

FRIENDS OF BRANDY BOTTOM COLLIERY, PUCKLECHURCH

Newsletter N^o 5, November 2014



This last quarter has seen a surge in reconstruction work. The masons have finished working on the top of the chimney, apart from repointing the outside, and hopefully these repairs will preserve this iconic landmark for many years to come. They are currently working on the roof of the Horizontal Engine House. At the same time the volunteers started rebuilding the base of the chimney in the Old Boiler House, and repairing the latter's north-east wall. There was also some clearance work elsewhere on the site.

Unfortunately there were several break-ins during the quarter, when the boundary fence was deliberately cut and on one occasion the gate to the chimney was damaged. It is probably the work of some youngsters who have also been causing damage to plant at the near-by tip. We would like to thank the falconer for keeping an eye on the site for us. The police have been informed about the damage, and two Police Community Support Officers came to the site in October to give advice on what could be done.

Progress: September-November 2014

The masons returned in September and completed work on the top of the chimney. The top course of badly eroded ornamental stonework was removed and replaced with a concrete ring that was cast in-situ. This will increase the stability of the top as the ring is bolted to the stonework below. The inside of the top section of the chimney was repointed at the same time. The photo on the right shows the top of the chimney from the south after the repairs, while for



comparison photo 1 was taken from almost the same viewpoint in March 2014. The masons have still to complete repointing the outside of the top. Some photos of both the site and the surrounding countryside (photos 4-6, 17) were taken while the masons were still at work and able to give easier access to the top. Most of the surrounding countryside is relatively featureless, but the top of the Parkfield chimney can just be made out hidden among the trees. That photo has not been included as the chimney is a tiny speck even on an enlarged copy of the photo. It was not possible at the time to take photos looking down on Vertical Engine House and the Old Boiler House, due to freshly-laid mortar on the top of the chimney. Photo 3 was taken before the concrete ring was cast, and gives an idea of the width of the masonry at the top.



A start was made in October on the rebuilding of the base of the chimney in the Old Boiler House. At some time in the past, probably when the boilers were moved to the other side of the chimney, the flue to the chimney had been bricked up. Poor foundations had led to the collapse of the brickwork over time. The wagon plate, shown in the first FoBB Newsletter, was found here during exploratory trenching in 2013. The photo to the right shows the state of the base of the chimney before rebuilding started. By the end of October



the rebuild had reached the bottom of the flue, which is the vertical slot seen in the middle of the picture. A close-up of the flue can be seen in photo 7. It will be kept as a feature in the rebuild, which uses bricks recovered from the spoil in the floor of the Old Boiler House.

Part of the end of the north-east wall of the Old Boiler House was also rebuilt. This section was on the eastern side of what was probably a window opening, and the end of the partially rebuilt section can be seen in the centre of the photo on the right. The rebuild also used bricks recovered from the floor of the Old Boiler House. There is still some repointing to be done to the original bricks at the base of the wall, and the rebuilt section has still to be capped with some of the large Pennant stones recovered from the site in Pucklechurch.



Excavation of the winding drum pit in the Vertical Engine House continued. The original bottom has been reached at both ends, but the centre, currently used for wheelbarrow access, has still to be cleared. While the south-western end was paved with flagstones, the bottom at the north-eastern end was a layer of oil-soaked spoil. Among the few notable finds were the remains of a window frame found in the north-east end. It was buried under some sizeable pieces of building stone, suggesting that the wall had collapsed around it. Two fragments of a large pot with a glazed interior (photo 11) were also found at this end.

The masons returned at the end of October to work on the roof of the Horizontal Engine House. By early November they had built up the top of the walls so that there is an enclosed space to hold the waterproof membrane. This can be seen in photo 8 after what had been a rainy night, but there is still some work to be done before the final waterproof membrane is laid. The sheets that can be seen in the photo are only an intermediate layer. The waterproof membrane will be covered with a protective layer of fine gravel. Photo 9 is a telephoto close-up of the eastern corner of the roof.

Photo 10 is a close-up from below of the northern corner, showing the stones that have been placed to throw rainwater draining from the roof away from the wall below. The masons are due to finish work on the roof by the middle of November, assuming that there is a let-up in the current rainy weather.

More of the path along the base of the north-west wall of the New Pit heapstead has been cleared, uncovering the two railway chairs seen in photos 12 and 13. While the one in photo 13 was probably used for the mainline railway, the other would have been used with the lighter rails found on the Dramway or on the mine's internal tram lines. Deciding which requires further research.

Future Projects

The masons will repoint the outside of the top of the chimney once English Heritage approves the proposed method of working. There is still work for the volunteers on rebuilding the base of the chimney and the north-east wall of the Old Boiler House, and then the latter will be braced against the heapstead. There are also many other places where walls need to be partially rebuilt and/or repointed, and this will keep us busy for some time to come.

Dates of work parties for the rest of 2014 are:

Wed 19 November; Sat 06 December.

Please note that 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.

Photographs



Photo 1 – View of the top of the chimney in March 2014. This was taken from about the same spot as the one of the finished top, seen on the first page.



Photo 2 – One of the masons at work on the top of the chimney.



Photo 3 – Close-up of the top of the chimney during the rebuild, before the concrete ring was cast.



Photo 6 – View to the east from the top of the chimney, with the edge of the tip on the right.



Photo 4 – View of the Cornish Engine House from the top of the chimney.



Photo 7 – Close-up of the bricked-up flue to the chimney in the Old Boiler House.



Photo 5 – View of the fields to the north-west from the top of the chimney. The long grey object in the left background is the Sainsbury's distribution centre in Emerald Park.



Photo 8 – Reconstruction work on the roof of the Horizontal Engine House underway at last.



Photo 9 – Close-up of the eastern corner of the Horizontal Engine House roof, showing the rebuilt walls and an intermediate membrane in place.



Photo 10 – Close-up of the northern corner of the Horizontal Engine House, showing the stonework placed to channel water draining from the roof away from the walls below.



Photo – 11 Fragments of a large pot with a glazed interior, found in the winding drum pit, Vertical Engine House.



Photo 12 – Light rail chair found at base of north-west wall of the New Pit heapstead.



Photo 13 – Rail chair found at base of north-west wall of the New Pit heapstead.



Photo 14 – The dirt is sent flying out of the winding drum pit in the Vertical Engine House.



Photo 15 – Rebuilding the corner by the window in the Old Boiler House.



Photo 16 – Rebuilding the base of the chimney in the Old Boiler House.



Photo 17 – View of the New Pit area from the top of the chimney. The container can be seen in the left foreground, with the Horizontal Engine House hidden behind the tree to its right. The pale-coloured square object in the middle is the New Pit shaft capping.

All photos are by Robin Whitworth (© 2014). Size is indicated by yellow/black 30 cm, black/white 1 foot, or white/blue 5 cm scales.