

Pitstone and Ivinghoe Museum Society Newsletter



Autumn 2021

EDITOR'S NOTE

It has often been suggested that historical record is very subjective or, to put it another way, “history is written by the winner”. We see this across the world. Japan has written out of its school text books the Manchuria campaign that intensified over the duration of WW2 and which, it is estimated, killed around six million Chinese. The UK, it is said, has largely ignored Black History and has covered up the atrocities suffered in the first concentration camps it established during both Boer Wars. The USA still denies the genocide carried out on indigenous American tribes during the push westward in the nineteenth century.

What does this have to do with us? Recently I attended a school reunion in South Wales and in the course of conversations that alluded to the same events, recollections were very different, dependent upon the person concerned. To try to pin point, therefore, the truth of even recent history is very difficult. If, though, we remove subjectivity of recollection, either deliberately or inadvertently, what are we left with? I think that this is where the museum sector comes into its own. We have on display inanimate objects that bear mute testimony to their use and/or origins. We are fortunate to have the provenance to most of these objects and it is this that gives us the confidence to talk about such things with our visitors.

Our half season of open days, this year, has been well attended and a lot of people have visited us for the first time. Having relinquished my responsibility for the model railway hut to a much more enthusiastic and knowledgeable colleague, I have spent time on reception engaging in “meet and greet” with families, in particular. So many refer, after their visit, to objects they remember from childhood, from visits to older relatives and from holiday activities. Little did we know that what we grew up with would one day become social history! So, what of today’s objects? How many will face the same recollection in the future, if, indeed, in our throw-away society they manage to exist at all?

Dennis Trebble

MANAGER'S MUSING

It only seems a short while since we were talking about the first Open Day of the season and now, by the time you read this, we will have had our last.

I think that we can be very pleased with our overall situation this year, given what everyone has had to go through. My sincere thanks and congratulations go to all of you who have contributed to the museum in any way, however small and seemingly insignificant.

We recently had a meeting to discuss the future of our organisation and my impression was that most aspects of life at the farm are considered to be OK and can continue without major changes. There are, of course, the usual observations that we need more and younger volunteers, particularly people who are prepared to put in a bit more time, by joining the committee and taking on specific roles. Many people are reluctant to commit to such things but we cannot run a registered charity such as ours without carrying out specific legal duties and without a fully functioning committee structure; we would have to close down!

One of the important things to come out of the meeting was that we should have a more comprehensive system for recording what jobs need doing, what their priorities should be and who should carry out the work. To this end I have started a file listing new jobs needed to be done, along with a list of tasks that *always* need to be done, such as cleaning, gardening, painting etc. There is a suggestions page at the front, so if you can think of anything that needs doing, you can write it down in the book. This is kept on the counter in Reception.

Another thing to be updated is the list of volunteers' responsibilities for individual rooms. The idea behind this, is that if you are allocated an area, you should go in there regularly, and particularly before each open day, to check that everything is OK and either sort out minor problems or let someone know so that we can get a team together to do the work.

As our open season draws to a close, let's all look forward to an enjoyable and productive closed season and if you know anybody who you think would fit in well as a volunteer and would enjoy the atmosphere, don't hesitate to work your magic on them and persuade them to give it a try.

Thanks for all your support and hard work.

Pete Farrar (Museum manager)

HOW? WHY?

One of the jobs of the editor is to try to twist arms in order to get a spread of articles in the newsletter. This is not always successful, but Ronnie Farrar, who runs the shop and is Pete's wife (behind every great man.....) came up with the suggestion that we might do a series of snippets about different volunteers and how they came to be a part of PIMS. She has started the ball rolling with her own experience and I have added mine. Look out, I shall be coming your way soon with paper and pen!

How did you get to become a volunteer?

I have been asked this on many occasions and I am sure others have too.

So.....When we were landed one day with babysitting our 3½ year old grandson we looked for somewhere to go, hence a visit to the museum, for the first time I may add. Frank was fascinated by everything particularly Roy's 40s room and went back many times to just stand and listen to the music. We realised in talking to the volunteers at the time that there was quite a lot we could do to help. As we already had a large garden we were

well equipped to cope with chopping, chain-sawing, hacking etc. Pete also thought he could help with the machinery and maintenance.

And so it began and we have never looked back.

Frank meanwhile has been many times, with his parents, on the odd occasion has even helped me at private functions and this year in particular when we were short of volunteers. He is now 12 and this is the time to interest youngsters in the past by encouraging their curiosity in equipment and museum running.

Ronnie

A long time ago – or so it seems now – I used to shoot at the Watford Rifle Club indoor range. I often found myself alongside a very capable shooter who I got to know over a period of time. This was Barbara from Catering and knowing that I was due to retire shortly she asked me what I intended to do. I really had no idea and was not in a rush to find out. However, she mentioned that her husband Rob worked at the museum and that if nothing else, it was surely worth a visit. Having moved from Watford to Aston Clinton, I remembered the location and my wife and I spent an enjoyable Sunday open day mooching around the site. The net result was to offer my services for whatever might be needed.

Not being a particularly gifted artisan (I had been a teacher), the first job I was given was to paint the gloss exterior woodwork of the Big Barn. Believe me when I tell you that red paint gets everywhere! However, as is the way with square pegs and round holes, eventually I began helping with office matters and computer records. I had no ambition to do much more than this when our previous secretary became very ill. I temporarily took over what duties I could and eventually grew into the role, which is where I find myself now.

Dennis

GROWING UP IN THE 1950s – Part II

Having covered my education and training experiences in the previous newsletter, I would now like to tell you about the social and recreational aspects of growing up in the 1950s.

The village football team, Haddenham United, was a huge part of the social scene in the 1950s and, for some years, I had hoped to be part of it. However, since I was away during the week and unable to train with the rest of the team, I rarely managed to get selected. Haddenham United played in the Aylesbury and District league, against such adversaries as Wendover, Aston Clinton, Wing, Bierton, Quainton and Waddesdon. On one occasion, when a few of the regulars were suffering injuries, generally work related rather than football, I was selected to play on the right wing, at home, against Bierton Rovers. One of Bierton's defenders was quite notorious at the time and his name was Bob Mabbutt. I was 19 years old and big Bob was well into his forties and approaching the end of a long and successful footballing career. Needless to say, I had a hard time in that particular match and I definitely grew up a bit more. My chances of reselection were just about finished. It was many years later that I learned that Bob was the grandfather of the legendary Gary Mabbutt MBE, who played more than 600 times for Tottenham Hotspur and was capped 16 times for England.

Cycling was also a popular activity for us in the fifties and we thought nothing of tackling a 60 or 70 mile round trip from Haddenham to various places on the Thames. We frequently visited Marlow, Henley, Abingdon, Wallingford and Oxford. Other places of interest were West Wycombe Hellfire Caves, Dunstable Downs, Ashridge and Ivinghoe Beacon. If someone wanted to join in our excursions but didn't have a bike, we would raid the refuse tip on the outskirts of the village and build a decent bike from several damaged and discarded ones. The parents of one member of our group ran the Rose and Thistle pub and we were allowed to run our

cycling club from their disused garage. This is where the repairs and rebuilds took place, when the weather was bad. The landlord of the pub was also a bookmaker and, if he had a good day, there would be bottles of Vimto all round.



A trip to Ivinghoe Beacon, 1958

A mile or so south of the village there was a small lake known as Pond Close, or "Ponnie" to the locals. It was evidently man made by building an earth bund across a shallow valley. A small stream ran through the village to fill the lake, which was approximately 150 yards wide and about 12 feet deep in the middle. Across the centre of the lake there was a wall, submerged under about two feet of water. I can only surmise that this was an early attempt at building the dam which had been abandoned, although there are other theories. Many of the villagers learned to swim in Ponnie,

and it was a strange sight to see a line of a dozen or so bathers, standing on the wall, knee-deep in water, across the middle of the lake. Ponnie was also stocked with fish, mainly tench, but also some roach and perch. In those days, fishing was assumed to be free for all and nobody seemed to bother about permits. Of course, it's totally different now. Many an unsuccessful day's fishing would end up with a swim to the wall and back.



In the PIG AND WHISTLE at Butlin's, 1958

By the late fifties, we were getting our driving licences and gaining our independence and family holidays had suddenly become less attractive. We needed to spread our wings and broaden our horizons. So, in 1958, four of us went to Butlin's Holiday Camp in Skegness, for a week, in my trusty 1938 Hillman Minx. I think the price of petrol was about six shillings (30p) per gallon, which equates to about 7p per litre. A memorable time was had by all, but we never did it again.

On the music scene, Skiffle was king, and the popular stars were Lonnie Donegan, Chas McDevitt, Bob Cort and Johnny Duncan and the Bluegrass Boys. One of our group was an accomplished pianist and a talented musician. It didn't take him long to master the guitar and the banjo, and soon we were putting together a washboard and a tea chest bass and various other things to form our own skiffle group known as "The Sons of Fred". The name was borrowed from a 1956 radio programme, called "Son of Fred", featuring Peter Sellers and Spike Milligan. We gigged at various

venues in and around Aylesbury and Thame, and once travelled as far as Cambridge.

Eventually, in the early sixties, pressure of work, relocations and other commitments caused the group to fragment, although some of us are to this day, still in contact, having known each other for more than seventy years. Those were the days.

Pat Kerry

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY FARM WORKER

What follows has been taken from a variety of on-line resources, though the basic structure closely follows << [familysearch.org/wiki/England Agricultural Occupations](http://familysearch.org/wiki/England_Agricultural_Occupations)>>.

Overview:

Every farmer was dependent upon the weather and market conditions. The price of corn (wheat) dominated the 19th century agricultural scene from the increased acreage brought under cultivation during the Napoleonic Wars, to the Corn Law of 1815 (modified in 1828) aimed at protecting the British farmer. Poor harvests in 1829-30 and consequent high prices for wheat, poor wages due to a surplus of workers, and the hated threshing machines which destroyed precious jobs in the difficult winter months, brought about the southern Swing Riots of 1830-32 involving machine breaking and arson.

The repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 resulted in free trade and two subsequent decades of prosperity for farmers. The last quarter of the 19th century was marked by severe recession for them after several bad harvests due to poor weather and the effects of growing imports of cheap grain from North America after the end of the U.S. Civil War. The railways opened up

markets over the course of the century, but also took away the best labourers ‘who were attracted by better prospects in the towns’.

The wealthier farmers were suppliers to institutions such as hospitals, workhouses, gaols, barracks etc. These men employed agricultural workers of all kinds. Men would be the prime money earners, though women and children were employed at times of harvest. Countrymen had to be extremely knowledgeable about many aspects of agricultural practice in the area in which they lived. They were not necessarily masters of every trade but certainly capable of tackling a wide variety of tasks as well as reading the weather, improvising solutions to problems, and using natural resources to feed their families.



The farm labourer had considerable skill if his tasks included ploughing, harrowing, rolling, sowing seed, tending and weeding a variety of crops,

harvesting with scythe, sickle and spade, and laying up and threshing during the winter. The animals had to be herded and milked, and the shepherds needed skilled help at lambing and shearing times. There was cutting, drying and stacking hay, as well as trimming and laying hedges or building drystone walls, fencing and making gates, making or mending roofs of thatch, tile or slate, and pointing brickwork.

Ditches, culverts, drains, ponds, farm roads and tracks all had to be made and maintained. In autumn stubborn invasive weeds needed to be skillfully eradicated by fire, and every item needed in his home had to be constructed on days when the weather was too poor to work outside. Not every agricultural labourer possessed, or needed, all of these skills but the seasonal nature of most work demanded that he be versatile and, naturally, the more capable he was the better wages he could command. The labourer's wife was traditionally responsible for their own poultry, brewing and dairy produce and she would accept paid work of this kind outside her considerable domestic duties whenever she could. This might also include picking stones, weeding vegetables, fruit picking or binding sheaves and stooking at harvest.

The children would scare birds, pick stones, plait straw, and weed fields. The older girls were expected to assist their mother in handicrafts, cooking, cleaning, raising chickens and other household chores, whilst boys from about the age of seven would work beside their father in the fields. Schooling, except for an hour of Sunday School, was almost unheard of for labourers until at least 1870, as even if a charity school existed they could not be spared to attend it.

About this time (1874), the following table of weekly expenditure for the labourer as a family man was compiled from a survey across a variety of locations in the UK.

Weekly Expenditure of a Farm Labourer, his Wife, and Three Children.

5 Gallons Bread	6s 3d
1/2 lb. Butter	8d
1 lb. Cheese	6d
1 lb. Bacon	8d
1/2 lb. Sugar	2d
Pepper, Salt, &c.	1d
2 oz. Tea lb.	4d
1/2 lb Candles	3 1/2 d
Soap	2d
Soda, Starch, and Blue	1d
Coals	2s
1 Faggot	2 1/2 d
Rent and Rates	1s 6d
Man's Sick Club	6d
Boots	7d
Children' Schooling	3 d



It will be noted that bread was the staple of the diet and took up the majority share of individual item expenditure. This table can be found on line, together with further commentary, at <<The Victorian Web>>. My old fashioned maths may be a little rusty, but this comes out, I think, at 14s 3d when his wages would have been about 15s a week.

Life in the labourer's cottage in the mid 19th century was not pleasant and quite primitive. Housing was perhaps a one or two-roomed cottage with a scullery or kitchen often added on. Some also had a shed attached to the house for livestock – imagine the smell, especially in summer. With such large families, there were usually several sleeping in each bed. When there was not more room, often the oldest was 'kicked out', and had to find work and own accommodation. There was no sanitation of any sort, unless near a stream or pond which would have been used. So, it was a hole in the ground or a bucket or tub in the house which had to be emptied often – usually as manure for the garden. Water was collected from the streams if there was no well in the centre of the village. Sickness from the water which may have been contaminated by effluent was widespread with diarrhoea and other disorders quite prevalent.



Most families had pigs and these were the main source of meat except for the old hens which had stopped laying. If a cow was owned, its milk was used for butter and cheese rather than for the milk itself. Most often had small vegetable patches and a lot of the villages had communal gardens at the edge of the village which people could use. The main staples were cabbage and carrots, along with boiled wheat and pot barley used in stews and soups.

Pitstone Green Farm was neither particularly more or less generous than others in and around the Vale of Aylesbury, employing nine men and four boys in February 1840. At that stage, the wage bill was £5 8s 11d for the week – men at the rate of 10s and boys, just a little over 4s.

Compiled by Dennis Trebble

OPEN DAY MATTERS

This short season has been a very successful one in terms of open days, in regards to numbers, classic vehicles, weather and general visitor satisfaction but on occasions we really struggled to cope with everything that needs to be done on the day, due to the number of volunteers unable to attend for various reasons, many due to last minute bookings and cancelations related to Covid. On one occasion we were over 20 people short of what we needed.

I don't quite know how to approach this subject without upsetting some of our hard working, loyal supporters but something needs to be done before too long. I know that we are all unpaid volunteers and that we all have active lives and commitments away from the museum but we are part of a rather fascinating family which gives as well as takes. Most of us have benefitted in many ways, both physically and mentally and our involvement has been a huge boost for us, as well as being a drain, at times, on some of our resources.

We could not financially survive as a museum without opening to the public for at least a small number of days a year and because of what we display and how we do it, it means we need volunteers to be on site whilst we are open. It is this that gives us our great reputation for being friendly and informative. For this reason I have worked out the dates for the next two years to make life easier for everyone to plan their appointments in due regard to open days.

There is a change to our normal routine in May/June 2022 because of our Queen's 70th anniversary celebrations. She actually came to the throne on my 4th birthday (February 6th 1952). I distinctly remember because I couldn't figure out why there was no "Listen with Mother" on the radio that day! The government has decided on a four day bank holiday from Thursday 2nd June until Sunday 5th June so we have decided to have our Open Days on Sunday May 29th and Sunday June 12th.

Despite discussions, we think that our normal tally of 9 Open days per year is about right for everyone involved and will probably remain that way for the foreseeable future.

2022

April 18th - Easter Monday
May 2nd - Early spring Bank Holiday Monday
May 29th – Sunday
June 12th – Sunday
July 10th – Sunday
August 14th – Sunday
August 29th - Bank Holiday Monday
September 11th – Sunday
October 9th – Sunday

2023

April 10th - Easter Monday
May 1st - Bank Holiday Monday
May 29th - Late May Bank Holiday Monday
June 11th – Sunday
July 9th – Sunday
August 13th – Sunday
August 28th – Bank Holiday Monday
September 10th - Sunday
October 8th - Sunday

Pete Farrar - Oct 2021

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

Admission charges.

Adults £9, Children £4, under 5 free. Concessions over 65, £8.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership currently stands at a total of 148 people. This includes 66 volunteer workers and 8 honorary members.

We post out about 130 quarterly newsletters.

A reminder membership renewal slip is included in this newsletter for those that have forgotten to renew this year.

Bill Barnard
(Membership Secretary)

FRONT COVER : Concrete workshop

BACK COVER : Two-man chainsaw Villiers engine

Both photographs by Dennis Trebble.

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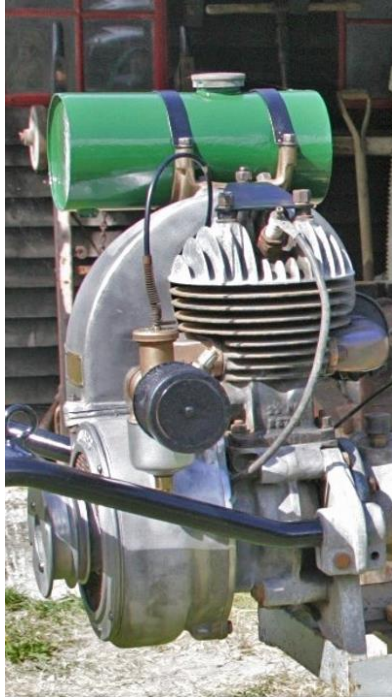
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