

BANCROFT MILL ENGINE TRUST

SPRING NEWSLETTER

Dear Member,

It is always nice to be able to begin on a pleasant note. One of our founder members, Hilda Elsworth, recently achieved her ninetieth birthday! Hilda worked as a weaver at Bancroft for many years, and when the Trust was formed, she would demonstrate weaving on one of our looms. She has a wonderful memory and many stories to tell, and was always a favourite with school children on Steaming Days. I am glad to say that she still likes to come and have a chat from time to time. We all congratulate you, Hilda, and look forward to your next visit.



Figure 1: Hilda in conversation during our first 2014 steaming

Before I go any further, I must admit to omitting a steaming date in my last Letter. Somehow I missed Sunday June 29th, so please add it to your list.

A very big “thank you” to everyone who has paid their subscriptions for this year. Needless to say, that goes for all who have standing orders with us, and who provide the occasional donation. I have said it before, and make no apologies for repeating; that without your support and commitment, the Trust could not exist. Some of you will have received your yearly membership cards, and I hope I can manage to send out the rest with this Letter.

We have had three Steam Days already this year. The first was very well attended, but the last two have been sadly well down on visitor numbers. It is always a bit of a mystery about why some days we are packed out, and sometimes not. There does not seem to be a pattern, and the weather does not seem to have a bearing on it. So far, the boiler and engine have behaved beautifully, and there has been between runs, entertainment, so there is always lots going on.

One of the things which changes from week to week is the progress on the Bradley Engine. Regular visitors ask for updates on the latest work done and show a great deal of interest. The most common question is, "When will it be finished". That is the 64,000 dollar question! It would be finished and up and running fairly quickly if we had the necessary money. However, we must be patient and plod steadily on. In my last Letter I told you that the piston rod, HP piston and rings, and the new gland packings were all assembled successfully. Since then the LP piston and back cylinder cover have been fitted, and the air-pump rod connected to the main rod.

I also mentioned the main-shaft bearing shells, which were being machined. We now have them, and considerable time and effort has been expended to lap them to a good surface, and to align them correctly. A whole afternoon can be spent on positioning things like that, but it has to be right.



Figure 2: The main bearing being tested in place.

We are trying to keep the space in front of the Bradley house clear of fire-wood, ready for the moment we bring the first half of the fly-wheel to put into the pit. That has to go in first, before we can place the main-shaft into the bearings. We decided that it would be sensible to clean and undercoat the fly-wheel halves before they were installed in the pit, so accordingly have been cleaning surface rust off them and applying red oxide paint. Of course, as they are lying on their side, we will have to turn them over to complete the job. To do that, we will have to get someone with a large jib-boom tractor to come and play with us. Each half weighs just over four tons!

Whilst still on the subject of the Bradley engine, I ought to mention one other new innovation which was installed last year. It can (and does) get mighty cold in that building, which does not help the spirits when working there. Thanks to Ian A. we

now have a small wood-burning stove at one end. We could not afford to run electric or gas heating there, but with this stove, we can fire it on scraps of wood, which cost nothing. It does not heat a great deal of the building, but it is nice to be able to go and warm ones hands when they lose all feeling!

One of the best things about Bancroft is the great gang of regular volunteers we have. A few years ago, we only had a handful, and so, apart from the essential work, no further improvements could be undertaken. Now, we have sometimes up to fifteen souls there on a Saturday or Steam Day, which is fantastic. The dedication of these stalwarts, who turn out almost every week, is really commendable, and they all deserve a very big vote of thanks. That said, we always welcome new faces – and it does not matter if they have any skills or not – there is something for everyone to do.



Figure 3: Our youngest volunteers hard at work

One other matter is being considered with regard to the original Roberts engine. For some time, steam and condensed water has been escaping from the cylinder glands. Not a lot, but it has become worse over the last few seasons. We have no idea when the glands were last attended to, but it is certainly before the Trust started, thirty-two years ago. We think that it is down to the white-metal seals having become very worn, or even breaking up. On the Roberts engine, the gland packing can be dismantled and replaced without any other dismantling, and in situ. So we have contacted the firm that sorted out the glands of the Bradley engine, and they have promised to see if they can help us. Any replacement will have to be done out of season, and if it is only the white-metal seals that need to be made, then we may be able to afford it. If, however, the other brass components have to be repaired or replaced, it will be a financial headache.

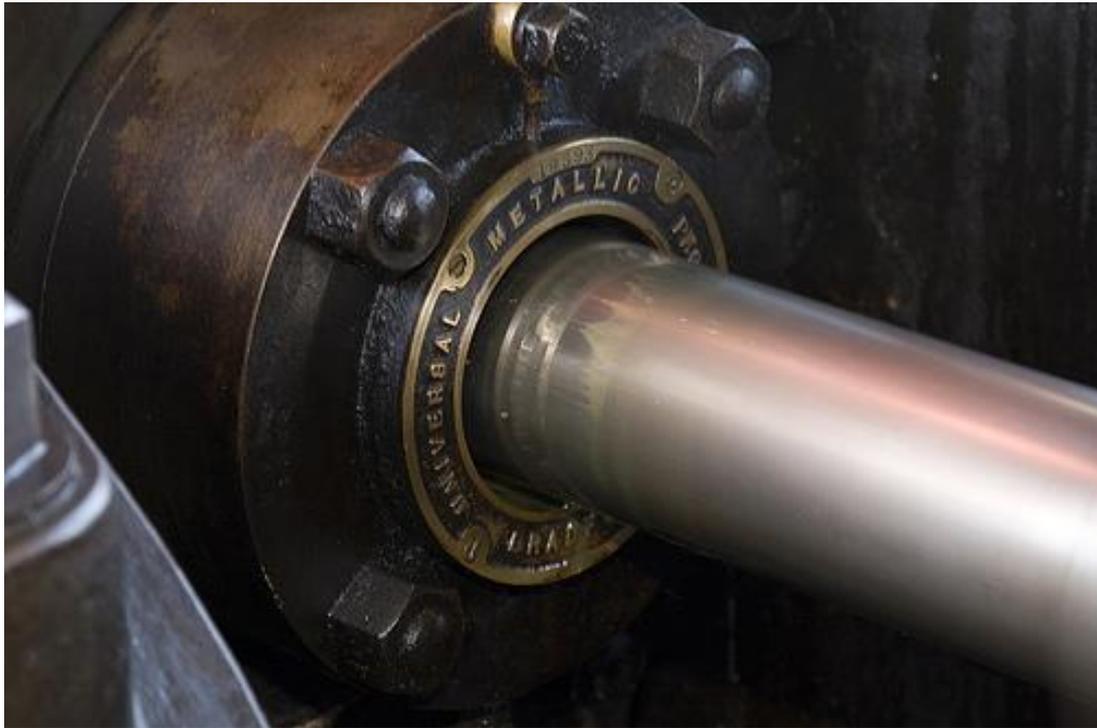


Figure 4: One of the guilty glands

That is about all the news from this end. The fourth steaming is just over a week away, and we hope and pray that we will be swamped with hordes of members and visitors. Will we see YOU there? I hope so.

Jim Gill

Honorary secretary. (01282 865626).

May 2014.



Figure 5: Parting shot. New and long standing volunteers