

Pitstone and Ivinghoe Museum Society Newsletter



Spring 2023

EDITOR'S NOTE

It seems as if, after one of the wettest March months on record, we might eventually be heading toward some more conventional Spring weather. It will, no doubt, be welcomed by us all but I feel that it is worth pointing out that throughout the cold and wet weather experienced since Christmas, there has been a core of volunteers prepared to turn up every week at the museum and carry on with the essential maintenance tasks necessary for the site to continue to function. You will be aware that our manager, Pete, has been experiencing some difficult health problems and we are fortunate to have such an able deputy in Dave Kirkwood who has been able to carry on relatively seamlessly.

The newsletter, this time, has the first part of Norman's recollections of early days and whilst preparing this for publication I felt that I needed photographic illustration to help break up the narrative. Now whilst we have an embarrassment of riches as far as such resources are concerned, imagine how tedious it would be to have to sort through them all to find something appropriate. I was spared this, largely due to the work of our previous newsletter editor – Sandra Barnard. Sandra has worked from home cataloguing, classifying and creating a complete digital archive of our photographic record. This must have been a monumental task for which we should all be grateful – we owe her a heartfelt vote of thanks.

Often we don't see or realise what goes on behind the scenes. The very heart of a museum is the supporting paperwork that lends context to the history of the site and the on-view displays. Our Archivist, Sue Denty, brings her punctilious approach for accuracy to this job and, having shared the office with her for a number of years I know how frustrating it can sometimes be. This is another area where attention to detail is invaluable whilst putting the newsletter together. So, to one and all, thank you for your efforts, they are much appreciated.

Dennis Trebble

MANAGERS' MUSINGS

(yes, there are two!)

This spring's version of the manager's report makes me feel a bit of a fraud, since I haven't done much to contribute to the huge amount of good work done in the closed season, when the weather discourages a person from even getting out of bed, let alone going down to the farm, where it's often cold, wet and windy. My personal thanks must go to relative newcomer, Dave Kirkwood for agreeing to take over the job of manager while I'm unable to attend. It may not compete with Prime Minister or head of the National Health Service but it's amazing how many difficult decisions have to be made and how often you have to balance your own opinion with that of a hard working unpaid volunteer who could well be justifiably upset about anything the manager does, which doesn't coincide with their point of view. One of the classic examples is when you get six people on a job and you seem to get eight different opinions as to how it should be done, none of which agrees with your own!

During my enforced absence, Richard Bysouth, with help from my Ronnie, has very successfully restarted the popular PIMS monthly meetings after a couple of years' absence due to Covid. Stephen Hearn has agreed to continue his yearly visit to chat to us and value some of our prized possessions. This event in August includes food so if you want to go, you will need to complete the form enclosed with this newsletter.

After many months of speculation about will it stay or will it go, the amazing Lancaster Bomber exhibit has finally gone, it's new home being The Spitfire & Hurricane Museum in Kent. We were sad to see it go but understand Norman's thinking and we can only thank him for its loan and all the other good work he has done for the museum, over many years. The Lancaster Room is going to be The Sound Studio and will take a year or two to get into the form we want but great progress has already been made, so our visitors will have something to interest them, from the start. The whole area of the science room and radio room is being gradually refurbished along with a better display of photographic items.

Our first open day of the year was probably one of the wettest most of us can remember but congratulations must go to all the amazing people, both volunteers and visitors, who combined to produce a great day out, despite the dreadful conditions. Traffic movements around the parking areas in the rainy weather have prompted us to investigate the possibilities of changing some of these areas and looking into the idea of another gate in the fence to produce separate entrance and exit points.

Pete Farrar.

Thanks to Peter for his kind words. It has been a privilege to carry on his work and only possible with the dedication of all our volunteers, whether working behind the scenes at home, here on open days or more practically here on volunteer days. I hope I haven't been too bossy!

To add to Peter's comments. I want to thank everyone involved in the big clean up to be ready for our first open day. A particularly a great job had been done in repairing the Big Barn in time, together with the new exhibit in the Owen Barn of our collection of model aircraft and the refurbishment of the computer room.

I understand that some people are concerned that they are not always involved at every stage of decision making and perhaps, then, become critical of jobs done. It is not always possible for this to happen and for the common good of the museum we must all get behind the majority vote whatever our personal opinion. It is particularly important when new volunteers start to encourage with positive words, otherwise we will lose them. We all have ways we like doing jobs. For me, if a job is done, safely and on time, I am happy, however that is achieved. With this in mind I look forward to future projects and our open days. Once again thanks for all your hard work.

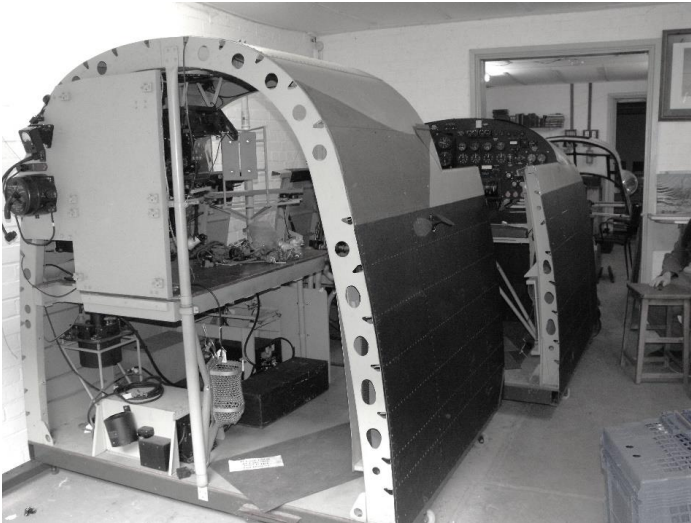
Dave Kirkwood. Deputy Manager.

FAREWELL TO THE LANCASTER COCKPIT

On 23 January 2023, after more than 20 years at the museum, Norman Groom's Lancaster Cockpit was removed and transported to its new home at the Spitfire and Hurricane Memorial Museum at Manston Airfield in Kent. Paul Chapman and myself were present to assist the team from the Museum who came to dismantle and remove the cockpit, and the day went well without any hitches.

The cockpit will become the centrepiece of a new display dedicated to the men and women who served with Bomber Command during the war years, as well being a tribute to Gerry Abrahams, a proud veteran of RAF Bomber Command, having served 31 operations with 75 (New Zealand) Sqn in the Spring of 1945, and a long-serving volunteer at the Spitfire and Hurricane Memorial Museum, who passed away in January, aged 99.

It's good to know that in its new home the cockpit will be enjoyed by veterans, their families and aviation enthusiasts for many years to come.



Steve Patschinsky

EARLY MEMORIES OF THE MUSEUM

Part one

In the 1980s I was a member of the Beds & Bucks Stationary Engine Club. This was before the lease was granted to our Society and the farm was still owned and run by Jeff Hawkins. Jeff already had a large collection of artefacts, relating to farming and village life stored in unused buildings and barns on the site. There were no animals then, only some pure white Silky chickens running free. Jeff would open the farm to the general public on several days a year supported by the then Pitstone Local History Society. Several members of the engine club would put on a display of stationary engines running various items of machinery, either using their own engines or those existing on the farm. Engine club members attempted to create a small area which they could use on a regular basis but this did not always work out. It was still a working farm and often the cleared area would disappear, having been filled with everything under the sun.



My first visit to the farm was on one of the open days, not as an exhibitor but just as an Engine Club member. The year must have been about 1989 or 1990 and by then I was on the committee of the Engine Club. At one of these open days, I was approached by David Lindsey who asked me if the club would restore the big Crossley Gas Engine that lay in bits, in what is now the engine room. The room as we know it today was not in existence, there was just an open ground floor area with the lofts above, the floor being of dusty compacted chalk. At this same time discussions were taking place between the Pitstone Local History Society and Jeff Hawking regarding the granting of the lease. A study team was set up to look at the feasibility of restoring the engine. They reported back in a favourable manner and work would go ahead but only on the basis that the lease was forthcoming.

Not only was it agreed to restore the Crossley but also the engine used on the rack saw. The Crossley engine parts were scattered around in old boxes on the floor, covered in dirt and rust and had lain virtually in the open for probably twenty years. The flywheel and crankshaft were still joined but the engine bed laid some way away. A work experience team had, some years earlier, dug a hole in the chalk floor in preparation for a concrete base for the Crossley but that had died a death and the excavation proved to be far too small to use in any case. The first thing was to provide workshops. The rooms or loose boxes as they are called were what are now the print room and the book binding room. These were full to the ceiling with stored items that Jeff had collected and which had to be moved. Everything ended up in the loft above what is now the meeting room with the loft itself now housing the Cook Collection. Photographs of the loft when it was just a store are still in our archives and it is quite something to see.

We were fortunate in the engine club in that one of our members was Dennis Goodyear who had years of experience in handling, moving and installing heavy equipment. We were also fortunate that the works manager at Crossley had personally retained records of the early Crossley engine, ours being made just post WWI. Massive pits had to be excavated both for the main engine bed and the outrigger bearing. No lifting gear was available as the ceiling above could not carry heavy loads; all moving lifting etc. was by small jacks, pulleys and wooden

blocks. Once the massive concrete base for the engine was cast, the bed in place and the basic engine erected, attention returned to the location itself. The floor was dug out, levelled and concreted and the room enclosed as you see it today. The restoration was carried out in record time - the whole project, from start to the engine running, in little more than two years. Work was carried out only on Sunday mornings by a team of about ten Engine Club members. At the same time a somewhat smaller team was working on getting the rack saw and engine working. A video taken when the engine was being restored is in the museum archives.



The Engine club members had by now been working at the museum for some two years and several joined our Society. They stayed on after the completion of the engine restorations and took on all sorts of tasks. Peter Keeley, Mike Price, Jim & Sylvia Andrews attended on a regular basis with others joining on the public open days. The Pitstone Local History Society members were busy working on the new toilet block. This included John Wallis, Jeff, Roy Curzon, Mike Sear and David Goseltine. Until the toilet block was built the only toilet was a small outside privy that was used by the labourers in the farmhouse opposite. Jim Andrews set up a working carpenter's shop in what is now the Forties Room, Mike Price took charge of the Cow Shed and Peter Keeley looked after all the engineering side of things.

We only had a few open days a year then and work started on the previous Saturday morning getting things ready. What is now the catering area was an open fronted shed in which were stored several carts. These were moved out to the front of the museum and the shed cleared ready to set up the catering for the next day. We had an enormously long trestle table and this formed the front counter.

Attendance on open days then was very good; Sunday trading had yet to come as were the many other attractions we have to contend nowadays. Tractor and trailer rides to the windmill were provided by Reg Jellis. Many craft demonstrations like weaving, spinning and enamelling were carried out by Society members, quite an active membership then. Although the lease was not granted until 1991 a lot of work had been carried out at the farm already, even though it was still owned by Jeff. The contents of many local small businesses that had, or were about to close down were rescued and reconstructed on the site. These included the blacksmiths, wheelwrights, brush shop, shoe shop and plumbers. Several other rooms had been set up including the country kitchen, dairy, village life room and the two microcosm rooms although some of these have since been relocated and updated.

be continued.....

Norman Groom

THE ENGLISH TRICK

A reminiscence from BOB SOUNDY, English child evacuee to the USA, Christmas Day 1943

This follows on from the new year Newsletter article on wartime evacuees

Snow always reminded him of America. As he stood at the window watching the flakes fall, he reflected that snow really was quite a rare event in Southern England, particularly on Christmas Day. Not so in Ohio, he remembered, and instantly he was transported back thirty five years and four thousand miles away to another Christmas Day, in 1943. As with every winter in Ohio, snow had appeared promptly in early September and would remain until the end of March. He and his friends had plenty of time for snow games and stood now at the top of Witwer Hill, each holding a sleigh, some unwrapped that very morning. The first pair had already set off down the track in a flurry of snowflakes. Soon it would be his turn to run forward, throw the sleigh on the ground, lie prone and steer with arms reached forward on the guides.

It was important to run as fast as you could to get off to a flying start. They raced in pairs with no rules what-so-ever, leading to rough play indeed. As he waited, the biting cold penetrated his warm clothing and pained hands and feet, breath materialising into vapour. He gazed into the distance, following the horizon round. Already golden lights shone from windows onto the snow on this rapidly darkening day. To his play mates these lights meant life, warmth and home. Home, he thought, and as the word swelled in size, two large teardrops welled uncontrollably in his eyes. They felt warm and wet as they rolled down his frozen skin and salty on his lips. He turned away and a deep wave of sadness and longing possessed him. He shrugged and knew he was not homesick, even though his real home was so far away.

A shoulder barge from Hank snapped him into the present. “C’mon, it’s our turn!”



He leapt forward, glad of the need for action. Pairing with Hank he raced the first ten yards down the track and then threw himself upon the sleigh. At first, because of this effort, he was in the lead, but gradually, Hank's faster sleigh drew alongside to his right. They were already half way down and Hank must surely win unless he did something. Quite often boys would try to dislodge their opponent by pushing or grasping the nearest guide on the other sleigh, causing it to crash into the thick briars on either side of the track. You needed a strong arm to do this as there was always the risk that if you missed your hand would be caught under the steel runners of the sleigh.

All the bitterness and anger of his melancholy mood surfaced and gave a desperation to his actions. He moved close to Hank's sleigh until there was no space at all between them and then reached across Hank's back to the guide on the furthest side. The wind roared in their faces as they hurtled downward, lending an exhilaration to his intention. Pivoting his elbow into the middle of Hank's back, he closed his grip on the guide and levered upward with all his strength. It simply had to work! With a great yelp, Hank and his sleigh suddenly turned over. There were screams and shouts of delight from above as hank disappeared in a great flurry of snow, sleigh, arms and legs. The onlookers clapped and laughed as he coasted to a clear victory.



In the way of boys at play, this method of defeating an adversary was immediately dubbed “The English Trick”. His popularity doubled and doubled again. In the days that followed, some would deliberately steer into the briars if his sleigh approached too closely, rather than be capsized. In fact, he seldom needed to do it again – reputation being enough. However, it was not that Christmas Day, or rather night, that stood out so strongly in his memory. The mood of sadness that had invaded him on the hill top returned with even greater strength at bedtime as he tried vainly to sleep. The turmoil in his mind was not home-sickness, he knew. He didn’t particularly want to return home to England, from whence he had been evacuated four years earlier, because he had no memory left of what it was. A transatlantic journey at nine years old, separation from his parents, the exciting and totally new world in which he now lived – all these tumultuous events had broken the fragile memories of childhood, the tenuous links with “before”. “Home” was an empty, meaningless word that held no shape or form. He could remember nothing of his life in England, neither people, nor places, nor things. Ultimately, he knew, he must return, but he had no idea when that would be. In the meantime, he lived with these kind and generous people. But he was not their kind and they were not like him. He simply did not belong here. In many ways, he felt like the family pet.

“What a cute little cookie your English kiddie is”, friends of the family might say to his foster mother. ”And so cheerful”.

But of course, you only cried at night, when nobody was looking. With aching head and tearful eyes he fumbled under the clothes in one of the drawers and withdrew a folder. For a moment, he stared at the prim faces looking up at him; then all the fears and apprehension of the situation flooded into being.

“But I don’t know who you are!” he sobbed in despair.

It was never quite as bad as this again. That Christmas night had been the climax, possibly the turning point. Another two winters passed before the summons finally came and he was on his way to England within a week of the announcement. Although now two years older and perhaps less fragile because of this, the return to England was a bewildering and traumatic event, far worse than he had dared imagine and much, much worse than the outgoing. He never did find “Home”; “Home” had been lost for ever. Now, many years later, he allowed a tear for the boy of so long ago.

“All by yourself, father?” asked his eldest daughter, breezing into the room. He liked the way she said “father”; there was a bright and friendly ring to her voice.

“Did I see tears?” she said softly, suddenly changing her mood.

He brushed at his eyes in a dismissive manner.

“Oh, er, well, I was over-indulging in nostalgia, I suppose”.

There was a tremendous rapport between them, and she moved closer, clutching his arm and resting her head on his shoulder. For a long time they stayed thus, watching the snow together. He was home now, he knew, but it had taken years of patient building. What could not be found had to be built anew. He felt a warm glow of gratitude to his loving wife, who had helped so much to achieve this and had given him four marvellous children.

It's nice just to be at home watching the snow", he said, and for him these words had an enormity of meaning. His daughter understood them only at face value, of course, and simply replied, "Yes".

"Snow always reminds me of America", he said as they finally turned away from the window.

Bob Soundy

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

RUBY SHARP

Volunteer at Pitstone Green Museum.

I wanted to share some sad news with you all. Ruby was diagnosed with a terminal brain tumour in November 2021. With courage and determination, she overcame new challenges on her journey, which eventually came to an end on 15th February 2023.

Both John and I had known Ruby for many years. We first met her at the Chiltern and Decorum Potters Guild. I also attended the pottery evening classes that she ran when they were held in buildings opposite the Amersham Leisure Centre. Ruby had managed the pottery area at Pitstone Green Museum for at least twenty years.

During her long-time of teaching pottery at Pitstone she proved her masterly skills when manipulating clay. She taught hundreds of members of the public how to throw a pot on the wheel and glaze-fired hundreds of pots painted by members of the public to perfection in the Raku kiln. Ruby was always full of laughter with stories to tell. Her love of bright colours and her wide smile were always present.

The Pottery area at Pitstone will remember her every time we open to the public. She will always be sadly missed. We send our heart-felt sympathies to Mark Newson, her husband, and their two lovely daughters, Heather and Holly.



Ruby at the Raku Kiln

John and Ronnie Powell

MUSEUM TALKS 2023

2.30pm Thursday 27th April,

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

The home of Lord Nelson and Lady Hamilton's grandson, still standing in its own ornamental grounds in old Pinner. Also home to the collected works of eccentrically elaborate inventor Heath Robinson.

8pm 25th May,

Neil Rees, Bucks County - Pennsylvania.

Neil expands on his exploration of where people from Buckingham, Chalfont and Stewkley followed William Penn in 1682 to found their New World along the Delaware River.

8pm 22nd June,

Wendy Austin, The Railway comes to Tring.

The London to Birmingham railway arrived at Pitstone in the 1840s. The station for Tring was planned to be at Pitstone Green at the north end of the Chilterns Cutting.

6.45pm Thursday 27th July,

Antiques evening with Stephen Hearn.

Stephen returns to discuss and value treasures we show him. Cheese and wine. Please return booking form for this event.

FRONT COVER : Lancaster sections loaded on transporter (*by Dave Kirkwood*)

BACK COVER : Jim and tractor rides (*by Dennis Trebble*)

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