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# OLD GLORY

April 2012

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No 266

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Front cover: Ransomes, Sims & Jefferies 7nhp traction engine No 36020 of 1925 simmers at the autumn Stotfold Mill, Bedfordshire, working weekend on October 8, 2011. The restored mill's spring steam fair will be held on May 12-13.  
JAMES HAMILTON  
The May 2012 issue of *Old Glory* (No 267) will be on sale from Thursday April 19.

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Taking pride of place on the vintage street scene at Beamish Museum, in the company of Sunderland No 16 and Fowler roller *Rambler*, is the restored horse-drawn Berriman's chip van.



# The one horse-powered chippy

As part of a wider 'chip shop project' at Beamish Museum, Berriman's of Spennymoor's horse-drawn chip van was rebuilt by Stanegate Restorations as part of the museum's outreach programme.

**I**s there anything as traditionally British as fish and chips? That's proper old fashioned fish and chips; wrapped in newspaper, cooked in beef dripping over a coal fired range, with chips cut just a few minutes ago as opposed to coming from a plastic bag or, heaven forbid, a freezer.

Don't get them any more? Well you can find them at Beamish Museum, as the attraction has opened its 'new' fish and chip shop – using two coal fired ranges to cook them as they used to. The interior fittings are from a variety of sources, not least the Davy brothers, who operated Tyneside's last coal fired chip shop into recent years, the contents being incorporated into the Beamish reconstruction.

But alongside this building stands a rather curious vehicle, Berriman's chip van, which for many years served the town of Spennymoor in Co. Durham.

The origin of this coke-fired, horse-drawn chippy is lost in time, although we know it was bought by George Kirtley – 'Chip van Geordie' – in 1923 before being taken over by the Berriman family in 1935. It sold chips or fishcake and chips – but never fish. A good sized cod would not fit in the pans.

It worked several sites in Spennymoor and the van holds special memories for the older residents of the town. "Excellent" and "best in the country," are just a couple of their recollections.

The chip van has a strong cultural connection in Spennymoor, for this is the

town where the famous painter Norman Cornish drew much of his inspiration and, perhaps not unsurprisingly, the van had featured (complete with queue of hungry townfolk) in several paintings by the artist. Beamish was keen that this connection was more widely understood and that the communities could engage with something three dimensional, thus it was decided at an early stage that the museum's outreach team would be able to take the van out to schools and communities to show an aspect

of life that has not perhaps changed as much as we might think. This would also tie in with a commitment to film the chip shop project development for a BBC documentary.

The chip van worked until 1971 before being purchased by Beamish Museum where it was stored until recently and the chip shop project gave an opportunity for it to see the light of day again. The firm chosen to restore the van was Stanegate Restorations & Replicas of Haltwhistle in Northumberland. Ian Yates' team had



Berriman Bros chip van pictured at Spennymoor, Co. Durham, in the 1960s.



Chips or fishcake and chips – the van holds special memories for the older residents of Spennymoor.





The condition of the chip van, as delivered from Beamish to Stanegate Restorations.



The roof was simply a collection of metal patches over the one remaining roof stick and added metal angle iron.



Upon strip down, the original frame is bared. Note the positions of the four coke-fired cooking wells.



The new frame, utilising as much original timber as possible.



The body frame takes shape.



New hearth fabricated.

already carried out some work on Beamish's trams as well as several smaller items. They were in the process of repairing a horse-drawn ex-Birmingham Co-op bakery van for the museum and had a lot of experience of rebuilding large complex wooden items ranging from old lifeboats to railway carriages and wagons.

On delivery to Haltwhistle, Ian carried out what can only be described as an archaeological dig on the van. It was completely untouched since coming out of use. The pans still held dripping and there were paper chip cones, washing up bowls, kitchen tools and a flask that, even though rusted through at the bottom, still held liquid. The hoppers still held about half a hundredweight of coke. Providing a source of tea-break amusement were the newspapers ready to wrap the chips.

One sheet, actually page 3, showed a young lady in the latest hot pants next to an article on a James Bond film which starred Sean Connery. >



Painter Norman Cornish drew much of his inspiration from Spennymoor and, perhaps not unsurprisingly, the chip van has featured in several of his paintings.





The chip van is almost finished, with the beading highlighted in red.



The main decision to be made was what was restorable and what to replace. The basic aim was to keep as much of the original as possible and in day to day condition. The roof revealed signs of fires and was basically a set of metal patches over the one remaining roof stick and added metal angle iron. The rest of the body was corroded aluminium sheet

internally with very rusted steel outside. The frame that it was rather loosely fixed on to was very rotten. The main underframe which had clearly been the subject of several modifications and crude repairs over the years had broken its back so the sad decision was made to build a new body. What could be repaired? The wheels and forecarriage were salvageable, although the

back axle had been completely burnt through as the cooking unit had no ashpan and all the red hot cinders fell through on to the axle. All the springs were completely shot. The storage units inside were reusable with repair as was the original chip chopper and the external fold-up eating shelves. The coke hoppers could be rebuilt and other bits of metalwork could be restored, there would be enough to say that it was a rebuild, not a replica.



Chips and sausages cooking for the benefit of the BBC film crew.



Outreach Beamish-style: Stanegate's Ian Yates was drafted in for the task of lighting up and cooking chips for distribution to children from a local school in Spennymoor.

The construction of the new body frame was completed quite quickly, although the final dismantling of the old underframe and running gear waited for the arrival of the TV film crew that was making a documentary about the Beamish chip shop project. It was only after the final salvage of reusable items from this that it was confirmed that one of the wheels was appreciably larger than the other three. "Keep it that way," said Beamish, "its limp is all part of its character."

Replacement springs were ordered and a thorough overhaul of the wheels and running gear commenced, revealing a rather complex paint scheme under many layers of later paint. What the van had started life as is still a mystery but it had fully lined out wheels and front axle, most probably being a dray or 'rolley' in an earlier incarnation.

The brief from Beamish was to create a primarily static exhibit, something to add to the collection of genuine chip shop artefacts being incorporated into the new chip shop but which would still be mobile for taking to exhibitions and events. The van clearly does not meet any current health and safety regulations. Imagine, the operators stand in a deep well with the storage unit one side and the range on the other. The cooking takes place in large 'jam kettles' which fit in a square of four circular holes above the coke fires. To top up the coke you lift out the kettle of hot fat and take the coke from the hoppers at the side of the vehicle and drop it through the hole before replacing the pan. Try this if it's the fire in the part of the range furthest away from the well! HSE inspectors would break into a sweat just looking at it.

The original cooking range was just a loosely assembled collection of rust and firebricks. Rather than produce a wood or steel pattern copy, Ian set Peter, a qualified welder and coachbuilder, the task of building a replica. In the spirit of Stanegate Restorations, he did manage to reuse the



A major plan for the end of restoration was to return to Spennymoor, which elicited fond memories from older people like "excellent," or "best in the country". Unfortunately Beamish-based Clydesdale 'Bonny', seen here making the chip van's triumphant return, had to be put down late last year.





The easiest way to move the chip van to its covered area at the chip shop proved to be by horse. A pause in the street resulted in this queue! The van was generally positioned before being used and would not travel in 'working' mode (the fat would splash out of the pans). By the end of its working life it was probably very seldom moved.

original firebars. Just for the fun of it, when the fire cement had sufficiently set, the unit was lit up. Again, with the TV crew filming and with dripping and potatoes purchased, an amazing number of staff from neighbouring businesses found a sudden need to visit.

A few weeks later the parts new and refurbished came together and Berriman's chip van trundled out into the yard. The final paintwork was slightly problematic. Ian is always keen on a very high standard of finish but on the steel cladding it just did not look right. Close examination of original sheets revealed a rather matt and uneven surface so a final coat was applied with a

roller to give a more weathered effect before Sara, the lass with a steady hand, set to with red paint on the beading.

Beamish took delivery in time for display at its spring Power from the Past event and the opportunity was taken to hitch up one of the museum's horses for a number of photographs in the period setting.

To really finish things off, both the film crew and Beamish wanted the van to return to Spennymoor. On July 12, 2011, the van was unloaded in the town and Clydesdale 'Bonnie', in all her finery, hauled the van through its old home. Ian was drafted in for the task of lighting up and cooking chips for distribution to children from a local

school who dressed in period clothes for the occasion. There were a surprisingly large number of people who remembered the chip van at its old location at the rear of the Waterloo pub and had fond memories of the fishcake and chips it produced.

Since then the van has been to various other locations across the north east, not least the opening of a new exhibition of works by 'Pitman Painter' Norman Cornish for which the van was positioned in a Newcastle City centre venue.

A very pleasing conclusion to a very interesting project. ♦

**Photography: Beamish/Stanegate Restorations.**



The interior fittings in the new chip shop are from a variety of sources, not least the Davy brothers who operated Tyneside's last coal-fired chip shop; the contents being included in the Beamish reconstruction, fully restored and still fired with coal to heat the beef dripping (with vegetable oil option) for the visitors who flock to this popular exhibit.



Beamish's new chip shop, made of brick to a traditional design. The typical provision in a pit village such as is recreated at Beamish would probably have been based in the front room of a terraced house. This format wouldn't be able to handle the demand so the next 'shop up' was chosen, and it can be imagined that a proprietor has occupied a former stables building and further expanded his business with an attached saloon in corrugated iron.