

# FRIENDS OF BRANDY BOTTOM COLLIERY, PUCKLECHURCH

Newsletter N° 12, August 2016



The masons have completed rebuilding the tippler slots and the adjoining top of the north-west wall of the Old Pit heapstead. They have also finished repointing the outside of the octagonal section of the chimney and repositioned displaced stones around the shoulder. We have started on planning for the next stage of conservation, which will cover work on the Horizontal Engine House and the walls of the New Pit heapstead. We have also had discussions with Ibstock Brick about extending the fencing to enclose the Fan Engine House, and about removing some trees along the cycle path to give passers-by a better view of the site. Spoil clearance in the Vertical Engine House restarted after the site clear-up.

## Progress: May – August 2016

(Photos 1-31 will be found on page 4 onwards)

CWS Landscaping completed rebuilding the tippler slots (photo right) in May, topping the brickwork with wooden beams made from old railway sleepers. Some overhanging brickwork has been straightened, as can be seen by comparing the 'before' (photo 1) and 'after' (photo 2) views of this area. The masons have also completed repointing the outside of the octagonal section of the chimney.



They replaced the shaped stones on the top of the shoulder in their original positions (photo 3), and replaced some missing stones below the shoulder (photos 4 and 5). Photo 6 shows a mason at work on this part of the chimney.

Once the masons had finished, there was a site clear-up that took several work parties to complete. One task was to clear new concrete from the northern corner of the Fan Engine House, which had been spilt while the new roof was constructed over the fan ducts (photo 7). The spilt concrete was successfully removed with the aid of hammer and broad chisel, without damaging the underlying floor. While working in this area we noticed that one of the original bricks of the fan duct walls had 'GS 17' inscribed into it (photo right). We still have to discover whether this is a piece of modern graffiti, or whether it was inscribed by a mason with the initials 'GS' when the fan ducts were



constructed. The 17 could refer to 1917, as the ducts were constructed at some time between the surveys for the 1915 and 1936 OS maps. We could also be barking up the wrong tree.

During the course of a site visit in early July, Historic England informed us that they could not provide any more grants for conservation work. As a result we are in the process of finding alternative sources of funds. A photographer from Historic England came in mid-July to take a photo of the site for possible use in HE's 2016 *Register of Heritage at Risk*. We will only know if that is the case when the register is published in November.

There has been much discussion about the layout of the engine in the Vertical Engine House. Current thinking is for a single cylinder at the north-east end, connected by an overhead beam to either gears or a crank at the other end of the bay. From there the drive went to a flywheel in the narrow slot and then to the winding drum. An example of this layout was photographed at the Think Tank museum in Birmingham during a BIAS visit to earlier this year (photo right, © K Kemp). The cylinder is at the far end of the overhead beam on the right. The other end of the beam is connected to the gear in the right foreground, while the flywheel can be seen in the centre of the photo and the final drive gear is on the left. Photo 8 is a view of the Vertical Engine House from a similar sort of viewpoint as that of the Birmingham photo – the south-western wall gets in the way of a true comparison photo.



More spoil has been removed from the engine bed bay of the Vertical Engine House. A layer of sooty spoil was uncovered near the bottom at the south-west end, containing several stones covered in soot which could be easily rubbed off (photo 17). A 21" wide, 1½" thick metal plate was uncovered spanning the width of the bay in early August. At present its purpose is unknown, but may be discovered at a later date. A considerable quantity of good building stone has been recovered, and the height of the nearby stockpile has grown from a couple of feet in March to the current 5 feet at its tallest point. Among the artefacts found is the 15" long eye bolt seen in photo 9. This has a 5½" outside diameter ring attached to the eye, and a 2½" long thread cut into the other end. Three similar 15¼" long bolts have been found, one of which can be seen in photo 10 before cleaning.

Traces of old structures were spotted on the south-east wall of the Old Pit heapstead. The two spreader plates above the entrance to the Old Pit alcove are of a different pattern to most of the others around the heapstead. Photo 11 shows the position of these plates, while the photo on the right is a close-up of one. The remains of four studs and the mark of a ring around them suggest that the plate was used to support a structure over the boilers. There are also traces of a structure butting up to the masonry around the entrance to the East Flue (photo 12), in the form of shallow



depressions in the masonry of the heapstead wall. These traces are hard to see in real life, let alone in a photograph, so a black line has been drawn on the outside as a guide.

It is amazing how quickly nature tries to reclaim the site. Photos 13 and 14 were taken a month apart, and show the bracken growing along the section of the Old Pit heapstead wall above the ramp. As a result the strimmers have been in action at several work parties. Cutting back the invasive species has allowed wildflowers to recolonise the top of the Old Pit heapstead.

The AIBT had a stand at the 2016 South Gloucestershire show adjacent to that of the South Gloucestershire Mines Research Group (SGMRG). The AIBT's stand can be seen on the left in the adjacent photo. Photo 15 shows final adjustments being made to the stand before opening on the Sunday. Photo 16 shows two AIBT members and a visitor looking at the display on Ram Hill in the adjacent (SGMRG) stand. Several visitors told us about playing in the buildings as kids, and one said that many objects had been thrown into the pond



in the 1950s. Another talked about some of the people living in the cottages. We have invited these visitors to come to Brandy Bottom during a work party and point out features they remember. None of them appear to have photos from that date. Sadly Brandy Bottom appears several times in the new book<sup>1</sup> published by the SGMRG on accidents, mainly fatalities, in the area's coal mines. This is an update of the author's 1980s book, and the reports give some idea of where the Brandy Bottom miners lived. Bearing in mind that the information comes from a small number of reports, we can say that Brandy Bottom's miners lived in Mangotsfield, Pucklechurch, Siston, and Soundwell. They had a fair distance to walk to get to work, and get home afterwards in their grubby clothes. There were no such luxuries as pithead baths in those days.

The stone stockpiles had to be restacked after the masons had finished, and the mouse in photo 27 was disturbed when a pile of stones at the base of the north-east wall of the Cornish Engine House was moved. The mouse was covered up with grass and left to recover in peace after this photo was taken. The same stack was also concealing the LMS telephone line insulator seen on the right. The building stone seen in photo 18 split when it was thrown out of the Vertical Engine House onto the ground, revealing a marbled red interior that contrasted with its buff-coloured exterior. The marbled effect was lost when the stone dried out (photo 19). Another stone slab from the same area split to reveal an almost complete ammonite fossil (photos 20 and 21).



<sup>1</sup> Killed in a coalpit – lives of the Kingswood colliers, Lindegaard D P, South Gloucestershire Mines Research Group, 2016

## Future Work Parties

At present access to the site is limited to days when there is a work party in progress. The dates for work parties for the remainder of 2016 are currently: Sat 03, Wed 14, Sat 24 September; Wed 12, Sat 22 October; Wed 09, Sat 19 November; and Sat 10 December.

Please note that these dates may be altered at short notice, so newcomers are advised to first make contact via the AIBT's email address of [info@aibt.org](mailto:info@aibt.org).

There is now a location map on the website, currently accessible only from the 'Location and Public Access' section of the main Brandy Bottom page. A description of how to get to the site from the car parking area, and links from other Brandy Bottom pages, will be added shortly.

## Photographs



Photo 1 – North-west wall of Old pit heapstead from below, showing part of the brick pillar between the tippler slots balancing over the edge of the wall.



Photo 2 – the same stretch of wall after rebuilding was completed, with the pillar between the tippler slots at the top of the photo.



Photo 3 – The shaped stones on the shoulder of the chimney have been replaced in their original places.



Photo 4 – Close-up of the south-east shoulder, showing where some stones were missing ...



Photo 5 – ... and after the replacements had been pointed in.



Photo 6 – Pointing in progress around new stonework at the shoulder of the chimney.



Photo 7 – Completed concrete roof over fan ducts in July 2016.



Photo 8 – View of Vertical Engine House from the south-west, with the positions of the engine bed, flywheel slot

and winding drum pit marked. This is taken from a similar view point as the photo of the engine on page 2.



Photo 9 – 15" long eye bolt with a 5½" diameter ring at one end. The other end has been threaded. (30 cm scale)



Photo 10 – 15¼" long bolt before cleaning. (30 cm scale)



Photo 11 – South-eastern wall of the Old Pit heapstead, showing the position of the two spreader plates above the alcove.



Photo 12 – The black line has been drawn around the outline of a possible structure around the entrance to the East Flue (see text).



Photo 13 – Capping of the wall above the Old Pit heapstead ramp almost complete on 14 May 16 ...



Photo 14 – ... and the same area on 6 Jun 16 as the bracken threatens to take over.



Photo 15 – Setting up the AIBT stand at the South Gloucestershire show on the Sunday.



Photo 16 – Two AIBT members and a visitor look at the Ram Hill display on the SGMRG stand, with the Brandy Bottom display on the right.



Photo 17 – Soot covered stone found in the Vertical Engine House. 30 cm scale just visible at the bottom of the photo.



Photo 18 – The marbled appearance of the freshly broken face of a piece of buff-coloured building stone ...



Photo 19 – ... and the much more prosaic look once it had dried out.



Photo 20 – A stone slab split to reveal one half of an almost complete ammonite fossil ...



Photo 21 – ... and the other half. (10 cm x 10 cm scale)



Photo 22 – Sweeping construction debris from the new roof of the Fan Ducts.



Photo 23 – Clearing spoil from the south-west end of the engine bay, Vertical Engine House ...



Photo 24 – ... and on 10 Aug when the excavation was much deeper.



Photo 25 – Metal fittings on the Old Pit heapstead wall are given a protective coat of paint ...



Photo 26 – ... and the finished result.



Photo 27 – This mouse had been hiding in a stone stockpile outside the Cornish Engine House, and had been disturbed when the stockpile was relocated.



Photo 28 – *Love-in-the-mist*, a garden escapee, growing beside the path to the Fan Engine House.



Photo 29 – *The Love-in-a-mist* had vanished by the next work party, two weeks later, but there were several new species of wildflowers, including these, in the same area.



Photo 30 – Honeysuckle growing near the Fan Ducts.



Photo 31 – With thighs like an Olympic weightlifter, this insect on the New Pit heapstead is probably one of the False Blister Beetle species.

Unless otherwise stated all photos are by R Whitworth  
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