

FRIENDS OF BRANDY BOTTOM COLLIERY, PUCKLECHURCH

Newsletter N° 9, November 2015



Work on site during the quarter was concentrated on the Vertical Engine House, where a drain was uncovered under the floor of the winding drum pit, together with an engine bed in the eastern corner of the building. There have also been discussions with Historic England about a possible grant for the patching and capping of some of the walls on site by professional masons.

Progress: September-November 2015

(Photos 1-21 will be found in the last section of the newsletter)

Photographs were been taken of the original edge of the Old Pit heapstead (photos 1-2). As mentioned in the previous newsletter, N° 8, this had been uncovered during vegetation clearance. The brick edge is about 30 cm high, and is currently unsupported as the stone face of the heapstead below has crumbled away. Rebuilding the wall is one of a number of items on the contract of work that is currently being drawn up.

The top of the central wall in the Vertical Engine House was uncovered over August and September (photo right, 30 cm black/yellow scales), allowing an assessment to be made of the work need to cap it and also to build it up its south-western end to support the overhanging section of wall. That section can be seen at the top of the photo. At the same time a narrow trench was dug along the eastern face of the central wall, uncovering a series of bolts for holding down various parts of the engine together with a wooden plate at the south-western end. The plate has been inset into the stonework and fixed with 6 bolts. A close-up of the plate can be seen in photo 3. What it signifies is still to be determined.



Spoil removal continued in the winding drum pit of the Vertical Engine House. The existence of two stone structures, both originally thought to be drains, was reported in newsletter N° 8. Further spoil removal showed that one is indeed a drain, while a holding down beam was inserted into the other. These structures can be seen in the photo on the right, together with a 27" x 18" manhole that had been covered by the 3/8" thick iron plate that is



resting against the wall at the top of the photo.

The arched structure of the drain can be seen more clearly in photo 5, with views in both directions shown in photos 6 and 7. The drain in photo 6 goes in the direction of the pit in the nearby alcove in the heapstead, while the one in photo 7 disappears under the batch and heads in the direction of the Old Boiler House. So far it has not been possible to establish where the drains came from or where they were going to. They are too small for someone to wriggle down, and 'selfie sticks' have a limited range. (Yes a 5 feet long one has been tried, with the small camera swivelled 180° and set to take flash photos at 10 second intervals.) There is a possibility that the drain carried the water away from the pumping shaft, but to prove that requires the drain to be traced back to the shaft - What is needed is one of those cameras on tracks that water companies use ... which for us is probably the proverbial pipe dream.

One artefact uncovered in this area was the 4½" dia. glass stopper seen in photo 10, which bears the legend 'Cannington Shaw & Co St Helens' around the rim. Research by a South Gloucestershire Mines Research Group (SGMRG) member has established that the company operated between 1875 and 1913, and that the style of lettering on the stopper was in use between 1875 and 1892. Cannington Shaw was one of 6 companies that amalgamated to form the United Glass Bottle Manufacturing Co.

One of the items on the masonry contract is the strengthening of the walls of the Vertical Engine House, rebuilding where necessary and also capping the walls to protect the walls from rain. A start was made in October on clearing spoil from the inside of the south-east wall, starting at the doorway and working northwards. This first uncovered a lone stub of a holding down bolt near the entrance, which can be seen in photo 11. This bolt is in line with a row of others to its north. Then several cream-coloured bricks were found with fragments of the word 'Bovey', which may have been part of the fireplace. This is an area where a 1982 photo showed there to have been a fireplace. Photo 12 shows the most complete brick, with just the final Y missing. These bricks may well have come from the brickworks at Bovey Tracey. If so, why was the local supply of bricks ignored? As the spoil clearance continued northwards, the remains of an elevated engine bed was uncovered, and the photo above right shows progress at the end of October. The size of the bed is indicated by the 30 cm yellow/black scale.

The engine bed was fully uncovered in early November (photo right), lying under the heavy stone slab seen lying behind it against the wall. The slab can be seen in its original position in photo 13, and photo 14 is a close-up of the engine bed. When



the scrap metal workers came to strip out the cylinder, they were obviously unable to undo one of the nuts. Plan B appears to have been an attempt to split the nut in two with a cold chisel (photo 15), but that did not succeed. Instead they must have gone for Plan C and broken the cylinder casing apart, leaving a fragment still attached to the bolt. Finding the engine bed was totally unexpected. As the 1900 sales catalogue mentioned two cylinders, the next item on the agenda is to find where the second was located. As part of this exercise, the positions of the numerous holding down bolts, including several long ones that are outside the north-east and south-west walls, will have to be plotted.

More spoil clearance in the area of the fan engine house in October unearthed a brick-lined pit in the eastern corner of the building (photo right). It is approximately in line with the northern of the fan ducts, and its purpose, as is so often the case at Brandy Bottom, has still to be established. It was closed by a trapdoor, suggesting that frequent access was needed.



There have been many discussions during work parties about the various phases of building at the Old Pit heapstead. One current area of interest is in the Vertical Engine House, where there are changes in both brick size and bond pattern in the heapstead wall above the south-western end of the winding drum pit. This wall would have been underneath the path of the winding ropes between the drum and the headgear. Photo 17 is a general view of the wall, while photo 18 is a close-up of the area of interest. Part of the adjacent, north-west, wall of the Vertical Engine House can be seen in photo 19. The wall follows the usual heapstead pattern of brick over stone, but a thin course of stone can be seen running between two brick courses in the middle of the picture.

The chimney is a potential target for a lightning strike as it is the highest feature in the surrounding landscape. The ladder has now been earthed, which might help to minimise the damage caused by a strike. Several photos have been taken of the inside of the flue at the base of the chimney, where there are as yet unexplained passages leading into the depths of the heapstead. The photo to the right is a view looking from the chimney end of the flue towards the open air. It shows that the brickwork in that part of the flue is in remarkably good condition.



The SGMRG has unearthed some more old press cuttings about Brandy Bottom. The most recent, from the *Western Daily Press* of 16 October 1937, announced the sale by private treaty of the buildings and 20 acres of land of both Parkfield and Brandy Bottom. The agents were Albert Ford, Howes & Williams of Small Street, Bristol, and this is another lead to be followed up as the sales catalogue, if it existed, might contain details of the remaining machinery.

A reader pointed out that the wildflower seen in photo 21 of the last newsletter should have been captioned as Herb Robert, and not as Red Campion. Thank you for the correction.

There is now a set of laminated A4-sized copies of the Brandy Bottom display boards on the inside of the container door (seen on the right), for the benefit of passers-by on work party days. There are also copies on the Brandy Bottom 'Display Boards' sub-page on the AIBT's website: www.aibt.org.



In early November a party of archaeological students visited Brandy Bottom as part of their field trip to conservation sites in the area.

An account of progress at Brandy Bottom, with photographs, can be found on the website, together with copies of all previous newsletters. The Brandy Bottom section of the website was expanded in September to include a page about the history of the colliery, however for copyright reasons this does not include any of the maps or photos used in the historical report. Paper copies of the report are available through the website.

Future Work Parties

Access to the site is limited to days when there is a work party in progress. The dates of proposed work parties for the rest of 2015 are: Sat 14 Nov; Sat 05 Dec.

The dates for 2016 have still to be decided and will be published on the website when available. Please note that these dates may be altered at short notice, so newcomers are advised to first make contact via the AIBT's email address of info@aibt.org.

Photographs



Photo 1 – The original brick raised edge of the Old Pit heapstead from the top of the heapstead. (30 cm scale)



Photo 2 – The original edge of the Old Pit heapstead can be seen in the centre of the photo. The apparent overhang has been caused by the face of the heapstead wall below crumbling away.



Photo 3 – Close-up of wooden plate (below 30 cm yellow/black scale) inset into the stonework of the south-western wall of the Vertical Engine House and fixed with 6 bolts.



Photo 4 – Close-up of part of the central wall of the Vertical Engine House, with the winding drum pit in the background. (30 cm scale)



Photo 5 – Close-up of the manhole in the base of the winding drum pit, Vertical Engine House, showing the arched construction of the top of the drain.



Photo 6 – View southwards along drain running under winding drum pit, Vertical Engine House. (© K Kemp)



Photo 7 – View northwards along drain running from winding drum pit towards Old Boiler House. (© S Grudgings)



Photo 8 – Spoil being cleared from the drain under the winding drum pit. (© S Grudgings)



Photo 9 – Shortwood brick (top) found beside central wall of the Vertical Engine House, with the reversed

image of the frog in the mortar attached to the brick below. The lower brick also has 'Shortwood' imprinted into its frog.



Photo 10 – 4½” dia. glass stopper bearing the inscription 'Cannington Shaw & Co St Helens' around the rim. (10 cm x 10 cm scale)



Photo 11 – Stub of holding down bolt next to the south-east wall of the Vertical Engine House, with the entrance door at the top right of the photo.



Photo 12 – Brick with most of the legend 'Bovey' visible on the face, found near the entrance to the Vertical Engine House. (30 cm scale)



Photo 13 – The engine bed in the Vertical Engine House before the stone slab covering it was lifted.



Photo 14 – Close-up of the engine bed found in early November in the north-east corner of the Vertical Engine House. (30 cm scale)



Photo 15 – This nut, one of 4 that held a cylinder down in the Vertical Engine House, has been partly cut in two with a cold chisel. A scrap of the cylinder casing, left attached to the bolt, can be seen in to the left and top of the bolt. (30 cm scale)



Photo 16 – Clearance work on both the inside and outside the Vertical Engine House.



Photo 17 – Section of the south-west wall above the winding drum pit in the Vertical Engine House. The area where there is a change in the bond and of the type of bricks used is in the middle, and can be seen in close-up below.



Photo 18 – Close-up of the centre of the south-west wall of the Vertical Engine House, showing the area above the winding drum pit where the bond and type of bricks change.



Photo 19 – Close-up of the north-west wall of the Vertical Engine House. The bottom of the wall is made of stone, with brick above. Note the single course of thin stone running across the middle of the photo.



Photo 20 – A fine crop of apples ripening along the boundary fence of the Old Pit in September. How the tree got there is yet another Brandy Bottom mystery - probably growing from someone's discarded apple core. However the apples left an aftertaste in the mouth when sampled in mid-October.



Photo 21 – Evening Primrose in flower at the end of September.

Unless otherwise stated all photos are by R Whitworth (© 2015).