

Pitstone and Ivinghoe Museum Society Newsletter



Autumn 2017

MUSEUM REPORT October 2017

We are on the move. Don't panic it's not the museum but things within the museum. Over the years we have accumulated a vast amount of useful bits and every few years we move them from one place to another, then a few years later move them, either back to where they came from or to somewhere else. We have over the last year or so acquired large skips, both for metal and for general rubbish. These have been filled very quickly and removed and we could really use further ones.

We have hidden, behind the carpenter's shop, an area that they we refer to as the builders' yard and this at the moment is the subject of 'the move'. One of our members suggested a while ago that we should have an exhibition garage at the museum, something that appeared to be a good idea, especially as we have been offered some items from a garage that was closed down in Marsworth some years ago. The problem has been to find space for such a garage and the only feasible space seemed to be to use the existing builders' shed adjacent to the petrol pumps at the rear of the museum and to move its contents elsewhere. We are now in the process of creating an undercover storage for the building materials in the builders' yard mentioned above and also to store items in there from our engineering workshop that are not used on a daily basis. Hence the move that is now underway and of course much of the original contents of the builders' yard is once again on the move to create the space needed. We never get bored and it does keep us busy!

One big advance we have made this year is to restore much of the farm machinery that is housed under the Black Shed canopy that is opposite the Farmhouse. We have had a great team working on this project such that virtually all the machinery is now belt driven from the overhead shafting and it has been a great attraction on our open days. The next project for the team is to sort out a number of horticultural machines stored in the old cart sheds at the back of the museum. We have over the years tried to open up this area for the public but it seems to end up as another general-purpose storage area that is ignored.

We have in the past had several filming contracts varying from larger organisations like the BBC down to small groups of individuals making promotional films. This seemed to have picked up recently with two already completed and one other at the enquiry stage. One was a programme being produced by Truenorth.TV, the subject being 'Walking with Dogs with Victoria Pendleton, Olympic Cyclist. They turned up in

force at the museum but most of the filming was based at Pitstone Windmill owned by the National Trust. We are hoping at least we can prise a small amount of money from them but may have to settle for just promoting the museum. The programme should appear on More4 next year and then probably on Channel 4. Keep a lookout.

We still have one open day to go before the end of the season but it's been our best year ever. Our income has exceeded all expectations and the volunteers and helpers have put on a great show for our visitors. It's almost embarrassing receiving so much praise from the visitors when they leave. The craft fair has been full up most days, the model railway layouts and science rooms often packed out and vintage vehicle and other popular attractions grow steadily year on year. Volunteer numbers are growing steadily and we must have doubled our weekly workforce in the last five years.

However, there is still one thing that is worrying the committee and at the moment we do not see an obvious answer to it. We need to find people to continue to run the museum in future years. Three of our officers are the wrong side of 75 and there will be a time in the future when they are unable to continue. We do need others to join the committee, not necessarily to undertake any specific duty, but to gain experience and knowledge of how the museum functions so at least they may be able to find suitable applicants, even if they do not want to take on such duties themselves. The request is addressed to all society members but especially to existing volunteers, as in many cases they already have a lot of valuable knowledge. Please don't assume it's someone else's problem. If you're a volunteer at the museum then it could be your problem in the future.

Norman Groom Museum Manager

Accounts

The year ending 31st March 2017 was a comfortable year financially with a surplus of £6504. Just a reminder that the year covers the 2016 Open days. The weather for the first 6 open days of 10 that year was not kind to us resulting in lower takings than 2015. Fortunately, this year has been much better. Most income streams were to budget except filming and group/school visits. Expenses were generally as expected although lack of volunteer time held back projects. Our balance sheet is healthy with ample cash reserves.

Details are on a separate sheet enclosed with this Newsletter.

John Youngs Treasurer

Living with a Monster

Those of you of a certain age may have fond memories of seeing council workers in the 1950's trimming the roadside verges using a friendly looking monster, misleadingly called an Allen Scythe. Seeing modern council workers with their gloves, goggles, ear defenders, eye protectors, toe 'tecter shoes, high vis' jackets and all the other health and safety paraphernalia vandalising our litter strewn roadsides with their strimmers, it seems that the 1950's must have been some weird parallel universe where these monsters were actually allowed out in the community to terrorise our green and pleasant land.

It was a few years ago that my love, hate relationship with one of these brutes first began. I spied a sad looking example in our local auctions, and put in a reserve bid of £80 just for a bit of fun! Twenty four hours later and I was the bewildered owner of a classic lawn mower green, grass cutting machine.

Knowing absolutely nothing about these beasts the first thing that struck me about it was its immense weight, as we wrestled it on and off our trailer and I desperately began to wonder what I'd got myself into — why? As my long suffering wife left to go shopping, a casual remark turned into a challenge "I expect to see that thing in working order, by the time I return".

So, digging out my old Whitworth spanners and trawling through my endless boxes of useful junk, work began. The engine turned over okay and seemed to have good compression, but no spark, so take off engine cord starter pulley and engine cover and locate the C.B.points. They open and close but look a bit grubby, so a bit of emery board lovingly rubbed across their faces produces a nice fat, healthy spark when the engine's turned using a new piece of knotted blue nylon rope and a 4" piece of stick.

Great, let's find some fuel and away we'll go. Well, not quite yet. There's no fuel pipe and the tank's full of crud. So whip the tank off, takeout the tap, give it a good shake with a few hefty nuts and bolts inside, blow it out with the airline, stick it back on with a nice new bit of petrol pipe and that's it, give it a go!

Amazingly the petrol tap didn't leak when the tank was filled up, so after shutting the slider in the air filter, opening the throttle a bit and giving it a hefty pull on the starter rope, it roared into life. What's happening— the whole machine's going berserk, everything's shaking at about 500 on the Richter scale and that cutter's going to do some damage if I don't stop it. Let's try pulling this lever, it must be the clutch. Wow, yes it is, but it's for the wheels, and the machine is now trundling off towards my car! Let go the lever. Nothing changes. Shut the throttle and pull off the plug lead. Ouch. Well, at least it works, and the dog's still got all its legs. This could take some getting used to. There must be something missing. It must be possible to disconnect the drive to the cutter, and why does it shake like that? But no, if the engine's running, so is the cutter and it shakes because no-one thought to

counterbalance it. People used to operate these things all day — amazing. Rule number one, lock up all children, pets, and people who can't run a hundred yards in under 15 seconds before starting and never stand in front of it if you value the use of your legs.

On returning home from shopping, my wife insisted on giving it a lawn test, so, after a couple of minutes of instruction (the blind leading the blind) she set off down the garden with all her wobbly bits moving as predicted by Newton's laws of motion.

Screams of delight turned to screams of alarm as the shrubbery loomed ever nearer, so a frantic burst of action saw us wrestle the machine to a stop just short of a cartoon like encounter with some dahlias.

Several cups of tea later and feeling ambitious we successfully cut our bit of paddock and realised the serious capacity of these machines to cut long grass.

Thinking we were now the masters of our new member of the family, we decided that we had found the solution to the problem of how to cut the grass in our garden in France, which is just a field on a slope of around 45 degrees, too steep even for the farmer's tractor. On our next visit, the old Allen Scythe was loaded onto the trailer and exported to the wilds of the Limousin, to start anew and exciting life, doing what it was put on this earth to do. As we unloaded it from the trailer, our neighbour looked on suspiciously. "How many gears does it have?" er, one! "No reverse?" er, no just one, forward! "And what about brakes?" er, no, but if you pull this lever it comes to a sudden stop — usually. The rural French people are wonderful and very polite so he didn't actually laugh at us; instead he insinuated that if we'd said, we could have had his old one which had brakes and a reverse gear. Well he thought it did. Probably when he last used it 45 years ago! Anyway, we thanked him and put the old machine into its new home — the old bread oven.

Pan forward a few days when all my excuses have run out. The old lady is dragged out of the bread oven under the distant, sceptical gaze of Gilbert, the neighbour, I proudly filled the tank with 2 stroke petrol oil mix, checked the tyres, oiled the cutter, wound the rope round the starter pulley, fuel tap on, full choke, half throttle, a hefty pull on the rope. Nothing. Again. Nothing. After about a dozen pulls with slight adjustments each time, still nothing. So I checked for a spark, et voila — nothing. So with the implied feeling of Gilbert's unspoken "I told you so" ringing in my head I set to, to check those old points again.

As I lay out my meagre travelling tool kit in between those monstrous shafts, more suitable to be hitched to a donkey than controlled by a mere human, I feel more like an extra from a Mad Max film than an engineer. Half an hour and a few insect bites later, the old girl roared into life in a cloud of smoke and that awful two stroke popping exhaust note. Bon, allez! The dog safely locked up in the house, I

set off down the track into the lower entrance to the garden. This in itself is a challenge as the track is deeply rutted by centuries of use by farm vehicles and the machine wants passionately to turn right or left and impale itself in the bank. Anyway we make it, and gather up the mental and physical energy required to attack this waist high wilderness. For some reason I decide to cut the really steep bit first, so set off apprehensively for the nettles, brambles and grass that we call our garden.

Things go well for a while until the shear volume of grass builds up around the front of the machine and brings us to a halt like arrester wires on an aircraft carrier. Now one of the many troubles with these machines is the clutch. It's a dog clutch so when it's driving hard, if you release it, nothing happens! So, when it's stuck on a hill with the front end firmly welded to the ground by the stubborn French grass, you can't move it or start it. So get round the front and clear the grass. You can't believe how strong grass can be when there's enough of it. It's not P.C but, if you operate an Allen Scythe, carry a knife, a big one!

Once I'd freed it, a superhuman heave on the handles allows the clutch to disengage and whoa, it wants to escape down the hill, so heave it round across the slope so I can restart it. Bingo, we're in business again. After about 10 minutes I was getting the hang of it, or so I thought. Going backwards and forwards across the slope is okay, it's turning at the end of each pass that's difficult. Turning up the slope is very hard work and turning down the slope is nerve racking as the slack in the transmission allows the machine to roll forward about 3 metres before it bites again. It was on one of these turns that disaster finally struck.

I suppose it was exhaustion (mine) which meant I wasn't thinking straight so, as the machine lurched forward in free fall, I panicked thinking it had come out of gear. I frantically lunged for the clutch lever and somehow released it thereby sealing its fate. Now in blissful freewheel the machine made a break for freedom down the hill, As with all accidents it all seemed to happen in slow motion. It went left, then right, then straight until it spied the biggest old walnut tree in the garden and made a final fatal dash for it. The machine and tree were intimately united as the cutter wrapped itself round the trunk in a less than amorous embrace.

Well that was that. No one was hurt, but the cutter was bent almost at 90 degrees like some enormous metallic stag beetle. Now the problem was to recover the sorry mess back to its home in the bread oven. So I grabbed a few tools and removed the Cutter drive bar so the engine could be started and the machine driven back up the track. Shear bliss, as it doesn't shake, with no oscillating cutter.

Several years down the road and with a nice new Cutter fabricated back in my workshop in England, I and my monster friend, continue our love hate relationship as we wrestle our way through the grass each spring and summer, even being hired out to one of our neighbours to help control his rapidly growing acres of nettles,

brambles, bracken and grass. As a means of cutting large areas quickly it is probably unrivalled by anything other than some form of tractor, but as regards health and safety, they belong to an era when men were men and if you had an accident people would say "you should look where you're going"

(Pictures on back page) Pete Farrar

Richard Samuel Downs AKA- SIGMA

Over the past four issues of this newsletter we have related a story about 'Moated Mansions In Bucks' that I transcribed from late 19th century editions of the Bucks Herald. It seems only fitting to write about the Author, Richard Samuel Downs, known by his pseudonym SIGMA. Richard Samuel Downs was born in 1845 in Evington, Leicestershire, his parents were Samuel John Downs and Mary Anne Downs. He died on 29th April 1923 in High Wycombe. I do not have an exact birth date but he was baptised on the 3rd August 1845. He had three brothers and two sisters, all of whom became schoolmasters or schoolmistresses in their own right.

The following (*reproduced in the original text*) is an article on him that was published in the Bucks Herald after he died in 1923. This contained a lovely description of his life and his funeral.

Bucks Herald, Saturday, May 5, 1923, Page 10

DEATH OF MR. R. S. DOWNS

We deeply regret to have to record the death of Mr Richard Samuel Downs who passed away at his residence Evington, (named after his Leicestershire birthplace) Benjamin Road, High Wycombe at about 12:30 on Sunday morning. Although having reached a ripe old age (he was 78) up to about 3½ years ago he had enjoyed splendid health, being of robust nature and a stout heart, and was very fond of an outdoor life in his leisure hours. From about the time mentioned he had periods of indisposition, which culminated some months ago in an illness to which he succumbed on Sunday, despite the devoted care of his wife and the unremitting attentions of his medical attendant, Dr. Huggings, of Wycombe.



The late Mr. Downs was known not only as a famous Wycombe schoolmaster, but as a learned archaeologist, and an expert and interesting writer on the topography and lore of Bucks, and even farther afield. In October of last year he had completed 33 years as a weekly writer on these subjects in the columns of the Bucks Herald, "Topical Notes" by Sigma, having proved an interesting feature all those years. He will be best remembered in Wycombe, however, as the headmaster of the National (Church of England) Schools, whither he came, from the Church of England Schools at Croydon, about 52 years ago.

His management of the Wycombe Schools gained him fame as an educationalist, and to his able tuition many of the tradesmen and residents of Wycombe gratefully attribute a good deal of their success in life. He was an ideal schoolmaster - a strict disciplinarian, but a kind-hearted man, with a real interest in the welfare of his pupils. On his retirement from the headmastership, some 12 years ago, he was presented with a handsomely inscribed and framed address, headed by a photograph of himself. The inscription was:-

"To Mr. Richard S. Downs. This Address is presented, together with a purse of gold, by the Mayor of Chepping Wycombe, on behalf of grateful pupils and friends, as a slight recognition of his devoted and valuable services for a period of forty years as Headmaster of the National Schools, High Wycombe, and with the sincere hope that he may enjoy many years of well-earned rest. 23rd October 1911".

Among his other activities, Mr. Downs was for many years the Hon. Secretary of the now defunct Wycombe Conservative Club: he was a member of the South Bucks Conservative Association, a zealous worker in the cause on all occasions, and meetings held in the town and district in support of the Party would find him in attendance. In April, 1911, he married as his second wife (his first wife having been many years previously deceased) Miss Florence Annie Sharp, only daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Sharp, of Wooburn, and among their many felicitations and congratulations on the auspicious occasion was a presentation (on April 9th) on behalf of the members of the Wycombe Conservative Club, and others, by the President, Major Coningsby Disraeli, of a handsome clock, with a pretty gold bracelet for his future wife, and a sum of money in a silver purse.

Deceased was a staunch Churchman, a regular attendant at the services at All Saints, and was the author of a well known popular History of Wycombe Parish Church.

Mr. Downs was very fond of cricket was for some years the Hon. Secretary of the High Wycombe Cricket Club, and up to the time when recurring indisposition sounded its warning note, he was an interested spectator at all the important matches on the Town Ground. The very deepest sympathy is felt by all classes in the town for his widow, who, after nine very happy years, is now bereaved of a beloved and devoted husband.

THE FUNERAL

Took place on Thursday afternoon, at High Wycombe Cemetery, and was largely attended by townsmen, residents, old pupils and others, who desired in this way to mark their esteem. The first part of the service was at the parish Church, in the presence of a large congregation. The principal mourners were Mrs. Downs (widow) and Mr. O. A. Downs (brother). Among intimate friends and mourners were the Mayoress of Wycombe (Mrs. J. Gibson), Mr. J. H. M. Gibson, Mr. C. W. Raffety, Mrs. Goodearl, Mr. C. Bridger, Mr. and Mrs. C. Luttman, Mr. and Mrs. H. Stone, Mrs. Varney, Mr. Barnes, Miss Janes, Mr. G. L. De Fraine, Aylesbury, and Mr. T. J. Northy, High Wycombe (representing Messrs. G. T. De Fraine and Co., and Bucks Herald), Messrs. T. H. Butler, J. R. Myrton, C. E. Skull, T. Thurlow, H. T. Dickens, G. Welch, H. J. Cox, and C. H. Elsom, Dr. L. W. Reynolds, Mr. and Mrs. E. R. Watkins, Mrs. T. J. Northy, Messrs. E. A. Janes, Dean, Peddar, E. E. Owens, and Fryer, Mrs. Freeman, Mrs. E. W. Thompson, Miss Williams (headmistress of the Church of England School), Mrs. Rogers (headmistress C.E. Infant Schools), Mrs. Syred, Mrs. Fry and Mrs. Barnes, Mr. E. W. Thompson (an old boy of the School, who succeeded the late Mr. Downs as headmaster) was present with a number of former pupils of the School. Mrs. Downs had received a large number of letters of sympathy, and regret at inability to be present at the funeral, including one from deceased's old friend, Mr. John Greenwood, for many years headmaster of the Council Schools at Wooburn Green.

The service at the Church was taken by the Vicar of High Wycombe, Rev. F. M. Molyneux. It was fully choral, Mr. G. F. Andrews A.R.C.O. presiding at the organ. As the congregation was assembling he played "O, rest in the Lord." Following the chanting of the customary Psalms, the hymn, "Peace, perfect peace." was impressively sung, and the Vicar read the lessons. The concluding hymn was "Jesus lives." and as the cortege was leaving the Church the Organist played "I know that my Redeemer liveth." At the cemetery, the concluding offices were said by the Vicar. The coffin, which was of polished oak, with plated furniture, bore the inscription:-

RICHARD SAMUEL DOWNS,

Died April 29, 1923:

Aged 78 years.

The remains reposed in a grave in the part of the cemetery not far from the top of Benjamin road, and only a few yards from the house in which Mr. Downs lived so long and peacefully passed away.

There were a large number of beautiful floral tributes, including the following:-

In ever-loving memory of my darling - From his sorrowing Wife. "At rest, in God's holy keeping." There were many other tributes.

Mrs. R. S. Downs desires to gratefully and sincerely thank all those kind friends who sent wreaths, and messages of sympathy and condolence with her in her hour of great sorrow.

Research by Bill Barnard.

MEMBERSHIP 2017

We currently have 160 members of PIMS, and if you find a "Membership Renewal Slip" inside this newsletter, then it will be a final reminder that you may have forgotten to renew this year.

Bill Barnard Membership Secretary

Stop Press!

The Museum has been awarded full accreditation status by the Arts Council on 5th October 2017

PROGRAMME 2017

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

Thursday 26th October

Philomena Liggins

Dropping off SOE Agents, supplies, radios etc. to resistance fighters in WW2 using Lancaster, Halifax and Lysander Planes.

Philomena is one of the people helping to run Bletchley Park, she keeps an eye on all the things written about BP and has a wide knowledge of many aspects of WW2 and how the war was managed. We are very lucky that she has agreed to come and talk to us on such a fascinating subject, which took place so close to us here.

Thursday 23rd November 2017 at 7.30 pm.

AGM - This is the AGM so come along and decide on the future running of The Museum, we will either have a short talk afterwards or some interesting videos.

Thursday 21st December 2017

Frank Banfield and his films from the archives

Christmas starts here as Frank Banfield shows us some more of his brilliant old films. Sup a glass of something whilst going back to a time well before Instagram and YouTube were even thought of.

Thursday 25th January 2018

Roger Moorhouse

The fantastic local historian returns to Pitstone with a talk based on his latest book. The History of the Third Reich in 100 Objects, if his last talk about Berlin is anything to go by, it should be a great evening.

Pete Farrar Publicity and Programme Secretary

FRONT COVER

Displays of Vintage Cars and Motorcycles on various Open Days this year.

(Pictures Bill Barnard)

BACK COVER

The Allen Scythe. *(Pictures Pete Farrar)*

Open Days 2018

Easter Monday 2nd April
Early Spring B.H. Monday 7th May
Spring B.H. Monday 28th May
Sunday 10th June
Sunday 8th July
Sunday 12th August
Summer B.H. Monday 27th August
Sunday 9th September
Sunday 14th October

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

Admission charges.
Adults £6 children £2.

Committee Officers:-

Chairman & Museum Site Manager
John Childs 01582 833501

Vice Chairman & Museum Manager
Norman Groom 01582 605464
manager@pitstonemusuem.co.uk

Treasurer
John Youngs 01582 833678
treasurer@pitstonemuseum.co.uk

Secretary
Dennis Trebble 07738786210
secretary@pitstonemuseum.co.uk

Committee Members:-
Museum Deputy Manager
Vacant

Publicity and Programme
Secretary
Pete Farrar 01525 221583

Minutes Secretary
Sue Lipscomb 01296 630578

Other Committee Members

Nigel Thompson
nigelthompson262@gmail.com
Paul Chapman
paulthemower@gmail.com

Non Committee Posts:-

Archivist
Sue Denty
archivist@pitstonemuseum.co.uk
Computer Records Officer
Norman Groom
Craft Co-ordinator
Brenda Grace 01296 668167

Dancers
Margaret Elliott
MEchipie@aol.com
Membership Secretary & Webmaster
Bill Barnard
membership@pitstonemuseum.co.uk
Newsletter Editor
Sandra Barnard
newslettereditor@pitstonemuseum.co.uk
Trading Secretary
Ronnie Farrar 01525 221583

Holding Trustees:-

Don Levy
John Wallis
William Hawkins
John Youngs

Museum Website:- www.pitstonemuseum.co.uk
Museum Mobile Phone Number:- 07827 703335



The Allen Scythe

Pete's Audition for Poldark?



**Pitstone and Ivinghoe
Museum Society**

**Pitstone Green Museum,
Vicarage Road, Pitstone
Leighton Buzzard LU7 9EY
Registered Charity No 273931**

