

FRIENDS OF BRANDY BOTTOM COLLIERY, PUCKLECHURCH

Newsletter N° 3, May 2014



Progress on the paperwork has been slow, as both the Heritage Protection Agreement and the renewed lease remain outstanding. Numbers on-site have varied, but there has always been a strong contingent from the South Gloucestershire Mines Research Group plus other volunteers to help the AIBT members. Thank you.

Progress: February – May 2014

The masons were on site in early March, installing the internal ladder in the chimney. Unfortunately they had to stop before putting the final section in place, as the brickwork at the top needs repointing internally before the ladder can be fixed to it. We are still waiting for approval from English Heritage for this, and the final specifications for work on the outside of the top cannot be drawn up until the ladder is firmly fixed. The entrance to the flue has been closed off with a stout gate, which will hopefully prevent unauthorised access.

While the masons were aloft, the groundlings got on with site clearance. The path along the wall of the Old Pit heapstead turned the corner at the base of the heapstead ramp at the beginning of March and soon reached the Old Boiler House. The area around the base of the ramp turned out to be a right tip, with all sorts of glass bottles being found. They had contained a variety of things, such as 'Bovril', 'Wheat Products, Bradford', and '1001'. A selection of bottles and jars from this area can be seen in figure 1.



Among the metal objects found were a pole end chain (photo right), used to attach two team horses to a vehicle, and a Palmolive shaving soap container (figure 2).

The inside of the Old Boiler House has now been tidied up, and we are ready to start work on strengthening the structure when English Heritage gives us the go-ahead. As can be seen from figure 4, the inside of the boiler house was heavily overgrown. The photo on the right shows work in progress on 29 March, while figure 5 shows the area ready for the next stage. As well as the structural work mentioned later, the walls need repointing. Figure 6 shows a window which was uncovered in the north-east wall.



One of the artefacts found in this area was the remains of a 14" long hand shovel (figure 7).

Clearance of spoil against the northern corner of the New Pit heapstead in early April uncovered the base of a wall (see right). This would appear to be the southern end of the building that first appears in the 1936 OS map after the removal of the railway lines. This building ran the whole length of the Horizontal Engine House, and its purpose is another of the site's mysteries. Interestingly the visible courses of bricks in this wall are not keyed into the wall of the heapstead.



After the Old Boiler House, attention turned to the Vertical Engine House. A temporary stockpile of stones inside the building has been relocated to the outside. Spoil clearance at the northern end of the building uncovered a beam socket set into the north-western wall (figure 8). Buried in the spoil were two fine examples of bricks, one with 'Shortwood' embossed into the frog and the other with an ornate frog (figure 9).

Seating in the 'al-fresco lunch area' has been increased, following the demise of the tree that was trying to push the fan ducts over (photo right). Some of the trunk has been converted into a bench seat, while the rest is now firewood. Another seat was manufactured from a tree bough that was growing where we plan to site a storage container. Conversation is varied: from the focused (different parts of the site), to the generally practical (availability and suitability of tools for different voluntary projects) and the wider ranging (misdemeanours of apprentices vs those of university students).



Future Projects

Final installation of the chimney ladder and the laying of the waterproof membrane on the roof of the Horizontal Engine House should be completed shortly. Proposals have also been submitted to English Heritage for a generic method for repointing/relaying masonry, and for specific repairs to both the top of the chimney and in the Old Boiler House. There are two main areas to be addressed in the latter. The brickwork at the base of the chimney has collapsed at some time in the past (see photo above right), probably because a much earlier repair was built on debris rather than a sound footing. And the north-east wall is bulging inwards due to pressure from the waste on the adjoining batch. All this work, if approved, will probably form the bulk of operations in 2014. There is also a plan to collect more stone, with our plans to do so over the winter being thwarted by the wet weather.



Dates for work parties for the rest of 2014 are:

Wed 21, Sat 31 May; Wed 11, Sat 21 June; Wed 02, Sat 12, Wed 23 July; Sat 09, Wed 20, Sat 30 August; Wed 10, Sat 27 September; Sat 11, Wed 22 October; Sat 08, Wed 19 November; Sat 06 December. Please note: these dates may be altered at short notice. Newcomers are advised to first make contact via the AIBT's email address of info@aibt.org.



Figure 1 - a selection of glass bottles and jars found by the base of the Old Pit heapstead ramp.



Figure 2 - Palmolive shaving soap container found at base of Old Pit heapstead ramp. (5 cm scale)



Figure - 3 Close supervision can be provided ...



Figure 4 - Old Boiler House on 25 Jan 14 before clearance work started.



Figure 5 - Old Boiler House from heapstead ramp (03 May 14).



Figure 6 - Window opening in north-east wall of Old Boiler House.



Figure 7 - Remains of metal hand shovel, found in Old Boiler House.



Figure 8 - Remains of beam socket found in north-west wall of Vertical Engine House.



Figure 9 - Two bricks in good condition found in the Vertical Engine House.



Figure 10 - Wildflower on top of wall of Horizontal Engine House on 29 Mar.



Figure 11 - Wildflower growing beside cycle path on 03 May.

All photos are by Robin Whitworth (© 2014). Scale is generally indicated by either a black/white 1 ft ruler or a yellow/black 30 cm ruler.