

*Pitstone and Ivinghoe
Museum Society Newsletter*



Spring 2010

Museum Report – April 2010

Just a couple of weeks into spring, and the memory of a quite vicious winter still fresh in my mind I am wondering what there is of interest to tell you about the Museum that I have not already written about. Not very much this time I think. Virtually the whole available effort from the volunteers has been devoted to finishing off the two major redevelopment tasks we started last autumn. As I write just after the Easter weekend, and which some of you will have discovered for yourselves if you came to the Museum on Easter Monday, the first open day of 2010, the new catering area is able to cater for you but is not finished. Time (and bad weather) has thwarted us. Everything is up and running but there is still work to do, and this will be completed by the second open day on Monday 3rd May. There is tiling still to be done, lights to be moved so that certain cupboard doors can open, and a host of outstanding trivial jobs. But catering will be as normal (we hope).

The other big task was the rebuilding of the Tractor Shed. To start with virtually all volunteers were involved, but when the basic structure was built and the roof was on most of the remaining work has been done by Roy and Joe, and they have worked long hours to achieve a quite spectacular result in the new 1930's-1940's room.

1930-1940 room



This room certainly brings back many memories to me, and the thing that was the biggest surprise to me was to see the installation of a kitchen dresser which is exactly the same as the one my mother used to use in

1935. In my mother's case the pull out enamel tray intended for food preparation also doubled as an ironing board with a blanket laid on top. She had an electric iron as well as a gas iron, and when she wanted to use the electric one she had to call my father because she wasn't tall enough. He would come into the kitchen and



The Kitchen

remove the electric light bulb and plug the iron into a vacant pendant socket. Of course the iron was not earthed, and that is why you always felt a tingle while you were using it. Good job it was a wood floor she stood on.

The only other project through the winter season has been the removal and complete rebuilding of the Gauge '1' outdoor model railway track, and Dave has accomplished this on his own, essentially unaided. All I can add is "Come and see it for yourself".



Roy Cutler left with his models

A variation of our lease is being prepared by The National Trust to include the extra parcel of land we have been given. There is talk of building covered accommodation for our ploughs, hay rakes etc which currently have to be kept outdoors and are consequently deteriorating, and The National Trust has no objection to this.

Our first open day was very satisfactory; although takings were not quite up to last year's which smashed records. It was a dry day, but with a fresh cold wind.

Although admissions were down the takings from refreshments and tractor-trailer rides were similar to last year. A good start to the year, and we are happy.

And that is all I can find of interest for you this time.

Peter Keeley, Secretary

ASHRIDGE- A Potted History

I haven't seen any articles on Ashridge published in the Newsletter since I became a member of the Society, so maybe a short 'potted history' might be appropriate at this time since our landlord is now The National Trust, and we are administered by their Ashridge office.



Ashridge House

First, what do we mean by Ashridge? Many of us think of it as the large afforested area behind Ivinghoe Beacon and stretching almost to Berkhamsted; golfers will think of the golf course there; others might think of the large stately building seen through a gap in the forest on the left when travelling from Dagnall to Berkhamsted on the B4506. I am going to try to cover the whole of this in as few words as I can manage, so obviously there will be many unfilled gaps. The definitive history of the building and its immediate surrounds is recorded in a book, *The History of the College of Bonhommes at Ashridge*, by H.J. Todd written nearly 200 years ago. This is a rare book (only 200 were printed) which contains sections of untranslated Latin, but Douglas Coult published a very readable book in 1980, and virtually all my knowledge has been gained from reading this book. It is available on loan from the Hertfordshire Library Service for those who hold the appropriate ticket. Also last year Ashridge College published a booklet to commemorate 50 years of the

current management. I divide this history into five sections which could be entitled The Monks, The Royals, The Egertons 1, 2, & 3, The Brownlows, and The College.

THE MONKS

It all started in 1283. Richard, Earl of Cornwall was the younger son of King John, and brother of King Henry III who succeeded John, and on his death in 1272 he was succeeded by his son Edmund as Earl of Cornwall. Edmund owned Berkhamsted Castle and there is some evidence he also owned a property (a hunting lodge?) near the site of the present Ashridge College, and he made many donations to religious orders. His greatest work was the establishment of a monastery at 'Asserugge' (as it was spelt then) and he populated it with Monks who called themselves the 'Bonhommes' (French for good men) and were similar to the Augustinian order. He also acquired, and donated to the monastery, what was reputed to be a portion of the 'Blood of Christ' which, at the time of the Dissolution of the Monasteries under Henry VIII, was denounced as a fake. There are many interesting stories about this and other items of mediaeval history in Coult's book but I cannot stray into describing these in a short work like this; you must read the book for yourselves.

One interesting snippet, if I may quote Coult's book, is that the Charter of Foundation of the monastery gives to Rector and Brethren in perpetuity "..... our manor of Ashridge with Pitstone, with all their possessions which we formerly had by gift and concession from Julian Chayndut, with the enclosed park of the same manor of Ashridge lying in the parish of St Peter Berkhamsted and in the parish of the church of Pitstone." I do not know who Julian Chayndut was, but that is an obvious place to start for anyone wishing to go back further in the history of the area. The charter granted tax concessions, privileges, and perks to the brethren covering lands as far as Hemel Hempstead in one direction. The charter was confirmed by the king (by then Edward I) on 5th November 1285 and one of the many witnesses to his signature was one John Neirnuyt whose family owned lands around Pitstone.

There are many stories concerning life with the monks at Ashridge during the next 250 years, but these are not relevant here. It seems that life for the monks became easier with time and was quite pleasant when Henry VIII decided he needed a different wife.

THE ROYALS

A cornerstone in the history of England was Henry VIII's "Dissolution of the Monasteries". We won't go into the whys and wherefores of his action. Suffice it to say that he abolished the Roman Catholic Religion in England and substituted a very similar religion in its place with himself as its head instead of the Pope.

Monks and monasteries are a prominent feature still of the Roman Catholic Church, but Henry VIII closed them all in England in 1535, and of course they all became his property. The monks from the Ashridge monastery went quietly and were virtually pensioned off, some retiring, some becoming members of the new Church of England.

Henry lived for another 12 years after this and in 1543 he held a Privy Council at Ashridge. He died in 1547 and was succeeded by his young son Edward VI who was 10 years old, and never a strong child. Edward in turn died just six years later leaving his two older sisters, Mary and Elizabeth as heirs to the throne. Edward had given Ashridge to Elizabeth in 1550, and the manors of Berkhamsted, Hemel Hempstead and Redbourn in 1551, but Mary, the much older sister succeeded to the throne and immediately started to restore England to Roman Catholicism under the Pope. There was much unrest in the country. Mary married Philip II of Spain and twice thought she was pregnant by him. Her health failed and she died at the end of 1558, and was succeeded as queen by Elizabeth.

After her father died Elizabeth spent much of her time in residence at Ashridge, especially after it became her property. She was there, unwell, in the winter of 1554 when her sister Mary demanded she attend court. She replied that she was too unwell to travel so Mary sent several doctors to verify this. They thought that she was fit enough to travel just a few miles each day so she set off for London, spending her first night in Redbourn, and the next in St Albans. After Elizabeth arrived in London it wasn't very long before Mary sent her to the Tower, later moving her to Hatfield, and she is not known to have ever visited Ashridge again. The first of several leases was prepared in 1555 and Richard Coombe of Hemel Hempstead became the first tenant of the Ashridge Estate under Elizabeth's ownership.

THE EGERTONS 1; THE FIRST EARLS OF BRIDGEWATER

One of Elizabeth's faithful followers was Sir Thomas Egerton. Coming from Cheshire he studied law at Oxford and entered Lincolns Inn where he rose rapidly. He was defending an action against the Crown in front of Queen Elizabeth when she determined he would never again oppose her in court. She made him a QC; he became an MP and Solicitor General. He became Attorney-General, was knighted, and became Master of the Rolls and Chamberlain of Chester. He was promoted Lord Keeper of the Seal. When James I succeeded Elizabeth in 1603 one of his first acts was to raise Sir Thomas to the peerage (Baron Ellesmere) and make him Lord Chancellor. He became Lord Lieutenant of Buckingham and Chancellor of Oxford University, and the king made him Viscount Brackley (though he was hoping for an earldom) before he died in 1617. He was making plenty of money throughout

his career and investing quite heavily in land. He bought estates in Lancashire, Cheshire, Shropshire, Northamptonshire, and later in Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire.

Thomas Egerton 1st Viscount Brackley (1540 – 1617) (picture in The National Portrait Gallery)



Contemporary with Thomas Egerton it is noteworthy that one Richard Brownlow was also engaged in practicing the law and rising to eminence in that profession. Like Egerton he was investing in land. Richard Coombe held a tenancy of Ashridge (the whole estate at £6.04 per annum) until 1572 when it was leased first to William Gorge for 3 years, then to Messrs Dudley & Ayscough for another 3 years before being leased to Henry, Lord Cheney, and his wife Jane for 15 years until Henry died. Jane, then a widow, sold to a Ralph Marshall in 1602 who, in turn a few weeks later sold to Messrs Crew & Chamberlain who sold to Thomas Egerton in 1604. Thomas, by then Viscount Brackley, died in 1617.

Thomas's only surviving son John (I) inherited Ashridge and immediately started to seek the earldom his father had wished for. In this he was successful with the help of the Duke of Buckingham and it is thought something like £20,000 was the cost involved; he took the title of Earl of Bridgewater; (the Egerton family had formerly owned the manor of Bridgewater, Somerset).



John Egerton, 1st Earl of Bridgewater (1579–1649)

(Picture from Wikipedia)

John (I) was active in the House of Lords, but lost his wife, who had born him 15 children, in 1635. From then on he spent much time at Ashridge, and though he was a royalist at heart he wisely 'kept his head down' during the civil war. His health deteriorated and he died in 1649 leaving Ashridge to his elder son, John (II).

John Egerton, 2nd Earl of Bridgewater (1623–1686)

(Picture from Wikipedia)

The second Earl of Bridgewater, John (II), also kept a low profile until after the restoration of the monarchy when, under Charles II, he was made a privy councillor. He served as Lord Lieutenant of Buckinghamshire, Chester, Lancashire, and Hertfordshire in all of which he owned substantial estates. He died in 1686 and was succeeded by his eldest son John (III) as the third earl who also inherited Ashridge from his father. The second earl was noted for the code of behaviour he imposed on his Ashridge household which governed their lives down to the minutest detail.



John Egerton, 3rd Earl of Bridgewater (1646–1701)

(Picture from Wikipedia)

John (III), the 3rd Earl of Bridgewater held a number of high offices including speaker of the House of Lords, Lord Lieutenant of Buckinghamshire, and later one of the Lords Justices of the Realm during King William III's absence in Holland. His two eldest sons died in a fire at his London residence and when he died in 1701 he was succeeded as 4th Earl of Bridgewater by his third son Scroop who also inherited Ashridge. The unusual name Scroop was the

surname of his maternal grandfather, Emmanuel Scroop, Earl of Sunderland.

THE EGERTONS 2; THE DUKES OF BRIDGEWATER

(Cont. next issue)

Peter Keeley

Meetings

Sulgrave Manor

In January Martin Sirot-Smith gave us a fascinating talk about Sulgrave Manor. Between 1988 and 2002 he was the managing director of the manor and it was during this time that he became very aware of the educational and recreational possibilities of the site and developed it in such a way that he succeeded in raising its profile thus increasing the visitor numbers dramatically. Sulgrave Manor is the Northamptonshire home of George Washington's ancestors. It is a superb example

of a Tudor manor house and garden dating from 1539. The special relationship between this building and the government and people of the United States continues to this day. For more information go to www.sulgravemanor.org.uk

Sue Lipscomb

Making homemade wine

In February, Tony Pragnell talked about making his own wine. This he has done for over forty years. 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 Museum.

Tony told us that the start of his Wine making was when he found he had grown too many parsnips in his garden; therefore he thought he should turn his hand to wine making. After this other wines he made were from Elderberries and Dandelions. Over the years he has made Gooseberry, Quince, Cherry, Rhubarb, Bullace Plum, Damsons and of course the Aylesbury Prune. He said he had won a 'Best in Show' for his Potato wine.

The members who came to the meeting were fortunate to be offered samples and several members tried them. At the end of the talk he said he was so grateful to be able to have some of the Aylesbury Prunes from the Museum so he suggested that people at the meeting should take a bottle of his wine home with them.

He donated his fee for the evenings talk to Keech Hospice Care.

Brenda Grace

Ashridge Estate – the management of a landscape

In March, our speaker was Graeme Cannon. Graeme 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. We were privileged with an illustrated talk which covered his work on the whole estate.

Adelbert Wellington Hume Cust the 3rd Earl Brownlow was the owner, of Ashridge when he died in 1921. In his will, his Ashridge estates were to be sold to pay off any debts and mortgages. The National Trust became the owners of the estate in 1926. (*More detail in the second part of Peter's history in the next issue.*).

The estate covers 5,026 acres of downland, farm and woodland. It is self financing and they have about 600,000 visitors each year. Most visitors think of Ashridge in connection with The Bridgewater Monument a tower on the Ashridge estate, which

was built in 1832 in memory of Francis Egerton, 3rd Duke of Bridgewater. Graeme described how the estate is much more than this local focal point. He talked about Ashridge woods with their spectacular bluebells, ancient trees that are an area of conservation. Ivinghoe hills and Beacon, chalk grasslands and several farms including Pitstone Green Farm are all part of the estate.

The Estate has their own sawmill. The wood is sold and often used in other National Trust properties. The talk included habitat management, and how dead wood in healthy woodland is important for wildlife.

Ivinghoe Hills are managed by the clearance of scrub from parts. This is often undertaken by volunteers. Sheep are also used to crop grass and fertilise the ground by their dung. The grasslands contain many rare species of flowers and butterflies. Some archaeology has been undertaken on the estate one find being an ancient sword. Metal detecting is illegal on the Estate.

There has been money received from a benefactor to improve views spoiled by pylons and replace them by underground cables. The bridge at Golden Valley has been restored. Filming now is very important as a revenue source, and several films have used the estate. There are some less pleasant issues they have to deal with. Visitors who light fires, barbecues, litter and fly tip.

There are fallow deer on the estate and the roads have to have warning signs to slow down motorists. One year they lost 125 deer killed on the road.

Education is a large part of the work done at Ashridge. There is a visitor centre with shop, tearoom and schoolroom.

Every season shows the estate in a new light. Golden Valley looks “golden” in summer. The woodlands in autumn are beautiful, wonderful ponds and in winter do not miss the lovely snow views.

Sandra Barnard

Membership

The 2010/2011 membership subscription is now due. Subscriptions are **£8 single, and £14 per couple.**

Please pay by cheque. This is now our preferred method of payment. Cheques should be made out to Pitstone and Ivinghoe Museum Society and returned with the slip that is in this Newsletter to the museum address: - Pitstone Green Museum, Vicarage Road, Pitstone, Leighton Buzzard LU7 9EY.

Please enclose a stamped addressed envelope, if you want your membership card quickly, otherwise they will go out with the July newsletter.

Bill Barnard Membership Secretary

Programme 2010

All meetings are held in the Meeting Room in the Pitstone Green Museum at 8.00pm. ***ALL VISITORS VERY WELCOME***

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

Thursday 15th July '10

Cheese Wine and Antiques

Our very popular evening at the museum with Stephen Hearn has been repeated again this year due to popular demand. The museum will be open from 6.45p.m. to allow members and their friends to walk around the exhibits, and then the refreshments will be served at 7.15p.m. The evening will cost £5.00 for members and £6.00 for non-members and will include a ploughman's platter and complimentary glass of wine. Please do not bring more than two items for Stephen's comments and valuations. We hope you will park in the orchard. **YOU WILL NEED A TICKET FOR THIS EVENT – SEE SLIP WITHIN THIS NEWSLETTER. DO NOT LEAVE IT TOO LATE TO BOOK.**

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

Front Cover Picture. By Norman Groom

Vic Lane Blacksmith on an Open Day

Open Days 2010

Spring Bank Holiday, **3rd May**

Ivinghoe Handbell Ringers

Late Spring Bank Holiday, **31st May**

Sunday, **13th June**

Sunday, **11th July, Chiltern Hundreds**

Morris Dancers

Sunday, **8th August, Old Time Dancers**

Summer Bank Holiday, **30th August**

Sunday, **12th September, Whitchurch**

Morris Dancers. Owls.

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>

Hits to April 2010... 21132

Pitstone and Ivinghoe Museum Society

Pitstone Green Museum, Vicarage Road, Pitstone

Leighton Buzzard LU7 9EY

