

# Potteries Pits, Railway & Canal Walk

## 19 miles around the north of Stoke-on-Trent

### Use OS 258 Explorer Map

The information is collated here in good faith to be of interest to those participating with Keith Bailey during his walk through the Potteries on Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> February 2020.

### HANLEY FOREST PARK GR SJ886488

Hanley is one of the five towns to make up the city of Stoke-on-Trent. From the top of this hill you can see the Red Street monument which is half way around the walk. The large blocks of flats you see look down onto Wellington Road School attended by:

**Sir Stanley Matthews CBE** (1<sup>st</sup> Feb 1915 – 23<sup>rd</sup> Feb 2000) was an English footballer and regarded as one of the greatest players in the English game. Born in Seymour Street, Hanley he played for Stoke City for 19 years and made 693 appearances for Stoke City FC and Blackpool FC and won 54 caps for England. Sir Stanley is honoured with a statue in Hanley town centre and a school in Blurton is named after him.

**Edward John Smith** (27<sup>th</sup> Jan 1850 – 15<sup>th</sup> April 1912). Looking over towards Eturia (we visit later today & just before Festival Park) is Garner Street where Edward John Smith was born. Smith was a British merchant navy officer and served as master of various White Star Line vessels. He was captain of the RMS Titanic and perished on 15<sup>th</sup> April 1912 when the ship sank on its maiden voyage.

**Frank Joseph Bough** born 15 January 1933 in Fenton was an English television presenter and is best known as the former host of BBC sports and current affairs shows. Over a long broadcasting career, Bough became renowned for his smooth, relaxed and professional approach to live broadcasts, once being described as "the most unassailable performer on British television".<sup>[1]</sup> In 1987, Michael Parkinson said: "If my life depended on the smooth handling of a TV show, Bough would be my first choice to be in charge."<sup>[1]</sup> In 1988, Bough was sacked by the BBC,<sup>[2]</sup> following revelations that he had taken cocaine and visited brothels.<sup>[3]</sup> He later presented programmes on LWT, ITV, Sky and on London's LBC radio before his retirement in 1998.

**Ray Reardon MBE** another personality who lived in the Potteries was a World Champion snooker player. Reardon born in Tredegar, Monmouthshire became a miner and following an accident where he was buried for three hours he quit mining and came to the Potteries as a policeman working in Hanley. His sharp toothed grin earned him the nickname 'Dracula'. He currently lives in Torquay, Devon.

**Phil Taylor**, nickname 'The Power' was born in Burslem on 13<sup>th</sup> Aug 1960 and is a retired professional darts player winning 16 World Championships.

**Eric John Bristow MBE** (25<sup>th</sup> April 1957 – 5<sup>th</sup> April 2018) was a five times World Champion professional darts player who lived in LEEK until his death on 5<sup>th</sup> April 2018. His nickname was the Crafty Cockney and was cremated at Carmountside Crematorium, Milton, Stoke-on-Trent.

**Freddie Jones** 12<sup>th</sup> Sept 1927 – 9<sup>th</sup> July 2019 was an English actor and born in Dresden. Freddie was best known for his roles in theatre 'The Dresser' in film 'The Elephant Man' and in television Emmerdale.

**Gordon Banks OBE** 30<sup>th</sup> Dec 1937-12<sup>th</sup> Feb 2019 was an English professional footballer who played as a goalkeeper and won 73 caps for England. Banks played for Stoke City FC and has a statue erected in his honour at the club.

**Alan Lake** 24<sup>th</sup> Nov 1940 – 16<sup>th</sup> Oct 1984 was an English actor and was born in Abbey Hulton, Stoke-on-Trent and featured in many film and tv roles but was best known as the 3<sup>rd</sup> husband to Diana Dors. He had a troubled later life serving time in HMP and a serious accident when on his horse. Alan committed suicide five months after Diana's death.

**Alex J Pritchard** born 5<sup>th</sup> November 1994 is a British dancer and choreographer and is best known as a dancer in the BBC series 'Strictly Come Dancing'. Alex was born and went to school in Sneyd Green a coal mining district.

## **Coal Mining**

There were many coal mines in North Staffordshire. On this site was Hanley Deep Pit Mine which was opened in 1854 employing 797 men. It was the deepest pit at the time in the North Staffordshire coalfield, reaching a depth of 1500 feet. In 1897 the pit belonged to The Shelton Company and at its peak in the 1930s it employed some 1552 men and boys below ground and 395 above ground often producing 9000 tons of coal a week. Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century the shaft was extended to the depth of 2661 feet, the deepest shaft in the area at the time. In 1927 the colliery was sending 50 coal trains each day onto the Potteries Loop rail line. The pit was closed in May 1962 when Wolstanton Colliery was modernised but much of the headgear and spoil heaps were left in situ. In the 1980s, the original site was cleared, landscaped and converted into Hanley Forest Park.

## **General Strike**

Coal miners in the Hanley and Longton area ignited the 1842 General Strike and associated Pottery Riots.

## **Sneyd Colliery GR SJ882496**

Coal was drawn from here from the 1820s. The mineral and royalties for the area in which the colliery obtained were payable to the Sneyd family owners.

Registered on 3<sup>rd</sup> Dec 1881 as Sneyd Colliery and Brickworks Co Ltd and changed to Sneyd Colliery Ltd on 5<sup>th</sup> Dec 1900 with a new shaft 700 yards deep. By 1927, 1650 were employed underground and 540 above ground.

During the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War there was a coal mining accident on 1 Jan 1942 in Burslem. An underground explosion occurred at 7:50 am, caused by sparks from wagons underground igniting coal dust. A total of 57 men and boys died.

Due to an old superstition that said the cutting of coal on New Year's day was unlucky miners traditionally did not work but because of the war effort the men of Sneyd turned out to work a normal day. 295 men were working in No.4 pit when at 7:50am an explosion occurred in the Banbury seam which was 0.5 miles (0.80 km) underground. The force of the explosion was powerful enough to blow men off of their feet; one apprentice, Reg Grocott (aged 16), was blown around a corner and his trajectory was stopped by a water drum. The man he was working with was not so lucky having been thrown against a wall and killed.

The explosion had been contained to one coalface in the Banbury Seam of No. 4 pit which had 61 men and boys working. All other workings were unaffected by the explosion, but all miners were evacuated from the No. 2 pit and the other areas of No. 4 pit.

55 workers were killed outright with two injured men dying of their injuries in hospital.

**Nationalisation of the coal industry** came in force on Jan 1<sup>st</sup> 1947 when 1,011 men were employed above ground and 447 below ground. In 1950 Sneyd Colliery and Hanley Deep Pit were connected to Wolstanton Colliery. Coal mining at Sneyd ceased in July 1962 by which time the 1,261 men employed were all transferred to Wolstanton. One of the shafts was maintained for ventilation and emergency. Wolstanton Colliery closed on 18<sup>th</sup> Oct 1985.

## **Burslem Cemetery GR SJ883498**

In 1873 28 acres of land was set aside on the side of 'Nettlebank' between Sneyd Street and Leek Road. The cemetery was opened in 1879.

**Enoch Arnold Bennett** 27<sup>th</sup> May 1867 – 27<sup>th</sup> March 1931 was an English writer. He is best known as a novelist, but also worked in other fields such as the theatre, journalism and films. Born in Hanley and educated in Newcastle-under-Lyme he left to work in London as a solicitor's clerk at the age of 21. After winning a literary competition he never looked back and never stopped writing: up to half a million words a year. When Bennett lay dying from typhoid in his flat at Chiltern Court above Baker Street station in 1931, London's city authorities laid straw on the streets to dull the noise: it was testament to his status as a great national figure. He is buried in the cemetery at Burslem along with many Victorian pottery manufacturers.

## **Arnold Bennett classics**

- The Card (1910): A comic fantasy about an ambitious young man (rather like Bennett) who tricks, flirts and works his way up the social ladder to become Mayor of his home town. Made into a film with Alec Guinness in 1952.
- The Old Wives' Tale (1908): Bennett's masterpiece about two sisters was inspired by seeing an old, fat lady in a Paris restaurant, and imagining her past life: "She was repulsive, no one could like or sympathise with her. But I thought: 'She has been young and slim once'."
- Anna of the Five Towns (1902): Meet Anna Tellwright, a modern young woman with wealth but a domineering father seeking freedom and independence in a small town with small town values. Will she marry for love, or for duty?
- Riceyman Steps (1923): A remarkable London novel about the household of a miser, told from the point of view of the maid, Elsie, married to a shell-shocked soldier back from WWI.
- The Pretty Lady (1918): Bennett was fascinated by the demi-monde. This sympathetic tale of a French prostitute who comes to London at the start of WWI features a powerful description of being caught in a Zeppelin raid.

Not bad for a pawnbroker's son with a terrible stammer from the grimy Staffordshire potteries' town of Hanley who dreamed of escape. That story of social mobility is what makes it all the more remarkable that Bennett's place in literary history is currently so obscure, especially compared to his great friend HG Wells, with whom he shared a fascination for the technological innovations like the cinema and cars that were transforming early 20<sup>th</sup> Century life.

First he wrote short stories for women's magazines, then novels and more. He wrote blockbuster film screenplays (Piccadilly 1929) and discussed working with a young Alfred Hitchcock.

He wrote smash hit plays that made him a theatre celebrity. He wrote self-help guides, such as 'How to Live on 24 Hours a Day' (still in print today).

Bennett's most famous novel The Old Wives' Tale is about two sisters one of whom elopes to a scandalous life in France and the other who stays at home running the family draper's shop.

The shop, now empty, that inspired the book still stands in Burslem. It used to belong to Bennett's maternal family and by coincidence Peter Coates, the Chairman of Stoke City FC started his family's Bet365 business (now owned by his daughter known to be Britain's richest business female) in that very shop.

Coates is one of a significant core of Bennett devotees who believe Bennett deserves rediscovery.

Standing at the front of Ford Green Hall turn to look up the bank to notice rows of shops. Phil Taylor known as the POWER had one of these shops before he died.

### **Ford Green House, Smallthorne GR SJ888509**

A Grade II\* listed farmhouse and historic house museum in Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire. The oldest parts of the house date from the late 16th century, with one wing being either added or greatly repaired at some point in the early 18th century. In its grounds, there also stands an 18th-century dovecote which shares the listed building status of the main farmhouse. The hall is thought to have been built in 1624 for Hugh Ford, a local yeoman farmer, remaining in the Ford family for some 200 years. A brickwork extension was added to the property sometime in the 17th century, most likely replacing or renovating a previous structure.

The Fords had left the area by the 19th century and after a series of tenants, it was split into three separate dwellings. During this period, the distinctive timber framing was covered in white stucco. The property was purchased by Stoke-on-Trent City Council in 1946 and, following restoration, opened as a museum in 1952.

The exterior off the house a mixture of 17th century timber framing and 18th century brickwork. The right-hand wing, built in the early 17th century, features black and white timber framing decorated with lozenge panels and balustrading. This older wing contains both two and three light mullioned windows and a two-storey gabled porch. On a beam above the inner door of the porch is the inscription "*Ralph Sutton, Carpenter*". The interior doors of the house has moulded gothic, or ogival, archways, decorated with fleur-de-lis detailing. The staircase is believed to either be original to the house or an early 17th-century replacement and features decorative balusters and newel posts with acorn-shaped caps.

The left-hand wing is built of brick and was likely constructed sometime in the early 18th century. This wing was either constructed as replacement for an earlier structure or as a major overhaul of an already existing building. A rainwater head possibly dates this section of the building to 1734.

### **Ford Green Nature Reserve GR SJ889510**

The 12-acre site was declared an SSSI in 1991 and has been regularly maintained by the local Council since then. This was the first such site in the Potteries.

Ford Green Nature Reserve, also known as Whitfield Valley Nature Reserve, is situated just off Ford Green Road behind Ford Green Hall, and is one of the largest reserves in the city boasting a wide range of habitats. The Ford Green Brook flows through the site and there are patches of grassland, hay meadow, heathland, hedgerow, ponds and scattered trees. Ford Green Reed bed, a Site of Special Scientific Interest, is located at the southern end of the nature reserve and many ducks and other water birds breed and overwinter here. At the northern end of the reserve the spoil heap from the Chatterley Whitfield Colliery affords great views of the area and is colonised by bird-foot trefoil which supports the largest known colony of dingy skipper butterflies in the West Midlands. Skylark and grey partridge are often seen in the grassland and barn owls and kestrels hunt across the valley. Other notable flora and fauna include water vole, yellow rattle and snipe. The plantation at the reserve is largely made up of poplar, rowan and white willow trees with occasional crack willow and maple. A few ash, field maple and small-leaved lime (rare in Staffordshire) are present whilst the ground flora is dominated by Yorkshire-fog grass and Cock's Foot. Teasel, which is uncommon in Staffordshire, can be found in small numbers in the ground flora.

### **Chatterley Whitfield Colliery GR SJ884528**

Originally Whitfield Colliery until 1891 the colliery has a history dating back to the 1830's. By 1862 it had four shafts: Institute, Engine, Middle and Prince Albert. However a fifth shaft, the Laura was completely destroyed in an underground explosion in the 1881 pit disaster.

### **1881 Pit Disaster**

During the early morning of Monday, 7 Feb 1881 there was a serious fire and explosion at Chatterley Whitfield. The latter fire was caused by the misuse of an underground blacksmith's furnace which resulted in an explosion, killing 24 men and boys.

The force of the explosion caused the collapse of the Laura Pit and the entire shaft and pit top were abandoned. At the same time the Institute shaft had to be partly filled, in an effort to extinguish the fire. An enquiry into the explosion was held at the nearby Norton Arms Public House, while at Stafford Assizes the Manager, Edwin Thompson, defended himself against a charge of manslaughter and was acquitted.

In an effort to recover lost output, the Middle Pit shaft (formerly the Ragman) was deepened to the Hardmine seam in 1881, and a new up-cast shaft to replace the Laura was sunk to the Cockshead seam.

In 1883 the Platt shaft was sunk to replace the Laura and a further two shafts, Winstanley and Hesketh were sunk around the time of the First World War.

The Colliery became the 'Jewel of the Crown' of the North Staffordshire Coalfield and in 1937, with manpower in excess of 4,000, it became the first colliery in Great Britain to mine 1 million saleable tons of coal in one year.

The Colliery was nationalised in 1947. However with the advent of major developments to collieries in the south and west, Chatterley Whitfield's fortunes began to decline and shortly after the underground connection was made to Wolstanton Colliery.

Chatterley Whitfield closed on 25th March 1977.

## **Princess Anne**

In 1979 the Chatterley Whitfield underground mining museum was opened by Princess Anne and utilised both the Winstanley and Institute shafts for visitors going down the mine. In 1986 the underground museum closed and the pumps which kept Wolstanton dry were switched off and the museum then abandoned and replaced by a 'new' replica underground experience. Falling numbers of visitors led to the closure of the underground experience in 1993 but not before English Heritage granted the site Scheduled Ancient Monument status due to it being the most complete coalmine in Great Britain.

**Norton.** While on top of the hill you are looking down on to Norton.

**Anthea Millicent Turner** is an English television presenter and was born 25<sup>th</sup> May 1960 in Norton. The school you can see is the school she attended and as a child would have played on this hill. Anthea married her first husband Peter Powell of Radio 1 in 1990 at Longsdon Church.

**John Harold Rhodes VC** 17<sup>th</sup> May 1891 – 26<sup>th</sup> Nov 1917 was born in Packmoor. His memorial is on the village green.

**St James Church Packmoor** GR SJ862545 is the burial place of James Brindley.

**James Brindley** Beneath a plain tombstone in Newchapel Cemetery lies the remains of that brilliant engineer and canal builder James Brindley. He was born in 1716 at Tunsted in the High Peak near Buxton, the eldest son of a farmer who in 1720 moved to Lowe Hill near Leek.

James's education was a straight-forward one consisting of the three Rs. At about the age of 17 he was apprenticed to Abraham Bennett a millwright from near Macclesfield. At a very early stage of his training it is said that he inserted all the spokes of a cartwheel the wrong way around. But with more experience he became an expert workman developing a natural tendency for applying water power for mechanical purposes. After his apprenticeship he continued as a journeyman and two years later about 1741 he started as a millwright, first at Leek then in 1750 at Burslem.

He gained a reputation for being an ingenious mechanic and was nicknamed The Schemer. His fame spread far and wide and from 1752 onwards he was engaged on numerous projects throughout Britain. On one occasion in 1760 while working for the Duke of Bridgewater he proposed to carry the Worsley - Manchester Canal over the River Irwell by the means of a 39ft-high aqueduct. An eminent engineer who had been consulted about the project ridiculed the attempt and retorted "I have often heard of castles in the air, but never before was shown where any of them was to be erected". Brindley was not discouraged and in 10 months the aqueduct was completed.

His involvement prevented him from indulging in any kind of amusement and on one occasion when prevailed upon by friends to attend a London theatre found his mind so disturbed by the play that he declared he would not on any account ever go to see another. In those pioneering days there were no books to consult when he found difficulty resolving his problems he would retire to his bed for one, two or even three days until he had found the answer. His complete devotion and constant attention to work eventually brought on a hectic fever which continued with little interruption for some years and was finally responsible for his death at Turnhurst Hall on 27 September at the age of 56.

In 1765 James Brindley married Anne Henshall a Newchapel girl by whom he had two daughters. Anne who died unmarried on her way home from Sydney in 1838 and Susannah who married a Bristol merchant.

**Robbie Williams** Now on the railway loop line if we turned left for half a mile we would come to Margaret Ward School. This is the school which Robbie Williams attended. He grew up and lived in the Tunstall area.

## **Old Potteries Loop Line GR SJ859549**

The Potteries Loop Line was a railway line that ran through the heart of Stoke-on-Trent. It was built by the North Staffordshire Railway Company off its main line (nowadays referred to as the Manchester branch of the West Coast Main Line via Stoke).

The line was opened in many short sections due to the cost of railway construction during the 1870s. The line throughout was sanctioned but the NSR felt that the line would be unimportant enough to abandon part way through its construction. This upset residents of the towns through which the line was planned to pass and they eventually petitioned Parliament to force the completion of the route.

The line was authorised and constructed as follows:

- **Etruria - Shelton**: authorised for construction on 2 July 1847, opening for goods in 1850 and passengers in January 1862.
- **Shelton - Hanley**: authorised for construction on 13 August 1859, opening to goods on 20 December 1861 and passengers on 13 July 1864.

The entire section to the NSR main line at Kidsgrove was authorised on 5 July 1865 opening as follows:

**Hanley - Burslem**: opened to passengers and goods on 1 November 1873.

**Burslem - Tunstall**: opened to passengers and goods on 1 December 1873.

**Tunstall - Goldenhill**: opened to passengers and goods on 1 October 1874.

**Goldenhill - Kidsgrove**: opened to passengers and goods on 15 November 1875.

## **CLOSURE OF THE LOOP LINE**

Mow Cop and Scholar Green

Kidsgrove Liverpool Road	Closed	1964
Market Street Halt	Closed	1950
Kidsgrove Harecastle North Tunnel	Closed	1950
Kidsgrove Harecastle South Tunnel	Closed	1950
Goldenhill Tunnel		
Newchapel and Goldenhill	Closed	1964
Pittshill	Closed	1964
Tunstall	Closed	1964
Waterloo Road Burslem	Closed	1964
Hanley	Closed	1964
Etruria Junction	Left open	

Freight workings continued for some years afterwards. In 1967 trains were frequently diverted onto the Loop Line between Longport and Kidsgrove via the Pinnox branch during the electrification of the West Coast Main Line, the upgrading of which involved construction of a new line avoiding Harecastle tunnel.

The section from Etruria to Waterloo Road remained open for oil traffic from Century Oils in Hanley; this traffic ceased on 31 July 1969.

The northern part of the route remained open until 1976 to transport coal from an opencast mine at Park Farm, near Goldenhill.

## **Birchenwood Gas & Coke Works GR SJ851542**

Clough Hall Coal and Iron Works

Birchenwood Colliery

Birchenwood Brickworks

Birchenwood Gas and Coke Ltd

Birchenwood was the largest industrial site that the Tunstall and Newchapel area has ever known.

## **The origins of the estate**

A freehold estate in Oldcott called Broadfield was held by the Colclough family from at least 1549. Colclough Lane, still the name of the Goldenhill end of the road to Newchapel, was in existence by 1535.

## **Discovering coal when building Harecastle canal tunnel**

During the excavation work for the first Harecastle tunnel, the wealth of coal underground was discovered and it became apparent that the whole area was rich with coal. Thomas Gilbert, who represented the Duke of Bridgewater, was the first to set up the collieries that would mine the area on a massive scale.

## **1833 and the first blast furnaces**

Iron ore was also found to be in plentiful supply and in 1833 the first blast furnaces were built to produce pig iron.

## **1871 and coking ovens**

The iron and steel works were steadily expanded and by 1871 there was a new addition in the form of 78 beehive ovens for the production of coke.

**The Heath family:** Robert Heath (who ran the Biddulph Valley furnaces) also owned a large part of Clough Hall estate which owned the land that the Birchenwood site occupied. After he died in 1893 his two sons inherited the business. When the operating company at Birchenwood closed the iron and steelworks closed leaving the coal and coke as the only business, the Heath brothers stepped in and purchased the whole site.

In 1896 the original ovens were replaced by 124 new 'Beehive' ovens. Nearly all the coal mined was now used for coke which the Heath's were using in their ironworks' Beehives. The Beehives where demolished and replaced in 1909. Over the next few years the Heath family would invest a staggering one million pounds in building what was to become the leading coke by-products plants in the country.

Birchenwood Colliery opened in the 1890s with most of the coal being used for coke and other by-products. The Colliery actually closed in 1932 but coke and other by-product production continued by using coal from other collieries. However this production also ceased in May 1973.

New ovens were added, a rail network built to link all of the sites, locomotives to transport the coal and coke, and houses for their employees were just some of things that contributed to a very prosperous business before Natural Gas was discovered, Town Gas was produced from coal. The process consisted of heating coal in enclosed retorts, where the gases were led through pipes and treated in a variety of ways. Coke was the main by-product of gas production along with a huge variety of other by-products including coal tar, benzol, pitch, creosote, nylon, and solvents for paints and varnish.

**King George & Queen Mary** visited the plant on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1913. They were shown the impressive new equipment that was turning 7000 tons of coal into 4500 tons of coke each week with all the remaining by-products dealt with in the recovery ovens.

## **Reginald J Mitchell GR SJ827544**

Here we turn right along the canal for a few hundred yards to the next road bridge at the RED LION pub which is Congleton Road. Turn left on the road up to Number 115: this was the birthplace of Reginald Mitchell (designer of the Spitfire). Born May 20<sup>th</sup> 1895. He died June 11<sup>th</sup> 1937 at the age of 42 years. He was cremated and his ashes were placed in South Stoneham Cemetery near Eastleigh Airport, Southampton. Mitchell never saw his planes fly in combat. His father Herbert Mitchell was a Yorkshire man and a teacher by profession who had settled in North Staffordshire and married a Potteries girl.

On reaching the Congleton Road and looking down to your right you will see the crossroads at Red Bull (GR SJ828553) here stood the turnpike for the LONDON to LANCASHIRE mail coach which ran through Newcastle. This building was demolished in 1920.

## **HARECASTLE TUNNEL KIDSGROVE GR SJ837541**

### **Harecastle Tunnel**

Is a canal tunnel on the Trent and Mersey canal in Staffordshire between Kidsgrove and Tunstall. The tunnel, which is 1.5 miles (2.4 km) long, was once one of the longest in the country. Its industrial purpose was for the transport of coal to the kilns in the Staffordshire Potteries. The canal runs under 195 m (640 ft) Harecastle Hill near Goldenhill, the highest district in Stoke-on-Trent. Although described singularly as a tunnel, Harecastle is actually two separate but parallel tunnels built almost 50 years apart.

The first was constructed by James Brindley, started in 1770 and completed in 1781 with a length of 2,880 yards.

The second tunnel was designed by Thomas Telford, started 1823 and opened in 1827. Its length is 2,926 yards.

Only the Telford tunnel remains navigable after a partial collapse closed the Brindley tunnel shortly before the First World War due to subsidence. As the Telford tunnel is only wide enough for a single boat, canal traffic is managed by sending alternating northbound and southbound groups of boats through the tunnel. Ventilation is handled by large fans at the south portal.

**Kidsgrove Boggart:** this is a headless apparition of KIT CREWBUCKET who was murdered in one of the tunnels in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century by a narrow boatman with whom she was travelling. Her shrieks, it is reported, may still be heard by those walking in the woods above the tunnels.

### **BATHPOOL PARK (BLACK PANTHER) GR 839536**

In the five years' terror he was involved in four Post Office raids in **BARNSLEY, HARROGATE, ACCRINGTON and Langley** in the West Midlands. These resulted in the murders of **DONALD SKEPPER, DEREK ASTIN and SIDNEY GRAYLAND** and the attempted murder of **FRANCES GRAYLAND**.

British teenager **Lesley Whittle** was kidnapped on 14 January 1975 and her body discovered 7 March 1975. Whittle's kidnapping and murder dominated national headlines for 11 months. The investigation involved over 400 officers from the Shropshire, Staffordshire and West Midlands police forces and the Metropolitan Police.

Whittle, aged 17, was kidnapped on 14<sup>th</sup> January 1975 from her home in Highley, Shropshire, by Donald Neilson, who by that time had committed over 400 burglaries and three murders. He was known to the British press as the **Black Panther**, for the black balaclava he wore during robberies of post offices.

Neilson held Whittle in an underground drainage shaft of a reservoir at Bathpool Park in Kidsgrove, Staffordshire. He had placed a hood over her head, left her naked, and tethered her to the side of the shaft by a wire noose. After what was later seen as a bungled police operation, including two failed attempts to engage with Neilson's demand for a ransom of £50,000, her body was found hanging in the shaft on 23 March 1975.

After being arrested on 11<sup>th</sup> December 1975 in Mansfield, in July 1976, at Oxford Crown Court Neilson was convicted of the kidnapping and murder of Whittle, for which he was sentenced to life imprisonment. Three weeks later he was convicted of the murder of three post office workers, and given three further life sentences. Later he was also charged with the attempted murder of the arresting police officer Stuart Mackenzie. All of those murdered were shot with a .22 pistol.

Donald Neilson died in prison on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2011 aged 75 after serving 35 years in prison.

### **HARECASTLE FARM GR SJ833524**

This the oldest house in the Potteries built in 1412. It was built as a farmhouse by the great Bournes family. In the cellar a tunnel was made to escape unwanted visitors, and came out in the woods behind the farm. The story is when Cromwell's soldiers came knocking on the door in 1643 the family escaped using the secret tunnel. The tunnel is now blocked.

The site was purchased by the Riley family who turned it into an Inn. The main road (now the A34) was part of an old Roman road from Newcastle. This road was also used by the Mail Coach in 1680 and was known as the branch line. The route from London called at Stone, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Brereton Green, Knutsford, Warrington, Lancaster & Kendal to reach journey's end at Carlisle.

The Sidebottom family bought it in 1930 and farmed it until the 1980s when the Beafeater Company purchased the estate and returned it back into an Inn.

**The Freeport Market at Talke** GR SJ825524 is about halfway up the hill and a good place for lunch.

**Red Street Monument** GR SJ822512 is also known as the Wedgwood Monument. It is located on hill to north east of Bignall Hill and can be reached on a public footpath from B5500. It was commissioned by the executors of John Wedgwood's will, designed by Thomas Stanley and built between 1837 and 1845.

Built also as a monument to two disasters at the DIGLAKE COLLIERY, which is directly below. First one was in 1785 when 42 men and boys died, the second accident was in 1866 when 90 men and boys died. Known as the Wedgwood Monument because it stands on land belonging to the Wedgwood family when the colliery was worked. The monument is now only a quarter of its original height after severe wind damage in 1979.

### **BRADWELL WOODS** GR SJ844508

The Woods in Bradwell are Ancient Oak Woodland appearing on maps dated 1117. Originally the New Forest of which this wood is part stretched for 30 miles to Stafford and where hunting grounds for the King and his nobles, and provider of Oak for the King's ships.

The Industrial Revolution came to this area for the clay that is rich in iron ores. Famously the Brown Betty Teapot the first of its kind that could take boiling water, came from clay that lies beneath the woods. The popularity of this teapot was huge and soon a thriving Ceramics Industry was starting thanks to Josiah Wedgwood and his kind.

During the 1880s red floor tiles were made at the woods carried down to the canal by railways that ran through the wood. Today Steelite Brick Company produce millions of bricks, some still use the clay extracted from the other side of the valley in Brown Hills.

The Wood is a hugely valuable source of native species and part is designated SSSI. The status has now become a Local Nature Reserve and this small part of ancient history is secure for future generations to enjoy.

These woods are the ancient Bradwell Woods, which cover over twp acres comprising of oak and ash trees. Also on the site are the Old Brick and Marl Works, Rufus Tile Works that were abandoned in 1945. The main track, which runs down through the centre of the woods, was the main horse-drawn tramline running from the drift mines at Chesterton to the canal at Longport.

To reach the canal by turning left for 1 mile we will come to the South end of the Harecastle Tunnel at GR SJ848521

When we reach the bridge. GR 856505 this is the place where JAMES BRINDLEY, in 1766, commenced construction on the GRAND TRUCK CANAL from the Trent to the Mersey. Later the canal changed to name to the Trent and Mersey Canal. The first sod of earth was cut by JOSIAH WEDGEWOOD.

### **Westport Lake** GR SJ853503

In the 1890s the lake was developed from an old marl hole (from where all the DARK BROWN CLAY came from for the pottery industry) as a pleasure resort, but it later became a wasteland. It was an early landscape regeneration project of Stoke-on-Trent; it was opened in 1972 as a recreation and conservation area.

### **Arthur Wood's pottery** GR SJ857498

The Arthur Wood pottery was based at the Bradwell Works in **Longport**, Stoke-on-Trent and derived its name from BRADWELL WOODS where they mined the DARK BROWN CLAY to make the BROWN TEAPOTS. The premises of Capper & Wood established in 1884 producing primarily teapots, Arthur Wood became sole owner in 1904 trading up until 1928 when the company name was changed to Arthur Wood & Sons Limited and further ranges of tableware were introduced.

**Price & Kensington** teapot factory next to Woods is just before the road. As you cross the road glance to your left to see that the front has been removed after damage to walls falling into the roadway in November 2019.

### **Longport Wharf GR SJ858496**

The warehouse here is dated from the 1840s, it was used for transporting raw materials and manufactured goods to and from Tunstall and Burslem. Owned by Mersey Weaver & Ship Canal Co. a wide range of goods came from as far as Weston Point at Runcorn to the Potteries. The Wharf is now used as a boatyard.

Under a new footbridge that belongs to Steelite connecting the old and new factories together. This is dated 1998.

### **Burgess & Leigh. Middleport factory GR SJ856493**

Factory makers of Burleigh Ware. Started as Hulme & Booth in 1851 then in 1877 became Burgess & Leigh until August 1999 when it changed its name again this time to Burgess Dorling & Leigh. This factory is now sponsored by Prince Charles Trust and is also used to film the new series of **POTTERY THROW DOWN**.

Next to this factory is a dilapidated building: on the frontage you will see a wooden structure which was a lift. This was used to load and unload goods from the barges. Look up to the pediment on this building and notice the carving which reads "**1890 ANDERTON & CO.**"

Soon we will come on to bridge No 125, which is Pidduck Street that will take us onto Milvale Street.

The factory on the other side of the bridge was the Port Vale Corn Mill, which later became Prices Bread, dated 1844 owned by Samuel Fitton between 1848 and 1854. In 1860 it belonged to Robert Cliff and by 1868 was owned by Fitton & Pidduck Flour Millers until 1924 and then passed onto Price and Sons until 1940s. On the south side the 5-storey building dates back to 1844; at the front of the factory from Milvale Street a sign reads "Morriblew Factory".

### **Clarice Cliff Newport Factory GR SJ864488**

The site is now a housing development.

Clarice Cliff born 29<sup>th</sup> January 1899 no 19 Meir Street Tunstall decided the time had come to retire after her husband died in 1963 and the factory sites were sold in August 1964 to Midwinter's, thus ceasing the production of all original Clarice Cliff wares. With the factory site sold, there was to be no successor to Clarice Cliff and the production of original Clarice Cliff ended. Clarice Cliff died on the 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1972. W.R. Midwinter's merged with Meakins in 1968, who in turn were absorbed by the Wedgwood group in 1970. The factory sites have now been redeveloped for housing.

**Next bridge on the canal is the end of Newport Lane.**

**Olivers Mill is a Grade II Listed Building** These mills were used for firing flint stones to make them friable for subsequent grinding or milling. The finely ground flints would then be added by pottery manufacturers to their clays to give the whiteness and greater strength to their finished products. The ovens were built by Oliver & Sons, Burslem Ltd in 1909 at the same time as their mill. The kilns were loaded at the upper level with a mix of coke and flint stones, then fired up for three days and then unloaded from the lower level. The contents were sieved to remove coal ash residue from the fractured flints. This then was taken to the grinding pans. The last time these ovens were last fired was about 1960. On this site WBB Minerals still produces milled ceramic material for the pottery industry, the factory is open to the general public Monday to Friday 10 to 4.

While walking along the canal on your right you will see a disused tip, look for the small notices which read "**PRIVATE KEEP OFF TIP BELONGS TO BURGESS & LEIGH**".

This is not far from the Burslem Old Port, which was opened in 1805 where all the barges would collect all their goods before Longport was opened in 1840.

Just before the canal bends to the right you will see an old railway bridge over the canal into Shelton Iron Steel direct from the Colliery, formally known as the Burslem Arm.

**Josiah Wedgwood** In 1767 Wedgwood was seeking room for expansion for his factory so he purchased the Ridge House estate (GR SJ868474) known then as Fowley Valley. Knowing the exact location of the canal he set up his new factory. The works were opened in 1769 but the completion of the canal was delayed until 1777. Due to the two-mile distance from Burslem Wedgwood was prompted to build a garden village for his workers. He named the village Etruria after the name of the pottery ware they were making. This was probably the world's first idea to build homes for the workers.

### **Wedgewood's Old House at GR SJ870477 is Etruria Hall**

**Etruria Hall** in Etruria, Stoke-on-Trent is a Grade II listed house and former home of the potter Josiah Wedgwood. It was built between 1768–1771 by Joseph Pickford. The hall was sold by the Wedgwodds in the 19th century and is now part of a hotel.

Etruria Hall was built near his new recently built Etruria works. The majority of the 'ceilings, ornamental friezes and chimney pieces' were designed by John Flaxman between 1781-1787. An entry in the 1784-1785 Wedgwood company ledger indicates that at least one of the ceilings was designed by William Blake, although it cannot be certain that this design was ever implemented.

The hall was the site of the innovative research into photography by Thomas Wedgwood in the 1790s. There is a small commemorative plaque on the Hall. Due to financial difficulties Etruria Hall was sold in the 1840s by Francis Wedgwood, who moved to the smaller Barlaston Hall nearby.

Etruria Hall was given Grade II listed status in 1973. The house was restored as part of the 1986 Stoke-on-Trent Garden Festival, the second of Britain's National Garden Festivals, and incorporated as the centrepiece of the festival to lend it a 'historical dimension'. After the end of the festival, the hall was one of the few buildings on the site allowed to remain. It was developed as part of the four star Stoke on Trent Moat House, a member of the Best Western chain of hotels.

**Bet 365 Main Offices can be seen on the other side of the canal** which is owned by the business woman Denise Coates. In October 2019 Forbes Magazine estimated her net worth was \$12.2 billion and she is said to be the highest paid Chief Executive of any UK company. Over £100 million has been donated to charities and good causes, including the Douglas Macmillan Hospice, by the Denise Coates Foundation.

### **National Gardens Festival grounds GR SJ871479**

- Much of the ground has been reclaimed from the Old Shelton Iron & Steel Works and the successful National Garden Festival was held here in 1986, after 137 years as a steel works.
- Granville Leveson-Gower, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl Granville, GCB, PC 1773 - 1846 (peerage 1815) obtained land next to The Wedgwood Factory from the Duchy of Lancaster in 1807.
- Wedgwood obtained his land from the Duchy in 1766 to build his factory and village for his workers on the site. He named the village Etruria. The name came from the ancient Etruscans whose work Wedgwood was to copy on his ware.
- In 1839 Granville erected his first blast furnaces. The first was blown in on 4<sup>th</sup> January 1841, they were 60ft high.
- The 1<sup>st</sup> Earl died in 1846 and was succeeded by his eldest son Granville George Leveson-Gower (1815-1891). In 1853 the new Earl built four more blast furnaces which produced 1800 tons per week. More furnaces were added in 1880 and 1887. At the Paris Exhibition in 1855 the company first used the trademark "GRANVILLE" with a crown, later this was changed to "SHELTON" with a crown. Colonel William Sargent Roden joined Shelton Iron and Steel in 1855. In 1870 he became the Managing Director until he left in 1875. In 1866 it was decided to form a private Limited Company, which was registered on the 10<sup>th</sup> July under the direct ownership of the Earl Granville.
- Also on the site was the **Hanley Racecourse** which started in 1824. The last race was held on 5<sup>th</sup> August 1840. Earl Granville sunk **Racecourse Pit** on the site in the middle 1890s. 800 men and boys were employed at the pit which closed in 1937.
- At the Annual General Meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup> March 1920, it was announced that the current wage bill was £33,000 per week.

- In November 1920 the company was sold to John Summers into a private company, construction was started to update the new works 1961 and the first casting took place on 27<sup>th</sup> June 1964 which cost £18,500,000.
- 1967 Shelton Iron & Steel was nationalised and then became known as British Steel.
- The last coke was produced at Shelton in May 1968, which was followed by the closure in June 1971 of the 18th century mill.
- By the 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1978 the last blast furnace was tapped for the last time, since the closure of the bulk and most of the site cleared. Steel now came from Scunthorpe by rail and was rolled at British Steel, Shelton. Steel was produced at Shelton for 137 years.

**Etruria Hall.** See the front, also the bridge which was used by Wedgwood to cross over the canal to reach his factory each day.

At the next roundabout GR SJ873480 you will find a statue.

**John Baskeyfield** at the age of 21 years in 1944, and a Sergeant in the Staffordshire Regiment, found himself on the streets in Arnhem in The Netherlands. He was the senior NCO in charge of a six-pounder anti-tank gun. His successful handling of the position soon gave the Germans something to think about, they had to mount an attack to wipe it out. Baskeyfield was the sole survivor of his crew and engaged a self-propelled gun but his luck ran out when an advancing tank blew him to pieces. He died on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1944.

Soon you will see the lake and on to the car park back at HANLEY FOREST where we started this walk.

Congratulations you have completed the walk & tour of the Potteries.

**Other memorable names from the Potteries include:**

**Gertie Gitana**, born in Longport in 1888, was a British music hall entertainer who performed at many theatres included those in London, Manchester & Stoke-on-Trent and was the Forces' sweetheart during the 1914-18 war. Gertie died on 5<sup>th</sup> January 1957.

**Sir Oliver Lodge**, born in Penkhull on 12<sup>th</sup> June 1851, was a scientist and the inventor of the spark plug. He was honoured as a Freeman of Stoke-on-Trent and died 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1940.

**Ernest Albert Egerton VC** First World War was born in Longton on 10<sup>th</sup> Nov 1897 and died on 14<sup>th</sup> Feb 1966. He is buried in St Peter's Churchyard in Blythe Bridge.

**Saul Hudson**, born 23 July 1965, known as Slash is a guitarist and during his early years was raised by his father and paternal grandparents in Blurton. In 1971 he left to live with his mother in Los Angeles.

**Jackie Trent**, 6 Sept 1940 – 21 March 2015, born Yvonne Burgess in Chesterton was a singer and song writer.

**William Brian Havergal**, 29 Jan 1876 – 28 Nov 1972, was a classical composer writing 32 symphonies. William was born in Dresden, Longton.

**Please note:**

The information is collated in good faith to be of interest to those participating with Keith Bailey during his walk through the Potteries on 9 Feb 2020.

Keith Bailey 01782 815386