

Pitstone and Ivinghoe Museum Society Newsletter



Summer 2022

EDITOR'S NOTE

It is often said that history is written by the winners. In other words, the documentation and reports that we have from an earlier age will carry a particular bias, be it political, social or religious. You only have to ask yourself how, in one hundred years' time, the current events in Westminster will be reported. Possibly the BBC newscasts will be kept, but they carry the stigma of accused bias in reporting. How would the reports in The Guardian (socialist), say, measure up against those of the Daily Express (conservative)?

I have been reading about Queen Victoria's prime ministers and the reasons they left office. Notables such as Lord Melbourne, Sir Robert Peel, Lord Russell, Lord Palmerston, Disraeli and Gladstone all had their political and private baggage that was used by both the opposition and those in their own parties to help remove them from office. You will all know that the large rack-saw on site is named the Roseberry rack-saw. What you might not realise is that Lord Roseberry was PM for just over a year between 1894 and 1895. During that time he was accused of romantic associations with other men, in particular the Marquess of Queensbury pursued him for a supposed relationship with one of his sons who had died in a shooting accident. This was all too much for Roseberry, whom Queensbury had publicly referred to in an open letter as "snob queers like Roseberry". The reports of the time are at odds with one and other and those that have gained historical currency are from those who shouted the loudest. It seems that political life was ever thus!

NEWSLETTER CONTRIBUTIONS

You will no doubt note that the main body of the newsletter is given over to a single article. This is not due to an overwhelming desire to be seen in print on my part, but more an admission that the society as a whole fails to contribute to what is their quarterly publication. You don't have to be chasing a Pulitzer Prize in order to write something

and neither does it need to be of any particular length. It should, though, have an historical context that might resonate with the readership. I don't mind being editor but sometimes it would be nice to have something to edit. All contributions to the museum address or to secretary@pitstonemuseum.co.uk please.

The reviews later in the newsletter were lifted directly from our Facebook pages. A big vote of thanks to Michelle.

Dennis Trebble

MANAGER'S MUSING

As I write this, we are half way through our season of open days and I think it's fair to say that it's been a successful season so far, apart from our usual problem of lack of personnel for key posts putting extreme pressure on our abilities to cope with demands on site, on the day. Unfortunately, age and ill health take their toll due to the nature of our organisation but we are fortunate in having a few slightly younger people joining us and doing a great job. The site is looking great, whilst retaining its character as an old farm.

We have been doing our best to promote ourselves to a wider public, using many different forms of publicity, from Facebook to good old fashioned road signs. We recently had promotional stalls at both Ivinghoe Fete and Eaton Bray Carnival which generated plenty of interest. We now have all of Fred Foskett's vehicles in working order and they form a great way to open a conversation with potential customers or volunteers about visiting the museum or becoming a volunteer. We have a few private visits arranged for the season and although they do not generate much income, I think that they do a good job by way of promotion.

We have not had any major projects to carry out this year but there are always things to be improved or refurbished and many are being

given much needed care and attention. With regards to the Austin 7 project, I think we should finish it to the state of being road worthy but at the same time acknowledge the fact that it is more interesting to our customers as a rolling chassis as it is now. I suggest that we look out for some other kind of rolling chassis that does not have any emotional ties to the museum, to display alongside the completed Austin. At the same time, we could think about extending the garage by one bay giving us the space we would need for such a display. It would not be difficult or expensive and the existing building could do with some repairs and maintenance anyway.

We are slowly getting to grips with improving the displays in the New Grain Barn, which would give it more impact than it has managed to generate in the last ten years. It may involve getting rid of one of the two reaper binders and moving the chaff cutter working display from the tractor sheds. We may be forced to think about replacing the existing ride-on mower as it is getting very long in the tooth and is beginning to become rather unreliable. I don't think it owes us anything as, at one time, it was the only means we had to cut the grass in the orchards.

My thanks to one and all for their support in so many different ways – keep up the good work!

Pete Farrar (Museum manager)

CHAIRMAN'S COMMENT

Halfway through our season already! It seems that every year passes more quickly. I guess this is a symptom of the high speed world we now have, or, more likely a consequence my advancing years!

It is so good to see the efforts of our new volunteers. They really have made a noticeable difference, especially with some of the perhaps less exciting, but essential, maintenance tasks. This season I have been particularly pleased to see the enthusiasm and

inquisitiveness of some of our young visitors. They are, for example, not just interested in operating the water pumps etc., but asking what they were originally used for and how they work. Surprisingly and for the most part, not a mobile or tablet in sight.

It is understandable, but with regret, that we have had to accept Dennis Trebble's resignation as Society Secretary. Dennis has provided an invaluable service to the Museum Society for many years. In more recent times, he has given full support for me as a “green” chairman. A special thank you, Dennis, from all members. Happily, he will continue to join us on site whenever that is possible.

I hope that all our supporters and volunteers keep safe and well.

Rob Henry

TREASURER’S NOTES

The financial results for the year ended 31st March 2022 are complete and ready for review by our independent examiner. I am pleased to report that despite no income from the first four Open days, including Easter usually the best day of the year, we achieved a surplus of income over expenditure of £13k. We started the current year well with open day takings already greater than last year, hopefully this trend will continue.

Our new ticket office shed works well reducing the congestion in the reception/toilet area, however the July hot weather caused us to move back into the main building when the temperature peaked at lunchtime.

As Pete Farrar our manager reports we are always short of volunteers. This is a particular problem as volunteers seem reluctant to get involved with handling monies and financial matters. Any ex-bank or accountancy staff out there prepared to help?

Hopefully, we'll see you at the AGM in November when the detailed financial results are reported.

John Youngs

THINGS LONG GONE

If you sit and think about your childhood, as I have, and your memory extends over almost seventy years, then there are things which have long gone even though you might have accepted them as immutable at the time. Growing up in the 1950s and 1960s meant that a lot of the war time spirit of self- sufficiency and make-do-and mend still existed. To that end, home repair of footwear was not an unusual occurrence and the ubiquitous Phillips “Stick-a Soles” were to be found in almost every home. Here, if you had a shoe last, you applied adhesive to both shoe sole and the replacement rubber sole



and waited for the sticky stuff to dry. Then very carefully bringing both elements together, the new sole was pressed onto the shoe. Once firmly in place any excess that protruded beyond the profile of the

shoe was trimmed off by a sharp knife. Today, these products are not available and we simply throw away our worn out shoes or take them, if they are deemed worth it, to a repair booth that will also cut your keys for you and fit new watch batteries should you so desire!



During the war, the house where I later lived (at 47 Tylacoch, Llanharry), was occupied by my grandfather and his family. He had done his part in the Dig For Victory campaign and was quite an adept gardener, producing seasonal vegetables, gooseberries, black currants and cold frame salad crops. When he died in 1957, the front garden had been returned to lawn, but the extensive back garden was still used for growing food. My mother could not let go of the idea that we should continue to do so and even though the area in vegetables was gradually reduced to half its size, cabbages, peas and green beans continued to be grown for most of my teenage years. I would, of course, do my share in the garden but I hated it with a passion. Then, all of our neighbours did the same, to a greater or lesser extent.



In the early 1960s, the house still had, in the living room, an oven adjacent to the open fire place, together with a warming oven above that. Food was cooked in saucepans over the fire or in the oven. It was not until 1964 that my mother installed the first gas stove in the house – an absolute revelation in terms of convenience and cleanliness. In order to use the fire place on a daily basis, the embers were carried out of the house last thing at night and spread on the garden to cool off overnight prior to being put in the dust bin (more accurately, the ash bin) next morning. And here is the thing – there was very little landfill produced by homes at the time because most inflammable rubbish was burned in the grate and packaging was not plastic-dense in the way that it is now. After clearing the embers, the fire place was laid ready for next morning. There was a strict

sequence to laying the fire to ensure it “caught” easily. First, the kindling sticks were arranged as the bottom layer. These had been chopped up from logs that were delivered regularly to the home by the local “log man”. They had been dried in the warming oven, above the main oven, the previous day. On top of these small lumps of coal were interspersed with loosely crumpled newspaper and the hood to the grate was pulled out to ensure a good draught when it was next lit. As this system also heated the domestic water supply, a lot of importance was accorded to getting it right.



In addition to the fire place, there was another location where a coal fire was necessary and that was the boiler that was in the “back kitchen”. This was where the main wash was done and comprised of a large capacity fixed unit that had a significantly large water container with an opening lid heated by a fire from underneath. Again, the sticks and coal needed arranging just-so in order to ensure a successful wash day. As I grew up, my jobs included chopping the logs for sticks and cracking the coal into smaller lumps than the slabs in which it was delivered. I don’t know how many twelve to fourteen year olds, today, would be happy wielding a sharp hatchet or a five pound lump hammer. I expect H&S would have apoplexy.

Laundry was still a labour intensive business. The boiler was lit on a Monday morning and various loads were put through; this took most

of the day. As each load was emptied, it was put through the hand operated mangle before being pegged out to dry. The arrangement of the house was such that the bathroom was on the ground floor next to the back kitchen. It was a simple matter to transfer the washing into the bathroom where the mangle, on a frame, was fitted over the bath. The drying of the clothes, as has been implied, was done by pegging out on the outside line. The use of a Monday as a laundry day was a throwback to Victorian times, I think, though it was almost mandatory for everybody to do it on that day and the veritable sea of washing blowing on lines in garden after garden was a familiar and comforting sight.

My first recollection of watching my grandmother and, later, my mother ironing was seeing them use a flat iron that had been heated over the open fire. To use this they had an insulating pad with which to grip the handle of the iron. As might be imagined, temperature control was a very hit and miss affair and care was needed to avoid scorching clothes. It was not too long before an electric iron replaced this system!



Almost all everyday products could be had from one of the three village shops. This was, though, at a premium. We had an account with a grocery chain store called Thomas and Evans that was located in the next (bigger) village. Once a week a visit was made for basic groceries. These were not delivered but had to be carried in shopping bags, using the local bus service. A great deal of forethought was

needed to minimise the physical effort this would otherwise entail. As this store was on my journey home from school, I was often tasked with calling in to pick up various bits and bobs. However, some goods and services were mobile and visited a sequence of villages over a period of time. Four such examples come to mind. The first was a dry cleaners service that was driven around in an old Bedford van by Mr Griffiths of Tal-y-Garn. He was a friendly soul, knew people by their first names and gave a good service. Brian Reed drove an old converted Austin lorry and was a mobile green grocery - always a welcome sight as the nights got darker and the temperature colder. Speaking of which, the “pink paraffin” man also did the rounds, but as we didn’t use him, I don’t remember too much about him. Finally, what village could function without the fish and chip man? You always knew when he was around by the sound of an old school hand bell and the pungent smell of vinegar and fish!



As I have said, the gardening had been reduced by replacing the vegetable beds with grassed lawns. However, the tools available were simple hand pushed mowers (no power assistance here) and hand held shears. It took a lot of effort to mow the lawns, trim the edges around the flower beds and cut the hedge. Today, with the ease of powered accessories we would still think of having a fair job

to do, but it would be so much easier than that which most people engaged with in the past.

The house had a single toilet and that was a separate facility from the bathroom and located on the corner of the house. The drawback was that it could only be accessed from the outside by going out of the back door. The toilet also was not heated by any source and did not have an electric light. The consequence was that if you need to go, particularly in the winter, you dressed against the elements and made sure you had some matches to light the candle that was kept on the window sill!

When the house was modernised in the late 1960s, the bathroom was moved upstairs, the toilet and downstairs bathroom had their internal walls demolished in order to extend the kitchen and central heating was installed. I never really lived in it much after modernisation, but felt that something had been lost in the process. Perhaps it was the conditions which were regarded as normal by most folk that were lost; perhaps most folk thought that was a great improvement in their standards of living and maybe we all just became a little bit softer in the process?

Something that has been lost, too, is the respect which was accorded when a neighbour died. The first thing would be to notify the local doctor, followed by the ladies in the village who did the “laying out” – which involved washing the body of the deceased and making it presentable for the undertakers. This was done in a very matter of fact way. Once the undertakers had completed their tasks, the body was brought back to the house to be placed in the “front room”, where friends and family were invited to pay their last respects. It was almost unheard of for a chapel of rest to be used for this. Throughout this time, curtains in the street remained closed and when the cortege moved off from the house, people stood still, quietly, until it had passed. This was something instilled in us as young children who might be out playing when such an event took place.

A final thought here – if a family possessed a car, they didn't use it in the way that we now do so – as a convenience. It was most often used for special occasions and weekends, with the local bus service being the preferred method of transport to work, school or shop. Walking between villages was an accepted way of life and a bicycle was almost viewed as a rite of passage, giving an element of independence to all and sundry. Perhaps we were, as a society, fitter then.

Dennis Trebble

MEMBERSHIP

Thank you to those people who have renewed their membership so far and to those who have paid extra money towards the museum's funds. For those who have not yet renewed their membership I have included a Membership Renewal Form with this newsletter. Please remember to make out cheques to 'Pitstone and Ivinghoe Museum Society'. For their generous donations of two motor cars, three motor bikes and other items, Margaret Foskett and Dennis Wilshire have been given honorary membership of PIMS. I will next be at the museum to receive membership renewals in person on August Bank Holiday Monday.

Bill Barnard

MUSEUM OPEN DAYS 2022 (10.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m.)

Sunday August 14th

Bank Holiday Monday 29th August

Sunday 11th September

Sunday 9th October

FRONT COVER : The Museum's pond (*by Pat Kerry*)

BACK COVER : Foskett Ford (*by Dennis Trebble*)

Visitor Reviews

Thank you for a lovely day out. There's such a nice atmosphere at the museum, a great day out for both children and adults.

What a fantastic day. Loved the place and all volunteers so friendly and helpful.

Absolutely brilliant day out, a gem of a museum.

**Wish I'd been before!
Exceeded my expectations.**

A great a day out and a really friendly and interesting place.

Had a lovely day at this fascinating site - there really is something for everyone- I learned so much chatting to the volunteers- I hope to come back again soon

What a great place! We went there to meet with family and had a really great time. Lots to see and do for all ages. My favourite was the Lancaster cockpit, but the static engine display was also brilliant.

Keep up the good work. Well done.

The volunteers do a great job to keep the Open Days running so well.

**We had a great time, thank you to everyone involved.
The homemade cake was super delicious**

We loved it, especially the vintage computer room

Extremely friendly volunteers and lovely atmosphere

I really appreciate all the time that the volunteers give. They are all so knowledgeable. Every time I come, I see things I haven't noticed before. I drive home exhausted but smiling.

What a charming historic heritage museum to visit reminiscent of a bygone age.

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