

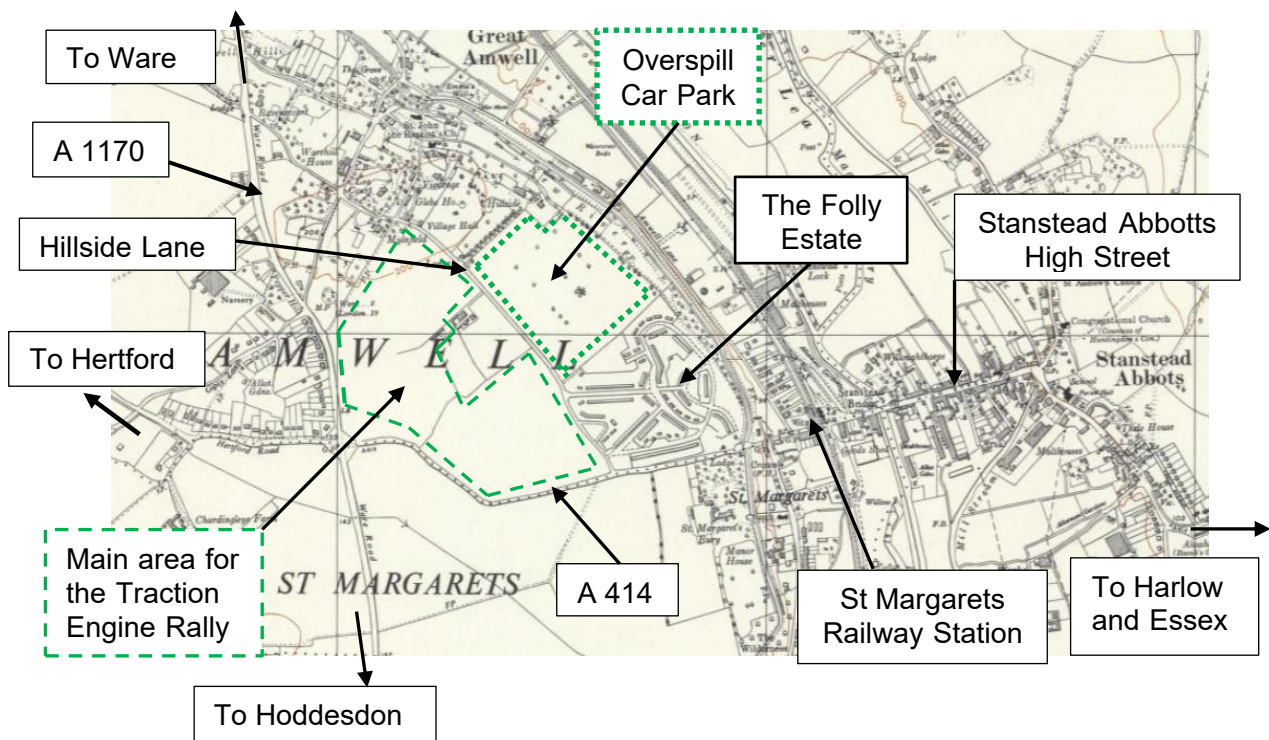
GREAT AMWELL

TRACTION ENGINE & VINTAGE VEHICLE RALLIES

BY
STUART MOYE

During much of the 1980s and 90s a Traction Engine and Vintage Vehicle Rally was held in the fields to the north east of Great Amwell Roundabout. It was run by the Rotary Club of Hoddesdon and was designed to raise considerable funds each year for a range of worthy charitable causes. The rally benefitted from the support of many local businesses that provided money and practical support for the event. This of course all added considerably to the income generated for the charities after each yearly rally. In addition to the large number of traction engines and vintage cars that attended there was a wide range of other types of vehicles to see as well as many stalls selling merchandise and the much-enjoyed fairground rides. In fact, there was so much on offer that many people attended both days of the rally in order to enjoy as much as they possibly could of the wide and varied range of things to watch and do.

THE LOCATION OF THE TRACTION ENGINE RALLY



The very first Rally at Great Amwell occurred over the weekend of the 11th & 12th of June 1983. The original idea for a rally was put forward by Peter Haynes of the Hoddesdon Rotary Club. He was a self-confessed steam enthusiast and perhaps not surprisingly was one of the key individuals that pushed through the initial plans into practical fruition. The Club had about 50 members who were attracted to the idea as it would provide the ability to make a significant profit from which they could donate to a wide variety of charities. This would be a significant additional contribution to their traditional fund-raising activities as well as providing a community event for the enjoyment of the wider public. The main organiser of the first event was Brian Egerton with a large proportion of the 50 Rotary Club members taking an active part in the many tasks needed to prepare for the event and in key posts over the rally weekend. The success of the rally also relied on a significant number of sponsors from local businesses that contributed funds, practical help and in some cases active participation on the rally days. One of the important contributions made by the sponsors was the funding of the larger exhibits, particularly the heavy traction engines which required expensive transport to and from the venue.

The various types of vehicles were involved in parades in the main arena with judges making decisions about which entrants deserved best in class. The judges had a difficult job to do as all entrants were to a high standard. The judges were Peter Haynes [Rotary Club President], Hilary Montford [Miss Travel World] and Mr Fred Brown [Rotary Club District Officer]. The main prize was awarded to a traction engine owned by Mr Neville from Saffron Waldon. Two other notable awards were given to a large crane traction engine all the way from Wolverhampton and a steam wagon owned by a Mr Role. The commercial vehicle prize went to a Guy Arab single decker bus that had once operated on the Hertford to Bengoe service. The best classic car prize went to a 1956 Ford Popular and the vintage section saw a Rolls Royce Silver Cloud of 1911 win the prize. All the winners were presented with a trophy and a bottle of champagne. The Mercury paper reported that Debbie Brace of Stanstead Abbots thoroughly enjoyed her experience of driving a large Garrett Traction Engine around the arena. After two very successful days of this first Amwell Rally the amount raised was of the order of £10,000. This was shared between St. Elizabeths Home at Much Hadham, Guide Dogs for the Blind, Hoddesdon Scouts, Hertford Hospital League of Friends and other good causes. The massive positive support from the public for the two-day event was one of welcome but considerable surprise for the Rotary Club members. Who had not expected that their idea of a Traction Engine and Vintage Car Rally would ever be so popular with the general public.



Some traction engines actually arrived at the Rally site by road giving spectators a chance to see these wonderful machines travelling along the highway. Something of course that was once a common sight especially when the fair or circus came to town. The traction engine pictured is one of those equipped with an electrical generator for powering a fairground ride in this case a scenic railway

Within the showground the large arena was used to parade the vehicles. At other times vehicles were on show in display lines on the showground. This horse drawn dray is pictured moving through the showground on its way to the arena. Vehicles like this were once a common sight delivering beer to local pubs.



By the sixth Great Amwell Rally in 1988 the first five rallies had raised £70,000 which had been distributed among 29 charitable organisations. Those charities supported ranged from very local ones like Hoddesdon and Roydon Scouts and Amwell View School for the Handicapped to national level organisations like the Guide Dogs for the Blind and the National Society for the Protection of Children. The sixth rally in 1988 had as its main charity the Imperial Cancer Research Fund with the hope of supporting the purchase of a scanner for the early diagnosis of breast cancer at Guys Hospital.

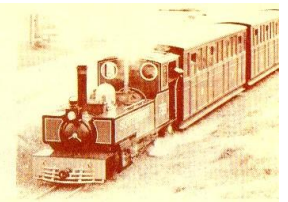
The Traction Engine Rally in 1988 took place on the weekend of the 11th & 12th of June. The weather was a little cloudy on the Saturday followed by a warmer and sunnier Sunday, with temperatures reaching 70 F in the early afternoon. The better weather on the Sunday saw an unexpected boost to the numbers attending. Two busy days for the organisers, with so many people arriving at once on some occasions that cars had to queue on the main road outside the exit to allow cars to leave showground before being allowed in. After the event a Rotary Club representative felt that after six years the Great Amwell Rally had become a major annual event in the East Hertfordshire calendar. A view shared by club members and many of the visitors for whom this was their sixth year of attendance.



The above is the front cover of a 52-page 1988 Rally programme which included a map of the showground site, a list and timing of the main events over the two days [See page 4]. In addition, it gave lists of the attending exhibits covering Traction Engines (44) [including miniatures], Steam Organs (4), Classic Cars (84), Commercial Vehicles (17), Stationary Engines (49), Tractors (27), Vintage Cars (9), Vintage Motorcycles (19) and 4 Horse Teams [Inde Coope team] (1), 3 Horse Teams (1), Pairs of Shires (3), Pair of Suffolk Mares as working plough team (1), Single Turnout (5) and In Hand Horses (12). [The list of classic cars on show was not listed no doubt due to the large number expected.]



PROGRAMME OF EVENTS



MAIN ARENA

SATURDAY 11th JUNE 1988

- 12.30 p.m. Opening Ceremony
- 1.00 p.m. Grand Parade of Vintage Vehicles
- 2.30 p.m. Steam Engine Events

SUNDAY, 12th JUNE 1988

- 11.45 a.m. Grand Parade of Vintage Vehicles
- 12.45 p.m. Essex Shire Horse Association Parade & Demonstration
- 2.00 p.m. Steam Engine Events
- 4.30 p.m. Essex Shire Horse Association Parade & Demonstration



DISPLAY RING

SATURDAY, 11th JUNE 1988

- 11.30 a.m. Gun Dog Display
- 12.00 noon Red Tail Falconry
- 1.00 p.m. Fencing Display
- 1.30 p.m. Radio Controlled Car Display
- 2.15 p.m. Army Cadets Field Gun Display
- 2.45 p.m. Red Tail Falconry
- 3.30 p.m. The Fire Service
- 4.15 p.m. Vintage Motor Cycle Display

SUNDAY, 12th JUNE 1988

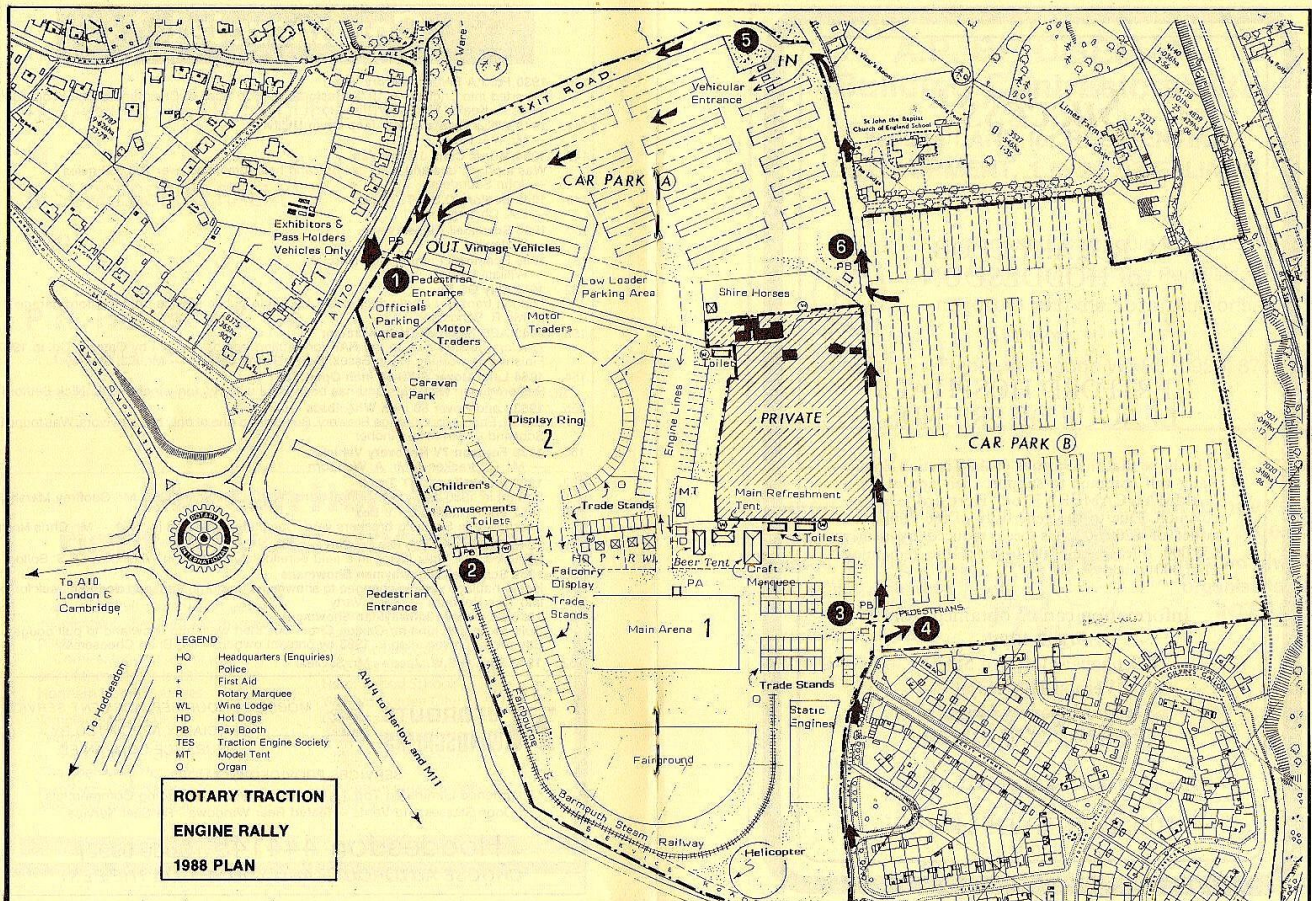
- 11.30 a.m. Service Conducted by Rev. E. Walker
Vicar of Great Amwell Parish
- 12 noon Radio Controlled Car Display
- 12.45 p.m. Red Tail Falconry
- 1.30 p.m. Cumberland Giants
- 2.00 p.m. Army Cadet Drum Corps
- 2.30 p.m. The Fire Service
- 3.00 p.m. Cumberland Giants
- 3.30 p.m. Red Tail Falconry
- 4.20 p.m. Emerald Express

Commentary by: JOHN CREASEY

Plus

Classic Cars Tractors Stationary Engines Steam Organs
Arts & Crafts Exhibition Models
Helicopter Rides Fairbourne and Barmouth Steam Railway
Over 100 Trade Stalls and Side Shows Many other Surprise Attractions

ALL THE FUN OF THE FAIR
Licensed Beer/Wine Bars Refreshments



For the first time in the events history the spectators could enjoy activities taking place in both the main arena and the display ring. This allowed for more featured events to take place over the two days. It was also an indication that the growing success of the previous five events had seen the Amwell Rally come of age as it were. It was also to prove to be a factor in encouraging some people to come to both days and not just the one as there was more than enough to fill and justify visiting on both days. The main event attracting the most interest was the grand traction engine parade in the ring. Many visitors also inspected the traction engines close up as they stood displayed in engine lines throughout the two days.



A miniature traction engine highly suited to the job due to its size delivers bags of coal to the display line of larger traction engines.



Showman's traction engines being prepared for venturing out into the main ring later in the day. The two engines on the right are using their longer extension chimneys which help with pulling the air through the fire to raise steam pressure as well as keeping the smoke away from the spectators.

Another favourite in the ring were the horses some of which were pulling vehicles whilst other displayed once common agricultural work carried out by horse power. The crowds gathered around the perimeter of the ring for these displays well before the start time stated in the complimentary programme.



A display of a horse drawing a single bladed plough without in this case digging up the display ring. Ploughs like this could manage to plough about one acre of land in a long day's work. They were rapidly displaced when pairs of steam powered ploughing traction engines arrived on farms in the late C19th.



A four-horse team pulling a brewery delivery cart clearly advertising John Smiths Beer. The competitors from the Courage Brewery are close behind as they make their way around the arena.

Other displays during the weekend included East Herts Fencing Club, Red Tail Falconry from Harlow, Haileybury Boys radio-controlled cars club, Harlow Showband the Emerald Express, Jules Baker's Cumberland Giants and the 1st Hertfordshire Cadet Battalion of the Royal Anglian Regiment, Corp of Drums. In the main arena members of the public were invited to take part in some events including a tug of war between the public against a very large and impressive steam traction engine. Another activity was a steam engine version of musical chairs. This involved the ability of the driver to stop the traction engine quickly when the music stopped, climb down from the engine and race to sit on a chair. Of course, there was always one less chair than drivers when the music stopped. As the number of traction engines and drivers diminished the driver of the last two left that sat on the one chair left won the prize.



A steam powered wagon in splendid Tate & Lyle livery



An early Rolls Royce with open cockpit for the chauffeur and luxury for the owner in the back



A horse draw cart with classic car display beyond



A Shire Horse is walked around the arena



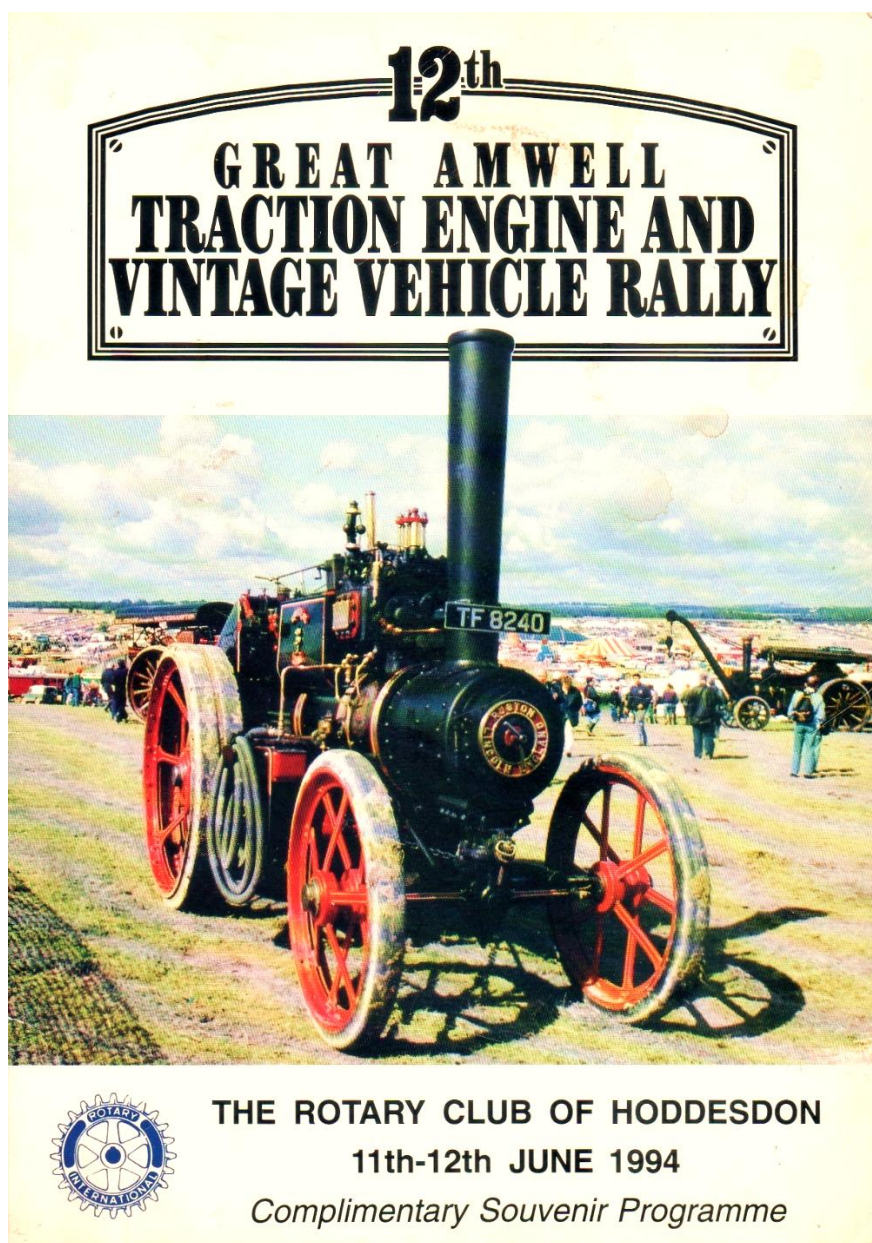
A horse draw Fire Engine is seen in the display ring



A firm favourite; the birds of prey and an owl seen in their rest area awaiting their turn in the ring for their display routine

There were some 150 stalls, sideshows and displays at the 1988 Rally selling an abundance of goods as well as an arts and crafts exhibition not to mention the much-frequented variety of refreshments stalls. Of particular interest was a 500-yard-long miniature railway that carried passengers from close to the area of the trade stands around the back of the fairground to the display ring. Enthusiasts and owners and dealers had flocked from all over the country to support this event. The large number of visitors over the two days had turned this sixth rally into a notable success. The funds raised for charity from this two-day event were in excess of £15,000 .

By 1994 the June Rally weekend at Amwell had gone from strength to strength with a larger and a glossy complementary souvenir programme featuring key pages in full colour, including the front cover





SATURDAY

Main Arena

- 1.30 p.m. Grand Parade of Classic and Vintage Vehicles
2.45 p.m. Steam Engine Parade
4.00 p.m. Steam Engine Events

Second Arena

- 2.15 p.m. Black Knights Medieval Display
3.30 p.m. Pony Parade
4.45 p.m. Black Knights Medieval Display

SUNDAY

Main Arena

- 11.30 a.m. Grand Parade of Heavy Horses
12.45 p.m. Grand Parade of Classic and Vintage Vehicles
2.15 p.m. Steam Engine Parade
3.15 p.m. Docklands Honda Imps Motor Cycle Display Team
3.45 p.m. Heavy Horse Display
4.30 p.m. Steam Engine Events
5.00p.m. Docklands Honda Imps Motor Cycle Display Team

Second Arena

- 1.45 p.m. Black Knights Medieval Display
4.15 p.m. Black Knights Medieval Display

Commentary by: JOHN CREASEY

**VISIT THE 12TH CENTURY MEDIEVAL CRAFTS VILLAGE
ADJACENT TO THE SECOND ARENA**

PLUS

Tractors	Fairground	Licensed Beer/Wine Bars
Steam Organs	Models	Reverse Bunjee Jumping
Stationary Engines	Arts & Crafts Exhibition	A Miniature Railway
	Hot Air Balloon	Over 100 Trade Stalls and Side Shows
		Refreshments

WARNING

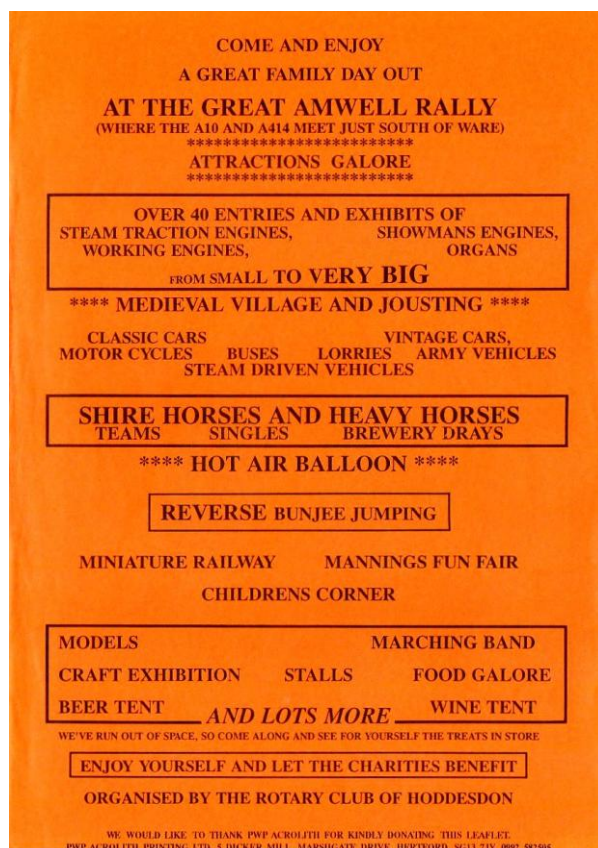
Traction Engines can cause serious accidents. The public are admitted to the rally site at their own risk. Children especially **MUST** be kept under strict supervision and on no account be allowed inside the arena ropes.

The Rotary Club of Hoddesdon do not accept responsibility for loss or damage to any property of exhibitors, participants or visitors to the Rally or to any injury caused to such person.

All enquiries to H.Q. Hut close to the arena (including lost children). Public telephone in Scott Avenue opposite Gate No. 4 (See plan).



This the 12th Great Amwell Rally took place on the 11th and 12th of June 1994 and enjoyed good weather throughout the two days. It was noted in the programme that the previous eleven events had raised in excess of £250,000, which had been donated to 56 charities and local organisations. The 1994 event saw the introduction of a medieval theme with Knights their Ladies, Minstrels and entertainers. These were dressed in authentic period costumes and were key attractions in the second arena that year. The event was also supported by 21 local companies and organisations in preparation for and during the event . On show in 1994 were 39 steam engines including steam wagons, 3 steam organs, 48 veteran and vintage vehicles, 48 classic cars , 15 older motorcycles 1931-1972, 26 Tractors, 20 Military Vehicles, 26 commercial vehicles, 43 stationary engines + 5 collections of vehicles, oil cans and Corgi and Dinky toys. Last but not least was the Heavy Horse entries which included 2 four horse teams, 9 two horse teams, 3 single horse turnout, 5 horses in hand show harness and 10 in hand horses. The rise in attendance of heavy horses is undoubtedly due to the work of Mr A Bridgeman the owner of the land on which the rally took place. This 12th Rally was regarded as a great success and once again showed the growing amount on offer at the Amwell Ralies and the increasing number of visitors to the event.



A flyer had been used for some years to attract folk to the Amwell Rally and this one features on the reverse the Medieval and Jousting event of 1994.



A favourite at rallies were the steam organs
This one is seen with its attendant engine



Although a small part of each show the older
motorbikes always drew plenty of interest

A PICTURE GALLERY



Moving on to 1995 the Rally Organisers made a point of celebrating the 50th anniversary of the end of the second world war. A variety of special attractions were included to mark the VE Day 50th anniversary.



VE - Victory in Europe 50th Celebrations

The VE attractions included no one less than **Vera Lynn** [lower left facing the camera] and a wartime band [top right] with singers recreating the wartime **ENSA** bands that entertained the troops. [ENSA stood for the *Entertainment National Services Association*] The army supplied an armoured vehicle and other attractions to draw attention to the 50th anniversary including a helicopter and band. The Royal Logistic Corps brought with them a mobile exhibition which of course extolled the virtues of a career in the British Army. All told with hardware including a very loud helicopter a military band as well as the ENSA band and singers the military made a very noticeable contribution to the 1995 Amwell Rally and the VE 50th



Vera Lynn was regarded as the forces sweetheart during WWII and was best known for songs including 'We'll meet again', 'There will be Bluebirds over the White Cliffs of Dover' and 'A Nightingale sang in Berkeley Park',

ENSA created in 1939 to entertain wartime troops and became in 1946 the Combined Services Entertainment Association [CSE]



As with each Amwell Rally event a wide variety of vehicles were on show. The retired Fire Engine was appropriately parked outside the entrance to a Hertfordshire Fire Brigade exhibition [Top left]. Of particular interest for many was the steam driven mobile circular saw [top right]. The traction engine is powering this very large and powerful circular saw by a belt driven off the engine's flywheel. To the right of the cutting table is an ex-military lorry which has had a crane fitted to the flatbed space. Many ex-army lorries found a new lease of life when considerably numbers were sold off after the war at very reasonable prices. The three wheel sports cars [Bottom left] attracted considerable interest as three-wheel cars in the 1990s tended to be Reliant Robins which had something of a dubious reputation very different to these racy sports cars with the single wheel at the rear. Of course, each rally tended to focus on the large and very impressive tractions engines particularly showman's engines as seen bottom right.

After a long run of very successful Traction Engine Rallies with a large amount of money paid over to charities the annual events came to an end in the late 1990s. As is the way with these things a convergence of several negative circumstances made it too difficult to continue and regrettably it was announced that the rallies at Amwell were coming to an end. Those who did attend these annual events tend to remember their days out at the Amwell Traction Engine Rallies with fond memories.



All photographs of the various rallies were taken by Kenneth Moyer. Who is seen right admiring the advertising sign set up at the edge of the show ground, facing onto the A414 road, in advance of the 1989 Amwell Traction Engine Rally

