

# OVER THE GATE SPRING 2013



## Friends of the Farmland Museum Newsletter

Regd. Charity No. 1072142. Website: [www.dennyfarmlandmuseum.org.uk](http://www.dennyfarmlandmuseum.org.uk)

## SEASON 2012 FINISHES WITH THE TRADITIONAL CAROL SERVICE.



**As is customary, the Farmland Museum closed its season with the ever popular Christmas special event culminating in the carol singing service. Did you give voice?**

Once again and in accordance with tradition the faithful flocked to the Farmland Museum's 'swansong' for the year on Saturday 8th December. Well, there were no swans but plenty of singing with gusto of favourite seasonal carols in the ancient and historic surroundings of Denny Abbey.

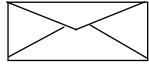
Needless to say there was a lot going on during the course of the day with children busily making Christmas trees with multi coloured baubles in the (well heated) education block. For the others to help keep warm and spirits up - roasted (well, let's face it, mildly burnt) chestnuts cooked to more than perfection in an improvised barbecue fashioned from a car or van wheel... yes, that too has become a traditional feature at this event.

And, there was more as mulled wine in natural alcoholic and wholly un-natural non-alcoholic forms were available for those with asbestos-lined throats from insulated drinking containers which ensured that the beverages did not cool down without a prolonged fight!

For those that did not take up permanent refuge in the tea room and were prepared to venture forth on a voyage of discovery - Walnut Cottage had been dressed up for Christmas with a decorated Xmas tree, paper chains and a low calorie plastic roast Christmas dinner.

For those who were unable to attend or reluctant to face the arctic conditions - more photos inside.

## THE CHAIRMAN'S LETTER.



Hello Friends, I hope you all had a good seasonal break and may I take this opportunity to wish you all a Happy New Year.

So we are now in 2013, I do hope you don't suffer from Triskaidekaphobia, Yes that's a very big word, It means the fear of 13, although there are a number of theories why 13 is unlucky none of them have been proved but in an Denny Abbey connection, on Friday 13<sup>th</sup> 1307, King Philip of France ordered the arrest of the Knights Templars, who were once Denny residents (not the very same ones you understand). Also talking of abbeys and monks, a year which contained 13 full moons instead of 12 posed problems for the monks who were in charge of the calendars. "This was considered a very unfortunate circumstance, especially by the monks who had charge of the calendar of thirteen months for that year, and it upset the regular arrangement of church festivals. For this reason thirteen came to be considered an unlucky number, on the other hand some do consider it lucky.

Anyway enough of the superstitions - let's move forward on a positive note with the year to come. Firstly a warm welcome to the new Museum curator Anne Wise and a thank you to all those that have helped in the last year. While we are all tucked up warm inside away from all this winter weather it might be a good time to think about the input as friends we actually put into the museum, How often do we volunteer our time or thoughts? This year funding will be greatly needed due to council fund withdrawal, So perhaps some ideas for fundraising could be put forward or, the museum will open again in the spring and a work day has been provisionally put forward for Sat 16 March to get everything ready. Let the museum know if you can help. Don't forget the AGM on the 21<sup>st</sup> of April. I look forward to seeing you all in the coming year

*Nigel Mansfield*

*Chairman of the Friends of the Farmland Museum*

## JENNY RESPONDS

In our previous issue we advised the retirement of Jennie Perkins who has been greeting visitors for many years now in the shop/entry kiosk.

Many of you may have been puzzled to see her again in situ at her familiar position on the occasion of the Christmas 'do' with carol singing service in the Abbey under somewhat arctic conditions... but you were well warned to wrap up.

Well, this was a "one-off" return by Jennie, who requested me to circulate this open letter from her in the Newsletter.

*Dear Friends,*

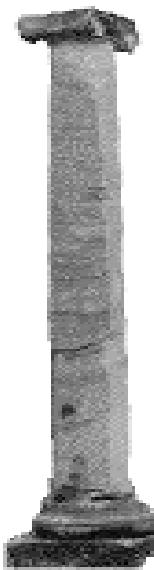
*Thank you for all your good wishes for my retirement and the gift of Life Membership of the Friends. I promise to put it to good use.*

*Sincerely,  
Jennie Perkins*



## THE MUSEUM'S COLUMN

Friends , volunteers, country men (and women) lend me you ears, for this is the last time I will be passing comment in the curators column in our great periodical, before our new leader takes over and I receive my orders to stand down and return to the dark world of the stores. With this I must extend a thank you to all who have helped the museum with your volunteering, visiting and support.



Our new curator Ann Wise, who has been at the helm since the start of January, is quickly making herself indispensable to museum. Even with her third week being met with the 'big freeze of 2013' she hasn't been put off.

The 2013 season will see the return of many of our popular events; Easter, May Craft Fair, 1940s Farm and Country Fair, Medieval weekend, Halloween and Dickensian Christmas. But our old favourites Cow Day and Scare Crow Making will return in the summer for our Family Activity Days. A new regular event will also make an appearance this season;

'Living Museum' one Sunday a month volunteers will take over the museum, in period costumes giving our visitors a real hands on experience of Denny throughout the ages. We will be announcing more details soon but if this sounds like the sort of thing you might be interested in joining we would love to hear from you.

One of our oldest exhibits on display, the Bassingbourn Plough is due for a revamp before the start of the season. The museum was fortunate to get hold of a small grant to pay for it to be cleaned, a new plinth built and some new interpretation.

And Finally it seems that just after you read about the great museum cover up we ask you to help out for the great museum uncovering! The volunteer workday is set for Saturday the 16th of March. It's pretty much the same as November work day, but done in reverse! We have jobs for all abilities and we even provide you with tea, biscuits and lunch. It is a great social occasion for the museum, and the museum simply could not run without your help.

All the best for 2013,

*Adam Macro*

*Collections Manager*

## NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS ??

O.k. - we are far enough into 2013 to start asking ourselves how successful our start to the New year has been to date. How many of us have actually lost weight, reduced smoking, alcohol or salt intake levels etc.?

Well it does not have to be 1st January to make resolutions and there is a simple one you could still make and gain that enhanced 'feel good' factor whilst helping others.

From time to time on special events etc. the Museum staff do rely heavily on volunteers to help run things smoothly. These duties are not onerous and generally fall into the category where most people can say "I can do that!" Typical such tasks would involve, helping out n car parking supervision, helping supervise childrens' activities, possibly donning a

costume, washing up or tidying up in the tea room etc, etc. Any time spent is greatly appreciated even for only a couple of hours and of course volunteers are under no obligation and help out on the occasions they are able to. Additionally perks are generally on offer with free tea and cake. This is a great opportunity for those who like to meet people and enjoy being helpful.

To alleviate any stress on the part of the museum staff of not knowing how much assistance may be forthcoming on any given situation they would like to establish a list of volunteers who would agree to be contacted when a need arises. So, if you regard yourself as helpful with sometimes time to spare and prepared to be approached, why not forward your contact details to the museum and be added to a register of occasional volunteers?

## THE CHRISTMAS 'DO'.



Dedicated dispensers of good cheer at work



Am I REALLY having a good time?



Burnt chestnuts anyone?



Ah! Good, someone has had the foresight to put the kettle on.



Lamplighter or Florence Nightingale impression?



Crayons, scissors, card.....and warmth. The irresistible Education Block has is all.

## **ALAN'S AMUSING ANECDOTE**

Christmas Carol services are often the meeting place for old friends and this December was no exception.....

A smartly-dressed man of middle age came up and asked how the Farmland Museum was progressing at Denny; not recognising him, Mike and he reintroduced themselves....and then the following story, which has been told many times to WI/Over Sixties Groups, was reiterated:

Back in the early Seventies, one dinner hour, a little lad rushed into the workshop at Haddenham announcing to Mike that he had found something really special for the museum which he would bring after school; always keen to encourage children, Mike told him that he would look forward to seeing him later that afternoon.

After school had finished, young Alan came pedalling down the roadway, announcing "Here it is in my bike bag". Imagine when Mike looked and saw the contents....the decomposing body of a very young lamb, obviously found in

a nearby sheep field. The look on Mike's face (horror? ) caused the enthusiastic Alan to say "I know what you are thinking (Mike thought I bet you don't)...you don't think I've got it all...but I have, and opened his anorak to reveal the rest of the poor lamb in the inside pocket...(I dread to think what his mother would think!)

Mike, in an effort not to discourage the lad's enthusiasm, explained that museums collect "old" things and that the little lamb had only very recently been born; shall we bury it safely and peacefully? Good idea thought Alan whose enthusiasm for the museum was not weakened by the event because the following week he returned, exclaiming "I've found another exhibit for the museum" (Help thought Mike!)...this time it was an ancient pistol which had been dug up on a building site and which for the past 40 years has been in the Farmland Museum's safe-keeping

So....last December Alan was delighted to hear from Mike that his museum "discoveries" and enthusiasm has given so many people so much pleasure...and will continue to do so.

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## **THE NEW CURATOR - BY HERSELF.**



I have undertaken most tasks in museums - previously the Museum Manager at the British Schools Museum in Hitchin where I managed 150 volunteers! Previously managed the Warner Textile Archive in Braintree and Worthing Museum & Art Gallery. My 'specialist' subject is Dress History but I tend to describe myself as a Social and Dress Historian. I've hit the ground running since I joined the Farmland Musuem team on 7 January and have so far seen the Abbey looking stunningly beautiful in the snow, and very soggy and sad in the rain! I'm looking forward to getting to know the members of the Friends and working with them to promote the Farmland Museum and encourage more people to discover this fenland gem. You can usually find me at the museum on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Tuesdays and Thursdays you'll find me at Burwell Museum in my role of Volunteer Coordinator.

Best wishes,

Ann.

## CAMBRIDGESHIRE VERSES - 'Fengirl' is back again.

Illumines all the dreaming landscape, while  
The sunlit orchards bloom for many a mile,  
And blackthorn in the hedges blossoms white.

Sadly since Constance Breed's day many acres of apple and plum orchards have been "grubbed up" and so many varieties of fruit in our supermarkets are flown in from abroad; there is, however, a society for "saving" old varieties of top fruit; called the East of England Apples and Orchards Project, with its own website EEAOP.....

A friend of mine, John Taylor, now living in Australia, decided to reminisce on his Littleport Childhood and last year Melrose Book published his efforts from Down

Under; how often do we see a "bobby on the beat" these days?

IF YOU WANT TO KNOW THE TIME.....

**Going home was never hard,**

**Rushing out of our schoolyard.**

**Although we were taught the crossing code**

**A policeman always saw us across the road.**

Copies of this book are still available at Burrows Bookshop in Ely and it is the most "modern" publication on my bookshelf.

Waterbeach writer and artist Denis Cheason, took Rupert Brooke's well-known poem, the Old Vicarage, Grantchester, and illustrated the rhyming couplets with his artistic scraper-board illustrations. Two particularly amusing ones are :

**"Strong men have run for miles and miles ,  
When one from Cherry Hinton smiles**

connection with Wicken Fen Vision; here are some verses from Fenland Facts and Fancies which epitomise modern agriculture....a far cry from that of Clare in the early Victorian days when so much work was done "by hand"

**Fen Farming today consists of very large fields,**

**With nitrate-assisted very high yields.**

**And alas, the hedges are in decline**

**To make more room for the new combine.**

**Gone forever are the days when**

**The fifty-acre farmer went to plough the fen.**

**His work was hard, his profit small**

**But at least he had control over all.**

*Friends of the Museum are invited to come along and help at:*

**THE BIG SPRING WORKDAY – Saturday 16 March (10am – 3pm)**

Come and help prepare the museum and abbey for the 2013 season – tasks to suit all abilities!

You supply the muscle & we'll supply lunch.

If you've managed to last until 3pm the Curator promises homemade cake!

Phone or e-mail the Museum to let them know you are turning up Tel. 01223 860988  
e-Mail: address info@farmlandmuseum.org.uk.

# FORTHCOMING EVENTS for 2013



**Wednesday 13 February – Twilight at the Museum (4.30pm – 7.30pm)**

Includes lantern making for children & ghost story in Abbey. Admission Free.

**Thursday 14 February – family/Children's Activity Drop-in (12noon – 4pm)**

Lantern making for children & follow 'light & dark' trail. Normal Admission prices.

**Sunday 31 March / Monday 1 April – Easter Fun (10.30am – 5pm)**

Lots of things to do!

**Saturday 4 May – Monday 6 May – Farmland Artists (10.30am – 5pm)**

Volunteers, Friends & staff show of their artistic talents in this exhibition.

Entry – as part of admission price

**Monday 6 May – May Day Craft Fair (10.30am – 5pm)**

Craft fair, the Farmland Museums popular craft fair returns with everything from home baked treats, sea glass jewellery, wood turners and ceramics and many more!

**Sunday 26 May – Monday 27 May – Farm & Country Fair (10.30am – 5pm)**

The museum goes to war again, giving you a chance to step back in time and see the farm as it was in the 40s, vintage clothes to try on, costumed re-enactors, vintage vehicles, children's activities horse drawn cart rides around the site.

Event day prices apply

**Sunday 23 July – English Heritage Members' Day**

**Sunday 25 August – Monday 26 August – Medieval Day (10.30am – 5pm)**

The knights return to Denny to show you their skills in the ring and how they lived on camp.

Event day prices apply

**Sunday 8 September – Heritage Open Day**

Visit the museum for free! Part of the national Heritage Open Days event.

**Sunday 27 October – Farmland Halloween (10.30am – 5pm)**

The museum gets spooky again, with pumpkin carving, apple bobbing, broom stick races and family activities! Event day prices apply

**Saturday 7 December - A Dickensian Christmas (12noon – 4pm)**

Christmas at the museum takes on a Victorian theme with costumed characters to meet. Carols in the Abbey from 4.30pm bring torch and warm clothes! Normal Admission applies

**NEW FOR 2013! Living museum – a visit to the museum comes alive with the chance to meet live costumed characters on the last Sunday of every month**

\*March 30<sup>th</sup> \*April 28<sup>th</sup> \* May 26<sup>th</sup> \*June 30<sup>th</sup> \*July 28<sup>th</sup> \*August 25<sup>th</sup> \*September 29<sup>th</sup>

**ADULT WORKSHOPS** (times – tbc) call 01223 860 988 to book your place

**Saturday 6 April – Basket Making with Sandra Barker**

Discover the wonderful world of English willow and take home your very own fruit, plant or small planter basket. £47 + £3 to purchase materials on the day, Prior booking essential

**Saturday 20 April - Life Drawing with Ann Biggs**

Working a professional life model and tutored by local wildlife artist and experienced tutor. £15 booking essential

**Saturday 15 June – Mixed Media with Ann Biggs**

Taking inspiration from the museum site, learn how to bring your own water colour pictures to life with a range of classic and modern experimental techniques, making water colour as fun as possible! £27 booking essential

## **Saturday 14 September – Sunday 15 September – Sketchbook Weekend with Ann Biggs**

The weekend will include a range of sketchbook exercises taking the abbey, museum and collections as inspiration. Learn how to make the most of your sketch book in an individual and creative way! £31 for both days £19 for one day, booking essential

## **Saturday 21 September – Rag Rug Making**

Explore the traditional craft of rag rug making in the relaxing and social environment of the museum. Come away with your own sample piece to inspire your own rugs, wall hangings and creative designs at home. Includes materials and a free slice of cake of your choice! £12 booking essential

## **Sunday 13 October – Fur & Feathers with Ann Biggs**

Drawing and painting animals can bring its own set of difficulties. With over 30 years experience in wildlife illustration, Ann Biggs will provide an introduction into depicting details such as fur feathers to bring your wildlife painting or drawings to life. £27 booking essential. Please bring your own materials.

*At least two more workshops planned for 2013! Contact the Curator for details*

## **CHILDRENS ACTIVITY DAYS**

### **Tuesday 2 April & Thursday 4 April – Toylandia! (12 noon – 4pm)**

So, what were toys like in the past? Investigate our collection of curious playthings. Then try your hand at making one to take home with you.

### **Tuesday 9 April & Thursday 11 April - Perfect Ploughing (12 noon – 4pm)**

Try your hand at ‘ploughing’; discover the ploughs in the museum on our special trail; learn about how they are used, and take part in our plough dressing celebration.

### **Tuesday 28 May & Thursday 30 May – Colourful Cows! (12 noon – 4pm)**

How much do you know about cows? Come and paint one any way you like, then make a cow souvenir to take home!

### **Thursday 25 July – Archaeology Day (12 noon – 4pm)**

Time to dust down the trowel and come to Denny for another of our annual digests. Try your hand and see what you find.

### **Tuesday 30 July & Thursday 1 August – Scare The Crows! (12 noon – 4pm)**

Keep those pesky birds away! Come and dress a scarecrow to help us save the crops, and make a model one to take home.

### **Tuesday 6 August & Thursday 8 August – Clay Day! (12 noon – 4pm)**

Sausages; pots; gargoyles; tiles... It doesn't matter, just roll up your sleeves and end up with something you can be proud of.

....More to follow folks.



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## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

Mail: The Farmland Museum. Denny Abbey, Ely Road, Waterbeach, Cambridge CB25 9PQ. Tel. 01223 860988

e-Mail: address [info@farmlandmuseum.org.uk](mailto:info@farmlandmuseum.org.uk). Web site address: [www.dennyfarmlandmuseum.org.uk](http://www.dennyfarmlandmuseum.org.uk)

Nigel Mansfield (Friends' Chairman) e-mail [nigelman71@hotmail.com](mailto:nigelman71@hotmail.com) or via the Museum. Treasurer e-mail [sheilaarmit@waitrose.com](mailto:sheilaarmit@waitrose.com), Ann Wise (Curator) Tel. 01223 860988, (Admin) e-mail [admin@farmlandmuseum.org.uk](mailto:admin@farmlandmuseum.org.uk),

Education Officer: Chris Leuchars [education@farmlandmuseum.org.uk](mailto:education@farmlandmuseum.org.uk),

Newsletter Editor (Peter Reeves) Tel: 01223 511992 e-mail: [piscator2003@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:piscator2003@yahoo.co.uk) or written mail c/o The Farmland Museum.