

16. CANNOCK CHASE FOREST

A ROYAL FOREST

The present day Cannock Chase forms part of what was once a vast piece of land that stretched from Stafford as far south as Sutton Coldfield.

It was uncultivated land, inhabited by deer, wild boar and wolves. In 1086, William the Conqueror declared it to be his royal hunting forest.

A royal forest was not necessarily wooded. It had much more open space than we see today, with native broadleaf trees rather than the present-day pines.

People lived in settlements around the forest and used the land for grazing animals and growing crops. Trees were coppiced and pollarded (cut back to encourage the growth of new, straight stems). They could then be used to make wooden items such as hurdles (frameworks of interwoven branches, usually used for enclosing land or livestock).

The Bishop's 'Chase'

In 1290 part of Cannock Forest became the Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield's 'Chase', a term that referred to a forest controlled by an individual rather than a monarch.

The Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield established a deer park and hunting lodge here in the 13th century. It was called Beaudesert, meaning 'beautiful wild place'.

Courtesy of the Trustees of the William Salt Library, Stafford



A picturesque scene of Cannock Chase near Hatherton, showing some of the heathland which by this time covered much of the area. This watercolour is by J Adveno Brooke. Courtesy of the Trustees of the William Salt Library, Stafford



For many centuries local people have used the natural resources provided by Cannock Chase. These women were photographed collecting wood in 1896. Image courtesy of Staffordshire Arts & Museum Service

Deforestation in the 16th century

From the 13th century there are records of iron forges in Cannock Forest. In 1546 a number of local manors were sold to Sir William Paget, who realised that the area's plentiful supply of ironstone, wood and water power could be used to develop the nearby iron industry. By 1584 Paget's ironworks were producing 164 tons of iron per year, which created a great demand for charcoal. A few years later the courtier Fulke Greville gained a lease on two of Paget's forges and furnaces, and on 3,123 acres of woodland. By the end of the 16th century most of the coppiced and pollarded woodland had been felled for charcoal. The destruction of the forest greatly enlarged existing areas of heathland. During the 17th and 18th centuries it was used extensively for the grazing of animals.



Since the first human settlers arrived, Cannock Chase has been put to a variety of uses, but in recent times it has been used mainly for leisure and recreation. Its natural beauty and open countryside make it a popular place for family outings. Among the group in this 1933 photograph are chauffeurs from the local country estate of Shugborough. Image courtesy of Staffordshire Arts & Museum Service

EXPLORE AND DISCOVER

The Forestry Commission and Cannock Chase

In the 19th century, landowners started planting trees on parts of Cannock Chase, but during the Great War many of the trees were felled.

Timber was being used for trench-building and industry, and by the end of the war the national timber reserve had been stretched to breaking point.

This led to the formation of the Forestry Commission in 1919. Planting on Cannock Chase began soon after, and trees dating back to this time can still be found here. In 1939 alone, about 5,300 acres were converted from heathland to pine plantation. After the Second World War, forestry became an important industry for the area.

Since the 1970s, the Forestry Commission has given increasing attention to landscaping, recreation, conservation and environmental protection. These are now seen as being equal in importance to its original purpose of timber production.

On 1 April 2019, the Forestry Commission became Forestry England.

You can find out more about what Forestry England offer here at Cannock Chase by visiting the Forest Centre.



The Forestry Commission manages 2,300 hectares of woodland on Cannock Chase for multi-purpose benefits.

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.



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