

Friends of Brandy Bottom Colliery Pucklechurch



Newsletter N° 29, November 2020

This view of the south-west end of the Old Pit heapstead looks as if the course has been set for a round of crazy golf. The orange flags are located at salient points around the uncovered brick structures with the scale indicated by 1 m red/white ranging poles (See comments on p.2).

There have been 11 work parties since the last newsletter, bringing the 2020 total to date to 27. The site was shut again at the start of November as part of the government's latest Covid-19 restrictions, and we will have to see if we can add to the tally in December.

The new boundary fences around both the Old and the New Pits were completed in September, and the builders finished working on site in October. This completes the work associated with the grants from the Istock Enovert Trust and the Enovert Community Trust. We would like to thank both trusts for their generous support, which has enabled us to complete almost all of the stabilisation phase of the project and also improve the security of the site.

The volunteers worked on the top of the Old Pit heapstead, where they uncovered structures at both the south-west and north-east ends. They also worked on site maintenance once the contractors had finished.

Progress: August - November 2020

The builders had finished laying the pivot stones at the top of the bob wall of the Cornish Engine House by mid-August. The scaffolding was removed before a photo of the completed layout could be taken, so the photo on the right had to be taken from the top of the Old Pit heapstead. Lighter coloured concrete fills the spaces left by missing fragments of the original stones, some of which have had to be pinned together (photo [1](#)). Photo [2](#) shows the northern corner of the engine house, with an arrow marking the position of the pivot stones. The builders have laid flagstones on both sides of the condenser pit opening.



Photo 3 shows the new flagstone floor in the northern corner of the building and photo 4 the area around the entrance. On the roof of the Horizontal Engine House, the top edge of the waterproof membrane has been bonded to the wall with a cement flaunch to stop rainwater seeping behind the membrane and into the walls and internal roof of the building. Photo 5 is a general view of the roof while photo 6 is a close-up of the area around the drain at the northern corner. They have also built a replacement low brick wall around the fan engine house (photo 7) and rebuilt the vandalised window grille and brick surround in the Horizontal Engine House (photo 8). When the builders left the site in mid-October the work associated with the grants from the Ibstock Enover Trust and the Enover Community Trust was complete. There are still a few outstanding items, such as rebuilding the vandalised top of the wall above the Pumping Shaft capping, but these are within the capabilities of the volunteers.

The new boundary fences were built in September. The fence is 8 feet high at the back and sides of the enclosures, and 7 feet high along the edge of the cycle path. The storage container is now inside the fenced area. Various views of the new fences can be seen in photos 11 to 14. In some places there is a generous gap between the two fences (photo 12), and less so in others (photo 13). The Old and New Pit interpretation boards have been relocated to the outside of the new fence. The new position of the Old Pit board can be seen in photo 14 and that of the New Pit board can be seen in the photo on the right. The latter also gives an idea of how the new fence affects a passer-by's view of the buildings when looking both square on to the fence and along its line. The Fan Engine House and the brick fan housing are now inside the boundary fence. As a result, the original fencing that ran across the semi-circular brick fan housing has been removed, allowing us to start on conserving the housing. We have also gone round the new perimeter, removing tree branches that might help any miscreants climb over the fences, but we have still to finalise our plans for the extra space in the New Pit enclosure. In addition, we have to decide on how we use the vegetation along the old fence as an additional deterrent to intruders.



Work continued in two areas on the top of the Old Pit heapstead. The composite 1844-1888 Ordnance Survey map on the Gloucestershire 'Know Your Place' website (<https://maps.bristol.gov.uk/kyp/?edition=southglos>) shows that there have been various structures on the heapstead. However, the map does not give any details about their functions, and the date span covers many of the significant events in the life of the mine.

The brick structures at the south-west end reported on in the last newsletter (N° 28) were measured and photographed. They were covered up for their protection after a drawing had been completed (photo 16), as we intend to return to them at a later date. The general layout of the cleared area can be seen in the photo at the top of page 1. One of the tippler slots can be seen above the black bucket on the right-hand side. The photo on the right shows the position of this area relative to the shaft capping, which is marked with blue flags. Orange flags mark the positions of two post holes and scale is indicated by 1 m red/white ranging poles. The post holes, each of which held a metal collar (photo 17) filled with the remains of wood, are roughly in-line with the edges of the shaft capping. A close-up of the edge of a particular piece of brickwork, on the extreme right of the photo on the right, can be seen in photo 19. This has openings inset into one edge, which may have held posts. Going by their position between the shaft and the tippler slots, these structures must have formed part of the coal handling system. What we still have to work out is why bricks were laid in some areas and not others.



Another group worked on the mass of confused brickwork at the north-east (batch) end of the heapstead (photo [22](#)), again something that had had been reported in the last newsletter. The various layers of the collapsed 9" thick walls have been slowly teased apart, photographed and documented with a drawing (photo [23](#)). The photo on the right shows the area after all the debris had been cleared. There is a brick floor at the batch end (back of photo), with a wooden floor in front of it. In front of the wooden section is a stone floor (see photo [28](#)). There would appear to have been doors in several places, judging by holes in the stone floor and a gap in the brickwork between Areas A and C. Examples of the holes in the stone floor can be seen in the front centre of photo [22](#), and on either side of the bottom of photo [24](#). (The stones have been marked with arrows) Photo [25](#) shows the gap in the walls between Areas A and C in close-up. The layout of the bricks on the edge of Area A on the right of the photo suggests that they were not joined to another wall, implying that they form the edge of an opening (? door ?).



A mixture of bonds was used in the construction of the walls. In photos 27, 28 and 29, some of the stretchers have been removed to make the headers easier to see. Photo [27](#) shows that Area C was a 1header/5 stretcher bond, while photos [28](#) and [29](#) show Area A was a 1 stretcher/1 header bond on the south-east edge. There was a section on the north-west edge of Area A where the arrangement was 3 stretchers, 7 headers 2 stretchers, suggesting that there was a window opening above the stretchers. At the edge of the wooden section of flooring is a brick plinth, with a small pit nearby on the edge of the section of stone flooring.

We will have to do more research before we can establish what the building was used for and when it was constructed. There is a narrow passageway on the north-western side above the Old Boiler House (photo [28](#)), and a much wider one on the south-eastern side above the Vertical Engine House (photo [30](#)). This corresponds to the detail seen on the 1844-1888 map on the KYP website. On that map the narrow gap was aligned with the centre line of the causeway to the batch, indicating the route used to haul waste to the batch. The passageway is now off-centre, probably because the sides of the causeway have collapsed unevenly over time. The present day gap between the inside base of the Old Boiler House wall and the outside of the footings of the internal building wall is 31", which seems to be a bit narrow for regular use by drams loaded with waste. (Anyone using the door would have had to look carefully both ways to avoid being hit by a dram, especially on a dark rainy night)

If the building is contemporary with coal and waste hoisting at the Old Pit, was it used by a tallyman? And if it was built after hoisting stopped, what was its function? A clue must be the combination of brick, wood and stone used for the floor. Dating it will require access to early 25" Ordnance Survey maps, and the earliest map at that scale on the National Library of Scotland's website is dated 1881. This shows the building in place, so further research is needed to discover if there is an even earlier one in another collection.

The salt-glazed jar found in the brick rubble at the north-east end of the Old Pit heapstead, and shown in photo 38 of the previous newsletter (N° 28), turned out to be a 3" high jar made by Price (photo right, cm grid behind). The inset is a close-up of the maker's mark. Price's works were in St Thomas Street in Redcliffe from 1809 until they closed in 1961. One wonders if the '4' referred to its capacity of 4 fluid oz. Found nearby was the piece of a metal casting seen in photo [34](#) after cleaning up. The diameter of the outer ring is 26". This suggested to Hamish that it was part of the 24" diameter cylinder that, according to the 1900 sale catalogue, was installed in the Vertical Engine House. We know from fragments left behind that the cylinder had been broken up when the scrap metal merchants were on site in the 1960s, and this fragment has been left behind. Why it was found on top of the heapstead and not in the engine house is yet another Brandy Bottom mystery.



There has been work on the upkeep of the site, tidying up the stone and brick stockpiles and clearing away the wooden shuttering used to build the concrete roof at the shaft end of the fan ducts. As that part of the shaft roof slab is under cover it is being used as a wood store instead of the passage under the New Pit heapstead (photo 35). Jeff has built the safety railings for the new steps at the south-west end of the Old Pit heapstead (photo 36), much to the relief of many of the volunteers. Part of the newly enclosed area behind the New Pit vehicular gates will be used as a materials store, though the layout of this area has still to be decided. The large metal tank that has sat beside the bench and the old interpretation board for some months will be used to store the rainwater collected by the impervious lining of the New Pit winding ramp. At present the water just drains into the passage. The tank will be placed on the cycle path side of the New Pit passage, where it will be easy to construct a drain to carry the overflow away from the site.

As reported in the last newsletter (N° 28) Brandy Bottom was not open as part of the 2020 Heritage Open Doors scheme, though we hope to take part again in 2021.

While work at Brandy Bottom may be at a standstill, planning for 2021 is well underway.

Visitor Access, Future Work Parties, and Joining In

There is no visitor access to Brandy Bottom until further notice. This exclusion is part of our Covid-19 working protocol to keep the volunteers safe. As a result, the dates of work parties are not being published. Anyone who is thinking about joining us as a volunteer should first make contact through the AIBT email address of info@aibt.org. Please note that we have shut down the site because of the latest restrictions, though volunteers will be keeping an eye on it.

Information on the AIBT 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 many photographs of the buildings, work parties, artefacts and structures discovered, the wildflowers and insects.

Photographs (August – November 2020)



Photo 1 – The laying of the pivot stones in progress, looking towards the inside of the Cornish Engine House from the scaffolding on the outside of the walls. The steel pins that hold various fragments of the right-hand stone in place can be seen in the centre of the photo above the hand brush.



Photo 2 – View of the Cornish Engine House from the top of the Old Pit heapstead, with the northern corner of the building in the foreground. The arrow marks the position of the pivot stones.



Photo 3 –The northern corner of the Cornish Engine House with its new flagstone floor. The edge of the condenser pit is on the left-hand side of the photo ...



Photo 4 – ... and the south-west (entrance side) of the engine house. The yellow patch in the top of the photo is a warning sign on the barrier around the condenser pit.



Photo 5 – View of the top of the Horizontal Engine House from the New Pit heapstead. The white area running around below the bricks on top of the walls is the new flaunching (see comments on p.2).



Photo 6 – Close-up of the flaunching at the drain in the northern corner of the engine house.



Photo 7 – The replacement low wall built along the edge of the fan house using reclaimed bricks capped with a row of modern bricks.

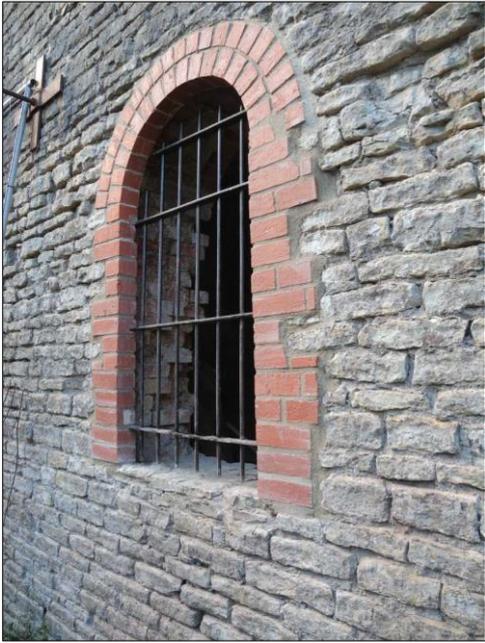


Photo 8 – The reinstated window grille in the south-east wall of the Horizontal Engine House. The grille had been vandalised for the second time in 2019 (see next photo).



Photo 9 – The extent of the damage to the brickwork surrounding the window in the south-east wall of the Horizontal Engine House in May 2019.



Photo 10 – Posts for the new fence have been sunk into the ground at the northern corner of the Old Pit enclosure ...



Photo 11 – ... and the same spot at the next work party. The 8 ft high palisades have been added and the 7 ft high section in the foreground runs along the edge of the cycle path.



Photo 12 – There is a sizeable gap between the new and old fences on the north-west (tippler) side of the Old Pit heapstead ...



Photo 13 – ... while the two fences are close together at the base of the New Pit heapstead ramp.



Photo 14 – The original interpretation board in front of the new fence around the Old Pit. The newer (AIBT) interpretation board has been moved from its position on the old fence to a spot on the new fence.



Photo 15 – The Midland Railway boundary marker found by Will Harris many years ago has been repainted and given a new location beside the cycle path.

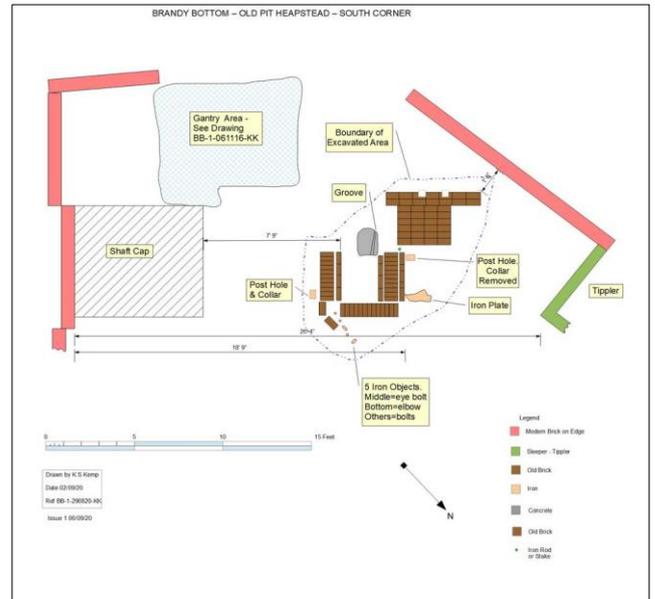


Photo 16 – Drawing of the structures seen in the photo on the top of p.1. (The 5 metal objects mentioned in the lowest box appear in close-up in photo 34 of newsletter N° 28. (©K Kemp, 2020)



Photo 17 – One of the metal collars after removal from a post hole, seen here still full of wood (30 cm scale)



Photo 18 – ... and after initial cleaning.(30 cm scale)



Photo 19 – The south-west edge of the structure seen on the right of the photo on p.2. (30 cm scale)



Photo 20 – Jeff (l) works on the safety railings for the steps at the south-west end of the Old Pit heapstead, while Pete and Ken (r) are surveying the area so that Ken can create the drawing seen in photo 16.



Photo 21 – Mark and Derek start to backfill the area around the structures at the south-west end of the Old Pit heapstead. They first covered the brickwork with a layer of sieved spoil, then a waterproof membrane followed by a final layer of spoil.



Photo 22 – Overall view of the brick structures at the north-east end of the Old Pit heapstead. The stone in the foreground marked with an arrow has holes drilled into it (see comment on p.3). (1 m red/white ranging poles and 30 cm yellow/black scale)

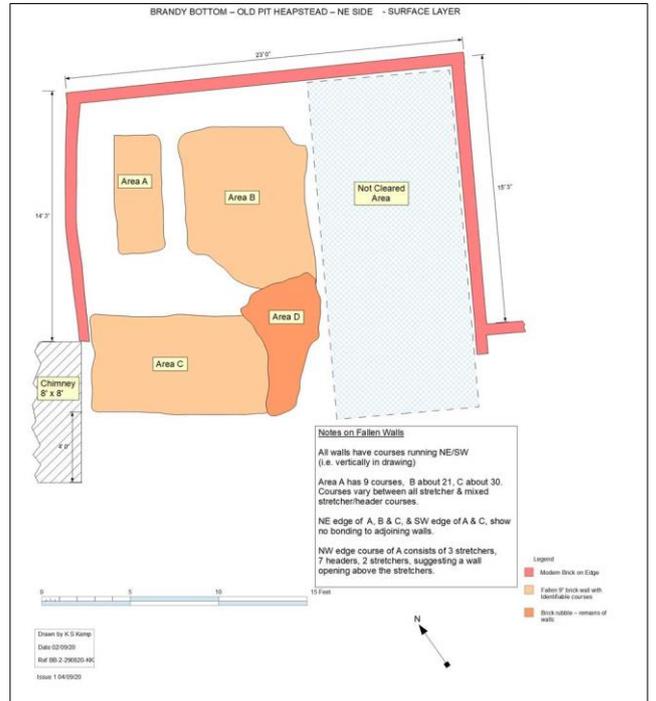


Photo 23 – Drawing showing the layout of the various brick structures before debris removal started. (©K Kemp, 2020)



Photo 24 – View of the collapsed walls on the north-western side, with Area C in the foreground and Area A in the background. The two stones marked by arrows in the foreground have holes drilled into them (see comment on p.3). (1 m red/white ranging pole)



Photo 25 – View of the gap in the brickwork between Areas A (on the right) and C. This gap is thought to be a doorway. (15 cm scale)



Photo 26 – The south-east edge of Area B before the bricks were removed. The salt-glazed pot, seen in the photo on p.3, was found towards the top of the photo along the line of bricks. (1 m red/white ranging pole and 30 cm yellow/black scale)



Photo 27 – Area C after some of the stretchers were removed to highlight the layout of the headers. (1 m red/white ranging poles)



Photo 28 – The stone floor lying under Area C can be seen in the foreground, while a partly dismantled Area A can be seen behind it. On the left the nearer ranging pole straddles the narrow gap between the building and the top of the Old Boiler House wall. (1 m red/white ranging poles)



Photo 29 – Area A has been partly dismantled, showing the arrangement of headers and footers. (1 m red/white ranging poles)



Photo 30 – The area between the foundations of the building on the left and the top of the Vertical Engine House wall (on the right) has been cleared of vegetation. (1 m red/white ranging pole)



Photo 31 – The brick plinth found under Area D can be seen on the right of the photo. (It also appears in the bottom right of photo [29](#)) In the foreground is a pit lying at the edge of the stone floor.



Photo 32 – Neil, Derek and Pete (l to r) working at the batch end of the Old Pit heapstead.



Photo 33 – Steve (l) and Pete clearing the ground on the north-east side of the collapsed building, with Neil in the background.



Photo 34 – This object is thought to be part of the 24" cylinder in the Vertical Engine House. (see comments on [p.3](#)).



Photo 35 – Pete built this two-compartment wood store out of old doors. It is situated on top of the concrete roof slab of the fan ducts.



Photo 38 – A volunteer assembles his kit for a digging session. The cushion was said to be for kneeling on, and not for ‘sleeping on the job.’



Photo 36 – Jeff completing the safety railings for the steps at the south-western end of the Old Pit heapstead.



Photo 39 – A *Pleated Ink Cap* growing on top of the Old Pit heapstead, which was identified with the aid of an app on Mick's phone.



Photo 37 – Hamish tries to demolish the old tree stump the hard way - with a hacksaw (Photo: M Fletcher).



Photo 40 – Comma butterfly resting on a bramble bush. Based on the time of the year (early September) and its pristine condition, it may well be one of the season's second brood.

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