

Bancroft Mill Engine Museum Summer Newsletter 2023



At last work has started on the repointing of the chimney. It seems like an age - in fact it is five years since we started the fundraising for this work - and throughout that time we have been saving any surplus funds each year to put towards this essential work. We have been greatly helped by some significant donations. It was our late friend and *Jacquard Master*, Peter Mitchell, who started the ball rolling with a sponsored walk of the Three Peaks in his 78th year and raised over £1,000, and last year we received over £1300 in his memory, donated by his many friends. Most recently a Member has generously donated £2,000 in memory of his late wife, and of course there have been many other donations large and small. We are very grateful for all the support we have received.

We are also extremely grateful to the Association for Industrial Archaeology who have awarded us a grant of £20,000 (the maximum they give) towards the work. We were only able to secure this as a result of the hard work of Anthony Pilling who drew up the specification for the work and Ian McKay who pursued the application.



Each year we invite the Mayor of Pendle to pay us a visit. Without the good offices of Pendle Borough Council, the Mill would have been totally demolished in 1979. It was thanks to their involvement with the working group set up to investigate saving the engine that the Museum is here today. We were very pleased to welcome the current Mayor, Cllr. Brian Newman to our Steaming Day on 16th July. Here you see him with Jim Gill, who as Secretary of the old BMET must have welcomed more Mayors than most!

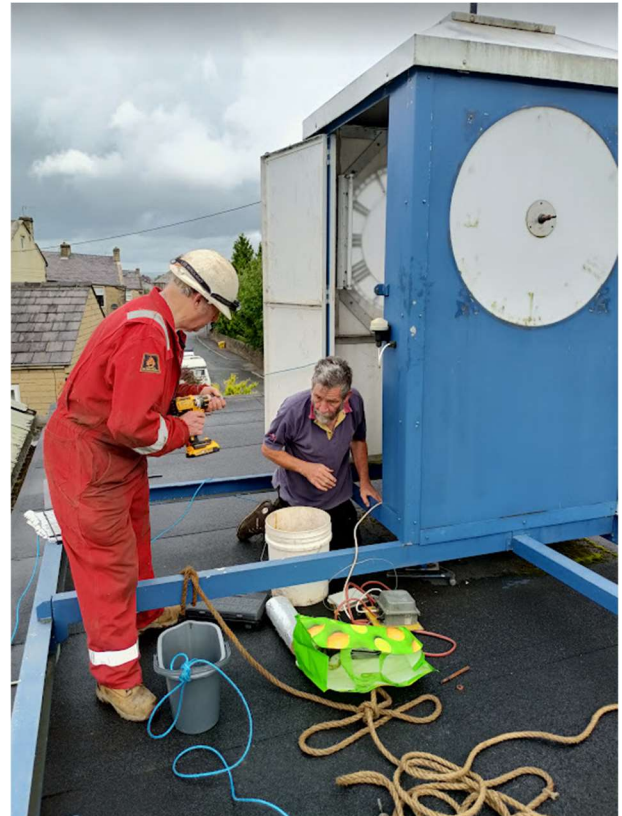
We are very sorry to record the death of Ken Hartley, a former Mayor of Pendle. Ken had a great interest in the local industrial heritage and was a valued Trustee of BMEM until he was forced to retire through ill health in 2021.

When the weather has permitted, work has proceeded on repainting the outside of north window of the Engine House and we are delighted that this is now complete. Many thanks are due to David and Philip who have done the bulk of the work in difficult conditions.

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Our second engine, the 'Bradley Engine' originally powered Peter Green's Mill in Cross Lane Bradley. For the first time this year Bancroft Mill will have a stand at Bradley Show <https://bradleyshow.org.uk/> which takes place almost in the shadow of the Cross Lane Mill, now converted to apartments. We'll be flying the flag for the Mill generally and aiming to drum up some interest from Bradley locals to come and see us. We will also have some merchandise for sale and be trying to encourage people to consider volunteering at the Mill.

This time last year we brought you the news that we had been given a rather large clock, made in 1937 by Millwright Johnny Pickles, of the firm Henry Brown Sons and Pickles Ltd. If you have visited in the last year, you might have seen that access to the low-pressure side of the engine has been restricted whilst we have been working on the clock. Removal of the clock from Wellhouse Road, and its reinstallation at Bancroft has posed some challenges, not least of which was a pleasant morning spent on the roof of its former home removing chapter rings, hands, and motion work. Work is almost complete, and we shall be ready for a formal unveiling of the clock in the presence of representatives of Barnoldswick Town Council, descendants of Johnny Pickles and members of the Gissing family who donated the clock, at our next steaming Day on Sunday 27th August. There will be a full report in the next Newsletter.



From time to time, we have updated you on events at Queen St Mill. You may recall that the splendid Roberts Engine, 'Peace' has lain idle since the retirement of the Engine Tenter, Aly Roberts, in June of last year. We are delighted to say that a new Engine Tenter has been appointed, and it is none other than Peter Robinson, a Bancroft Life Member who has been involved here pretty much since the museum opened in 1982. He is currently undergoing training at Queen St, and we hope that you will be able to see 'Peace' in operation again before too long.

Here are of the year's remaining 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.

27 August

8 October

19 November

17 September

29 October

We look forward to seeing you during the year.

August 2023

And now, overleaf, is part three of Ian's brief history of the Mill.

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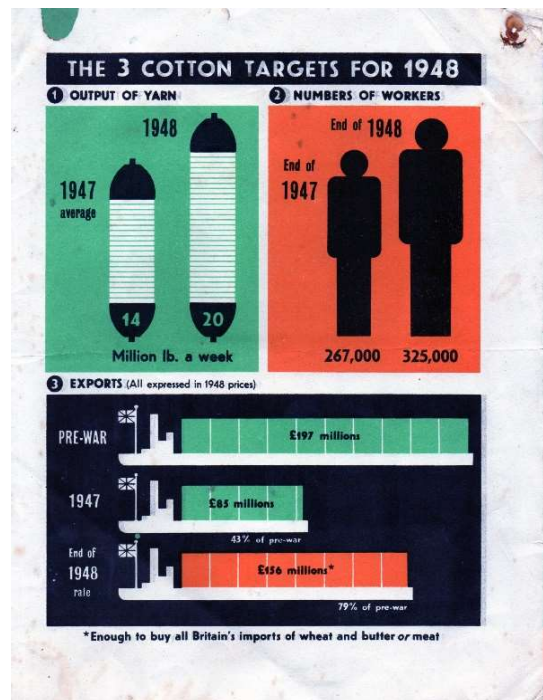
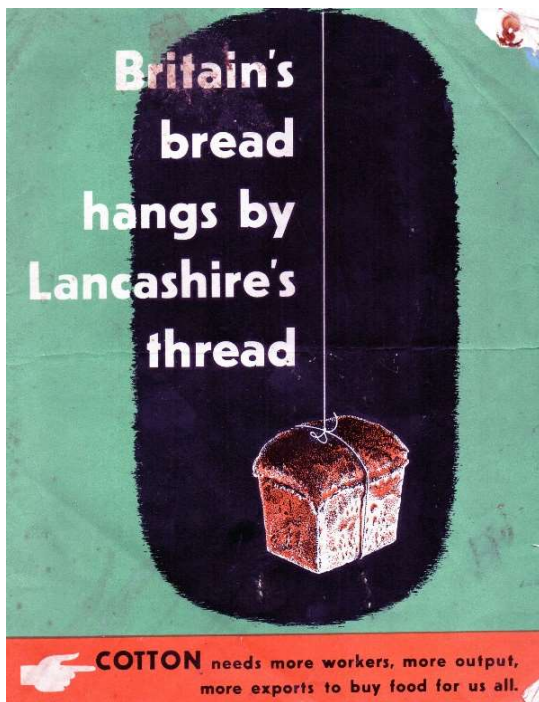
Part 3 - Carrying on the fight.

The war was over. Rationing had not yet ended but at least the hostilities had. Britain was now fighting to get back onto its social and economic feet. One of the lesser-documented issues was that nationally, expenditure on maintenance of mechanical equipment had been effectively zero for six years. The war effort took all the available bits of ironmongery and most of the personnel who might have potentially been able to do any mechanical fitting, so nothing except that which was critically necessary had been done to keep the mill going. As well as that, coal quality could be poor, varying to very poor, and attempts to run the mill efficiently must have caused Mr Nutter to tear his hair.

Personnel issues and training could well have been partly responsible for the mill accident in Burnley in 1948, when an over-speeding engine caused a flywheel burst, the destruction of half the mill and the death of a weaver.

Aside, by 1948 we were told that “Britain’s Bread hangs by Lancashire’s Thread”. Ignoring the trifling fact that Barnoldswick was then in Yorkshire, Bancroft was clearly one of the mills targeted by the Government drive to increase production.

Cotton, we were told, was lagging behind its best. With only three workers where before



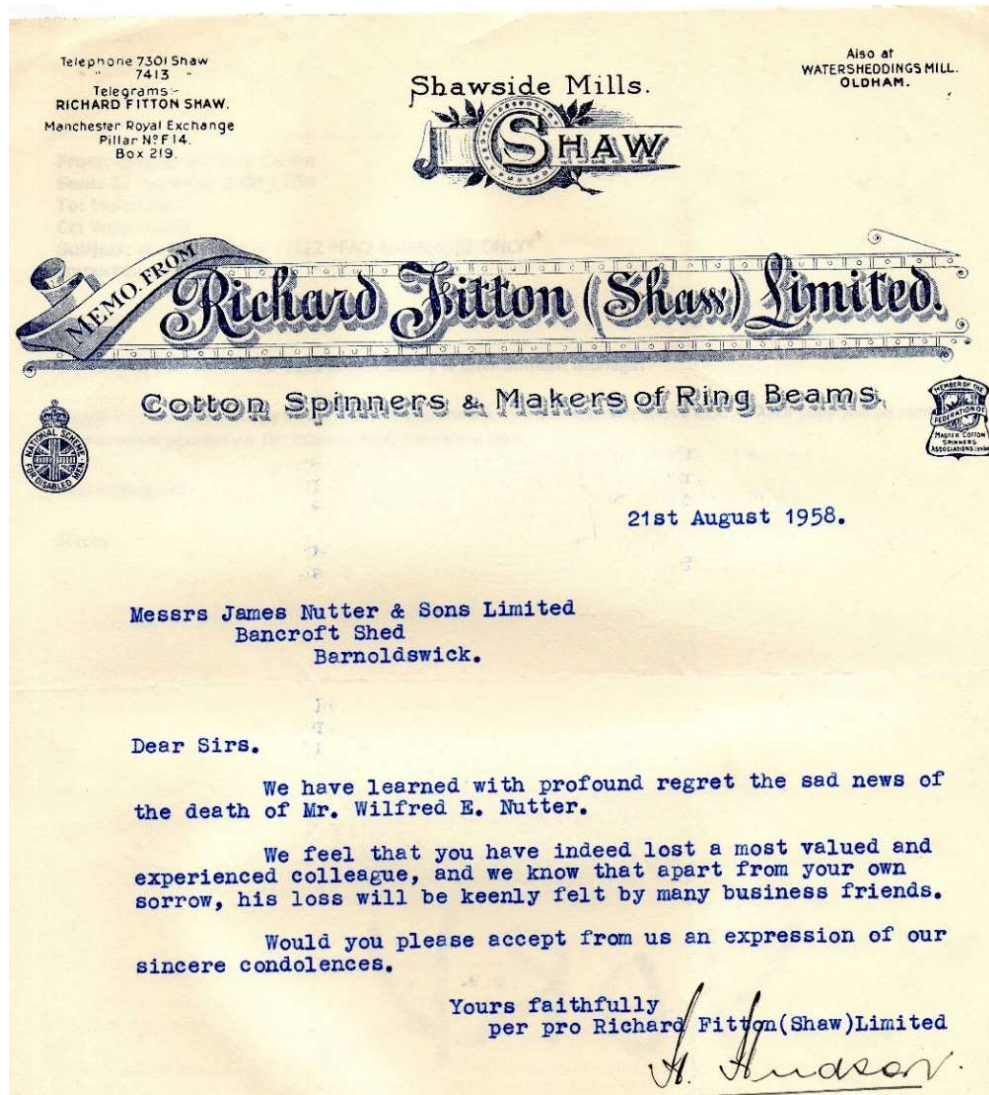
the war there were four, and about 1/3 of the spindles and looms were idle. In 1937 there had been 4124 million yards of cloth made by 187,000 employees operating 485,000 looms. By 1950 output had fallen to 2830 million yards, made by 137,000 employees on under 358,000 looms.

There was however a significant degree of optimism and initiatives like the More Looms system offered a degree of hope for the industry, though many weavers were very much against it. Even with this system, which gave improvements in working conditions as well as wages, there was an undercurrent of disquiet.

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Bancroft Mill must have been well aware of the parlous state of the industry and surely things could only get better. Oh no! On Tuesday 19th August 1958, Wilfrid Ewart Nutter died at the age of 75.

He had been one of the founding Directors of James Nutter and Sons in 1907 and had become Chairman in 1949 and then Managing Director. He was clearly and deservedly a well-known and well-respected figure in the cotton industry. There were tributes from a number of mills and cotton businesses throughout Lancashire which expressed the sorrow of their respective managements to Bancroft Mill in most sincere terms. But his death brought to the end the era of the Nutter family control of Bancroft Mill.



This portrait of Wilfrid, which you can see in the Café, was painted by Howard Barron. It was commissioned by his family, but he was too ill to travel to the artist and so the picture was painted from photographs. Sadly, Wilfrid did not live to see it completed.

