

Friends of Brandy Bottom Colliery Pucklechurch

Newsletter N° 37, February 2024

Photo 1 – Volunteers at work in the foundations of the Lancashire boilers in the New Boiler area in June. The black strips are sections of old conveyor belts laid to protect the brick flooring after excavation.

There have been twenty six work parties in 2023 at Brandy Bottom since the last newsletter, bringing the total for the year to forty. There has been a further four work parties in January and February 2024. Work parties in July and August 2023 concentrated on getting the site ready for the Heritage Open Days (HODs), but thereafter there has been work on both the Egg-ended Boiler and Lancashire Boiler settings, as well as the water distribution network .

Brandy Bottom was open to the public on Saturday 09 and Sunday 10 September as part of the HODs scheme. Total visitor numbers were two hundred and twenty four, compared to three hundred and sixteen in 2022 and two hundred and eighteen in 2021.

Progress: May 2023 – February 2024

We would like to welcome Bob and Frank to the volunteer group.

The initial stage of rebuilding the brickwork at the north-east end of the Egg-ended Boiler settings was completed, as can be seen from photo [2](#) on the right.

Derek arranged for a drone survey of the top of the walls of the Cornish Engine House in May. The survey was used to plan what needed to be done to the tops of the walls, something that could not be done from ground level. One of the survey views is shown as photo [10](#). This has been annotated to show the positions of the Egg-ended Boiler settings, and those of the Lancashire Boilers. A scaffolding tower was built in June on the outside of the south-east wall of the Horizontal Engine House (photos [12](#) and [13](#)), in addition to the tower on the inside of the wall. This has allowed some fallen stones above the window to be replaced. In addition, voids in the wall have been pressure grouted to increase the stability of the structure. The extent of the damage on the outside of the wall can be seen in photo [14](#), while



Photo 2 – The completed repairs to the bottom section of the wall seen in photo 26 of the previous newsletter (N° 36).



photo [15](#) is a view of the same area after the repairs were completed. The inside tower was dismantled at the beginning of August (photo [16](#)), while the outside one was left up until after the HODs.

The volunteer gang moved into the New Boiler area in June (photo [1](#)), hitherto the preserve of Tim and his sons. More of the two brick bases of the boiler settings have been uncovered (photo [18](#)) together with an open area to the north-east (photo [23](#)). The latter had a layer of dark material covering the floor (photo [25](#)), thought to be compacted coal dust. Many of the clay and fire bricks in this area are badly decomposed and conservation work started after the HODs. Photo [31](#) shows Ken and Mick at work on the Lancashire Boiler settings nearest the Cornish Engine House in November, while Hamish is working on the settings furthest away in photo [32](#), and Steve H is working on the Egg-ended Boiler settings in photo [33](#). Photos [35](#) to [40](#) were taken between November 2023 and January 2024 and show work in progress in both the New Boiler area and the Egg-ended Boiler settings. Photo [42](#) was taken in January and shows the rebuilt brickwork of the Lancashire Boilers' settings covered up against the winter weather.

The bricks in the floors of the two boiler setting are laid in different orientations – those in the setting adjacent to the Cornish Engine House are laid across the line of the boiler (photo [3](#)) while those in the other setting run along the line of the boiler (photo [22](#)). Both Steve H and Derek have visited the Lancashire boiler set-up at the Crofton Pumping Station and brought back photos of the layout there to help with our understanding of the Brandy Bottom layout.

John has spent several work parties cleaning the cast iron window frames that Hamish obtained (photo [4](#) right), often working in isolation from the rest of the crew. His attempts to recover some of the glass panes have been frustrated by the ancient rock-hard putty. The plan is to fit these frames, with Perspex as the glazing, to the windows of the Horizontal Engine House. This might make the HEH slightly less draughty during winter lunch breaks, when everybody sits well wrapped up to eat their 'pieces' and there are cries of "will somebody close the windows."

Work has continued on the site's water distribution system. The area around the end of two metal pipes beside the Egg-ended Boiler has been excavated. These had been previously traced as running from the chamber near the New Pit vehicle entrance. Photo [45](#) shows the area after excavation, while photo 33 of Newsletter N° 36 was taken before work started. Photo [47](#) shows the position of the pipe end relative to the Egg-ended Boiler settings. We have not decided exactly what the function of the pipes was, but their position at one end beside the Egg-ended Boiler settings and the connection at the other to the drainage chamber suggest that they may have been used to drain or blow-down the boiler. There had been a lot of rain before the work party on 03 January, and the sound of running water was heard in the chamber by the New Pit vehicle gate. Another pipe was traced running from the chamber, this time along the path leading to the nearby tip (photo [50](#)). However, this was not the source of the sound as it ended in a disconnected pipe (photo [49](#)), and we did not discover where the sound was coming from. The purpose of the disconnected pipe is still one of the site's mysteries.

Several work parties in July and August concentrated on getting the site ready for the Heritage Open Days (HODs). Steve H and John worked on the treads of the steps leading from the top of the Old Pit heapstead to the platform outside the Cornish Engine House (photos [52](#) and [53](#)). Some of the treads were loose as the bricks holding the securing screws had split. These bricks have been replaced, and holes drilled into them to secure new screws. On others the mortar between the top two courses of bricks has had to be re-laid. Bob (photo [54](#)) and Ken worked on the ramp up the Old Pit heapstead ramp. The original steps cut into the earth have been replaced with a set of stone slabs resting on wooden risers. The latter have been inserted to retain the soil (photo [55](#)). Pete W put up a sign on the top of the Old Pit heapstead (photo [56](#)) advertising our part in the Heritage Open Days scheme. Hamish worked in the Cornish Engine House, rebuilding the area around the missing holding down bolt on the south-east side of the engine bed (photo [57](#)). He has replaced the tiles that were vandalised with spares that



Photo3 – The south-eastern end of the Lancashire Boiler setting furthest from the Cornish Engine House (See comments about the brick floor on p.[2](#)). (30 cm yellow/black scales)



Photo 4 – John cleaning one of the cast iron window frames that will be fitted into the window openings of the Horizontal Engine House.

have been uncovered on site. Photo [58](#) shows this area after he had finished. Marek built a gate (photos [59](#) and [60](#)) to stop visitors falling into the Vertical Engine House, while John worked on marking the edges of drop off with warning tape (photos [61-63](#)).

Most of the remaining parts of the original boundary fence have now been removed, leaving just the sections adjacent to the batches at each end of the site. This has made it easier for passers-by to look through the new fence at the buildings. It has also made it easier for us to maintain the area inside the fence.

The investigation into the maker of the firebrick seen in photo 19 of the last newsletter (N°36) continues. The best lead so far has been an advertisement in volume 15 (1866) of the splendidly named *Journal of Gas Lighting, Water Supply and Sanitary Improvement*. In it, E Baker and Co are offering firebricks, gas retorts, garden edgings and ornate house bricks from premises in London's Paddington. The address suggests it is a storage depot for a Stourbridge factory and the last line is: "Shipments at the shortest notice."

When looking for information on Brandy Bottom, Andrew Perrin, a friend of Derek's, found a book on the life of the Rev George Whitefield. Stuck inside the front cover is the certificate seen in photo [5](#) on the right, which had been given to a Parkfield employee at Christmas 1860. It was given to Alfred Croy (the name will have to be confirmed by someone familiar with 19th Century handwriting) and signed by Henry Wethered. Henry was one of the partners in Parkfield, together with his father William, brothers Joseph and Edwin, and brother-in-law Handel Cossham. Closer examination showed that the certificate had been glued to the front cover after the hinge had been repaired. The two cannot therefore be directly connected. Whitefield, also known as Whitfield, was an 18th Century Anglican clergyman and one of the founders of the Methodist movement. As Handel Cossham was a Methodist lay preacher, it is possible that he may have been thinking of the employees' spiritual welfare that Christmas. Strictly speaking this has nothing to do with Brandy Bottom as the date is some eleven years before Wethered, Cossham & Wethered took over the lease of Brandy Bottom. However, it is an interesting pointer to the attitude of the company's management towards its workers. Andrew also found the photo of the Crown Collieries in Warmley (photo [64](#)) in a separate search. This photo is slightly different from the ones in the BIAS Journal N° 4 (1971) and on p.10 of the SGMRG's book: *Kingswood Coal*, where it is captioned as a 19th Century print in both. Those two show a small building with a chimney in the background on the right hand side, and that building is missing from the version in photo 64. It may have been too difficult to fit the whole of the drawing in *Kingswood Coal* onto the size of photographic paper used for photo 64, so there had to be some 'bodging' in the darkroom.

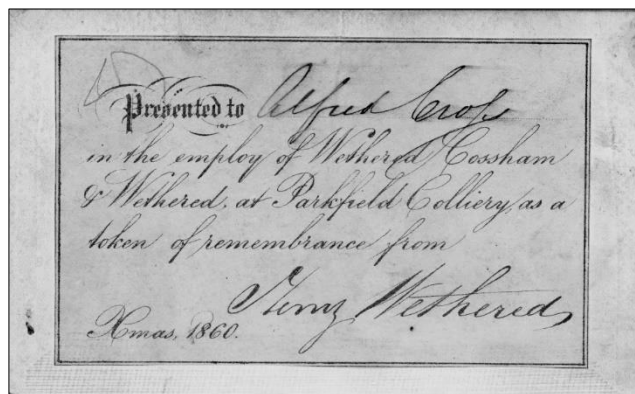


Photo 5 – Certificate glued to the inside of a book on the life of the Rev. George Whitefield.

Daphne and Ann have continued to tend the flower beds, including the new one in the Old Pit enclosure (photo [65](#)). The area around the latter was sown with grass seed, just in time for the visitors to the HODs to walk all over the newly emerged growth. (The grass seedlings survived) Tarquin devised the QR code seen in photo [6](#) on the right, which directs viewers to the main Brandy Bottom site of the website. Copies will be displayed on notice boards outside the boundary fence, and it has also been used in some of our advertising for the 2023 Heritage Open Days. It will be added to all our advertising as the various artworks are updated.



Photo 6 – QR code for main Brandy Bottom page of website.

In June there was a pre-arranged tour of eighteen people from the Retired Members Association of the NASUWT teachers' union, when Steve H organised the guides. We would like to thank them for their donation to the project funds. In July two people from the Kingswood History Society paid a visit, guided by Steve G. He and Mark B were the guides in September for a group of 35 people who had been attending the Association for Industrial Archaeology's 50th Annual Conference and AGM. This had been held in Bath over the preceding weekend.

One result of Steve G's and Mark B's efforts was the receipt of some 1973 photos of the site taken by Terry Evans. We would like to thank him for letting us have the copies and permission to use them. Three have been included with this newsletter. The first, seen as photo [7](#), was taken looking northwards with the chimney on the right. The cottages are in the centre, and the broad path to their left is the old track bed of the railway after the rails have been removed. There are two things of interest in this photo – the first is the view of the cottages. Up till now we have either had a sideways view (Matt Southway's photo in newsletter N° 30, taken at some time between 1965 and 1977), or the vertical views of the 1940s or 1950s aerial surveys. Now we can see one face of the building, and it looks as if two of the windows are boarded over with corrugated iron sheets. The other item of interest is the appearance of the Parkfield chimney in the distance, clearly visible just above the left hand side of the cottages. The trees in between Brandy Bottom and Parkfield have grown since 1973, and by September 2014

the Parkfield chimney could just be seen above the trees when looking from the top of the Brandy Bottom chimney (photo [66](#)). Photo [67](#) was taken from around the same point as the 1965 photo on the front cover of Steve G's historical report. A comparison between the two shows the progress of the collapse of the north-east wall of the Cornish Engine House. Photo [68](#) shows the bed of the railway talked about on p.26 of the report, and this had been removed during the extension of the clay pit.



Photo 7 – 1973 photo looking north, with the Brandy Bottom chimney on the right and the cottages in the middle. The chimney at Parkfield can just be made out in the distance. (See comments on [p.3](#). ©Terry Evans, 1973)

September 2023 Heritage Open Days

Brandy Bottom was open on Saturday 09 and Sunday 10 September as part of the HODs. There was a total of 224 visitors: 88 (82 adults and 6 children) on the Saturday and 136 (114 adults and 22 children) on the Sunday. This compares to a total of 316 in 2022, 218 in 2021 and 182 in 2019. We did not take part in 2020 when Covid was at its height. Visitor numbers are showing an upwards trend, and the apparent surge of visitors in 2022 may be due to many places not taking part in the HODs following the death of Queen Elizabeth.

We would like to thank Mark W and Tracy for running the refreshments for the second year and once again donating the proceedings to the AIBT. Daphne and Anne ran the stall that combined a South Gloucestershire Mines Research Group bookstall, plant sales and Daphne's selection of second-hand books. This year Derek suggested we obtain a card reader to allow visitors to donate by card as well as by cash. It was used by both the refreshment gazebo and the book stall, so it is not possible to split the donations between the two. After deducting the takings of the bookstall, and other expenses associated with the event, we received £476 in donations. Book sales included seven copies of the Brandy Bottom Historical Report.

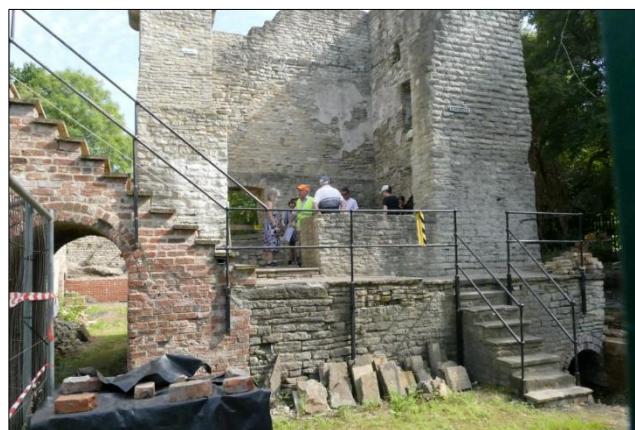


Photo 8 – A tour party inside the Cornish Engine House during the HODs weekend.

The site model was on display in the Horizontal Engine House (photos [72](#) and [73](#)), and Hamish spent most of the weekend talking to visitors about it. Hailey and Peter R took over Jeff's old job of directing passers-by towards reception. This was run by Bob and Marek, who also had the job of allocating the following guides to the tours: Derek, Hamish, John, Ken, Mick, Steve H, Pete W, and Robin. Bob and Marek also hit on the idea of announcing the impending departure of a tour with several loud blasts on an air horn - the same horn that Jeff used to announce the welcome start of the lunch break during work parties.

The number of visitors given above does not include those passers-by, mainly cyclists, who stopped off for cake and coffee but who did not look around the site. Also excluded are the visitors to Phil Root's pottery workshop, which used his redesigned kiln seen in photo [71](#). The new kiln is more compact than the original version, which can be seen in photo 22 of newsletter N° 33, and Phil very kindly donated the surplus firebricks to us. Some of these have already been used in the conservation work in the New Boiler area.



Photo 9 – Hamish built this model of a narrow gauge truck. It has been mounted on two lengths of high hat rail.

The span of dates for the 2024 HODs have been announced as 06 to 15 September, and we have provisionally set Saturday 07 and Sunday 08 as the dates for Brandy Bottom's opening.

Visitor Access, Future Work Parties, and Joining In

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

The dates for work parties in 2024 are: Saturday 06, Wednesday 17, Saturday 27 April; Wednesday 08, Saturday 18, Wednesday 29 May; Saturday 08, Wednesday 19, Saturday 29 June; Wednesday 10, Saturday 20, Wednesday 31 July; Saturday 10, Wednesday 21, Saturday 31 August; Saturday 07 and Sunday 08 September (both provisional HOD dates), Saturday 14, Wednesday 25 September; Saturday 05, Wednesday 16, Saturday 26 October; Wednesday 06, Saturday 16, Wednesday 27 November; Saturday 07, Wednesday 18 December.

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

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. There have been no announcements about the South Gloucestershire Council proposal to close Coxgrove Hill/Roman Road to through traffic. Nor has there been any progress on our suggestion on accessing Brandy Bottom from one of the roads on the nearby housing estate.

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: May 2023– February 2024



Photo 10 – Annotated aerial photo of the Cornish Engine House (middle), Egg-ended Boiler settings (top right) and Lancashire Boiler settings (left), taken in May 2023. (Drone photo © Toby Hore, 2023)



Photo 11 – A view along the Egg-ended Boiler settings as the scaffolding was being built outside the Cornish Engine House.



Photo 12 – Hamish building the scaffolding tower outside the south-eastern wall of the Cornish Engine House ...



Photo 13 – ... watched by several volunteers.

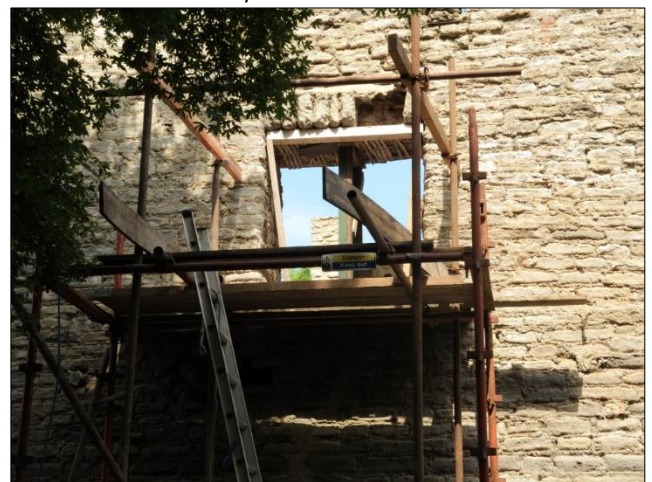


Photo 14 – The outside of the south-east wall of the Cornish Engine House. The area just above the window opening shows where masonry was missing ...

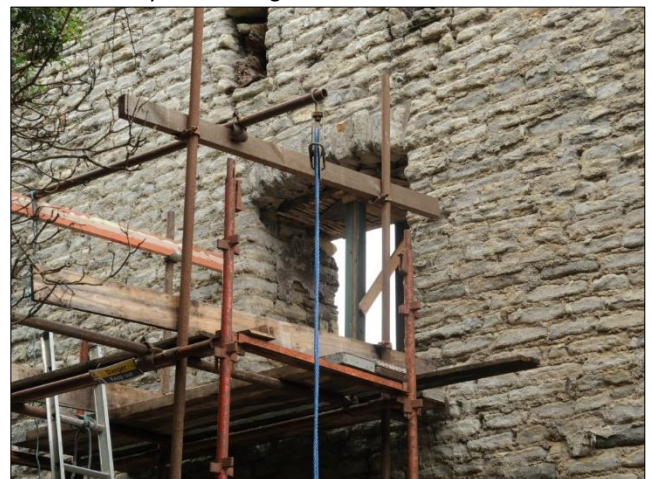


Photo 15 – ... and the same area after repairs were finished.



Photo 16 – Hamish and Marek dismantling the scaffolding tower inside the Cornish Engine House.



Photo 17 – The inside of the south-east wall of the Cornish Engine House after repairs were completed.



Photo 18 – View of the excavations in the New Boiler area. The photo was taken in July from the top of the Old Pit heapstead, with the north-east wall of the Cornish Engine House on the right.



Photo 19 – Ken and Bob at work in the boiler settings near the Cornish Engine House.



Photo 20 – The number tents do not signify any particular areas of interest, but act as a key to other photos taken of the area. (1 m black/white ranging pole, 30 cm yellow/black scales)



Photo 21 – One of several Bovey firebricks found when clearing the area seen in the photo above.



Photo 22 – Brick floor of the boiler setting furthest away from the Cornish Engine House. The brick courses in this setting run along the length of the setting (See comment on p.2). (1 m black/white ranging pole, 30 cm yellow/black scale)



Photo 23 – Partially excavated bay to the north-east of the boiler settings. This is where the firebars seen in photo 27 were found.



Photo 24 – The solid floor has been uncovered. The floor was covered with a layer of dark material, seen in close-up in the following photo (25). (1 m black/white ranging pole)



Photo 25 – Close-up of the area seen in the top left of the previous photo (24) during excavation. This shows the dark material sitting on the floor. (30 cm yellow/black scale)



Photo 26 – A layer of a fine brown deposit, seen here marked by two arrows, has been found in various other locations within the boiler setting.



Photo 27 – Two complete firebars were found when removing spoil from the most north-easterly part of the New Boiler excavations. (30 cm yellow/black scale)



Photo 28 – Marek measuring the difference in heights between the two brick boiler bases in the New Boiler area. He is using as a reference point the top of a ladder, which was levelled with the aid of the yellow spirit level seen just behind him.



Photo 29 – Steve H and Marek look over the excavations in the New Boiler area at the end of a work party.



Photo 30 – Steve H and Hamish stand on the top of the flues in the New Boiler area, discussing the layout with Steve G who is standing on the bank above.



Photo 31 – Ken and Mick working on the conservation of the brickwork of Lancashire boiler settings nearest the Cornish Engine House in November ...



Photo 32 – ... while Hamish works on the settings furthest away from the engine house ...



Photo 33 – ... and Steve H works at the southern end of the Egg-ended Boiler settings.



Photo 34 – Peter R and Steve H move a length of conveyor belting from a storage point.



Photo 35 – Steve H works on rebuilding brickwork at the south-west end of the Egg-ended Boiler settings ...



Photo 36 – ... while Hamish, Ken and Mick work on the eastern end of the Lancashire boiler settings.



Photo 37 – Marek, Hamish and Steve H work on the Egg-ended Boiler settings while Mick and Ken work on the Lancashire Boiler settings.



Photo 38 – In the foreground Hamish and Marek are backfilling with concrete, while in the background Ken can be seen building up a brick pillar.



Photo 39 – Hamish, Bob, Pete W and Derek watch Steve H at work at the southern end of the Egg-ended Boiler settings.



Photo 40 – Pete W and Steve H backfilling the newly built brickwork on the south-west end of the Egg-ended Boiler settings with concrete.



Photo 41 – The brickwork at the eastern end of the Lancashire Boiler settings during the rebuild (Note the rebuilt brick arch over the recess in the wall at the back left) ...



Photo 42 – ... And in January 2024, after the area had been covered up for the winter.



Photo 43 – A layer of dark material, possibly compacted coal dust, was found in the flue to the east of the Egg-ended Boiler settings. Here its position is marked by an arrow, while there is a close-up in the following photo ([44](#)).



Photo 44 – A close-up of the layer shown in the preceding photo ([43](#)).



Photo 45 – The Egg-ended Boiler end of the two pipes connected to the sump by the gate to the New Pit yard. (See comments on [p.2](#)) This view was taken from the south-west... (Two 1 m black/white ranging poles)



Photo 46 – ... and from the north-east. (© K Kemp, 2024)



Photo 47 – The pipes shown in photo [45](#) can be seen at the top of the photo, just below the open gate. The settings of the Egg-ended boiler are out of sight on the right. (© K Kemp, 2024)



Photo 48 – Hamish works on the settings of the Egg-ended Boiler on the left, while Peter R watches Steve H and Marek at work in the flue. Ken has his head down in the foreground.



Photo 49 – The disconnected end of the pipe that runs from the chamber beside the vehicle gate to the New Pit yard. (see comments on [p.2](#))



Photo 50 – A location shot for the position of the pipe seen in the previous photo ([49](#)), marked by the bricks. (© D Hore, 2024)



Photo 51 – Derek and Mick standing by the end of the pipe seen in photo [49](#).



Photo 50 – Hamish and Mick stand in the wet Pond area in early January. The water comes from the culvert in the south of the area, and the discharge has been swollen by the recent rainy weather. (© D Hore, 2024)



Photo 51 – The lengths of Dramway and Top Hat railway lines have been given a coating of WaxOil. The length of Dramway rail on the left is no longer straight. As the changes occur on the unsupported areas between the sleeper blocks, Hamish suggested that this was caused by a heavy load such as a loco.



Photo 52 – Steve H repairing the steps between the top of the Old Pit heapstead and the platform outside the south-west wall of the Cornish Engine House ...



Photo 53 – ... as did John...



Photo 54 – ... while Bob rebuilt the steps up the Old Pit heapstead ramp.



Photo 55 – A view of the steps from below.



Photo 56 – Pete W concentrates on hitting the top of a post of a sign on the Old Pit heapstead. The sign advertised the dates that Brandy Bottom would be open during the HODs.



Photo 57 – Hamish working on repairs to the floor inside the Cornish Engine House (See comments on [p.2](#)). The red and the yellow traffic cones cover the two remaining engine holding down bolts ...



Photo 58 – ... and the same area ready for the HODs.



Photo 59 – Pete W, on the left, was hauling up leaves cleared from the floor of the Vertical Engine House by Peter R. At the same time Marek was building a gate to stop visitors from falling through the opening ...



Photo 60 – ... and the finished article.



Photo 61 – John prepares to mark the edge of the path along the south-east of the New Boiler area with hazard tape ...



Photo 62 – ... while a view from another angle shows the final result.



Photo 63 – Red/white warning tape has been stretched along the edge of the south-east wall of the Old Pit heapstead.

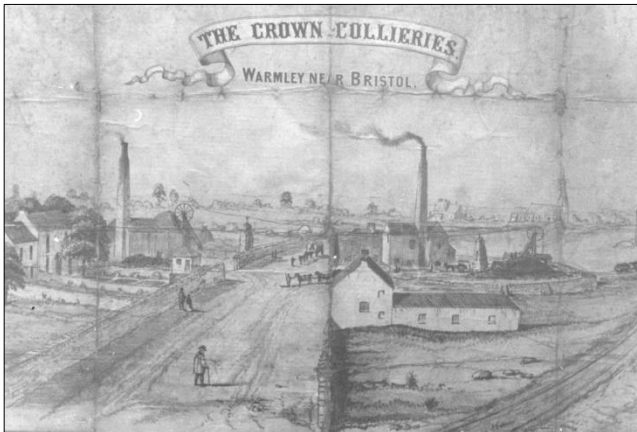


Photo 64 – The photo of the Crown Collieries that came with the book on the life of the Rev. George Whitefield. (See comments on [p3](#))



Photo 65 – Hamish constructed a new flower bed in the western corner of the Old Pit enclosure while Daphne planted the flowers he provided.



Photo 66 – 2014 view taken from the top of the chimney. Close examination of the original shows that the Parkfield chimney is just visible above the tree line. Its position has been marked with an arrow. (See comments on [p.3](#))



Photo 67 – 1973 photo of the Horizontal Engine House on the left, the chimney, and the Cornish Engine House on the right. (See comments on [p.3](#). ©Terry Evans, 1973)



Photo 68 – Track bed of the light railway coming downhill towards Brandy Bottom. (See comments on p.3. ©Terry Evans, 1973)



Photo 69 – At a work party before the HODs, Ken took a group of potential guides around the proposed tour route, pointing out areas of interest.



Photo 70 – The New Pit yard during the HODs, with the refreshment gazebo on the left and the pottery area on the right.



Photo 71 – The rebuilt pottery kiln can be seen on the right of the photo. (See comments on p.5)

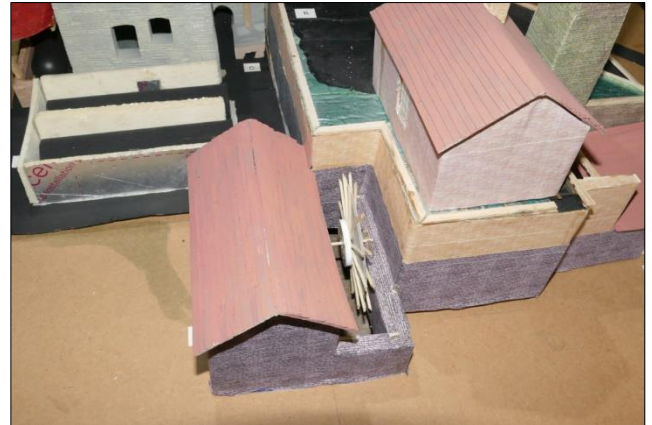


Photo 72 – The Vertical Engine House end of Hamish's site model.



Photo 73 – A view of the Old Pit area of the model, with the Old Boiler House in the left foreground.



Photo 74 Pete W cuts a groove around the inside of one of the Horizontal Engine House windows, making it easier to fit the window frames.



Photo 75 John works on the never-ending task of keeping the container clean and tidy. He also does the same in the Horizontal Engine House.



Photo 76 – A Marbled White butterfly at rest on top of the New Pit heapstead ...



Photo 77 – ... while a small Tortoiseshell butterfly sits on a Buddleia in the New Pit yard.

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email: info@aibt.org

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