



Bancroft Mill Engine Museum

Winter Newsletter 2023

Firstly, we are very sorry to tell you that Derek Greenwood, one of our long-serving volunteers, died on 18th December last. He had come to the Mill for the steaming on 30th October when it was clear that he wasn't his normal cheerful self. Shortly after that date he went into hospital and then presently was transferred to Pendleside Hospice where he died, unfortunately just three days before his 76th birthday. We send our sincere commiserations to his family and friends.



Derek had worked all his life, most recently at Rolls-Royce in Barlick. Having retired from there, and not being a man who could sit and do nothing, he was an active volunteer at Pendleside Hospice Shop in Church Street. He was widely known and liked around Barlick. At the Mill he was always active, coming on Saturdays often to join David on building maintenance tasks and on most steaming days he would help with getting fuel to the boiler. He could always be relied upon to do his utmost for the Mill, where he was a popular character and we shall all miss him. The Mill was represented at his funeral which was very well attended.

A meeting of the Trustees was held in December. At this meeting it was agreed that each Trustee would take an overseeing role in some area of the Museum's business. This would hopefully ensure that, not only would the load be equitably spread between the Trustees but that work which was necessary to be done would not be overlooked. A list of these roles and responsibilities is displayed at the Mill. The meeting also considered Membership and Admission charges for 2023 and decided, in view of the difficult economic climate, to hold these at the present level for another year, though they would probably have to increase for 2024.

This is of course the time for Membership Renewals, many of you have already renewed – thank you for that. If you have not (and we hope that you will!) there is a gentle reminder in the letter, or email which accompanied this Newsletter.

The winter is the time when we do a lot of the routine maintenance tasks which would disrupt the Steaming days if we did them at other times. This inevitably means we do them at the coldest time of the year and we are very grateful to all those volunteers who take them on without (too much) complaint.

The first job is to prepare the boiler for its annual inspection which means removing the firebars from the furnace, and cleaning the firetube and flues. We are very grateful to Ian and Tim for doing this. It was at least easier this year as the new access hatch behind the boiler made getting in and out much easier. See last year's Winter NL for a reminder of this

The Boiler Inspector made his visit and reported satisfaction, though some welding would need to be done to build up wasted areas in the firetube in 2024. The protective paint inside the boiler has been renewed. Thank you to Philip for doing this and indeed

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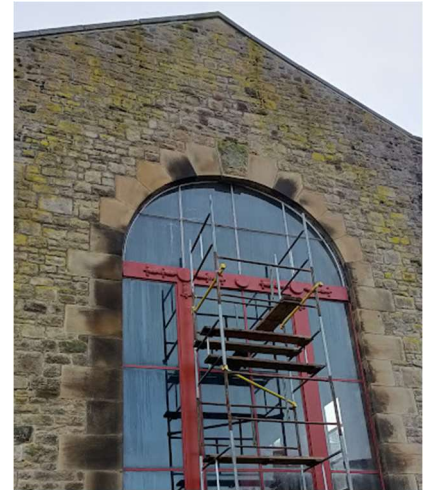


for cleaning inside the water-space. We rely on him for this task, he is our only volunteer agile enough to do this and we are more appreciative than perhaps we tell him - he deserves credit for doing this filthy and uncomfortable job.

David has repainted the floor in the Roberts Engine House and it looks very smart. The challenge is for us to keep it clean during the winter while we are working in there. He has also replaced the wall at the back of the storage shed in the yard.

Late last year David and Philip started painting the metal frame of the end (North) window of the Engine House. They were only able to complete the preparation and priming before the weather became too cold, so the scaffolding has been left in place until work can restart. Earlier last year they had also treated all the external woodwork on the Engine House windows.

Let's not forget, too, the less obvious tasks. Ady has spent ages cleaning and renovating the clogs which form part of the Museum's display – he's made a fine job of it so we've roped him in to have a go at the wage pots in their case. He has also been cleaning out the Cooling Tower and various parts of the cellar not generally on view.



Work continues on the Pickles clock. At present it is being carefully dismantled, section by section to be cleaned and reassembled, We are very grateful to Barnoldswick Council for financial assistance with the cost of getting an electrical supply to the clock for automatic rewinding, and for the provision of new safe materials for the display cabinet to replace the glass that was previously in it. We hope to have the clock finished early in the Steaming season.

Following the feedback (thank you to those who made it) about the previous NL, we intend to print a 4 -part article briefly looking at the history of the Mill. The four parts are to be:

Part 1 - Going to war - from the beginning up to 1939

Part 2 - Peace at last from 1940 to 1950

Part 3 - Peace work - 1950 to 1960

Part 4 - Losing the battle - from 1960 to 1980

So here's the first.

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Part 1 – Going to war

Bancroft mill is a microcosm of 100 years of cotton history. Back in the last century, prior to 1914, James Nutter clearly had a vision of making a commercial success of Newfield Edge Mill – to be called Bancroft Mill in due course.

Why Bancroft? We understand that the mill land was bought from Bancroft Farm just up the road. This farm is mentioned on the 1895 OS map as “**Bancrofts**” but previously on the 1849 survey it had been called **Bank Croft**, which is a farmstead on a hill and is a plausible and appropriate name. The newer version “Bancroft” is an Old English name from the 13th century, derived from *bean*= beans and *croft* = a smallholding. One can only infer it would be perhaps a couple of fields in which beans were grown. Whatever the merits each has, we won’t see the name changed now!

The construction of the Mill started in 1914 – there may have been earlier preparatory works – and did not finish until 1919. Of course, James and Mary Jane never saw the mill finished and the war delayed this completion significantly. That’s why the original idea was to call the two cylinders of the engine “Patience” and “Perseverance” because it had taken so long to build the place, but at the last Aunt Eliza said, “No, I want the engine named after Mum and Dad” and so it was, and is still.

Tragically there occurred on 18 January 1921 an incident at the Mill which caused the death of a weaver, Elizabeth Brown. “It appears that two large iron fire-proof doors had been left in the warehouse awaiting erection between the warehouse and the shed, and were leaning against a stack of pieces in the warehouse. As the deceased entered the warehouse to obtain a supply of weft, the stack suddenly collapsed and Mrs. Brown was knocked down, her head coming into violent contact with the floor, and the iron doors, weighing approximately 10 cwt. falling across both her legs. She was extricated in an unconscious condition and removed home, where death took place about two hours later from a fracture of the skull.” The inquest returned a verdict of “accidental death”. Elizabeth goes down in history as Bancroft Mill’s only known fatality. Her grave is in Ghyll cemetery.



Back in March 1925 when the paint can have hardly dried on the mill walls and the ink on the deeds, there was already disquiet in the cotton industry. The Beamers and Twisters had demanded nationalisation of the cotton industry in 1919, clearly in response to grievances real or envisaged.

Then the Daily Dispatch on Friday March 6th printed an article by Sir Edwin Stockton who had been a member of the Cotton Control Board during WW1. He said that it was all to the good that the cotton trade appreciated two essential factors in commerce, namely the world-wide network of influencing conditions and the fierceness of world competition. Global trade is not new! He thought that we should restore pre-war stability but warned that we (= Britain) should not expect to regain dominance in world



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markets. He also said that “We cannot afford to see any diminution in the skill and enthusiasm, any decline in the well-being, or any deterioration in the training of the young generation”. He went on to say that “Lancashire appeals for an avoidance of government intervention in the cotton industry” but suggested that “a greater measure of co-operationis desirable in all sections of the cotton trade”. He thought that there should be “..efforts at wiser employment of such finance as (was) available for the purposes of the cotton trade”

But nevertheless, the cotton trade declined significantly in the 1920s and 1930s. Total exports of cloth plummeted from 7075 million linear yards in 1913 to 1448 million in 1938. We know that BM survived the great depression, which closed many of the mills which once numbered 2600 in Lancashire alone. It also survived the Barnoldswick flood in July 1932 (can you identify anyone on this picture?). This flash flood caused havoc in Barnoldswick and the workers at Bancroft Mill had to be brought out of the mill yard on the backs of lorries.



We know that the mill was clearly operating in 1936 when the insurance inventory taken in that year shows that they had about 1250 looms. Indeed, 21 additional workers were taken on in 1937. The mill was no doubt hopeful that the 1936 and 1939 Cotton Industry (Reorganisation) Acts would help to redress the disastrous state of the cotton trade, with the 1936 Act generating income to be reinvested in the industry and the 1939 Act scrapping redundant capacity and setting production quotas. But it was not to be. The outbreak of hostilities prevented the 1939 Act from being implemented and we can only assume that Bancroft Mill must have faced the growing inevitability that they would have to deal with the effects of the depression and the consequences of war as best they could.

And now another new feature, the first of an occasional series which might be entitled “A Volunteers View”

Man Made Wonders

In the book, ‘Man Made Wonders of the World’, there are spectacular examples of architectural and engineering skill from all continents and cultures.

Although the Ribblehead Viaduct doesn’t make into the book, it is nonetheless a man-made wonder closer to home. Now Grade II* listed, the surrounding remains of temporary construction camps are an Historic England scheduled monument.

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The engineering needed to build the viaduct is impressive. One account of its construction asks us to imagine digging 25 feet deep foundations, through hard rock with rudimentary tools, on the exposed moorland, in winter...

After five years of construction the Designer, John Sydney Crossley, must have beamed with pride at the official opening in August 1875. But his success was unachievable without the 1,000 or so navvies, their families and people supplying services to them. The work was dangerous and disease rife; over 100 men died.

The more I have learnt about our beloved Bancroft Mill, the more I am struck by the way all involved in its construction and operation were interdependent.

James Nutter certainly had the entrepreneurial drive to bring it into being; though, sadly dying before its completion. But he too relied upon the labours of construction workers and engineers.

Once the Mill was operating, this interdependency of one with another continued. The Tenter (engine driver) depended on the Firebeater (Boiler Man) for steam; the Weavers depended on the Preparation and Winding Departments for warp and weft, the Tenter for power and on the Tacklers to keep the looms working. And beyond its walls, the Mill depended on suppliers of cotton thread & coal.

Along with others who conduct guided tours, I include human stories like this which seem to engage our visitors' interest. I can do this work confident that, if someone asks a technical question, there is no shortage of engineers with the knowledge to answer it!

Thankfully, there is a growing understanding in the world of business that co-operation is a far more productive model of working, than is economic competition alone.

Adrian Cragg, Volunteer

Finally: a reminder that if you need something to do from time to time, here are the year's steaming dates. These can always be found on our completely revised web site www.bancroftmill.org.uk do have a look and let us know what you think.

12 March	25 June	17 September
2 April	16 July	8 October
23 April	6 August	29 October
14 May	27 August	19 November
4 June		

Finally, a warm wish to you all for a happy, healthy and prosperous 2023. We look forward to seeing you during the year.

Ian McKay

Tony Nixon

February 2023