

# FRIENDS OF BRANDY BOTTOM COLLIERY, PUCKLECHURCH

Newsletter N° 14, February 2017

(Photos 1-29 will be found on page 4 onwards)



2016 was a very busy year and considerable progress was made on the conservation of the site. The AIBT would like to thank all those who helped make it so successful, not just by working on site, but by bringing their equipment to the mine to make certain tasks easier. Others have donated materials for specific tasks, or given their time to negotiate with Historic England, Ibstock Brick, our contractors, or to raise funds for restoration work. Not to forget the backroom tasks of recording what has happened, and the cleaning, cataloguing and storage of the artefacts.

In the last letter the partnership between the AIBT and Historic England was highlighted. However it must be pointed out that it is in fact a three-way partnership between the AIBT, Historic England and Ibstock Brick. Ibstock own the land and have leased part of it to the AIBT at a peppercorn rent, allowing us to work on the conservation of the site. They have agreed to extend the leased area to enclose features, such as the fan engine house, that we have discovered since the fence was put up, and have also provided material assistance to the project, such as the recent tree felling. The AIBT would like to thank Ibstock for their assistance to the project.

There were 55 work parties in 2016, compared to 29 in 2015, and there have been 8 so far in 2017. While the main emphasis in 2016 was on the Old Pit, in 2017 it should be the turn of the New Pit. The intention is to give the tops of the heapstead walls the same treatment as those of the Old Pit heapstead, to rebuild the windows and doors of the Horizontal Engine House, and to extend the fenced area to enclose the Fan Engine House. We have applied to a new funding body for a grant to pay for the cost of employing masons, though we are still waiting for the outcome of the application. Historic England has agreed to pay for a set of interpretation boards, which are currently being designed.

## Progress: November 2016 – February 2017

The outlet to the pond was cleared of rubbish in November, and the resulting drop in water level has uncovered another culvert feeding water into the area (photo right). There is a steady flow of water discharging from the culvert, which appears to come from the direction of the New Pit heapstead. The water levels of sump in the Old Pit alcove and the well in the Vertical Engine House have also dropped, indicating that both of them are directly connected to the pond



The top of the Old Pit heapstead was tidied up in December and early January. The ground was levelled off and the remains of some bushes removed. The stumps of two oak trees were uprooted in January. These had been cut down in 2011 as they were growing close to the edges and their roots would have eventually damaged the fabric of the walls. Over time one stump had rotted away and could be dug out, while the other had to be levered out with the aid of a hand winch (photo right). The latter was found to be growing on a hard surface, which had prevented it sending down a tap root – something that made the task of removing it a little bit easier. This area has been backfilled, so that what the hard surface represents will be investigated at a later date. The 16¾” long metal handle seen in photo 1 was uncovered while the ground was being levelled near the tippler slots.



The bushes have been cleared from along the fence running between the New Pit enclosure and the cycle path (photos: right, 2 and 3). While this will allow passers-by to get a better view of the buildings, the main intention was to give us room to erect scaffolding along the side of the heapstead for the repair of the walls. The 4” diameter pulley wheel seen in photo 4 was found while clearing the bushes.



On the assumption that the conservation work will go ahead, a start was made on the archaeological investigations along the tops of the New Pit heapstead walls. This will allow us to finish the task before the arrival of contractors, and the information gained on the state of the walls also helps to fine tune the tender specifications. After scaffolding had been erected at the north-eastern end of the heapstead (photo 5), the ivy was removed from the face and top of the wall. Given that old maps show there were railway lines running alongside, it is thought that this wall will contain some tippler slots similar to those found on the Old Pit. The first structure uncovered contained a metal pipe of approximately 6” diameter (photo right, 30 cm scale). This appeared to run in the direction of the shaft, and a 5 m long tape was inserted up the pipe without finding any obstructions. A search through the site diary showed that a similar sized pipe had been discovered in 2014 below the ground level at the base of the wall. The two pipes would appear to be part of the same system, but this has still to be confirmed. There was a metal bracket at the back of this structure (photo 6), which may have been used to keep wooden planks in place. A start has been made on uncovering two more structures, though it is too early to confirm that they are





the remains of tippler slots and work in this area continues. Photo 7 shows this area from the top of the heapstead, while the volunteers can be seen at work in photo 8.

Some of the bushes along the cycle path side of the Old Pit boundary fence were cleared in January (photo 9). This included the removal of various metal objects, plastic bottles and other rubbish that had been dumped there. A robin took a keen interest in the proceedings (photo right), flying down from various perches and inspecting the newly disturbed ground around our feet. Eventually it got what it was waiting for – a big fat worm about twice its own length – and it flew off into the bushes to enjoy its meal in peace away from prying photographers.



There have been sufficient volunteers at recent work parties to split into several groups. As a result investigations have resumed in the area outside the south-east wall of the Cornish Engine House, where it is thought that the settings for an egg-ended boiler had been found in October 2016 (photo 10). A test pit dug at the southern corner contains some brickwork (photo 11), but it is not possible at this point in time to say whether this is the other end of the settings. The curved brickwork, of the type seen in photo 10, has not yet been found. However it may have been damaged when the boiler was removed for scrap. Work in this area continues.

Ibstock's tree surgeons cut down a number of trees and large bushes in early February. This included the large spreading willow at the northern corner of the New Pit heapstead, plus many of the bushes along the fences on the cycle path side of both enclosures. As a result passers-by on the cycle path now have a better view of both the Old and New Pit heapsteads and the Horizontal Engine House (photo right). The contractors have also cut down two trees near the Fan Engine House, as they would have interfered with the new alignment of the boundary fence. The AIBT would like to thank Ibstock for this contribution to the conservation plan. The effect this work has had on the views from the cycle path can be seen in the 'before' and 'after' views of the Horizontal Engine House and the Old Pit heapstead in photos 12 to 15. Photos 16 to 21 were taken from inside the boundary fences, so are 'before' and 'after' views not normally seen by passers-by. Photos 22 to 29 were taken while the tree surgeons were working at Brandy Bottom.



Passers-by have been given impromptu tours of the site at most work parties, sometimes there have been as many as three tours on a single day.

There are copies of all previous FoBB newsletters on the website ([www.aibt.org](http://www.aibt.org)), together with over 200 photographs of the buildings, work in progress, artefacts found, etc.

## Future Work Parties

At present access to the site is limited to days when there is a work party in progress. The date for work parties for the rest of 2017 are: Sat 18 February; Sat 04, Wed 08, Sat 18 March; Sat 01, Wed 12, Sat 22 April; Sat 06, Wed 10, Sat 20 May; Sat 03, Wed 14, Sat 24 June; Sat 08, Wed 12, Sat 22 July; Sat 05 (South Gloucestershire Show), Wed 09, Sat 19 August; Sat 02, Wed 13, Sat 23 September; Sat 07, Wed 11, Sat 21, Sat 28 September; Sat 04, Wed 08, Sat 18 November; Sat 02, Wed 13 December. Please note that work parties 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 a location map on a dedicated page of the website, together with directions to the site.

## Photographs



Photo 1 – 16¾" long metal handle found near the tippler slots, Old Pit heapstead. With a bowed height of 5½", it was secured by two triangular plates fitted to the swivels at each end. (30 cm scale)



Photo 2 – Clearing the vegetation around the fence at the southern end of the New Pit enclosure.



Photo 3 – The fence along the New Pit enclosure is being cleared of bushes.



Photo 4 – 4" diameter pulley found when clearing bushes along the New Pit boundary fence. (30 cm scale)



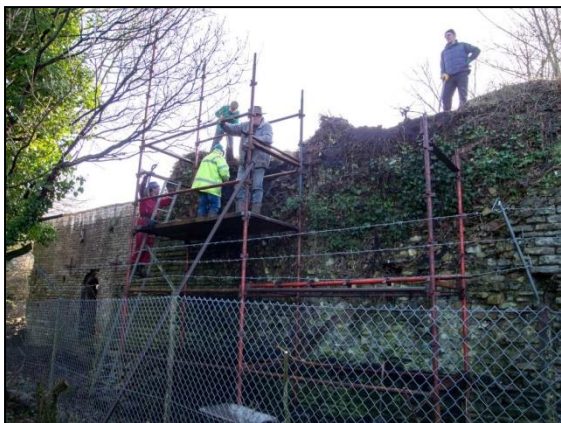


Photo 5 – Erecting scaffolding along the north-west wall of the New Pit heapstead.



Photo 8 – Working on the top of the north-west wall of the New Pit heapstead.



Photo 6 – Metal bracket in-situ in a slot at the top of the north-west wall of the New Pit heapstead. (30 cm scale)



Photo 9 – Clearing rubbish from the area around the present interpretation board outside the Old Pit enclosure.



Photo 7 – Area currently under investigation along the north-west wall of the New Pit heapstead.



Photo 10 – Possible settings for the egg-ended boiler outside the eastern corner of the Cornish Engine House.





Photo 11 – Brick structure that may be part of the other end of the settings for the egg-ended boiler.



Photo 12 – The view of the Horizontal Engine House from the cycle path was previously obscured by the willow at the corner of the New Pit enclosure ...



Photo 13 – ... and it can now be seen clearly after the willow was cut down.



Photo 14 – The Old Pit seen from the cycle path in April 2016. Later in the season the view would become obscured by the growth of leaves ...



Photo 15 – ... and in February after the small trees and shrubs were cut back.



Photo 16 – Looking towards the Old Pit across the top of the Horizontal Engine House in October 2014 ...





Photo 17 – ... and in February 2017 after the trees had been cut down.



Photo 20 – ... and in February 2017 after the willow by the northern corner of the enclosure had been cut down.



Photo 18 – The Horizontal Engine House seen from the top of the Old Pit heapstead in April 2016 before the trees were in full leaf ...



Photo 21 – The Old Pit seen from the top of the Horizontal Engine House, a view that was not possible until the trees had been cut down.



Photo 19 – ... in May 2016 ...



Photo 22 – The ivy is removed from one of the trees by the Fan Ducts.





Photo 23 – Tree surgeon at work in a tree near the Fan Ducts ...



Photo 24 – ... the upper branches are cut down ...



Photo 25 – ... while the very top starts to fall to the ground.



Photo 26 – One of the two trees by the fan ducts starts to fall ...



Photo 27 – ... and is almost on the ground.



Photo 28 – Tree clearance in progress at the northern corner of the Old Pit enclosure. (© M Taylor)



Photo 29 – The willow by the northern corner of the New Pit enclosure is being cut down. (© K Kemp)

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