antiques fair at the museum as the work load would be too great for the limited number of helpers we have.

Norman Groom.

1999 A.G.M.

The AGM was held on the 20th May and was attended by 19 members plus the committee members.

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed and signed and there were no 'Matters arising' Reports were given by the Chairman and the other committee members. The chairman's and treasurers report will be issued prior to the 2000 AGM, Farm Museum and Watermill details have already appeared in the Newsletters.

The committee was re-elected unchanged except for the fact that Corral McCormack was unable to attend committee meetings and Gill Arney had agreed to take her place.

Under 'Any other business' the following matters were brought up.

Val Rayner asked that the position regarding refreshments for the craft people and volunteers to be made clear. The following details were given :- There would be no free rolls for anyone. The craft people would be given a ticket that would enable them to have one free drink. All society members who help on the open days would have free access to coffee, tea and biscuits, available in the reception area, on a self help basis.

I expressed to concern over the cost of sending out the previous years AGM report to all members when only a few attended the AGM. The cost was in the order of £150, a considerable sum that has to be earned by our volunteers.

There was a lot of discussion for and against changes to the present system. David Lindsey said that as we are a registered charity, our present procedure was correct. Gill Arney said that the information sent out was by then up to two years old and of little use to members.

A compromise was finally agreed and the notice of the AGM would only include the Chairman's and Treasurers report, hopefully sent out with the newsletter. If members did want a full copy of the minutes then these would be available from Brenda, the Secretary.

Sylvia Andrews said that she had seen people smoking on the museum site and asked what was the museum's policy.

I stated that there was no smoking on the museum site and if any member saw someone smoking, if they would let me know and I will ask them to stop.

THE MEASUREMENT OF GRAIN

Whilst working on our allotment in Ivinghoe, I came across a cylindrical metal container with two handles which came in very useful as a receptacle for weeds. Then I noticed it was stamped "1 Bushel" so I cleaned it up, treated it with Waxol and it is now on display at the Watermill.

Preparing the 'Interpretative' notice for it necessitated some research, and this is what I found:-

All grain (corn) used to be measured by volume and not weight until the Corn Sales Act was passed in 1921 abolishing the system.

The units of measure were :-

4 Pecks = 1 Bushel

4 Bushels = 1 Coomb or Sack.

2 Coombs = 1 Quarter (a fourth of a ton)

A Peck was equivalent to 2 gallons, and a Bushel to 8 gallons.

The actual weight of the grain varies according to the type of the cereal because of its shape and density. For example, a bushel of wheat weighs 63 lbs, barley 56 lbs and oats 42 lbs. However using the bushel as a unit of volume measurement meant that all three were the same.

The exact quantity in a bushel measure was obtained by levelling the grain across the top with a piece of wood called a 'strike'.

Coomb sacks weighing about 20 stones (280 lbs or 127 Kg) were the standard size of sack used for grain in mills and on farms

- hence the need for a sack lifter.

Which means that William Heley, who was milling at Ford End between 1784 and 1799 and who was recorded in 1798 as 'grinding 16 sacks a week' would have been milling about 20 stones (2032 Kg) or 2 tons of grain a week. Not bad for such a small mill.

David Lindsey.

IVINGHOE W.E.A COURSES

Genetics - Local History - Literature

Genetically modified Food has been the subject of heated debate in recent months. This is your chance to get the argument straight in a short evening course organised by the W.E.A. Come to the Village Centre on Monday 20th September to get the facts from Alan Myers. The course lasts

three weeks meeting at 7.45 pm for an hour and a half and costs just £9.50.

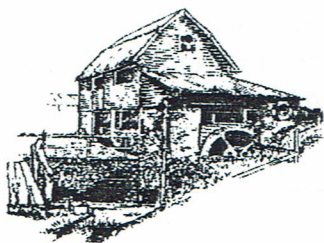
Local History follows Genetics and starts on Monday 11th October, same time, same venue but this course lasts 8 weeks. Julia Gibbs is the tutor and she aims at a practical course examining the sources available to study the period 1750-1900, comparing what happened locally with the national picture. No previous knowledge is needed and Julia will bring lots of documents and information to the course, but contributions from the students are always welcome. Come along and find out how to find out about your locality. The cost of this course is £27.

The third course is the popular **Literature** course on Friday mornings from 10 am to noon starting on September 24th and meeting at Ivinghoe Library. Jane Irons is the tutor and she aims to provide a chance to catch up on some modern 'greats'. Starting with Proust and James Joyce the course includes works by some of the most remarkable European writers of our time. For a full book list please contact our W.E.A. secretary. This course lasts 11 weeks and costs £38. There will be a further course of 11 sessions in the Spring 2000 following the same theme.

For further information and enrolment please contact the Secretary, Mrs Connolley, 48 High St, Cheddington (668719)

FORD END WATERMILL

'BOSS - ON THE MILL' (5)



Something different this time. Barry Darkin, who helps at the Mill on Sundays and with school parties, said he had been asked whether the saying "to go like the clappers" had its origin in milling. I do not know for sure, so have tried to find out. In the course of my research I have turned up a few sayings which come from mills and milling and which I quote below with some explanation. you will know most of them I am sure.

"Grist to the Mill" - means something that brings profit or advantage. 'Grist' is the term given to corn

for grinding i.e. which will keep the mill operating profitably.

"A millstone around ones neck" - obvious really - something that is a heavy burden or responsibility to you which prevents easy progress. (each of our millstones weighs 3/4 ton)

"To put someone through the mill" - to put someone through a series of difficult tests or troublesome experiences. This is a reference to corn which, after going through the grinding process in the mill, emerges in a refined form as flour.

"Run of the mill" - not very special or unusual. An American term for unsawn timber as produced by a sawmill.

"Calm as a millpond" very calm water. Might originate from the contrast between the still water in the millpond and the often fast flowing and turbulent stream that feeds it - but not in the case of our Whistle Brook!

"He who avoids the mill gets no flour" - effort is required to achieve an end. (Latin proverb: "Qui fugit molam, farinam non invenit")

"I am loathe to change my mill" - I'll stay with what I know.

"The mill cannot grind with water that is past" - One cannot look back to missed opportunities

"The same water that drives the mill decayeth it" - nothing is ever free.

"Much water runs by the mill that the miller knowd not of" - there are many things going on behind your back. ("More water glideth by the mill that wots the miller of" -Shakespeare, "Titus Andronicus").

"To much water drowned the miller" - one can have too much of a good thing.

"Hard as the nether millstone" - the lower or bedstone, being fixed to the floor, is not only hard but immovable.

To return to **"going like the clappers"**. Initially I thought it was connected with the clappers of (church) bells but could not equate speed with them. Then I recalled that in Scottish mills the damsel is sometimes called a 'clapper'. If you consider that a square or four arm damsel (like Ford End's) rotating at 120 rpm (the recommended millstone speed when milling) would give 480 raps or clacks a minute, or 8 a second, then that is really "going like the clappers"! So there might be some justification for the saying having a milling origin.

Have you any thoughts or better knowledge? Can you recall any other similar sayings with milling connotations?

David Lindsey

Straw Plait - A talk at Ivinghoe Village Hall.

Laszlo Grof spoke to a well attended meeting of the Society. His first admission was that he could not plait straw. His interest had come from his wife's family who had been straw plaiters in Edlesborough for several generations. He began with the history of straw plait as seen in classical paintings and in Shakespeare's 'Wheaten hats' He also mentioned straw hats that had been noted in wills. The earliest factual written references were to paupers in Hitchin, farmed out to Jeremiah Hockley to work at flax dressing, the spinning of linen threads and the making of straw hats. Also at that time the prisoners in Bedford jail were demanding straw for plaiting. They were refused on the grounds that they would make a rope and escape.

The industry had started in Dunstable and the surrounding villages during the seventeenth century. The wheat grown in the area produces the best quality straws. A petition to parliament in 1720 mentioned 14,000 petitioners who had worked at straw plait since 'time out of mind' Plaiting gave young girls an independent income and they spent it on cloths. Plaiting paid better than going into service but it was also considered morally low. Young girls would walk out with their young men plaiting as they went. The imagination of the 'upright' wondered what they were doing when out of sight. Lace makers were considered more respectable! It does seem that most babies were born in wedlock so things cannot have been that bad.

Up to 1720 English straw hats had been made of whole straw. They began to suffer from the import of finer Italian hats. Mr Jane of Edlesborough invented a straw splitter which sliced down the length of straw. It resembled a crochet hook. The splitter was improved by Austin of Tring who made it capable of varying the width of the straws. The Napoleonic wars were the making of the straw industry as all imports were restricted. At this time in Luton even the policemen had straw hats. Machinery for sewing plait into hats made production much faster. The plait was sold in plait markets in Luton and Dunstable, Ivinghoe and

Tring. Every village had a dealer who would sell the straw and collect the plait. Children learned to plait in plaits schools where they worked for long hours to fulfil quotas that would help to maintain large families, at the time when agricultural wages were very low. The plait kings became very grand and built a new plait hall for selling plait in Luton but it was a step too far, within 20 years at the end of the century, imports had completely defeated the industry. Most of the old ladies who kept the craft alive have now died but fortunately Veronica Main, a curator at Luton Museum, has become an expert and maintains the plait collection at the Museum.

At question time it emerged that Veronica was teaching the ladies of Edlesborough to plait for a particular exhibition. We may be able to see them at Museum Open Days.

Gill Arney.

Pitstone Local History Society - Programme 1999-2000

All talks to be held in the Ivinghoe Town Hall at 8pm unless otherwise stated.

Thursday 16th September * The Life and Times of John Hampden**

I have contacted the John Hampden Society who were delighted to provide us with a speaker for this occasion. I'm particularly interested in this talk since the school where I teach in Wendover is named after the great man himself.

Thursday 21st October * The History of Morris Dancing**

Barry Williams, who works at the National Trust property at Osterley Park is coming to give us this talk. He has even, I believe, had experience of Morris Dancing in Australia so we should have an interesting evening in store. **Please note that this meeting will be held at the old school in Ivinghoe.**

Thursday 18th November * Disraeli and his wife at Hughenden**

Mrs. Lee works for the National Trust at Hughenden, so she is the ideal person to give us this evening's talk.

Thursday 16th December * Quiz Night**

We have a rare Christmas treat in store for you this evening. As well as our traditional mince pies

and sherry, we have a quiz organised by our very own John Wallis and David Lindsey. Some of the questions will relate to the watermill and the museum, so be forewarned! Please bring a contribution of a few mince pies if possible to help make this evening go with a swing.

Thursday 20th January * An Evening with the National Trust**

This will be an audio-visual experience with Frank and Joan Randall guiding us through some of our local and not-so-local properties.

Thursday 17th February * Ancient Countryside in the Chilterns**

Alison Doggett is the co-author of a book entitled "The Chilterns". With her wealth of accumulated knowledge she will talk to us about aspects of her book.

Thursday 16th March * Wendover Waterways**

Peter Nicholls will be bringing his slides and photographs and sharing with us his expertise in this talk about the canals of Wendover and the surrounding district. I understand that he has information about Buckland Wharf, the area where I live, so I look forward to this with considerable interest.

Thursday 20th April * Hidden Bucks**

Miss Jean Archer bases this talk on her book of the same title. I have heard Jean talk before and so I know how fascinating it is to hear her speak of these out of the way places that I had scarcely heard of.

Thursday 18th May * A.G.M.**

Do please come and support your Society's AGM and then listen to David Lindsay as he talks about "Anthropology, Physics and Chimney Pots."

Please note this will be held in the Pitstone Green Museum.

Sue Lipscomb

Farm Museum Report.

At the time of writing his report we are only a few days away from our last Open Day for 1999. As usual we have good days and bad days when we open but reducing our paid advertising costs and the slight rearrangement of our catering procedure has made us more efficient, with the results that even on the August 'Craft and Family' day, when we had torrential rain for the best part of the day, we still returned a healthy income.

The museum shop, the plant stall and second hand book sales, recently established, helps considerably with our income. None of this would happen without our band of volunteers, members who provide their own attractions and of course those that organise and help with the excellent catering service that is provided.

We have also had a couple of successful group visits to the museum in the evenings. Members of the visiting organisation were surprised and

PLHS COMMITTEE

Chairman:-

Mike Sear 01296 622221

Vice-Chairman :-

Bob Rayner 01296 661967

Secretary :-

Brenda Grace 01296 668167

Treasurer :-

John Wallis 01296 661997

Museum :-

Norman Groom 01582 605464

Watermill :-

David Lindsey 01582 600391

Programme :-

Sue Lipscomb 01296 630578

Crafts :-

Val Rayner 01296 661967

Publicity :-

Jean de Selincourt 01296 662151

Trading :-

Jeannette Wallis 01296 661997

Archives:-

Gill Arney 01296 668123

Membership:-

Corrall McCormack 01296 662560

delighted with both the museum and the facilities we could offer, especially the Big Barn that was ideal for group events. This is something that we can build on in future years. If you know a group or organisation that would like to have an evening visit or other event at the museum please, let them know, it would be a benefit for all. Our attempts so far to attract local people to the museum have so far resulted in almost total failure. Val Rayner arranged to publish one free admission ticket in the Marsworth and the Cheddington Newsletter,

we only had about three persons taking up our offer. We will next try Ivinghoe!

Improvements, maintenance and restoration have been carried on throughout the Open Season with a steadily growing band of helpers. John Wallis has completed the wheelchair access toilets and the two new members that have joined us have, together with help from some others, completely stripped and rebuilt the rack saw and re-installed the Crossley Oil engine that was incorrectly fitted several years ago. The brush shop is now reorganised with working demonstrations and Malcombe has moved on, restoring a rather nice chaff cutter that we have.

The amount of work that we get through at the museum and the improvement made are quite amazing and it is difficult to remember what has happened and even if I could recall them all it would require several sheets to include all the details. We still await Johns financial results but I am sure we have had a good year and due for an even busier closed season. We have just been

offered a magnificent collection of model farm carts and wagons and hope by next season to have a special model room open as well as a printing shop, if all goes to plan, but more of that later. Don't forget we are always looking for volunteers. Our working days are Tuesdays and Sunday mornings, why not come to the museum and see what is happening?

Norman Groom.

STOP PRESS

Extra milling demonstration on Sunday afternoon, 3rd October. Your last chance to see the Watermill working this century! Do come along and bring your relatives and friends.

David Lindsey.

£200. Reward

WHEREAS

The WAREHOUSE of Mr. William Radcliffe,
COTTON MANUFACTURER,
ADJOINING TO HIS DWELLING-HOUSE IN THE HIGHER HILLGATE,
STOCKPORT, IN THE COUNTY OF CHESTER,

**Was, between the Hours of 2 and 3 in the Morning
of FRIDAY the 20th of March, instant,**

Wilfully, maliciously, & feloniously

Set on Fire,

By some wicked and desperate Incendiaries, who broke the Windows thereof, and threw in five Flambeaux or Torches, composed of Pitch, Tar, Oakum, and Spirits of Turpentine; and some Waste Cops of Cotton-west, which had been dipped in similar Spirits.

The Villains left on the Outside of the said Warehouse, three Clubs or large Sticks of a peculiar Sort, which may be the future Means of a Discovery.

A Reward of £200. will be paid to the Person who may give such Information as may lead to the Discovery and Conviction of the Principals concerned in this diabolical Crime, upon Application to

J. LLOYD, Solicitor.

Stockport, March 21st, 1812.

LOMAX, PRINTER.