

PITSTONE & IVINGHOE MUSEUM SOCIETY
FORWARD PLAN issue 9

Museum: Pitstone Green Museum

Governing Body; Pitstone & Ivinghoe Museum Society

1. Introduction

Since issue 1 of the Forward Plan adopted in October 2000 considerable advances have been made at the Museum. The name of the Society has been changed from the Pitstone Local History Society to the Pitstone & Ivinghoe Museum Society (PIMS) to reflect the major activities of the Society.

In December 2001 our landlord Jeff Hawkins died and under the terms of our lease a significant additional number of buildings came under the Museum's control. This has added to our workload but solved many problems in that we have total control of the site and have resolved the previous problems of ownership and storage of 'no longer required' artefacts on the site. Virtually all of our Strategies as defined in Issue 1 of this document have been completed and it is only time and the availability of volunteers that governs the rate of progress of our present plans. The 'Mission' and 'Mission Statement' remain unchanged and they have proved to be correct in all their aims, as the fortunes of the Museum have continued to improve..

2. The Mission

The Museum is fortunate that it not only has an 1831 farm as its base but collections of artefacts and equipment that were used on this farm. Over a period of some 30-40 years the then owner of the farm, together with a band of volunteers had collected a vast quantity of other local artefacts including the complete contents of several tradesmen's shops.

The Museum and hence the collection will not survive unless we have both adequate funds to pay our annual running costs and a sufficient number of volunteers to operate the Museum. Both these require the Museum to be of as high a standard as possible. Volunteers will remain if they can see an attractive environment in which they can carry out their tasks and see their results appreciated by the visitors. The visitors will attend if we can make the Museum attractive and interesting to them.

We have nowadays to contend with Sunday shopping and a proliferation of other events at the weekends and it is an unfortunate fact that the public may not instantly recognize farm machinery as a fascinating subject. Whilst the Museum is basically a Rural Life Museum it has to contain a mixture of other historical craft or hobby related exhibits to provide interest for the whole family. The Museum is primarily for education whilst at the same time being entertaining, and an important part of the Museum's development is to encourage school parties and provide additional facilities for their needs.

3. Mission Statement

To maintain a Museum at Pitstone Green Farm that has a secure volunteer base in order to preserve the core collection of original farm buildings, artefacts and local history documentation for the benefit of present and future generations. To make both the site and the collection available to present and future generations for general interest, research and education. Exhibits and attractions outside the core collection to be included to ensure public interest and hence financial security.

4. Situation review

4.1 Volunteers

The Museum is operated by volunteers only. These can be divided basically into three groups namely manual, services and administration, with considerable overlap between groups.

The Museum's strongest asset is the manual group. We have volunteers experienced in building and construction techniques, planning, plumbing, horticulture, carpentry, mechanical and electrical engineering and technology that are capable of tackling the majority of tasks we can envisage in the future. To date they have converted what was a redundant farm with a vast quantity of unsorted items into a Museum that one can be proud of.

We have a service group that provides all the additional help required on the Museum open days (in particular, the catering). Whilst the group is small and often over-stretched it does provide a high standard of service for the Museum.

The third group is administration and management. The group has become more focused in its outlook in terms of the abilities of those involved. Management, on a day to day basis, is the responsibility of the museum manager and he is advised, from time to time, by the executive committee. This system works well in that it allows volunteers to engage in those tasks they find most interesting and suited to their abilities, whilst the overall progress of these tasks is monitored by the manager. The administrative staff include both the secretary and minutes secretary together with the archivist. All three posts are occupied by ex-school teachers with significant organisational and IT skills.

4.2 Curatorial training

Virtually all the volunteers who work at the museum are retired individuals and they have accumulated over many years, multiple skills and considerable knowledge regarding the tasks required to maintain and improve the museum site.

Since the adoption of the previous Forward Plan we have undertaken a complete inventory of the museum's artefacts, updating the computer records and ensuring that the location of each is both known and recorded. This has been a major task and it revealed a number of errors in our database which have now been amended. The hope is that the small team responsible for this task will be able to maintain the accuracy going forward and training is available to others to ensure the continuity of this system.

The general volunteer body is periodically updated about the progress of what might be thought to be "office" matters and the proof of the pudding has been seen in the museum's decision to acquire the Cook Collection (essentially one man's museum of the changes to everyday life via seemingly transient consumer goods of the Twentieth Century). This has engendered considerable enthusiasm and reflects well on the curatorial skills that have been developed.

The opportunity for an educative work experience for a person or persons of undergraduate experience who might be interested in using primary evidence for research purposes and who may also be considering a career in the curatorial profession should be available at the discretion of the Executive Committee. This kind of training should be in partnership with the further education establishment attended by the trainee.

1) To inform those volunteers who are not at the present involved in administration about the details of this work that is carried out, the importance of it, and the need to follow guide lines to ensure that we keep within the requirements of the various bodies involved such as the Charity Commission and the Arts Council. This is of particular importance in ensuring that correct processes are carried out when any artefact is moved from one location to another, and that all new artefacts are documented on arrival.

- 2) To ensure that all those individuals who are involved in other administration tasks are fully informed as to the procedures to be followed regarding our documentation/cataloguing system, the location of that information, and the requirements for keeping it up to date.
- 3) To make all the information we hold, including details of our artefacts, slides, photographs, documents, official documents, reports, historical information, minutes of all meetings, in fact all basic information relating to the Museum and to PIMS, to be available to any individual who may require it. This to be prepared in a form that requires minimum knowledge of computers other than the ability to insert a DVD and operate a mouse or touchpad.
- 4) To find one or two suitable candidates to become involved in the administration/documentation processes such that the loss of a key individual would allow their work to be carried on without long term interruption.

4.3 Management

The Pitstone & Ivinghoe Museum Society (PIMS) Executive Committees is the governing body of the Society and delegates the day to day operation of the Society to the Officers as follows.

The Museum Manager, reporting to the Executive Committee, is responsible for day-to-day decisions, forward planning and museum expenditure. All decisions taken by the Manager should be discussed with the appropriate Officers also taking note of opinions; comments etc. raised by any of the museum volunteers. The Manager submits a museum report at each Executive Committee meeting, on the activities and decisions taken at the museum. When the manger is unavailable, the Deputy Manager undertakes his duties and responsibilities.

The Secretary, reporting to the Executive Committee, is responsible for communication with the Arts Council, the National Trust, the Charity Commission, and legal matters in conjunction with the Society's Treasurer.

The Society's Treasurer, reporting to the Executive Committee, is responsible for the financial control of the Society and is to be involved in all decisions that affect substantial expenditure and income as well as involvement with legal matters.

The Site Manager, reporting to the Museum Manager, is responsible for all construction, repair and maintenance of site buildings and their services, and the purchase of building materials.

The Society's Archivist, reporting to the Museum Manager, is responsible for the cataloguing of all artefacts, building structures and photographs using the Modes Compact Documentation System and the storage and safe keeping of all these and other museum and Society related documents.

4.4 4 Year Financial plan

Below is our forecast of Income and Expenditure for the next four years. The forecast is based on our results for prior years adjusted to allow for known or expected changes. Historically we have operated to a budget since 2007. Our experience has been that we are usually close to total expenditure figures although the detail, in particular of Project costs, does change during the year. The main weakness of our budget and forecasting is Income. The main source of our income is the Open Day takings and these are very dependent on the weather and what other events are taking place locally and in some instances, nationally. We can increase our Open day income by increasing entrance fees but need to balance such increases to ensure we meet what is acceptable to our target family visitor.

Currently we have a solid Balance Sheet with sufficient cash resources to meet foreseeable problems. Our policy now is not to accumulate cash but endeavour to achieve a Nil Surplus/Deficit each year whilst ensuring the Museum remains viable.

Year	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
2017-18			
<u>Income</u>			
Subscriptions	1500	1500	1600
Open day income	12300	12500	13000
Visits & meetings income	900	1000	1100
Hire & filming	1200	500	550
Donations etc.	300	300	300
Interest received	250	250	300
Total income	<u>16050</u>	<u>16050</u>	<u>16850</u>
<u>Expenditure</u>			
Open day costs	1500	1600	1800
Project costs	7250	8000	8000
Repair & maintenance	1475	1500	1600
Admin costs	4500	5000	5500
Capital spend	500	500	1000
Depreciation	800	600	500
Total expenditure	<u>16025</u>	<u>17200</u>	<u>17400</u>
<u>Surplus/Deficit</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>-1150</u>	<u>-550</u>

4.5 Visitor numbers, access by the public and other bodies, groups or individuals

As the standard of the Museum and our advertising experience has risen over the past few years we have seen a steady rise in visitor numbers. Rearrangement of school's curricula has unfortunately reduced the number of visiting school parties, and financial constraints along with an excessive overburden of red tape has currently reduced them to only one or two groups each year. In recent years the museum has been open to the public on-nine days each year from April to October. The museum site is extensive and housed in farm buildings. Hard standing is at a premium, car parking is in orchards and the majority of the site is on grass. Being a rural life museum we frequently attract large numbers of vehicles as part of our open day displays. These can be military vehicles, motorcycles, vintage and veteran cars, or agricultural tractors. The season between November and April means that the ground conditions are not suitable for either the public or school parties, apart from an occasional person requiring research information or specialist knowledge.

One of our biggest attractions is the variety and unusual forms of entertainment that we can offer. These are often owned by or operated by individuals, groups or other societies, several occupying a permanent place within the museum site and all requiring experienced and knowledgeable persons to attend to these exhibits. To open at weekends and Bank holidays for nine times during the summer season is the maximum we can expect the volunteers to give in the way of their time. This of course includes our catering staff who provide refreshments on every open day.

Our visitor season is unbalanced in that our best open days by far are the four Bank Holiday Mondays. We would like to increase visitor numbers on our Sunday open days from June to October. The maximum number of visitors we can accommodate comfortably on the site is approximately 350; above 400 would become embarrassing. We are often close to this level on Easter Monday, especially if we have good weather. The balance is difficult to maintain throughout the season but it is something we are addressing.

We have until recently offered the site for wedding receptions and other private events. For these events we are dependent on volunteers experienced in museum matters to give up a substantial amount their time over a weekend. In view of our healthy financial situation and the decreasing numbers of volunteers willing to give up such time, the decision has been taken to suspend such hires in the foreseeable future. Our income has also been boosted by filming on site or providing items to be used on film sets. Group visits outside our normal opening times are available but again within our limitations, and individuals are always welcome for research purposes. Our vast photographic and document archives are often accessed by both private and professional organisations.

4.6 The Museum Site

The Museum is housed in farm buildings, the majority dating from after 1831, many of them being listed

. The site has a very large 16th/17th century timbered barn. Much of the effort to date has been in stabilising these buildings, modifying, adding to or improving them in order to house the collection and provide facilities such as toilets, wheelchair access for the disabled, a Museum Shop, and a catering area. The listed buildings are considered as artefacts in their own right.

It is unlikely that we will ever have areas with a controlled atmospheric environment other than a very limited storage or office area. In December 2001 more buildings were turned over to the Museum in accordance with the leasing agreement. This reduced the congestion in buildings that were being used for storage, and also increased our display areas.

Included in our 99-year lease is a mixed prune and gage orchard. Orchards like this were very common in the area 50 years ago, but now very few remain. The trees are believed to be of breeds specific only to the Vale of Aylesbury, and are very mature and nearing the end of their lives. It is intended to try to propagate these in order to preserve the species and the orchard for future generations. The orchard also offers scope for additional events both on Museum open days and as stand-alone events.

When our original landlord died, the farm, along with some of its cultivated land was bequeathed to the National Trust, who are therefore now our landlord. As part of an arrangement between the National Trust and the Local Authority to provide allotments for villagers a small parcel of land adjacent to our boundary became surplus and was offered to us at a peppercorn rent. A lease for this land has been signed, but it is considered unlikely we would obtain planning consent to build on any part of it. Its use will be limited to outdoor displays.

Recently a building which was donated to PIMS in the 1980's, and was erected at Pitstone Green Farm with the owner's permission, has shown signs of dereliction. The building, commonly referred to as the "Green Shed", was being used as a store and occasional workshop and has been demolished. It has been replaced by a new building on approximately the same footprint and furnished as a carpentry shop open to the public on open days.

During the winter of 2011 we had a major roof tile slippage on one of the listed buildings. We had been under the impression that the whole of the roof in question had been re-tiled in the early 1990's, but a search of the relevant documentation revealed that although the original survey recommended a full re-tile, a second survey recommended only a partial re-tile and this was done with the aid of a grant. The rest of the roof has now been inspected and a maintenance plan endorsed to ensure the safety of the structure.

4.7 The collection

The core collection of the Museum consists of those items that were used at Pitstone Green Farm together with further farming, crafts, domestic and other items relating to the local area. The end date for the core collection is taken as mid 1900's, arbitrarily 1950, otherwise the collection becomes too great to cope with, given the space we have available for storage and display. Over the twenty plus years in which PIMS has had a firm base upon which to establish the Museum a small collection of scientific/technical artefacts has been accumulated, and these seem very popular with visitors. With the increasing pace of modern technology, items being sold as 'state-of-the-art' today are becoming obsolete within 20 years and being scrapped. A representative selection of some of these is being acquired for preservation while they are still available, and so in this category we have a few items on display from as late as the mid 1980's.

There are no storage facilities in which we can control the temperature or humidity and in the majority of the storage areas these two parameters are the same on the inside of the building as the outside.

The Museum policy is not to act as a storage facility and we will leave this to the larger museums with paid staff and adequate space. A serious problem is woodworm but now that we have the collection under control we are steadily treating all artefacts and some buildings that are vulnerable to prevent re-infestation. Rust problems also exist but not as serious as the woodworm problem. A minor but ongoing problem is wood rot due to the ingress of rain over long periods, but the building maintenance programme of work is alleviating this.

Those items such as farm machinery, left outside, unprotected for many years, are potentially long term expendable due to their present state of deterioration. However over the last two years a number of the less dilapidated of these machines have been stripped, grit blasted and painted, so preventing further deterioration for some years and making them more attractive to the visiting public. Indeed it has been revealed that some are still capable of being used and demonstrated.

One of our greatest assets at the Museum is that the provenance of much of the collection is available from the people who actually used the equipment. To date, most of the discussions regarding the collection have dealt with the artefacts themselves and not the information. Whilst brief descriptions of some of the items are already on computer, many of the stories behind the others, and the detailed history of the working life of the farm are kept in a more piecemeal fashion and therefore difficult to interpret. This information could easily be lost to future generations. By now being more selective about what we keep, it is possible to retain both the item and the full information on when, how and why it was used.

We have virtually completed rationalizing the 'on site' material, retaining items which are included in the core collection and disposing of those which we consider beyond restoration,

duplicates or items not relevant to our mission statement. We were fortunate in that Jeff Hawkins, our landlord had built a large storage barn on his own land for storing his own equipment that was previously on the Museum site and items that he had collected but were unwanted by the Museum. Most of these items have already been removed from the Museum site with a few, recently discovered, being either removed or accepted within the Museum.

4.8 Documentation

Items in the core collection can all be categorized into one or another of the following three areas

1. Tangible solid artefacts
2. Documents, e.g. papers, booklets, maps, letters, etc, etc
3. Recorded images; e.g. photographs, transparencies, audio and video recordings, etc

Our policy from here onward is to maintain this classification in the form of three databases.

As has been allude to earlier, the cataloguing of the museum collection is now complete and there is an internally generated program that allows rapid retrieval of information from this process. This system utilizes the Modes Compact program and a series of spreadsheets that can be integrated with that program. The manager, archivist and secretary have access to this system, which has proven useful in a number of instances where we have been asked for help by either members of our society of local individuals seeking help with family history projects

Each of the three categories have separate databases, making their accessibility a more simple task. The problems that we had experienced in the change from the Catalyst program to Modes Compact program have been solved and our computer records officer keeps an up to date record of any additions/deletions to the collection.

4.9 Technology.

Due to the location of the Museum, the cost of providing a permanent telephone line becomes excessive and thus the Museum does not have 'on site' access to the Internet. However a Museum Website has been created (www.pitstonemuseum.co.uk) which is visited regularly and from conversations our members have had with users it would seem to be adequate for its purpose. We are aware of and keen to increase our involvement with I.T. if finance and time become available. A recent initiative has been to set up a Facebook page together with a number of volunteers who have consequently "spread the word" and this has proven to be a successful effort.

We see audio/visual displays as a useful enhancement to visitor experience and it is intended to investigate ways and means of introducing these in selected locations at the Museum.

Acquisition by donation has provided the Museum with a number of microscopes with CCTV cameras and monitors, providing further technological advances.

5. Key Service Statistics 1st April 2014 to 31st March 2015

Visitor Numbers (Adults) - 1767 (not including group visits)

Visitor Numbers (Children) - 279

School party visits. 1 Number of Children in party ~30

PIMS Income - £18551

PIMS Expenditure - £11952 Grants NIL

Estimated number of items in Artefact Collection 2700; of which over 99% catalogued

Estimated number of items in Document Collection 450; of which 99% catalogued.

Estimated number of items in Photographic Image Collection 2000; of which 99% scanned and catalogued

6. Strategic Aims

6.1 To increase public awareness of the Museum, increase visitor numbers and adult and school parties.

6.2 To maintain the structure, drainage and roofs of the buildings for the long term future of the Museum and to ensure as far as possible the best environment for the artefacts.

6.3 To extend or enhance existing buildings in order to provide more space for exhibits in keeping with the existing listed building environment. To reorganize or relocate existing exhibits to use the existing space more efficiently.

6.4 To continue with the conservation and restoration of the artefacts held by the Society

6.5 To restore and maintain the orchard.

7. Strategy

7.1 To promote the Society by every means possible using articles in newspapers, journals, newsletters, free events advertising etc. Distribute circulars to local clubs, societies and other groups that may use the Museum for evening functions. A recent innovation has been a link with Three Counties radio and the intention is to host a live show from the museum site next season.

7.2 To ensure the installation of disabled access facilities where feasible for the whole of the collection on public display.

7.3 To maintain the Documentation tasks as defined in section **4.8**

7.4 To continue repairs and restoration of the recently donated Barrel Piano to working condition

7.5 To continue with the collection development in the loft above the MeetingRoom. This currently houses the Cook Collection (new to the museum in 2015) and will be further enhanced by additions to the displays together with information sheets .

7.6 To engage in the redevelopment and expansion of the current office space to allow for designated areas for the Manager, Secretary and Archivist as well as the provision of paper artefact storage space.

7.7 To investigate the feasibility of using audio-visual displays to improve the quality of information available to the public as in section **4.8**.

7.8 To manage the tree belt that borders the site to the north and east to provide an attractive 'walk through' for members of the public.

7.9 To update descriptive information adjacent to all exhibits to assist interpretation by the general public.

7.10 To complete roof tiling/repairs to all the site buildings as referred to in section **4.5**.

7.11 To maintain the orchard by judicious pruning and by raising saplings to replace ageing mature trees nearing the end of their lives as in section **4.5**

7.12 To provide guided and mentored work experience via one or more of the retired school teachers during further education holiday periods as indicated in section **4.2**. We are currently engaged in this partnership with Miss K. Brown who studies history at reading University.

8. Objectives

8.1 Strategy items 7.1, 7.2, 7.6, 7.7, 7.8, 7.11 are continuously ongoing projects.

8.2 Strategy item 7.10 is conducted in accordance with the findings of a surveyor who ~~has been~~ was commissioned to report on one of our listed buildings.

8.3 Strategy item **7.12** has been a recent development and is one we would wish to continue to foster.

Issue 8

..... Chairman

Annex 1 – Winter projects 2015/16

- Finish chaff cutter complete renovation
- Office extension to be completed by March 2016
- Village Life Room to be completely stripped and refurbished, including displays, to be ready for open days, beginning Spring 2016
- 00 gauge model railway to be finished
- Various barn engines to be put to running order
- Reception and toilets to be cleaned and prepared for Spring 2016
- Internal signage to be continuously updated/replaced
- Line Shafting to be erected in Black Shed in order to render barn machinery operable
- Crossley Engine Room facelift
- Big Barn replacement of rotten and broken boarding
- Creation of outdoor 5 inch working steam railway
- General ongoing artefact renovation