

Friends of Brandy Bottom Colliery Pucklechurch

Newsletter N° 33, November 2021

Photo 1 – The refreshment tent was a big hit with the tour guides during the Heritage Open Days weekend. It was the first place the tour organiser went to if he needed a guide in a hurry.

There have been 13 work parties since the last newsletter, bringing the year to date total to 33. These numbers include those associated with the Heritage Open Days. We were open for 2 days in early September as part of that scheme when there were 278 visitors. There had been 182 in 2019, which was the last time we took part. Work has continued around the base of the south-west wall of the Cornish Engine House, the foundations of the egg-ended boiler next to its southern corner, and at the stretch of brick work uncovered when making a path as part of the site preparations for the Heritage Open Days weekend.

Progress: August – November 2021

At first work concentrated on finishing the preparations for the Heritage Open Days weekend. Jeff completed his work on the safety railings at the steps at the south-west end of the Old Pit heapstead and marked the inside of the steps with a rope with flags made from white/red warning tape. Hamish went round the site marking metal trip hazards with pink paint, and the photo on the right (2) shows the stubs of the holding bolts in the Cornish Engine House sporting their new colour scheme.

But as soon as that weekend was over it was back to those interesting areas outside the south-east wall of the Cornish Engine House. These were the area of brickwork discovered when making the new path along the outside of the south-east wall of the Cornish Engine House, the area immediately outside the base of the south-west wall itself,



Photo 2 – The tops of the holding down bolts in the Cornish Engine House have been marked with pink paint as a hazard warning.



and the brickwork at the south-west end of the egg-ended boiler foundations.

The brickwork beside the path was slowly uncovered over the space of several work parties and may be part of a flue. The brickwork is very fragile in places and will need to be rebuilt to conserve it. Photo [7](#) is a view along the excavated area, looking towards the north-east. The N° 4 marker is placed on top of a loose length of railway line which is laid flange upwards as if to support a heavy load. We now have an isolated stretch of flue that may be connected at one end to the foundations of the egg-ended boiler with the other end disappearing into New Boiler area. Further work is needed to show just what the ends are joined to, which will involve diverting the new path at the southern end. The base of the south-east wall of the Cornish Engine House has been cleared of spoil, the first time this area has been explored since some test pits were dug in 2012. The photo on the right (3) shows the whole wall, while photo [8](#) is a close-up of a section. The modern bricks between the black/yellow scales are holding up a number of the original bricks that fell out during the excavations. The bricks at the base of the wall appear to have been laid as an unconsolidated path between the boiler and the engine house wall. This area has now been covered up for protection from the winter weather (photo [14](#)). Work is continuing at the south-west end of the Egg-ended boiler foundations (photos [9](#) to [11](#)). Some of this area was first explored in 2017 before being covered up again for its protection as we did not have the volunteer time available to complete working on it. It was also too close to the old boundary fence to expand the excavated area.



Photo 3 – The exposed brickwork at the base of the south-east wall of the Cornish Engine House. There is a close-up of the central section in photo [8](#). The black/yellow scales are sitting on top of what may be the springing for a cover over the boiler. (1 m black/white horizontal pole, 30 cm black/yellow scales).

Jeff has made another access gate, this time covering the outfall above the pond. Derek surveyed part of the New Pit enclosure with a magnetometer (photo [15](#)), discovering what looked like a length of railway line still attached to a chair (photo [16](#)). This was in the area where the refreshment tent had stood during the HOD weekend. Further exploration will take place at later work parties.



Photo 4 – Work in progress outside the south-east wall of the Cornish Engine House.

Oliver has started work on a Lidar survey of both enclosures and the pond area. A new survey is long overdue, as the last one was completed in 2008, and since

then we have made major changes to the topography of the site. Oliver also gave us a copy of an 1875 report in the Bristol Daily Post about the start of the sinking of the New Pit shaft. It appears that Cossham waited 4 years after he took over the lease before he started to build the New Pit. (We will have to rewrite our history accordingly as we had assumed that he had started in 1871) The shaft was to take about 18 months to sink and was expected to cost £12 000. At the same time, a tunnel was being constructed to link the new shaft with the existing one, so that coal hoisting could start as soon as the new shaft reached its design depth.

Research for an article in another newsletter uncovered a tenuous connection between Brandy Bottom and the Bristol Mining School. The school was founded in 1856 and Handel Cossham, who took over the lease of Brandy Bottom in 1871, gave lectures to the school in 1857 and 1858. He may well have given lectures in later years though this topic needs further research. The school was part of the Bristol Trade School, which over time became the Merchant Venturer Trade School and then the Merchant Venturers Technical College. The college closed in 1949 but for how long mining was taught remains to be discovered. The introduction to a book of lectures given in 1857 states that the mining course covered surveying, mining and machinery, the working of coal and other minerals, ventilation and accident prevention, and geology and mineralogy. All for the sum of “6s 6d per quarter, payable in advance.” Another part of the Trade School taught mathematics, chemistry, physical sciences, and practical mechanics and mechanical drawing. The charge for this was “5s 6d per quarter”. There was no mention of payment

in advance, so one wonders if that was a slip of the editors' pens or an allusion to the miners' credit history. The list of lecturers shows the Victorian social divide between the gentlemen lecturers and those who appear to be the paid staff. The former have 'Esq' and FGS, Fellow of the Geological Society, after their names while the latter must make do with the prefix 'Mr', even when one of them was a Fellow of the Chemical Society.

Heritage Open Days – September 2021

Brandy Bottom was open on Saturday 11 and Sunday 12 as part of the national Heritage Open Days scheme. The weather was variable over the weekend, with some drizzle on the Saturday morning giving way to sunshine in the afternoon. The Sunday was generally overcast, but that did not put the visitors off. Visitor totals this year were: 92 adults and 30 children on the Saturday and 115 adults and 41 children on the Sunday, giving a grand total of 278 for the weekend. The last time we were open, in 2019, there was a total of 182 visitors and 134 in 2018.

In 2019 there was a congestion point at the passageway leading to the New Boiler area as parties trying to enter met others trying to leave the area. Since then, we built the steps at the south-west end of the Old Pit heapstead and removed the original boundary fence by the New Boiler area. We would like to thank Tracy and Mark W for donating the takings from their refreshment tent (£205), while the collecting tins raised £120. Visitors on the Saturday had a chance to see Tim and his sons working in the test trench in the New Boiler area. Photo 5 (on the right) and photo [17](#) show the scenes on the Saturday while photo [18](#) was taken on the Sunday. Hamish had been working on additions to the site model, and this year it showed both the Old and the New Pits, linked together by an overhead gantry.



Photo 5 – One tour party is in the New Boiler area, while a second is on top of the Old Pit heapstead. (© K Kemp, 2021)

Phil Root used a corner of the New Pit yard (photo [19](#)) for his pottery workshop. This was part of a community project by Barretts, who are building a nearby housing estate. The workshop attracted many visitors on both days, but we have no idea of the actual numbers as the workshop was organised separately from the Brandy Bottom set-up. It may have even contributed to the rise in our numbers. One family missed several consequent Brandy Bottom tour slots as one of their number was so engrossed with the pottery. The pots made during the HOD weekend were fired in a kiln at Brandy Bottom at the end of October (photo [22](#)).

Visitor Access, Future Work Parties, and Joining In

At present visitor access to the site is limited to days when there is a work party in progress. It is usually possible to give small groups a guided tour during the work parties on a 'turn-up on the day' basis. Special arrangements can be made for parties of 10 or more people by making contact through our email address of info@aibt.org.

The date for the remaining work party in 2021 is Wednesday 15 December. The dates for 2022 are: Wednesday 05, Saturday 15, Wednesday 26 January; Saturday 05, Wednesday 16, Saturday 26 February; Wednesday 09, Saturday 19, Wednesday 30 March; Saturday 09, Wednesday 20, Saturday 30 April; Wednesday 11, Saturday 21 May; Wednesday 01, Saturday 11, Wednesday 22 June; Saturday 02, Wednesday 13, Saturday 23 July; Wednesday 03, Saturday 13, Wednesday 24 August; Saturday 03, Saturday 10 and Sunday 11 (Heritage Open Days), Saturday 17, Saturday 24 September; Wednesday 05, Saturday 15, Wednesday 26 October; Saturday 05, Wednesday 16, Saturday 26 November; Wednesday 07, Saturday 17 December.

Please note that work parties, and their starting and finishing times, may be altered at short notice. The nominal opening times are between 10.30 am and 3 pm, but these timings are not fixed so we may start later and/or finish earlier. Because of this, newcomers who would like to join a work party are advised to first make contact via the AIBT's email address of info@aibt.org. Youngsters must always be accompanied by a responsible adult.

We 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.

There is a location map on a dedicated page of the website www.aibt.org, together with directions on how to reach the site. This page can be found by a link on the main Brandy Bottom project page.

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: August - November 2021



Photo 6 – The test trench in the New Boiler area, marked off with warning tape, seen from the top of the Old Pit heapstead. The stones near the top right mark the edge of the new path out of the New Boiler area.



Photo 7 – Exposed brickwork along the line of the flue outside the new path from the New Boiler area. (1 m black/white vertical pole)

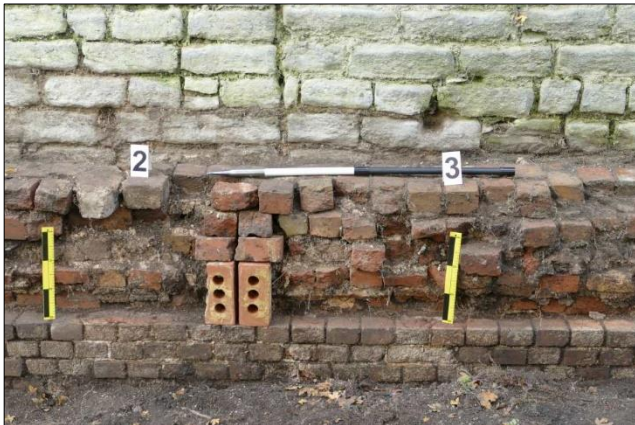


Photo 8 – Close-up of part of the base of the south-east wall of the Cornish Engine House. The whole width of the wall can be seen in photo 3. (1 m black/white horizontal pole and 30 cm black/yellow scales)



Photo 9 – View of the brickwork uncovered at the southern end of the foundations of the egg-ended boiler, seen from the south-west.



Photo 10 – View of the newly exposed brickwork seen in the previous photo (9) seen from the north-east. The bricks on the left have been cut to form a semi-circular channel. (30 cm black/yellow scales)



Photo 11 – View along the south-east wall of the foundations of the egg-ended boiler, with the southern corner of the Cornish Engine House seen in the top left of the photo.



Photo 12 – Mark B dumps a barrowload of spoil on the sieve, while Hamish looks on. It is being used to sieve the ash-laden spoil lying on top of the foundations of the egg-ended boiler so that the spoil can be re-used at a later date.



Photo 13 – Close-up of the sieve, made by Jeff, and the associated wheelbarrow ramp.



Photo 14 – Steve H and Mick at work on spoil removal outside the southern corner of the Cornish Engine House.



Photo 15 – Derek using a magnetometer to search for metal objects in the area where the refreshment tent stood during the HOD weekend ...



Photo 16 – ... the length of railway line he found, with a chair still attached. (© D Hore 2021)



Photo 17 – Many eyes watch the one poor individual who was actually doing some archaeology during the Heritage Open Days weekend. (© K Kemp, 2021)



Photo 18 – Hamish stands outside the Vertical Engine House with a tour party on the Sunday of the Heritage Open Days weekend.



Photo 19 – Phil the potter setting up his stall during the Heritage Open Days weekend.



Photo 20 – The insider of the kiln chamber before the pots were loaded into it and the chimney built on the top. The chimney can be seen in photo [22](#)



Photo 21 – The firing end of the furnace.



Photo 22 – The kiln being fired on 23 October. (© M Fletcher 2021)

© Avon Industrial Buildings Trust 2021

Website: www.aibt.org

email: info@aibt.org

Unless otherwise stated, all photos are by R H Whitworth (© 2021).
All the photographers/draftspersons have kept the copyright of their work.