

Pitstone and Ivinghoe Museum Society Newsletter



Spring 2024

EDITOR'S NOTE

You might remember that in the last newsletter I intimated that as I was moving house and away from the proximity to the museum that I had previously enjoyed, this edition would be the last newsletter that I would put together and I asked, more in hope than in expectation, for a volunteer to step into the vacated chair. I have been deafened by the sound of silence! I gather that it might be possible to produce two newsletters per year at the current time. It seems to me that given the size of the membership we should be able to find a willing person to take on the role. However it turns out I think it a real comment on the society we have become should we lose this opportunity to maintain the link with those who may be unable to attend the site in person.

I have asked various people on site to contribute to this edition – hence the articles on extending the model railway, running the museum shop and Wags Wharf. There always seems to be so much going on that it is difficult to keep a finger on the pulse. Tuesdays and Thursdays are volunteer days and we have been fortunate, since lock-down was imposed, to have attracted a band of enthusiastic volunteers with a multitude of skills. There is always room for a few more should the need to scratch a practical itch arise, however.

I hope that the museum continues to go from strength to strength and continues to be a unique window on the past and the way we lived.

Dennis Trebble

MANAGER'S MUSINGS

As you probably all know by now, I haven't really been able to come to the farm much this year, due to my neutropenia which is something to do with the white blood cells, which are the ones that fight infection of any sort. Apparently I haven't got many and I could be seen off by the most minor of ailments, so I have to keep away from my favourite people, until the medics can persuade my bone marrow to make me some working white blood cells.

The worst part of it is missing my first Open Day in ten years. Thank you all for making it one of the best and particular thanks go to whoever arranged the fantastic weather. We seem to have a very healthy number of new volunteers who have slotted in beautifully to our systems and have been accepted into our community by our existing volunteers.

One of the most impressive features of life at the museum is the way most people seem to be able to slot into place seamlessly without having to be persuaded. One thing I would like to see on Open Days is volunteers exploring parts of the site they are not familiar with. We can be better hosts if all of us know a bit about everything and it's not good for someone to be stuck in one location all day long! We really need more people to help on reception. I really mean *help* - just an hour or two - we don't want anyone to be stuck in one place all day. This applies to all stations, no matter how specialist. There are 40+ sites that need some form of supervision, so it gives you plenty of scope for a great day, we should enjoy the event as much as our guests.

Pete Farrar

THE MUSEUM SHOP

How would you like to run the shop, Norman asked me one day.

Yes, I would love to.

I had never worked in a shop so it was a big leap of faith. Pete and I set about redesigning the interior and I arranged a list of helpers. The stock from the original shop was re-organised, but after a year or so I decided that it was rather silly having to buy enough stock to get a discount and pay delivery when we had a large contingency of older volunteers downsizing or clearing parental homes, together with those who had children who had grown out of their toys. So, the message went out and the items came in. Brilliant.

In the end I had to turn down items as it was in danger of becoming a kitchen shop! The books and jigsaws saw us through Covid. I put a table out for returns, left them for 7 days, then back to be borrowed again. The shop now has a fantastic array of items for sale from old tools, toys and lovely ornaments to curiosity items. In the past we have sold two old manual Singer sewing machines, one to a visitor who was delighted as his wife could now do sewing - they lived on a barge.

Parents love it when we count the change back to their children, thereby teaching them the value of money. Even siblings sort change out between themselves to pay for things. We have a system of barter as well -- nothing has a rigid price and all we wish for is that the visitors don't feel ripped off. It is a win-win situation. Costs are nil, any money made is a profit for the museum, and we all have fun with the visitors.

Ronnie Farrar

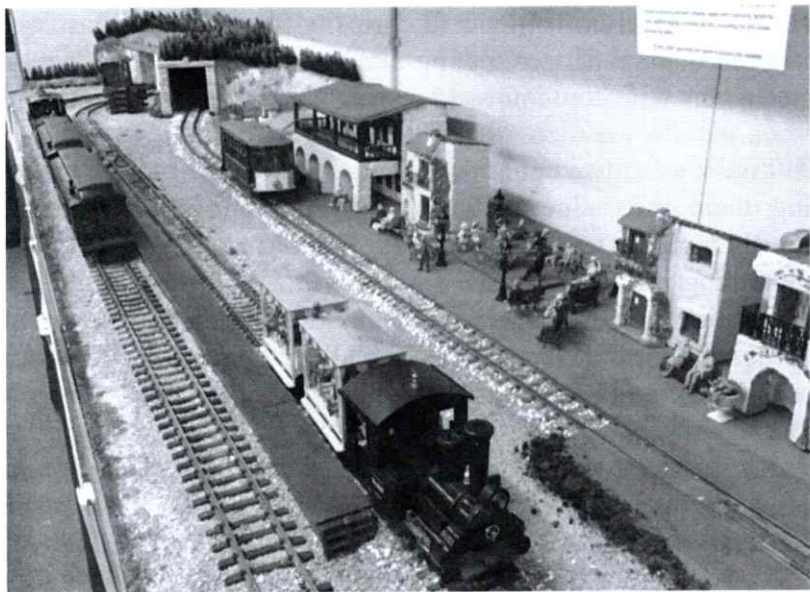
IMPROVEMENTS TO THE MODEL RAILWAY

On the September Open Day last year, we received, from a visitor, a very generous donation of a quantity of LGB-G model railway equipment including a locomotive, some rolling stock, a considerable quantity of track and several accessories.

We already had, in the Model Railway shed, a small LGB-G display, notionally set in New Mexico USA. Space was quite restricted, and it had only been possible to accommodate a layout which included a shuttle locomotive, a streetcar and some traditional New Mexico style buildings.

To make best use of the donated items it would be necessary to combine it with the existing layout and try to find a way to increase the available space. We concluded that the best option would be to make a continuous circuit, with one of the straights enclosed in a box, with transparent front panels, on the outside of the existing shed. Initially, the idea was to

support the outside box on trestles or heavy-duty shelf brackets. We were hoping to complete the work throughout the winter months, in time for the Easter Monday Open Day.



Interior of the railway layout

Inside the shed, there is a wonderful collection of models of old farm carts and carriages, made by Clarence Purton, each displayed in a glass case. The collection is located on a high-level shelf, above the model railway layout, and there were several wooden struts under the shelf, to support the considerable weight of the exhibits. These struts would have significantly inhibited what could be done with the background scenery of the new railway layout, so they were removed, and the shelf is now supported by three wire cables suspended from the roof timbers.

When we removed some of the weatherboarding from the outside of the shed, we found that the framework was sufficiently robust to allow us to repurpose the shelf struts as cantilever supports, under the base board of the external box. This eliminated the need for trestles and simplified any problems that might arise with grass cutting.

The external box has been weatherproofed with a metal clad roof and complimentary weatherboarding on the ends. The transparent front panels can be easily opened in the unlikely event of a derailment, but they are closed in such a way as to deter unauthorised access.

The large American train will run continuously around the full circuit and will be visible through the clear panels outside the shed. The tram will be controlled by an electronic shuttle circuit, which allows it to run back and forth automatically, with a pause at each end. The small, donated locomotive can be operated by visitors using a two-way switch on the front of the layout.

Work is now complete, and has been given its' first trial run over the Easter Sunday open day.

Dave Hale and Pat Kerry

WAGS WHARF

It all started in 2003 when Geoff acquired, on spec, a box full of beam engine bits, boilers and odds & ends related thereto. The engine was assembled and coupled to a boiler and, hey presto a working live steam driven model was achieved!

It was very nice but what to do with it?

Enter the Wednesday Afternoon Garden Steamers, a motley bunch of fellows [collectively known as WAGS, even before football wives assumed that title] keen on running live steam trains in their gardens. "How about building an exhibition layout?" someone said.

So it came about that "Wags Wharf" was built over the winter of 2003-04 and went out for the first time for exhibition at Leighton Buzzard Railway in July 2004.

The layout, which is totally fictional was designed around the beam engine, said to represent the beam engine that pumped reservoir water into the Grand Union Canal at Tringford. The canal was "rerouted" to Wags Wharf for delivery of "coal" needed for the boiler and removal of the arising "ash", akin to the transfer of sand from Arnold's quarries at Leighton Buzzard onto narrow boats [note: not "barges"]. We have to go to Watford to find a pumping station with a narrow gauge railway. This connected with an LMS siding for the delivery of coal and salt to the Colne Valley water pumping station. Further historical information can be found on the display board opposite the model.

From 2004 the layout went on the exhibition circuit to a number of exhibitions until 2008. This was very labour intensive storing the many parts of the layout at members houses, hiring a large van for transport on a Friday evening, loading up, early the following morning driving to the venue, unloading, erecting, getting everything working and operating the layout all day for the public. One exhibition we attended at Chatham Dockyard went on for 3 days! At the end of the exhibition it was a reverse procedure. As we got older the novelty began to wear off and a permanent home for the layout was sought.



The steam beam engine and engine house (Wags Wharf)

A chance meeting with Norman Groom lead us to Pitstone museum. At first we were offered one of the bays of the cart shed. This was open-fronted so we had to build a wall incorporating a period window and stable door. We had good times in that little room, the layout was set diagonally across the room to get it in, so this only left a small triangular space for the public. It certainly was cosy! The museum chiefs must have approved of our entertaining the visitors so we were relocated to a bigger space in the Dairy Nissen Hut displacing a display of a Victorian schoolroom. And there we are still to this day, so do come and see us sometime!

Wags Wharf March 2024

FRONT COVER : The shop (*by Ronnie Farrar*)

BACK COVER : old machinery by the pond (*by Dennis Trebble*)

OPEN DAYS 2024

All Open Days are from 10.30am to 4.30pm.

6 May	Early May Bank Holiday Monday
27 May	Spring Bank Holiday Monday
9 June	Sunday
14 July	Sunday
11 August	Sunday
26 August	Bank Holiday Monday
8 September	Sunday
13 October	Sunday

EVENT

25 July	Antiques evening: 6.45pm see leaflet for details
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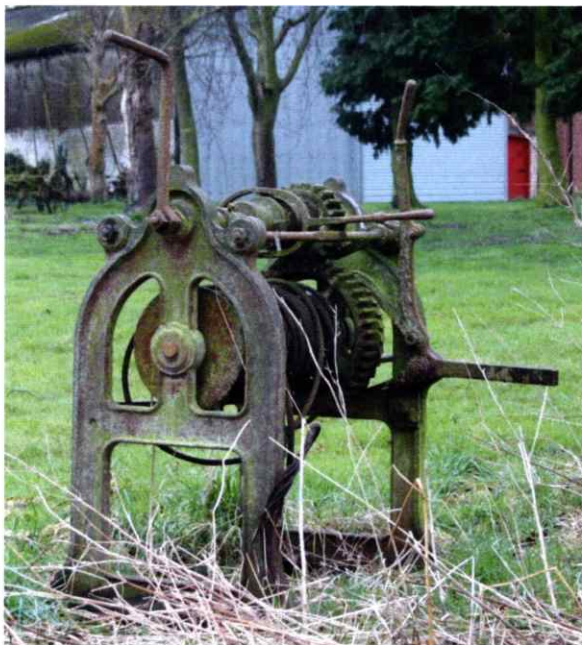
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