

Minutes of Directors Board Meeting

Date of Meeting: 9th October 2025

Time of Meeting: 2pm

Place of Meeting: Foreman's Office, Combe Mill

Purpose of Meeting: Scheduled Board meeting of Combe Mill Society

Distribution: Directors, Noticeboard, Website Members' page

Present: Nigel Evans, Tony Simmons, Margaret Gruber, Peter Trowles,
Richard Stone, Rose Ralphs, Bob Wheeler
Members: Lorna Gale (minutes)

1 Apologies

No apologies

2 Minutes of previous meetings

The Minutes of the Directors' Board meeting on 10th July 2025 were confirmed as a true record of the meeting.

3 Matters arising from previous minutes

- 3.1 Problems with the Klargestor tank have been dealt with.
- 3.2 The fallen tree in the river has been dealt with by Blenheim Estates but there has been no response from Blenheim regarding the reed bed.
- 3.3 Fire alarms are dealt with later on the agenda.
- 3.4 The fire extinguishers have been serviced this week.
- 3.5 Fire drill is overdue, Derek knows he has to organise.

4 Correspondence

Verification of Directors' identity for Companies House legally needs to be completed by November 18th 2025

5 Acknowledge reports of DRS, Treasurer, Head of Operations and Activities

5.1 Safety group – meeting every 2nd Wednesday

Risk Assessment (RA) for Models has been revamped and will come to the Board for sign off before being added to the website.

Plan to review one RA per month.

RA re river pollution – river water is used to load various pieces of equipment on site. There is a risk that water contaminated with E.coli, (for example), could come into contact with volunteers or members of the public. There will be a RA written for each piece of equipment and swabs obtained to screen for pollutants.

E.coli is part of the Evenlode Catchment Partnership monitoring and PT will chase up re testing.

ACTION PT

It was noted that an article had been published in the press by the Evenlode Catchment Partnership which mentioned Combe Mill. There had been no contact with us.

5.2 Treasurer's report –

There was discussion around the recommended price increase and age of concession increases. These were approved by the Board. Figures are included in the appendices. Accounts for the first 6 months suggest we will break even but the Treasurer would like to see a surplus of at least 10% to enable funding of larger projects, for example replacement of fire detection system.

Our costs have risen most notably in insurance and food costs, so the Tea Room prices have recently been increased.

Gift Aid for the current year will go into the Mill account in May/June 2026.

No budget details have been seen for the mill stone or the water pumps project.

RS suggests that total costs less than £100 can approach Richard directly, intermediate sums (~ £250) can be discussed among Directors informally. Anything over this amount needs to come to the Board for approval.

5.3 Operations report – attaches in appendices

Recruitment has been less than was thought. There is 1 new volunteer, Colin Paice.

The other 3 may only be available on a Sunday.

There are already gaps in volunteers for the next steaming – 37 volunteers are required and currently we only have 26.

Nigel voiced concerns that as a group passwords and information are held by individuals, possibly at home. Everyone needs access to this information.

'Winter job lists' are available for comment and costing.

6 Actions arising from reports

6.1 Actions from reports have all been captured.

Need to recruit 2/3 fire marshals, Nigel to approach individuals. **ACTION NE**

7 Review of progress on strategic issues

7.1 Fire alarm quote from ART

Requires 1 panel in tea room, existing cabling is OK, sensors will be changed.

To upgrade Fire Detection System including maintenance and call out system

£7449 +vat (£9000) plus £346 annually.

Approved by Board.

7.2 Formally approve Sarah Menary as museum accreditation mentor and to reimburse her for any associated expenses. PT to sign agreement as our appointed curator.

ACTION PT

7.3 The formal approval of museum documentation will be scrutinised as part of our accreditation process. The Board needs to formally approve the policies and procedures relating to the Society operating as a museum. Namely:

Organisational Overview - Vers C

Risk Assessment – Vers C

Emergency Plan – Vers D

Collections Management Framework – Vers E

Documentation Procedure – Vers C

Care and Conservation Plan – Vers C

Access Plan – Vers C

Documentation Plan – Vers C

Audience Development Plan – Vers C

Formally approved. These documents are available to view from any Board member.

7.4 The Board will conduct an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) of members to approve the following new objective for our Articles of Association

To be a museum that holds collections which record the trades, crafts and skills that were practised at Combe Mill and within Combe Yard in support of the Blenheim Estate.

The historic clock collection is distinct and illustrates the development of mechanical time keeping over the decade.

The Winter plan and Xmas Fayre will also be discussed at this meeting.

PT to send formal invite within 21 days.

Date 12th November 2025 @ 11.00

ACTION PT

8 Review of governance issues

No items to discuss

9 Review any major operational issues

9.1 Al's Owls – The Alan Charlett and his wife Mary would like to come every Wednesday and to the Xmas Fayre for free and every steaming from April 2026 for £60 per visit. Long discussion re costs, are the owls going to attract more visitors to the Mill? The Board agreed to pay for the owl visits for one year April- Oct. 2026 , total cost £420, and monitor the impact on visitor numbers.

9.2 Next year's programme – need to look at the ease of organising some of the events
Put meet and greet in the Foreman's office?
Is running an event in March too early?
Maybe just have Mill in Steam?

Separate Board meeting **13th November 2025** to organise this.

10 AOB

10.1 Bob has asked about a group getting together to get the bandsaw running.

It is on the programme of works for winter jobs

10.2 Callum Miller MP visited and did post about the Mill on his Facebook page

Next meeting: 13th November at 2pm (to discuss 2026 events)

Minutes Secretary
Lorna Gale

Appendices

Operations Report for the Board Meeting on the 9 October 2025

The **pumps and barn engines area** restoration work has been continuing slowly . Both barn engines are now working, and the pumps are nearing completion but unfortunately will not be ready for the last steaming day. The area has attracted a number of visitors who enjoy learning about the conservation project. Displaying conservation projects is just as important as the finished operational piece.

The **tearoom's** tri-annual assessment was completed in April and sent to for approval, and no inspection by WODC has been conducted. Following our contract cleaner s resignation in June, a CM member had been contracted to clean the tearoom & WCs and is working extremely well.

Recruitment, Although conducting 4 recruitment sessions in August when 7 people signed up only 2 new members have turned up. We have a 33 regular attending members attending on Wednesdays and Sundays, but we require 37 members to properly operate all areas in the Mill on Sundays. I bring to the Board's attention, that if we are unable to recruit more people, the projected regular membership will approximately **18** members at the end of 2029.

Jobs in the Mill I have nearly finished a listing of jobs that need tackling over the winter. A number of HTAs have given me a list for their area and have compiled them into 18 distinct areas. These jobs cover a range of skill requirements from general housekeeping to painting of WCs, ceilings to investigating and rectifying big end bearing on steam engines. The whole listing will be completed by end October when I estimate there will be over 100 jobs, ranging from easy and complex. The listing will be made available to all members in early November with the actual tasks being under the control of the particular Head of Area. (part finished list will be available at the board meeting)

CMS stand at Kelmscott Manor The Blacksmiths have been making bespoke items for sale at the Manor. Some of these items sold 2 of which were hanging brackets and are now in Virginia USA. New items are being designed and made for next year shop at Kelmscott and as a consequence, there is a drive to recruit more blacksmiths.

Steam engines some notable upgrading works have been completed by the HTAs and certified members in all the areas and the presentation of all three areas has greatly improved in the last 12 months. I draw the Board's attention to the extensive work done by especially George, Stuart and Richard S and others in the last 12 months to the beam engine (See appendix below) . I would encourage board members to 'walk the mill' regularly and appreciate what is going on, often unnoticed and not appreciated.

Clocks all five clocks are now 'reconnected' for demonstrating as runnable, with particular care to be taken. Despite their robust construction there are elements within that are vulnerable and only certain named members should wind the clocks .

Wood Turning. We are very vulnerable at the moment with providing 'Experiences' . This is another area which needs additional certified members so recruiting new members in this area is critical. We are looking at the administration of experiences so that there is a current and future record of experiences sold with contact details kept at the at the Mill.

Training Only a few areas have a full complement of certified trained members which puts great pressure on the others especially on steaming days. Effort will be made during winter to train more members in areas such as line shafting, and the waterwheel .

Appendix 1 to Operations Report

Summary of Beam Engine work completed over winter 2024/25:

- Removed the concrete blocks and logs supporting the free end of the benchtop and replaced them with a pair of custom made 3" x 3" timber braced legs (ex-fence posts).
- Installed an oak tools & spares storage cupboard under the bench.
- Cleaned off the accumulated and embedded oil & detritus from the pulley, shaft and bearing, handrail and guard fence.
- To address the running noise from the badly worn fit between the pulley, gear pinion and their common shaft and their keys, particularly the pulley key, 'shims' were fitted between the shaft and hub of both the pulley and gear pinion (these consisted of various items in combinations – hacksaw blades with teeth ground off, steel shim stock and custom steel wedges). Pushing the pulley along the shaft towards the gear pinion beforehand tightened the fit a little. An additional shaft clamp was made to fit between the pulley hub and the bearing to keep the pulley and its shims in place.
- Made an oil drip trough and fitted it below the pulley side bearing to catch steam and avoid it oil dripping onto the inner rim of the pulley, creeping onto the OD and being flung off in all directions.
- Remove the hot tank return pump parts (piston/shaft and rod) from the floor and bench area and hung them on the back wall as visible artefacts.
- All the 'red' painted components of the engine were cleaned/degreased and repainted with red oxide primer and then Burgundy gloss paint
- Investigate the leak from the river pump output flange. Add further washers to two of the bolt heads to avoid nuts bottoming out on the bolt shank. Leak has reduced but not eliminated.

- Cleaned out the flywheel pit, removing silt, sand stones and various miscellaneous items, to reveal a small shallow sump.
- Installed a dedicated flywheel pit pump (Black & Decker BXGP600PE Self Priming 230v 600W Water Pump). It had proved difficult to get the previously used submersible pump to prime when there is only a couple of inches of water in the pit, less than about 1" is required to avoid the flywheel teeth throwing water everywhere. This releases the submersible pump to prime the river pump from the cold tank.
- Scraped white wall paint off the timber belt slot lintel then applied timber preservative to it (the heritage timberwork behind the pulley/gear pinion still need to be treated).
- General clean and tidy up of the area.

Summary of subsequent Beam Engine work completed during the 2025 operating season:

- Cleaned the flywheel removing the dirty film left when it is stationary and under water in the pit.
 - Lowered the submersible pump into the cold tank so that it can prime the river pump without the need for mains water (when mains water is used it significantly reduces the pressure affecting the water supply to the boiler).
 - Re-arranged the copper drain pipes from the high and low pressure steam manifold gauges, extending them to direct the steam and condensate away from the gear pinion and pulley.
 - Replace the stock B&D pump suction hose filter (course) with a bespoke steel 'pancake' filter with a 200mesh gauze (filtering down to 0.003" particle size), sufficiently weighty to keep it in the shallow sump at the bottom of the flywheel pit.
 - Cleaned out the full length of the pulley/gear pinion pit removing a heaped wheelbarrow full of mostly soil, sand and silt but also offcuts of leather gasket (subsequently cleaned and treated), glass fibre lagging, foam pipe insulation, cable ties and a brick.
 - Continue to generally clean and tidy up of the area.
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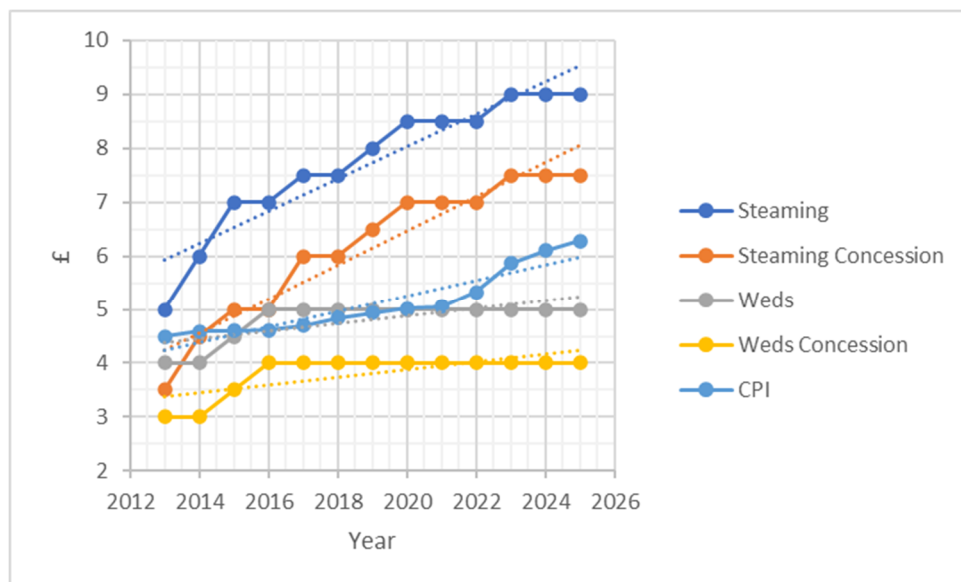
Safety Group - Interim report for the Board Meeting on the 9 October 2025

The Safety Group, comprising Les Allen, Clive Stayt and Nigel Evans, has now started to meet monthly every 2nd Wednesday in the foreman's office, the first meeting is due to start on the 6th October. I will give a verbal report of this meeting at the Board meeting .

Nigel Evans 5 October 2025

Admission Price Proposals for 2026

The Admission Price trends are shown in the plot along with the CPI (Consumer Price Index). The dotted lines are straight-line fits to show the trends.



My proposals are for:

- a) Steaming Sunday - £9.50 (now £9.00)
- b) Steaming Sunday Concession - £8.50 (now £7.50)
- c) Wednesday £6.00 (now £5.00)
- d) Wednesday Concession £5.00 (now £4.00)
- e) Concessions should be for students and those over 65 (now 60)

We probably also need free admission for a carer accompanying someone who has paid for admission.

For comparison, **Oxford Bus Museum:**

Open every Wednesday and Sunday 10am - 4pm - also Saturdays in July and August.

On select dates ride on board our Heritage buses for FREE

Aid	Normal Admission	with Gift
Adult - (Aged 16-64 years)		
Free admission for a disabled person's carer	£8	£9
Concessions - (Aged 65 and over)	£7	£8
Junior (aged 5 to 15 years)	£5	£6
Under 5 Free		
Family (2 adults & 2 children)	£20	£22

A direct comparison with the Bus Museums not possible. Wednesdays are clearly very cheap at the Mill. Nor does the Mill charge a premium for Gift Aid. Some examples:

	Bus Museum	Mill
Family - 2 adults & 2 children (£18.00 now)	£20	£19.00
Family - 2 adults & 3 children (£18.00 now)	£25	£19.00
Family - 1 adult & 2 children now)	£18	£9.50 (£9.00
Family - 2 concessions & 2 children (£15.00 now)	£20	£17.00

Richard Stone

Wednesday, 20 August 2025