

Pitstone and Ivinghoe Museum Society Newsletter



New Year 2011



Museum Report –January 2011

What are the working parties doing this winter season at the Museum? Well, there is plenty going on, weather permitting. First of all we have just finished building an undercover store for some of our items which are in need of restoration in the more distant future and are not required to be on display now. This store is quite out-of-the-way behind the fuel storage tanks at the far end of the Museum ... and it is packed full already. This has yielded a small amount of spare space elsewhere in the Museum, notably in the cart sheds, in the Owen Barn, and in the space where we used to keep the combine harvester which has itself been squeezed into the Grain Barn. I mentioned last year that part of the combine harvester shed was being turned into an extension to the Science & Radio Room next door, and this extension is currently being fitted out with display benches and cabinets. Electrical wiring has already been completed and we have taken the opportunity of rationalising the electrics in this whole area which includes the shop and the Science Room itself. Next winter the plan is to move Wag's Wharf into the remaining part of the shed where there are still a few items kept awaiting restoration.

The Owen Barn is being given a major facelift. Hitherto this building has suffered from poor drainage, uneven floors, and poorly arranged exhibits crammed too tightly together. Joe and Roy are handling brickwork and concrete laying, and others are carrying out repairs to the building which is quite old. I understand it was originally a military building first erected during World War One. I won't try to describe in detail what we are doing in here; come and see for yourselves at Easter.

And last, but by no means least, we are re-arranging Reception. "Not before time", I hear some of you muttering, and I fully agree with you. It is not for want of trying on my part that this has been so long in happening. Reception is the first impression most visitors gain when they come for a day out; and what do they see behind the delightful and ever helpful Shirley? An old refrigerator piled high with telephone directories and catalogues, topped by an old VCR (video-tape recorder) and an old monochrome (green) monitor. Next to it an old red cupboard which has seen better days. To the left a

large battered sheet of plywood holding a year-planner on which someone has scribbled illegibly, and to the right a hot drink preparation area for the volunteers with the ever-present pile of unwashed mugs nearby. We have to keep the hot drink making facilities but we can try to make it less obtrusive. The new vista, as seen by the visitor, will hopefully contain nothing except what Shirley needs for her job, and if there is any wall space still free perhaps one or two interesting and relevant pictures.

When we re-routed the National Trust's new chain link fence separating us from the new allotments we had some fencing materials left over. We have decided to use this up and buy a little bit more to site a fence through our orchard from the Blacksmith's Shop, in a straight line, right across to the garden boundary fence of the nearest house in Vicarage Road. This will enhance our security considerably, and in summer when there are leaves on the trees it will be almost invisible from outside our property. In effect it will separate the part of the orchard we now use for staff parking from the part we use for vehicle displays and outdoor model railways on open days. It will, of course, be a nuisance when mowing the grass, and we all regret having to divide the orchard, but the increase in theft in the Pitstone area, coupled with the suspicion that occasionally members of the public have gained free admission on open days via the orchard, has left us with no viable alternative.

Our application for a gift aid refund from HMRC went in about two months ago. It was possible to claim refunds back to the year 2000, but we were only claiming back to April 2003 because our membership records prior to that date appear non-existent. Our claim has been rejected because on 1st April last year they made it only possible to claim for the preceding four years; i.e. back to April 2006. We have therefore lost about £115 by not making this claim before 1st April last year. This was the first I had heard about this sneaky change, and I read all literature that comes my way on subjects like this. A new application for refund has been made and we await the outcome. If you are a taxpayer and have not yet completed a Gift Aid Form for us to reclaim the tax on your membership subscription it is not too late to do so as we have not yet made any claim for this

current year or for the two preceding years. Every little helps in these days of spiralling costs and financial cut-backs.

Peter Keeley, Secretary

Museum Collecting Policy

Following the acquisition of our lease in the early 1990's, we applied for Provisional Registration to the MGC (now MLA). We eventually achieved Full Registration followed soon afterwards by achieving the new Accreditation Standard. For this we had to improve our documentation, especially in the areas of collecting and the recording of artefacts held at the museum. As I am sure you are aware we have a vast collection of items, many still in store. These were collected by Jeff Hawkins and others and stored at the farm, whilst other items were given by local individuals. Very few records were kept at the time but now we are near to getting to grips with listing everything on the museum site. Our problem sometimes is that we still get items brought to the museum without prior notification and often we have to refuse items, making it embarrassing for both the donor and ourselves in refusing them. If items are accepted then the donor must fill in an acceptance document that contains an identification number. The item is then held in a known location until the appropriate action is taken. So if you have an item that you may wish to donate please phone me first (Norman Groom on 01582 605464) and if the item is thought to be of interest we can make the appropriate arrangements. Please do not assume that we no longer want items but they must now be somewhat unusual due to limited display space available. As an example of an item that we would accept, was a rather nice 1920's crystal set given to us a week or so ago which has been restored to working order and will be on display in the museum for this coming season.

We have moved.

No! not the museum but our website. The previous website has been hosted free, first by Lineone, then by Tiscali and finally by Talk Talk. We have been running out of web space (only 10 Mbytes allowed) followed by other technical problems, making it necessary to have our own domain name. This has resulted in a small annual cost but something we can easily cope with. The old 'lineone' web address will still remain for at least 12 months but will not be updated apart

from opening times and dates. It also contains details of our new web address. The new site already has some video uploaded, two by Bill Barnard on the 'Tractors' page and the 'outside Gauge1' page and one of the Tappalachian Dancers on the 'Prices' page downloaded from You Tube. The dancers visited the museum last year. Hopefully they will again visit this year on the 10th July, not to be missed. The new web address is :-

www.pitstonemuseum.co.uk

Norman Groom. Museum Manager

The Cat's Whisker

A strange title of an article for the Newsletter, until I tell you that the museum was given a Crystal Set by one of our members. Most of our older members will know what I am referring to as I am sure their fathers or grandfathers would have owned a crystal set in the 1920's or 30's, or even later if you were a DIY wireless enthusiast. They probably heard the term 'Cat's Whisker' but did not know what it referred to. The crystal set belonged to the grandfather of the person who gave it to us; he found it when clearing his loft to have loft insulation fitted. It has now been restored and is in working order. By the way early radio sets were known as wireless sets, the term 'radio' probably came from the United States like radar, which the British referred to as RDF (Radio Direction Finding).

Wireless transmissions were used in the early years of the 20th century but only for sending Morse Code signals, i.e. a series of dots and dashes that could be decoded into letters. The signal was generated by a spark transmitter. If you have ever heard ignition noise from a car running, that was spark transmission. The only difference between sparks from car ignition and wireless transmitters was basically much bigger sparks. Needless to say these types of transmitters were later banned and valves were used to generate a cleaner signal that did not spread over all the radio bands. In the early 1920's techniques had advanced and speech/music transmissions became possible and the first commercial broadcast station came on air (2LO).

Back to crystal sets, these were very simple wireless sets that required no electrical power whatsoever, relying on the power picked up by the aerial only. You did need a very long aerial, a couple of hundred feet long and a connection to the water pipes or a copper rod in the ground, which served as an earth connection. The power output from the crystal set was only a few millionths of a watt (a torch bulb is about 1-3 watts) so one had to use a very sensitive pair of headphones to hear the signal. If you were fortunate enough to live reasonably close to a transmitter you could use two pairs of headphones, quite a family event for the 1920's. Why use a crystal set when there must have been other radios available in the 30's? There was a big advantage in costs. If you could afford an early valve wireless set which appeared in the mid 20's, they were very expensive. They required three batteries, one being an accumulator that required recharging quite frequently, a high tension battery which may have lasted six months but was very expensive, and a less expensive 'grid bias' battery for the valves. Contrast this with a crystal set that could be made by an amateur with basic DIY skills but virtually no knowledge of electrics.

In the early years of the 20th century there was a mass of information available to the DIY enthusiasts. Engineering, model making and electrical engineering magazines were published regularly, many coming out weekly. Some of the things that appeared made one shudder. You could find articles on generating voltages of tens of thousands of volts, X-ray machines and other dangerous pastimes as well as the safer 'model making' articles. Early wireless sets were very simple and components, although quite expensive, were readily available. The magazine articles would describe exactly how these items should be mounted on a wooden base board and detail every connection between the various components. We have several examples of both crystal sets and early DIY valve wireless sets in our science rooms at the museum.

Returning to the crystal sets I will try to explain how they worked and what the 'Cat's Whisker' was for. I need to get slightly technical but will keep it as simple as possible. Radio waves (or should I call them wireless waves, it's at least self explanatory) are the same

waves as one can feel when standing in front of an electric fire or the same as the light beam being emitted from a torch. The different is only the frequency of those waves. Our 240 volt mains are referred to as an AC or alternating current. A battery is a steady DC (direct current) whereas the mains voltage oscillates much like a swinging pendulum, swinging between about 350 volts positive to 350 volts negative with an average voltage (for those clever people that know it all, RMS voltage) of 240v. The number of oscillations in one second is 50, hence 50 cycles per second. Just to confuse everyone, some clever person decided not to call it 'cycles per second' but 'Hertz' after the person that discovered radio waves, so now its 50 Hz. The radio waves that our crystal set picks up are much higher, between two hundred thousand to one million cycles per second (TV signal are around 700 million per second) which corresponds to the old Medium and Long waves. If you look on the tuning dial of one of the old wireless sets you will see these numbers appearing. The BBC home service was about 560 Kc/s I think. So how do we pick up just one radio station and exclude all others? The secret is the 'tuned circuit'. We need two items to make a tuned circuit, a coil of wire and two sets of metal plates closely spaced but not touching. If we connect one end of the coil to one set of plates and the other end to the other set of plates in acts like a swinging pendulum and respond only to one frequency. Connect an aerial and earth to the two ends and by adjusting the spacing between the metal plates one can amplify one frequency rejecting all others, this is called 'tuning'. The adjustable interlocking metal plates are referred to as a 'tuning condenser'.

In the wireless transmitter the microphone converts our speech or music into a fluctuating voltage that in turn alters in sympathy the amplitude of the transmitted radio signal. What we have to do in the receiver is to recover this varying amplitude and feed it into a pair of headphones. We are now getting close to the 'Cat's whisker'. We cannot hear directly the frequency of the radio waves, they are far too high. What we do is to chop off the negative going part of the signal (remember the description of the oscillating mains voltage) leaving only the positive bit. This resulting positive bit can then be fed directly into the headphones and appears just like a varying DC

voltage, the variations following the original speech or music. The 'Cats Whisker' is an extremely thin and springy piece of Tungsten wire just touching a piece of Galena crystal and acts like a modern diode. It is this, in conjunction with the galena that rectifies the signal, chopping off the negative half, changing it from AC to DC. The galena crystal was mounted in a holder, usually in a glass tube for protection, with the springy wire or 'Cat's Whisker' mounted at the other end of the tube in an adjustable mount. One could spend many hours fiddling around with the 'Cat's Whisker' trying to find the absolute best contact point for the strongest signal then accidentally knocking it and having to start again. Could this be where the term 'The Cat's Whisker' came from?

Norman Groom

The AGM

Last November this was attended by 23 members and the committee. During the proceedings we had the following changes.

John Childs has re-joined the committee after a year's absence. He has re-joined as Chairman. David G relinquished the Chair following his successful open heart surgery in November and is recovering well; he is remaining as a committee member.

The Archivist position remains unfilled as many of the jobs are too heavy for me and have to be done by others. I will be concentrating my efforts on the computer records, concentrating on the new program "Modes Compact" which has replaced the old "Catalist" program, now obsolete and not provided to any new museums, photographs and of course editing the Newsletters. My husband Bill (Membership Secretary) continues to provide films of open days and many photographs. He also offers his wide knowledge of computing giving much technical advice.

Sandra Barnard Editor

Booking Talks for PIMS

This is a time consuming but rewarding task to complete each year and I am therefore always grateful for help. Often this help comes from programme secretaries of some of the other local history

societies since we all recommend good speakers to each other. However, I am always pleased to hear from members who have heard a particularly good speaker at another Society which they could perhaps recommend and also from members who could do a talk themselves.

Sue Lipscomb Programme Secretary

Society Monthly Meetings

Hopefully all members are aware of the programme of monthly meetings held on the second Thursday of the month.

Our Programme Secretary Sue Lipscomb puts a lot of effort into finding relevant and interesting speakers and is always trying to balance what will be of interest to members and the cost of same. Professional speakers are expensive as are those who represent charities who are dependent on such income. The cost of speakers is often much greater than the charges made to members on the evening and your Executive Committee have to find ways of reducing this shortfall. We will therefore be increasing the charges from the April meeting to £2 for members and £3 for non members. We would remind you that this includes tea and biscuits and we hope you will agree these new charges are not unreasonable for an entertaining evening.

Special evenings such as the Wine & Cheese and/or Antiques evenings have always been charged at higher rates reflecting the costs incurred by the Society and this will continue. We could employ very highly regarded speakers but the cost is so high that we would have to charge a supplement to try and recover the extra. We intend to try this in the future to see what response we get from members. It is in your hands whether this succeeds.

Another way of saving cost is if we have any members who have a special subject which might be of interest to members and prepared to give their services for a fee of about £20. Every assistance will be given in preparing your presentation so if you are able to help contact Sue at: - Sue.Lipscomb@btopenworld.com

John Youngs Treasurer

A poem from the 16th century

Taken from the **Oxford Book of English Verse**, first published in 1900. This was probably a drinking song.
Dedicated to all those who indulged at Christmas!

Jolly Good Ale and Old

I cannot eat but little meat,
My stomach is not good;
But sure I think that I can drink
With him that wears a hood.
Though I go bare, take ye no care,
I nothing am a-cold;
I stuff my skin so full within
Of jolly good ale and old.

Chorus

*Back and side go bare, go bare;
Both foot and hand go cold;
But, belly, God send thee good ale enough,
Whether it be new or old.*



I love no roast but a nut brown toast,
And a crab laid in the fire;
A little bread shall do me stead;
Much bread I not desire.
No frost nor snow, no wind I trow,
Can hurt me if I wold;
I am so wrapp'd and thoroughly lapp'd
Of jolly good ale and old.

Chorus

And Tib, my wife, that as her life
Loveth well good ale to seek,
Full oft drinks she till ye may see
The tears run down her cheek:
Then doth she trowl to me the bowl
Even as a maltworm should,
And saith, "Sweetheart, I took my part
Of this jolly good ale and old."

Chorus



Now let them drink till they nod and wink,
Even as good fellows should do;
They shall not miss to have the bliss
Good ale doth bring men to;
And all poor souls that have scour'd bowls
Or have them lustily troll'd
God save the lives of them and their wives,
Whether they be young or old.

Chorus

William Stevenson circa 1530-31

I have since found another version of this poem as a song on line together with the music. Link below.

<http://katrowberd.elizabethangeek.com/projects/2004-pms-2nd-ed/drinking/backandsides.pdf>

This link below takes you to the "Period Music Song Book"

<http://katrowberd.elizabethangeek.com/projects/2004-pms-2nd-ed/#drinking>

Sandra Barnard



Front Cover Picture and below

The frozen Museum pond and Orchard in the winter.

By Bill Barnard



Open Days 2011

Easter Monday, 25th April
Spring Bank Holiday
Monday 2nd May
Late Spring Bank Holiday
Monday 30th May
Sunday, 12th June
Sunday, 10th July
Sunday, 14th August
Summer Bank Holiday
Monday 29th August
Sunday, 11th September
Opening times from
11.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m.
Admission charges adults £4
children £2. Members free.

Committee Officers:-

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Norman Groom **01582 605464**

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