

BANCROFT MILL ENGINE TRUST

AUTUMN NEWSLETTER 2014

Dear Member,

There seems to be a fair bit to tell you since the last Newsletter. For a start, the Annual General Meeting is done and dusted. Not a great deal to report, other than all the Officers of the Committee stood down, and were re-elected – again. It seems that no one wants to have a go at taking on a post!

The Steaming Days have been quite fair for visitor numbers and money, which is a relief. There have also been entertainments on most steamings. A couple of Steam Days ago, we had a chap demonstrating a model Newcomen atmospheric engine. Although it was somewhat of a “Heath Robinson” thing (he is currently building a proper model), it worked well, and was really fascinating to watch in action. Steam was provided by an old domestic pressure cooker with an electric kettle element in it! It has been noted that when there is a group of musicians performing, they can usually be heard over the engine, now that it is running much more quietly. Musicians usually only perform between engine runs, but sometimes the “fire beater” gets too much steam in the boiler and shouts for the engine to be run!

There are still more attractions on the remaining Steam Days – Morris men, singers, motor cycles, and one of the early Rolls Royce Merlin engines will be on show on the 26th October. Whether it will actually run, I could not say!

The Heritage Open Days weekend attracted a good crowd of visitors, especially on the Sunday, and they were very generous with their donations, in spite of it being free entry. We also gained a few new members, which is always nice.

There has been plenty of work going on in between Steam Days, as you may imagine. All the Engine House windows have been painted, inside and out. The mill chimney which had all the new mastic pointing fall out the winter before last, has been re-pointed, coated in linseed oil, and the bands re-painted. We can only pray that the pointing will stay in place this time!

We are always aware of health and safety issues, and this year we have had all portable electrical appliances tested, thanks to a volunteer who knows about these things, and was able to borrow the testing equipment. It is quite amazing just how much there is to test. A modern home has a lot, but a place, such as Bancroft has double or treble the number.

At the end of the season, when we prepare the Cornish boiler for its annual inspection, we are also going to strip the metallic gland packings of the Roberts high pressure cylinder, to see if the Babbit metal sealing rings have broken up, as we suspect. Having those replaced, supposing there is no other work to do, is going to be a costly business, even though the firm involved has promised to try to do the work at cost.



Figure 1: At last, one of the flywheel halves is lifted from the yard and taken to its final location.



Figure 2: The 3.5 tonnes of weight is not the only hindrance to bringing it in!



Figure 3: The main shaft is brought into place



Figure 4: Job completed successfully. What a relief!

Now for the Bradley Project up-date. A lot of progress to report on that. To start with, we had a man up with a large tractor, and he turned the two halves of the fly-wheel over so that we could clean and paint the sides which we could not get at. Then we opened up the pit in the Bradley house, and placed the appropriate amount of packing in the bottom, to support one fly-wheel half. A few weeks later and the tractor came again. One half was lifted and transported down the yard to the Bradley house, and carefully eased through the doorway. It was lowered into the pit and securely wedged, so that there was no danger of it moving.

The main-shaft was then placed over the centre of the fly-wheel and located in the bearing journals. Whilst the tractor was there, we had the fly-wheel from the Campbell oil engine taken out. It had been there since the Trust started! The Campbell is the subject of another project – very much in the future.

The next job was to jack both ends of the main-shaft up a little, and slip the new brass bearing shells into place – a little bit tricky, but successfully achieved. Unfortunately, they have had to be removed again to have a very small amount of machining on the edge – for a perfect fit.

The second half of the fly-wheel is not going to be so easy, because we have very limited headroom. If the wheel is raised by a suspended lift, it will foul not only the door lintel, but also a roof truss. We have decided to contact a specialist lifting firm (who we used to lift our Cornish boiler in and out), and see what they suggest. It will be added cost, but it will only have to be done once!!!

One other job we may be able to start on this winter, is the steam-pipe line from the Cornish boiler to the engine. We have obtained a grant locally, to purchase what we need, and have worked out the route it will take. Getting exciting, isn't it?

That is about all the news for the time being. We will be a little short of bodies for a while, as two of our volunteers are going into hospital – not for long, we hope. I am sure they will be back again before too long.

Hope to see you at a Steaming Day, or earlier.

Jim Gill. Hon. Secretary.
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