

BANCROFT MILL ENGINE TRUST

SPRING NEWSLETTER 2013

Dear Member,

You will notice that I have optimistically entitled this letter "Spring", although the winter seems determined to drag on interminably. However, we have had the first steaming of the new season, which, although stressful, turned out quite well. When I say stressful I really mean it. The welding on the Cornish boiler shell was successfully carried out, but much later than we had hoped. I have to take my hat off to the welder and his mate, however, for working in such a very confined space. The boiler inspector then passed the boiler as fit to run for this year, and it was filled with water and all the fittings replaced. When we came to fitting the man-hole cover, a new gasket was required. Not to worry, we had a couple of spares. Unfortunately, they turned out to be too large, so we had to order a replacement which could not be obtained until the following week – which was the week before the steaming day! Once the new gasket was fitted, the boiler was fired up, and low and behold, it leaked! On the Wednesday before the steaming, the cover was refitted and this time it was all right. We were unable to get any useable steam pressure on the Saturday, and it took a long time on Sunday morning to get going – everything being so cold and damp. I do not think we have ever had such a close shave as that before, but it was worth it because lots of visitors came. They were treated, during the early afternoon, to the spectacle of a steam test of the safety-valves for the Inspector to witness!

It is my sad duty to report the passing of two of our valued colleagues. Raymond Mitchell was the owner of a local textile mill, who had assisted Bancroft in many ways over the years.



Bob Maxwell was a Trustee, and I believe, had been so from the very beginning. He also had given us a great deal of help over the years. We are all very appreciative of their input, involvement and support. They will be very much missed and we extend our sincere condolences to their families.

As, under the rules of the Charities Commission, we are required to have at least three Trustees, we started to seek a replacement for Bob Maxwell. Our own Chairman, Arnold Bettess, rose to the occasion and volunteered to take on the post. We extend a welcome to him, together with our thanks, in the sure knowledge that there is no more committed member than him. Arnold continues as Chairman of the Bancroft Committee.

Some more work has continued on the Bradley Engine Project over the winter period, and there are now very neat footplates over the steam-pipe pits. They were obtained by Roy F., but we do not enquire how he came by them! All above board, I assure you. Thanks to John R., we have managed to obtain some drawings of the main-bearing shells, similar to those of our engine. Quotes for cost of making new shells have been obtained, and they are, as expected, going to cost a very large amount of money. We are applying for a grant to cover most of the cost, so keep your fingers crossed that it may be successful.

The new high-pressure piston that we had cast last year, is currently being machined, so hopefully we will have that back before very long. We have also had two new piston rings cast, to go with it. They will also need machining when we locate someone to take the job on. When all that is done, we will be able to install the piston-rod, complete with pistons. There will still be the metallic packings to re-new – again an expensive procedure. We are getting there, albeit very slowly! The steam-pipe fittings and valves have been worked out for taking steam from the Cornish boiler to the Bradley engine, and the boiler Inspector is happy with the proposed layout. That is in the future, of course, but is another expensive item to find funding for.

You may remember that the mill chimney was completed over the 2011 and 2012 summers, with all new mastic pointing. Well, during this winter much of the pointing has fallen out! The steeple-jack reckons that it is frost which has caused it. He will have to do it all again, so we will have ladders on the stack for quite a long while.

One other job which has been completed over the winter period is the construction of a boarded patio area next to the visitor entrance. David N. and Derek G. have worked on it nearly every week to finish it in time for the start of the season, and very smart it looks too, complete with picnic tables. I hope the gods of climate are not offended!

Photo in the next newsletter. (Ed.)



Finally, a big thank you to all members who have paid their subscriptions or made donations. All pennies are gratefully received.

That is all for this time, but we look forward to seeing you at Bancroft.

Jim Gill (Hon. Secretary.) 01282 865626. April 2013.