

12. HEDNESFORD HILLS

In 1933 Hednesford Hills was given to the local Council by the Marquis of Anglesey under a Deed of Gift. In 1981 much of the site became common land and in 1992 it achieved Local Nature Reserve status.

The wildlife of Hednesford Hills

Lowland heath is a very rare habitat that supports a specialised range of plants and vegetation such as heather, wavy hairgrass, crowberry, cowberry, bilberry and the bilberry/cowberry hybrid known locally as the 'Cannock Chase berry'. The hills are home to a wide variety of mammals, invertebrates and birds, and are sometimes visited by red and fallow deer. Recently, muntjac deer have been spotted.



The common lizard, *Zootoca vivipara*, is widespread on Hednesford Hills. You may be able to spot it sunbathing on logs and the sides of paths. In late summer it gives birth to live young, which are almost black in colour and can be seen more easily than the adults.
Image courtesy of Andy Jukes.



Cannock Chase berry
Image courtesy of the Heathland Partnership.

The social and cultural role of the hills

Heathlands such as Cannock Chase and Hednesford Hills have been managed by people for thousands of years. The combination of sand and gravel soils, tree harvesting and grazing produced an open landscape with small woodlands and scattered trees. Since the 1850s, however, much of this heathland has disappeared.

Traditionally, sheep, cattle and other animals were grazed on Hednesford Hills. The soil is unsuitable for growing crops, but people have found many uses for the other natural resources that the hills provide. For example, broom was used for making brooms and brushes, bracken for making soap and bilberries for brewing and dyeing.

In the late 1870s a reservoir was built on Hednesford Hills, but in 1887 it lost thousands of gallons of water when part of its embankment collapsed. The reservoir was abandoned in 1930, and in the 1950s a motor racing circuit that became known as Hednesford Hills Raceway was built on the site. Meetings are still held there today. Construction of a new, covered reservoir at a different location on the hills was completed in 1992.

Heathland needs to be managed to prevent it being taken over by invasive vegetation such as scrub and tussocky grasses. During the summer months, Dexter cattle graze Hednesford Hills as part of a scheme to re-introduce traditional methods of management.



Racehorse training

Horses were probably trained on Hednesford Hills since at least 1760, and by the mid 1830s about 120 horses trained here. Good drainage, excellent turf and a central location helped to provide an ideal training ground, and national recognition followed.

Hednesford had at least six racing stables by the mid 1850s, but horse training declined as coal mining grew. By the early 1900s only three stables remained.



Racehorses being exercised on Hednesford Hills c1920-1930.
Image courtesy of the Museum of Cannock Chase

EXPLORE AND DISCOVER

Gaskin's Wood

The wooded areas of Hednesford Hills are mostly plantations that were established in the 1960s or 1980s. Gaskin's Wood, the plantation opposite the Museum of Cannock Chase's main building is older. It dates back to the 1800s.

The Gaskin murder

Gaskin's Wood is so called because Elizabeth Gaskin, a Hednesford lady, was murdered there in 1919. Her husband, Henry Thomas Gaskin, killed her in the woods shortly after he returned from serving in the Great War. He was hanged at Winson Green Prison, in Birmingham, on 8 August 1919.



Several postcards followed the events of the Gaskin murder.



Elizabeth Gaskin (on the right) is pictured with her sister-in-law, Mary Law.
Images courtesy of the Museum of Cannock Chase

CANNOCK CHASE HERITAGE TRAIL

Cannock Chase Heritage Trail is a 10-mile route linking the towns of Cannock, Hednesford and Rugeley. It passes through, or close to sites of historic or environmental interest, with interpretation boards along the way that tell the story of each location. Intended to support a healthy lifestyle, the trail is a facility for walkers and cyclists, offering walks and off-road cycle routes. The trail was initially funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and several project partners in 2008.

The trail passes close to wildlife sites of international importance. Cycle wheels, horse hooves, and feet, can severely damage these sites, and out of control dogs disturb wildlife. Please help us to protect wildlife by remaining on designated routes and by keeping dogs under close control.

Remember to follow the Cannock Chase Code.



Scan the QR code to download a map of the Cannock Chase Heritage Trail



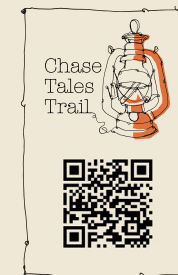
Take on the
Cannock Chase Heritage Trail Challenge
with the Cannock Chase Can App!

Cannock Chase Can is an exciting health and wellbeing programme to help you make healthier lifestyle choices. It hosts a variety of wellness challenges which can be undertaken as an individual, group or family. Here's how you can get involved...

Download the App for **FREE** today by visiting **Google Play** and the **App Store** and searching for 'Cannock Chase Can'.



Scan the QR codes on each interpretation board to bring to life elements of the Trail. Content has been created by local schoolchildren alongside professional artists and The Birmingham Repertory Theatre.



Chase
Tales
Trail



Hear
Our
Heritage

Collect all the QR codes for each themed trail to complete the challenge and gain points and rewards for your efforts.