

Pitstone and Ivinghoe Museum Society



Newsletter October 2004

Editorial

Many members will have heard of John Wallis's illness during September and October. I am happy to report that he is safely home again recovering from a quadruple heart bypass. Let's hope he does as well as Bill Clinton. He has decided that after 12 years the time has come to leave the job of Treasurer of the Society. He is willing to continue until the end of the financial year on 31st March 2005 but during that time we need to find a new Treasurer for John to train for the job. If you know of anyone who would be suitable please let him know as soon as possible.

There is a vacancy for one committee member. If you would like to be involved in the running of the Society please fill in a nomination form and notify Brenda.

I am pleased to report that Maggie Smith who has been our resident basket maker for many years has passed her City and Guilds Part 2 in Basketry. This has taken her two years hard work and travelling to London from Northampton in her spare time. Congratulations Maggie.

From January 2005 attendance at meetings will cost £1 for members and £2 for visitors

and includes tea and biscuits. Speakers are getting more expensive and attendance does not cover the cost. The more people who come regularly the better speakers we can afford. Check out the programme in this newsletter, see how many meetings you could make and write them in your diary now.

You will notice that the Christmas meeting is a social evening. The evening would be much enhanced by any entertainment that the members could offer. If you have any party piece - song, short talk conjuring trick or demonstration that might entertain please let Sue Lipscomb know.

Gillian Arney

Programme 2004/2005

All meetings are held in the Education Room in the Pitstone Green Museum at 8pm.

Thursday 18th November 2004 **AGM Video Farming in the Past**

Once the formal business of the Annual General Meeting is complete and we have our refreshments in our hands we hope to watch a video about Farming in the Past.

Thursday 16th December 2004 **Christmas Social**

We rarely have a chance to chat informally during our monthly meetings, so I felt that the December meeting was an ideal time to do just that. We shall be serving the traditional sherry and mince pies and if any members feel disposed to talk for 5 or 10 minutes about their hobbies, their memories of their childhood; in fact anything that they feel would interest others, I would be delighted. If anyone would like to ring me beforehand with the subject of these 'mini' talks, I would be pleased to hear from them. (01296 630578)

Thursday 20th January 2005 **Transport of Yesteryear**

James Knight has a collection of old slides and, using these, will take us on a journey from Leighton Buzzard by train to Dunstable. From there we will travel on the trams in Luton and then finally from Cheddington to Aylesbury by train again. His slides span the years from 1908 to 1960 and should give us a unique glimpse into travel in the past.

Sue Lipscomb, Programme Secretary

Museum Report October 2004

At this time at the end of the open day season I had hoped to be able to present an analysis of how well/bad we had done financially for 2004. However the records we have on the museum computers seem to be either incomplete or not easily accessible, and having only returned from holiday on 1st October I find I have left it too late to do this. All I can do is to report that for the whole season we have made just over £K6. This is just for the 8 normal public open days we run, the four bank holiday Mondays and the four second Sundays (Craft days). There will be additional takings from private visits, hire of facilities, sale of surplus equipment and artefacts etc, etc, but these figures will not

be available until the AGM where they will appear in the accounts. Without the figures for recent previous years I cannot make any meaningful comment. All I can say is that the Easter Monday open day was very pleasing when we took £1060, and the recent September craft day was disappointing at £592.

Previously we have always advertised the craft days in the press. These advertisements cost a lot more than we make from the craft stall holders. We have not used press advertisements for the bank holiday open days, so we decided we would drop the press advertisement for this September as a trial. The result is inconclusive.



**Peter Keeley on the Leighton Buzzard
Light Railway Trip 19th August 2004**
(picture by Bill Barnard)

In August we had a visit from an Industrial Archaeology group which showed a lot of interest. In July 46 children from Dunstable made a middle of the day visit. The Beds & Bucks Stationary Engine Club used the site for their July and August meetings as usual and we have £50 from them (they are corporate members of the society).

Since the July 1st committee meeting some activities have proceeded much as expected. The restoration work being done by John (the cart) and by Michael and Alan are progressing and the ends of their current tasks are now within sight, though not imminent. Jack has also been continuing with various restorations and two newly

restored machines are now on view in the Owen Barn. Another task Jack has undertaken is the salvaging of a large quantity of rusty screws, nuts and nails etc which was given to us by St Albans Organ Museum. He does this by throwing about two buckets-full at a time into our concrete mixer along with a bucket of water. The mixer is switched on and left running for a while. Then the contents of the mixer, which is by now fairly rust-free metalwork and very rusty water, is then tipped out on to a sieve and dried as quickly as possible. They are then sorted and given a thin coating of oil to preserve them from rusting again. The nuts and bolts are all pre metric and are becoming very difficult to source these days.

The manager Norman and his deputy (myself) have had a difference of opinion, but Norman has been allowed to have his way. The difference was basically how to allocate our slender labour resources at the museum during the summer just past. Once we had decided what to use the Nissen hut for Norman wanted to proceed with the task with all haste with the aim of opening it to the public this season as an exhibition of models in general with the major item being a working '1' gauge model railway layout. We succeeded in this and managed to put on display our fine collection of model carts along with the railway at the September open day. Indeed we filled the available exhibition space with some items left with no space to show them. We shall be looking to see how we can squeeze more in for next year.

I think all will agree that a fine job has been done in fitting out the Nissen hut. The downside to this is that certain items of maintenance and restoration which can only practically be done in the summer will now have to await next year. These include painting all the red doors in the refreshment area, finishing the cleaning and creosoting of the cart sheds started last year, and pressure washing and treating various carts and other mainly wood artefacts.

Tasks for the winter season are replacement of the curved corrugated iron roof over the new workshop, the brush shop, plumbers shop, cobblers, dairy, and wheelwrights. This is a major task and will consume a large slice of our resources, financial and labour. At the same time a corrugated roof will be built onto the new tractor & trailer shed. We are awaiting a quote for another roofing job which is urgent; that of the cow shed, model railway and printers shop wing. Many of the tiles are starting to slip due to rot in the battens, and we estimate that about one third of the 18,000 tiles will need replacing. The roof over the office is showing similar problems but on a smaller scale at present. When these roof tasks are complete it is unlikely there will be much cash left for additional projects.

Intermittent work during the summer has at last made a space in the loft so that artefacts and rubbish can be moved around and sorted. I have undertaken to sort the whole content of the loft as a background task; when it is sorted the various categories can be examined to decide their future. Nothing except pure rubbish will be discarded until this sorting has been done.

Peter Keeley, Deputy Museum Manager

Bess - On The Mill (15)



Hi folks - 'fraid it's mostly unhappy news this time from the mill, but there's just a bit of good news as well.

Firstly, as you'll already know, my friend John has had a heart attack and, as I write, is in hospital waiting for a triple bypass operation. We all wish him well. The Boss has been to see him several times (I was outside in the car as I wasn't allowed in) and says he's looking reasonably well in the circumstances but a bit bored. He's waiting for his turn to go to the Radcliffe which has now fixed for 13 October. He should be back home by the end of the month. The Boss is already compiling a

list of 'light duties' after hearing that after a weeks complete rest at home, he can do light work like dusting! (I wonder if Jeannette has had a word in someone's ear!)

The Boss himself is not in good shape either with his back. He has been with it to a specialist (I suppose he couldn't go without it now I come to think) who had X-rays taken which showed that two discs in the bottom part of his spine have virtually disappeared. This explains why he's had so much pain and cannot walk more than 20 paces at a time. And this explains why my other friend, Mr Thompson the vet, says I'm putting on weight. My Mum's having to take me up on the Downs whilst the Boss sits at home or in the car feeling miserable. So that only leaves one of the three mill workers still fully operational, namely the young lad Chris.

To make matters worse, we were milling on Sunday 26 September to use up the remaining wheat to make room for the new wheat waiting for us on a farm near Baldock, when the wretched pit wheel wedges worked loose again. The pitwheel wobbled and, with a loud cracking noise smashed a couple of cogs before it could be stopped. So, it's back to the drawing board again!

Don't ever believe that lightening never strikes twice in the same place.



The Watermill 30th August 2004 Bank Holiday
(picture by Brenda Grace)

After that, now for some better news. We've had a good season at the mill this year with the number of visitors up by 8 ½ % to 845. This is good; the Boss heard at a meeting that the numbers in many museums, especially heritage and country life ones, were down by 20%.

We also milled over 400 kg of flour, which is nearly 8 cwts. Two 2 cwts were produced on the afternoon of the August bank holiday. The 173 visitors made it a very busy afternoon I can tell you. I know because, "I was there" as Max Boyce the Welsh comedian used to say.

See the photograph taken by Brenda.

The Boss has asked me to include this advertisement for a post presently undertaken by 'B' who sadly wishes to retire now he's well past the 80 mark :-

"WANTED : PARTY BOOKING OVERSEER.

Responsibilities include : keeping a diary, taking telephone bookings (mostly daytime), allocating a guide (3 in post) and preparing summary at start of each month for Treasurer and Mill Manager".

Please have a word with the Boss on 01582 600391 if you are interested in this voluntary work which is so essential for the continuing success of the mill. No written correspondence involved; out-of-pocket expenses paid and full guidance will be given.

'B' has done sterling work in this role as witnessed by the number of children who visit each year. Many thanks 'B' for all your support and hard work.

T.T.F.N (Remember ITMA?)

✍ Bess

Pictures of PIMS Trip on the Leighton Buzzard Light Railway 19th August 2004



(picture by Bill Barnard)



(picture by Bill Barnard)

Over 50 members had an enjoyable though very damp evening at the Leighton Buzzard Light Railway. Ladies of the Railway Society provided an excellent meal before embarkation on the journey to the old Quarry Buildings some miles up the line. There was an excellent display of old methods of working the sand quarries. The party returned in good order to the terminus after dark.

Memories from Arthur Reeve (part 2)

Here are a few more of Arthur Reeve's memories. They may seem a little disjointed as the questions that prompted

them have been left out and they are written more or less as they appear on the tape.

Churchill used to land there. (Cheddington Airfield) When you are down there you are not far from Chequers. You could always tell when he was going to land because there were two jeeps against the control depot, facing which ever way the plane was going to come in. One had got police in with their revolvers and the like and the other one had got to pick him up. The plane had only just got off the runway, just turned onto the perimeter track and they would pick him up.

He came really at the end of the war because he went to France a lot. The American headquarters were at a girl's school in High Wycombe on the Reading road and Churchill's, the English one was on the left up in the woods before you get to High Wycombe from Princes Risborough.

The base commander was Colonel Abbot. He was ever such a nice gentleman. He had been over to France one night and he was shot down by one of ours over the channel. You didn't hear much about it though.

They all had bicycles and they'd come along the canal at night and fall in. They'd often throw their bikes in so they didn't have to go by the guards to get into the site because they were after hours. They used to get them out the next morning. They used to scramble through hedges, over the lock gate on the arm and they were right in the site. It wasn't fenced then.

They had a baseball ground and they were always standing about throwing a ball at one another with a glove on their left hand. On one occasion, they dressed two of them up as Germans and they went round the camp, had food in the mess hall and weren't detected until they went out onto the field. They were had then straight away.

Another time I can remember, General Patton came in. I thought there was going to be something on. On the Saturday evening at 4 o'clock, old Clarky said "You want to get to early to headquarters on

Monday morning, sweep up around the rose bushes, around the flag pole and I want everything tidy. Not a scrap about” Reg Brummage and I and some others did the sweeping up everything and went round to other site and the Tuesday morning I said to Reg “They’ve got someone coming.” We went along and had a look and it was General Patton, and he had some of the American airman with him and he was decorating them with medals.

After the war they were flown over Germany to see what they had done. They wanted me to go but I wouldn’t go. They were all flown over there and then they gradually whittled them out. They cleaned up the airfield. They had a string of airmen right across picking up everything that was there. They left it really tidy.

After the Americans I was there for six months on my own, sort of caretaker of the airfield and then a group from Halton called the 24 Group, a medical group came in. We called them the spit and polish group. They came in and had several of the sites and they did all sorts of hospital training. They had a dental block there in one of the mess rooms where Keen’s garage is now.

In 1949 the Poles came. After them it was empty for some time until the small arms affair came in where they stored the small arms and they were the ones who put the fence round the airfield. Much of it was restored to agriculture in 1982 just before the new memorial was built.

Gillian Arney

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