

# *Pitstone and Ivinghoe Museum Society Newsletter*



*Summer 2014*

## **Museum Report – July 2014**

Some ten years ago, coffee and lunch breaks at the museum meant crowding around the desk and being perched on stools in the reception area with a sandwich in one hand and a cup of coffee or tea in the other. This unsatisfactory situation was solved by cutting a doorway through into the next room, the Microcosm room, where we had plenty of space for a table and chairs. We are now finding that fortunately our volunteer numbers are growing steadily and especially on our main working day, Tuesday, we are fighting for seating places at coffee break. In just over the last twelve months we have managed to attract about nine more volunteers, all good people with skills and knowledge who, apart from a gentle nudge in the right direction to keep everyone working to a common plan, can be left to carry out their chosen tasks without any intervention. Some of us are getting a bit ‘long in the tooth’ and slowing down so slightly younger volunteers are a great asset.

The type of work carried out during the summer months varies considerably, grass cutting and ground work takes up a lot of time and it’s natural to work out of doors in any case. The type of work is also changing with the years. A while ago the concentration was on replacing old buildings or creating new ones but those days are now over as we have used up all available building space without spoiling the appearance of the site.

Much of the work now is on restoration, building maintenance and creating new and interesting displays for the public. We have carried out several visitor surveys and the message we get back is that active demonstrations are always welcome. To this end we are looking at further working activities. This year our working printing room has proved very popular and next year we hope, with a bit of reorganisation, to have demonstrations of book binding and other paper associated crafts immediately next door to the print room. Both wood turning and quilt making have been in place this season, one in the new carpenter’s shop and the other in the old carpenter’s shop which has now been fully restored and decorated. The old carpenter’s shop is also equipped with two very nice display cabinets which will re-house artefacts now poorly displayed in the Village & Country Life room. The Shepherd’s Hut restoration is nearing completion (see separate report) and work continues on the restoration of our massive chaff cutter. If we can get this working again, it is something that can be driven from a tractor and would make an impressive display.

A major task over the last two years has been to catalogue and photograph virtually every item in the museum, some three thousand in total. Peter Keeley had taken on this task and I have been collating the results and getting them onto our master data base. Peter has virtually now completed this task leaving only one or two locations still undone. Unfortunately his illness has prevented him from now attending the museum but it has been an immense and daunting task that I do not think anyone else would or could have undertaken as it needed considerable knowledge as well as lots

of patience. Without this work our Accreditation status would not have been achievable.

Advertising is still the major obstacle we are facing. This year we tried new road signs. We made eight large signs painted bright yellow with clearly readable black text but omitting individual attractions and placed them out for two weeks instead of the usual single week. Surveys at reception indicated that road signs are a significant factor in attracting visitors and yet visitor numbers were down considerably compared to last year. We could have waited to see the results for the remaining portion of the season but instead we have purchased printed overlays to cover the existing boards which have reintroduced some of the attractions. We await the results of the new signs!

Another problem we have had has been due to the wet weather earlier in the year. Two years ago we purchased a gang mower with cylindrical cutters to cope with the vast amount of grass we have. Previously we had used a ride on mower which took



two days of continuous mowing to complete the whole site. With the gang mower it could be completed in a morning's mowing. However if we missed our mowing day, or worse still two days in a row, due to rain, the gang mower could not cope and would clog up. We have now invested in a Topper - more accurately called a Finishing mower - which can cope with long and wet grass.

**Picture above and on the front page, *(pictures Brenda Grace)*  
Paul Chapman and Norman Groom with the Finishing Mower.**

The work we have to carry out at the museum is never ending with people beavering away at all sort of tasks and projects, too many to individually detail in the available space. I think what most volunteers enjoy however is a chance to meet and chat with like minded individuals whilst carrying out a worthwhile task that provides enjoyment for the general public and preserves some of our heritage.

**Norman Groom, Museum Manager.**

### **The Shepherd's Hut at the Heritage Park, Pitstone Museum**

The shepherd's hut can be described as a rather robust wooden rectangular wood hut with a pitched roof, feather edged walls and four large cast iron wheels at each corner, with the floor being a foot or more off the ground. It was in use from the mid 19<sup>th</sup>

century up till 1942 at Pitstone Green Farm. It was the shepherd's headquarters especially in the lambing season, January onwards. Starting in the sheepyard during lambing and then moved by horse into the fields, it would now probably be called a workstation for the shepherd.

*(Picture Norman Groom)*



The shepherd's hut stood in the staff car park for many years, in truth, rather neglected although the roof had been repaired and David Goseltine had made a very effective brace repair thereby securing the vertical ribs which were rather rotted away at their base.

The wheels were mounted on stub axles, which were in turn fixed to transverse wooden beams, fore and aft. The problem with these beams

was that they were in such a state that the stub axles were in imminent danger of collapse. In essence the work entailed propping up the hut, surprisingly heavy, and replacing the beams. One way of spending last winter was to lie under the hut with a few large spiders for company, whilst replacing the beams and fixing them with heavy gauge angle iron and coach screws. Needless to say my compatriots were only too pleased to suggest that it was an excuse to lay about all day in total indolence.

Eventually the great day arrived, Pete very carefully dragged the hut, using the Fordson tractor, to its new site, watched anxiously by yours truly hoping that nothing would come adrift. The wheels were shot blasted by Melvyn at Flamstead and painted. A hard standing of large flagstones were placed under each wheel. The hut now looks presentable and hopefully even more so when a new coat of special paint is applied. Pete is going to make some steps for easy access and Norman is going to make electronic sheep noise emanating from the hut (?) In glossy magazines such huts are greatly sought after, in any event this historic hut should grace the Heritage Park.

**Nigel Thompson**

### **Membership News**

Membership currently stands at 135, quite good for this time of year. As always we have a number of people who have forgotten to renew their membership and so I have included another reminder slip inside this newsletter. Others will find their membership cards inside.



We have a had a few new members due to the promoting of The Heritage Park at two local events, Whipsnade Summer Fete and Edlesborough Church Carnival, by Pete and Ronnie Farrar. They were helped at the latter event by Dennis Trebble .  
**Bill Barnard (Membership Secretary)**

**The Museum Stand at the Carnival (picture *Bill Barnard*)**



**Left to right people facing forward:  
Dennis Trebble, Pete & Ronnie Farrar and Sandra Barnard**

**Graham Michael Atkins MBE 1945-2014 - College Lake**

Graham was born in Abbots Langley, one of a family of six children. He attended the local schools where his love of music and the natural world came to the fore.

He learned to play the Organ and to the end of his days gained much pleasure from playing his favourite early music – Vivaldi, Bach etc.

On leaving school he worked for a while at John Dickinson's at Apsley but found it so suffocating and boring being shut in an office all day that he changed direction entirely and accepted a job at Tunnel Cement Pitstone as a Lorry Driver.

This job took him all over England which he enjoyed very much. By this time he was married with two children.

As the years' passed he became obsessed with the way that Mother Nature was slowly taking over the bare quarried chalk faces and it was this observation that eventually led to the creation of the nature reserves at Pitstone Fen and College Lake, Bulbourne.

- ***Read Graham's book "Creation of a Nature Reserve"***

It is for College Lake that Graham will be best remembered in this area but in the industrial north he is famous for creating a beautiful, green park, full of trees, birds and flowers on acres of slag heaps. Even Mother Nature was beaten here – nothing at all would grow. (Graham had been invited to re-visit later this year for the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary.)

It was for this parkland that he was awarded the MBE. He also gave advice to Farmers' on how best to manage set-aside land and to Foresters' trying to save trees in Ancient Woodland.

Graham always seemed to think outside the box – finding answers to what seemed to be insoluble problems.

He had a wonderful sense of humour and patience and incredible stories and will be very much missed, especially by Mother Nature, because he was always on her side and would give her a helping hand whenever he could.

**Marlene Lee**

**Footnote**

Jeff Hawkins loaned a number of farming items from the Museum to Graham at the start of his project at College Lake. These items were at a later date given to College Lake.

**Pitstone 1800 – 1850 a Report by WEA.**

The following is an extract from our historical documents held on our computer at the Museum. This long report was prepared from a WEA course-project on local history in Pitstone, 1971-72. (The report begins in Summer 2013 issue)

***Part 5 Continued from the last Newsletter.***

**SOCIAL WELFARE; (I) THE POOR LAW**

**General**

Poor relief was until 1835 based upon the parish unit and financed by rates levied on property and administered by the overseer of the poor under the general supervision of the vestry (see Tate **The Parish Chest**). Buckinghamshire was one of the "Speenhamland" (*Note at end*) counties where the practice of subsidising or supplementing the wages of able bodied labourers had become general, beginning in 1795. The extent and duration of this form of relief are not known in any detail but its incidence must clearly have been linked with economic factors such as local wage rates and the availability of work. Unfortunately, the Pitstone overseers' accounts covering the period are missing so we have to rely upon information gleaned from references in the vestry book and from the scanty official statistics available. No attempt has yet been made to ascertain the situation regarding the records of the post 1835 poor law union.

## Statistics of Relief

The following figures for Pitstone are taken from the printed parliamentary Returns of the Poor:

Date	Amount Expended	Number Relieved Permanently	Number Relieved Occasionally
1803	£286 (=6/s rate)	33	6
1813	£564	26	7
1814	£462	26	8
1815	£329	24	7
1816	£281		
1817	£456		
1818	£466		
1819	£478		
1820	£386		
1821	£455		

+ i.e. no. of persons permanently relieved outside of any workhouse, not including their children.

For comparison, the average expenditure on the poor in 1783 - 85 was £85.

### Allowances

It is clear from the returns and from the vestry book that cash allowances were the most important form of relief. As regards the recipients, the return for 1803 above gives the additional information that no less than 20 of the 33 persons "permanently" relieved were either over 60 or disabled from labour by infirmity or chronic sickness. The remainder might well be accounted for by widows and orphan children. We are also told that the total number of children under 14 relieved was 44 of whom 17 were under 5. This information is supplemented by two lists of persons in receipt of weekly allowances which are entered in the vestry book. The first, dated February 1815, contains 29 names. No details of circumstances are given, but they comprise 9 males, 19 females (including 8 widows) and one child unspecified. The second list is dated September 1822 and contains 27 names; viz. 9 males and 18 females; 16 of the names (6 males, 10 females) correspond to names in the earlier list.'

The amounts stated in the 1822 list range from 1/s.to 3/s. with three exceptions, these being the only instances where more than one person is 'specifically stated:-

Widow Seabrook and daughter 3/9d.

William Dollimore and wife- 5/-

Widow Bedford and-family 10/-

The amounts are generally lower than in the 1815 list, the total bill being under £3; doubtless, however, the scale varied according to the time of year and other factors.

The numbers stated in the Returns as occasionally relieved are surprisingly low. The vestry book records some 12 individual applications for relief, almost all of them between 1830 and 1835 of which 7 refer to sickness or confinements, one to the expenses of a child's funeral, one to rent arrears, two are requests for shoes and two for housing. There are a few examples of the granting of relief to inhabitants living outside the parish. The

1815 lists mentioned above include an allowance to Elizabeth Penn "at Sir Jonathon Milles at Hoxton" and in 1832 John Collier of Aldbury was relieved.

### **Provision Work**

The evidence given above does not suggest that relief payments to able-bodied men were anything other than exceptional in Pitstone. The first direct reference to unemployment in the vestry book is in May 1832 when a vestry was called "to consider allotting the men out of work according to the rate" In June of that year 15 men and 3 boys were allotted to 9 individual rate payers, and the surveyor of the highways (1 man). The road works undertaken about this time, to which reference is made in the vestry book, were probably intended primarily as a means of unemployment relief. In November 1832 it was agreed to work a labour rate (see Tate) and in April 1834 it was decided that the labourers should be allotted according to the number of acres to each farm. There are no further references after this and the New Poor Law came into operation in the following year.

### **Medical Assistance**

In March 1834 it was agreed in vestry to continue the parish contract with Mr. Duesbury for medicines, etc. "according to past regulation". Mr. Duesbury's contract was renewed the following year, his duties being to attend all cases excepting midwifery at a salary of £12 per annum. In May 1830 it was agreed that women capable of attending as nurses and who received parochial relief shall be employed whenever wanted to attend upon any pauper who may require their help.

### **Housing**

In contrast to Ivinghoe, there was no parish workhouse or poorhouse in Pitstone. Low-cost housing for poor families was, however, available in the form of the seven "town houses" belonging to the Town Land Charity which were let at under 6d a week. In March 1826, a request from Elizabeth Smith for a house for herself, husband and child, was granted by the vestry. A similar request in April 1834 was refused without any reason being given.

### **The Parish Finances**

In 1803 the total annual value of property in the parish was £1291. In 1848, following a revaluation in 1837/38, it was £2060, of which the railway property accounted for £620.

## **SOCAL WELFARE: (2) FRIENDLY SOCIETIES**

### **General**

Friendly societies were a form of self-help designed to make recourse to public assistance unnecessary. We know from the printed Return of the Poor of 1803, which lists friendly societies, that there was one at Ivinghoe by that date with a membership of 40. They do not seem to have been common in rural areas, however, until somewhat later in the century. A list of friendly societies enrolled under the Friendly Societies Acts of 1856 shows that many new, mainly parish, societies were founded in the district in the 1830's and 1840s.

The following affected Pitstone:-

1840, East Bucks. General Friendly Assurance Society: 1844, Ivinghoe and Pitstone Male and Female Teetotal Benefit Society: 1846, Pitstone Friendly Society.

The records of the first of these survive and are being studied. Some notes on its functioning are given below.

### **Membership**

Membership was limited to persons under the age of 55, in good health, and living within 7 miles of Ivinghoe. In 1849 membership stood at 167, a figure which increased by only 31 during the remaining 44 years of the society's existence. Of the total of 199 members, 89 were men and 110 women. Well over 50% joined under the age of 20 and few new members were over 30. Unfortunately the membership register does not give the occupations or parish of residence and only 3 of the much more informative proposal forms have survived.

### **Organisation**

The society was run by a committee of local people. None of the members of the first committee were from Pitstone. Paid stewards were appointed for the different parishes; those for Pitstone in 1840 were Henry Philbey and Elizabeth Collyer. Weekly visits were made to the sick that were attended by the society's apothecary. All members were obliged to attend the annual meetings and dinner held at Ivinghoe. Receipts from sickness and other contributions were £54-7s in 1849 and expenditure £29-17s. In 1858 the total of members' sick days was 1463 (99 members).

### **Benefits**

The amount of the monthly charges was determined by actuarial tables and the type of insurance required. No one could insure above 4/5 of their income. An example is a total contribution of 9d per month from a female domestic servant aged 16 earning 7/s. per week in 1840. This entitled her to 5/s. weekly in sickness or 2/6 half pay, superannuation of 2/6 and £2 death payment. This case is the only one in which earnings are known.

### ***To be continued***

*Note: The Speenhamland system was a form of outdoor relief intended to mitigate rural poverty in England at the end of the 18th century and during the early 19th century.*

## **PITSTONE GREEN FARM AND THE HAWKINS FAMILY PART 3**

The new buildings at Pitstone Green Farm were designed with the best interests of the then modern farming in mind.

During the rebuild all the old buildings except Stevens' Barn and the Big Barn were demolished. Oak timbers from these old buildings, some with holes originally used to hold the wattle infill showing in them to this day, were used to build a cartshed on the back of the stable so as to face east. It was very necessary that the sun should not shine on the wooden wheels of the carts and wagon, as this caused the wood to shrink as it dried out, parts of the wheels would become loose and they would then drop to pieces. The bay of the cartshed nearest the house was partitioned off and had a plastered ceiling and double doors fitted to house a special vehicle for use of the farmer's wife and children.

To this day this shed has been known as the "chaisus" or more properly the chaise house. Another improvement included in the 1830 rebuild was the construction of three rick frames or wheat frames as they used to be called, as sheaves of wheat were usually stacked in them. Whereas in earlier times all corn when harvested was carted into barns, it

was now becoming more usual to stack the increased quantity outside in ricks that were thatched to keep out the rain, but corn stacked on the ground had to be protected from damp rising from the soil, and would be eaten by rats and mice, especially if it were left several months before being threshed.

Included in Lady Bridgewater's accounts for the rebuild were three rick frames. These boarded frames were circular in plan, some sixteen feet in diameter and raised upon mushroom shaped saddle stones, or "York" rickstones as the accounts call them. These frames were added to the one already there built of the local Tottenhoe stone; they form a line down the rickyard behind the Big Barn. It is interesting to note that the frame built of Tottenhoe stone must have been built before the Canal came. When the Canal could be used for transport it was better to build of the more durable York stone. As long as nothing was placed against the rick to form a ladder for the rats and mice to climb, sheaves of corn stacked and thatched on these frames would stay vermin free and dry until months later when they were carted into the Big Barn for threshing with the flail.

The rick builder and Thatcher took great pride in his work not only to keep the rick in good condition but also hoping it would win a prize in the local agricultural association's show. The ricks were built so that their sides curved outwards in a beautifully symmetrical rounded shape to the eaves, where the carefully clipped edge of the thatch would deposit the rainwater well clear of their sides. A "dolly" would top these works of art made of wheat straws drawn so that all the ears were level from the head, it was given a haircut with the Thatcher's shears and fixed at the point of the rick over thirty feet above the ground. In later years corn was threshed direct from these wheat frames with a threshing machine. There is no record of a threshing machine on Pitstone Green Farm until 1857 when one that was probably driven by a steam engine was used.

An account book for that year gives "The number of days we use the machine". One pound and ten shillings a day was paid for its hire - much more than "Money paid to the Machine men", which was a total of two shillings and sixpence a day. This was much later than the probably horse powered machine that was used in the Ashridge Estate barn in 1813.

Perhaps one of the reasons there were none of the so called Swing riots in the Pitstone area was because few threshing machines were used. The name Swing was given to the riots because of the almost certainly mythical Captain Swing who the rioters claimed led them. At the beginning of the 19th Century the Swing riots, some as near High Wycombe, were directed against low wages and against machinery, particularly threshing machinery, which was often smashed or caused to be dismantled by the rioters. They claimed that the machines were depriving them of their livelihood by taking away the regular winter work of threshing with the flail. If a tale handed down in the Hawkins family is to be believed one man working on Pitstone Green Farm did not want the arduous work of threshing with the flails to continue.

A young couple were staying in the farm house. They heard the regular, bump, bump, bump, of the flails on the threshing floors and asked what it was. They were taken out to see the men at work. Watching them swing the flails back past their heads before bringing them down to strike the corn the young wife said, "It's a wonder they don't knock their brains out with those things". Her husband replied "Bless you! Men who do this haven't got any brains!" One of the men happening to hear the remark threw down his flail and never used one again.

The date of the building of the house, 1830, with the name of Samuel's youngest son James who was twelve at the time, is carved on a brick under one of the windows. The design of the house, which has remained largely unaltered since 1830, gives a good indication of the domestic arrangements of the time in the household of a farmer farming a relatively large acreage. Bricks for building the house, which is very substantial, with walls fourteen inches thick were made, according to the accounts, at a brickyard belonging to the Ashridge Estate at Slapton, a village about three miles north of Pitstone.

*To be continued*

### **Programme 2014**

All meetings are held in the Meeting Room in the Pitstone Green Museum at 8.00pm. ALL VISITORS VERY WELCOME. Fees £2.00 members £3.00 visitors.

#### **28.8.14 Hobbies Evening and Supper**

This is a great occasion for putting yourself and your hobby on display! All are welcome however quirky and unusual your collection (nothing has been censored yet!). If you have brought a display to a previous hobbies evening, please don't let that stop you from coming again and if you truly have nothing to bring, then do come and learn more about other people's hobbies. If you have friends who would like to show us their hobby or simply enjoy the evening, please bring them along. This year we are again including a supper.

#### **25.9.14 An Introduction to the Cook Collection with Buffet**

In a break with tradition we are invited to visit the Cook Collection in its newly created exhibition space in the loft above our Meeting Room. The late Colin Cook accumulated an enormous collection of artefacts which he carefully restored and which his wife has donated to the Museum. Norman Groom our Museum Manager and his team will be on hand to show us the items in this collection and answer our questions. A finger buffet and drinks will accompany this evening.

#### **23.10.14 The Lee in the First World War**

Mike Senior lives in The Lee and is a local historian and author of a book, 'No Finer Courage' about the impact of war on his village. He has had a life-long interest in the First World War and, since his retirement, he has devoted much of his time to research, lecturing and writing about aspects of the Western Front. Although this talk is about The Lee in the First World War, the same basic story would apply to thousands of villages around the UK. It is about village men who went to war together and died together in 1916 and it is about those who remained at home.

**Sue Lipscomb**

**Reminder:26-7-14** Bucks Family History Society Open Day, Grange School Aylesbury

## **Open Days 2014**

Sunday **10th August**

**Wicket Brood Morris Men**

B.H. Monday **August 25th**

Sunday **14th September**

**Dolmetsch Historical Dance Society**

Sunday **12th October**

**Opening times** from

11.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m.

Admission charges adults £6

children £2. **Adult and child £6**

**(Sundays Only).** Members free.

## **Committee Officers:-**

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**Museum Site Manager**

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**Vice Chairman &**

**Museum Manager**

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