

# Pitstone & Ivinghoe Museum Society



**Newsletter January 2007**

*Picture by B. Wright (01296 668083)*

## **From the Chairman**

We are facing a problem for our Catering Department. The Government has introduced regulations for Food Safety and Hygiene but it is not very clear whether these regulations will affect us. As is usual with Government regulations it is possible to interpret them in various ways. But one thing is clear; if we are affected we need to send someone for a one-day course to gain the necessary Health and Hygiene Certificate.

There is a Catering meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> February where we intend to settle the matter.

## **Kit Kite**

## **Museum Report – January 2007**

The report for this quarter is brief. This is not because of any lack of activity at the Museum but because the major efforts being made do not make for very interesting reading.

Several tasks have been started but are on hold. Among these are the restoration of the loft area over the meeting room, and the improvement of rain water drainage from the same building. Effort is concentrated on modifications in the reception area where the adjacent room (the so-called Microcosm) is being altered. This involves insulation and draught-proofing of the roof and fully partitioning this room from the next (the old Archaeology Room). A door is being installed between reception and Microcosm (at the time of writing the door frame in and the door just requires hanging). When this is completed the

Microcosm will be able to double as a canteen/rest-room for the use of the volunteers when the Museum is not open to the public. When the public are around the room will revert to Microcosm with some artefacts on display on a table.

The restoration of the Hawkins cart is now well underway. This will not be a full restoration to useable condition (we do not have a carhorse anyway), but all the rotten wood is being neatly replaced so as to show the cart as it would have looked when it was a part of the farm. It will also be possible to tow it to alternative locations in the Museum. This restoration has occupied Alan, John Youngs, Michael and Tom for many weeks now, and more recently John has been bringing a friend of his along to do some sign writing.

The racksaw engine has now been fixed and should be running on all open days next year; it is 18 months since it last was demonstrated; the basic problem was that we had been using the wrong fuel. We have tracked down and spoken to one of the original restoration team and he confirmed that the correct fuel should be paraffin, which Norman and I had decided resulting from our attempts to get it going again. It would appear that some years ago (in the late 1990's) somebody decided to top up the part-empty fuel tank with diesel. Then, later, it was probably topped up again with diesel. The writer also topped it up with diesel around Easter 2005 as he had been told that this was the fuel to use; but from then on the

engine became increasingly difficult, then impossible to start.

We are spending a significant sum of money to enhance our grass cutting capability. For some years past John Richmond had been making do with a small, unreliable ride-on mower on which he also did all the servicing and maintenance. Now that John has left us it has been decided that we need a professional machine and, subject to a satisfactory demonstration we have bought a 44 inch cut diesel fuelled ride-on machine. You will see it in use throughout the summer months; you cannot miss it, it is bright yellow ! We have also had a donation of a fairly new professional hand mower for the smaller areas of grass so there will be no excuse for imperfect lawns this year.

We have been given an engine. Oh ! How boring I can hear some of you say, but this is a quite beautiful machine with an interesting and local history. The engine has been given to us by Lacey Green windmill. They were given it by the BBC, Caversham, some years ago on the condition that they restored it and ran it in public. They ran it in

1996.....once, and not with cooling water in it else they would have realised how bad a water leak it had. It had no silencer and consequently made a lot of noise we are told. They have realised that they are unlikely ever to have the resources to carry out a proper restoration so, as we have the know how and facilities it has passed to us. We still hope to have it installed and running by Easter; depending a great deal on the weather.

Mike and Jean Morris are busy again this winter re-arranging and re-labelling some of our exhibits, in particular those that have been disturbed with the building work in the Microcosm. There are so many exhibits in the Museum that we could use additional help during the closed season for cleaning and re-arranging work if anyone has an hour or two to spare. This is especially so during the 2-3 weeks leading up to Easter when the first open day is on the Monday. Remember, we broke all attendance and takings records last Easter Monday and we must keep improving our displays if we are to continue in this way. Come along and help us; you will be made very welcome.

**Peter Keeley, Deputy Museum Manager**



**Frank, a friend of one of our volunteer restorers, hard at work repainting the lining on Jeff's Wagon.**

### **Model Railway of Gerrards Cross at the Museum**

The model of Gerrards Cross station, displayed at the Museum, has been built by members of the Chilterns Group of the 3mm Society and the model depicts the station as originally built. Trains running are representative of those seen on the line and provide a 3 dimensional moving picture in miniature of rail transport from the early GW & GC days right up to the British Railways era, when steam gave way to diesel traction. The model is almost entirely hand built and is built to a scale of 3mm to 1 foot, which is about 1 : 100 scale.

In the 1890's the Great Central Railway was constructing a brand new north-south trunk route down through the Midlands to an end-on connection with the recently opened Metropolitan Railway Aylesbury line under the dynamic leadership of Sir Edward Watkin. As he was both chairman of the GCR and the MET. the idea of using the 40 miles of existing line between Quainton Road and Neasden at first seemed a good one since all three major gaps through the Chilterns were already occupied by railways. His great dream was to eventually to build a railway through the centre of England to the coast, and then via a channel tunnel to Paris. Unfortunately, Sir Edward, having arranged the alliance between the Metropolitan and the Great Central companies, had to retire through old age, and without his strong personality to unite the two Boards, the partners started to fall out.

In 1898 (a year before the opening of the G.C. line) they had almost come to blows at the "border" station at Quainton Road, when, John Bell, the General Manager of the Metropolitan had tried to stop the Great Central from exercising its running powers into London by actually stopping a goods train from running on to Metropolitan metals. This obviously could not go on. Furthermore, even if relations had been easier, there would still have been a problem of congestion on the busy suburban route between Aylesbury and London, once the Great Central was open to traffic. The Great Western Railway company had been looking at new ways of providing a shorter route to Birmingham.

One such proposal was to build a line from Acton to High Wycombe, here part of the (Maidenhead to Oxford) old Wycombe Railway route would be used and upgraded to form a new main line running through Princes Risborough and Thame to Oxford. The Great Central viewed this proposal with interest. If it could link its own route with

this new line somewhere north of Quainton Road then all its problems would be solved. The two companies had in fact already collaborated in the region to the north of Banbury, where an 8 mile line had been planned to link the two systems. Clearly with these connections between the two companies it would be possible to divert at least some Great Central traffic to London via either Banbury, Oxford and Thame, or Aylesbury and Princes Risborough.

The two companies therefore decided to collaborate still further, and on 1st. August 1899, the Great Western & Great Central Railways Joint Committee was set up by Act of Parliament. The proposal finally agreed was for a new joint line, built to main line standards, running from Grendon Underwood to Northolt. At Northolt a junction would be built and new lines would be constructed to give access to both the Great Central main line at Neasden and the Great Western main line at Old Oak Common.

Construction began early in 1901, under the direction of the Great Western engineering department; the resident engineer was Mr. R.C. Sikes. In all, the new scheme now involved the construction of 73 miles of double track main line, and these were to constitute the last major railway building operation of the Railway Age before the railways were nationalised.

On 20th November 1905. the whole of the Joint Line was opened for G.C. freight traffic. The slow moving and heavy goods traffic served to 'iron out' and consolidate the new line. The entire line was opened for G.C. passenger traffic on Monday 2nd April 1906 and G.W. passenger traffic on Sunday 1st July 1906. Two special trains ran on the 2nd April. carrying invited guests to High Wycombe for a celebration luncheon in the Town Hall

After the luncheon the trains that had brought the guests separately from Paddington and Marylebone were joined, and the double-sized train then made its way over the new joint line and onto the G.C. line as far as Calvert. At first the G.C. provided main line as well as local services on the New Line particularly at peak periods when the Metropolitan route was congested with suburban traffic. The quarrel with the latter company had for all intents and purposes been patched-up, and in 1906, the matter of running powers was finally settled, thus the Great Central's need of the G.W.&G.C.Jt. line was not as pressing as it had been back in 1899, and the High Wycombe route became something of a "second string" line as far as the G.C. was concerned. Nevertheless, as was pointed out above, the line

was useful during the morning and evening rush hours.

The final section of the G.W. New Line- the Bicester Cut-Off- was not completed until 1910. It was opened for goods traffic on Monday 4th April, and for passengers on Friday 1st. July. The majority of Great Western mainline trains from Paddington to the Midlands and the North were immediately transferred to the new route, resulting in some spectacular speed-ups enabling the G.W. to challenge its old rival the L.N.W.R. for the lucrative Birmingham traffic.

The G.W.& G.C. was never a " Joint Railway " in that it never owned any locomotives or rolling stock, and was not a system in its own right. Nevertheless it did have some of the trappings of an independent concern. It had its own seal, for example, and the staff on the Joint section of the route sported the initials "G.W.&G.C.J.C." on their uniforms. Moreover the Joint line had its own tickets and general paperwork scrupulously lettered with the initials of the Joint Committee.

Architecturally, the stations on the G.W.&G.C.Jnt. line were pure Great Western, and followed that company's established house-style; built of red brick, with trimmings executed in purple-black engineer's brick, the station buildings were long, low single storey structures. GERRARDS CROSS was the exception in that it was a two storey building which passengers entered on the upper floor and descended to the platform by means of the footbridge steps. Signals and signal boxes were again pure Great Western. A peculiarity of the line was its sparse goods facilities. The familiar large all-over warehouses

were rare on the joint line, instead, most of the stations had rather smaller brick built lock-ups. This suggests that the Joint Committee realised that the New line would be primarily a passenger route, and held out little hope of establishing a busy freight business.

GERRARDS CROSS was provided, as were most of the stations on the new line, with a quadruple track layout, the platforms being situated on the outer loops enabling the local passenger train or a goods train to stand safely in the platform roads whilst expresses could pass by non-stop at full line speed. The station layout today is very different. It has lost both the goods yard sidings and the passing loops. All buildings except the main ones and the footbridge have gone.

In the 1960's British Railways decision to electrify the West Coast Main Line, which included the old rival L.N.W.R. line to Birmingham, heralded the end of the direct G.W. route to Birmingham (Snow Hill) via High Wycombe, plus the decision to close the G.C. route north of Aylesbury spelt the end of the Joint Line as a main trunk route. The joint line lost its express trains to Birmingham in the early 1970's and was gradually being run down and an attempt to eventually close Marylebone Station altogether was tried, with all trains on this route going into the already overcrowded Paddington Station. A new lease of life for the line came in the 1990's with the creation of NETWORK SOUTHEAST and both lines out of Marylebone have since seen extensive modernisation and modern Turbo trains have replaced the old 1960's diesel trains.

**Phillip Hutchings**



**Duchess class loco waiting to be steamed on a cold winters day on the museums outside track**

### **From our Archives**

The following article was previously published in the New Year issue 1981 of **Yesterday's World**. It was written by Catherine Hitchens who was the editor at that time.

**Sandra Barnard**

### **Some Dates and their Derivations**

The first Monday after 6th January, the end of the Christmas Season, was called Plough Monday because it was the day when work started again on

the farms, and, weather permitting, the spring ploughing began.

Candlemas Day is 2nd February, taking its name from the blessing of the candles on this day for use in church throughout the coming year. It is also the last day of the extended Christmas Season, when any greenery not taken down on Twelfth Night was removed and the Yule Log burnt for the last time.

Shrove Tuesday gets its name from the custom of going to confession on that day and being shrived in preparation for the long period of fasting and abstinence ahead. Since eggs and fat were not eaten in Lent during the Middle Ages they all had to be used up, and pancakes have become the traditional way of doing so:

*Shrove Tuesday, Ash Wednesday, when Jack went to plough,  
His mother made pancakes, she didn't know how,  
She tossed them, she turned them, she burned them quite black,  
She put in some pepper and poisoned poor Jack.  
Old Rhyme.*

Lady Day is 25th March, and is the day of the Annunciation by the Angel Gabriel to Mary, the date was fixed because when Christmas Day was fixed on 25th December, the Annunciation naturally fell into place nine months before the birthday of Christ. From the twelfth century until 1752 when England abandoned the Julian Calendar the year was officially reckoned to begin on Lady Day.

Maundy Thursday - Maundy derives from the Latin *-mandatum*, meaning commandment. In former times the Sovereign washed the feet of thirteen poor men, referring to the washing of the feet of the disciples by Christ. Nowadays there is the specially minted Maundy money presented by the Sovereign to as many poor elderly men and women as there are years in his/her life.

In 1555 Leonard Dygges described in *Prognostications*:

*"Thunders in the morning signify wind; about noon, rain; in the evening good tempest. Some write (their ground I see not) that Sunday's thunder should bring the death of learned men, judges and others; Monday's thunder the death of women; Wednesday's thunder the death of harlots, and other bloodshed; Thursday's thunder plenty of sheep and corn; Friday's thunder the slaughter of a great man and other horrible murders:*

*Saturday's thunder a general pestilent plague and great death."*

Leonard Dygges considered July the most treacherous month for thunder.

St Swithin's Day is 15th July. He was a bishop of Winchester in the third century, and when he died he asked to be buried in the churchyard where the rain could fall upon him, and this was duly done, but some years later it was decided to accord the bishop more honour, within the cathedral and 15th July was the date appointed for his bones to be moved. However it rained so heavily on that day removal was impossible and it was thought that the bishop was showing his displeasure at being moved, that displeasure lasting for the next forty days. Hence the legend.

The Dog Days are said to be the period of greatest heat in this country and run from approximately 3rd July to 11th August, that is twenty days before and twenty days after the conjunction of Sirius, the Dog Star and the sun, as originally calculated in Mediterranean countries.

Sirius the brightest fixed star in the sky is in the constellation of the Dog (canis Major). Dogs were thought particularly likely to go mad during this time of sultry heat. A popular cure for the bite of a mad dog was to make the victim swallow several of the animal's hairs. Hence "hair of the dog that bit", indicating that a little more of the same can do no harm, or perhaps, no more harm.

The first Sunday in August was the end of the cherry-picking season, and became known as Cherry Pie Sunday. The finest cherries in the country came from Buckinghamshire, particularly around Stowe, and were made locally into turnovers known as cherry bumpers.

Lammas is the first of August, the day of first fruits. Old Lamas Day is 12th August when grouse shooting begins.

July and August both have 31 days, and this is said to be because Julius Caesar having named July after himself, his successor Augustus Caesar named the month following after himself. However at that time August only had thirty days, whereas July had thirty one. Determined not to be inferior, Augustus is alleged to have taken a day from February and added it to August, which is why February is so short.

Corn dollies made to traditional designs and now available in many craft shops are the last survival

of a very old custom. They were originally made from the corn of the Last Sheaf left standing in the middle of the field, the last refuge of the Corn Spirit. Whoever cut the Last Sheaf killed the Corn Spirit and ill luck attended him. To spread that ill luck as widely as possible, the reapers threw their sickles in turn at the Last Sheaf so that all had contributed to its downfall. The corn dolly was taken back to the farmhouse in procession - the Harvest Home - and presided over the Harvest Supper, being kept until the following year when a new one replaced it.

Michaelmas is 29th September, and is the feast of St Michael the Archangel, the only angel to be so honoured in the Western Church. Michael was believed to be the leader of the heavenly host who personally hurled the rebellious Lucifer down to Hell from Heaven. Michael was therefore considered particularly adept at ousting devils and churches dedicated to him were often on the site of pagan temples. Such temples were frequently situated on hilltops, which explains Michael's association with high places, although the most famous, Mont St Michel off the coast of Normandy was founded as the result of a vision of the saint to a tenth century local bishop.

The traditional English food for Michaelmas was a goose, because spring goslings became ready for the table at this time.

Halloween is 31st October, and is the eve of All Hallows, hallows being an old word for saints and saints having been honoured on 1st November ever since the ninth century. It is also the Old New Year's Eve of the pagan Celts, for their year began on 1st November, the feast of Samhain. At that season the dead were supposed to revisit their homes, so Halloween has always been associated with ghosts.

Since the dead were feared and their ghosts regarded as evil spirits, all those who trafficked with them were active at this time and 31st October was one of the great witches' Sabbaths, the other being 30th April, May Eve, or Walpurgisnight. So owls, bats, broomsticks and black cats are part of our Halloween decorations and games of fortune telling are rife.

December was the tenth month of the Roman year and takes its name from the Latin for ten - *decem*. Before the calendar change in 1752 when Christmas Day fell on what is now 6th January, white Christmases were more common than now, because snow tends to reach this country in the first half of January.

Father Christmas, or Sir Christmas as he was often called, survived even

Puritan attempts to suppress him. He does not have and never did have, any religious associations, which belong to St Nicholas the original Santa Claus, whose feast day is 6th December, the day when many European children still receive their gifts. St Nicholas was a bishop of the early Church; consequently he was not one of the select band of saints still honoured by the new Church of England and the Puritans of course looked askance at all saints, so he never really stood much chance in England. However Sir Christmas persisted among country people and even figures in one of Ben Jonson's court masques of the early 17th century. Gradually he became the very embodiment of the Christmas Spirit and when the cult of Santa Claus arrived from the United States in the last century, the two soon became fused. Father Christmas traditionally wears a long red robe and fur-trimmed hood, whereas Santa Claus wears tunic, breeches, boots and cap. The term "Father" was simply an honourable form of address for an old man, as in Father Time.

**Catherine Hitchens**

### **Programme Secretary's Questionnaire**

I would like to thank all those members who took the time to complete my questionnaire. I had 44 replies and they made interesting reading. I had hoped to get some insight into the reasons why attendance at our monthly talks has been steadily declining. Two particularly disappointing attendances were below 10, an embarrassing situation when an outside speaker has been invited to talk. I thought it might be of interest to summarise the findings here.

Of those who replied, 6 attended the talks regularly, 24 occasionally and 14 never. The majority of the latter group did not attend because Thursday was not a convenient day for them. Other reasons given included difficulty in hearing the speakers, poor car parking facilities, poor access to the toilets and the fact that they lived too far away. The majority however, felt it would not improve the situation to hold meetings at the Village Hall. More than 50% felt that meetings should take place throughout the year, rather than just in either the summer or the winter months. Very few wanted more social events, the majority preferring the talks or indeed the existing balance between the two. Some kindly outlined the brief they felt I ought to work to when booking speakers, and their ideas were very close to my

own. Many made very appreciative comments about the selection of speakers provided so far.

Ideas for forthcoming talks were very interesting and useful and I will follow up many of those. Fifteen of you thought that email contact would be good to remind you of talks and I have set up a contact group and will email reminders about a week before the event. If anyone wishes to be added to this reminder group, I would be delighted to do so.

My final question concerned ways in which we might improve attendance. Many thought we simply needed to advertise more widely in local magazines and use posters around the villages, others felt that a microphone for speakers to use would help the talks to be more easily heard, some felt that car sharing could be organised. One

mentioned that she felt the refreshments should be served after questions had been taken and another mentioned that there should be a stronger sense of welcome at meetings.

Certainly these ideas give me food for thought and I will try to act on any that I feel are feasible in the hope that members will vote with their feet and that the talks will once again become a popular feature of our local history society. It is a thankless task for a programme secretary when the attendance for a talk drops below 20, as has so often been the case during this year. Nevertheless, many of your comments have given me the enthusiasm to continue to provide a varied, and I hope interesting and appealing programme of events.

**Sue Lipscomb, Programme Secretary**

### **Programme 2007**

All meetings are held in the Education Room in the Pitstone Green Museum at 8.00 pm.

#### **Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> February**

##### **Sewage and Victorian Splendour**

For nearly 100 years four giant steam beam engines, designed and built by James Watt in 1864, served to pump up to 17 million gallons of South London sewage every day into subterranean reservoirs until flushed down the Thames estuary on ebb tides. The story of their inception, installation in a still magnificent Victorian 'palace', abandonment and rescue is a fascinating tale that Alan Frost, who is currently working on the building's conservation, recalls in this illustrated talk.

#### **Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> March**

##### **Long Case Clocks**

Alfred Bennett had been involved all his working life in electronics, but once he retired from British

Aerospace in 1989 he became interested in clocks, particularly long case clocks. He is coming to talk about this hobby, bringing with him, not a Grandfather clock, which would be a challenge for any car, but a quarter chiming clock to show us.

#### **Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> April**

##### **A Touch of Glass**

Gordon Casbeard and Tony Brown will be giving us a magic lantern show, using 6 or 7 sets of their large collection of glass slides. Some are humorous, some are set to music and all will give us an insight into entertainment in the Victorian era. They both belong to the Magic Lantern Society of Great Britain and will talk to us about the history of magic lanterns. They will bring 2 or 3 extra lanterns so that we can all have a chance to examine these fascinating objects at close hand.

**Sue Lipscomb, Programme Secretary**

### **Open Days 2007**

Easter Monday	9 April
Sunday	10 June
Bank Holiday Monday	7 May
"	28 May
Sunday	8 July
"	12 August
Bank Holiday Monday	27 August
Sunday	9 September

Opening times from 11.0 a.m. to 5.0 p.m.  
Adults £3 Children £1.50.  
Members of PIMS free

### **Committee:-**

#### **Chairman**

Kit Kite 01296 668918

#### **Museum Manager, Treasurer and**

##### **Membership Secretary**

Norman Groom 01582 605464

#### **Deputy Museum Manager**

Peter Keeley 01582 792701

#### **Secretary**

Brenda Grace 01296 668167

#### **Committee**

John Wallis 01296 661997

#### **Programme Secretary**

Sue Lipscomb 01296 630578

#### **Publicity Secretary**

Anne Ball 01442 822672

### **Trading Secretary**

Jeannette Wallis 01296 661997

### **Other Officers:-**

#### **Archivist** (of computer records)

Sandra Barnard

#### **Craft Co-ordinator**

Kathleen Haran 01582 792895

#### **Newsletter**

Sandra Barnard

**N.B. Last date for articles for next copy:-31st March 2007**

### **School Group Visits**

For information on school visits, please contact Sue Jones on 01296 660436

**Museum Website:-** <http://website.lineone.net/~pitstonemus>

**Pitstone and Ivinghoe Museum Society :-Registered Charity No 273931**