

# 2. CANNOCK TOWN CENTRE

## A brief history of **CANNOCK**

The name Cannock may derive from the Celtic word *Gnoc* or *Cnoc*, meaning high place. A settlement at Cannock is mentioned in the Domesday Book.

### Mediaeval Cannock

Cannock was once part of an extensive forest, which, in 1086, became the royal hunting ground of William the Conqueror. In 1189 the manor of Cannock passed from the king to the Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield. Then, in 1259, Cannock was granted the right to hold a weekly market - an important step in becoming a thriving trading community.

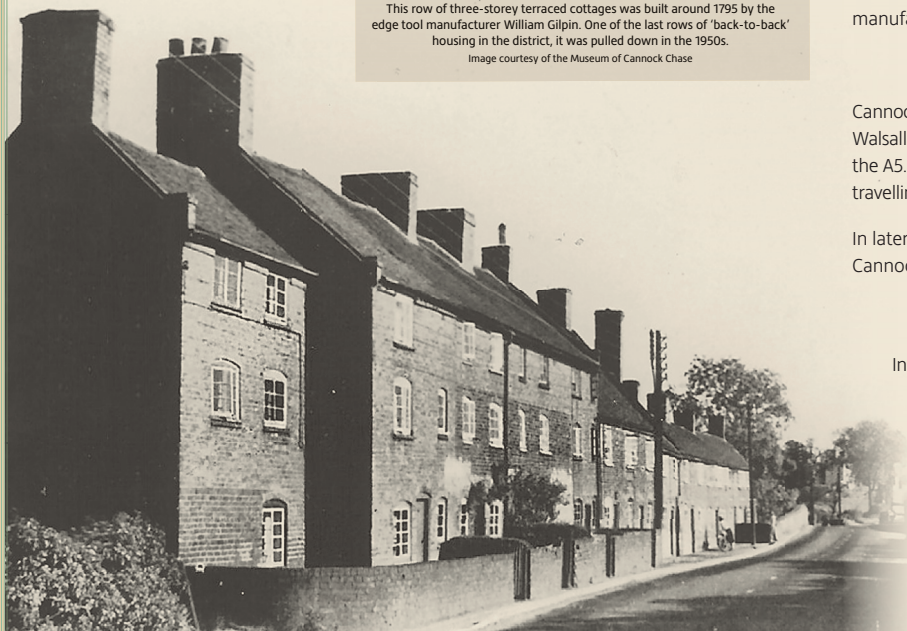


### A fashionable spa town

During the 17th and 18th centuries, the quality of its water gave Cannock a reputation as a spa town, which attracted a number of wealthy families. We can still glimpse some of their wealth in the houses around High Green, which was then the town centre.



This row of three-storey terraced cottages was built around 1795 by the edge tool manufacturer William Gilpin. One of the last rows of 'back-to-back' housing in the district, it was pulled down in the 1950s.  
Image courtesy of the Museum of Cannock Chase



Cannock town centre, looking south. This image probably dates from the early 1900s.  
Image courtesy of the Museum of Cannock Chase

### The development of the coal industry

As late as 1851, Cannock was described in White's History Gazetteer & Directory as a large and well built village. Soon after this, the rapid growth of the coal industry brought major changes. Large numbers of coal miners and their families began to move into the area. New housing was built, and the town developed and changed to cater for the needs of its increased population.

### Bricks, tiles, iron and edge tools

Until well into the 20th century, the brick-making, tilemaking and iron founding industries were among those important to the Cannock area, as was the manufacture of edge tools (tools such as chisels, that have a cutting edge). Communities such as Wedges Mills, Churchbridge and Bridgtown grew up south of Cannock to house the edge tool workers. The two main employers were Gilpin and Whitehouse, both among the most prominent manufacturers in the area.

### Roads, canals and railways

Cannock is linked by road to the nearby city of Lichfield, and to the towns of Stafford and Walsall. It is only a mile from the ancient Roman road of Watling Street, better known today as the A5. These roads helped Cannock's trades and industries to flourish. By 1818, stage coaches travelling between London and Liverpool passed through the town three times a week.

In later years, the development of the local canal and railway networks meant that coal from Cannock and the surrounding areas could be transported all over the country.

### A new urban district

In 1877 Cannock was divided into three wards - Cannock, Chadsmoor and Hednesford. In 1894 the Urban District of Cannock was formed and in 1900 three new wards, Bridgtown, Heath Hayes and Littleworth, were added. In 1934 the hamlet of Hazel Slade and part of Norton Canes were also incorporated into the urban district.

In 1974 Rugeley and Brindley Heath became part of the newly formed administrative district of Cannock Chase.

### EXPLORE AND DISCOVER

The picture below is taken from a postcard. Even though the postcard was never written, it can give us lots of clues to the past.



Image courtesy of Ray Smith

In 1935, when this branch of Woolworth's opened in Market Place, everything on sale cost either threepence or sixpence (1.25p or 2.5p).

On most counters there were shop assistants who selected the goods for customers and worked the tills. In 1972, the shop converted to a self-service system, with a checkout at the store exit.

The passengers are probably going on a day trip. A local beauty spot such as Seven Springs on Cannock Chase, or a seaside resort such as Blackpool or Llandudno, are likely destinations.



This bus is one of two that were purchased new by Mrs E.P. Homer of Stafford Road, Cannock, who ran a coaching firm. Its number-plate is likely to be either BRE 477 or ERE 602. The body of the vehicle would have been made by Burlingham Coachbuilders of Blackpool, on a Leyland chassis made near Preston. In about 1940-42, Mrs Homer's coaching firm was taken over by Harper's of Heath Hayes.

Fred Parsons, Cannock is embossed at the lower right of the postcard. Fred Parsons was a Cannock photographer.