

FRIENDS OF BRANDY BOTTOM COLLIERY, PUCKLECHURCH

Newsletter N° 17, November 2017

(Photos 1-18 will be found on page 4 onwards)



There have been 12 work parties since the last newsletter, bringing the total for the year to date to 54. The aim of many of the early work parties during the quarter was to prepare the site for the Heritage Open Days weekend, and after that for the arrival of the masons. Some of the exposed areas of brickwork have been covered up for protection against the worst of the winter weather, and there has also been time to work on spoil clearance around the entrance to the Old Boiler House. The masons started work on rebuilding the tops of the walls of the New Pit heapstead towards the end of November.

Progress: August – November 2017

The viewing platform in the Vertical Engine House was completed in time for Heritage Open Days weekend (photo 1), and made it much easier to explain to visitors the layout of the building. For example they could look across at the engine bed and see that there was another stone of comparable size below the bed (marked with an arrow in photo 2). This may, or may not, be an earlier engine bed. However a visitor in October, who has worked on similar mine sites in northern England, put forward different ideas about the machinery in the Vertical Engine House and its layout. These ideas are different to our current ones, and are still being assessed. He also suggested that the Cornish Engine House may be a later addition. While that building does not appear in the 1840 Tithe Map, neither does the heapstead or the chimney so its absence from the map cannot be taken as proof that it was built at a later date.

The spoil ramp, which had been left in the entrance to the Old Boiler House to make for easier access during the Open Days, was removed on the first work party after the event (photo right). Hidden in the spoil were some fragments of glazed stoneware. By chance two fragments unearthed in different parts of the site on the same day were found to fit together (photo 4). The bottom piece in that photo was found in the Old Boiler House, while the neck fragment was uncovered close to the Cornish Engine House. Belcher & Co were grocers whose premises



were located in the Market Place at Faringdon. Another find of a domestic nature was a small, 3 fluid oz capacity, glass bottle with a distinctive logo. A close-up of the logo can be seen in photo 5, and appears to be of an armour-clad hand holding a battle axe emerging from a water surface. The bottom of the bottle (photo 6) gives a possible clue to its origins, as the word is DÉPOSÉ (the acute

accents are not clear in the photo). If so the bottle might be French, as that could be a contraction of the French phrase for 'Trade Mark'. The style of the logo suggests 'aftershave' rather than 'perfume'. Has anyone come across this trademark before, and if so what was the merchandise? In November a local resident confirmed our long-held suspicion that the area around the entrance to the Old Boiler House had been used as a dump by the inhabitants of the nearby cottages.

Work started in October to clear spoil from the outside of the north-east wall of the Old Boiler House, with the aim of allowing rainwater pooling on the floor of the boiler house to escape through a drain hole at the base of the inside of the wall. Excavation work outside the house, aimed at ensuring that the end of the drain hole was not blocked, uncovered the pipe and stone slabs seen in photo 7. But before they can be fully investigated, the ground above will have to be terraced back to stop it sliding into the work area. The first stage, cutting down shrubs growing inside the fence, had been completed during the last work party in November (photo 8).

Buried in the spoil were a number of fragments from at least two stoneware jars. Three fragments (photo 9) were found to have come from one jar, which had the name of 'Peter Showell' of Oldbury (photo 10) below the neck. So far no information has been found about the company. Two more pieces fitted together to display a warning about misuse of a jar. They were found during cleaning to fit together with a neck fragment of a jar that had been found in June inside the Old Boiler House (photo right). That carries the name 'Pickup & Co Botanical Brew... Bri...'. One of the volunteers produced a photo of a complete Pickup jar found at another place, which showed that the full text of the warning was:



THIS BOTTLE IS NOT SOLD
ANY PERSON DETAINING OR USING
SAME WILL BE PROSECUTED

The photo, which is of a complete jar dated 1940, makes no mention of the 'Botanical Brew...' printed on the 1925 jar found at Brandy Bottom. It does however confirm that the 'Bri...' refers to Bristol. Subsequent research has established that the 'Brew...' reads 'Brewers'.

Another find was a metal guide (photo 11), identical to the one found in the Vertical Engine House in October 2016 and illustrated in photo 16 of FoBB newsletter N^o 13. What they are, and why they were found in such different places has yet to be resolved.

Exposed areas of brick walls located in several parts of the site have been covered with plastic sheets to protect them against the winter weather. The sheets covering the first areas were able to withstand the winds associated with Storm Brian in October, so hopefully all the sheets should still be in place when spring arrives. Photo 12 shows a sheet in place in one of the tippler slots, while photo 13 shows volunteers covering up the area on the top of the Old Pit heapstead where there are the foundations for a possible bridge to the Horizontal Engine House. The holes in the floor of the Old Boiler House have been temporarily filled in using spoil contained in rubble bags. The largest hole had to have a wooden frame specially built to stop the edges from collapsing inwards (photo



14). This hole can be seen in close-up in photo 15, and has what appears to be a channel running through it (from top to bottom of the photo). It is however rather too small to be used as a stable drain, as it would quickly become blocked. One of the tasks for the coming spring will be to investigate more about this area.

Two more bottles have been found in the pond area. One is a narrow necked 20 fluid oz capacity bottle marked 'Mendips Bristol' and 'Sterilised Milk'. A similar bottle had been found in April 2014 when the path was being driven around the bottom of the Old Pit heapstead ramp. The other is the base of a 'Brooke & Prudencio' bottle which had probably held mineral water. It can be dated to after 1889, which is when Brooke & Prudencio was formed by the amalgamation of T Brooke and Batten & Prudencio. There is a photo of an earlier 'T Brooke' bottle on page 2 of the previous FoBB newsletter, N^o 16.

The calm of one September work party afternoon was disturbed by a drone flying over the Vertical Engine House. Was it a coincidence that it left in a hurry as soon as a camera was trained on it?

The masons started work on the walls of the New Pit heapstead towards the end of November (photo right). They are also scheduled to rebuild the edges of the window and door openings of the Horizontal Engine House, and to rebuild parts of north-west and south-west walls of the Cornish Engine House. This work will be financed by the grant from the Ibstock Cory Environmental Trust.



There are copies of all previous FoBB newsletters on the 'Archive' page of our website (www.aibt.org), and there are over 300 photographs of the buildings, work in progress, and artefacts found, on the Brandy Bottom project pages.

Doors Open Day 2017

Brandy Bottom was open during the Friday, Saturday and Sunday of the 2017 Heritage Open Days weekend in September, when a total of 78 visitors. There are plans to open again in 2018.

Future Work Parties

At present visitor access to the site is limited to days when there is a work party in progress. The dates for the rest of **2017** are: Saturday 02 and Wednesday 13 December. It is usually possible to give small groups a guided tour during the work parties on a 'turn-up on the day' basis.

The dates for **2018** are: Saturday 06, Wednesday 17, Saturday 24 January; Saturday 03, Wednesday 14, Saturday 24 February; Saturday 10, Wednesday 21, Saturday 31 March; Saturday 07, Wednesday 18, Saturday 28 April; Saturday 05, Wednesday 16, Saturday 26 May; Saturday 09, Wednesday 20, Saturday 30 June; Saturday 07, Wednesday 18, Saturday 28 July; Saturday 04, Wednesday 15, Saturday 25 August; Saturday 08, Saturday 15 and Sun 16 (Heritage Open Days), Saturday 29 September; Saturday 06, Wednesday 17, Saturday 27 October; Saturday 03, Wednesday 14, Saturday 24 November; Saturday 01, Wednesday 12 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 am and 3 pm, but these timings are not hard and fast so we may start later and 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.

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

Photographs



Photo 1 – The completed viewing platform spans the Vertical Engine House.



Photo 2 – Photo of the engine bed of the Vertical Engine House in 2012. The arrow points to what may be the bed of an earlier engine.



Photo 3 – Fragment of a stoneware jar found in the entrance to the Old Boiler House. Pearson & Co

(Chesterfield) was a Derbyshire stoneware maker that operated under that name between 1922 and 1994.



Photo 4 – These two fragments of stoneware were found on the same day on opposite sides of the Old Pit enclosure, and were only discovered to be from the same flagon during the process of cleaning them.



Photo 5 – Close-up of the logo on a 3 fluid oz capacity bottle found in the Old Boiler House.



Photo 6 – Markings on the base of the same bottle. (See main text)



Photo 7 – A metal pipe, covered by stone slabs at the far end, outside the entrance to the Old Boiler House.



Photo 8 – The area outside the Old Boiler House after the shrubs were cut-back to allow terracing of the slope.



Photo 9 – Three pieces of a stoneware jar found outside the Old Boiler House.



Photo 10 – Two of the pieces have been temporarily joined with Selotape to show the legend 'Peter Showell Wine & Spirit Merchant Oldbury'.



Photo 11 – This metal guide was found outside the Old Boiler House. It is similar to one found in the well in the Vertical Engine House in October 2016, shown in photo 16 of FoBB newsletter N° 13.



Photo 12 – The base of one of the tippler slots has been covered with plastic sheeting held down with spoil to protect the brickwork against the winter weather.



Photo 13 – The area at the south-western of end of the Old Pit heapstead being covered up with a layer of spoil on top of a plastic sheet.



Photo 14 – Building a support frame to stop the sides of a hole in the floor of the Old Boiler House from collapsing inwards.



Photo 15 – The inside of the large hole in the floor of the Old Boiler House. The channel mentioned in the text runs from the top to the bottom of the middle of the photo.



Photo 16 – Removing tree stumps from the area between the cycle path and the Old Pit boundary fence.



Photo 17 – 6" square floor tile found beside the cycle path about 200 yards to the south-west of the site. It is marked with 'Cattybrook Brick Works Bristol', and was probably dumped as sub-standard due to the presence of cracks at the edges.



Photo 18 – This old lorry chassis was found when some vegetation was cleared by the spoil dump.

Unless otherwise stated all photos are by R H Whitworth (© R H Whitworth 2012, 2017)

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