

FRIENDS OF BRANDY BOTTOM COLLIERY, PUCKLECHURCH

Newsletter N^o 18, February 2018

(Photos 1-33 will be found on page 4 onwards)



The 2 work parties in December 2017 brought the total for the year to 56, one more than in 2016, while there have been 3 so far in 2018. Contract masons have almost finished working on the walls of the New Pit heapstead, the Horizontal Engine House and the Cornish Engine House. As a result almost all the initial major stabilisation work on the site, apart from the area around the fan housing has been completed. But that still leaves the volunteers many other things to do, such as repointing large expanses of exposed brick or masonry walls and the intention is to finish that during 2018.

Progress: December 2017 - February 2018

The current programme of conservation has been partly funded by a £20 000 grant from the Ibstock Cory Environmental Trust, with the balance coming from the AIBT's own resources. The work has been done by CWS Landscaping, and was substantially completed by the end of January 2018. (CWS Landscaping has done all the contract reconstruction to date.) The AIBT would like to thank the trust for their financial assistance, and also Ibstock, the landowners, for delivering some more special bricks for use in the rebuilding.

In the Horizontal Engine House, the brick surrounds of the door and windows have been rebuilt, and the opportunity was taken to turn the engine house into a secure storage area by incorporating door and window bars into the rebuild. These have been fabricated by one of the regular volunteers. Photo 1 shows the state of the brickwork around the door and window openings in the north-east wall in June 2017, while photo 2 is a close-up of the window on the right of the doorway in November 2011. The photo on the right is a close-up of the same window after the rebuild.



The rebuild of the tops of the eastern corner and south-east wall of the New Pit heapstead has been completed. The masonry of the walls forming the northern corner of the heapstead was in a very poor condition and had to be extensively patched. Photo 5 shows the corner, and photo 6 part of the north-west wall, while still covered by vegetation, while photos 7 to 9 show the same areas after the vegetation was removed but before work started. It was found that the vegetation had fortunately prevented a large vertical slice of wall between the corner and the northern-most tippler slot from collapsing. Photo 11 is a view of the rebuilt face of the northern corner and 17 shows the corner from a different angle. At the same time the tippler slots in the north-west wall were reconstructed. This was a much longer task than on the Old Pit, as the New Pit slots were found to

be in a poor state of preservation. Photo 12, taken in March 2017, shows just how bad things were, while photo 13, taken in January 2018, shows the same area after the rebuild. The slots were rebuilt using the ones on the Old Pit as a pattern. Photos 14 and 15 are 'before' and 'after' views of the northern tipler slot, while photos 16 and 17 show the rebuilt slots and heapstead walls. The walls of the winding ramp have also been rebuilt. Photo 18 shows the winding ramp area in January 2017, when a test trench had been dug between it and the south-east wall of the heapstead. Photo 19 shows the area in April after the walls were fully exposed. The photo on the right shows the rebuilt ramp walls from the south, while photo 20 is another view from the opposite side.



The masons have also worked on the Cornish Engine House. The vertical southern end of the bob wall had not been squared off when the top was capped in early 2016, and this has now been done to seal it and stop it from deteriorating. Photo 21 was taken from the top of the Horizontal Engine House in March 2017, and the rough face of the bob wall can be seen in the middle of the picture. Photo 22 was taken in January 2018 from a position outside the south-west wall of the building, and shows the wall after the rebuild. At the same time a section of the south-west wall was built up (photo right). It had been broken down to walkway level (photo 23), possibly when the scrap metal merchants were working on site in the 1960s, and the stones removed from the site. The treads of the stone steps leading up to the walkway outside the wall are now surfaced with pennant slabs (photo 25). Photo 24 shows the 'as uncovered' state of the treads, which were definitely not people-friendly. The original working surfaces of both the walkway and the steps had been robbed out in the past. The masons have not rebuilt the top surface of the walkway, as that is one of the jobs that can be done by the volunteers. Visitors will have easy access to the inside of the Cornish Engine House once that has been done and a set of handrails made for the steps. The temporary wooden steps seen in the above photo will then be removed.



The undercroft of the Horizontal Engine House was surveyed in early December, and a number of photos taken of various areas. The photo on the right (© H Orr-Ewing, 2017) shows the miners' font in the northern corner of the undercroft. There are two brick walls running almost the full length of the undercroft that would have been used to support the machinery, and photos 26 to 28 were taken



along the space between them. The rusty shuttering used in casting the floor can be seen at the top of photo 26. The floor appears to have been cast on the top of the brick walls, and it is not clear at present whether the engine settings have been destroyed. There are bricks heaped up in places (photo 27) and it is not obvious where they came from. A number of bull-nosed bricks were salvaged from the heaps, and have been used in the rebuild of the eastern corner of the engine house (photo 31). This, for some strange reason, is the only corner of the building where they are used.

There were site tidy-ups in January and February. Some of the stumps left over from the forestry work in early 2017 were uprooted from both inside and outside the Old Pit boundary fence. They were starting to sprout again, and would have started to block the views from the cycle path.

Research by one of the volunteers on an unrelated topic turned up some information on the builder of an engine installed at Parkfield in the 1870s. George Watkins, the Bristol-based photographer, included a photograph in one of his series of books on stationary steam engines¹, noting that the maker was Teague and Chew, who were based in Cinderford. However there is also a reference² in the *Colliery Guardian* where the maker is given as Gregory, of Kingswood Hill. As Watkins was working in the 1930s, it is possible that the original maker was Gregory, and that Watkins recorded the name on either a later engine or on the original after a rebuild. The 1870s date of the Parkfield engine is contemporary with the building of Horizontal Engine House at Brandy Bottom, so Cossham may have used the same engine maker at Brandy Bottom. While this is still in the realms of conjecture, it is at least a starting point for further research.

The art work for four interpretation boards is almost complete, and we will hopefully have them in position by the time the next newsletter is published. These have been funded by Historic England. There will be one board for the Old Pit, one for the New Pit, one covering the overall history of the site while the last board will cover the AIBT and its conservation work at Brandy Bottom and elsewhere. The existing board will be left in place, as it complements the new ones with some different information, such as how coal seams are formed. It should also be pointed out that the nearby mine winding wheel did not come from Brandy Bottom, as stated on the existing board. It was actually brought by Sustrans³ from a mine in south Wales, at some time in the 1990s, and marks the spot where the Dramway cycle path crosses the line of a Roman road. In any case at 20 ft diameter it is the wrong size — according to the 1900 sale catalogue, there was a 13 ft diameter wheel on the Old Pit and a 7 ft one on the New Pit.

Planning has already started on opening Brandy Bottom during the ‘Heritage Doors Open’ weekend in September 2018.

The metal guide seen in photo 11 of the previous newsletter (N^o 17) has been identified as a cage guide, which was used to prevent a cage from twisting in the shaft.

¹ Watkins G, *Stationary steam engines of Great Britain, Vol 6: the South Midlands*, Landmark, 2000-2004?

² Grudgings S/Kemp K, private correspondence, 29 Dec 17

³ Grimshaw J, private correspondence with R Gosling, 19 Aug 13



There are copies of all previous FoBB newsletters on the 'Archive' page of our website (www.aibt.org), and there are over 350 photographs of the buildings, work in progress, and artefacts found, on the Brandy Bottom project pages.

Future Work Parties

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.

The dates for 2018 are: 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/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.

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 front of the Horizontal Engine House in June 2017, showing the dilapidated state of the brickwork around the door and window openings.



Photo 2 – A November 2011 close-up of the right hand window in photo 1. There is a photo of the rebuilt window area on page 1.



Photo 3 – A mason rebuilding the brick surround to the window in the south-east wall of the Horizontal Engine House.



Photo 4 – The finishing soldier course of bricks has been laid along the top of the eastern corner and part of the south-east wall of the New Pit heapstead in January 2018.



Photo 5 – Vegetation growing at the northern corner of the New Pit heapstead in April 2014.



Photo 6 – Vegetation covering the top of the north-western wall of the New Pit heapstead in January 2017.



Photo 7 – The northern corner of the New Pit heapstead in April 2017 after the vegetation had been removed.



Photo 8 – Another view of the northern corner of the New Pit heapstead. The unsupported section of wall, referred to on page 1, can be seen at the top centre.



Photo 9 – The north-western wall of the New Pit heapstead in April 2017 after the vegetation had been removed. The break at the top to the left of the scaffolding shows the location of the northern tippler slot.



Photo 10 – The northern corner of the New Pit heapstead during the rebuilding of the vertical faces of the walls.



Photo 11 – The same corner of the New Pit heapstead in December 2017 after the rebuild. The light coloured areas show where the faces of the walls have been patched.



Photo 12 – The tippler slots on the north-west of the New Pit heapstead in March 2017. They had been cleared of spoil so that a specification could be drawn up for their rebuilding.



Photo 13 – The New Pit tippler slots in January 2018 after they had been rebuilt in a similar style to those of the Old Pit.



Photo 14 – Close-up of the northern tippler slot, New Pit heapstead, after excavation in April 2017 ...



Photo 15 – ... and in January 2018 after the rebuild had been completed.



Photo 16 – View of the rebuilt north-west wall of the New Pit heapstead in mid-January before the scaffolding was taken down. The light coloured areas show where the face of the wall has been patched.



Photo 17 – Close-up of the rebuilt northern corner of the New Pit heapstead, seen from the cycle path in January 2018, during the reconstruction of the tippler slots.



Photo 18 – The winding ramp on the top of the New Pit heapstead in January 2017, after a test trench had been dug on the south-eastern side ...



Photo 19 – ... View of the ramp in April 2017 after the walls had been exposed ...



Photo 20 – ... and in January 2018 after the reconstruction.



Photo 21 – The rough southern face of the bob wall of the Cornish Engine House can be seen in the centre of this photo, which was taken from the top of the Horizontal Engine House in March 2017 ...



Photo 22 – ... and the wall in January 2018 after the face was patched, seen from a position below the walkway outside the south-west wall.



Photo 25 – ... and in January 2018 after the stone treads were rebuilt with slabs of pennant.



Photo 23 – The south-west wall of the Cornish Engine House in August 2017. The middle photo on page 2 shows the same wall after the centre section was rebuilt.



Photo 26 – View south-westwards under the floor of the Horizontal Engine House along the space between the two brick pedestals. The rusty corrugated iron at the top of the photo is the shuttering used when the modern concrete floor was cast. (© H Orr-Ewing, 2017)



Photo 24 – The steps outside the south-west wall of the Cornish Engine House in June 2017 ...



Photo 27 – View north-eastwards along the same space as the previous photo. The grease-laden wall seen towards the back of the photo is shown in close-up in the next photo. (© H Orr-Ewing, 2017)



Photo 28 – Close-up of the grease covered wall seen in the previous photo. (© H Orr-Ewing, 2017)



Photo 29 – Close-up of the base of the eastern corner of the Horizontal Engine House in November 2011.



Photo 30 – The weathered state of the brickwork forming the eastern corner of the Horizontal Engine

House in November 2011. The bull-nosed bricks at the point of the eastern corner can be seen at the extreme left hand side of the photo.



Photo 31 – The restored eastern corner of the Horizontal Engine House in January 2018. The bull-nosed bricks used came from the piles in the undercroft of the engine house.



Photo 32 – Uprooting old tree stumps from beside the cycle path, using an easier method than that seen in photo 16 of the previous newsletter.



Photo 33 – Stacking new bricks on top of the New Pit heapstead ready for use in rebuilding the tippler slots.

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