

# HISTORY

It is hard to imagine as you stand by Denhall Quay today that the area was once a seething hub of industry. Three collieries operated in this area over the years, exploiting the small part of the Flintshire Coalfield which extended to England:



🚛 **Ness Colliery:** 1759 -1855 owned by the Stanley family

🚛 **Little Neston Colliery:** 1819 to about 1849, owned by the Cottingham family

🚛 **Neston Colliery, later Wirral Colliery:** 1874 to 1927, with various owners.

This was where the region's Industrial Revolution started. It saw the earliest large-scale employment: in the 1770s there were about 200 workers (in the 1920s the figure was over 300). And the first use of steam engines in Wirral and West Cheshire was here.



Conditions were appalling: until the 1850s children aged just nine were employed, and some miners worked 100 hours per week. The work was dangerous, with many deaths recorded. Rock falls and flooding presented risks, as did poisonous and explosive gases. Later, there were railway accidents.



The early miners lived in one-room shacks with their families - in 1847 Ness was described as 'the most miserable mass of hovels' on the Wirral.

All the collieries struggled to be profitable against strong regional competition, ultimately forcing this chapter of Neston's story to close.

# TRAIL INFORMATION

The Trail takes you around the sites of the three collieries that operated in the area between 1759 and 1927. The trail is just over two miles (3¼ km) long and takes about an hour and a quarter to walk at a gentle pace. Much of the route has beautiful views over the Dee Estuary, but there are also points of interest scattered amongst the areas of housing inland. Please note it can be muddy between points 5 and 6, and before point 7.

**Start/finish and parking:** By Denhall Quay, near the bottom end of Marshlands Road, Little Neston.

**Buses:** Routes 22, 22A, 272 and 273 go though Little Neston.

**Facilities:** The Harp Inn (0151 336 6980) - food at certain times and customer toilets. Points 2 and 6 are lovely picnic spots. There are shops 120m off route between points 7 and 8. (See main map overleaf).



## Acknowledgements

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This leaflet has been designed by the Graphic Design team at Ellesmere Port & Neston Borough Council.

# THE NESTON COLLIERIES TRAIL

*A guided walk around the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution in Wirral and West Cheshire*



**1 Ness Colliery** - Colliery operations started here in 1759. The area was noisy and filthy with coal heaps and great engine houses belching black smoke from chimneys. George Stephenson, the great engineer, had men working the engines here and almost certainly visited the site.

**2 Denhall Quay** - Built in 1791 this quay was used to ship coal, mainly to North Wales and Ireland - before railways, ships were the cheapest way to move coal. Silting of the estuary eventually made the quay unusable - a key reason for Ness Colliery's closure.

**3 The Harp Inn and the underground canals** - The pub was here by 1817 and was originally the 'Welsh Harp' reflecting the origins of many of the miners. Their pastimes included drinking, cock-fighting and horse racing. Today, the pub displays many pictures of Wirral Colliery.

From near here ran two underground canals. Boats called 'starvationers' brought coal from far out under the estuary to the shafts. To propel the boats men lay on their backs, pushing their legs against the tunnel roof.

**4 The later collieries...and sabotage!** - Look up Marshlands Road: both Little Neston Colliery and the later, larger Neston/Wirral Colliery lay on land to your left. The first two properties on the left were built for Neston Colliery.

There was intense rivalry between Little Neston Colliery and Ness Colliery. On one occasion the Stanleys deliberately blew up Cottingham's tunnel. On another they allowed water from Ness to flood Little Neston's tunnels.

**5 Little Neston Quay, and the spoil heaps** - The first local coal-shipping quay was built here, probably in the 1760s. A mine shaft was located within it. All signs of the quay have now gone.

The slopes to your right are the remains of spoil heaps from Neston/Wirral Colliery and were once much higher. They consist of mining waste including rock, dust and coal fragments.

**6 The Old Quay** - From the 1500s a quay projected into the estuary here, but it fell into disuse. In the 1760s there were plans to renovate it to ship coal, and to build a harbour and warehouses - but they came to nothing. Under the trees are the remains of Old Quay House, used for a time to accommodate colliery staff. *Follow path inland.*

**7 The Mineral Railway Line** - The double line of hedges marks the route of a railway running from sidings at Parkgate to the bottom of what is now Marshlands Road. Economical rail transport allowed Neston Colliery to open in 1874. *To avoid housing, retrace steps. Otherwise turn right and follow narrow path under power lines to follow line of the old railway.*

**8 Wirral Colliery shafts** - Behind the brick wall is one of the great shafts of Neston/Wirral Colliery, 135m deep. There's another on the opposite side of the road, behind garages, where trees grow. Above the shafts towered winding gear, with many large buildings including coal-washing sheds and offices nearby.

**9 The Railway Bridge** - A bridge once stood here, with an embankment extending south. It carried the trains as they reached the top of shafts of Neston/Wirral Colliery to have their wagons filled.

**10 New Street** - The rows of houses were built in the 1870s for colliery workers. Then, they were seen as quite luxurious - though it wasn't until the next century that toilets were installed! Seven Row, seen later, was also colliery housing.

**11 Ness Colliery shafts** - This circular area, and the open area you've just walked through, mark the location of some of Ness Colliery's shafts. At least 30 shafts were sunk in all, about 2m across and 125m deep. Now capped for safety, they lie by the marsh or amongst the houses.

**12 New Houses Lane** - This was once a main route to Ness Colliery. Terraced housing for colliery workers was built where a barn now stands, further up the track. The Wheatsheaf pub was originally at the top of this route.

**13 The Brick and Tile Works** - In the field lay a brick and tile works operated alongside Ness Colliery. Goods were made from local clays, fired by coal in kilns. The colliery also sold coke (a purified form of coal), charcoal, lime and Welsh slate.

**14 The Baptist Chapel** - Religion was important for many miners who often joined non-conformist organisations. A Baptist church, now disappeared, was built here for them in 1909.

