

# Pitstone and Ivinghoe Museum Society Newsletter



**Summer 2020**

## **EDITOR'S NOTE**

I would, first of all, like to thank you for your understanding concerning the non-appearance of the Newsletter in the Spring. I need not go into the evident reasons why this was so, but it prompted a few thoughts. For those of us born after the Second World War, this Covid-19 pandemic has had the most influential effect upon the global infrastructure within our lifetimes. As a museum, we are interested in the past and what it tells us of those times. Surely, then, we should try to put together some cogent account of this time in history for the benefit of future generations. In a hundred years' time, for example, what will they say about today's responses? With that in mind, I felt it appropriate to ask you, our membership, to contribute to an archive. It would be helpful if you would write to me, either at the museum, or on line, with your experiences. For example, people associated with the NHS, those who have survived the virus, parents home-schooling children and those who have had to deal with funerals, weddings or births during this time. Have there been people stuck in foreign countries, or on ships? Perhaps some of us have been involved with volunteering locally with food deliveries, telephone calls or fund raising. How has the clap for the NHS worked in your area or street? Have you any photographs of these activities and what about artefacts? If, for example, you have made face masks could we have one donated to our collection?

You see, the list of what we could put together is significant, although it depends upon your willingness to be involved. This is something that could reflect well on the society, so I implore you not to simply ignore the request, but to add to what could become a valuable social and historical document.

Dennis Trebble

## **MANAGER'S REPORT**

Here we are, halfway through the year and we are still dominated by this terrible Covid-19 crisis. Ronnie and I are fairly well insulated from the worst aspects of the effects of the lockdown, so we probably have no idea what some of you have to endure to stay away from the virus. We do hope you are all coping OK, we are always here if you need to chat about anything. Unfortunately PIMS has a large proportion of people in the at risk category due to age or medical conditions.

The museum is being looked after by a small group of volunteers pulling, cutting, mowing, and strimming all the grass, weeds, nettles etc that threaten to overwhelm everything on the site. We manage to keep our distance and being outside means we should be safe from spreading the dreaded lurgy. Other people have been keeping an eye on the exhibit rooms, keeping down the dust and cobwebs and at the moment the meeting room is getting a spring clean.

I somehow managed to break the mower on the back of the tractor but a new gearbox was located in Northern Ireland and delivered in only two days, so the mower was back in action before the grass had a chance to grow too much. As a penance, I've at last managed to get round to replacing the rotten window in the print room, something else to be painted!

I think it's still too early to make decisions about opening this year but I think that with all things considered it's likely that we will not be opening to the public for open days. With regards to the long term future, again, it's a bit early to be making major changes before we know what society will be like for large gatherings of people and we still don't know if and when a workable vaccine will be available.

I think that a revamp of the reception and toilet area would be in order and we can have some serious thoughts about making a window in the side wall so that visitors enter down the road between the orchard and the reception/toilet building and are kept apart from the people using the toilets and the reception staff can be more isolated from the public.

There are so many other places, on site, whose operation is dependent on what happens nationwide; catering, the shop, lacemaking, pottery, craft stalls, the Colin Cook Collection, tractor rides and so forth. All of these and probably some others will need careful thought as to how they may function safely and effectively.

I do wonder whether we could have one day and call it Picnic In The Park - probably on Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> September. You would need to bring your own food - catering would be just cans and hot drinks. The museum would only open where safe to do so. There would probably be no shop, pottery or Cook Collection. Let me know what you think, it's only an embryo idea at present.

One last bit of *good news*, we think we have a £10,000 grant from Bucks CC as part of the government's Covid compensation scheme, so that should help cover the financial cracks.

Best wishes to you all - keep washing your hands and keep your distance –

Pete & Ronnie

## **MEMORIES OF WARTIME EAST END OF LONDON**

I was born in 1939 and brought up in East Ham which was then close to the London docks so suffered considerable war damage in the early part of the Second World War. When I go to PIMS Antiques evenings I am always surprised by the number of family heirlooms that people bring. I have none as our home and its contents were destroyed by a V2 rocket in early 1945.

The V2 landed one January morning of 1945, there was no warning and that's why it was called the silent killer. I was standing in our hall when our front door was blown in flattening me but protecting me from the rubble falling from above. I was dug out and taken to hospital with non-life-threatening injuries, but I do still have the scars. I was in hospital about 6 months but that was largely due to getting measles and having to go to isolation hospital. There was no NHS in those days but I presume the

government paid as it was wartime. My mother who was in our kitchen at the back of the house only had a minor cut on her wrist. My father was at work in the docks where he was a carpenter, I presume he was informed by the police and rushed home on his bicycle. Unfortunately, there was some loss of life and I do have some unpleasant memories. As our house was uninhabitable we were allocated a requisitioned house about half a mile away.



Navarre Road 1945

Prior to the V2 I have many memories of V1 rockets (known as doodlebugs), but you knew you were safe if the engine stopped over you because they then glided to crash some miles away. We had many near misses of explosive and incendiary bombs. It was not unusual to have to walk around large holes in the ground sometimes with the bomb still in it, I presume the fuse had been removed. My father was an Air Raid Warden and had stories of running past a burning incendiary bomb, dumping a sandbag on top of it as he ran. He ran as some were booby trapped. In the early years we used the Anderson air raid shelter my father had built in the garden but as it was cold and dank we eventually slept together under our reinforced dining table and got away with it until the V2.

After the war ended my father, who had a background in building, acted as the project manager for the owners of the ten immediate properties which had suffered damage. He negotiated with a local architect, builder and the

War Damage Commission to have the houses rebuilt. So, we now had an inside bathroom, toilet and running hot water, a real luxury instead of the tin bath in the kitchen and the outside loo. Although we lost all our possessions we were lucky to live through the experience which some of our neighbours did not.

For those interested you can look up on Google where the V2s fell, our one is listed but with no details, don't know why. You can see photo of the damaged properties in Navarre Road (1945) and the rescuers working to look for survivors.

John Youngs

### THE FARM TRAILER



Over the winter closed season, the trailer, used to tow behind the tractor to provide visitor rides, has been refurbished. This has been done for two reasons – to improve safety and to make a more attractive environment for the occupants.

Both tractor and trailer used for this purpose were brought to the museum by Reg Jellis where his family have allowed them to continue to be used as a tribute to a man who had the good of the museum project at heart.

One of our volunteers, Alan Carter, worked at the farm as a young man in the 1960s and recalled that the trailer had an entirely different purpose then. Adjacent to the current museum site, where the new houses on the

Marsworth Road are located, used to be the site of Jellis' yard, which was part of the abattoir site. The trailer was the offal trailer and was used to transport "liver and lights" for collection. This may account for the relatively good condition of the wood – having absorbed a fair amount of preservative (!) in the earlier years. A conservative estimate is that the trailer is around sixty five years old.

Dennis Trebble

## **RING A RING O' ROSES**

With our recent horrendous experiences relating to the pandemic of the coronavirus, I thought it might be interesting to see what has happened in the past and how society has coped. There have always been outbreaks of disease which have ravaged through communities, killing more people than would be normal and these would have confused and alarmed societies long before the idea of germs, viruses etc. were even thought of, let alone understood, so people had no idea what to do to avoid being affected.

Many outbreaks were confined to fairly small areas of territory because people did not have the ability to travel long distances quickly but as they started to trade more, with other countries far and wide, their tendency to spread disease also increased, The Black Death started around 1347/8 and managed to wipe out some 200 million people in only 4 years. From then on, there was an outbreak about every 20 years for about 300 years until 1665 when the Plague of London took a hold in the crowded confines of the city, killing 100,000 people in only 7 months. The disease was confined largely to the city itself because of the crowded conditions and by this time people had realised that there was something significant about the proximity of dwelling places and the transmission of the disease and so the concept of isolating people from entering other towns and cities helped reduce national spread.

An exception to this occurred in Eyam a tiny lead mining village in Derbyshire, when a local taylor bought a bale of cloth from London and, discovering that it was damp, hung it up in front of the fire to dry. Unfortunately it was infested with plague carrying fleas that woke up and went on to spread the disease around the village. As it took a hold, the young local rector managed to persuade the villagers to isolate themselves

from the surrounding towns and villages and in doing so prevented a more serious outbreak. After about 14 months in quarantine some 260 villagers were dead, out of a population of less than 800. Even back then, it was noticed that many of the people who died had had underlying health problems and many of the people who did not catch the disease at all, seemed to have some natural immunity. Elizabeth Hancock buried her husband and 6 children in a period of 8 days and yet never caught the disease and also the village grave digger seemed to be immune and survived for many years after the event.

A century or so later physician Edward Jenner was the first to experiment with the idea of a vaccine to prevent infection of the then deadly smallpox, as he had noticed that those who had contracted a milder form of the disease, known as cowpox, did not go on to develop the full blown smallpox. Luckily for us, we are now at the point where we can produce vaccines from the basic DNA of the virus itself and scientists are working round the clock to produce something that will save us all from the scourge of this worldwide pandemic and the enormous upheaval to our lives and economies across the world, in an ever more crowded environment.

Ring a ring o' roses is a children's nursery rhyme, with words bearing direct links to the plague, the roses being the red blotches on the skin of a victim, the pocket full of posies referring to the bunches of flowers they carried in their pockets in an attempt to avoid infection and atishoo, atishoo all fall down needs no explanation !

Keep well, carry on washing your hands and keep your distance.

Pete Farrar

## **EJECTION (never 'ejector') SEATS**

Staring with admiration into Norman's amazing Lancaster cockpit I was suddenly struck by the sheer horror of flying in one over an enemy hell bent on your destruction.

In WWII an aircrew's only hope of surviving a plane crash would be to 'bail out', in other words – jump for it - and hope you were high enough for your parachute to save you. Not easy if, possibly injured, you had to force your way out of an escape hatch, cope with the g-forces, and pray not to get hit by your tail plane. WWII crew flew strapped into their parachutes, all

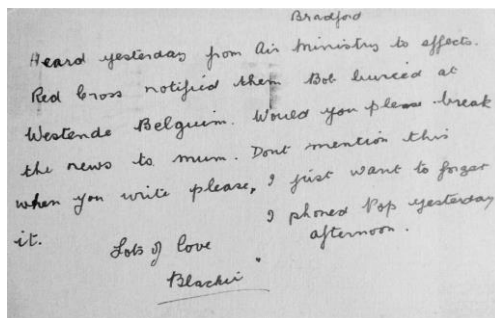


except for tail gunners who didn't have room in their turret to wear one and had to take it from its hook in the fuselage and strap it on - once they had rotated the turret sufficiently to allow them to crawl back into the plane through a hatch. If you ditched in the sea hopefully you had the inflatable dinghy, and could get into it and assemble and fly your yellow box kite (see one on the wall of our Science Room) to raise the aerial for your emergency radio.

*'From my mother's sleep I fell into the State  
And hunched in it's belly 'til my wet fur froze.  
Six miles from Earth, loosed from its dream of life,  
I woke to black flak and the nightmare fighters.  
When I died they washed me out of the turret with a hose.*

### The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner **Randall Jarrell**

"Piloting his Hurricane, Bob was shot down over the Channel in June 1940. A few days later his cousin wrote "Bob shot down. B (his wife) had a 'gram from the Air Ministry but one of his pals had phoned through first. They saw him go and are convinced he's OK and would make a perfect landing. He wirelessly on his way down. B doesn't seem very worried as all the boys say they are sure he's OK". The date on the headstone on his grave in Belgium is June 1940, but it wasn't until April 1942 that his wife had her worst fears confirmed and sent this poignant postcard to his Aunt.



Bradford  
Heard yesterday from Air Ministry to effects.  
Red Cross notified them Bob buried at  
Westende Belgium. Would you please break  
the news to mum. Don't mention this  
when you write please, I just want to forget  
it. I phoned Pop yesterday  
afternoon.  
Lots of love  
Blackie

In September 1942 (Henry) Valentine Baker crashed at Wing Aerodrome when the Napier engine of the MB3 fighter plane he was test flying failed. Perhaps dead, certainly unconscious, his body and the plane burned in clear sight of his friend and business partner James Martin, who had designed the

MB3 which they were demonstrating to the RAF in the hope that it would rival the Spitfire and Hurricane.

James Martin, a brilliant engineer, had established Martin's Aircraft Works in 1929. Captain Valentine Baker, a WWI fighter pilot, had taught both James Martin and Amy Johnson to fly. With an obsession for aircraft in common, the three became good friends.

In 1934 the two men had decided to combine their engineering and flying skills and, with finance from another friend, Francis Francis (yes – Francis Francis!) founded Martin-Baker Aircraft Company Ltd. Their prototype MB1 was a civilian aircraft, but with war looming the Company turned to developing the MB2, a single seater, eight-gun fighter. This plane failed to find approval with the Air Ministry and Martin turned his mind to the next version – the MB3.

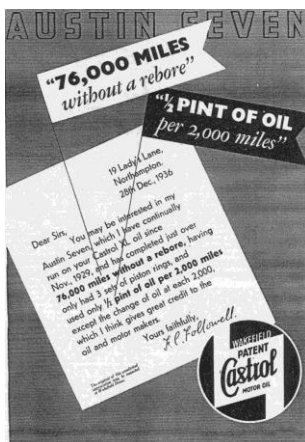
Deeply affected by the death of his best friend, Martin began to focus on pilot safety. Aircraft were becoming faster, making emergency escape virtually impossible. Germany (Heinkel) and Sweden (Saab) were developing ejection seats, and with the jet-engined Gloster Meteor due to be introduced to the RAF, the Ministry of Aircraft Production began holding meetings in 1944 to consider emergency escape for pilots. James Martin turned his brain to solving the innumerable difficulties besetting the various proposed methods of ejection. Catapult principle or compressed air; pilot out with or without his seat; how much g-force can a man stand? By 1945 Martin was demonstrating an ejection seat powered by explosive cartridge to the RAF and the first non-test ejection was in 1949, saving the life of the pilot of an Armstrong Whitworth AW52.

Ejection now is completely automatic. Pull the ejection handle and the canopy will be blown off. Arms and legs held tightly to your side to prevent injury from wind blast and, your face protected, you will be floating down on a fully deployed parachute – all in the space of three seconds! Should you eject at over 10,000 feet (there has been a successful Martin-Baker emergency ejection from 57,000 feet), the parachute will not open until you reach an altitude where it is easier to breathe. The pilot leaves his crippled plane with his seat, and comes down without it – except for the base, which comes down with him and contains a raft which automatically inflates in water and a survival kit.

Today the chance of survival is seriously good; over 7,600 crew have been saved by their Martin-Baker ejection seats and become automatic members of the Ejection Tie Club. Indeed, in 2008 a French Airforce pilot made his second emergency ejection from a Mirage 2000.

Sandra Oxley

## MORE AUSTIN SEVEN FUN!



In the New Year newsletter, it was reported that we had taken custody of Fred Foskett's 1931 Austin Seven car. We thought it appropriate to provide a little more automotive detail here. The following is taken from an article first published in *Cars Illustrated* in 1958 and re-published by Unique Motor Books. It was entitled *Plucky Seven*, written by Merwyn Dembling.

The opening salvo suggests that there are two types of British motorists – “Austin Seven enthusiasts and people who can afford a car.” In bare figures, the car had a wheelbase of 81 inches, a 745.5 cc side-valve four cylinder engine, developed 17 bhp and cost £125. This seemingly underpowered car (in standard form it could reach around 55mph) could easily be tuned and by 1934 it took a flying start kilometre record for its class at 122.74 mph. Approximately half a million were made between 1922 and 1938. The car regularly returned 50 mpg at 35 -40 mph.

There are some reservations concerning claims relating to the transport of “four adults in comfort and style”, although the writer says it can be thought of as reliable transport from A to B.



Fred Foskett on the Bantam D1, currently being sympathetically restored at the museum

*“Provided the road between A and B is fairly level; provided the weight of four people does not go above fifty stones and provided the two who are sentenced to the back seat have retractable knees and don’t measure over four feet from head to heels in the first place.....An uphill slope makes the speed of the Seven so moderate as to verge on the depressing.....genuine Austin Seven brakes are such that it is even money the car shoots right past B, and after some frantic struggling on the part of the driver, only squeaks to a stop somewhere around W.*

*The failings, peculiarities and perversities; its gift for doing all the right things all the wrong ways add up to what people who are comfortably rolling along in something else describe indulgently as “character”, and people in Austin Sevens call by other names – few of them printable”.*

Mechanical noises emitted from the machine included “the wailing of the starter, the crankshaft jingle, the clank of the fan pulley and the main rear bearing rumble”. On top of these foibles is the “*thoroughly mediocre*

*steering layout.... In which ....oil manages to leave the steering box, drip UP the steering column and land on the driver's trousers. Nobody has worked out anything to do about this – except wear oil-coloured trousers”.* The clutch has a travel between engagement and dis-engagement of only one eighth of an inch, making a smooth start next to impossible. The lubricating oil circulates the engine in a “spit and hope” fashion and the brakes are marginal for the job they have to do.

For all that, the Seven remained an object of affection. Why? It was cheap to build, buy and own. It was relatively straightforward to keep in running order, it had pre-WW2 styling and charm and, rather like the Mini which resurrected the Seven name when it was launched, it remained an almost classless vehicle.

Dennis Trebble

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We were saddened to hear of the death of Hazel Travis on 26<sup>th</sup> May and our thoughts are with Geoff at this difficult time. The two ladies who worked with her in Lace Making have this to say:

### **Hazel Travis**

Hazel demonstrated lace making at Pitstone Green Museum for over 30 years. She was later joined by Mary and then by Mel. She made us both feel very welcome and happy friendships formed. She often talked about the early days when the lace makers’ stand was in a caravan. She was delighted when space was then found in the shop.

In addition to being a highly talented lace maker, Hazel also tatted and made beautiful beaded necklaces which she proudly wore and were much admired. She had an extensive knowledge about the history of lace and frequently used this to answer questions from visitors.

Hazel was especially patient with young children when they were reticent about having a go at lacemaking on a practice pillow. Her favourite question was to ask if they could count to four. When the answer was “yes”, she would tell them that they would be able to make lace. She was usually successful in persuading children to “have a go”.

Hazel was a lovely, kind and elegant lady with a joyful personality. She will be sorely missed by us and everyone who knew her.  
Rest in Peace, Hazel.  
Mary Chapman & Mel Davis

## **Jean Morris**

Jean Morris sadly passed away on the 14<sup>th</sup> June. Jean and husband Mike served the Museum for many years, joining the Society in the early 1990's. They were both involved in many other local organisations including the Ivinghoe Hand Bell Ringers, the local Beacon Art Group and working at Pitstone Church. I worked with them both during my term as Manager and they spent many hours reorganising many of the rooms and displays at the museum as we see them today. They both set out the displays in the Microcosm 1 room with Mike painting the murals on the back walls of the cabinets. They cleaned and organised all the adjacent rooms down to the Village Life room. Originally Microcosm 2 was then used as the dairy, which in a reorganisation, was first moved to the Sheep Yard and then finally to the Nissen Hut. Both Jean and Mike carried out all this work including setting up the Old Curiosity Shop in the Nissen Hut. Sadly Mike died and Jean continued both visiting the museum on most open days and often helping in the shop and latterly in the Colin Cook Collection. Much of the Museum as you see it today is the result of countless hours they both spent working at the Museum and it will seem strange not seeing Jean's smiling face and meeting her on future open days.  
Norman Groom.

## **FRONT COVER**

Farm Kitchen Dresser in Victorian Kitchen display by Glen Price, Woodside U3A

## **BACK COVER**

Returning to Nature by Ken Cotton of Woodside U3A

## **2020 Museum Calendar**

The museum is closed to visitors until further notice.

## **Committee Officers:-**

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### **Deputy Chairman**

Position vacant

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