



Rocks By Rail

2023 Review

Welcome.

We hope that you find this review of what has been happening at your Museum over the past 12 months or so of interest, reassuring and inspiring. Of interest, in that if you are unable to get to the Museum you will find out about much of the work going on and what happened during the year. Reassuring, in that your Museum has and is continuing to operate successfully and celebrating the ironstone quarrying industry in the East Midlands. Inspiring that your membership is contributing to entertaining and educating visitors about what was once a major industry. Thank you for your membership and support – it really does make a big difference.

Museum Accreditation.



It may have been a cold start to 2023 weather wise but the Museum was warmed by the renewed Arts Council England Museum Accreditation that it gained at the end of 2022 This success was very much down to the hard work and long hours, much unseen and done off site, by our Curator, David Atkinson with assistance from our museum advisor Anita Hollingsworth.

So what is this accreditation and why is it important? Well to quote the Arts Council of England:

'It helps everyone involved with a museum to do the right things, helping people to access and engage with collections, and protect them for future generations.

The Accreditation Scheme does this by making sure museums manage their collections properly, engage with visitors, and are governed appropriately by encouraging all museums and galleries to meet an agreed standard in:

how they're run

how they manage their collections

how they engage with their users

Apart from the kudos of having gained such a prestigious accreditation it does ,very importantly, open many doors to seeking external funding from sources such as the National Lottery, Central Government and Local Authorities.

Keeping informed.

The Museum has its own web site which can be viewed at <https://www.rocks-by-rail.org/> where general information about the Museums opening times, events and exhibits can be found. For information on the day to day activities and event specific information have a look at the Museum's Facebook page which can be viewed at <https://www.facebook.com/rocksbyrailironstone/>

Events



The Museum really comes to life on operating days with visitors enjoying seeing and experiencing the delights of the exhibits. It takes a great deal of effort to both organise, as well as run such days and much of this is down to the expertise and unique persuasive abilities of Andy Salmon in his role as General Manager. 2023 saw:-

5 full quarry days,

8 steam brake van ride days

6 Driver for a Fiver days

Several operating days also had themes to them including: -

Marking the 50th anniversary of the last ironstone train to leave Sproxton Ironstone Quarry.

Marking the anniversary of the closure of Exton Park Ironstone Quarry.

Exhibition to mark the anniversary of the last train of ironstone to use the HighDyke Mineral railway.

Marking the 78th anniversary of the liberation of Far Eastern Prisoners of War in 1945.

Marking the 50th anniversary of the closure of Rutland's last ironstone quarry at Exton Park.

There were also a number of group visits by local interest groups who benefitted from presentations and guided tours by the Museum's Curator, David Atkinson.



We saw over 2000 visitors during the year with the quarry days being especially popular with visitor numbers being high on all days. However there was also good attendance on the steam brake van ride days but the Driver for a Fiver days proved more popular than ever with over 30 participants on some days. What was interesting to see was the number of young families visiting. Some were returning visitors but a significant proportion was first timers. In general the feedback that was given was very positive both in relation to what was presented but also for value for money.



There were also visitations from groups including a tractor run to celebrate Ray's birthday and various motor cycle groups looking for a destination of interest to their run out and the Museum was it!



There were also three events centered on the locomotive Singapore, which is a registered war memorial. These events saw many relatives, representatives of related organisations and the armed services attending the Museum . The event on the 17th October, when the Museum played host to the Far East Prisoners of War Remembrance Event “We Will Remember Them”, was perhaps the most poignant as it marked the 80th anniversary of the completion of the Burma – Siam Death Railway to Thailand.

Military Training

Following contact from the 1st Military Working Dog Regiment the Museum has played host to an initial visit by them with more to follow. The Museum site, with its mix of industrial type buildings as well as open ground has proved an ideal training location for sniffer dog training.



Pricing and running costs.



The last twelve has not been the easiest cost wise especially with the price of coal having doubled and diesel being similar. It is fortunate that Andy Salmon, who is both the General Manager and Treasurer, has a firm hand on costs and a keen eye for a bargain!

Given rising costs in 2022 and into 2023, it was a difficult decision for the Trustees to make on the 2023 admission and café prices. However, believing that potential visitors would be looking at value for money days out, especially those with young families, the Trustees took the decision to hold admission prices at 2022 levels and increase café prices in a modest way to cover increased food prices. That decision appears to have paid off – literally! The Museum has seen an increase in income from both admissions and the café. Feedback from visitors is that they still see their visit as being both entertaining and value for money with many returning for a second or third visit in 2023. Possibly the ever popular café bacon cob may also contribute to those returning!

The Sundew Café.



Work in the early part of 2023 saw the café undergo a small makeover with decoration and some new (to the Museum) equipment that has made it an even more welcoming entrance for visitors. The café has become a significant source of income during the past two years. The wonderful work of the volunteers, Barbara (café lead), Anne, Sharon, Jean, Cathy, Heather, Imogen, and Ray to name a few has been critical in that increased income. However it is not just food that the café sells as there has been a buoyant market in books, magazines DVDs and thanks to Roger model railway items and Christmas decorations! However, there are also Rocks By Rail souvenirs now on sale including pens, pencils, note books and poncho key rings all sourced by Clova. These have proved a popular addition to the sales and hopefully the range will be extended during 2024.



Work over the Winter by Roger saw the rejuvenation of the Sundew and other models into working exhibits that have proved popular with children especially. David has also produced a number of information panels that record the history of various ironstone related events that have formed an integral part of the overall displays within the café.

Toilets.

There are plans to eventually build a new purpose built toilet block but in the meantime we have to ensure that the present facilities are functional. Therefore work was undertaken prior to opening for the 2023 season to refurbish the toilet block. Rob's welding skills saw the structure of the building repaired and Roger and Heather took care of updating the internal plumbing and decoration. It may not be the best in the World but it is a lot better than before!

Weighbridge Office



Work has been progressing on creating a weighbridge office in the wooden building on the path leading up to the quarry area. David and Paul have painted the inside freshening and brightening it up and the weigh head that has been in store for many years has now been moved into the building. Steve has been using his electrician skills to wire in a sensor to switch on the light when visitors look inside through the window. This will give an interesting attraction for visitors on their walk up to the quarry area.

New Plant Shed.



With a need to free up space in the Woolsthorpe Shed for restoration projects work has been going on to create a new plant shed to safely and securely store the JCB and CAT. This is located in the storage area behind the scenes and has involved removing the middle container of three and putting a roof over the resulting space. It has taken a great deal of work to clear the area and most volunteers have had some involvement at one point or another. The roof is a sturdy structure of steel and Rob's welding skills have again been put to good use!

Grounds Maintenance.



With a year of relative warmth and a lot of moisture, conditions have been ideal for the growth of grass and shrubs, meaning that keeping the site looking neat has been a challenge. A new mower has seen a great deal of use and Geoff, Roger, Heather, Ian, Richard assisted by Riley and Clive have spent much of the year keeping on top of things. There has also been clearance of vegetation behind the Woolsthorpe shed, the Nature Trail has had 'windows' opened up to be able to see the trains running and the Quarry area has also been opened up to view the shunting and excavator. As always, Geoff's planting of bulbs and flowers has provided a splash of colour to the site and is much admired by visitors.



The mysterious low water pressure that the site has suffered for a number of years has now been cured. The cause of the low pressure was actually a leak on the supply pipe which had somewhat been hidden over the years by the lack of any visual indication. However that changed when it finally burst near to the electrical substation. Work by Derek, Eric, Steve and Trevor saw the burst not only repaired but full pressure restored to the rest of the water system on site.

Woolsthorpe Shed

The hub of restoration work, The Woolsthorpe shed has seen an action packed year. The restoration of the Midland brake van spearheaded by John has been completed and is now in service on the quarry trains.

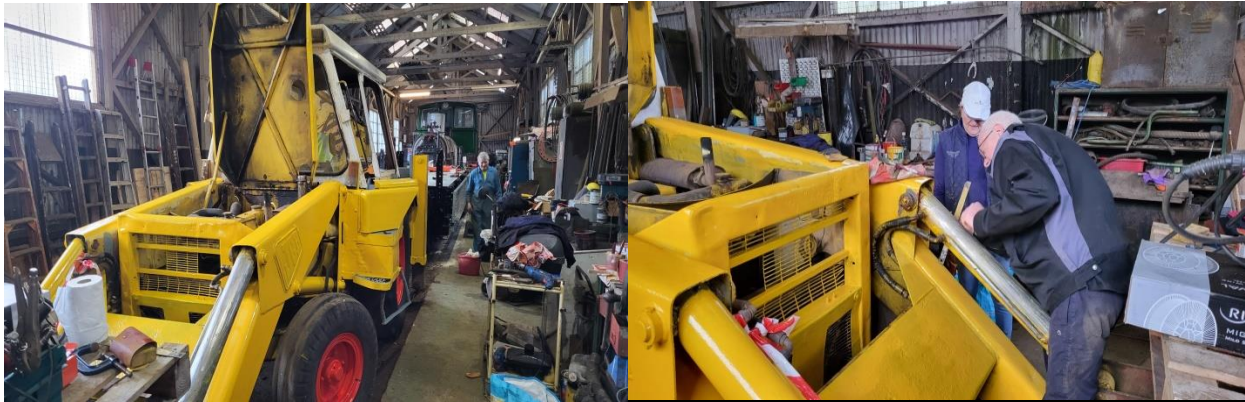


Ketton No3, thanks to Thomas, Alex, George and Gary has moved on to the point where it is near becoming a running locomotive. Much of the bodywork is complete and painted and the engine has been started. It even has operating brakes!



Steam locomotive Elizabeth remains as a work in progress but hopefully 2024 will see much more work carried out. The Shark brake van underwent a rolling restoration in early 2023 and it is a credit to all those that worked on it. It certainly has been an integral part of the success of the brake van rides.

A three plank wagon has nearly been completed with new woodwork being added to an existing and now refurbished chassis. Once complete it will be used as a coal wagon making coaling of the locos much easier. An unusual sight is that Harriot, the Museum's JCB, is slowly being returned to her former glory with much work by Rob, Andy, Martyn, John, Pam and Pete.



Just outside the Woolsthorpe Shed, Mr. D has been undergoing some major mechanical work to bring her back into service. The transmission has been removed, rebuilt and reinstalled which was no mean feat! Mr. D should be back in operation in which will be a welcomed addition to the operational fleet.



Simon Layfield Exhibition Centre.

The Exhibition Centre continues to be a major attraction for the Museum with its unique collection of locomotives. There has been continued work on the exhibits with Derek, Eric, Steve and Trevor working on the Sentinel locomotives which provide much of the power for the quarry trains and Driver for a Fiver events. The Janus has also been repainted by Dan and Mick who have done a fantastic job on bringing back the loco to its former glory. Thomas has been instrumental in the repainting of a covered van which is now painted up in the fictitious but authentic looking Ruston Bucyrus livery with sign writing by Thomas's dad Thomas also got this year's award for innovation in repurposing a walking stick as a extension handle to his paint roller



Of course we cannot forget the work to keep 1931 in steam and the Ticket was extended to July 2024 which shows just how well maintained it has been.



Vandalism.

Unfortunately the Museum suffered some destructive vandalism in mid 2023. The actions of these vandals saw the windows of various cabs in the quarry area smashed and the accommodation coach trashed. Although repairs have been carried out and the Police have investigate, the culprits remain unidentified. However the Museum has increased its security measures with both signage as well as CCTV.



Donations.

Throughout the year the Museum has received new donations of exhibits and other useful items such as tools and hardware. These have all been very welcome but possibly one new donation that is somewhat larger than normal has been a wonderful mobile Coles crane.



Bequeathed to the Museum by its previous owner with a requirement to return it to Colsterworth Quarries livery, the crane makes a fine addition to the stock of plant and machinery.

Members and Volunteers.

In April, in response to an invitation from Anne and the family, a group of museum members came together at Marholm crematorium to help celebrate the life of our former curator Robin Bickers. After the service all participants met up in the Sundew Building at the museum where Andy gave a presentation focussing on all the work for the museum undertaken by Robin at the museum over many years. An architect by training he played a major role in delivering the exhibition building whilst also spending many hours on curatorial matters and supporting the museum as a Trustee. The museum was especially pleased to welcome Anne as a new Trustee later in the year.

Without you as a members and all the volunteers who give their time, there would be no Museum so a very big and grateful thanks to them all!

