

Pitstone and Ivinghoe Museum Society Newsletter



New Year 2023



Can you help us decorate the museum for the Easter openings? We would like to use bunting with a uniquely "British" flavour. Flags, red, white and blue, crowns and the like. We will not be open for the Coronation bank holiday but would like to show our support for King Charles. If you could loan something similar it would be greatly appreciated and properly looked after. Please get in touch with the secretary as listed at the end of the newsletter.

FRONT COVER : The lane in winter (*by Dennis Trebble*)

BACK COVER : Old boys and even older toys! Setting up for an open day (*by Dennis Trebble*)

EDITOR'S NOTE

Three years ago I reluctantly took over the editorship of the newsletter. I had intended that this be a short term affair until a suitable candidate be sought from amongst the membership. In the way of things, however, this has not happened and I now find myself quite enjoying the task. As is often the case, the editor tends to put his/her own stamp on the content of the periodical. In my instance, I have tended to increasingly focus on what might be called modern social history and, indeed, at the AGM when I issued an invitation for more contributions for the newsletter, I pointed out that we are almost all of an age when the periods of our our lifetimes are now to be found as part of modern history GCSE syllabi.

I don't often get feedback, good or bad, but it has been suggested to me that we ought to focus more on the history of the farm and its environs in the newsletter than we currently do. I am of the opinion that this would require somebody to do the research in order to meet the kind of truth and historical accuracy that Norman Groom points out in his article (a reprint from some twelve years ago and as relevant now as then). We have the archive available should there be anybody who might like to tackle this suggestion.

For my part I think it equally important to focus on "voices". By this, I mean listening to first hand recollections that might find parallels within our own experiences. I recall, as a school teacher, exhorting my forms to go along to a lecture we had laid on, being given by a Holocaust camp survivor. I stressed the importance of hearing testimony at first hand rather than from some condensed text. Within two years, that person had died and no longer could the voice be heard directly. So it is with much of our own experience. Social history has a significance beyond kings, queens and battles. We should hear the voices whilst we still can. The other two main pieces are set in this context.

Finally, you will see a plea for contributions of bunting to dress the museum as we approach the coronation of Charles III. Whilst we will not be open on the extra bank holiday that has been granted for this event, we have a number of other days in close proximity. Anything of an appropriate theme would be gratefully accepted.

Dennis Trebble

MANAGER'S MUSING

Another year gone and another one we can all be proud of. We were very lucky with the weather that we had on our regular open days but the delight on the faces of our visitors as they discovered the fantastic display of fascinating objects on show, was not luck. Dozens of our loyal volunteers spent many happy days preparing the site and for that we are all very grateful, and a bonus is the fact that most of the volunteers come because it's great fun and very satisfying. We seem to manage to replace people who have to give up for a variety of reasons and we hope that the newcomers are made welcome and manage to slot themselves into a spot that suits their tastes and talents. Anyone who has any suggestions as to how we can improve in any department, feel free to speak out, we all have different ideas as to how things should be done.

As most of you probably know by now, I have recently been diagnosed with a rare form of cancer which means that during the few months of treatment, I may not be able to come to the farm to carry out my managerial duties, I guess it will depend on the effectiveness of the treatment and the severity of any side effects. I hope to be able to work at home for practical jobs and all the usual administration jobs, so please feel free to contact me if you need anything regarding the Museum. The email address is manager@pitstonemuseum.co.uk. If you think that you might be able to help with any aspects of administration please speak up because we really do need people to fill all the usual admin posts, the Museum will not run itself and we have to have an effective administration team.

During this closed season we had few major projects on the go, apart from very necessary repairs and maintenance, as is usual with very old wooden buildings. One anticipated project was the replacement exhibit for the Lancaster Bomber which now seems to have been sold after many harrowing months of negotiations. For sometime now, I have had it in mind to use the extensive range of sound recording equipment that we have in our archives to set up a comprehensive history of sound recording. This would encompass the cylinder format phonograph of around 1880, through 78 RPM records, various formats of audio tape

and compact discs, right up to today, with our latest computer based systems. It will be called The Sound Studio and should be of interest to most people, as almost everyone has some kind of system at home. I would like to find a volunteer who could take charge of the project and develop it into an exciting new attraction. If you think you would like to have a go, let me know ASAP.

The other project on the horizon is the extension of the garage exhibit, a considerable amount of work has already been done but we need to decide exactly what layout we aim to achieve, so that we can put some dimensions on the drawings and subsequently work out some costs for the project.

We reopen again on Easter Monday - 10th April. These next 3 months will fly by and I may not be able to get down to the farm to help much, so good luck to you all and thanks for all your hard work and support.

Pete Farrar

FROM HERE TO THERE AND BACK AGAIN

We have all heard the term “evacuees” and know that when referencing the nation’s experience in the Second World War it meant the removal of children from areas at high risk of bombing to safer locations. Having said that, what else is there to know? This was a government initiative, code named, appropriately enough, Operation Pied Piper. In the first four days of September 1939, nearly 3,000,000 people were transported from towns and cities, most of whom were school children. Few realised that within a week, a quarter of the population of Britain would have a new address. One of our volunteers, Bob Soundy, was one such youngster.



If you have been to the model railway display you will have noted the American engines and tram opposite the gauge 1 layout. This is part of Bob's much larger home layout and gives a flavour of his interest. He was one of seventy eight children who, on August 22nd 1940, went to live in Canton, Ohio. They were the sons and daughters of employees of various Hoover plants in the UK. He was accompanied, at the age of eight, by his two brothers, Barry, nine and Peter, thirteen.

For those being relocated in the UK, broadly speaking the four-day official exodus worked surprisingly well. The real problems came in the reception areas where the Government had left arrangements for the children's arrival and care to local authorities, with little more than an injunction to do their best. The result can only be described as a typically British wartime shamle. Hundreds of children arrived in the wrong area with insufficient rations. And, more worryingly, there were not enough homes in which to put them.



As a result of the mismatches, selection was made according to rudimentary principles. Billeting officers simply lined the children up against a wall or on a stage in the village hall, and invited potential hosts to take their pick. Thus the phrase 'I'll take that one' became etched on the memory of our evacuees. Whilst the majority of children were well treated, it has been estimated that as many as 12% suffered either physical or mental maltreatment at the hands of their host families. Most were unaware of where they were going, what they would be doing and all were wholly ignorant of when they would be coming back.

Other children, like Bob and his brothers, travelled far further than rural reception areas. Before 1940 about 11,000 children were privately funded to travel overseas, many to the United States. Between July and September 1940, a further 3000 were sponsored by the government to travel to the Dominions, particularly to Canada, Australia and New Zealand, before the risk from torpedo attack at sea was deemed too great. This comparatively short-lived and voluntary scheme was one of many twentieth-century child migration schemes. Some were voluntary, others enforced, and aimed to give children a 'better life': some are now the subject of ongoing inquiries into cruelty, abuse and neglect.

The stories of such children are important to hear, particularly as the number who experienced such things inevitably dwindle. Some

memories of the time are quite specific about the emotional ties made with host families. I quote from a draft document of 2012, concerning the Hoover – sponsored evacuation.

Bob said *“With the hospitality, generosity and enthusiasm for which the Americans are justly famous, we were quickly adopted into our new families. Most of us lost our English accents within a few weeks and revelled in our new-found quality of life. Through sheer love and kindness we became totally Americanised”*.

He kept in touch with his host family and his foster mother was guest of honour at his daughter’s wedding. Speaking at a 1990 reunion, his brother, Barry, said

“I’m getting sentimental as I get older and I don’t like the word ‘foster’ any more. I prefer to say Dad, Mom, brother, sister, cousin, because that is what you are”.

Talking to Bob, now, it is evident how deeply entrenched some of these experiences were and how many of the children felt the same way. The “Hoover” evacuation had been part of a larger drive by paternalistic American-owned companies like Ford and Kodak to provide safe havens for such children but the threat of U boat activity in the North Atlantic curtailed many further efforts.

It is a sobering thought that many of today’s displaced Ukrainian children will be going through similar experiences. In our next newsletter I am going to include the text of a piece of writing that Bob has penned concerning one particular day – Dec 25th 1943 – in his life at the time. This concerns a day eighty years ago when he was eleven years of age. Time passing is, of course, relative and when I was that age in 1960, eighty years previously (1880) felt like pre-history!

Dennis Trebble and Bob Soundy

THE TRUTH

The truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

Transferring information from one generation to the next one has traditionally been either verbal, or documented in some way. In later years photography appeared to be both accurate and reliable but with the advent of digital imaging and the ease in the way images can be 'doctored', that is now in doubt. The only way of checking that information is accurate is to go back to the very source of that information, assuming it is available. Fortunately the archives at Pitstone do in fact contain a great deal of source material.

When I started at the museum some 30+ years ago, it was helping to install the Crossley Gas Engine with the Beds & Bucks Stationary Engine Club. At the conclusion of the work many of the members, including myself, joined the Society, known then as the Pitstone Local History Society, later to become the Pitstone & Ivinghoe Museum Society. Jeff Hawkins was still very prominent and heavily involved in the museum even though he had granted us a 99 year lease on the site. We spent many hours talking to Jeff about the history of the Society and his experiences during the war years at the farm. Two subjects covered were of particular interest, the first was the formation of the Society and the second, the creation of the farm back into the 1830's. Obviously going back to the 1800's involved information being transferred through several generations - either verbally or written -and hence could become unintentionally corrupted. Both myself and Peter Keeley, our previous secretary, became interested in the early years of the farm itself. The facts that we were given concerning these two subjects were that the present Pitstone Green Farm was built on the site of an earlier farm, that the Big Barn already existed on that site and that the new farm used that as its central structure. Doubts however began to arise concerning the truth of these statements as certain facts and early maps did not always agree with this assumption. We did produce a detailed report at the time which concluded that the farm was actually built on a green field site and that the Big Barn had been dismantled from elsewhere and re-erected on the site.

The problem often arises when unintentional errors end up in print and then become facts that are used by others. The only way to avoid these problems is to go back to any information available at the time and compare several sources until a somewhat clearer picture emerges.

The second fact that everyone appears to have accepted is that the Society was formed by members of the Young Farmers Club, which somehow became the Pitstone & Ivinghoe Museum Society. Again going back to source information and talking to individuals who were members of the Young Farmers Club showed this not to be correct. We are fortunate at the museum to have accumulated a vast amount of archive material; so much that is difficult to remember and find what we do have. It was pure chance that I came across the minutes from issue 1 of both the Young Farmers Club and the early society then named the Pitstone Local History Club. At this date the club would arrange walks around the area looking at the flora and fauna and studying areas of historical interest, there was no mention in the early years regarding the formation of a museum. The Young Farmers Club appeared to be just a social organisation formed entirely for teenagers and not the impression I had of farmers in their 20's and 30's. This has been confirmed by two past members of the Young Farmers. There were obviously individuals who were members of both organisation and the idea of creating a museum originated in the Pitstone Local History Club at a later date. Jeff Hawkins often used the farm as a meeting place for the club providing coffee and biscuits and somewhere to meet.

All of this data is still held in our archives and we have only just scratched the surface uncovering such information. It would be lovely to think that it would be possible to continue the research and publish a more detailed report of our early history. It's all there - it just needs unearthing. This is a job that could be carried out either at the museum or at home, at the individual's convenience.

Norman Groom.

ROB HENRY – A PERSONAL HISTORY

Rob's recollections begin, as a young boy, during WW2

For my very early years, Mum, Dad and I were living in my paternal grandmother's house.

Unfortunately, a bomb destroyed the house next door. Grandmother's house survived but was badly damaged. I was told much later that we were all in the indoor "Morrison" shelter at the time, which probably saved us. Unfortunately our neighbours were not so lucky.....

My children used to ask me if I remembered anything about my early years during the war.

The only thing I can really recall was being frightened by very loud bangs close to our house. My father later suggested that they could probably be attributed to an anti-aircraft gun rather than bombs. In the farm field opposite the house was a large concrete slab. Evidently, the gun would arrive towed by a truck, be quickly set-up on the slab, fire a few rounds, then pack up and rush to another local site and do the same. Dad explained that this was an attempt to fool the Germans that we had a lot more guns than we really had!

As our house was structurally unsafe, we had to move out. Mum, Dad, and Gran went to friends locally. I was shipped off to my Aunt's home in Ampthill Bedfordshire. She became my "favourite" aunt and I spent many happy times with her, my uncle, and my cousins in my early years.

Christmas was always a special time for myself and my cousins. We would squeeze into my maternal grandmother's house with most of the family. There would be temporary beds everywhere. The Christmas tree would be decorated with home made baubles and lit with highly dangerous lanterns with candles! Luckily, there were no accidents. Presents were mostly made by hand by family members. Typically, wooden engines for boys and rag dolls for the girls. I remember listening intently to my grandfather and one of my uncles talking about their wartime experiences. Grandad was in the navy in the Great War on the battlecruiser Indomitable, which played a part in battles at Dogger Bank

and Jutland. My uncle was a survivor from the sinking of the Cornwall by the Japanese in the Indian Ocean in WW2.



HMS Indomitable (17,250 tons, Battle Cruiser)

During primary school holidays at “Aunt Pegs”, I would spend hours on the bridge adjacent to Amphill station, watching trains go by. It was the LMS main line at the time, with an amazing range of steam locos pulling passenger and freight trains. Like so many others, Amphill station closed completely in 1959. One loco was particularly strange and interesting. I found out later that it was probably a Garratt.



Garret double articulated engine

During most of those early summers of late 40's and early 50's, we would all go, together with my “favourite aunt's” family, to Westcliffe in Essex for a “holiday by the sea” (it is actually on the Thames estuary!).

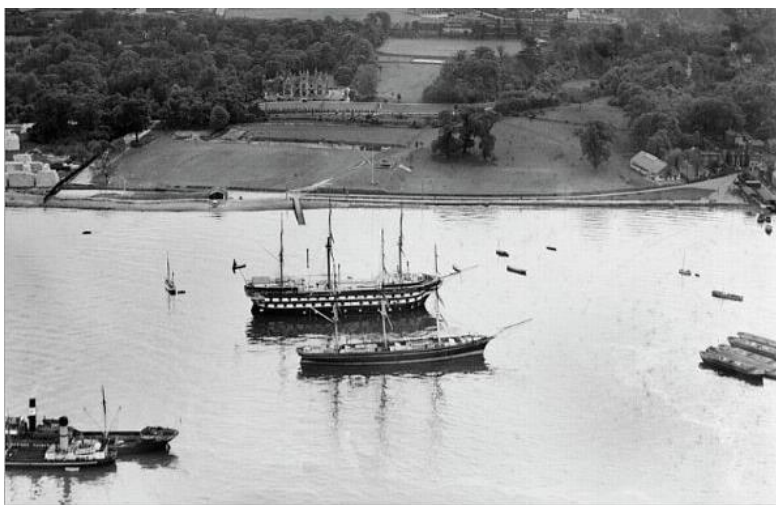
For a young boy, it was a real adventure to get there. First we would catch a 480 bus to Gravesend. Next was a Thames crossing to Tilbury on a steam ferry. I would spend this part of the trip watching the triple expansion engine and the man stoking the boiler. This was possible as the engine “well” was open apart from some railings. We would then catch a steam train to Westcliffe. Exciting stuff in those days.



The Gravesend Ferry

Later having passed the eleven plus, I went to Gravesend Grammar School as the school in Dartford was oversubscribed. It was generally a good experience albeit with a relatively tough regime. The school had a historical link with the Navy. As an example of the general discipline, if boys were caught fighting in the playgrounds they would be put in the main gym the following day with boxing gloves on. Quite often the playground bully would lose under Queensbury rules. From memory, this action usually had a positive outcome, with the combatants often becoming good friends thereafter. I can imagine the reaction of today's parents to this.

One of the traditional school sports was rugby union. I didn't make the 1st fifteen, just one of the lower teams. Each year there would be a set of rival matches against Dartford Grammar School. It is therefore possible that I could have been on the opposing side to Mick Jagger! One of many school trips was to the naval training college at Ingress Abbey in Greenhithe. At that time, the famous tea clipper Cutty Sark was moored close to HMS Worcester. Both ships were used for training until the Cutty Sark was towed to Greenwich, restored and opened to the public.



The Cutty Sark and HMS Worcester

In 1953, the year I started secondary school, we had the terrible effects of the disastrous floods. They covered a vast area of Kent and the east coast. Many people lost their lives.

We were lucky as our house was on high ground. I can remember looking out, with my father, from the top of our hill overlooking the Thames. It had the appearance of a huge lake as far as the eye could see. Most of the riverside factories were flooded. The most spectacular was Wells firework factory. A chemical reaction started a fire which caused a number of large explosions. Over 500 windows were shattered in the nearby Joyce Green Hospital as a result. Luckily, the hospital had been evacuated, and no-one was hurt.



Flooded Dartford, 1953

After completing exam stuff, with help of the school careers lady, I managed to get a student apprenticeship with BICC, a power cable manufacturer. Compared to the situation facing young people today, getting a job of your choice was relatively easy back then.

There was a lot of industry along the Thames. Between Dartford and Gravesend, and in just a matter of a few miles, there were five paper mills and five cement works. All of these have now gone except one paper mill. The local landscape was dominated by many chalk quarries which supplied the cement factories. Most of these have been used as landfill sites for both the local area and London. One notable exception is the large quarry originally owned by Johnson's Cement Works, which was part of Blue Circle. This is now home to the vast Bluewater shopping complex.

Most of my family worked either for Borroughs Welcome Pharmaceuticals (latterly taken over by Glaxo) or J & E Hall in Dartford. Halls were famous for big refrigeration plant and also lifts and escalators. In their office block, they had one of the very few operating paternoster lifts. The founder, John Hall, started the company in the late 18th century. He was a close supportive friend of Cornish engineer Richard Trevithick. These companies employed hundreds of people. Both factories are now gone.

During my time at BICC, I made a small contribution to many large

projects. Notably, the cables for the Kariba Dam project in Africa, the cross channel DC cable link to France, early developments on plastic insulated power cables and so forth. The Kariba cables, I believe, were the largest oil-filled paper insulated cables ever made. They were about 6 inches in diameter with a 2 square inch conductor working at 400,000 volts. The factory was a vast modern complex, however, with one quirky exception.

As part of the founder Tom Callender's legacy, there was a preservation provision on the original site railway and locos. On a daily basis these old steam locos would transport cable drums around the site and up to our Thames dock for shipment.



After completing my apprenticeship, I stayed on at the Erith factory for about two years before leaving to take a very different path which resulted in travel to most parts of the world.

To be continued.....

Rob Henry

OPEN DAYS 2023

10 th April	Easter Monday
1 st May	Early May bank holiday Monday
29 th May	Spring bank holiday Monday
11 th June	Sunday
9 th July	Sunday
13 th August	Sunday
28 th August	Summer bank holiday Monday
10 th September	Sunday
8 th October	Sunday

Opening times : 10.30 am to 4.30 pm

Prices are published on our website : pitstonemuseum.co.uk

MUSEUM TALKS 2023

Thursday 26th January 2023 – 2.30 p.m.

Colin Oakes - The Museums of London.

Thursday 23 February – 2.30 p.m.

Richard Tregonong – Nica Rothschild, Jazz Baroness.

Thursday 23rd March – 2.30 p.m.

Paul Miller [National Trust manager] - The Ashridge Estate.

Thursday 27th April – 2.30 p.m.

Lucy Smith, Heath Robinson Museum and History of West House, Pinner.

Thursday 25th May – 8.00 p.m.

Neil Rees, Bucks County - Pennsylvania.

Thursday 22nd June – 8.00 p.m.

Wendy Austin, The Railway comes to Tring.

Visitor Reviews

Thank you so much for having us this year. Really enjoyed attending with all the other crafters.

This is an incredible place! We're always bowled over by the knowledge and enthusiasm of all the volunteers, a huge thank you to everyone, what a unique and special place

**Awesome amount of exhibits. Very educational for people of all ages
You need to allow yourself plenty of time because there's a lot to take in. Kids are fascinated by the way we used to live and they are allowed to be hands on with some of the exhibits.**

**First visit today.
Won't be the last.**

We were delighted with the exhibits and the excellent organisation of the museum.

Well done to all, a lovely musuem.

Thanks to the volunteers for making us so welcome and bringing their museum to life for us.

We highly praise all the volunteers for your friendliness, care, help and consideration.

**What's not to love?
So many things to see and do.**

**We had the most incredible day at the heritage park. It is clear that all the volunteers operate the different areas with love and passion to preserve the knowledge and share it with visitors.
The hands-on experience made it so interesting for our kids and seeing all the machines at work brought the experience to life. We will definitely be back next year.**

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