

*Pitstone and Ivinghoe
Museum Society Newsletter*



New Year 2010

Museum Report – January 2010

Noughties! Noughties?? They've spelt it wrong, haven't they? I expect better of the Daily Telegraph. It should be naughties, shouldn't it? But, No! They've spelt it wrong again somewhere else. Then the penny dropped... Seventies, Eighties, Nineties, what next? Noughties, of course. Why didn't someone tell me? It's not in the dictionary anyway, so I can be forgiven, I suppose. What comes next in ten years time? Will it be the "Tenties"? Somebody tell me, please. Why should I care anyway; I doubt if I shall be here then.

What did the "noughties" mean to the Museum? Although I had been working on and off at the Museum since the late eighties I had only really been "full-time" for a few months (since my wife died) so I suppose that virtually everything that I have seen happen there happened in the noughties. First, sadly, Jeff died, soon to be followed by Mike Sear who I never really got to know. Perhaps our main accomplishment has been to sort out the things worth keeping from the huge amount of (mainly) rubbish scattered around the site. The Nissen hut was crammed full of mainly rubbish. The big loft likewise, although perhaps not quite so much was rubbish. The semi-derelict shed by the fuel pumps contained little more than the rusty straw-mat-making machine, right at the back with piles of rubbish hiding it. "You'll never restore that", many of the volunteers said to me: but I did, but only because I had already been involved in restoring another one elsewhere and knew what an interesting mechanism it was.

During the nineties Jeff Hawkins (with much assistance from Museum volunteers) had built a large barn from telegraph poles, roof trusses, second-hand corrugated iron sheets and a few old windows. This was outside the Museum boundary and was meant as a store for his surplus stuff from the Museum site, but items surplus to our needs were also allowed in there. After Jeff died the contents of the cart sheds which all belonged to him were either sold or transferred to the barn he had built. This gave us an empty space under cover so that we could start moving things around without having to leave stuff outdoors. Bit at a time this work progressed until the grain barn was emptied so that it could be cleaned out and the end partition rebuilt with a shutter door. Some stuff was then moved back in and arranged as a display.

Many overdue repairs to the buildings have been carried out over the last 10 years. The cowshed roof has been stripped and re-tiled, the woodworm infested cart sheds have been creosoted throughout (using real creosote before it was banned), almost all the corrugated iron roofs on the site have been removed and replaced with new sheeting, and the end wall of Jeff's workshop has been replaced (by Chris Wallis). New buildings have been erected, with planning consent where needed, and a car

parking area created opposite the cart sheds. Electricity services have been enhanced over the whole site, and while all these major tasks were being carried out the volunteers have managed to keep abreast of most of the minor maintenance work which crops up routinely. I think we all deserve a (gentle) pat on the back.

The start of a new decade! Who knows what the Museum will be like in another 10 years? This time 10 years ago we were slowly gaining possession of the several locations on the Museum site which were, under the terms of our lease, still occupied by Jeff Hawkins. The meeting room was one of these and was possibly the one we were most keen to obtain. The Society used to hold its monthly meetings across Vicarage Road in Pitstone Memorial Hall 10 years ago. The place where many of you park your cars when you come to the monthly meetings was occupied by a semi-derelict and very long caravan, and the Nissen hut and grain barn were packed full of inaccessible unsorted items. There have certainly been plenty of changes on the site over the last ten years, and I wonder what it will look like ten years from now.

One area you will not recognise at Easter (when we have the first open day on Easter Monday) is the refreshment counter. This will present a totally different aspect, but only time will tell if it is to the liking of our customers. The food and drink on offer is not planned to change very much, but the volunteers who have worked all autumn and winter on the changes are hopeful that you will all approve of the alterations. As I write there is some slight doubt as to whether we can completely finish the task by Easter as we have been hampered by bad weather and other things.

Jim's Sawmill R.I.P. Jim Andrews ran a simple woodworking show here on most open days for many years, making trellis and flower-pot-men etc, for sale. Jim, who was usually accompanied by his wife Sylvia who helped in refreshments, came from Flitwick in Bedfordshire, but since they moved away to Lincolnshire they found the journey to Pitstone much too far to make regular appearances on open days. Several times last year Jims Sawmill was used as a showplace for Roy Cutler's extensive display of World War Two domesticity. Now the whole building, including the Tractor Storage Sheds next door, have been upgraded amounting to virtually a complete rebuild from ground level upwards. This will provide Roy with a permanent site to display his collection, and he reckons he can fill it. If he can it will certainly be well worth a visit, a nostalgic visit for the older citizens (like me).

Dave Fuller is in the process of moving his outdoor railway from its position last year under the trees to a location in the orchard. This will not only provide more

space for this very popular exhibit, but will enable it to be kept under better observation. Last year we had several instances of children trying to interfere with it right under the noses of the adults supposedly in charge of them.

Hopefully there will be another change for you to notice this year. The field at the rear of the Museum site is being turned over to allotments, and, at the time of writing the new fences and gates are in place, a car park has been built, and the allotments have been scraped of the top inch or two (~50 millimetres for you Europhiles) of weeds, but not ploughed. PIMS have been promised an area of land surplus to these needs but we have no written agreement as yet. The boundary fence has been erected on a slightly different line to what we anticipated and this has rendered useless to us the strip of land containing a drainage ditch stretching up to Marsworth Road. We shall be meeting with The National Trust (who own the ground) soon to discuss these things in more detail.

This report is the last one you will receive before the first of our open days on Easter Monday 5th April, so do try to come and inspect all the changes we have made this year.

Peter Keeley, Secretary

Catering

We are having our usual catering meeting on Saturday 27th February at 11.00 am and there will be a light lunch following at 12.00am. We welcome any person who has anything useful they wish to contribute to the meeting but please let me know for catering purposes. My telephone number is on the back of this Newsletter.

Anne Ball



**A reminder of
warmer days!**

**Open Day
September 2009.**
Picture by visitor
Sandra Milton of
Chesham

Bequest

The Society is pleased to report that we have received a generous bequest of £1000 from the estate of the late Humphrey George Williamson (12.06.1920 to 10.02.2009). As we reported in the April Newsletter, Humphrey was a member of the Pitstone Local History Society from its formation in 1963. He was of course a great friend of the late Jeff Hawkins of Pitstone Green Farm, who he helped on a number of projects at the museum.

Norman Groom, Museum Manager.

Restoration of the Museum's Cart/Wagon collection – Heavy Wagon

The heavy wagon is thought to date from about 1850. It is sign written with the Hawkins name so we presume has been in the family for many years if not from new.

Its condition was poor with extensive rot and wood worm attack; it was quite daunting to the four of us who had agreed to take on its restoration. The floor needed complete replacement but we decided that the main chassis members were just about acceptable. The steering undercarriage needed extensive work as did the wheels but the rear wheels were considered usable. Much of the upper frame work and panelling needed repair or replacement as did the rear cross member and the tailgate. The fore and tail ladders also needed broken and rotten parts replaced or repaired. The metal work was rusty but sound so only needed de rusting and painting. After much discussion it was agreed that Michael Bickerton and Alan Easter would work on the floor and undercarriage and Tom Coles and I would work on the body etc.

A problem we have every time we start such a project is balancing how far to go on restoration against cost. We have limited funds and quality timber as used in the original build is expensive. Timbers used in carts and wagons are usually oak, ash and particularly elm. Unfortunately the latter is very expensive and difficult to find in the south of Britain.

We started work in the winter of 2004/5 stripping out the floor and making card patterns of various sections. Next we had to lift the cart body using a hoist attached to the barn roof joists so that the steering undercarriage and rear wheel assembly could be removed and the body then lowered onto supports. Once we had the undercarriage free Michael and Alan were able to start stripping the damaged parts and dismantling the wheels. Meanwhile Tom and I started repairing or making and replacing the upper rails and panels as necessary.



In the first photo above top you can see that the outer top rails are missing and in the second photo although the chassis members are pitted and worn they are largely complete.



Above Michael is taking his life in his hands standing in the cart and working the hoist. Meanwhile I stay safely on the ground working on one of the top rails.



The second photo shows the rear under carriage which whilst dirty is in a reasonable condition.

Work progressed through that summer and the winter and spring of 2006. One of the undercarriage wheels had to have all of the felloes replaced and some of the spokes the other needed four felloes replaced. Work continued through 2006 and the whole of 2007, it took so long because we usually only work one day per week sometimes two.



Here is a repaired wheel awaiting welding of the rim.



Above most of the rails and panel work are almost complete.

Reassembly took place in early 2008 and Frank Simpson joined us to do the lining and sign writing. Although the cart is now complete we still have to decide on final woodworm/rot treatment and painting. The woodworm treatment does colour the wood and it may well be we will find a finish that is acceptable without painting.

The pictures below show the cart in its final restored glory.



John Youngs (The cart man)

Archives

Our archives hold many interesting papers of studies done by various organizations on local History. We hope to print some of these in future Newsletters. This extract is from the Pitstone Vestry Book.

Parish Government

On 24th April 1829, a group of men led by the Rev. W. Shepherd gathered in the vestry of Pitstone parish church. This particular meeting, traditionally called by the churchwardens during the month following Easter, received the Warden's accounts for the year past and appointed new wardens - Mr. Thomas Woodman of Barley End (by the Minister) and Mr. John Tompkins, farmer, butcher and parish clerk (by the Meeting). It was agreed then that payment for polecats and other vermin, excepting sparrows, should be abolished and that the payments for singing in church should be voluntary. It was approved that only those parishioners who sent their children to Sunday School should be eligible for parish relief, that the Sunday School teacher should be paid £2 for her past year's work; that a survey should be made of the interior of the church; that thanks should be given to the Countess of Bridgewater for a donation towards communion plate; that an exchange of pews might be made; that the overseer should "go and see the family of Harwood, and act according to circumstances"; that £280 be transferred to the bank; that Mr Atty, the Countess of Bridgewater's agent, would query the builder's accounts and that more specifications be given on repairs to pews and pulpit.

The record of the meeting was signed by some of those present - the Minister; John Tompkins, churchwarden; Samuel Ware Smith; Samuel Hawkins of Pitstone Green Farm, and Joseph Simmons, farmer of Little Barley End; and the uncompleted meeting was adjourned forthwith for a fortnight.

Membership

As announced at the November AGM, the Committee had previously decided that it was necessary that we raise the PIMS subscription to £8.00 with joint membership going from £12.00 to £14.00. As there were no objections this change will take place from 1st April 2010. Further details and subscription slips will be sent out with the next Newsletter.

Programme 2010

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

ALL VISITORS VERY WELCOME

Thursday 18th February '10

Making homemade wine

Tony Pragnall has been making his own wine for over forty years now and considering that he makes one hundred gallons a year, which amounts to quite a quantity of wine!

He mainly uses fruit, including our very own Aylesbury Prunes from the orchard at the farm. There will be samples for those who are not driving and bottles too.

Thursday 18th March '10

Ashridge Estate – the management of a landscape

Our speaker, Graeme Cannon, has a long standing association with the countryside. He began working for The National Trust at Ashridge in 1986 and has been Property Manager for the estate since 1995. He also has an additional role representing The National Trust on matters of countryside management throughout the Chilterns. He will be giving us an illustrated talk which covers the whole estate and includes a bit of everything from habitat management, land uses and history/archaeology (only a little) to filming and also some of the less pleasant issues they deal with.

Thursday 15th April '10

Ashlyns: My life in a Foundling Hospital

In the 1730's, Captain Thomas Coram returned from many years at sea and was appalled by the plight and neglect of children left to die on the streets. In 1739 he received a Royal Charter from King George II to establish a "hospital for the maintenance and education of exposed and deserted young children". This became known as the Foundling Hospital and over a period of two hundred years, up to the Second World War, the Foundling Hospital took in over 27,000 children. The governors of the Foundling Hospital decided in 1926 that it should be moved to Berkhamstead. Our speaker, Lydia Carmichael lived there from 1938 until 1948. Two years later it became Ashlyns School.

Thursday 20th May '10

Dunstable's Treasures

This illustrated talk is by Paul Heley, a Dunstable town guide. He will tell us about the four priceless items associated with Dunstable's medieval past, namely the Fraternity Register, the Fayrey Brasses, the Fayrey Pall and the Dunstable Swan Jewel.

Thursday 17th June '10

The Woodland Trust and Heartwood Forest

Pam Farley is a speaker for the Woodland Trust and the Chairman of the Heartwood Forest support group. She will outline the work done by the trust and then go on to talk of Heartwood Forest near Sandridge, St Albans which when complete will be the largest new native forest in England

Sue Lipscomb, Programme Secretary

Note: - If you would like to be put on Sue's email reminder list, so that you receive an email about a week before each meeting, please send her an email – [**Sue.Lipscomb@btopenworld.com**](mailto:Sue.Lipscomb@btopenworld.com)

Front Cover Picture. By Norman Groom

Blacksmith on an Open Day

Open Days 2010

Easter Monday, 5th April
Spring Bank Holiday, 3rd May
Ivinghoe Handbell Ringers
Late Spring Bank Holiday, 31st May
Sunday, 13th June
Sunday, 11th July
Sunday, 8th August
Summer Bank Holiday, 30th August
Sunday, 12th September
Opening times from
11.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m.
Admission charges adults £4 children £2
Members free.

Committee:-

Chairman

David Goseltine
Email... daigos@tiscali.co.uk

Vice Chairman

Norman Groom 01582 605464

Secretary

Peter Keeley 01582 792701

Treasurer

John Youngs 01582 833678

Museum Manager

Norman Groom 01582 605464

Minutes Secretary

Sue Lipscomb

Deputy Museum Manager

Dennis Treble
07738786210

Programme Secretary

Sue Lipscomb 01296 630578

Publicity Secretary

Anne Ball 01442 822672

Other Officers:-

Archivist

Sandra Barnard

Craft Co-ordinator

Position Vacant

Membership Secretary

Bill Barnard

Email... barnardw@bre.co.uk

All subs. to Museum address below

Newsletter Editor

Sandra Barnard

Email... alexrose42@btinternet.com

Site Manager

John Childs 01582 833501

Trading Secretary

Jeannette Wallis 01296 661997

Holding Trustees

Don Levy

Bob Morgan

John Wallis

Reg Jellis

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

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**Pitstone and Ivinghoe Museum Society
Pitstone Green Museum, Vicarage Road, Pitstone
Leighton Buzzard LU7 9EY**

