

Friends of Brandy Bottom Colliery Pucklechurch



Newsletter N° 32, August 2021

Photo 1 – The tops of both heapsteads become wildflower meadows in summer. When the photo was taken mowing had been restricted to paths around the tops. This view of the New Pit heapstead in June shows the path leading to the winding ramp, while Jeff can be seen on the right mowing an extension towards the area above the fan ducts.

There have been nine work parties since the last newsletter, bringing the year-to-date total to twenty. Work has concentrated on site maintenance, including removing parts of the original fence around the Old Pit. The routes taken by several underground pipes has been traced, a start has been made on conserving the foundations of the building on the top of the Old Pit heapstead, and work is well underway on getting the site ready for the Heritage Open Days weekend.

Progress: June - August 2021

Pipe tracing continued in June, and photo [6](#) shows Derek at work on the top of the New Pit heapstead while Ken looks on. As reported in the last newsletter (N° 31), a pipe at the base of the north-west wall of the New Pit heapstead had been traced as running underground to the conduit above the pond (B in photo 2 on the right). This pipe must have originally run up the wall of the heapstead as we discovered a section sticking out of an area of damaged wall during restoration work in January 2017 (photo [7](#)). As this part of the wall facing was to be rebuilt, a length of modern pipe was fitted over the original so that it protruded through the new wall face to mark the spot (photo [8](#)). Tracing confirmed our earlier suspicions that the pipe on the top of the heapstead ran towards the New Pit shaft. In 2012 we discovered a metal pipe when clearing the ground outside the north-west wall of the Horizontal Engine House (photo [10](#)). At the time we did

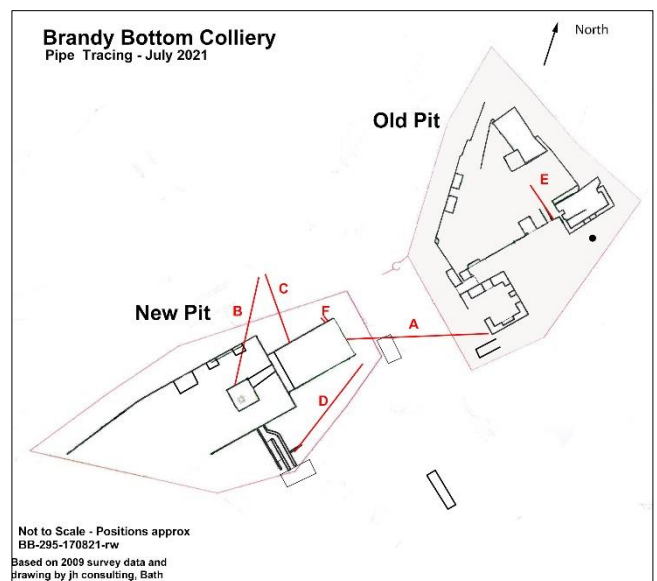


Photo 2 – Position of the underground pipes traced in July 2021.



not have the ability to trace pipes underground, so had to leave it exposed and forget about it. We now know thanks to Derek's work that this pipe (C in photo [2](#)) also runs towards the culvert above the pond, suggesting that both were part of the site's drainage system.

Tracing has confirmed that the pipe outside the southern corner of the Cornish Engine House (A in photo [2](#)), seen in photo 25 of the previous Newsletter (N° 31) is connected to the pipe entering the undercroft of the Horizontal Engine House (photo 26 of the same newsletter). A structure (photo 3 right) in the north corner of the undercroft of the Horizontal Engine House has two pipes leading to the outside of the building (F in photo [2](#)). The signal from these pipes stopped about two feet outside the building in an area where we found a brick floor in 2012. This floor formed part of a building that appears in the 1936 Ordnance Survey but not in the 1915 one. At one time this structure in the undercroft was called a 'miner's font' but closer examination shows that is unlikely to have been watertight. It has therefore been renamed as a 'pipe box', as its function would appear to have been to protect the pipes.



Photo 3 – Pipes sticking out of the wall in the northern corner of the undercroft of the Horizontal Engine House. (© D Hore, 2021)

Another attempt was made to trace the route of the heavy-duty electric cable found beside the fan ducts (D in photo [2](#)). The signal was again lost by the eastern corner of the Horizontal Engine House, suggesting that the cable had been severed in this area. The final pipe to be traced was one discovered in 2016 when the top of the south-east wall of the Old Pit heapstead was being capped (photo [14](#) and E in photo [2](#)). This runs parallel to the south-west wall of the building next to the chimney. It runs about 2' away from the wall and at a depth of about 2' below surface and stops around the eastern doorway. Its size suggests that it was a gas pipe or electricity conduit.

We started to remove the old boundary fence from the south-eastern side of the Old Pit enclosure, and this will give us more room to investigate the boiler foundations outside the south-east wall of the Cornish Engine House at a later date. This work can be seen in photos [15](#) to [21](#), while photo [20](#) shows the improved view of the southern corner of the Cornish Engine House. Most of the fence posts were firmly fixed into the ground and had to be eased out by Jeff using his lifting gear (photo [21](#)), assisted at times by others. While clearing vegetation in the wooded area between the old and new fences, Steve came across two flat metal bars sticking out of the ground (photo [22](#)). At first glance they appear to be the side arms of a ladder which have lost their top two rungs. Finding out what they really are will have to wait until after the Heritage Open Days.

Hamish has fixed the updated sponsors' banner (photo 4 right) in place on the front of the Old Pit heapstead. It now carries the logo of the Enover Community Trust as well as those of other major sponsors. Photo [23](#) shows that it can be seen from the cycle path. This sign replaces the one installed in September 2018, which is still in good condition after all those months exposed to the elements.



Photo 4 – Updated sponsors' banner on the side of the Old Pit heapstead.

Ken, Derek, and Mick have been working on the building foundations on top of the Old Pit heapstead. Some of the brickwork had to be rebuilt before the area is covered up again for protection against the winter weather. Their work can be seen in photos [25](#) to [29](#).

Tim has been working in the New Boiler area, where his test trench has uncovered a section of flooring (photo [30](#)). The initial trench had to be enlarged once the first part of the floor was uncovered, and photo [31](#) shows the relationship between the initial trench and the north-east wall of the Cornish Engine House. We are not yet sure what this floor signifies, but the excavation has given us valuable

information on the depth of spoil covering any structures in this part of the site. It should be possible to reduce the work of the volunteers by getting a mini digger to remove some of the overlying material.

Preparation for the Heritage Open Days is underway, and the tour route has been modified to try to stop people congregating at pinch points. Removal of the original fence around the Old Pit has allowed us to make a new exit from the New Boiler area by building a path built along the line of the fence (photo [32](#)). This uncovered a section of brickwork in the bank above the line of the path (photo [33](#)). The brickwork has been affected by heat so may have formed part of a flue, possibly connecting the egg-ended boiler to the chimney. Its significance is something else that will be investigated after the Heritage Open Days weekend. The new tour route enters the New Pit enclosure through the yard, so a path is being made to connect the flat area of the yard with the foundations of the Fan Engine House (photo 5 right).



Photo 5 – Mick and Hamish building a path from the New Pit yard to the Fan Engine House.

A trawl through an 1890s textbook¹ on the mechanical engineering of collieries unearthed some comments about the shape of colliery chimneys. The author, C M Percy, was a Member of the Institute of Mechanical Engineers and a lecturer in engineering at the Wigan Mining and Mechanical School. He felt that octagonal chimneys were the best in appearance and possibly in strength but were difficult to build, round ones were to be preferred in terms of utility and appearance, while square ones “look the worst and are the worst.” What would he have thought of the Brandy Bottom chimney with its square stone bottom of alternate courses of blue and white lias, square brick middle section and an octagonal brick top with its ornate stonework? A polite summary might be ‘Southerners – more brass than brains.’

According to a 1975 paper² in the BIAS Journal, Shortwood Brickworks planned to demolish Brandy Bottom in 1969. Their plant lay about 400 yards away down the cycle path and had been built on top of what was said to be the best clay in the adjacent deposit. To gain access this clay, the plan was to build a new plant on the site of Brandy Bottom and then demolish the existing one. Luckily for us Shortwood was taken over by Cattybrook Brickworks, who closed the Shortwood plant before Brandy Bottom was demolished.

Heritage Open Days – September 2021

Brandy Bottom will be open on Saturday 11 and Sunday 12 as part of the 2021 Heritage Open Days. On both days, the first guided tour will start at 10.30 am, and the last at 3.30 pm. The intention is to start the tours on the hour and the half hour. The tours should take 45 minutes, and their size will have to be limited for Covid safety reasons. It might be possible to expand the number of tours, to start at quarter past and quarter to the hour, but that would depend on demand and, more importantly, the number of guides available.

Visitors should note that this is a working site, with unfenced drops (some over 15 feet high), rough ground, flights of steps and some steep slopes. Not all the site is accessible to people with mobility problems, especially the top of the Old Pit heapstead and the inside of the Cornish Engine House. Suitable shoes should be worn as there are no gravel or tarmac paths - just grass or bare earth. All children must be accompanied by a responsible adult.

If all goes to plan, Phil Root will be holding a pottery workshop during the open days weekend. This is part of a community project by Barratts, who are building a nearby housing estate. We are unable to answer detailed questions about the workshop as the AIBT is merely providing the working space. Phil’s intention is to make pots with small groups of visitors over the weekend, and then build a kiln and fire the pots a fortnight later.

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, we are not publishing the dates of work parties. Anyone who is

¹ Mechanical Engineering of Collieries, Percy C M, v.1, 5th Edⁿ, Colliery Guardian, 1892

² Shortwood Brickworks, Doughty M, Ward O, In: BIAS Journal, No 8, 1975

thinking about joining us as a volunteer should first make contact through the AIBT email address of info@aibt.org. The AIBT would like to thank the volunteers and near-by residents who keep an eye on the site when there are no work parties in progress.

Information on the AIBT Website

There are copies of all earlier newsletters on the Archive page of the AIBT's 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, and of some of the wildlife and wildflowers.

Photographs: February - May 2021



Photo 6 – Derek traces the course of the metal pipe on the top of the New Pit heapstead, while Ken looks on.



Photo 7 – Pipe uncovered in 2017 when the top of the north-west wall of the New Pit heapstead was cleared of vegetation and loose masonry before rebuilding. (30 cm black/yellow scale)

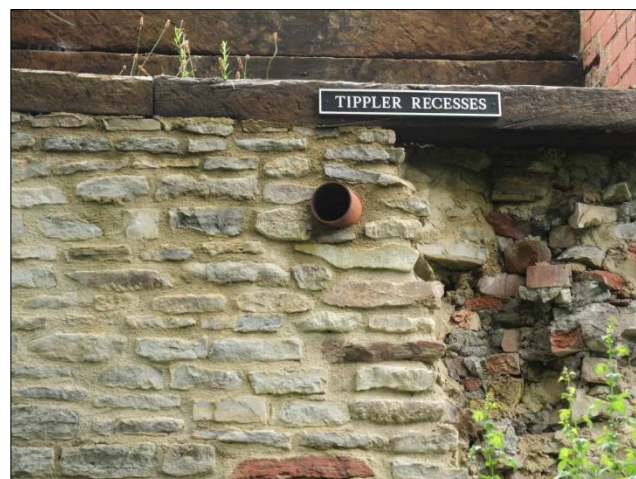


Photo 8 – A modern extension has been fitted to the pipe seen in the previous photo, and the wall facing rebuilt around it. The top arrow in the next photo (9) points to where the pipe can be seen protruding from the wall.

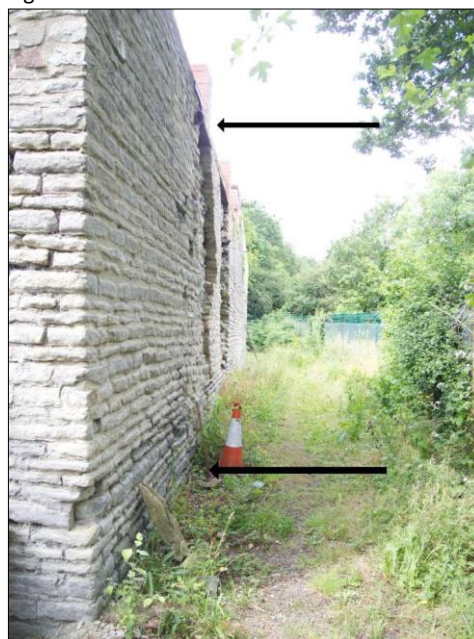


Photo 9 – The north-west wall of the New Pit heapstead, with the arrows showing the positions of the two parts of the pipe described on p.1.



Photo 10 – This 2012 photo shows the pipe uncovered outside the north-west wall of the Horizontal Engine House (See comments on p.[1](#)). (12 in black/white scale beside the pipe)



Photo 11 – The left-hand pipe in photo [3](#) has an object inside ... (© D Hore, 2021)



Photo 12 – ... which turns out to be an iron bar with what looks like a thread at the end. (© D Hore, 2021)



Photo 13 – This glass bottle was found by chance in the undercroft of the Horizontal Engine House during pipe tracing. It stands 2½" high and is 1¾" across the octagonal base. Working capacity is 1½ fluid oz and the inside of the top of the neck is chamfered. It has the air of an ink bottle. (5 mm grid)



Photo 14 – Pipe discovered during the rebuild of the top of the south-east wall of the Old Pit heapstead in March 2016. (See comments on p.[2](#))



Photo 15 – View north-eastwards along the part-demolished old boundary fence. The Cornish Engine House is on the left of the picture, with the Vertical Engine House to the left of the two figures.



Photo 16 – Steve clearing vegetation from the old boundary fence.



Photo 17 – Pete, Steve, and Mark W at work dismantling the fence.



Photo 18 – The New Boiler area and the Old Pit heapstead seen from outside the line of the old boundary fence. Mark B is collecting up some of the old fence wire.



Photo 19 – Steve and Pete remove the old fence from in front of the south-west wall of the Cornish Engine House.



Photo 20 – This view of the south-western wall of the Cornish Engine House was taken from the new wide gate. The black polythene sheet is covering part of the foundations of the egg-ended boiler. Derek, Ken, and Mark B are being slowly kippered in the smoke from a bonfire on the other side of the building.



Photo 21 – Jeff, Neil, and Mark W set up the lifting tackle so that a redundant fence post can be uprooted.



Photo 22 – Two flat metal bars were found when clearing in the wooded area to the south-east of the Cornish Engine House. The North arrow shows the orientation, and scale is indicated by the 15 cm section of black/white squares.



Photo 23 – This view of the Old Pit heapstead shows the position of the two information boards in front of the fence, and the sponsors' banner on the wall of the heapstead.



Photo 24 – Jeff building a safety railing near the top of the steps up to the Old Pit heapstead.



Photo 25 – Rebuilt section of wall running along the base of the south-east wall of the chimney.



Photo 26 – Part of the building foundations on top of the Old Pit heapstead. The loose bricks to the left of the central strip of wood have now been mortared back in place. Photo [28](#) shows Mick working on this area.



Photo 27 – Ken cutting out damaged brickwork at the base of the chimney.



Photo 28 – Mick working on the section of the foundations seen in photo [26](#).



Photo 29 – Ken, Mick, and Derek working on the building foundations on the top of the Old Pit heapstead.



Photo 30 – The brick floor found at the bottom of an enlarged test trench in the New Boiler area. The far end of the 1 m black/white ranging pole points towards north.



Photo 31 – An earlier photo of the test trench in the New Boiler area, showing its position in relation to the north-east wall of the Cornish Engine House.

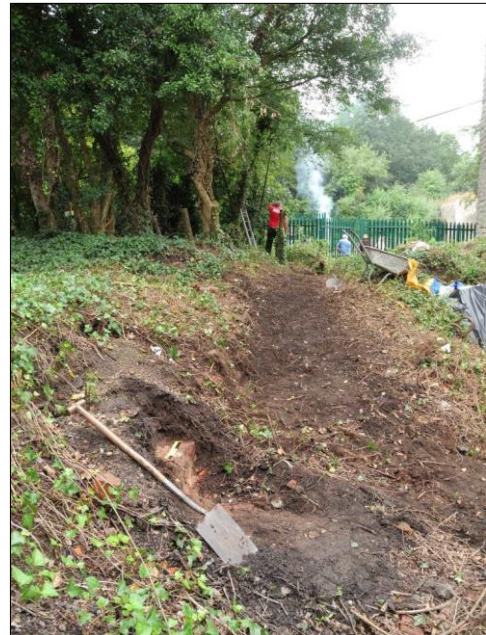


Photo 32 – The new path cut outside the south-west wall of the Cornish Engine House. The spade marks the position of the section of brick wall seen in the following photo [33](#).



Photo 33 – Section of brick wall uncovered when building the path seen in the previous photo ([32](#)). (See also comments on p.3. 30 cm black/yellow scale)



Photo 34 – Ken and Pete cut the new path along the line of the original Old Pit fence, while Mick tends to his bonfire. The left-hand figure is standing roughly where the piece of brick wall, seen in the previous photo ([33](#)) was found.



Photo 35 – Occasionally Mark B and others get to work in the condenser pit of the Cornish Engine House. Here Mark W is working at the bottom, pumping water out of the sump into a bin. The pump layout then had to be changed to pump the water out of the bin to the surface. Eventually the sludge in the bottom of the sump got the better of the pump, so it is back to the drawing board.



Photo 36 – Hamish laying bricks to form the retaining wall at the base of the slope near the egg-ended boiler. The flat area just above the nearest wheelbarrow is a seat that can be seen in the next photo ([37](#)).



Photo 37 – The wall below the egg-ended boiler now has a seat made from stone slabs. Passing cyclists have already started to use it while eating their lunch, so a second seat has been added beyond the first one.



Photo 38 – Steve working on a sick mower.



Photo 39 – Neil strimming the grass and wildflowers on top of the New Pit heapstead.



Photo 40 – For some reason, the local snail population has decided that the new boundary fencing is an ideal spot for some sunbathing.

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Website: www.aibt.org

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