

# **Pitstone and Ivinghoe Museum Society Newsletter**



## **Summer 2023**

**FRONT COVER** : Vickers Gunbus FB5 from 1914 – a model refurbished by Jeff Denty, hung in the Owen Barn (*by Dennis Trebble*)

**BACK COVER** : Slowly decaying farm carts, opposite the pond, lending some ‘atmosphere’ to the place (and a habitat for local wildlife) (*by Dennis Trebble*)

## **EDITOR'S NOTE**

It is all too easy to have built a casual acceptance of the skills of our fellow volunteers without pausing to give thought about how and where those skills have been achieved. For some, they have come from the workplace where they had been finely honed: for others, they have been the result of an interest or hobby that has simply grown to significant proportions. This was all brought home to me recently when I was tasked with creating an up-to-date register of such matters. You will find the synopsis of one such volunteer in these pages – Paul Chapman. Like so many others, Paul is not given to proclaiming himself, but without him, the museum would be a poorer, more untidy and less safe place for all of us.

At a recent open day, a visitor said to me that they thought the museum was all about local history and, as such, there were a number of displays that simply did not fit the bill. I was told that the model railway, the Sound Studio (replacing the Lancaster exhibit), the pottery and the classic car display were all such examples. I found myself explaining about socio-economic national trends that provided a context into which local history slotted and that this was the thinking behind these displays. It is, though, sometimes difficult to smile and be pleasant in the face of intransigence; they went on to say that commercialism and enjoyment (!) had no place in museum culture. You may gather that I begged to differ and cited the RAF Museum at Hendon, the Science Museum in Kensington and the Coventry Science and Transport Museum to support my argument. The visitor left with a bit of a grumpy comment. Such are the thrills of being a volunteer on open days.

A final thought – if we accept museums as just being “there” and not visit regularly, they will lose funding, atrophy and die. Such was the post-Covid consequence in the case of the London Motor Cycle Museum – that and the uncaring attitude of the Greenford local authority, who were the museum’s landlords. Thank heavens for our agreed lease.

Dennis Trebble

## **MANAGER'S MUSINGS**

Now that the Lancaster flight deck has departed we have installed the basis of what we call the Sound Studio – essentially a display of the history of recorded sound. We are fortunate in having examples of almost all of the different systems that have been used in the last 150 years or so. It is relatively easy to chart the major steps in sound recording, unlike photography, which is also features in the same display space. As advances in photography took place, film technology, shutter design, lenses and focusing systems all continued to improve. The takeover by digital systems has resulted in unimaginable image quality available at the touch of a screen on a mobile phone. Who would have thought this possible, even ten years ago?

Open days see more classic vehicles attending in addition to our usual stalwarts. We are actively encouraging interested clubs to book us for their special events as it also benefits our reputation.

The site itself continues to require non-stop care and attention as the grass, wild flowers, trees, shrubs and so forth all require management to prevent them taking over display areas. Luckily we have plenty of volunteers happy to do this work, enabling us to stay on top of it. Various volunteers have stepped into roles across the span of museum activities. A few deserving of specific mention are Ray and Lesley Herriot who have taken on the “Forth Bridge” of the museum – the never ending job of creosoting the wooden buildings; the electricians who have been re-wiring the whole site; Gill, our new secretary and Dave Kirkwood, standing in as manager during my prolonged absence. Other projects still in the pipeline include the Foskett garage and the refurbishment of the concrete workshop.

On July 1<sup>st</sup>, we had our usual stall at St. Mary's Carnival, Edlesborough and as well as promoting ourselves, as a local charity we benefit from receiving a sum of money from the proceeds. We continue to attract new recruits to the volunteer work force, a number from open day visits. The museum is in good health and looks set to continue in the same vein.

Pete Farrar

## **EARLY MEMORIES OF THE MUSEUM**

### **Part two**

By 1991, several buildings had been acquired and had been erected on the site, including the concrete workshop, the Nissen hut and the Owen Barn, named after Tom Owen one of the volunteers.

Where the present museum shop is located was a lean-to shed that Jeff used to store the hay rake. The front walls originally consisted of straw bales to keep the rain off but by then had been replaced by packing case ply from Vauxhall Motors. In front of this lean-to was a huge mound of hardcore. Jeff allowed anyone in the village to dump hardcore in the yard, which he used to fill in the pot holes in the drive up to the windmill. One of the first tasks was to get this removed when we took over the lease. All the rooms that had been reconstructed down the sheep yard were faced in the same Vauxhall Motors packing case ply which was later replaced by feather edge boarding.



*The Owen Barn*

In the early years we had no access to the New Grain Barn other than some space during the then Sunday open days, as Jeff was still using it to store grain. What is now the Lancaster Room (*recently vacated and redeveloped*) was a completely enclosed double grain bin that was no longer in use. Jeff allowed a vintage agricultural machinery club to store their vast amount of spare parts there, from a firm that was closing down. The only good thing they did was to get someone to cut doors at the back, front and centre into the brickwork to gain access to the bins. The idea was that they restored and displayed both the farm machinery and their own items. This died a death after a very short while and it took a long while before we could remove both them and their spares.



*Sheep Yard buildings faced in packing case material from Vauxhall Motors*

The Elliott Shop shed did not then exist; there was a ramshackle shed with an old up and over garage door at the front that the cricket club across the road used to use to store their tractor and bits. This was something else that we managed to get rid of when Jeff offered them another space further up the drive. The Big Barn was full to bursting with farm machinery; there was just a narrow pathway though to the Mill Barn. On open days John Wallis had a portable shop that they used

to wheel into the front of the barn. When you managed to get through to the mill barn, again it was packed out. There were three pianos plus other items that farmers never threw away. The only non-domestic item was a cobbled-up wood turning lathe that eventually was scrapped.



*Where the Elliott Shop now stands*

The most spectacular of all the old buildings that had been used for storage was the Nissen Hut. It was packed solid from back to front and apart from the first few feet was impossible to get into. There was shelving on the right-hand side containing everything under the sun. Unfortunately damp, rust and woodworm had taken their toll and much was useless. There were lovely Victorian card books half eaten away, rolls of old newspapers eaten away by mice, carts, bicycles and almost everything under the sun were also stored there. We eventually emptied the whole building outside and we still have photos of the original contents spread out on the grass ready for sorting and disposal. On the positive side for us was that it was an exciting time rummaging through these old buildings not knowing what rare and unusual items we would find; indeed many of the present artefacts now in the museum were uncovered in those early days.

According to our lease we did not have access to what is now the Meeting Room, the Cook Collection loft and the cart shed at the back; however, Jeff allowed me to use what is now the kitchen area of the meeting room to set up the first wireless room. During the rummaging, several very old wireless sets were discovered and just about restorable to working condition. The rest of the downstairs was again full to the ceiling including car seats, junk and quantities of chemicals used around the farm. Jeff did eventually allow us to clear the area and remove the ceiling support timbers that had been used to hold up the floor when the loft had been used for storing tons of fertiliser. During this clean-up phase several wooden boxes and an old walking cane turned up. The boxes contained some unusual glass cylinders and electrical items. Fortunately, I had some knowledge of very early electrical equipment and the collection turned out to have belonged to Jeff's grandfather and had been stored in the attic of Clements shop in Tring and had been moved to the farm when the shop closed. The glass cylinders turned out to be static electrical generating devices pre-dating the Wilmshurst machine and an early electrical shock treatment machine. The walking stick could be unscrewed and turned into a telescope, which was quite a valuable find and Jeff generously donated everything to the museum.

During these early years Jeff was still very dominant at the museum and to some extent not many individuals dared to say much. However, after a year or two I was asked to take on the job as museum manager and worked closely with Mike Sear. Sadly, Mike died a few years later. Our archivist then was Gill Arney, a very knowledgeable person on local affairs and had talked to Jeff about many of the artefacts found on site. In order to create some sort of order in the collection we did have to get Jeff to dispose of quite a quantity of bits and pieces he had accumulated. Eventually he did realise that it was necessary but rather than dispose of them he built a massive storage barn that still exists today on his own land. To this day it still contains the contents of the farm that were not required in the museum. Reg Jellis had donated a vast number of roof trusses that had been stored in the chicken yard. Every time a local telephone pole had to be replaced Jeff acquired it and used the poles as the main verticals of the new shed. A hole boring machine fitted to the back of a tractor was used to dig holes some six feet into the ground. The whole building was sheeted with corrugated iron. David Goseltine, Roy Curzon, Jeff and others carried out much the work. This building



eventually was used when we cleaned out the cart sheds when Jeff died in 2001 and we then had access to the whole site. Chris Wallis, the son of Barnes Wallis of the bouncing bomb fame of WWII, helped Jeff with the build. John Childs had by then joined the Society and together with David Goseltine clad the barn with corrugated iron that Jeff had accumulated. I remember they had all the roof trusses fixed ready to take the roof sheeting. Unfortunately, they didn't cross brace them and the wind in the night laid them flat, as found the next day

To be continued.....

Norman Groom

## **PAUL CHAPMAN**



Paul, it seems, can put his mind to most things mechanical that need either designing and construction or a “quick fix”. He uses the machinery in the museum’s old farm workshop with a deft ability that belies the skills involved. When asked about the need to provide an

alternative exit to the Cooke Collection, he designed, fabricated and welded the staircase beneath the farm clock. To get to this level of ability is the result of the culmination of his working life's experiences. In 1960 he began an engineering apprenticeship with GEC in North Wembley, working on coal mine safety equipment and x-ray machinery. The work in the tool room, as Paul puts it, was good training. In 1967, a move to Data Dynamics involved teleprinters and meeting Mary, his wife, and consolidated those earlier skills. Another ten years passed before working for a company repairing electrical military equipment. A stint at EMI followed working in the tool room making bespoke jigs and fixtures. Finally, Paul found himself at Brunel University in Uxbridge between 1996 and 2011, again in the machine shop and aiding students with their undergraduate projects.

Paul doesn't only volunteer with us, he also is part of the Ruislip Lido Railway Society and in a matter-of-fact way mentions having modified around 50 new axles for use on the rolling stock to overcome the problem of bearings loosening on the axles during use. His contacts have allowed him to help re-equip their workshop with lathe and hydraulic press, both for a moderate outlay.

Not being one who is content to sit back, he also works for Remap – a nationwide group of engineers making artefacts for disabled people. This allows him to pick up a problem, produce a design brief and, by trial and error to produce a fully functional aid that would not have been available commercially.

If all this were not enough, Paul also repairs lawn mowers as a small side business. He says that he likes to keep busy because he easily gets bored. Mary may be glad that he has a properly kitted out workshop at home where he can pursue the work outlined above!

Dennis Trebble

## **A BRIEF HISTORY OF [MY!] TIME**

### **Part two**

Further reflections on my life which began during WW2 in Dartford Kent.

In the latter years of my time at BICC, I was also a semi-professional bass guitarist. I played in several bands during during the late 1950's and 60's. Although none of them “made it”, I had some great times meeting lots of interesting people. We were usually a support act and were on shows with Joe Brown, Nero and the Gladiators, etc.

The best “gigs” I remember were at American Air Force bases around the east and south of England. Nearest to Pitstone was the base at Chicksands. I don't know how we managed to juggle our careers with gigs! Many times driving home through the night just in time to catch the bus to work!

At this time at BICC, most big power cables were constructed using multi-layered paper tapes as insulation. Although inherently a good insulator, it was hygroscopic to a degree. To dry the lapped cable it was put in a sealed tank under high vacuum and heated for several hours to dry the paper. Finally, a wax or oil compound was fed in to impregnate the paper. As part of my training I was sent on a vacuum technology course at Edwards High Vacuum Co. in Crawley. On the course were a number of people from Rolls Royce. I didn't know at the time, but I think their interest was probably in coating the experimental carbon composite fan blades for the troubled RB211 engine.

Although my main interest and training was electrically based, I went for a speculative interview for a job as a “Commissioning Engineer with knowledge of instrumentation and vacuum systems”. I was offered the job, and, as it meant a threefold increase in salary, my acceptance decision made itself! The company was Parkson Industrial Equipment Co. in Dartford. It was a UK subsidiary of Parkson Corp. in Fort Lauderdale Florida. The company was founded by Einar Parmason in 1960. He was the owner of the Parker Pen Co. I guess the company name was based on this history.

As a commissioning engineer, I visited many interesting sites throughout UK and Europe including Fort Dunlop, Lindt and Sprungli, Suchard, Jet Petrol refinery, and many others including British Gelatine in Luton. Amongst these, was a factory at Speke, Liverpool, originally owned by The Distillers Company, which was the world's largest producer of penicillin during the latter stages of WW2 continuing into post war years. At this time, I was able to swap my ailing Ford Anglia for a Sunbeam Rapier. A wonderful drive for it's time! I get very envious of the superbly restored example that usually shows up on our open days.



After a number of years, the company was taken over by Axel Johnson Inc., the American arm of a large Swedish group. As a result, Parkson UK was closed. A lucky few, including myself, were offered jobs with Johnsons in the UK. Their factory was based in Berkshire, so it was a big upheaval for my young family. The Company treated their staff very

well, so our moving “package” was very generous. The company was run on very traditional lines and structure, retaining sports and social club, staff restaurant, parties for employees’ children at Christmas etc. In my opinion these were good things which have largely disappeared today.

Johnsons UK continued with some of Parkson products, but their main business was for food processing machinery. The biggest projects in my time there were for the then Soviet Union. We sold many complete soft margarine plants there. They included all equipment to make the product including, thermoforming and printing plastic tubs, filling machines, packaging and palletising. As a result, I spent a lot of time in USSR cities including Moscow, Kiev, Minsk, Tbilisi and others.

At the time, the Johnson group had a very wide range of products. Commissioning these took me to bunkering oil tankers in the Persian Gulf and a North Sea oil rig. The oil rig was, at the time, the largest of its kind. It was 125 miles NE of Sumburgh in Shetland and involved travelling in a big Bristows Sikorsky Helicopter, full dry-suited.



*Thistle Alpha North Sea Platform*

During this period, I was promoted to Projects Manager overseeing a group of mechanical, electrical and chemical engineers. We all gained experience with a wide range of interesting projects. Apart from continuing business in the then USSR, we had contracts with Birds Eye, Findus, Rowntrees, Glaxo, and many other food and pharmaceutical companies in the UK and around the world. In the early 80's I made my first visit to China. The site was at a small place called Kong Mun. This was situated on the banks of the Pearl River. To get there entailed an 8 hour overnight trip on a "steamer" from Hong Kong. At that time, the population of the Pearl River delta, which includes Hong Kong, Guangzhou, {Canton}, Macau etc., was approximately 10 million. In 2022 it was estimated at 74 million.

In the mid 1980's, Johnsons sold their UK company to Swiss based TMCI. As part of the take over, I became general manager of the UK arm of the company. We had head office near Zurich, test plants in USA, a factory near Venice and engineering and design offices in UK. My new job entailed a lot of travel to most parts of the world. The installation and commissioning crew I had was truly international. The main crew consisted of engineers from UK, Italy, South Korea, Spain and USA. In spite of diverse cultures, in general we all worked well together. To promote our business, I travelled extensively in China at this time, from Guangzhou in the south to Baotou in Inner Mongolia, Qinhuandao in the north east and many other cities. My final working trip there was in 1998.

I made a lot of Chinese friends in Kunming, and in 2004 and 2008 I went back to visit some of them. It was like travelling to a different country to that I had worked in. Originally, the only cars on the roads were government or factory vehicles. With the lifting of restrictions and the exponential growth in the wealth of the people, there were now traffic jams of private cars. Kunming was a different place - new international airport, new western style hotels, tower blocks everywhere even Walmart and Macdonalds!!

After retirement from TMCI, I set up a small consultancy for electrical design of bespoke control systems. I had a thoroughly enjoyable and interesting time until finally quitting in 2008. It was by chance that I discovered PIMS. This was from a visit by the Aylesbury model boat

club I belong to.

Thus far, I have thoroughly enjoyed the company of our superb volunteers, and the interesting projects undertaken. I confidently hope it may continue.

Rob Henry

## **Vacancy for Bookkeeper**

The PIMS Executive Committee is seeking a bookkeeper to work alongside our existing Treasurer, who is due to retire next year.

The work content will be about one day per week, with some additional days required at year end (31 March).

The post would suit someone already working in an accountancy practice / business accounts department, with an interest in the museum. An understanding of double entry bookkeeping to trial balance level is required. This position will be voluntary, but remuneration would be considered for the right applicant.

Start date, ideally, would be 1 January 2024.

**Please contact the Museum Secretary for further information:**

**[secretary@pitstonemuseum.co.uk](mailto:secretary@pitstonemuseum.co.uk)**

### **OPEN DAYS 2023**

13 <sup>th</sup> August	Sunday
28 <sup>th</sup> August	Summer bank holiday Monday
10 <sup>th</sup> September	Sunday
8 <sup>th</sup> October	Sunday

Opening times : 10.30 am to 4.30 pm

Prices are published on our website : [pitstonemuseum.co.uk](http://pitstonemuseum.co.uk)

## **MUSEUM TALKS 2023**

6.45pm Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> July,

### **Antiques evening with Stephen Hearn.**

Stephen returns to discuss and value treasures we show him. Cheese and wine. Requires pre-booking.

8 pm Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> August 2023

### **Knitting in Africa.**

Chris Hillier talks about his experience of representing the Workaid charity when he went to Uganda to see how equipment refurbished in Chesham was being used to enable people to support themselves.

8 pm Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> September

### **The making of the Tring Zoological Museum.**

Tim Amsden a leading local authority on the Rothschilds takes us through the development from the obsession of a young Walter to the present day world class collection.

8pm Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> October

### **Great Barns.**

Ken Bonham's talk previously arranged was postponed by covid. He visited our big barn on an Open Day and is keen to share his enthusiasm and show his static display of barns. Website: [www.greatbarns.org.uk](http://www.greatbarns.org.uk)

8pm Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> November

### **AGM.**

Followed by

### **My life in H.M. Customs.**

Geoff Travis, PIMS member, relates stories of his experiences from the docks to the airports.



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