



SALTFORD BRASS MILL PROJECT

Established 1997 – Registered Charity 2017

To conserve Saltford Brass Mill and educate the public on the history of the mill, the heritage of the Bristol based brass industry and its relevance today

Annual Report – 2019 / 20

Aim

1. This report covers the 2019 operating period (May to November) and preparations for 2020, noting that activity in 2020 has been severely curtailed due to the coronavirus emergency. The report addresses:
 - Meetings of the Trustees.
 - Conservation of Saltford Brass Mill.
 - Education of the Public.
 - Displays and Interpretation.
 - Archives.

Meetings of the Trustees

2. As well as informal meetings, a formal meeting of the Trustees was planned for 16th March but postponed due to the coronavirus emergency.

Conservation of Saltford Brass Mill

3. Conservation of the Mill has focused on:
 - Clear up following a flood.
 - Reorganising the rolling mill.
 - Replacement of waterwheel wedges.
 - Maintenance of the garden.
4. The work is carried out by an enthusiastic team of 17 volunteers, an increase in 1 since 2018.

Flood

5. The River Avon flooded on 22nd February 2020, resulting in approx. 0.4m of water in the Mill. Water enters the Mill most winters with a more significant flood occurring every five to ten years. The last major incursion had been on 24th December 2013. The displays were in their winter store and no damage was incurred. Volunteers cleared up the Mill once the waters had receded.

Rolling Mill

6. With the introduction of video display screens, the projection booth for showing the short film about the Mill had become redundant. The projection booth was a temporary structure and was dismantled to open up the rolling mill to give visitors a better feel for the scale of the workshop. Removal of the booth also made visible the remains of the bowling alley installed by Eric Butler in the late 1920s.

Waterwheel Wedges

7. The working water wheel is aligned within the leat by wooden wedges inserted between the wheel's hub and axle. The wedges are made of oak but have a finite life. It was evident that the wedges were nearing the end of life; hence a programme of wedge replacement has been undertaken.

Penstocks

8. Work on penstock gates 1, 2 and 4, commenced in 2018, was completed with the installation of grilles over the open culverts and fencing as additional health and safety measures.

Garden Maintenance

9. The gardens continue to be maintained to provide a pleasing vista in The Shallows and to set the Mill in an attractive setting. Maintenance of the gardens is a major activity conducted by volunteers of the SBMP, involving on average 2½ man-days of effort every two weeks throughout the year.

Future work

Re-pointing

10. The next major programme of conservation will involve re-pointing of those structures identified as in need of repair. The areas comprise: external walls; watercourse walls, accessible without de-watering; and watercourse walls, requiring de-watering to enable access. This will be an ongoing project. In the first instance we will address those external walls to which there is easy access. We have investigated the different types of mortar that are available to determine which is the most appropriate for use at the Mill. Historic England consent will be sought to proceed with the repairs.

Education of the Public

11. Education of the public about the Mill has focused on visits to the Mill and talks to local history and interest groups.

Visits

12. In 2019, we welcomed 1,126 visitors, comprising 976 adults and 150 children; a record for recent times, if not all time. The Mill was opened to the public on 33 occasions, including 22 open days and 11 group visits (2 of which were in early 2019 before the formal open season). The Mill was opened to coincide with:
 - South Wales and West of England Conference on Industrial Heritage
 - National Mills Weekend.
 - Salford Festival.
 - National Heritage Open Day.
 - B&NES Museums Week.
13. Two visits had been planned in early 2020 but had to be cancelled because of the coronavirus emergency.

Talks

14. 16 talks were delivered to local interest groups in 2019 with 3 more delivered in early 2020. 7 more are planned for later in 2020, the first of which is in July. The topics covered include:
 - The Early Avon Valley Copper and Brass Industry – 1690 to 1740;
 - The Later Avon Valley Copper and Brass Industry – 1740 to 1927;
 - The Restoration of Salford Brass Mill; and
 - John Padmore – 18th Century Engineer.
 - Mills on the River Chew.
 - Mills in Widcombe.

Undergraduate Project

15. The Mill was made available to a photography student at Falmouth University who is resident in Saltford for an undergraduate coursework project. The project involved making a photographic record of the wildlife in and around the Mill and producing a magazine article which discusses the relationship between conservation of the Mill and the conservation of wildlife. The results of the work have been uploaded onto our website.

Displays and Interpretation

2020 Open Season

16. Plans were made to introduce a number of improvements to displays within the Mill for the 2020 open season but have been postponed due to the coronavirus emergency.

Annealing Workshop

17. Improvements to the lighting of the displays continue to be made to enhance the visitor experience. Recent improvements have focused on the lighting within the annealing furnace; electronic-controlled LED lighting and sound being employed to aid explanation of its operation. A review of the older displays has been undertaken and plans made to revise those associated with the annealing furnace to reflect new facts which have come to light as a result of recent research. A stand has been manufactured to mount the acid-bath found in a neighbouring garden which was once used to etch tarnished brassware following the annealing process.

Video Displays

18. Following developments made in recent years, plans have been made to introduce a number of video displays focusing on the wildlife in and around the Mill as well as the Mill's history. The videos are interactive enabling our younger visitor select the topic they want to see.

Water turbines

19. A small Francis Turbine has been made using 3-D printing. Plans were being made to use the turbine to add to the very successful, hands-on, display of working waterwheels.

Archives

Joan Day's Archive

20. Following the death of Joan Day in 2019, her extensive archive is being catalogued by the Project. The archive, which is paper-based, is being scanned to provide a digital record which can be used for future research and the original documents are being lodged in the Bath Records Office.

Shipham Dissertation

21. A dissertation for a Masters Degree in Landscape Archaeology from Bristol University entitled 'A History of Calamine Extraction on Mendip: To What Extent Has the Mining Heritage of Shipham Been Lost' was made available to the project and has been posted on the projects website to aid education and research.

Tony Coverdale
Chair, Saltford Brass Mill Project