

13. BRINDLEY HEATH

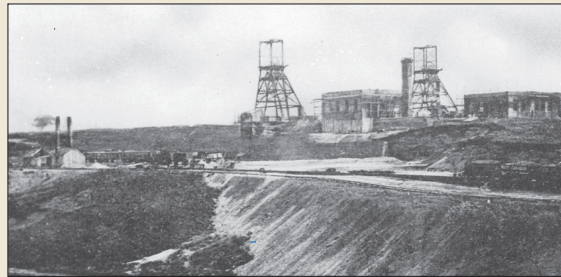
Brindley Heath brings together two important episodes in the history of Hednesford.

Part of this site formed the western boundary of a colliery that was a prominent feature of the landscape for almost 70 years.

A few years after the colliery opened, the colliery company purchased a disused military hospital to house its employees and their families. The site became a thriving community known as Brindley Village, which was located about one and a half miles west of here.

West Cannock No 5 Colliery

West Cannock No 5 Plant (sometimes known as The Tackeroo or Fives) opened here in 1914. By 1919 the colliery employed 403 men, and its output was rising steadily.



A postcard showing West Cannock Colliery No 5 Plant c1920.
Image courtesy of the Museum of Cannock Chase

The West Cannock Colliery Rescue Team

There were many local rescue teams that operated both across the Cannock Chase coalfield and within the wider region.

Rescue teams held annual competitions intended to display their skills and expertise in performing mine rescues. The winners could go on to compete regionally.



Image courtesy of the Museum of Cannock Chase



A miner being comforted after an explosion at the colliery in 1933, which killed six men and two horses.
Image courtesy of the Museum of Cannock Chase

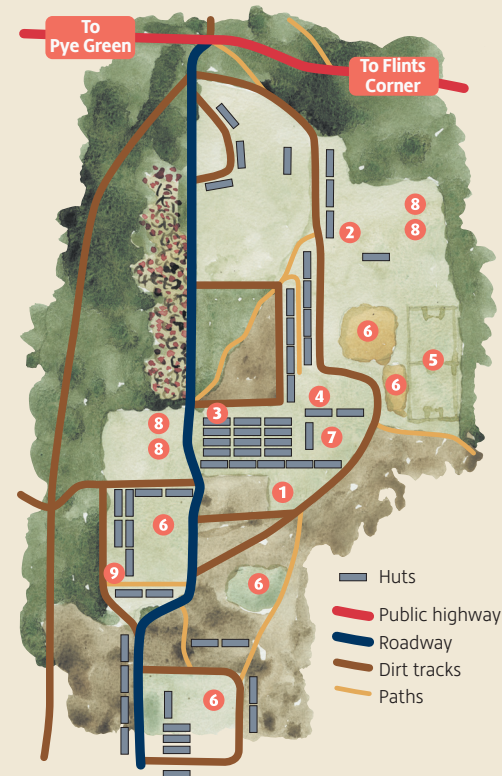
On May 16th 1933, an explosion of firedamp ripped through the pit. Firedamp is a combustible mine gas consisting chiefly of methane that explodes when mixed with air.

Six men died in the disaster, two were injured and thirteen were affected by afterdamp - the deadly poisonous gas that is formed after a firedamp explosion. On his deathbed, William Higgs described to his father the inadequate ventilation where he was working. He was about to leave when the blast occurred.

When it was nationalised in 1947, the colliery was renamed West Cannock No 5 Colliery. Production continued to rise through the early 1960s when the yearly output was over 1,000,000 tonnes. It was not to last though, as the colliery had long been dogged by water problems that grew worse.

In 1976 water affected the main production area and output began to decline. On December 17th 1982 the colliery finally closed. Ironically, a new world record had been set the year before when four seven-man teams tunnelled 251.4 metres in just five days!

Plan based on an original kindly provided by Mr Eric Whitehouse.



- 1 St Mary's Church
- 2 Infant School
- 3 Shop
- 4 Working Mens' Club
- 5 Football pitch
- 6 Sport and play
- 7 Garden
- 8 Air raid shelters
- 9 Youth Club

The site today

In its last decade the colliery implemented a scheme that involved planting 7,000 trees. In 1975 a further 2,000 trees were planted on a newly landscaped tip. Many of the trees that you see here today are part of this legacy. The colliery's surface buildings still remain and the site is now a small light industrial park managed by Staffordshire County Council.

EXPLORE AND DISCOVER

The Tackeroo Railway

During the Great War, two military camps were set up on Cannock Chase. In 1915 a railway line known as the Tackeroo was built to serve them.

Primarily a goods line bringing in much needed supplies and equipment, it ran from the main line at Milford to the West Cannock No 5 Plant sidings here in Brindley Heath. The train that ran on the line became known as the Tackeroo Express.



George Taylor was foreman of the men who built the Tackeroo railway.

The Irish labourers who helped construct the Tackeroo railway were an unruly bunch, and George Taylor, their foreman, had problems controlling bad behaviour. In *A Town for Four Winters*, C.J. and G.P. Whitehouse tell us that Matters finally came to a head when, in an improvised and flare-lit "ring", George downed the Irish champion after a long-drawn-out and bloody bare-knuckle set-to. George's life-long souvenir was a broken knuckle, but there was little more trouble.



The Tackeroo Express on the nearby Tackeroo railway line.
Image courtesy of Ray Smith

Our Tackeroo Express, Our Tackeroo Express!
The scenery is wonderful as you all confess,
Everything is splendid, especially the Mess,
From the sparks that fly, as we pass by,
on the Tackeroo Express.

Anon