

FRIENDS OF BRANDY BOTTOM COLLIERY, PUCKLECHURCH

Newsletter N° 15, May 2017

(Photos 1-39 will be found on page 5 onwards)



We have received a grant of £20 000 from the Ibstock Cory Environmental Trust, which be used to employ masons to work on the New Pit. They will cap the tops of the heapstead walls, replace part of the missing stone face of its north-west wall, and rebuild the brickwork around the window and door openings of the Horizontal Engine House. This will have the effect of stabilising the structures for the foreseeable future. The trust is an environmental body, founded in 2001, which awards grants to community, heritage and environmental projects through the Landfill Communities Fund. More information on the trust can be found on their website (www.ibstockcory.org.uk). The AIBT would like to thank the Ibstock Cory Environmental Trust for this financial contribution to the project.

The pace of work has not let up, as there have been 18 work parties since the last newsletter and a total of 26 so far in 2017. The tops of the New Pit heapstead walls have been exposed, partly so that detailed specifications could be drawn up for the proposed conservation work, and partly so that we are aware of any archaeological features before the masons start work. The area round the winding ramp of the New Pit heapstead has also been explored. A 30 foot long egg-ended boiler was purchased from a collector in Kent, and delivered to the site in April.

The comments made by passers-by on the forestry work have mainly been favourable, though there are some who lament the loss of the trees. What is noticeable is the increase in the numbers who stop and ask for a tour. They often remark that they had no idea of what was going on, and are delighted to see that a piece of history is being conserved.

Progress: February – May 2017

Further excavation work in February around the foundations for the egg-ended boiler uncovered the remains of the firebox (photo right). The light coloured brick, seen at the top of the photo and in close-up in photo 1, bears the makers name 'Johnson Andrew & Co' with a crown as an emblem. So far we have not been able to discover more about its maker. Hidden in the spoil were the pottery fragments seen in photos 2 and 3. The piece seen in photo 2 is part of an ornate item, as the surface is indented below the white markings that run diagonally across the piece.



One of the items in the 1900 sale catalogue was a 30 foot long egg-ended boiler. This, plus many other items, has vanished from the site over time, possibly when the scrap metal merchant was

clearing the place in the 1960s. A replacement has been purchased from a collector in Kent, and it was delivered on an articulated lorry in April (photo 4). The driver was very skilful, as they invariably are, in manoeuvring his long vehicle off the cycle path, between the two fenced areas and the storage container and then alongside the temporary storage bank (photo 6). The intention is to put the boiler onto its original foundations outside the south-east wall of the Cornish Engine House, once that area has been cleared, so that it can represent some of the missing machinery.

This year we intend to rebuild the tops of the walls of the New Pit heapstead to protect the walls against frost damage. The tops were cleared of spoil in the early part of the year so that detailed specifications could be drawn up for the rebuilding contract. This has highlighted some differences in construction between the north-west wall of the New Pit heapstead and its Old Pit equivalent. The adjacent photo shows part of the north-west wall of the New Pit heapstead. There appears to be a later



brick wall (beside the '5' in the photo) built across the face of what may have been a tippler slot, a feature which was not found on the Old Pit tippler slots. Photo 10 shows the section to the left of the '4' in the above photo, and there the construction is the same as that of the Old Pit slots.

More has been found out about the pipe located at the top of this wall, whose discovery was reported in the last newsletter and which can be seen from above in photo 13. We now know that it runs from the shaft and would have connected with the section of pipe found at ground level in 2014. That in turn appears to be connected with the nearest culvert feeding the pond, suggesting that the pipe drained water away from the top of the shaft.

Examination of the 1947 and 1955 aerial photos of the site showed that there was a building at the top of the New Pit heapstead ramp. The 1947 photo shows a chimney on the south-western side of the roof, while the building is roofless in the 1955 one. The latter does indicate that there was a doorway at the eastern corner, something that was confirmed when the bottoms of the walls were uncovered in 2013 (photo 15). The interior was left undisturbed, and the presence of a brick floor was only discovered this year when the north-west end was cleared of spoil as part of the heapstead wall clearance (photos: right with 30 cm scales; 16 to 18). As can be seen from photo 17, the floor in the western corner of the building has subsided in the region around the '1' and '2'. However there is a definite plinth in another area, marked by '5' in the photo on the right and in photo 18. The brick floor has now been covered up again to protect it while the masons are working on the adjacent



section of the heapstead wall. At the moment the building's function is another of Brandy Bottom's mysteries. It was built at some time between the surveys for the 1915 and 1936 OS maps, so would not have been connected with coal hoisting. The building is located opposite what appears to have

been a bridge attached to the south-east wall of the heapstead, which in turn is connected to the batch. This bridge appears in the OS maps from 1903 onwards.

Spoil was removed from the winding ramp on the top of the New Pit heapstead. Stretched across the middle was a length of wire rope, which had originally been connected to another length on the outside of the north-west wall (photo right). The length outside the wall was formed into a loop that was connected to an anchorage point. Photo 19 shows the whole of the rope/anchorage in-situ, seen from the winding ramp end. In it, '1' marks the point where the wire rope was clamped back on itself and '2' where the loop is attached to the bolt. '4' marks the plate at the end of the bolt, which appeared to have been braced against some timber. Photo 20 shows the two pieces after lifting from the trench. The spoil removal revealed the asymmetric layout of the walls of the ramp, and photo 21 shows that the gap narrows towards the Horizontal Engine House. The right hand wall in the photo points towards the centre of the brick arch, while the left hand one points towards the edge of the arch. This suggests that the layout was changed at some time from the original twin cage to a single cage operation.



Further exploration work in the pond area has uncovered another water inlet, and some glass bottles. The one seen on the right is a 7¾" high half pint capacity brown bottle (30 cm scale). This, judging by the thickness of the walls and an internal thread in the neck, would have held a gassy liquid under pressure such as ginger beer. Written in raised lettering around the shoulder is the name 'John Arnold & Sons Wickwar'. So far we have been able to establish that that brewery was closed down



after it was taken over by the Bristol Brewery Georges & Co in 1917. A fragment of a clear glass bottle, photo 24, carries the legend 'Ross, Elliott & Weston Leicester' in raised lettering on a flat side. Research shows that the company were 'wine, spirit, ale, stout and cider merchants'. Company papers between 1882 and 1968 can be found in the Leicestershire Archives, suggesting that the company may have been closed or taken over in 1968. This fragment looks like the remains of a spirit bottle, say the size below a ¼ bottle, but of very uncertain date. As well as the complete 2 pint capacity brown bottle (photo 25), the broken-off necks of two similar bottles were uncovered. This work has led to the discovery of two more conduits that feed water to the pond.

George Watkins, the Bristol-based steam engine photographer, visited Brandy Bottom in the 1930s. In his notebooks, which are held at the NMR, Swindon, he records that there was a 54" diameter cylinder with a 6' 6" stroke in the Cornish engine House. The 1900 sale catalogue lists a 60" cylinder with an 8' stroke. The diameters of the 3 pump pistons are also different. There may have been a major change in the pumping equipment between the two dates. If so, it may, and at present this is pure conjecture, have some bearing on the crack found running across the stone engine bed when the floor of the engine house was cleared of spoil in 2012. The bed can be seen in the photo above, which taken at that time (1ft scale). However, and this is always the case with Brandy Bottom, one discovery leads to more questions. For example if the shaft was capped in 1923, as we believe from the inscription in the concrete capping, why did Watkins indicate pump rods in his drawing made around 8 years later? It is a case of back to the archives to sort out the discrepancies ...



As the bulk of the pre-conservation work has been finished on the New Pit side, attention has returned to the Vertical Engine House. A protective cover is in the process of being fixed over the sump in the engine bay (photos 26 and 27), and more spoil was removed from under the engine bed.

Passers-by have been given impromptu tours of the site at most work parties, sometimes as many as three tours on a single day. Work on site has now progressed to the point where it could be opened to the public on a more formal basis, and discussions are in progress with various organisations. Details will be published once the arrangements are finalised.

There are copies of all previous FoBB newsletters on the 'Archive' page of our website (www.aibt.org), together with over 250 photographs of the buildings, work in progress, artefacts found, etc on the Brandy Bottom project pages.

Future Work Parties

At present access to the site is limited to days when there is a work party in progress. The date for work parties for the rest of 2017 are: Sat 20 May; Sat 03, Wed 14, Sat 24 June; Sat 08, Wed 12, Sat 22 July; Sat 05 (South Gloucestershire Show), Wed 09, Sat 19 August; Sat 02, Wed 13, Sat 23 September; Sat 07, Wed 11, Sat 21, Sat 28 September; Sat 04, Wed 08, Sat 18 November; Sat 02, Wed 13 December. Please note that work parties may be altered at short notice, so newcomers are advised to first make contact via the AIBT's email address of info@aibt.org.

There is a location map on a dedicated page of the website, together with directions to the site.

Photographs

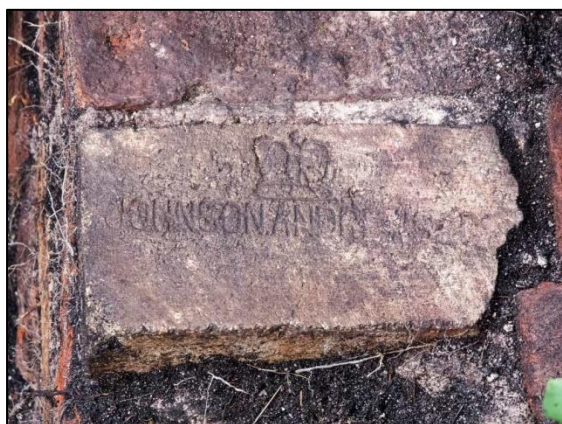


Photo 1 – Close-up of the Johnson Andrew & Co brick that forms part of the base of the egg-ended boiler outside the south-east wall of the Cornish Engine House.



Photo 2 – Decorated piece of pottery discovered when removing spoil from the egg-ended boiler foundations outside the Cornish Engine House. (10 cm x 10 cm scale)



Photo 3 – Decorated pieces of pottery discovered when removing spoil from the egg-ended boiler foundations outside the Cornish Engine House. (10 cm x 10 cm scale)



Photo 4 – Egg-ended boiler waiting to make its approach to Brandy Bottom ...



Photo 5 – ... almost at the mine ... (© M Taylor, 2017)



Photo 6 – ... ready to be off-loaded onto a temporary holding area ...



Photo 7 – ... and being rolled back into a stable position after off-loading.



Photo 8 – The inside of one end of the boiler.



Photo 9 – Two passers-by look at the existing interpretation board, while behind them the ground is cleared for one of the new boards.



Photo 10 – Part of the top of the north-west wall of the New Pit heapstead, seen from above.



Photo 11 – Slot in north-west wall of the New Pit heapstead after the removal of the encroaching ivy. The left hand end of the brick section can be seen adjacent to the '1' marker in the previous photo.



Photo 12 – The inside of the left hand end of the slot, containing a fragment of the original wooden beam.



Photo 13 – The northern end of the north-west wall of the New Pit heapstead, with the remains of the drain pipe in the middle of the photo. (See comments on page 2)



Photo 14 – The length and direction of the drain pipe in the north-west wall of the New Pit heapstead is probed, while spoil clearance continues above.



Photo 15 – Exploration work in July 2013 uncovered the foundations at the south-eastern end of the building that stood at the top of the New Pit heapstead ramp.



Photo 16 – Close-up of the western corner of the building after spoil removal. (30 cm scale)



Photo 17 – The same corner as in photo 16, but from a different angle that shows the subsidence in the area around the '2' more clearly.



Photo 18 – Looking towards the western corner (marked by '1' and '2', with the raised plinth (marked '5') in the foreground. (30 cm scales)



Photo 19 – The wire rope and anchorage point in-situ to the north-west of the winding ramp, New Pit heapstead. (30 cm scales)



Photo 20 – The wire rope and anchorage point, seen in the middle of the photo, after removal from the trench. (30 cm scale below the loop in the wire)



Photo 21 – The partially uncovered winding ramp of the New Pit heapstead. The gap between the walls narrows towards the Horizontal Engine House.



Photo 22 – Spoil clearance in progress along the winding ramp, New Pit heapstead.



Photo 23 – This ornate 4 1/4" by 3" lid was found in the spoil removed from the winding ramp, New Pit heapstead. (10 cm x 10 cm scale)



Photo 24 – Fragment of a clear glass bottle carrying the legend 'Ross, Elliott & Weston Leicester' in raised lettering on the flat side. (See comments on page 3, cm scale)



Photo 25 – 2 pint capacity bottle found in the pond area. (30 cm scale)



Photo 26 – Building the supporting framework for the sump cover in the Vertical Engine House ...



Photo 27 – ... and the cover is temporarily put in place to check the fit.



Photo 28 – The buildings at the new Lyde Green development get closer. (2x magnification)



Photo 29 – A discussion on the rebuild of the top of the north-west wall of the New Pit heapstead.



Photo 30 – Work on the winding ramp area, New Pit heapstead in May.



Photo 31 – Lunchtime in the sun on one April work party. A similar scene a few years ago prompted a passer-by to enquire "if this was the Teddy Bears' picnic."



Photo 32 – Coltsfoot in bloom on the top of the New Pit heapstead in March. (5 cm x 5 cm scale)



Photo 33 – Wildflower, probably a Bugle, growing on top of New Pit heapstead ramp in April ... (cm scale)

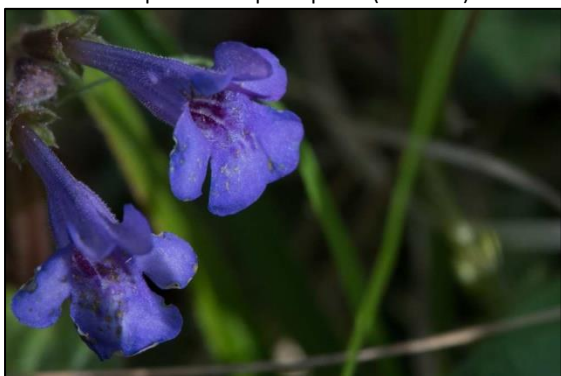


Photo 34 – ... and a close-up of the flowers.



Photo 35 – Blossom on a tree alongside the cycle path a short distance to the south of Brandy Bottom (April).



Photo 36 – Hawthorn trees in flower around the pond area in May.



Photo 37 – Tiny (2-3 mm across) wildflowers, possibly an Early Forget-me-not, on top of New Pit heapstead in May.

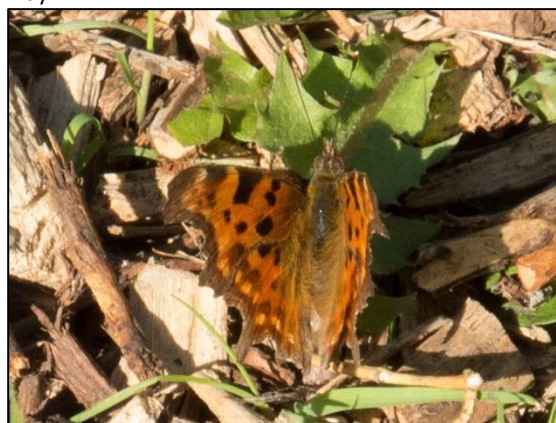


Photo 38 – Comma butterfly at rest near the entrance to the Old Pit.



Photo 39 – One of three frogs rescued from the sump in the Vertical Engine House, on its way to being released into the pond.

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