

# **Pitstone and Ivinghoe Museum Society Newsletter**



**New Year 2020**

## **EDITOR'S NOTE**

In this issue I have included something that I wish I knew more about – it is a letter, written by a WWII Wren, who must have been from a local (well off) family. I have tried my best to find out as much as I can about the writer, which I have added at the end of the letter. The signature on the letter is quite unclear so “Trudy” might well be wide of the mark when it comes to the signatory. If there are enough clues that I have put together, perhaps somebody might recognise the writer and let us know? The letter, by the way, was in an old file in one of the cabinets in the office, but had no supporting documentation with it.

When I took on what I had hoped to be a temporary editorship last year, I made a plea for somebody within the membership to come forward to take on the job on a more permanent basis. I realise now that this was a naïve hope because the word “editor” is entirely a misnomer: it would be more correct to refer to the post as part-time author, given the amount of material of interest that I have sourced and written. Perhaps I should have requested, instead, simply that members consider putting pen to paper, now and again, to provide items that may hold a personal interest whilst having the possibility of a wider appreciation. Please try. I am indebted to those who have done so for this issue.

**Dennis Trebble**

## **MANAGER'S REPORT**

As we creep into the next decade against a backdrop of seemingly endless rainy, miserable days here, and Australia being overcome by horrendous fires destroying everything in their path, I think we can still pat ourselves on the back to congratulate ourselves on what has been achieved here at Pitstone Museum over the last ten years. The original gang of people who started off the project, laid a fantastic foundation on which we have been able to build, to produce the incredibly successful attraction we now have. It was not easy to improve on what had been built without damaging the very thing that makes this place so much fun. People ask why we don't open more often but I think that even if we opened only once a week, we would lose the carnival atmosphere that we seem to generate now and as long as the numbers remain manageable we will continue as we have done for the foreseeable future.

If it ever stops raining, we can carry out some of the improvements we have been promising, ie. a Portaloo to relieve congestion in reception at peak times and a new fence, gates and museum sign at the front of the staff orchard. We will also get the potholes in the drive repaired.

We have at last taken over the lovely old Austin 7 donated by Margaret and Dennis as described in the accompanying article and have made a start restoring it to full working order. We are hoping to preserve it in its old condition rather than restoring it to new. When it was laid up in 1961 it was already 30 years old so that's the way it should stay. We hope to have volunteers working on the Austin on open days to keep up the practice of having working exhibits rather than static displays. If we are going to turn the old builders' shed into a garage exhibit, it will need some work done to its roof as it is leaking badly. The BSA Bantam is now working. I'm still researching the pushbike, to work out the best way forward and the Cyclemaster is making good progress towards full roadworthiness. The engine was absolutely seized solid but was cleverly coaxed back into its constituent parts and is now slowly being reassembled.

Norman Groom assures me that we will have the Lancaster Bomber exhibit for at least another year.

I will have to contact the tree surgeon, as we have a rather large, dead tree behind the new grain barn which would do considerable damage should it fall down of its own accord and we have some other work to be done at the same time.

The trailer used for passenger rides to the windmill is at last being refurbished and painted and should look very smart in the new colours for the open days this year.

The burned out hay barn adjacent to the site has been demolished and will, I'm told, be replaced with a new one in the Spring and things have started to move in our own efforts to have the roofs replaced on the silos and the bins. It is hoped to get this work done during the Autumn period.

**Pete Farrar**

## **FRED FOSKETT (15 FEBRUARY 1916 – 5 MAY 2018)**

This is the story of Frederick Charles Foscett, probably our oldest member, who was born at the height of the First World War and died aged 102, still a regular visitor on open days. Fred, his daughter Margaret and her partner Dennis were particularly well known for getting to the museum late on Open Days, but they were always in good spirits and took great interest in all we had to offer. When Fred finally left us, he left behind a selection of forms of transport which he couldn't bear to part with because they all had their special memories which he wanted to hold on to. I gather that Margaret and Dennis had many offers and suggestions but thankfully they decided that Pitstone Museum would be the best place to preserve Fred's precious objects. We are very grateful to them and we will do our best to look after them, showing them off in the Old Garage exhibit which is slowly taking shape opposite The Cart Sheds, next to the old fuel pump.

Fred's first machine was a bicycle, bought second hand from a friend, in the early thirties, to be used for work and pleasure. Although now in poor condition, I would think that in its time it would have been classed as a

racing bike, sporting drop handlebars and derailleur gears, although it's interesting to note it has only three gears, whereas today's machines can have as many as 27! He must have been very fit as he used to cycle to work from his home in Berkhamsted to his work at Waterlows Printers in Dunstable, when he began work there, after serving a 7 year apprenticeship with Baileys Printers in Berkhamsted.

Before the start of WW2 Fred splashed out and bought a 1931 Austin Seven car, to be used for going to work and pleasure trips. In those days it was a real treat just to *go out for a ride in the car*. Printers were fairly well paid and deserved it, after a 7 year apprenticeship, so the little Austin must have seemed very luxurious after the bike. Used for several holidays pre-war with his brother and pal; up to the Lake District and to Wales with his fiancé Edith, pal Fred Taverner and his fiancé Kath - quite a load for one small car plus luggage.



After returning safely from war service with the RAF, Fred bought the Cyclomaster, in an attempt to save money getting to work, still with his job at Waterlows but now only having to travel from Billington. When the tiny 2 stroke engine finally gave up the ghost Fred purchased a BSA Bantam D1 motorcycle, from his friend George Norton who was selling it, after falling off, breaking his ankle and swearing he would never ride it again. The

Bantam was a regular form of transport until the late 70s when he went over to bus travel. The Austin was laid-up during the war years, to be used again after Fred's demob in 1946, for work and pleasure. He was by then married to Edith (in 1942 on leave from service in Iceland) with a daughter Margaret born in 1947. The car was used regularly for trips out, Sunday afternoon spins in the countryside and every Bank Holiday to South Wales where Edith's parents still lived. There were lots of trips out in Wales until the 1960s when the parents retired and went to live at Billington. By then the little Austin was getting on in years and was too small to take out the whole family, so it was laid up around 1960/61 when a new Ford Popular 100E was purchased.



We feel honoured to have been chosen to preserve these vehicles for future generations to appreciate, I think it's fair to say that the four machines and the stories that come with them, illustrate very effectively a lifestyle long since disappeared. Life was simpler but much harder physically, day to day. Which era would you have preferred to have lived in?

**Pete Farrar**

## ARMY MATHS QUESTIONS 1943

In the July issue of last year's newsletter I gave a flavour of what entrants for REME (Royal Electrical Mechanical Engineers), at the age of 14, had to contend with under examination conditions, during WW2. This time, drawn from the same source, I present some Maths (sums) questions for you to have a think about.

Remember that these were all intended to be done without the aid of calculators or mathematical tables!

1. A man invests £1512½ in 3% War Bonds at 103⅞. If the income is subject to tax at the rate of 10 shillings in the pound, what is the net percentage he receives on his investment?
2. A cylindrical tank with a diameter of 24 feet is fed from a supply pipe 9 inches in diameter. How long will it take to fill the tank to a depth of 3½ feet if water flows along the pipe at the rate of 7 feet per second?
3. ABC is an isosceles triangle right-angled at C. If AC=BC=2 inches, find the length of AB to the nearest hundredth of an inch and verify your calculation by actual construction and measurement.
4. The wing span of a certain bomber is twice that of a fighter and four feet more. If ten bombers side by side take up the same space as twenty one fighters side by side, find the wing span of each.
5. A bin is made of thin sheet metal with a sloping top. It is 3 feet 11 inches high at the back, 3 feet 3½ inches high at the front, 1 foot 6 inches wide from front to back and 4 feet 6 inches long. Find....
  - a) The volume of the bin in cubic feet
  - b) The area in square feet of metal needed to make the lid (neglecting any overlap)

There were five other questions on the paper involving various formulae and some basic geometry. Given that this was the level that REME expected of its' boy entrants, it is small wonder that for a while, in the post war period, the army managed to retain the technical lead over our allies!

**Dennis Trebble**

## **LETTER RECEIVED FROM PETER WARD, 13 October 2019**

Dear Sue

I am delighted that the case of barn owls I donated to your museum some years ago is in such good hands. I believe that the owls are Victorian taxidermy. At one time they were owned by the council museum (now defunct) that was in Hatfield Road, St Albans.

In the mid 1960s, when I was a teenager, the St Alban's museum gifted the owls to a friend of mine as a thank you to him for doing voluntary work for them. This friend later passed the owls on to me, to become part of the wide ranging museum of curiosities my younger brother David and I had amassed in our bedroom.



As part of our museum obsession, my brother and I tried out a bit of self taught taxidermy. The mouse (or vole) in the owl's case was stuffed by David, then aged about 14. When we grew out of the bedroom museum, some of the best objects were boxed up and stowed away. Then many years



later with decluttering I donated the owls to your museum, who renovated the outside of the case, repainted the inside and reglazed.

In your meeting room, there are also items of horse harness. Some of these items were donated by me from the remains of the bedroom museum. I obtained my harnessing from a posh antique shop Hollywell Hill, St Albans. I used to pester them for "cheap, old, interesting curios". They ended up selling me, for a token payment a miscellaneous pile of harness oddments on the understanding that I then left the shop alone!

Best wishes for your wonderful proper museum.

**Peter Ward**

Hemel Hempstead

*Editor's note; the owls are in a case in the Meeting Room, displayed above the harmonium.*

## LETTER FOUND IN MUSEUM OFFICE

*Brucklay, Liverpool, May 6<sup>th</sup> Monday*

*Dearest Popa*

*Thank you so very much for forwarding Bill's letters to me- we have done well, haven't we. Two mails so close together – and he talks of coming home.*

*The raids here are quite exciting once again, and on all three nights running I was on duty – we were straddled and missed heaven knows how many times, one H.E. landed just outside the swing doors while I was just inside, and the blast blew me backwards downstairs. Only very weak as we were protected a bit by the wall. The doors eventually gave up the battle and fell right down! As I had no right to be above ground, the blast was a well timed rebuke. We've been so busy here, I have to sleep most nights at my "place of duty" dashing back to quarters during the day for a bath and a clean collar – sometimes I run to a clean shirt too. Gala days those – the buildings and roads all around us are bombed and gutted by fire and we had incendiaries on our roof and have no glass at all but even a direct hit wouldn't actually affect us below. The building is very strong and seven floors – we don't worry, besides, "he" seems to have lost interest in us now!*

*Poor Pop, you do have awful problems, don't you. Mop said you have to move everything and the whole staff again. I'm sure you are working much too hard, and is your knee better? I do so wish I could get home- Bill says he thinks there's a hope of getting home next month, at least he feels it's possible. So I'm going to get any leave coming to me postponed in case, so there won't be any difficulty if and when he does.*

*I'm afraid Mop must be frightfully worried about everything – the situation does look bad, I suppose, on the surface and Bill away. But people are awfully cheerful here and America looks as though she intends to be a real help, doesn't she. I should think A Hitler has quite a headache in one way or another.*

*Isn't it fun, little Hump going to an O.C.T.U. Poor Pop, when we're all at home together, the house will be completely filled with brass buttons – its lucky they make them untarnishable these days!*

*My pay now, on paper, with allowances and provision amounts to some £18 - £19 per month, less income tax, living in quarters and allowances deducted. I get around £9 - £11 clear per month – it isn't bad at all – and I'm now absolutely self-supporting and a bit over for leaves and clothes. Bill seemed worried still about money, in the last letter but one, but I think we're alright – don't you? All the wobbly feeling of probationary times and things like that, seem to be slipping away. He's doing so frightfully well and I'm so terribly proud of him. I must stop now, time is short. I'm going to write to Mop the first possible chance. I've tried almost every day in the last week and have been stopped. The other night I was sent for at 10 o'clock at night cos someone was taken ill. But the time certainly passes quicker when one is busy.*

*Heaps of love to you and Mop – always, your loving Trudy.*

Some research has been put into this letter. In the first instance, “Brucklay” refers to Brucklay House on North Mossley Hill Road, Liverpool. This house was used to billet personnel from the WRENS during WW2. It is a logical step to assume that this must represent the quarters that the writer refers to in her letter. It begs the question as to where she might have been working. Recently, the city of Liverpool has opened up one of its secret locations from war time. This is known as The Western Approaches Museum and is located behind the City (Town) Hall in Rumford Street. Both this site and Brucklay House are within walking distance of each other – an important consideration in a city where public transport could be easily disrupted. The writer refers to feeling safe because of the seven floors above her and the fact that she had no business being above ground. The pictures of this building show just that – seven floors above ground level and some seventy feet depth of underground rooms and corridors on a variety of levels. It seems that this was where she worked – in The Citadel – as it was known, which controlled North Atlantic convoys, escorts, submarine hunting aircraft and which helped wage war on the German Wolf Packs (U boats that hunted together to attack convoys). There remains one problem and that is the date. The only Monday May 6<sup>th</sup> in the 1940s was in 1940 itself. Unfortunately, the first bombs did not drop on Liverpool until August 17<sup>th</sup> 1940. However, May 1941 was marked by seven days of

intensive bombing – The Liverpool Blitz – between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> of May. Given the references to high explosives (HE), incendiaries, bombed and gutted buildings, it would not be too much of a leap of logic to think the writer had perhaps mistaken the date at the start of her letter and simply been a day out in her recognition of the day date.

**Dennis Trebble**

## **PUBLICITY REPORT**

Publicity this year has followed the same format as 2018 except that we had two lots of leaflets printed, the first covering the 9 open days of 2019, the second, (midway through the season) covering the remaining Open Days plus the first 3 of 2020. This was an effort to save having to throw away out of date leaflets at the end of the season. It would have been a good idea if it were not for the unexpected change of the date of the first May Bank Holiday from Monday 4<sup>th</sup> May to Friday 8<sup>th</sup> May 2020! So we will be having our first ***Friday*** Bank Holiday Open Day in 2020.

I'm still looking forward to someone coming forward to do some more Internet promotion of the museum and its open days as I think that's the way forward and anything that reduces the burden of putting out and collecting in excess of twenty road signs, nine times a year, is to be welcomed !

I was recently contacted by a company that does a kind of Google street map of your premises, so you can look on the website and do a walk round the museum and go into all the rooms. Unfortunately, the cost of such a system is way outside what we could justify at the moment but it would be worth bearing in mind for the future.

**Pete Farrar**

## **PROGRAMME REPORT**

The programme for next year is complete except that we are still awaiting confirmation from Tring Auctions of the antiques evening and the visit to The Paper Mill has been arranged for Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> August starting at 10.30 am.

Don't forget that the first 4 meetings of the year (Jan. - April) will be in the afternoons with the talk starting at 2.30PM, everything else will remain unchanged.

The first talk of the year will be Graham Laurie talking about Roald Dahl's war, covering his life in the RAF and his subsequent rise to literary fame. He started out working for an oil company and went on to be a fighter pilot and managed to crash in the Libyan desert. Come and learn all about the fascinating life of a very talented man.

**FRONT COVER** – The drive in winter, by Dennis Trebble

**BACK COVER** – The barn with weathercock in winter, by Dennis Trebble

## **2020 Museum Calendar**

Thursday **Jan. 23<sup>rd</sup>** PIMS talk (afternoon)

Thursday **Feb. 27<sup>th</sup>** PIMS talk (afternoon)

Thursday **March 26<sup>th</sup>** PIMS talk (afternoon)

Sunday **April 5<sup>th</sup>** Classic Car Meeting (provisional booking) ticket only Monday **April 13<sup>th</sup>** Open Day (Easter Monday Bank Holiday)

Thursday **April 23<sup>rd</sup>** PIMS talk (afternoon)

Friday **May 8<sup>th</sup>** Open Day (Early May Bank Holiday - VE Day, changed from Mon.)

Monday **May 25<sup>th</sup>** Open Day (Spring Bank Holiday)

Thursday **May 28<sup>th</sup>** PIMS Talk

Sunday **June 14<sup>th</sup>** Open Day

Thursday **June 25<sup>th</sup>** PIMS talk

Sunday **July 12<sup>th</sup>** Open Day

Thursday **July 23<sup>rd</sup>** PIMS Talk

Sunday **August 9<sup>th</sup>** Open Day

Thursday **August 27<sup>th</sup>** PIMS talk

Monday **August 31<sup>st</sup>** Open Day (August Bank Holiday)

Sunday **Sept. 13<sup>th</sup>** Open Day

Thursday **Sept. 24<sup>th</sup>** PIMS talk

Sunday **Oct. 11<sup>th</sup>** Open Day

Thursday **Oct. 22<sup>nd</sup>** PIMS talk

Thursday **Nov. 26<sup>th</sup>** PIMS talk

Thursday **Dec. 17<sup>th</sup>** PIMS talk

### **Opening times from**

11.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m.

### **Admission charges.**

Adults £8, Children £3, under 5 free. Concessions over 65, £7.

### **Committee Officers:-**

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#### **Deputy Chairman**

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