

2022 AGM

Our 2022 AGM, reviewing the society’s performance in the Financial Year 2020/21, will be at 11am on Saturday, May 28th, 2022. We are very pleased to be able to announce that as the Covid restrictions have been lifted, we will be able to return to our ‘normal’ AGM format at the Revival Church in New Mills this year, giving our members a chance to attend in person. The Zoom AGMs did have one benefit, however, as they enabled members who live some distance away to participate. We are therefore planning to provide a live feed of the proceedings and are exploring ways to make the meeting more interactive, although you will have to attend in person to enjoy the coffee and cake! There will be an Open Day down at the site from 1-3pm that afternoon.

GEARBOX REFURBISHMENT

Archie’s gearbox, which had a design lifetime of 12 years, began to misbehave in mid-2021, and finally died in early December. The Directors were all too aware of this possibility and, having weighed the benefits of replacement vs refurbishment, had already sent requests for quotes to refurbish the gearbox to appropriate companies. We were, however, hoping it would not become necessary until the summer. Unfortunately, matters became critical and Archie had to be shut down over what would have been his peak generating season.

Some intense and urgent planning ensued, as this was by no means a straightforward operation. It made sense to get the generator refurbished at the same time, and by the same company, but these items each weigh over a ton and cannot be safely manoeuvred through the door of the engine house. Also, the bridge over which they must be transported to get to the nearest road is very old and has a relatively low weight limit; heavy loads are a real no-no. Some imaginative thinking was clearly in order.

Fortunately, we have some very creative and innovative people amongst our volunteers, and Jim Harries and Nobby Towse organized a team of Angels to accomplish the (almost) impossible: disconnecting the gearbox and generator safely and making them ready for transport, then lifting them out through a hole in the roof using a spider crane and loading them onto a telehandler (a type of forklift truck) to be trundled over the bridge and up the hill to the waiting lorry. And of course, the whole process then had to be repeated in reverse a few weeks later.

Operations have now resumed and even though we have had some very dry weather and the river has been quite low, Archie generated 6,800 kWh in April.



The gearbox drivebelt shredded at the beginning of October



Opening up the roof



Gearbox (left) and generator



The gearbox being craned back into position

ARCHIE'S NEW ROOF

After several years, and much negotiation, a new “vandal-proof” roof that looks sufficiently like our original (but sadly vandal-attractive) slate tiles was installed in early 2021. The local vandals clearly saw this as a challenge - even before the 2-day installation process was completed, there was an unsuccessful attempt to break in to the engine house!

Unfortunately, just a few months later, we had to lift a section of the tiles on our beautiful new roof and cut a hole in the boards underneath so we could extract the gearbox and generator and send them offsite to be refurbished. Needs must, however, and a hole just big enough to do the job was carefully made and the pieces taken to a safe place until they could be reinstalled, almost as good as new.



NEW MILLS BEACH PARTIES

We do things differently in New Mills, so our beach parties do not involve sunshine and fruity drinks with little paper umbrellas. Instead, welly boots, shovels and strong backs are the order of the day! Archie is located on the inside of a bend, which is where debris tends to be deposited, so the intake has a regrettable tendency to silt up when the river is high. The 15-week shutdown over the winter came at the worst possible time and a huge island built up, completely blocking the intake to a level where the top bar was no longer visible. Efforts to shore up a bank collapse further upstream on the Sett only added to the problem, as rocks from the attempted repair added to the usual river debris.

As the weather started to improve, we noticed that in addition to occasional visitors a few people were bringing their lunch there for a picnic. This is quite unsafe - the water may look reasonably clean but it isn't as United Utilities has an 'emergency waste overflow' (which can include raw sewage) just a few yards away.



A week or so before the gearbox was due to return, we started the mammoth task of shifting by hand the tons of sand, gravel and rocks (some quite large) that had built up. The first job was to unblock the fish pass, which was achieved by dint of much hard work with shovels. Once Archie was back in one piece we were able to open the sluice gate slightly so some water could flow through, albeit with some worryingly loud bangs as the bigger rocks went through. The picture above shows the situation about half way through the process. Water is flowing down two channels, one from the Sett side and one from the main channel. The two remaining islands (one next to the intake and the other at the top of the weir where we were dumping the debris back into the river) took a bit longer to clear but are now below the water level when Archie is not drawing water.

GDPR

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If you have any comments/queries/suggestions for improvements, please email the newsletter editors, Directors Jan Szechi and Mary Cohen (via secretary@torrshydro.org). You can also write to us at 90 Market St., New Mills, High Peak SK22 4AA.