

Friends of Brandy Bottom Colliery Pucklechurch



Newsletter N° 25, November 2019

(Photos 1-32 are on page [4](#) onwards. The photo above, showing the chimney, Old Pit heapstead and the Cornish Engine House, was taken from the top of the Horizontal Engine House in November 2019.)

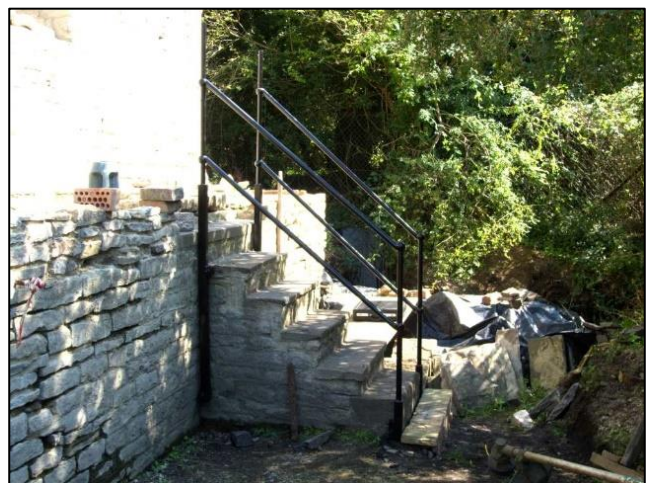
There have been 11 work parties since the last newsletter, bringing the total to date for 2019 to 37. The numbers include both Heritage Open Days. The weather has changed, from the warm and often sunny days of summer to the cold, wet days of autumn. The last two work parties were wet, bringing an end to a long run of dry work parties.

Brandy Bottom was open for two days as part of the Heritage Open Days, when we had a total of 182 visitors. The emphasis before the opening was on getting the site ready, and afterwards it was back to work on the condenser pit of the Cornish Engine House and the under croft of the Horizontal Engine House.

By chance a search through the photo archive uncovered some photos that had not been published before, and these are included in the last [section](#). They include a couple of the old photos taken at Parkfield, a 1977 photo of the Old Pit, and a 2005 one of the Vertical Engine House.

Progress: August - November 2019

The emphasis during work parties in August and early September was on preparations for the Heritage Open Days (HODs) in mid-September. Handrails were fitted to the steps outside the south-west wall of the Cornish Engine House (photo right) and vegetation was cut back along the paths the visitors would use. The start of the work party on 07 September was delayed by the discovery of a hornet's nest inside the container (photo [2](#)). The colony was none too pleased at the prospect of sharing space with humans so had unfortunately to go. They had built the nest in the two weeks since the previous work party. While the pest control was in progress people looked around for alternative things to do ... only to realise that the necessary tools were inside the container. At least these hornets were the native species and not the foreign invaders. The hornets were persistent as they were still hanging around

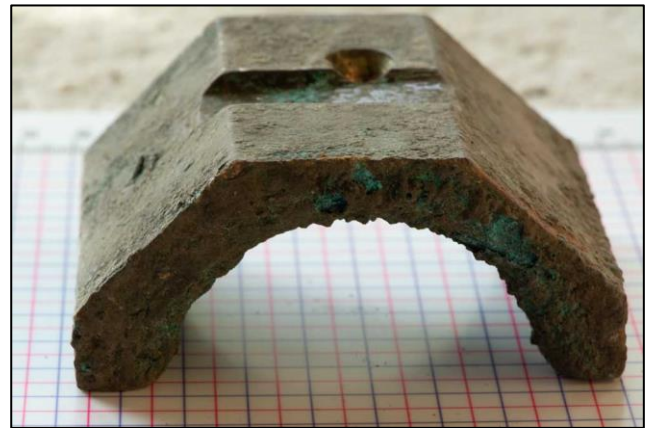


on 11 September but had got the message by the HODs weekend. There the problems were caused by intruders leaving cigarette papers around the New Pit after we had tidied up the site on the previous Wednesday.

Work resumed in the Cornish Engine House on the first work party after the HODs, despite the forecast of rain showers. They did arrive but were not long enough or heavy enough to force a switch to the undercroft – see [below](#). The make-up of the spoil removed from the condenser pit has changed and now contains many pieces of limescale. Some appear to have been formed around pipes. Other pieces were formed on a flat surface, and an example of this type can be seen in the photo on the right. This 9" x 2¼" piece of scale has a series of raised strips running across it. They have the appearance of a scale gouged into a wooden surface, as the gaps between the four strips on the right are the same. Not that the markings would have been much use when buried under a covering of limescale. At first sight one of the pieces of curved limescale appeared to have been deposited on a large diameter pipe, but later work confirmed the diameter as 12". This is the same diameter as many other pieces of limescale that we have found.



The top half of a bearing appeared on 16 October (photo right, 5 mm scale). It measures 3½" x 2½" x 1½" and would have fitted a shaft about 2¼" in diameter. We have still to work out what piece of equipment it came from.



We also uncovered what appears to be a pipe clip fixed to the bob wall of the condenser pit at the same work party. Its position has been marked with an arrow in the photo [5](#), and photos [6-7](#) show it as the covering stones were removed. Overall it measured 4½" x 3" x 2", and the central slot was 1¾" wide. There was a 1¼" diameter hole drilled through both of the arms at right angles to the slot, which can be seen in photo [8](#).

Another find was a piece of pottery that appears to be from the same mug as reported in the previous (N° 24) newsletter as it has a similar style of decoration (middle of photo [9](#)). A third piece of the mug was found at a later work party (photo right, 5 mm scale) and proved to be the key to the mystery as to what the mug commemorated. This latest piece carried the inscriptions 'THEIR' 'CORONA...' and on another line a '2' with what looked like the leading part of another '2'. The '22' could be part of a date, and some research confirmed that the coronation of George V and Queen Mary took place on 22 June 1911. We are confident that the mug was a coronation souvenir as the picture on the first fragment was that of Queen Mary. All three pieces can be seen in photo [9](#), with the latest item on the right. It still does not explain why the mug came to be in the Cornish Engine House.



A somewhat worn Victorian 1859 6d piece was found in spoil from the Cornish Engine House. Photographs will have to wait until the next newsletter.

After the HOD Jeff continued to build the railings running along the edge of the platform outside the south-west wall of the Cornish Engine House. He has now completed all the railings for the area between the steps and the south-eastern end of the platform (photo [12](#)).

There was more work in the undercroft of the Horizontal Engine House during one rainy work party in August. As this is under cover it is a suitable job for such weather. For those working in the undercroft that is, the people moving spoil to the dump or on other outside tasks may have a different opinion. Rubble was removed from along the full length of the south-east passage, uncovering what was thought at first to be a pit in the eastern corner of the building (photo [13](#)). Further exploration was put on hold for the next wet work party ... and then there were two in succession – one at the end of October and one at the beginning of November. Spoil clearance extended the pit in the eastern corner into a trench running along the north-eastern wall. This uncovered an arched opening with a metal pipe running through the wall (photo right). We will now have to find out if this pipe connects with the one found outside the alcove at the end of the south-western wall of the Cornish Engine House. This might be the steam feed to the Horizontal Engine House, as we have not found any other openings for feed pipes. In true Brandy Bottom fashion, the discussion about the pipe's significance continues ...



The work force varies in size, with a core group of Hamish, Jeff, Ken, Mark, Mick and myself, joined when they are able by Bob, Martin, Neil, Peter, Steve G, Steve H, and Tim and his sons. A thank you to all of them for their efforts in both the dry and the wet weather.

Heritage Open Days

Brandy Bottom was open to the public on 14 and 15 September as part of the 2019 HODs series of events. The photo on the right shows one tour party on top of the Old Pit heapstead, with Steve, its guide, standing near the edge. The estimate of a 45-minute long guided tour was a tad optimistic, as 60 minutes was closer to the mark for many of them and even that was done at a gallop. We had a total of 182 visitors, 100 on Saturday and 82 on Sunday, compared to the 2018 figures of 134, 51 and 83, respectively. They generously gave us donations totalling £130 – thank you. Thanks also go to Hamish, Ken, Jeff, Steve H, Mick, and Robin for all their work over the weekend.



The model of the Cornish Engine House made its first HOD appearance, as did the revised display panels on conservation at Brandy Bottom. The Cornish Engine House model can be seen in the photo on the right, with the “western” corner in the foreground. Hamish has made some additions to the model, in the form of the steps outside the south-west wall, and a rocking beam and pump rod. The steps can be clearly seen in the photo, but it is not so easy to spot the beam. Photo [19](#) gives a slightly better view of it. Alba's work was produced by 3D printing with plastic, a luxury that Hamish has not been able to use for his additions. The Cornish Engine House model is at the same scale as the New Pit heapstead, so it should be possible to integrate them both into a single site model at some date in the long-term future. The updated display panels nearly missed the event, as they were only collected from the printers the day before the first of the open days. There was room for only two of the Parkfield photos given to us the previous year on them, so the complete set of 10 featured on a separate A3-sized sheet. It was a chance for visitors to see all the photos in one place, albeit at a smaller size than the originals. Copies of the artwork of all the current display panels can be found in the Brandy Bottom section of the AIBT's website.



No sooner has one HOD finished than the planning starts for the next one. This takes the form of a review of what could be done better, so that there is not a last-minute rush to do things before the next HOD. The 2020 event will take place on the individual location's choice of days between 11 and 20 September. At the moment it looks as if it will be 12 and 13 September for Brandy Bottom.

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 though this cannot be guaranteed as it depends on there being enough volunteers present. 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 for the rest of 2019 are:
Saturday 23 November, Saturday 07, Wednesday 18 December.

The dates for work parties in 2020 are:
Saturday 04, Wednesday 15, Saturday 25 January; Saturday 01, Wednesday 12, Saturday 22 February; Saturday 07, Wednesday 18, Saturday 28 March; Saturday 04, Wednesday 15, Saturday 25 April; Saturday 09, Wednesday 20, Saturday 30 May; Saturday 06, Wednesday 17, Saturday 27 June; Saturday 04, Wednesday 15, Saturday 25 July; Saturday 01, Wednesday 12, Saturday 22 August; Saturday 05, Saturday 12 and Sunday 13 (Heritage Open Days - Provisional), Wednesday 23 September; Saturday 03, Wednesday 14, Saturday 24 October; Saturday 07, Wednesday 18, Saturday 28 November; Saturday 05, Wednesday 16 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 or pay a visit are advised to first make contact via the AIBT's email address of info@aibt.org. Youngsters, either as visitors or as part of a working party, must always be accompanied by a responsible adult.

At present there is only a small team working on the conservation, so newcomers are welcome to pay a visit and see if they would like to join in. The work varies, sometimes excavating spoil and recording both the buried objects and the structures that have been revealed, at others rebuilding and repointing masonry walls. Any major rebuilding required, such as the work on the chimney and the edges of the heapsteads is done by contract masons. Other tasks include keeping the vegetation under control. If you would like to find out more about work parties at Brandy Bottom, please contact us by email at info@aibt.org.

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 using a link on the main Brandy Bottom project page.

Information on Website

There are copies of all earlier newsletters on the Archive page of the website www.aibt.org. There is a brief history of the pit and reports on work parties on other pages, as well as around 500 photographs of the buildings, work parties, artefacts and structures discovered, and the wildflowers and insects.

Photographs (August - November 2019)



Photo 1 – Jeff and Hamish working on a temporary rebuild at the top of the steps outside the south-west wall of the Cornish Engine House before the HODs.



Photo 4 – Close-up of a hornet at the base of the container. It is resting on a 2½" x 3¼" platform, which gives an idea of the hornet's size.



Photo 2 – The nest the hornets built against one of the doors of the storage container. They had to be removed by spraying as they objected to sharing the space with humans.



Photo 5 – The position of the pipe clip on the bob wall of the Cornish Engine House has been marked with an arrow. (See comments on p.2)



Photo 3 – Once most of the hornets had succumbed, the door could be opened. This broke the outer shell of the nest, giving a glimpse of the interior structure. One of the surviving hornets can be seen flying in front of the honeycomb.



Photo 6 – Close-up of the pipe clip sticking out of the bob wall of the Cornish Engine House before the covering stones were removed.



Photo 7 – The stones have been removed and a 5cm x 5cm scale placed on the clip.



Photo 8 – View of the side of the clip, showing the 1¼" diameter hole that runs through both arms.



Photo 9 – The three fragments of the decorated mug found in the condenser pit of the Cornish Engine House, with the latest on the right. (5 mm graduated scale) (See comments on p.2)



Photo 10 – Hamish takes it easy when repointing the brickwork by the entrance to Pumping Shaft passage.



Photo 11 – Jeff working on the railings outside the Cornish Engine House, helped by Hamish.



Photo 12 – The completed railings at the south-eastern end of the platform outside the Cornish Engine House at the beginning of November.



Photo 13 – The pit in the eastern corner of the Horizontal Engine House’s undercroft. (See comments on p.3)



Photo 14 – View along the south-eastern wall of the undercroft with the pit seen in the previous photo at the top of the picture.



Photo 15 – Colliers' font in the northern corner of the undercroft, Horizontal Engine House.



Photo 16 – Mark and Ken take a break from sorting out the bricks found in the undercroft of the Horizontal Engine House.



Photo 17 – Two visitors look at the displays on 'Local Industrial Heritage' at the HOD.



Photo 18 – Mick, Ken, Hamish, and Jeff get ready to receive the visitors on the Sunday.



Photo 19 – Alba's model of the Cornish Engine House, with Hamish's additions of steps up to the platform and a beam and

pump rods. This is the view from the “west”. See comments on p.3)



Photo 20 – A view from the “south” of the model.



Photo 21 – Hawthorn berries ripening beside the cycle path in August.

Old Photographs (Mostly 1977 onwards)

The trawl through the archives for suitable photos for use in the new display panels uncovered some interesting photos, some of which had not been published in earlier newsletters.

Photos [22](#) and [23](#) show how the contract masons worked on the outside of the chimney. Every time they finished a bucket of mortar, they had to abseil down to ground level, and then climb back to the top of the chimney with more mortar before abseiling back to where they had been working. We had to employ contract masons as none of the volunteers have the required ability of repointing while abseiling.

It looks as if AD Wadley’s 1977 photo of the Old Pit was taken from a point near the pond on the other side of the cycle path (photo [24](#)). The present cycle path will be found just beyond the fence in the foreground, and there is no sign of the many trees that now line the edge of the path. Another of his photos is shown as [25](#).

We were given some aerial photos of the site by a drone enthusiast in April 2018 and one of them can be seen in photo [26](#). This first appeared in newsletter N° 19 (May 2018), but this time most of the major features have been labelled. This should help those readers who are trying to work out which building is being referred to and which way is north-east and south-west.

Photos [27](#) and [28](#) are two of the photos taken at Parkfield that did not make newsletter N° 21. The first shows a miner standing in a haulage way, while the second is literally ‘at the coal face’. K Gardner, whose father had worked at Parkfield, gave us 10 photos at the 2018 Heritage Open Days weekend. Copies of all the photos can be seen on the display board page of the website.

The view of the Vertical Engine House (VEH) in photo [29](#) was taken in 2005 and shows that the south-east wall was still standing at that date. It must have finally collapsed shortly before we started working on the site. The relatively recent collapse will explain why we recovered so many good building stones from the VEH compared to other parts of the site. The next photo, [30](#), shows rebuilding work in progress on the north-east wall of the Cornish Engine House in 2012. The photographer was passing by when he noticed that there was work in progress. Photo [31](#) shows the large gaps between some of the stones at the top of the chimney during the 2014 rebuild. These gaps could be seen from the ground, and it was thought at first that the stones had become displaced. Inspection from the top of the chimney revealed that the stones had not moved, and the original builders had filled the large gaps with mortar. The last photo ([32](#)) shows a replacement stone being hauled up to the top of the chimney.



Photo 22 – Charlie working on repointing the outside of the chimney in 2016.



Photo 23 – Charlie working on the shoulder at the top of the square section of the chimney in 2016.

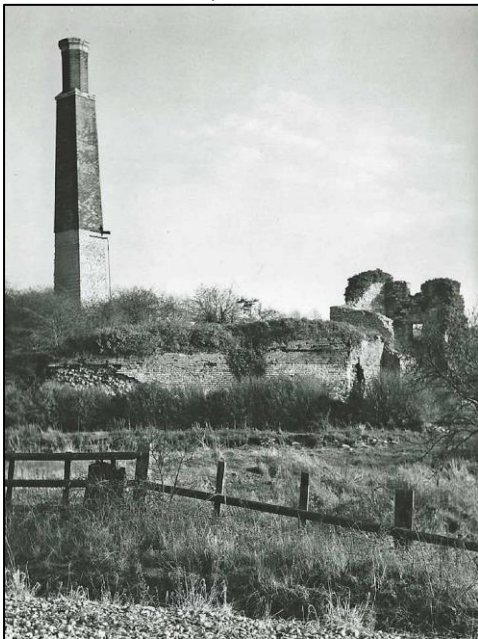


Photo 24 – AD Wadley's 1977 photo of the chimney, Old Pit heapstead, and the Cornish Engine House (on right). It appears to have been taken from a spot near the present-day pond, long before the current hedge at the edge of the cycle path appeared. (© AD Wadley 1977)

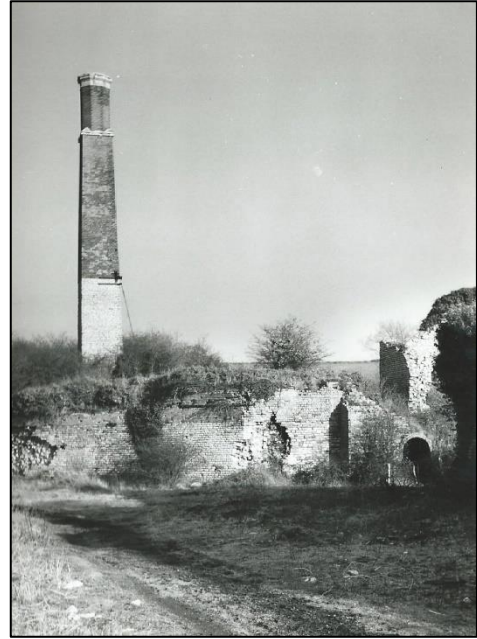


Photo 25 – Another of AD Wadley's 1977 photos of the Old Pit heapstead, chimney and part of the Cornish Engine House. This was taken long before the path in the foreground was tarred to form the cycle path. (© AD Wadley 1977)



Photo 26 – An aerial view of the site taken in April 2016 showing the location of the key features of the site. (© P Hodson 2916)



Photo 27 – One of the Parkfield photos that did not appear in Newsletter N°21. It shows a miner standing in a haulage way, judging by the height of the passage and the railway lines on the floor.

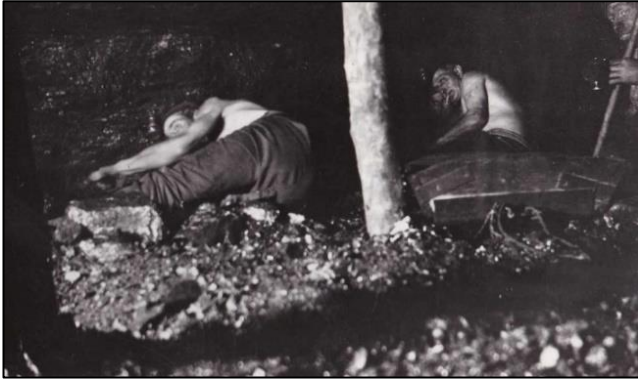


Photo 28 – The other Parkfield photo shows miners at work at the coal face.



Photo 29 – A view of the Vertical Engine House in 2005, just a few years before the trust started work. It shows that a large part of the south-east wall was still standing at that date. (© M Adams 2005)



Photo 30 – The inside of the Cornish Engine House during the rebuilding of the north-east wall in 2012. (© M Cole 2012)



Photo 31 – With the passing of time the mortar had been eroded from between the stones at the top of the chimney, leaving the large gaps seen in the photo. These gaps could be seen from ground level. (© C Skelton 2014)



Photo 32 – A replacement stone is hoisted up the inside of the chimney during the rebuilding of the top in 2014. (© C Skelton 2014)

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Website: www.aibt.org
(17 November 2019)

email: info@aibt.org

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