



JANUARY NEWSLETTER 2008

Dear Members,

A Happy New Year to everyone and here is an update of what's been happening since the last newsletter. Many of you that come to the Mill regularly will know much of this but it is always hard to make sure that everyone is up to speed with news and hence the newsletters will be issued each month from now on.

Headrace re-instatement project

Much has happened to our project to re-instate the head race and get the waterwheel turning again. Our application to Grantscape submitted in September for £90K required that we got some financial contribution from elsewhere and we applied to West Oxfordshire District Council for finance to pay for the initial engineering survey plus the required percentage contribution required by Grantscape. The original project was to re-instate the head race along its original route to the top of the sawmill site at the river bend and to achieve this we had to get the underground work done ahead of the construction work being done by Blenheim Construction.

To stay ahead of the game we had to commission the initial hydrology survey before we heard if we have been awarded the grant and the survey report was received on 9 November. This told us that the river level has dropped over the years to a point where the bottom of the waterwheel is now above water unless a weir is built to raise the water level. It also demonstrated that there is no benefit in making a connection to the river as high up as the bend but that we could link up at a point near the iron bridge. This conclusion meant that the work we need to do would not conflict with Blenheim ground work.

We were invited to present our case for project funding directly to the WODC cabinet members who decided they wished to visit the Mill before making a decision. The visit took place on 3 December and the leader of the council, Barry Norton, spent a morning together with several other cabinet members to tour the Mill and listen to our plans for its conservation and improvement. They left totally committed to helping us achieve our ambitions in every way they could, which was an excellent outcome. The visit took place on the same day that we heard the devastating news from Grantscape that Combe Mill had not been chosen for one of the eight grants available.

Despite this set-back we have re-grouped and the situation is now that we have established a relationship with a watermill consultant Rupert Armstrong Evans who is based in Plymouth and who has already provided us with pragmatic advice on how to proceed. He will also deal on our behalf with the Environment Agency to get

the necessary licenses. We are funding Rupert to visit site in the next few weeks and to provide us with enough detail to give the basis for physical work to begin on at least

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making the river connection. We may have to raise additional funds to pay for the required sluice and debris strainers to complete the job. We are attempting to identify as much work as possible that can be done by volunteers and we are also seeking practical assistance from Blenheim Construction to do instruct their sub-contractors to carry out the required ground works.

On 13 December Ron and Tony were invited to a meeting with Roger File of Blenheim Estates and called by Martin Holland, WODC, to update one another on the present status of the project. Martin is paving the way for a meeting between Barry Norton and John Hoy, Chief Executive of Blenheim, to encourage the Estate to provide support to us by doing some of the ground-work to create a culvert when we have obtained the design details from Rupert Evans.

The story continues.

David Cameron visits Combe Mill

On Friday 18 January we welcomed David Cameron to the Mill so that he could see for himself what a gem we have and to hear of our plans for its conservation and improvement once we have the lease in place with Blenheim Estates. His visit lasted an hour and included refreshments provided by Paul Downer from the Cock Inn at Combe.

David Cameron was accompanied by two research assistants and one of our local counselors, Derek Millard.

Mike Hallam acted as guide and Ron Rutherford presented our visitor with a poker and toasting fork set made by Bill in the forge. The turned wooden handles were made by Steve Nicholls - one for the poker was of apple-wood with an apple finial complete with stalk. It was still intact when presented!!



Steve Nicholls' apple-wood poker handle



David Cameron admires his poker/fork set

David Cameron was interested to learn of our plans for the waterwheel and identified our need for more space in which to display our exhibits and cater for visitors. He agreed that ideal premises would be the actual sawmill part of the building that is occupied by Barlows and offered to raise the prospect of the Society being able to lease this from the Estate. Tony Simmons explained that our request had already once been rebuffed at a meeting before Xmas.

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Key arrangements at Mill

A reminder to those not having been to the Mill recently - you won't be able to get in unless you have got a key from John Ross.

Update on the Lease

Lease negotiations have progressed to the point where the extent of the plot, or 'demise', has been settled. We will have a space stretching 14m from the rear of the Mill, the grass picnic area sweeping round to the tail leat and the tail leat itself. We are now trying to agree a reasonable amount that we should pay for 'services'.

2008 Opening Times

In the last newsletter we mentioned additional open days for 2008 and the schedule has been posted on the website. The public open days will be on the third Sunday of the months between March and October.

School groups can book visits on the Mondays and Tuesdays following these open days when the machinery will still be oiled up and ready to run.

Parties of individuals may also book a visit via the web site provided there are enough of them to cover the cost of raising steam.

Finally we will accept telephone booking from the public for any Thursday to see the Mill provided we receive at least one day's notice.

All this is on the web site and details have also been posted at the entrance to the Mill.

Annual Subscriptions

At the last meeting of directors a vote was taken to increase membership subs to £6 for individuals and £10 for families/couples. The increase is the first for many years and has been made to cover the increasing costs of postage and to enable us to publish a regular newsletter every month. Subscriptions became due on the 1st January unless you are a new member and joined in the last few months of 2007.

100Club

The 100Club continues to attract subscribers and is helping to provide funds for the society.

School visits

We now have a leaflet that describes our provisions for school visits. If you know of a school local to you having pupils in the 7-11 age group then perhaps you can encourage them to visit.

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Pollarding the Willows

There's nothing like watching other people work to give you a sweat and we were treated to just this experience by Mike Hallam and Nicholas Washington in December with help from John Ross.

With agreement from Paul Orsi, the willows were pollarded as a routine task and some of the branches were



Mike Hallam, Nick Washington & John Ross at work

cut and stored ready to use as stakes to be driven in to reinforce the riverbank and to stop erosion.



Nicholas again - this time with chainsaw

However, the river had other ideas and the recent floods have washed away some of this good work.

Developments on site

Great changes can be seen on site since just before Christmas. The concrete base of the building at the top of the site has been broken up and crushed for back-fill. Ground works are well underway to lay new foul and surface water drains. A start was made at the top of the site on drilling deep boreholes into which ground-source heat exchanger tubing was put. It was soon discovered that high ground water pressure was resulting in water gushing to the surface and the Environment Agency requested that no further bore-holes are drilled. Now instead of deep boreholes, mats of tubes will be laid about one metre below ground. One such mat will be at the rear of the Mill to serve the Barlows building.

The old sawdust cyclone and hopper have now gone and view of the Mill not seen for many years have been revealed made more obvious by the pollarded willows. There is much mud around at the moment.

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Christmas Social



Members debate bowling tactics before the meal!

Our venue for the Christmas Dinner on Friday 18 January was the Gardiner Arms again and an enjoyable time was had by all who came. Unsurprisingly the ladies beat the men in the bowling match. The carvery food was excellent and we owe our thanks to Nicholas Washington for organizing the event.

Work sessions

Our first work days of this year have taken place on January 12 and 26 during which handrails have been fitted to each Mill entrance and up the left side of the main stairway. Work has also been started at enlarging the visitor platform over the Cornish boiler so as to reduce the bottleneck as visitors enter the Mill. Now that the David Cameron visit is behind us work will move ahead to tackle this job.

The next work days at the Mill are on Saturdays 9 and 23 of February. These are to get projects completed before our first steaming on 16 March. We would love to see more of you on these days to help out with everything from tidying-up, dusting, moving, fixing and grunting. On the back of this newsletter is the list of jobs that we are working through. If you would like to help then please give Ron a call on 01865 379402.

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The hydraulic pipe bender bought by Nicholas Washington was put to use in bending thick-walled pipe for hand railing and the Society's new pipe thread cutter set was used by Bill to modify the steam supply to the small engines.



Nicholas preparing the new handrail for primer



Ron and Chris Hayes work on the forge barrier

Member information

No-one has asked not to be excluded in the published list of members, so if you would like such a listing please contact Tony Simmons.

Tourist Direction Signs

We have submitted an application to Oxford City Council for the erection of brown signs to direct visitors to the Mill. The threshold for eligibility included the requirement that we received 5000 visitors each year and we have written explaining our Catch-22 situation that without such signs visitors are unlikely to know we exist! There is also a requirement that we have registered to the Visit Britain Code of Practice which we have now done. The main topic of this CoP was the need for us to have an Access Statement and our website now has such a document for download. Please let us have any comments you think fit on this document.

Education Room

Under the agreed terms of our lease, we have a 50/50 arrangement over the use of the Education Room with the Society being the responsible party. We have already begun using this room for meetings and recuperation in the warmth on work days. After Blenheim have removed their paperwork we intend to use the space for storage of our archive documentation and for display purposes on open days. We also intend to locate the sales area for the wood turners and publication and souvenir sales there.

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Apprentice Scheme

At the recent committee meeting the need for "Multi Skilling" was discussed and how we might move forward with this subject. We invite all members to become involved in a "whole membership programme" to achieve, so far as we can, a wider range of skills and abilities amongst us.

This 'apprentice' scheme to develop our skills and to record our competencies to demonstrate machinery and skills to the public and is being supported by training sessions on Thursday evenings (or as convenient to those who cannot join us on Thursdays). If you have a secret ambition to drive the engine or the work the forge then do get in touch with Ron on the above number.

To those holding 'Grandfather Rights', if you would accept the idea, you are a "Key Stone" in the programme. Would you please take on the training/briefing of volunteer members in your speciality?

To note each volunteer's attainments a "Task Sheet" will be used to record progress. We hope you will approve of the proposal but do feel free to comment and make suggestion that would improve the overall outcome. Could we please have your response by say Thursday 21st February 2008? If you wish, you would be very welcome at a gathering in the Education Room at the mill at 7.30 pm.

Finally

By the time you read this we will be well towards the end of January and while April seems a long way off, Ron has indicated that he would be pleased to hand over the chair to someone else. Nominations should be sent to our Company Secretary Chris Hays who can be contacted on 01608 811278.

Ron can be reached on 01865 379402.

Best wishes,

Your Committee - Adrian, Bill, Chris, John, Ron, and Tony

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WINTER JOBS LIST @ COMBE MILL

OUTSIDE FRONT

Fit new handrail to entry steps. **DONE** Needs painting

BEAM ENGINE AREA

Renovate the clevis pin
Extend the entrance platform/walkway and re-arrange steel barriers. **UNDERWAY**

FORGE AREA

Erect metal barrier/fence and rail in place of blue polythene and prime/paint. **UNDERWAY**
Fit wooden rail to top of new barrier.

SMALL ENGINES

Re-pipe the high pressure steam supply. **DONE**
Lag steam piping.
Fix broken window pane behind the engines

HEAD RACE AREA

Check 100mm pipe for leaks
Fit handrail to the steps into waterwheel room. **DONE** needs painting
Complete the standby boiler house.

RIVERSIDE

Assistance in piling the river bank with wood from pollarded willows.

UPSTAIRS

Fit handrail to the left of the access stairway **DONE**
Set up the old band-saw to run from a belt drive.
Move the small engines to one side to provide easier access to the Education Room
Fit new handrail for stairs up to Education Room

EDUCATION ROOM

Clear out the cupboards (in co-operation with Blenheim Education department.)
Make flat tops for the display surfaces
Gain access to the steel cupboards
Move old sawmill paperwork to fresh location
Remove the wall partition
Organise Library/Archives
Set up publication and craft sales area.

FOR SCHOOLS

Simplify drawings/diagrams. **UNDERWAY**

SIGNS

Arrange for announcement signs for the eight 2008 open days.
Replace rain-damaged warning and direction signs in the Mill.