

Friends of Brandy Bottom Colliery Pucklechurch



(Photos 1-26 are on page 3 onwards. The photo above, showing the chimney, Old Pit heapstead and the Cornish Engine House, was taken from the top of the Horizontal Engine House in December 2019. The photo shows the area in winter, and can be compared to the summer and autumn views seen in Newsletters 24 and 25 respectively)

There have been 11 work parties since the last newsletter. The 6 at the end of 2019 brought the total for the year to 43 and there has been 5 so far in 2020.

We have received two grants which will allow us to complete the stabilisation phase of the project.

Work focussed on the Cornish Engine House, where spoil was removed down to the base structures below the present water table. There were three sessions in the under croft of the Horizontal Engine House on rainy days.

Ibstock Enovert Trust and Enovert Community Trust Grants

The AIBT would like to thank the Ibstock Enovert Trust for their grant of £15 000 and the Enovert Community Trust for their grant of £41 000. The grants will allow us to complete the stabilisation phase of the project, as the contractors will be working on the buildings in both the Old and the New Pits. They will also install new boundary fences around both enclosures. At the time of writing contractors were being asked to tender for the work. We received a grant from the former in 2017, but this is the first time that we have applied to the latter. More information about the two trusts can be found on their websites.¹

Progress: November 2019 – February 2020

In November a space had to be levelled in the New Boiler area to take another bag to hold the fine spoil excavated from the condenser pit (photo [1](#)). Digging out the top layers of the ground uncovered the brick structure seen in photo [2](#) and probing with a rod suggested that there is a firm surface some 1½ feet below the level of the bricks. Much to the regret of the diggers, this had to be covered up again after photographing the area - Partly because the space was needed for the bag and more importantly because there are too many unfinished items on the current 'to do' list. We have long thought that this area would hold the foundations for the two Lancashire boilers mentioned in the 1900 sale catalogue and intend to return to explore it at a later date.

¹ Ibstock Enovert Trust: <https://www.enovert.co.uk/Trusts/Ibstock+Enovert+Trust>
Enovert Community Trust: <https://www.enovert.co.uk/Trusts/Enovert+Community+Trust>



There was further work in the undercroft of the Horizontal Engine House on three rainy days in October and November, the sort of days that are fortunately rare. Rubble was removed from the central aisle, uncovering a layer of a tarry material. This is probably a mixture of the grease used on the winding ropes with oil from the machinery and has quite a strong smell. Photo 6 shows a recovered bull-nosed brick coated with the stuff. It can be removed by scraping, so the bricks can be reused at a later date. We also found three fragments of white pottery (photo 8). In the photo these have been joined together on a temporary basis using Sellotape to show they form the base of a bowl or vase. There is no maker's mark on the base.

More spoil was removed from the condenser pit of the Cornish Engine House. We have now reached the base of the condenser pit some 12 feet below the main floor of the building. This is below the water table and the working area has to be pumped out before work starts. Photo 12 was taken at the start of a work party in February before pumping commenced. As for the source – some of it will be rainwater, some may be ground water seeping in.

A number of wooden planks have been recovered, some of which can be seen in photo 13. These may have been part of a wooden box around the condenser, similar to the one seen on the 1786 Boulton and Watt steam engine in the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh. (More details can be found on their website: <https://www.nms.ac.uk>. Two more planks can be seen still in-situ in photo 14, which also shows how wet the bottom of the excavation is. The artefact seen on the right was found buried in the spoil at the bottom of the pit. The left-hand side in the photo is made of a rubbery material, which is attached to the metal plate on the right. Exactly what it did is still a mystery. Another find is a piece of glass tubing, which may have been used to show the water level in a vessel.



Hamish has been surveying the levels in the various water shafts dotted around the site. When completed this may give us an idea of how they are connected. The water level at the base of the condenser pit does not appear to be connected to the water level in the shaft outside the Vertical Engine House.

A Victorian 1859 6d piece was discovered in some spoil as the last newsletter (Nº 25) was being written, and is the only coin found so far at Brandy Bottom. It is in very poor condition, worn and with broken edges. The obverse (photo right, 5 mm grid) has a bust of the young Queen Victoria, while the reverse has the words 'six pence' enclosed by an oak wreath surmounted by a crown. Records show it would have been minted from a 92.5% silver alloy.



There was also some preparatory work on the top of the New Pit heapstead ahead of the arrival of the contractors. The intention is to lay a waterproof membrane above the line of the passageway between the Horizontal Engine House and the heapstead proper. This will protect the brick roof of the passage from frost damage in winter. Drains will also be laid to stop rainwater pooling in this area. The piece of light railway points seen on the right (30 cm scale) was discovered when a piece of loose concrete on the path side of the heapstead was lifted. Some parts of the rails show signs of heavy wear, so it may have been dumped after replacement. The lump of concrete, which



has some light gauge rails were embedded in it, can be seen marked with an arrow in photo [23](#). Photo [24](#) shows the artefact lying where it was found under the lump.

As can be seen from photo [25](#), Jeff has completed the safety railings around the platform outside the south-west wall of the Cornish Engine House.

Visitor Access, Future Work Parties, and Joining In

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 enough volunteers present and what is being done. 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 2020 are:

Saturday 07, Wednesday 18, Saturday 28 March; Saturday 04, Wednesday 15, Saturday 25 April; Saturday 09, Wednesday 20, Saturday 30 May; Saturday 06, Wednesday 17, Saturday 27 June; Saturday 04, Wednesday 15, Saturday 25 July; Saturday 01, Wednesday 12, Saturday 22 August; Saturday 05, Saturday 12 and Sunday 13 (Heritage Open Days - Provisional), Wednesday 23 September; Saturday 03, Wednesday 14, Saturday 24 October; Saturday 07, Wednesday 18, Saturday 28 November; Saturday 05, Wednesday 16 December.

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 fixed so we may start later and/or finish earlier. Because of this, newcomers who would like to join a work party or pay a visit are advised to first make contact via the AIBT's email address of info@aibt.org. Youngsters, either as visitors or as part of a working party, must always be accompanied by a responsible adult.

At present there is only a small team working on the conservation, so newcomers are welcome to pay a visit and see if they would like to join in. The work varies, sometimes excavating spoil and recording both the buried objects and the structures that have been revealed, at others rebuilding and repointing masonry walls. Any major rebuilding required, such as the work on the chimney and the edges of the heapsteads is done by contract masons. Other tasks include keeping the vegetation under control. If you would like to find out more about work parties at Brandy Bottom, please contact us by email at info@aibt.org.

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.

Information on Website

There are copies of all earlier newsletters on the Archive page of the website www.aibt.org. The Brandy Bottom section has pages covering a brief history of the pit and reports on work parties, as well as over 500 photographs of the buildings, work parties, artefacts and structures discovered, and the wildflowers and insects.

Photographs (August – November 2019)



Photo 1 – Ken, Jeff, Mick and Mark adjusting the frame used to hold bags open.



Photo 2 – A close-up of the brickwork found buried under the area used for spoil storage. (See comments on [p1](#). 30 cm scale)



Photo 3 – A location shot for the previous photo. (30 cm scale)



Photo 4 – Mick working in the central aisle of the undercroft in the Horizontal Engine House.



Photo 5 – The partially cleared floor of the undercroft, showing the dark tarry layer under the rubble. This photo was taken a short distance in front of the metal bucket in the previous photo.



Photo 6 – A bull-nosed brick covered in a tarry-like substance. This had been found in the undercroft of the Horizontal Engine House.



Photo 7 – One of three fragments of white pottery found in the undercroft. (5 mm grid)



Photo 8 – The three fragments have been stuck together with Sellotape on a temporary basis to show they come from the base of the same object. (5 mm grid)



Photo 9 – Peter works the hoist located above the condenser pit of the Cornish Engine House ...



Photo 10 – ... while Mark watches as a bucket of spoil is raised ...



Photo 11 – ... and Mick stands in the wet sludge waiting for the photographer to finish.



Photo 12 – The water level in the north-east of the condenser pit at the start of one work party.



Photo 13 – Some of the wooden planks found at the bottom of the condenser pit ... (Photo: K Kemp)



Photo 14 – ... with two more, marked by arrows, still in situ at the south-west end.



Photo 15 – This strange structure is at the south-west end of the condenser pit. It has what appears to be a wooden plug in the middle, which can be seen in close-up in the next photo.



Photo 16 – Close-up of the wooden plug seen in the previous photo.



Photo 17 – Wooden planks embedded into floor of the north-east end of the condenser pit.



Photo 18 – Ken and Jeff setting up the pump used to dewater the bottom of the condenser pit.



Photo 19 – Ken digs out sludge from the south-west end of the condenser pit, while Mark works the delivery line from the pump. The structure Ken is standing on can be seen more clearly in photo 15 opposite.



Photo 20 – Ken watches Mick digging sludge out of a sump at the south-west end.



Photo 21 – Steve G excavates spoil from the area of the New Pit heapstead above the tunnel ...



Photo 22 – ... and covers the base of the excavation with a plastic sheet, helped by Hamish.



Photo 23 – A lump of concrete on the top of the New Pit heapstead has been marked with an arrow. As mentioned on p.2, it concealed a piece of railway points ...



Photo 24 – ... whose hiding place has been marked with an arrow.



Photo 25 – Completed safety railings along the platform outside the south-west wall of the Cornish Engine House.



Photo 26 – Some of the regulars at the Christmas dinner, showing that they can scrub up nicely.

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Website: www.aibt.org

email: info@aibt.org

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