

FRIENDS OF BRANDY BOTTOM COLLIERY, PUCKLECHURCH

Newsletter N^o 22, February 2019

(Photos 1-18 will be found on page 3 onwards)



There have been 8 work parties since the last newsletter, bringing the total for 2018 to 40. There have been 5 so far in 2019. There are plans to open on one of the Heritage Open Days weekends later in the year, though the date has not yet been finalised.

The emphasis during most of the work parties was on conservation work in the Vertical Engine House, though attention was moved to Cornish Engine House for the last two work parties. There have been a number of discoveries there that need further investigation.

Progress: November 2018 – February 2019

Conservation work continued both in and around the Vertical Engine House. Two stone slabs and some tiles have been laid as a sill for the window beside the entrance (photo right), replacing the original single slab that was vandalised some time ago. The existing slab at the top of the stairs outside the entrance has now been re-laid, and another added to replace the broken one that was lost some years ago after a visit by vandals. Part of a recovered Dramway sleeper was used to replace a missing section of the top step. Photo 1 shows this area in January 2019, when there was still some repointing to be finished. For a comparison, photo 2 shows the steps in November 2013 shortly after they had been fully uncovered.



Repointing of the outside of the south-east wall of the Vertical Engine House continues, and a start has been made on repointing the eastern corner of the winding drum pit and the inside of the wall above the engine bed. However we have still to start on the major task of repointing the inside of the building. A path was cleared around the north-east end of the building to make it easier to get building materials to the winding drum pit. This has a secondary purpose of catching minor sloughs of materials from the batch before they fell into the drum pit. Most of the spoil removed along the line of the path was dark and full of coal, but a small section near the drum pit had been covered in a white layer of mortar (photo right, 30 cm scale).

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Careful probing revealed that there was nothing solid below. Why the mortar was put there is yet another Brandy Bottom mystery, and the area has been covered up again for its protection.

Preparatory work started on the re-laying of slabs on top of the platform outside the south-west wall of the Cornish Engine House. The resulting level surface will improve access to the inside of the engine house. It has not yet been decided whether this will be done by the volunteers or by contractors.

A start has also been made on excavating part of the inside of the Cornish Engine House. The area in question lies in front of the opening in the bob (north-west) wall, and was not explored in 2013 when the rest of the inside was cleared down to a solid floor. At that time probing in the area had revealed that there was a significant depth of consolidated spoil below what was then the surface. The photo on the right shows the area at the end of the mid-February work party. It was taken from a position above the engine bed and looks towards the open arch in the bob (north-west) wall. The plank of wood marks the inner edge of the vault on the north-east side of the building. Another view of that vault edge can be seen in photo 10, while photo 11 is a view of the inside of the vault itself. What is noticeable is how shallow the arch is. The edge nearest the engine bed, behind the green handle of the shovel in photo 10, was covered with lime scale. This was smooth on the vertical face, while the underside looked like stalactites. An example of the edge brickwork was recovered from the spoil and can be seen in photo 12, where it has been photographed upside down for clarity. It, and some other pieces, was found in the top layers of spoil, suggesting that it had been broken off after the area had been filled with rubble. This may have happened when the fragments of a large stone bearing pad fell from the bob wall.



Spoil was also removed from the inside of the opening in the bob wall (photo right). Work here is still at an early stage, and the significance of the structures found has yet to be determined. For example there is a channel running towards the edge of the building, which can be seen to the left of the yellow/black 30 cm scale. (The light coloured stonework running across the photo marks the edge of the engine house. The Pumping Shaft capping and wall of the Old Pit heapstead, which can be seen in the background, are separated from the engine house by a passage.) Another structure whose purpose is as yet unknown is the semi-circular shaped groove found below the north-west edge of the engine bed (photo 15). Photo 16 shows the edge of the vault on the south-west side in the course of being excavated. This side is in a far worse condition than that of the vault on the north-east side. Here some



2 or more feet of brickwork has been lost from the inner edge. More spoil will have to be removed before it is possible to make an assessment of the conservation work required.

Visitor Access and Future Work Parties

At present visitor access to the site is limited to days when there is a work party in progress. It is usually possible to give small groups a guided tour during the work parties on a 'turn-up on the day' basis though this cannot be guaranteed as it depends on there being sufficient volunteers present. Special arrangements can be made for parties of 10 or more people by making contact through our email address of info@aibt.org.

The dates for work parties in 2019 are: Saturday 09, Wednesday 20, Saturday 30 March, Saturday 06, Wednesday 17, Saturday 27 April, Saturday 04, Wednesday 15, Saturday 25 May, Saturday 08, Wednesday 19, Saturday 29 June, Saturday 06, Wednesday 17, Saturday 27 July, Saturday 03, Wednesday 14, Saturday 24 August, Saturday 07, Heritage Open Days *, Saturday 28 September, Saturday 05, Wednesday 16, Saturday 26 October, Saturday 02, Wednesday 13, Saturday 23 November, Saturday 07, Wednesday 18 December.

* As the Heritage Open Days for 2019 are spread over a 10-day period in September, we have decided to open on Saturday 14 and Sunday 15, though this choice is still provisional.

Please note that work parties, and their starting and finishing times, may be altered at short notice. The nominal opening times are between 10.30 am and 3 pm, but these timings are not hard and fast so we may start later and/or finish earlier. Because of this, newcomers who would like to join a work party are advised to first make contact via the AIBT's email address of info@aibt.org. Youngsters must be accompanied at all times by a responsible adult.

There is a location map on a dedicated page of the website www.aibt.org, together with directions on how to reach the site. This page can be found by using a link on the main Brandy Bottom project page.

Photographs



Photo 1 – Steps outside entrance to Vertical Engine House in January 2019. There is still some repointing to be completed on the brickwork at the bottom of the base.



Photo 2 – For comparison, this photo was taken on 16 Nov 13, and shows the state of the brick plinth and steps shortly after excavation.



Photo 3 – Ken and Mick working on the northern corner of the Vertical Engine House. The winding drum pit is on the left.



Photo 4 – The opening to the south-east of the engine bed of the Vertical Engine House has been closed with a metal grate – one of the many examples of Jeff’s metal working skills to be found on site.



Photo 5 – Robin and Ken working at the northern corner of the Vertical Engine House. (© M Taylor 2019)



Photo 6 – Hamish setting a level for the re-laying of slabs on the top of the platform outside the south-west wall of the Cornish Engine House.



Photo 7 – Jeff, Mike and Mark getting ready to move the heavy stone fragments of a bearing bed across the inside of the Cornish Engine House.



Photo 8 – A chute has been made to direct the spoil removed from the inside of the Cornish Engine House into a waiting wheel barrow ... (© M Taylor 2019)



Photo 9 – ... and the chute in use.



Photo 10 – The exposed edge of the brick arch on the north-east side of the building. The wheel barrow on the right is sitting on the engine bed.



Photo 11 – View looking north-eastwards into the cavity seen in the previous photo. Note the shallowness of the arch.



Photo 12 – This piece of the edge of the brick arch (BB 090219-2) was found in the top level of the spoil. It has been inverted for photography, and the rough lime scale deposit on the 'top' would actually have been on the underside of the arch. (30 cm scale)



Photo 13 – Hamish working in the opening in the bob wall.



Photo 14 – Ken clearing spoil from along the north-western edge of the engine bed.



Photo 15 – Close-up of the engine bed area of the excavations in the Cornish Engine House. The bed is in the top right of the photo. Below it, and just to the left of the 30 cm yellow/black scale, is a semi-circular groove cut into the engine bed foundations.



Photo 16 – View of the vault on the south-west side of the Cornish Engine House.



Photo 17 – This shaped stone (BB 090219-1) was found when removing the spoil from inside the Cornish Engine House. We have not yet worked out what it did. (30 cm scale)



Photo 18 – These objects were also found in the excavated spoil. The bottom item appears to be part of a flange of a large diameter pipe (BB 130219-1), while the strip of lead above it may have been part of a gasket (BB 130219-2). (30 cm scale)

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