

Bancroft Mill Engine Museum

Spring Newsletter 2020



Dear Member,

What a complete mess our world is in! Looking back over my life, I do not remember a more worrying time; even though I was born before the start of WW 2, and lived in London all through the hostilities. I suppose that children are far more resilient and adaptable, plus the fact that, at the time, I and my contemporaries knew nothing else! This pandemic has swept like a tsunami round much of the globe. We can only hope that our Members and their families have not been badly affected and we send our sympathies to any who have suffered loss. My own family has not put a foot – or indeed any of their feet - outside my premises, except for exercise for over four weeks, and I imagine most of you are in the same way. We are fairly fortunate in that we have a decent amount of outside space in which to enjoy what has been excellent weather – it must be immeasurably more difficult for those confined to flats or who are for some reason unable even to leave their homes.

There is little doubt that, six months or so ago when the first cases of coronavirus were reported from China, any of us thought for a moment that the effect on the UK and the rest of the world would be so dramatic. Initially of course the pandemic had not reached the UK. When the Mill opened for the first public steaming in March 2020 the effect on us was simply that in an effort to protect any visitor to Bancroft, I spent the weekend wiping down door handles and railings etc., with a strong solution of bleach, which was all we could get at that time. It probably worked very well, but my trousers were well spotted with bleach!

It is said that every cloud has a silver lining. In the present situation it must be that owing to the world-wide lock-down, there are very few aircraft or vehicles and reduced industrial emissions, so the air must be a lot cleaner at the moment. The virus has done what all the clean air activists have been striving for! Greta Thunberg and her band or supporters must be overjoyed at that.

Our very first Steam Day in March brought a great horde of visitors, more than 80 of them. Talking to some of them, it would seem that quite a few had seen the mill engine running on the Channel Five programme “Celebrity Britain by Barge” which obviously gave us some good exposure. Filming had taken place in mid-September last year but we were sworn to secrecy at the time, we were not allowed to publicise it or say who the celebrities were. I think we all recognised Bill Oddie when he arrived but though some may have heard of Pete Waterman and his interest in, and ownership of, several steam loco’s few of us actually recognised him. A team of volunteers had been at the mill from early in the morning to get everything ready and we were expecting the film crew around lunchtime. In fact it was after 4pm when they arrived, but it was fascinating to see how such a programme is filmed, pretty much off the cuff with no script and just the Director suggesting what should happen next.

The programme is still available for viewing on the Channel 5 ‘Catch-up’ service, we feature in Episode 2.

The March Steaming Day was the first to be held under the new charity, Bancroft Mill Engine Museum, which has now taken over operations at the Mill - hence the new name and logo at the top of this Newsletter. The final stage of the process will be when the

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premises and property are formally transferred to the new charity. We are still awaiting news of this from the solicitor.

In the rest of the mill, all the weaving shed had been revamped and two of the three looms were in full running order. Even the front of the engine house had been completely cleared of wood so as to present the best image that we could do, ready to promote our first centenary. As you will all be aware though, Bancroft is completely shut down for the foreseeable future. We are hopeful that we shall run again this year, but it seems less and less likely. We shall therefore set the steaming dates for 2021 in the near future and publish these on the website and newsletter.

The most disappointing aspect of this closure has been the postponement of our Centenary celebration. I hope that we can do it next year – Centenary Plus One! I am informed that the original Mill opening was also delayed because of the great 'flu epidemic following WW1, so history repeats itself.!

During the lockdown, a couple of our Members who live close by are checking the premises from time to time, to see that all is in order. They have topped up the Cornish Boiler to the brim in order to exclude as much oxygen as possible and applied water treatment chemicals as per the winter shutdown. I understand that David has seized the opportunity presented by the absence of visitors and volunteers alike, to do some more floor painting. The only issue now is that he is likely to run out of paint and of course so far, the DIY market is closed down. An excellent opportunity that we are completely unable to exploit.

Some people have enquired about the special Centenary Tea-Towels which they had ordered towards the end of last year. Before the shutdown we had woven enough to satisfy all the orders with some to spare, and they are safe in Barnoldswick. Your order will be available to collect from the Mill on the next possible steaming day. If you have not already ordered some and would like to reserve some please write to the Secretary at the Mill or contact him by email on info@bancroftmill.co.uk The towels are slightly longer than the standard ones and cost £9 each. If you are desperate to receive them, we may be able to arrange postage at cost, which will be around £1.50 for a single towel.

There is not a lot I can add, as there is nothing going on. We shall be very short of money with practically no income, apart from very welcome donations. Of course, we still have to pay insurance, water, and other bits and bobs but we shall make every effort not to incur expenses which we can avoid. I am sorry that there are no pictures in this newsletter, but there is nothing new to show you and also the paper version is being printed by the Treasurer at home thanks to the lockdown.

In the meantime, all of you please be careful and keep safe. Goodbye for now.

Jim Gill. 01282 865626.