

Friends of Brandy Bottom Colliery Pucklechurch



Newsletter N° 27, May 2020

(Photos 1-14 are on page 3 onwards. The photo above shows a very muddy Mark standing welly-boot deep in the sludge at the bottom of the condenser pit, March 2020. His left hand is resting on one of the wooden beams mentioned on the next page.)

Work has stopped at Brandy Bottom, much to the frustration of the volunteers. We will resume once the government allows and each individual volunteer has decided it is safe for them to restart – a decision that will depend on their own circumstances. We all hope that our readers are safe and must apologise for the brevity of this newsletter – regrettably, it will not distract you for long.

There have been 4 work parties since the last newsletter, with the last on 07 March, bringing the total to date in 2020 to 9. The emphasis during these work parties was clearing spoil from the condenser pit of the Cornish Engine House. So far 6 work parties have been cancelled during the Covid-19 shutdown.

Less welcome was the appearance of vandals over the weekend of 21/22 March, when they caused considerable damage to some of the original brickwork, some of the modern repairs, and the boundary fences. A further invasion occurred on 26 April. This time the passer-by called the police, whose arrival chased the vandals away. We hope to bring forward the construction of the new perimeter fence. A grant for this work has already been approved.

We are extremely grateful to the two passers-by who alerted us to the damage on the first occasion, and to the person who phoned the police on the second. We would also like to thank those volunteers who have arranged to take their exercise by walking or cycling past the site and so keeping an eye on it. If anyone is passing and sees vandals in action would they please ring the police on 999 from a safe distance and let them know that there are vandals at the Brandy Bottom colliery. The location is on the cycle track 200m SW of Coxgrove Hill near Pucklechurch. If there are signs of damage but no vandals around will they please let us know by email at info@aibt.org. We will then check whether it is a new incursion or one that we already knew about, and inform the police about any new occurrences. We would be most grateful if anyone can pass by the site between 6-6.30 pm and dusk, especially on Saturdays and Sundays, when normal traffic along the cycle path has died away. Brandy Bottom appears to be at its most vulnerable at those times.

Brandy Bottom is not completely deserted, as builders are on site working on the conservation programmes funded by the Ibstock Enover Trust and the Enover Community Trust.



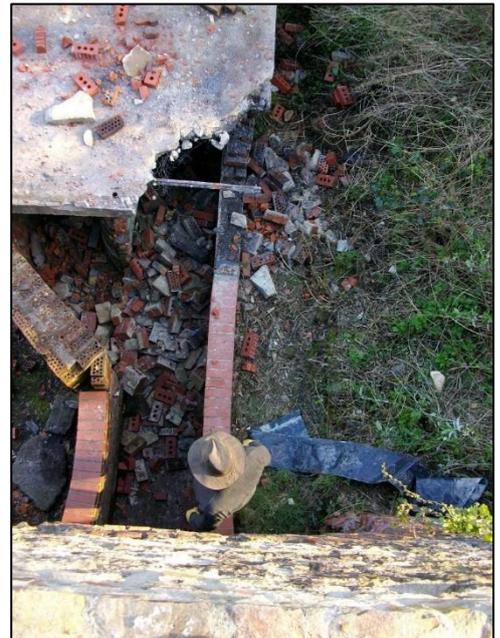
Progress: February-May 2020

The current bottom of the condenser pit is below the local water table, so the water in the working area must be pumped out at the start of each work party. The photo on the right was taken at the start of the work party on 07 March, which explains why the water is clear. The most efficient way of removing the bulk of the clear water has been Jeff's pump, but other methods have been tried to get rid of the muddy sludge left at the bottom which would clog the pump. One can be seen in photo [1](#), where Ken is pouring a bucket of sludge into a funnel attached to a pipe leading to the sump in the Old Pit alcove. It was not a success, so we had to try plan b. Steve H developed a larger funnel which has yet to be used due to the interruption in work parties.



The photo at the top of p.1 shows what the working conditions are like at the bottom of the pit ... dry gloves become a much sought-after item, especially after the lunch break, as the sludge is wet and sticky. The metal object seen in photo [2](#) was recovered from the bottom of the north-eastern end of the pit. (Its position in the water has been marked with an arrow in the photo to the right) Ken has been cleaning it at home, and suspects it might be part of a boiler, such as a damper door or an access door for raking out ash. There has been a distinct dearth of artefacts in the sludge, just some structures that need further investigation. Two wooden beams that may have supported the base of the condenser tank can be seen on the right of the photo on the previous page covered with sludge with a narrow V-shaped opening between them. One beam measured 24" by 16" while the other appears to be of similar dimensions. They are not resting on the solid base of the pit, so we will have delve through the sludge to find out how they are secured to the walls. It is unusual to find such structures still in place, and the water is helping to conserve the wood in between work parties.

The vandals caused damage in both the Old and the New Pits on 21/22 March. It is our bad luck that this occurred just at the start of the government's restrictions on movements, and as a result the volunteers have only seen photos and have still to be allowed back to clear up the mess. A few examples will illustrate the extent of the damage, which appears to be vandalism for the sake of vandalism. Photo [3](#) shows the viewing platform in the Vertical Engine House in September 2017, while photo [4](#) shows its current state. Even worse is the loss of the fragile original brickwork at the top of the brick extension at the south-west end of the Old Pit heapstead, near the entry gate. A comparison between photo [5](#), taken in May last year and photo [6](#), taken after the event, shows the extent of the damage. In the New Pit the capping course of bricks laid along the top of the south-east wall of the New Pit heapstead has been destroyed and the bricks used as missiles to damage the fan ducts. Photo [7](#) was taken in May 2019 and shows the original layout of the capping. The next photo, [8](#), is a view looking south along the top of the wall showing that most of the capping is missing. The roof of the fan ducts has also been damaged. Ken's photo on the right was taken when he and Hamish went to check on the damage on 23 March. Ken was standing on top of the New Pit heapstead looking down on the fan ducts. The damage to the corner of the cast concrete roof is clearly visible, and the ducts are full of the bricks that used to lie along the top of the adjacent heapstead wall. (That is Hamish hiding under the hat at the bottom) The remaining capping bricks were vandalised in April and as a result there was more damage to the roof of the fan ducts. This can be seen by comparing the photo on the right with photo [12](#). There have been further incursions since then, and Brandy Bottom is starting to become a place where the local hooligans think can take out their frustrations on being locked down.



The volunteers have only seen photos of the damage, so their feelings can only be imagined. We will have to spend a lot of time tidying the place before it can be re-opened again for visits. The usual spring growth of weeds and

shrubs will have to be dealt with and the damage done by the vandals will have to be cleared away to make the site safe. We are currently considering if it is possible to recruit some extra volunteers for a one-off special work party devoted to this back log. Details will be circulated when they are finalised.

Contactors are currently working at Brandy Bottom, initially at the base of the New Pit heapstead ramp. The scope of the original contract will be expanded to include repairs to the some of the vandal-damaged areas. Hamish is keeping an eye on progress as the clerk of works. The first area to be worked on was the facing of the wall on the cycle path side of the New Pit heapstead ramp. Photo [9](#) shows the completed repairs to the upper end of the wall. Photo [10](#) shows the end of the wall, while photo [11](#), taken in September 2019, gives an idea of the state of the stone facing before repairs started. The contractors have also started to build up the missing stonework at the western corner of the Old Pit heapstead (photo [13](#)). That corner has been marked with an arrow in photo [14](#). The photo shows a general view of the Old Pit, taken in June 2019 from roof of the Horizontal Engine House. The scope of the building works contract has been extended to include the rebuilding of the vandal-damaged top of the brick extension at the south-west end of the heapstead.

At present it is our intention to take part in the Heritage Open Days in September. While the final decision will not be taken for some time, the present inactivity on site gives us an opportunity to catch up on the creation of new artwork. This year's national theme is to be 'Hidden Nature', and a collection of photos of the wildlife at Brandy Bottom has been built up over the years. The subjects are mostly wildflowers, but there are some insects, a few reptiles, but a distinct shortage of birds. A mouse is the only animal representative as the local fox has pointedly declined to appear on camera. And if we do not open this September ... well the artwork will be available the next time the display boards are needed.

Will those of you who receive the South Gloucestershire Mines Research Group's newsletter please note that the AIBT's email address given on p.38 of the latest (N° 57) newsletter is incorrect. The correct address is info@aibt.org.

Visitor Access, Future Work Parties, and Joining In

There is no visitor access to Brandy Bottom for the near future, and all scheduled work parties have been cancelled. The resumption of work parties will be reported both on the website and in a newsletter.

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 (February - May 2020)



Photo 1 – Jeff watches Ken pouring some muddy sludge, dredged from the bottom of the condenser pit, into a funnel connected by a pipe to the sump in the Old Pit alcove.



Photo 2 – The metal object, marked with an arrow in the photo on the top of p.2, after removal from the condenser pit and before being taken off-site for cleaning. (30 cm scales)



Photo 3 – The viewing platform inside the Vertical Engine House in September 2017 ...



Photo 4 – ... after it had been comprehensively trashed by the vandals. This photo was taken looking along the length of the viewing platform. (© H Orr-Ewing 2020)



Photo 5 – A view of the brick extension at the south-west end of the Old Pit heapstead, looking along the line of the platform outside the south-west wall of the Cornish Engine House, in May 2019 ...



Photo 6 – ... and after it was vandalised. (© H Orr-Ewing 2020)



Photo 7 – A view of the capping running along the top of the south-east wall of the New Pit heapstead in May 2019 ...



Photo 8 – ...The same wall showing that almost all of the capping has been demolished by the vandals. (© K Kemp 2020)



Photo 9 – The recently rebuilt face of the cycle path side of the New Pit heapstead ramp. (© H Orr-Ewing 2020)



Photo 10 – The rebuilt base of the New Pit heapstead ramp. (© H Orr-Ewing 2020)



Photo 11 – A view of the bottom of the New Pit heapstead ramp taken in September 2019.



Photo 12 – There was more damage to the roof of the fan ducts during the second wave of vandalism. (© H Orr-Ewing 2020)



Photo 13 – Repairs underway to the stone facing of the western corner of the Old Pit heapstead. (© H Orr-Ewing 2020)



Photo 14 – The Old Pit in June 2019, taken from the top of the Horizontal Engine House. The arrow marks the corner that is being repaired.

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 Website: www.aibt.org

email: info@aibt.org

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