

## **Remaking Beamish – an update.**

An illustrated talk by Geraldine Straker and Les Brunton  
16<sup>th</sup> March 2022 – Virtual, on Zoom

In developing ideas for forthcoming events, I mentioned in a Membership & Activities Committee meeting last year that the Remaking Beamish project had managed to continue work through much of the Covid lockdown periods, so there was a lot of progress to report since our last visit and presentation on 19 April 2018. So we set about planning an update presentation for 16 March 2022. In view of the uncertainty of the lifting of restrictions, this was organised to be a virtual presentation, on Zoom, to update our members and whet their appetites for a 'real' visit once we are further down the 'normality' route. As for the 2018 event, the presentation was arranged to be given jointly by Geraldine Straker (Remaking Beamish Community Participation Officer) and myself, Les Brunton, (N&N member; Electrical Engineer with Beamish Tramway Group) – dubbed the 'Gez and Les Show' by Jackie! Geraldine opened the presentation with an illustrated account of the new exhibits that have been completed and opened since April 2018:

### ***Joe the Quilter's cottage***

Opened on 19 July 2018, the exhibit shares the fascinating story of quilter Joseph Hedley of Warden, whose work was reportedly sent as far as America. He was well known for using a border pattern, which became known as "Old Joe's Chain". Joe was murdered in 1826 in an appalling crime that shocked the nation. It is because of this crime that we know so much about him and his life; it is very unusual to have this much information about an "ordinary" person from Georgian times. The cottage was unfortunately damaged during the recent storms, so is currently closed pending repair.



### ***Welfare Hall***

The Welfare Hall was the next exhibit to open, in June 2019. It is a replica of Leasingthorne Colliery Welfare Hall a Community Centre, near Bishop Auckland, which opened in 1957 employs a glued laminated timber form of roof construction originating in Scandinavia. Beamish worked closely with the community members at the original hall – now known as 'Coundon and Leeholme Community Centre' – who shared memories, stories and objects. The hall also features an NHS clinic.



### ***Bus Depot***

The Northern General Transport Bus Depot, adjacent to the Tram Depot at Foulbridge opened on 22 November 2019 and houses the museum's fleet of buses. The exhibit can accommodate up to eight buses and supports Beamish's important work of passing on heritage engineering skills. This project was generously supported by Go North East.



Geraldine then turned to the work that managed to proceed during the challenging Covid pandemic lockdowns, thanks to continued support from Heritage Lottery Fund, namely the 1950s Terrace and Spain's Field Farm. Completion of these exhibits very recently enabled both to be opened to visitors before Easter this year:

### **1950s Terrace**

Front Street terrace features recreations of (left to right):

- **Middleton's Quality Fish and Chips** from Middleton St George, near Darlington, has been replicated to serve up this popular 1950s food. Doreen Middleton owned the shop from 1952 and the original range was donated to Beamish and was used to inspire the design of the replica the museum is using.
- **John's Café**, a recreation of the popular café from Wingate in County Durham. Visitors can enjoy an ice cream and other traditional treats while listening to 50s tunes on the jukebox. The exhibit features original elements from John's Café, which was popular with young people in the 1950s. The café was owned by Giovanni Baptista Parisella, known locally as John, who was of Italian descent.
- A recreation of the **1950s home of North East artist Norman Cornish**, from Bishop's Close Street in Spennymoor. Norman, then a miner, and his family lived in the original house from 1953 to 1967. Norman, who passed away in 2014, had donated items from his house and his later art studio to Beamish.
- **Elizabeth's Hairdresser's** based on an end-terrace shop from Bow Street in Middlesbrough. Visitors can book an appointment at the salon on the day of their visit on a first come, first served basis.



These exhibits opened on 19 February 2022 during the start of Half Term activities. Geraldine stressed the close liaison throughout the research and construction between Beamish and these local communities, to ensure the accuracy of detail and story-telling.

### **Spain's Field Farm**

Spain's Field Farm originally stood for centuries in Eastgate, near Stanhope in Weardale. Around 1,170 tonnes of Spain's Field Farm's stone and timber were moved to the museum after the farm was kindly donated by the Jopling family to Beamish, where it has been carefully rebuilt to show life in the 1950s on the region's upland farms. The farm was officially opened three days after this talk, on Saturday 19th March, by Yvonne Forster, whose late mother Mary Forster is among generations of the Raine family who lived at Spain's Field Farm. Beamish carefully recorded the farm as it stood on its original site before taking it stone by stone and rebuilding the beautiful farm house and outbuildings in their new setting looking down across the Beamish valley, complete with its quirky features and wonky chimney pot! The stories that Beamish is able to tell here have been shaped by the people who lived, worked and farmed at Spain's Field and



the surrounding area. Geraldine explained that the last very difficult two years of Covid and Lockdowns had initiated much reflection on the content, scope, financing, resourcing and programming of Remaking Beamish, from which has emerged a flow of planned new exhibits:

### ***Recreational***

This summer will see the of a number of period recreational facilities: a Playground (with much attention to Health and Safety considerations of course), Football Field (celebrating the Cup win by Bishop Auckland), a Bowls Pavilion and Green (based on a facility in Billingham), a Putting Green, followed later by Allotments behind the Front Street Terrace.

### ***Police Houses and Social Housing***

Round the corner from Front Street is a pair of Police Houses and Police Office, based on Leam Lane, Gateshead, already under construction. The roof is currently being tiled. For the interior fixtures and fittings, Beamish is closely working with the NE Police History Society. Next to the Police Houses is being constructed a replica of semi-detached 'Social Housing', based after a local competition on original buildings at Red House, Sunderland.

### ***Cinema and Shops and more...***

Back in Front Street, a cinema will be recreated, using materials from the Grand Cinema, Ryhope. Next to this is planned a block of 1950s shops, featuring Parrish's Toy Shop from Middlesbrough and an Electrical, Radio and TV Showroom. Elsewhere in the 1950s Town, a row of Aged Miners' Homes will be recreated, based on originals in Marsden Road, South Shields. Here, Beamish's renowned work with people living with dementia will be developed and expanded.

### ***Georgian 1820s development***

Meanwhile, up near Pockerley Old Hall, the original dilapidated outbuildings are to be restored and re-purposed, to provide a Blacksmith's, Pottery, Tavern and overnight accommodation on site.

At this point Geraldine handed over to Les Brunton to cover the transport requirements for the developing areas.

### ***Trolleybus route***

In presenting an update on the 20 Sept 2017 N&N talk, Les first gave a brief nostalgic overview of the Newcastle Trolleybus system, which had served the city well from 1935 to 1966. He then explained how he and a group of enthusiasts had persuaded the Corporation to save one of the locally-built trolleys for posterity, which is how Trolleybus LTN 501 ended up at Beamish in 1975. Restoration took 27 years, aided by two retired coachbuilders who had been apprentices at Northern Coachbuilders, Claremont Road, when the 30 buses in the batch were built in 1948!



Les went on to describe the planning of the 1950s bus / trolleybus route which link the Entrance in an anti-clockwise circular route through the 1950s Town described. Beamish already has two Daimler double-deck motorbuses (from Rotherham and Darlington, and in addition to trolley 501, has purchased a second restored trolleybus, Tees-side 11. In addition to this 'home fleet', Les described liaisons with other preservation societies who are keen to loan their preserved buses from time to time.



Finally, Les described some of the detailed work involved in designing, procuring and erecting the poles, wires and overhead fittings to complete the trolleybus service. Beamish was fortunate in 2019 to be able to import from Wellington NZ a quantity of old but serviceable overhead line fittings. There is no completion date declared yet for the Trolleybus Route, but it should not be too long before our visitors can once again enjoy a silent, vibration-free, fume-free ride on a local trolleybus!



*Les Brunton, Membership & Activities Committee March 2022*