

9. HEDNESFORD TOWN CENTRE



This postcard shows Old Hednesford c1920.

In the foreground on the left is the Cross Keys Inn. On the right, near the top of the hill, is the Queen's Arms public house. Built in 1866, it still remains today. Where the road dips you can see the crossing of the Cannock Mineral Railway line, which opened in 1859.

Image courtesy of Ray Smith

The Cross Keys Inn

The centre of Hednesford was once based about three quarters of a mile from here, in the area where the Cross Keys Inn now stands.

The Cross Keys Inn was built in 1746, and is among the oldest buildings in the town. The busy road on which it stood was originally an ancient packhorse route called Blake Street. In the eighteenth century the inn was a staging post for stage coaches and road wagons.

Splash Lane, opposite the Cross Keys Inn, c1920. Near to this area, originally called le Plash, there was once a stream. In Saxon times, it is thought that a man named Heddin or Hedda built a ford over the stream, and it is possible that the area became known to travellers as Heddin's Ford, which eventually became Hednesford.



Image courtesy of Ray Smith

Could these letters on the exterior of the Cross Keys Inn give us a clue about its past as a coaching inn? It is possible that they stand for Taylor's Wagon Company, which was a large company in the Midlands at the time. An alternative theory is that the letters are the initials of a previous landlord.



The origins of HEDNESFORD

The first recorded mention of Hednesford was in 1153, when King Stephen II granted the small settlement of Hednedford exemption from pannage dues. Pannage was a tax that was imposed for the right to feed animals such as swine in the nearby wood or forest.

By the late 12th century, a family of knights named Trumwyne owned some land here. Records suggest that other families arrived during the same period, but as late as the early 16th century, the settlement was probably only inhabited by around fifty people.



When this postcard was sent, in 1911, Hednesford was enjoying a period of prosperity. Image courtesy of Ray Smith

Early industry

The 15th century saw the beginnings of early industry in the area. In 1473 there was an iron forge in Hednesford, and by about 1561 William Paget had built the first blast furnace in the Midlands, along what is now the Hednesford to Rugeley road.

Although Hednesford was once dominated by the coal industry, a few other industries have played a role in the town's history. Hednesford Brickworks, which was near the current ground of Hednesford Town Football Club, was one of the largest in the area. Before nationalisation of the coal industry in 1947, it was owned by Cannock Chase Colliery Company.

From village to thriving town

Although still primarily an agricultural area, during the first half of the 19th century some small coal mines had been sunk nearby and a number of other trades had emerged in the village. The population had originally settled in the area around the Cross Keys Inn, but began to spread further afield.

In the late 1850s, the operations of the Hednesford Colliery Company attracted a significant number of newcomers to the area. The rapid growth in the local coal industry was boosted by improved transport links. By 1881, the population had rocketed to almost 7,000 people, and over 50% of the male villagers were employed in coal mining.

During the late 19th century and early 20th century, the prosperity of the area continued to grow. The town centre was thriving, and Hednesford market was the principal market in Cannock Chase.

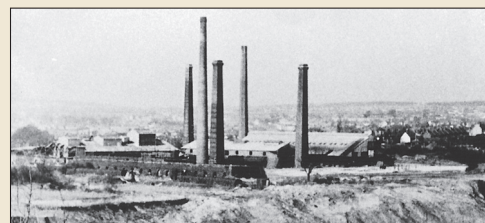


Image courtesy of the Museum of Cannock Chase

Coal mining in decline

After the Great War the local coal industry fell into depression, forcing the closure of some of Hednesford's collieries. More closures followed nationalisation in 1947. In the 1940s and 1950s Hednesford saw further changes in the wake of redevelopment when many areas of terraced housing were demolished.

In 2006 a memorial to local miners was erected outside the town's library. Miners' relatives were able to buy a brick, which was then engraved with the name of the person they wished to commemorate, along with the name of the colliery at which they worked.

Horse training in Hednesford

The hills around Hednesford have excellent drainage and good turf, and are ideal for training race horses. By the early 19th century, horse training here was gaining national importance. In 1841, eighty-seven locals were employed in the training of horses.



Blacksmith forge and variety of horseshoes. Image courtesy of TiktaAllik

Hednesford today - and tomorrow

In recent years, attention has turned to town centre regeneration - and so the face of Hednesford continues to change.

EXPLORE AND DISCOVER

Patterns in brickwork

Brick walls are built to a repeating pattern known as a bond. The two most common are English bond and Flemish bond, which you can spot throughout Hednesford.

English bond is stronger than Flemish bond since it has more header bricks connecting the two courses. A garden wall bond has fewer headers still, and is best for walls that do not need to bear much weight.



English bond



Flemish bond



Flemish garden wall bond

Headers and stretchers

When the long side of the brick is visible in the wall it is called a stretcher, and when the end of the brick is visible it is called a header.

Terracotta specials

The moulded, cut and shaped bricks that you can see around windows and where the wall and roof meet, are known as terracotta specials.



When locally-made bricks were fired in kilns, the parts nearer to the heat source were often darker in colour. Builders used this variation in colour to create brickwork patterns and designs. In this wall, it looks as if the stretcher bricks are baked more thoroughly than the headers.



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.