

Pitstone and Ivinghoe Museum Society Newsletter



Spring 2016

Museum Report April 2016

At the time of compiling this report we have had our first open day on Easter Monday. We had an unfortunate visitor that day in the form of Atlantic Storm Katie but fortunately she left before lunchtime and the rest of the day was quite successful. The only problem was mud. A couple of our volunteers were kept busy pulling out inexperienced drivers who got stuck and insisted on putting their foot on the accelerator in an attempt to get out. The storm also prevented us using the catering marquee so the tables were set up within the Big Barn. It was all very cosy and I am sure the craft people profited by the extra attention. We did have an excellent display of small animals that the children could handle, including quite a number of small goats. They did at the end of the day lose two of their chickens but our Secretary found them hiding in our builders' storage yard. It was self funding by making a small entrance charge and the event seemed very popular.

The first open day of the year is always a last minute panic and this year it was made even worse due to Easter being so early. However we did eventually make the site looking quite presentable. Apart from the new revamped Crossley Engine room, the only new venture this year was yet another railway. Some years ago we had an outside five inch gauge track on which we used to run a radio controlled Hunslet shunting engine, a quite substantial engine and capable of pulling children when used under manual control. With the acquisition of our new piece of land we acquired a year or two ago, the track was in the way and had to be dismantled. One of our new volunteers is in the process of building a five inch gauge steam locomotive and has also obtained a completed one made by his father in law. We hope sometime in the future to offer train rides to the children, but that is still some way off. In the mean time we have resurrected the old radio control Hunslet engine that the children can operate under supervision. One or two other projects have not yet materialised and the planned revamped Village Life Room is now on the back burner waiting time for completion. Our new Office extension is progressing well but again on the basis of 'when time is available'.

The pottery area has for many years been under the jurisdictions of the Dacorum Potter's Guild, but under our new arrangement it is self contained within the museum. We have purchased a new kiln, potter's wheel and will

supply the gas for the kiln. All the income derived from the pottery area will be paid into our accounts.

Our next open day is only two weeks away from the Easter Monday opening, an extra day this year due to Easter being early. It is also a Sunday when we do not normally do so well, so we await the results with interest. We are still very short of members to help man the exhibits on our open days. Two of the rooms, the Book Binding and the Model Engineering workshop remained closed at Easter as we had no one to supervise them. It doesn't necessarily need any knowledge or experience of the subject, just someone to keep an eye on things. If you can spend an hour or two helping please contact any committee member or volunteer.

Norman Groom Museum Manager



**New train track at the Museum with
Ivinghoe Beacon in the background**

Vanishing road signs.

In the last two years we have mysteriously lost one or two of our large road signs. We put one sign out at the "T" junction at the end of the road down

from the Beacon. Within two hours it had vanished. It had not been just thrown in the hedge as we checked, but it had just been taken away. Last year we lost two, one in a similar position and a rather nice substantial 'A' frame sign made by one of our volunteers and erected at the end of Vicarage road where it joins the upper road. This sign was quite heavy and would have taken some moving. It has not just happened to the Museum signs but has also happened to the Ford End Water Mill signs and even some local village events notices in Ivinghoe. Is it the Local authorities? Or do we have a secret 'sign pincher' in the area. If it is a local person we would prefer they contact us and we will use alternative locations. If it was the Local Authorities, one would expect them to contact us directly. If anyone can shed any light on the mystery we would love to know.

Norman Groom

Nellie Charlton

I received an email from Mike Charlton with the sad news to say his Mother Nellie had passed away on 8th March at the age of 94 following a short illness. He said she was a devoted Mother, Grandmother and Great Grandmother.

Nellie and her husband Bill were involved with the Pitstone Local History Society, when it was a combined Society of Pitstone Green Museum and Ford End Watermill. Bill was our Treasurer and he and Nellie were often seen taking parties around Ford End Watermill at Ivinghoe.

I had received a previous email in December to say Nellie's sight was failing and Mike said that we should stop sending the PIMS Newsletters to her as it was difficult for her to read. Nellie was an Honorary Member of the Society. Nellie moved from Pitstone to be near her family in Maidenhead in the mid 1990's.

Following the email in December I ask if she had ever written about her involvement at Bletchley Park, as I remember when we had a visit there from the Society she came along with a friend who had worked with her. The following are the notes her son sent which she had made.

When war broke out I was working in the statistical section of the National Savings Department of the Civil Service. Although it was a reserved occupation, I was anxious to get my release to join the W.R.N.S. I liked the

uniform and I wanted to travel. I was fortunate enough to be accepted in the W.R.N.S. and did my initial two weeks training at Mill Hill. During that time I was interviewed to decide which branch of the Service I would serve in, and I think that the fact that I had had a good Grammar School education which included German lessons I was offered the job of doing secret intelligence work. I had no idea of what was involved, but was dispatched to Eastcote. Four weeks of intensive lectures and I was informed I was a Special Duties Wren and sent to Bletchley Park to work in Hut III.

I was billeted at Wavendon House and taken by bus each day to Bletchley Park to work the 3 shift pattern. I learnt to use the Colossus machine and later helped to try to translate some of the cryptic messages. I stayed there until V.E day after which I was remustered and trained to be a pay writer and served at R.N.A.S at Yeovilton until the Civil Service claimed me back as a class B release in 1946. It was at Yeovilton that I met my husband Bill. He knew I had been a "Special duties" Wren but when he died in 1993 he had never known what had happened at Bletchley Park. I had signed the official secrets act!

Nellie Charlton nee Ross

From Mike

Go to:- bletchleypark.org.uk

History, Find a Veteran, Roll of Honour, Search, Name, Ross

Brenda Grace

Membership 2016-17

It is now time to renew your membership of The Pitstone & Ivinghoe Museum Society.

To continue to receive our quarterly newsletter and gain free access to the museum on Open Days and reduced fees to our monthly talks, please complete and return the enclosed Membership Renewal Slip with your cheque for the correct amount. The fees this year are unchanged from last year at £12 for a single member and £18 for joint membership.

Bill Barnard Membership Secretary

Gordon Rodwell 1921 – 2006

(Continued from October Newsletter)

Atlantic Tour

Crews:

Lancaster ‘A’ (NX687) 15 Squadron, 5 Group, Mildenhall:

Pilot – W/C Calder, DSO, DFC

Navigator – F/O Shepherd

Navigator – F/L Webb, DFC

W/Operator – F/L Wright, DFC

Lancaster ‘B’ (NX688) 156 Squadron, 8 Group, Wyton:

Pilot - W/C Craig, DSO, DFC

Navigator – S/L Blackadder, DFC

Engineer – P/O Ashton, DFC

W/Operator – F/L Green, DFC

Navigator – S/L Chandler, DFC

Lancaster ‘C’ (NX689) 582 Squadron, 8 Group PFF, Little Staughton:

Pilot – S/L Cairns, DFC

Navigator – F/O Rodwell, DFM

Engineer– F/L Stocker, DSO, DFC

W/Operator – P/O Hough

Navigator- F/L Crowley, DFC

Air Gunner – F/L Cooper, DF

Ground Crew: F/S Leach, F/S Butterworth, Sgt Grange, Sgt Graham, Sgt Radlett, Sgt Toye, Sgt Weckshire, Sgt Westhead.

The Atlantic Tour, attended by Air Vice Marshal ‘Bomber’ Harris, left on the 24th July, 1945 and was rated ‘Top Secret’ until departure. Lasting seven weeks, it was a goodwill mission to Brazil, one of the first countries outside Europe to join the allies during the war. It was hoped that the tour would boost morale and that the Brazilians might be encouraged to become involved in the war against Japan. The route was from Wyton via St Mawgan, Rabat

Sale, Bathurst, Natal, Recife and then on to Rio de Janeiro. The group were the first to use this air route to South America. The crews were treated with great respect on their journey over and were plied with meals and extra rations at each stopover point.

Gordon's crew were provided with a brand new Lancaster Mk VII, in need of some minor assembling and air testing and it had been equipped with a Lincoln undercarriage and brakes to help with landing on potentially rough runways. Before they left, the crew were required to fly a tour of France in order to conduct a ten hour fuel consumption test.

On the leg of the journey between Rabat Sale and Bathurst, the crew had to navigate their way through the Inter Tropical Front, a wide belt of thunderstorms that through the year regularly moves North and South. On meeting the belt, they decided to drop the aircraft by around four thousand feet and, luckily, found the turbulence to be no worse than a cold front across Europe. However, Rodwell describes the rain as being like flying through a waterfall and as the nose of the plane began to leak the crew got wet. Around ten minutes before their Estimated Time of Arrival, they found themselves in a large raincloud and the rain flooded in like a river through the front turret and the crew were soaked through. The low cloud meant that visibility was only half a mile and it became very difficult to navigate. It took three attempts to descend onto the runway, a stretch of red clay with metal mesh overlaid, by which the plane's braked wheels were rendered useless. They eventually made it to the aerodrome and then British Overseas Airways Corporation rest house, where they were presented with a huge feast but they were too tired to enjoy it.

The entire tour was intended to be pleasurable and every stop meant formal dinners, dances and exploration. At Recife, they were treated to a seven course dinner, with appetisers, cocktails, tonic water, red and white wine, liqueur and cigars. During this evening they heard the news that Labour had won the election and that Churchill was out.

When they reached Rio, the runway was only three thousand feet instead of the usual six thousand, the Lincoln undercarriage and brakes were greatly appreciated. The American four engine crafts had been banned from landing on it. A formal reception was planned and a parade took place in the aerodrome, which was then opened to the public who took their chance to have a look at the bombers and ask questions, all before the crews could unpack.

The men were split into groups for accommodation, with those above the rank of F/O staying at the Copacabana Palace Hotel and the NCOs went to the Hotel Pax. Rodwell's group of five had two Chevrolets with chauffeurs at their disposal, all day every day. Most days centred around parties and autograph signings. Gordon felt that the group were treated almost as though they had won the war by themselves. On one occasion, he had the luck to meet the Spanish ambassador's daughter in a lift and be invited to a party at the Casino Urca hosted by her. During a visit to Sao Paulo, an air show was laid on for them with around six Bostons demonstrating skip bombing. Unfortunately, later that day the Bostons were flying low over the town and one of the aircraft went into a high speed stall and crashed, killing all of the crew, though fortunately no civilians. That evening, 'Butch', or 'Bomber' Harris gave a speech over a formal dinner thanking the Brazilians for their hospitality and paying tribute to the brave men of Bomber Command. He noted that out of 110,000 men to pass through Bomber Command, around 50,000 had lost their lives. That day's events must have had a rather a sobering effect.

Their last function was a dinner with members of the Embassy, followed by a ball. Although drinks were in shorter supply than at previous parties, Gordon remembers 'Butch', who was in very high spirits, providing some entertainment by merrily dancing the Samba for fifteen minutes. The last day of their tour was supposed to be the ninth of August but on the eighth they were informed that the crews were being switched about and they were not leaving. Furthermore, their craft needed a new engine, which would have to be flown out. From the following morning they were told that their official visit had ended and that the Brazilian government would no longer cover their expenses, they did not see their hosts or taxis again.

As the daily cost of hotels they had been staying at was more than they were paid, and accommodation elsewhere was scarce, Gordon was grateful to be invited to stay with friends in the area. A few days later, the crew were faced with another blow. The new engine had arrived but it was designed for a different craft and the fittings were different. The RAF's response was to send someone down to convert the engine, rather than ordering another.

During their journey home, they stopped at Natal, British Guiana, Nassau, Montreal, Labrador and St Mawgan. Most flights to take place over the Atlantic were scheduled for night time because of the availability of Astrological Navigation. While flying over Iceland, the crew enjoyed a view of the Northern Lights, which Gordon remembers initially mistaking for searchlights and then vapour trails. Having been away for seven weeks, they returned to Little Staughton and the war had finally finished.

After the war, Gordon went on to work as a pilot for British Overseas Airways Corporation, now known as British Airways. He was one of a small group specially selected to work as the first ever aircrew of pure jet air liners.

This completes the article on Gordon Rodwell by Katie Brown

Molly the Working Clydesdale Horse on Sunday 10th April





Care Building SERVICES LTD

We are very grateful to Care Building Services who have very kindly donated a quantity of roof tiles to the museum. These tiles are for the big barn and are very hard to acquire.

Care Building Services Ltd

**Unit 10 Bridgegate Business Park, Gatehouse Way, Gatehouse
Industrial Area, Aylesbury, Bucks, HP19 8 XN**

Telephone: 01296 583365

Website: www.carebuilds.com

Email: info@carebuilds.com

Programme 2016

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.

Thursday 28th April '16

An Evening of Music with Ron and his player pianos

Ron and Barbara Hartwell have once again invited us to their home in Chesham to enjoy music from the collection of player pianos that Ron has accumulated over the years. This event will start at 7.30pm please ring Ron & Barbara on 01494 786738 to book.

Thursday 26th May '16A Walk across the Dancersend Reserve**

A 2-hour walk with warden Mick Jones through Dancersend Nature Reserve, the oldest reserve in the county, starting from the historic Rothschild pumping station. We will explore chalk pits, species-rich scrub, an orchard and ancient woodland on our way to open clearings, full of orchids and butterflies, where Dame Miriam Rothschild carried out some of the first wildlife conservation experiments in the UK. There will be rough ground and one steep climb so sturdy footwear is advisable. There is no charge, but there

will be an opportunity to make a donation towards the work of BBOWT, the local Wildlife Trust.

Thursday 23rd June '16Monastery Gardens**

Our speaker, Gordon Bell will be giving us a brief history of Dunstable Priory and its contribution to the Dissolution of the Monasteries and the lasting legacy of the Reformation. He will talk about the recreated Physic Garden and other more extensive herb gardens recreated throughout England. We will also hear about the *Doctrine of Signatures* and the development of modern medicines from plant materials.

Thursday 28th July '16Cheese Wine and Antiques**

Our very popular evening at the museum with Stephen Hearn is appearing once again in our programme. 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.** Refreshments will include a ploughman's platter and complementary 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 and a booking form is enclosed with this newsletter. **This event is held in the Big Barn.**

Sue Lipscomb Programme & Minutes Secretary

Dancers- New Moon Morris on the Open Day 10th April



Cover page

**The Petting
Farm at the
April Open
Day.**

**All pictures by
Bill Barnard**

Open Days 2016

Early Spring B.H. Monday 2nd May
Whitchurch Morris Men

Spring B.H. Monday 30th May

Sunday 12th June

Sunday 10th July
Tappalachian Dancers

Sunday 14th August

B.H. Monday 29th August

Sunday 11th September

Sunday 9th October

Opening times from
11.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m.

Admission charges.
Adults £6 children £2.

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