

A living van lives on

by Pat Freeman

A recent committee meeting of the Road Roller Association was held at Market Harborough and as I arrived early for it, I popped up to the nearby Welland Traction Engine Club yard-and what a rewarding visit it was! Standing centre stage was an old very large, decrepit looking living van. A young man, Robert Carrie, who had opened the gate for me, said that it was a Beeby Ploughing Van and that it was awaiting collection as it had been recently sold.

It was my good luck that it was being picked up that morning and it was not long before a low loader arrived accompanied by a number of enthusiasts who were soon swarming all over the van. One of them David Barden, told me that his great grandfather worked for Beeby Brothers, hence his more than passing interest.

The new owner, Stuart Buckland, was there to supervise the removal of his prize acquisition and he had enlisted the help of his brother in law, Alan Lloyd to whom the low loader belonged. This was too long to be manoeuvred from the narrow lane into the yard so the trailer was disconnected and left in the lane. A Fordson Major kept in the yard was coupled up to the van and easily pushed it out to the trailer. There it was uncoupled and many willing hands aligned it with the ramps. The Fordson was then attached to the van via a long wire rope and gently pulled it up onto the trailer.

There it was secured ready for its journey back to Alan's premises where it would remain whilst being repaired. Hopefully it will be ready for rallying sometime in 1992. The plate with the van identified it as the van from Beeby Bros No 8 Set. This was confirmed by a small plate high up on the front of the van carrying the number 8.

I decided to make a few enquiries and telephoned Michael Beeby. He was most surprised that No 8 Set van was still around as he thought it had been scrapped long ago. He said he would ask his uncle Philip Beeby, who was now the sole owner of the firm, if he could shed some light on its history. However, Michael did say that the van had been involved in a bizarre accident a long time ago and as a result there was an identifying mark left on the van. It would appear that No 8 van was being towed by one of Beeby's Fowler ploughing engines along the road between Ashby Folville and Gaddesby, Leicestershire, when the accident occurred. It was following another Fowler towing a plough and the route led over a river bridge. This had been rebuilt about a year before, for light traffic only, but had just been passed by the County Highway Engineer as fit for all types of traffic.

The leading Fowler and plough had passed over the bridge, but as the second engine did so, the bridge collapsed, dropping the rear of the second Fowler to the level of the stream below and the living van toppled forward onto the tender of the engine. The steersman had managed to jump clear, but the driver was unfortunately trapped, although apparently uninjured. To free himself he had to struggle through the van, then break out of the front and climb out. The van was very soon hauled out by the first Fowler after it had taken a roundabout route to get back across the river.

To return to the identifying mark referred to earlier. Michael said that the front right hand side top panel, through which the driver had smashed his way, had been repaired using a different type of wood and a different method of fixing, which was quite noticeable.

On this point I checked with Stuart Buckland and he said that he could see that a "new" panel had been put in which confirmed that it was the van involved in the accident. As the accident happened in 1905, then the van must have been bought by Beeby Bros and not by Angrave & Burrows as they were taken over by Beeby Bros in 1907. I mention this as Philip thought that Angrave & Burrows may have purchased it. He remembers that it was used in ploughing and cultivating work in the Rempstone/Nuneaton area.

Michael Beeby said that Ken Roadley of Stamford Hill Farm, near Loughborough acquired the van from his grandfather, Edward Beeby, about 30 years ago, especially for his children to use as a playhouse. It seems some time afterwards it was moved to a nearby field and used as a hide for pigeon shooting. Ken said that he sold it to an engineman who used his farm as a stop-over between rallies but could not remember his name.

Stuart was very pleased that I had been able to tell him something of the van's history. Michael Beeby was pleased to know that it still exists and I am sure many Fowler and Beeby enthusiasts will look forward to seeing it appear on the rally fields in due course.

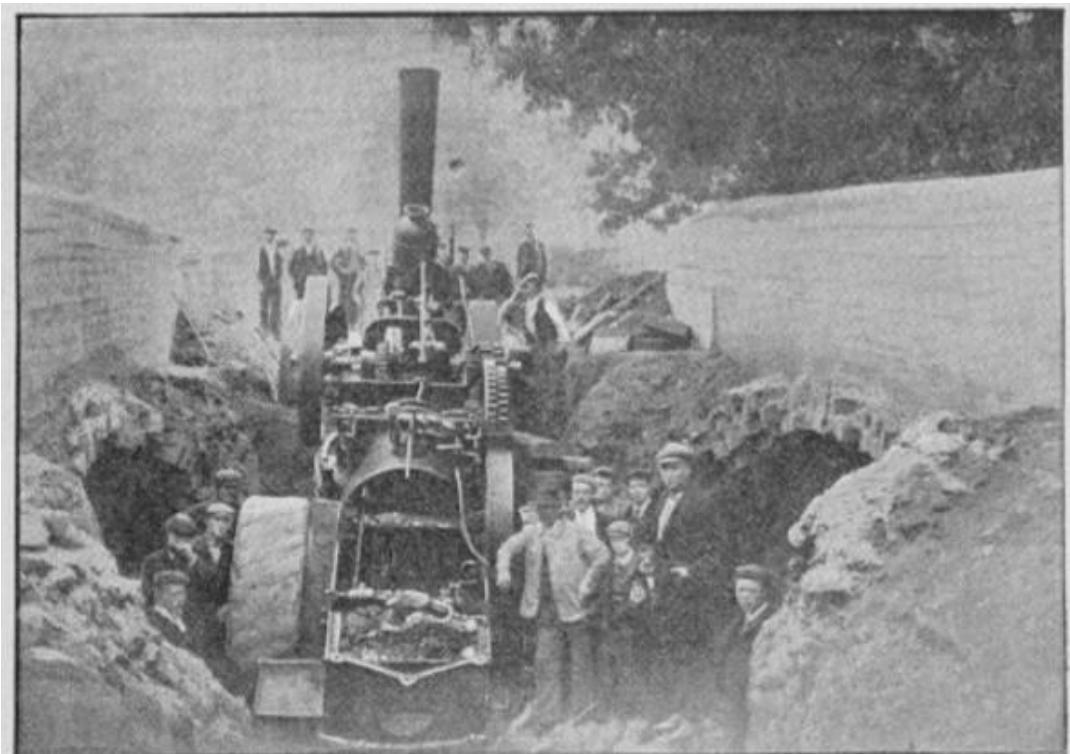
Michael Beeby died on 21 December 2020.

Member Edward Potts has provided the following from an illustrated newspaper report dated 29th September, 1900, which describes the incident. This confirms that the engine were at the time still owned by Angrave and Burrows as the company was not taken over by Beeby Brothers until 1907.

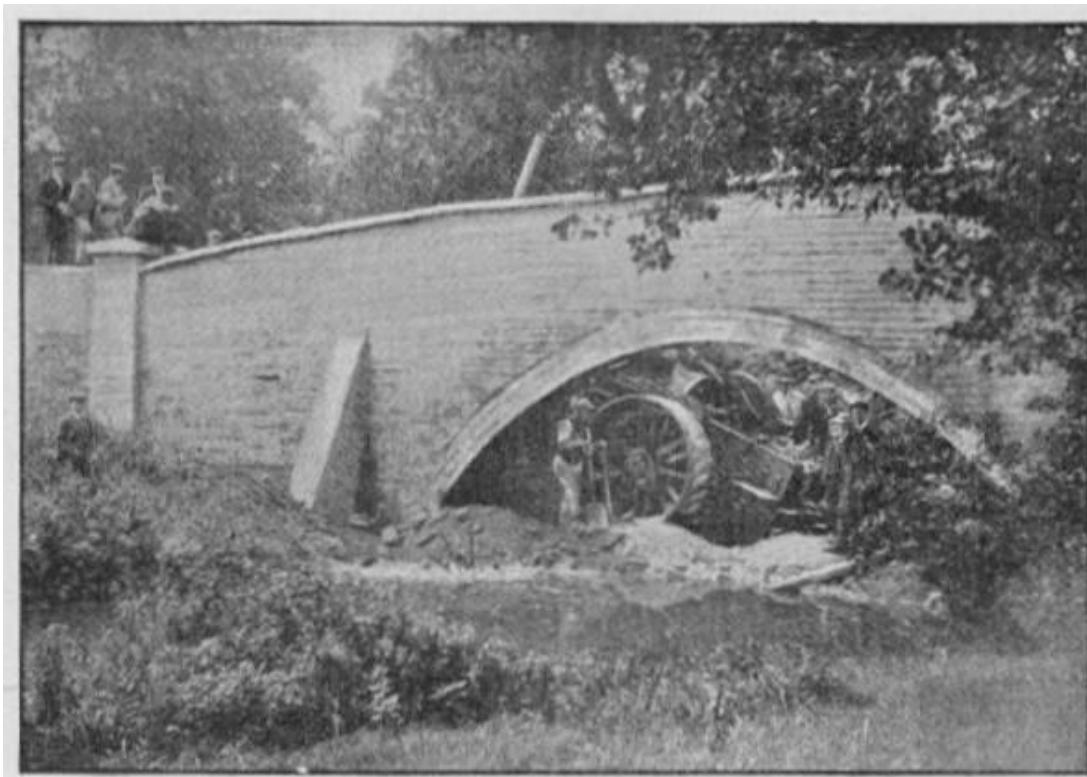
Our thanks to Edward for looking this out so well.

The Graphic - Saturday 29th September 1900

A STEAM CULTIVATOR IN DISTRESS: AN ACCIDENT IN LEICESTERSHIRE



THE DAMAGED BRIDGE



VIEW FROM THE SIDE OF THE BRIDGE

A bridge situated between Gaddesby and Barsby, in Leicestershire, had just undergone a thorough repair, and the workmen had left only three days, when an accident happened. A steam cultivator engine was crossing the bridge, and had reached half-way across, when the arch collapsed, letting down the coal-bunker and bringing down the van on to it. The two engine-men were injured, one of them seriously. Our photograph is by W. Murray, Leicester



We have a further picture of this incident that was published in John Crawley's 1985 book "Ploughing Engines in Focus" pp 81-2. This shows clearly where the driver had broken his way through the van. The book caption states incorrectly that this occurred c 1905 and the tackle was at that time owned by the Beeby Brothers. The date of the incident can be confirmed by the newspaper article, 1900, and the Beeby Bros did not take over till 1907. Such are the pitfalls that await the historian!

John Billard 15 February 2021