

Pitstone and Ivinghoe Museum Society Newsletter



Spring 2021

EDITOR'S NOTE

As members of a museum society, it is not too far a stretch of logic to assume that we are all interested in social history. Amongst our membership there must be those with photograph albums, shoe-boxes and other collections of pictures that reflect how society, places and the way we live our lives (fashion, transport, education, work etc) have changed over a period of time. Now wouldn't it be nice to be able to share those with others and also to monitor how others have changed? I am not much given to recommending web sites, but have, for the past few months, been increasingly attracted by a site that does what I have just described. It is called **Memory Lane** and can be accessed at memorylane.co.uk, where there is a simple set of guidelines about loading your own pictures to the site. It is searched by simply putting in a location you might be interested in. I wondered if we could get Pitstone and Ivinghoe "on the map" as there is very little representing them at present. You also get the opportunity to say something about the picture you have included. There seems to be no limit on the number of pictures that might be included. This site is growing rapidly and I find it fascinating. I assure you that I have no connection with it and it does not ask for money or other personal details. Let's see what we can achieve. Any feedback would be gratefully received.

On the same theme, it may not have escaped you that a new series called **Secrets of the Transport Museum** is aired on the Yesterday channel at 8.00pm on a Tuesday evening. This looks at the work of the Brooklands Museum and has reflections of the sort of activities we get involved with. If you have missed it, I gather that it can be accessed on "Catch Up". Well worth a viewing.

Dennis Trebble

MANAGER'S MUSINGS

As the days grow longer and more of us have had all our jabs, the statistics for Covid-19 are looking better and the reality of opening to the public again, begins to concentrate our minds. We have kept up with our usual maintenance tasks and the site is looking OK for the time of year but if we are to re-open we will need a concentrated effort to bring all our exhibits up to scratch. We will all need to concentrate on cleaning, tidying and generally preparing for visitors.

We have a few items of expenditure coming up but with our recent subsidies from the losses due to Covid closure, we should be able to afford them. There is a very tall, dead ash tree on the boundary behind the New Grain Barn which will not stay upright for very much longer and its fall would severely damage either the fence or the barn itself. The National Trust agree and the tree will be taken out by the time you read this report and we have agreed to a survey of all the boundary trees every three years.

We had a bit of a setback in the repairs needed to the old Austin 7 as the chap who said he could do it has moved away from the area but we have found a new contact who could be very good in the long term. This guy runs a company called Philip D'Archambaud Vintage Construction. They have a fantastic workshop at the old Cheddington airfield and do reconstruction and renovation of a huge variety of classic old cars and motorcycles. He has been to the museum and I feel we could be of mutual assistance. He could take the Austin body to his workshop and carry out the welding repairs required. He is local, and seems very helpful, friendly and well established and is the proud owner of Reg Jellis's old truck.

We now have the material for the new stairs for the Cook Collection so *that* project is well under way and I aim to have the new reception hut finished by our first open day.

With regards to open days as we emerge from lockdown, I think that we must leave it up to each individual volunteer to decide on the risks involved in their particular aspect of the museum. Some exhibits such as pottery, lacemaking, tractor rides, museum shop and many more, require closer distancing than has been the normal for the last 18 months and we have to let volunteers decide how they want to deal with their own situation. Of

course, whatever they decide must be in keeping with Government regulations as they develop. I am very impressed with the look of the new version of the website and we must all concentrate on pointing to the website as the primary source of information with regards to dates, times, entry fees etc. and I will endeavour to make sure that it is always up to date.

The next couple of months could be quite difficult and there will be much to do and many unusual decisions to be made but with the wonderful efforts of everyone and a bit of luck with the weather and the Covid situation, we should be able to get back to entertaining the public in the way we did for many years before we were blighted with this terrible virus.

Pete Farrar (Museum manager)

FINANCIAL UPDATE

As our major income comes from our 10 Open days per year from April to October, the total closure of museums due to Covid-19 meant our only income last year was £65 from one site visit during the brief period rules were relaxed. Fortunately, we did meet the criteria for Government grants and were able to claim £19,765 via Bucks CC and many of our members and volunteers generously donated. General overhead running costs still needed to be paid such as rent, rates, insurance and utilities. Our insurers gave us a rebate and utilities were kept as low as we could and still maintain the site. The closure gave us the opportunity to do some essential long term maintenance such as replacing the roof over the historic silos, at a cost over £20k. We expect we will make a loss for the year ending 31st March of just over £8k.

Looking to the future, Covid will still have a serious effect on our current year as we don't expect to reopen before late June and don't know what rules may apply then. We have received another Government Covid grant of £8k which will ease the loss of the Easter and Whitsun open days. Fortunately, we do have a strong balance sheet for such a small organisation and confidently expect that we will survive this serious epidemic.

John Youngs, Treasurer

BREWING AT IVINGHOE

I grew up in a small village in South Wales that today has almost been subsumed by a corridor of growth along the M4. The next village along, two miles away in a westerly direction, contained a fairly large brewery that serviced the working men's clubs of the area. When the wind was in the right direction, the smell was distinctive, to say the least. This is something that residents of both Ivinghoe and Pitstone would have recognised whilst the Ivinghoe brewery was still an active concern. Prompted by this thought I decided to dig a little deeper into the history of the place.

To start with, here are some basic facts that have been gleaned from a very informative website – **Brewery History Society Wiki**. I have taken the liberty of quoting directly in the following extract.

*“Roberts and Wilson's publicity stated that the business was established in 1720. By the 1770s it appears to have been operated by John Emmerton and A **Brewers Compendium – A Directory Of Buckinghamshire Brewers (ABC)** by Mike Brown says that it then came under the control of the Meacher family who also had brewing and malting interests in Newport Pagnell.*

By the end of the century, George Meacher was running the business and in early directories the business is described as George Meacher and Co. Subsequently it became Meacher and Rackstrowe, the Meacher in question being George's son Charles Meacher. He died in 1871 and the business was subsequently (1872-1873) sold to William Wilson (see also Dagnall) and Henry Roberts. At this time it included 30 pubs and beerhouses, many of which were in Bedfordshire and north west Herts.

The business expanded, more licensed premises were acquired and improvements made to the Brewhouse. Malting capacity on site was limited and leases were taken out on Maltings at Tring and Dagnall. The Malthouse at New Mill was taken over from Locke & Smith Ltd of Berkhamsted in about 1912.

In 1927 the business was taken over by Benskins Ltd of Watford, with 56 licensed premises, and brewing ceased in October of that year. The

brewery was subsequently demolished (circa 1930) but the adjacent Brewery House survives, having been a youth hostel until 2006.”

This begs the question of why the brewery was established in the first instance. The year 1720 places the business squarely Pre-Industrial Revolution and at a time when man power would have been a significant draw for a manufacturer. The men of the area, used to agricultural labour, would not have found the work too physically demanding. Another factor would have been the presence of a ready market, beer still being the drink of choice and relatively cheap. Further, clean water was needed for the brewing process and that which had been filtered by the chalk hills was ideal. Lastly, and by no means insignificantly, was the location of Ivinghoe along the routeway between Leighton Buzzard and Aylesbury with Tring close by. The building of the canal and then the railway both emphasised the accessibility of the area.



Brewery c 1927

We take the finished product largely for granted, but what is entailed in the brewing process? At the very start, the barley grain is **malted** – that is, it soaked in a vat of water for around 40 hours, then spread on a floor to germinate and, after 5 days, put in a kiln to undergo high temperature drying. The end product is termed malt and is **mashed** in a tank of hot water where the starches are converted to sugars. The liquid, known as **wort** is then placed in a copper where it is boiled with hops which add flavour and aroma to the finished product. From here, the product is cooled

to a temperature when yeast can be added. This takes place in a **fermentation** tank where the sugars turn to alcohol and carbon dioxide. The end product then needs to be **conditioned** by letting it stand in barrels for any length of time from a week to several months. This increases the smoothness of the brew and allows unwanted favours to dissipate. For distribution, a bottling or canning plant is then used to support the larger cask sales.

Until 1927 the townscape of Ivinghoe was dominated by the buildings of Roberts & Wilsons brewery. The brewery is said to have employed 60 men and supplied 200 public houses in the area. Today the manager's house survives built around 1800, and listed Grade II.



Cuff links of The Ancient Order of Frothblowers

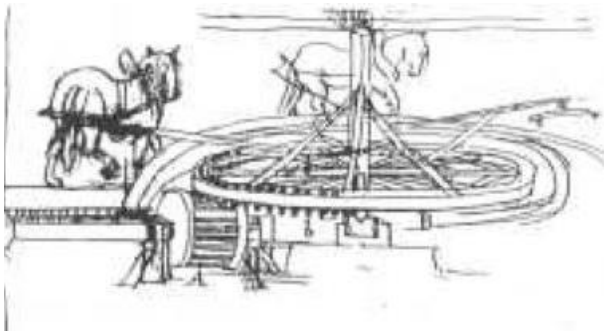
Considering the proximity of the museum to Ivinghoe, we have relatively few artefacts that relate to the brewing industry. Two malt shovels, two bricks from a drying kiln, a malt ventilator tile, some bottles with Roberts and Wilson written on them, a few barrel tap removers and taps, a brewer's slide rule, a local invoice and a Roberts and Wilson poster. One of the stranger acquisitions is a pair of cufflinks of The Ancient Order of Frothblowers! We also have some photographs, a small picture album and a cup – the last two from a tour to India by one of the brewer's sons in the very early 20th Century. As I said, this amounts to very little in terms of the local impact, but provides a glimpse of the past.

BITS AND PIECES

When I joined the museum in 2010 I was lucky enough to be given a copy of a long out of print book entitled *In Pitstone Green There Is A Farm*. This was a publication, in 1979, of the then Pitstone Local History Society and was compiled by the late Jean Davis and Mary Farnell. To be honest, most of what I know of the farm and locale was gleaned from this book and it has provided me with a foundation from which to build my own understanding of our heritage. Here we now are, forty three years later, and it seems to me that the time is ripe to revisit some of the topics in the book. I shall not quote it verbatim, but pick, mix and précis some interesting snippets.

Wages and Costs: In February 1840 the weekly wage bill of the farm was £5 8s. 11d, for nine men and four boys. The men were paid 10s. per week and the boys 4s. During harvest, the rate increased and free beer was supplied to the workforce. Income streams to the farm included selling everyday produce – milk for one halfpenny per pint, butter for 1s. 1d. per pound and a chicken or duck for 1s. 6d. The weekly market at Leighton Buzzard was used to sell other kinds of farm produce including vegetables, hay and straw and livestock. In the year 1839/40 the farm profits were £275.

Horses: Working animals were used in two ways – either for pulling implements or for driving machines via a horse gear. This latter was a circular gear to which, via reduction cogs, machines like threshers, winnowers and hay elevators could be linked and driven (we have one on view next to the Carpenter's Shop). The machinery pulled by horses became more sophisticated over the nineteenth century and included seed drills, horse hoes (the Garrett Hoe actually had fourteen hoe heads in action at one time), mechanical reapers (we have the McCormick Reaper/Binder in the Grain Barn) and expandable hay rakes. Between 1857 and 1900 steam engines were hired for threshing and chaff cutting, after which one was bought by the farm for further use.



Worship: Although the established church of St Mary the Virgin existed in Pitstone, the Hawkins family (between 1820 and 1918) were non-conformists and worshipped at the Wesleyan Reform Church in Ivinghoe. Local government at the time was in the hands of the parish vestry, followed by parish councils in 1894. The Hawkins, as an influential farming family, played their role in spite of their non-conformism, with John Henry Hawkins both Chairman and Clerk of the Pitstone Parish Council around the turn of the twentieth century.

Childhood: Children were expected to pull their weight in a way that many would find alien now. Those from the village cottages were expected to feed the pig, gather the eggs, run messages, take refreshment to the men in the fields and help with any new-born in the household. Gathering nuts and blackberries, helping with the harvest and plaiting straw also were fitted in to the annual round. When games were played, they included rolling hoops, whip and top, marbles, skipping and fishing. On Sundays, no games were allowed, Sunday best was worn and Sunday school was attended. Clothing was largely made of hand-me-downs and altered to suit the new owner.

Support Trades: The local blacksmith was a man in great demand. Horses needed shoeing, cart wheels needed iron tyres, a miscellany of repairs needed carrying out and the trade was passed from generation to generation. The forge at the museum came from Stokenchurch when Mr. Barney left the business at the age of 96! A complementary trade was that of the wheelwright. As well as doing the obvious job the name suggests, he was often the village carpenter, undertaker (he made the coffins, after all) and cart maker. The shop opposite the museum forge illustrates the multiplicity of tasks the wheelwright undertook.



Of course, thatching was also very important for both roofing and proper hayrick construction to withstand the weather. Throughout most of the second part of the nineteenth century, the local thatcher also worked as a farm hand at Pitstone Green farm. Millers, hedge layers and lace makers also contributed to the many skills that, today, are almost dismissively referred to as rural crafts.

Finally: The following information seems to typify the character of the locality. Throughout the early years of the twentieth century – until at least the 1920s – the local carrier, John Groom by name, made the weekly journey to London utilising his cart drawn by two horses. Leaving at midday on a Thursday he would reach Edgware by the evening, spend the night there and then travel into London on Friday. Deliveries and collections duly done he would once again overnight at Edgware and be back at Pitstone on Saturday afternoon. For much of the journey, he walked beside his horses. During the fruit picking season he would often do this journey more than once in a week!

Dennis Trebble

MEMBERSHIP

A big thank you to those that paid their membership last year, or made a donation towards the museum's running costs. With the opening of the museum to the public, very soon, we can now start the membership renewal process for this year. Please send cheques and completed forms to the museum's address, together with a Stamped, Self-Addressed Envelope, if you would like to receive your membership card before getting it with the next newsletter. I may not be at the first open day to accept cash payments, but they can be left with reception for me to pick-up.

Bill Barnard (Membership Secretary)



Front page of museum website : www.pitstonemuseum.co.uk

Your Museum needs You !

As time passes, we all age at the same numerical rate but going from 30 to 45 years old involves quite a different transformation, than that from 70 to 85. Unfortunately most of us volunteers at Pitstone are in the latter bracket, which means everyday tasks we used to take for granted, become more problematic. In the next few years we will be needing to recruit more volunteers from a slightly younger age bracket, newly retired would be ideal, so that we can keep up the high standards that have been set over the last 40 years or so.

If you are newly retired or have some spare time to fill or know someone in that category, please think seriously about coming to join us. At the moment we work Tuesdays and/or Thursdays, it's very relaxed and enjoyable and you can tackle whatever jobs suit your skills and personality but if you would like to join us but can't make these days, I'm sure we could come to some arrangements which would work for everyone, there are jobs such as publicity which can be done at home. At the moment, in particular we are looking for a couple of people to take over the role of first aiders on open days. Volunteers would be given training but obviously someone with some kind of medical background would be even better.

BBC 3 Counties Radio described us as a very special sort of *care in the community* (!!) and many people derive an enormous amount of pleasure and satisfaction from joining in, so tell all your friends, drag them down to the farm and you will all wonder how you managed before you joined as a volunteer. Give me a ring on 07944 357715 and we can arrange to meet.

Pete Farrar (manager)



FIELD MARSHALL TRACTOR FOR SALE

Many of you will have seen the wonderful old green Field Marshall Tractor chugging around on open days, with it's very distinctive engine sound, being a huge single cylinder two stroke.

This machine belongs to one of our long serving volunteer members and is now up for sale for around £12,500

If you are interested but are worried about where to store it,
It could continue to live at the museum.

This particular machine is in very fine condition,
with many new parts.

If you feel that you may be interested in becoming its new owner
please contact the manager or any of our main volunteers
so that we can put you in touch with its present owner.

2021 Museum Calendar

The museum is closed to visitors until further notice.

However, we are hoping to have our first two open days on Sunday 27th June and Sunday 11 July 2021. Please check website for confirmation and how to book tickets.

FRONT COVER : 1949 Fordson tractor (*photo by Dennis Trebble*)

BACK COVER : Dairy cart (*photo by Andrew Bynoe, Woodside U3A*)

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