

A Brief History of Coal Mining in Essington

The Miners' Monument, of which this Time Capsule is a part, acknowledges the contribution made to mining in the village by the people of Essington.

This account is meant as a summary of the history of mining in the village.

Origins of Coal Mining

Essington was first recorded as 'Eseningetone' in the Domesday Book of 1086, but it was several centuries before coal came to be influential in the village. The first deep mine, originally named Essington Wood Colliery, was established in the early 19th century. The name changing in 1892 to Holly Bank. At its peak, in the 1920's, nearly 2000 people were employed in the local mining industry. However, it became uneconomic to continue to extract coal at Holly Bank soon after this, and from 1924 Holly Bank was only used to pump water out of the recently sunk Hilton Main Colliery workings.

Other collieries existed within Essington. Essington Farm Colliery opened in 1873, on the bend of the Wyrley and Essington Canal, and in 1890 the main Springhill Colliery opened as part of the Essington Farm Company. A tramway connected the two, passing under the railway and terminating near the canal basin. However, the following 20 years saw significant changes culminating with the Springhill Colliery closing in 1916.

Ownership of most of the UK's coal mines passed to the National Coal Board on 1st January 1947. The mines of Essington were not exempt; they too became part of the nationalisation process.

Transport

Wyrley and Essington Canal opened in 1794 to transport coal to the factories of the Black Country from the area around Essington. The advent of a railway line, in 1875, linked to the main line between Bloxwich and Cannock, meant coal from the then Essington Wood Colliery could be moved much more efficiently. An extension was added, to connect to the Hilton Main Colliery, when it opened on 30th September 1924. A signal box, with an unusual overhanging turret upon a small building, controlled the railway crossing at Bursnips Road. The small building was the Tommy Shop, owned by the Colliery Management, where workers were forced to buy goods using tokens received as part of their wages. An extension was later added to the Tommy Shop to accommodate the wages office.

Housing

As coal mining developed, houses were needed to accommodate the miners and their families. "30 House Row" (on Bursnips Road) were amongst the first to be built in 1850, with "20 House Row" (in Upper Sneyd Lane) built in the 1880s. Further investment in coal mining necessitated a significant increase in housing for the miners. 500 new houses were built at Feathersone and Westcroft, with the population of Featherstone, in particular, increasing immensely from 39 in 1921 to 1,095 just ten years later.

Essington Working Men's Club

During the general strike of 1926 a group of ten miners got together in a shed, looking for companionship and a drink. This was the beginning of what would become the Essington Working Men's Club. Soon a wooden building was bought and erected between New Street and High Hill. By 1939 a brick building had been constructed and EWMC was becoming fundamental to the social fabric of the village. At the time of writing, the club is having to navigate a difficult path with the changing nature of entertainment impacting their place in the community.

Brick and Tile Works

In common with many collieries, by the 1860s Essington Wood Colliery had its own brick and tile works on Hobnock Road, although from around 1920 it seems likely that the Essington works were producing only "Rosemary" roof tiles. This works alone could produce 150,000 tiles per week. In addition, the late 1930s saw the opening of a brick works at Hilton Main Colliery with four continuously fired kilns capable of producing 26,000,000 bricks per year. A newspaper article, published in August 1938, stated that the then Hilton Main & Holly Bank Collieries Ltd operated three brick/tile works with a total output of 36,000,000 units per year.

Conclusion

Coal Mining and related activities in Essington has a long history, as can be glimpsed from this summary. Much of the shape of the village can be traced to coal mining and related life.

The end of coal mining in Essington came finally with the closure of Holly Bank and Hilton Main collieries on 31st January 1969.

This Miners' Monument acknowledges the blood, sweat and tears put into coal working by the miners and their families in Essington over the centuries.

Compiled with thanks to:

"Hilton Main and Holly Bank Collieries" by Trevor Matthews

"Essington Parish Millenium" by Jim Evans

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www.staffordshirehistory.org.uk

www.buddlepit.co.uk

www.uknamedbricks.blogspot.com