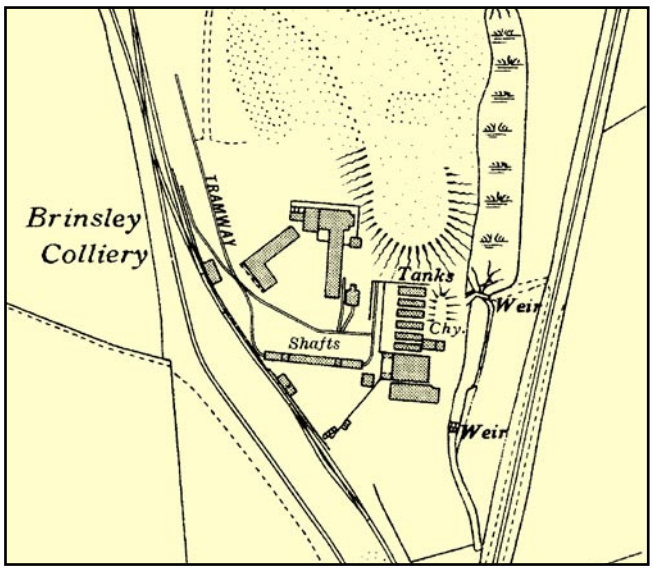
FROM THE ARCHIVES

Headstocks at Brinsley Colliery

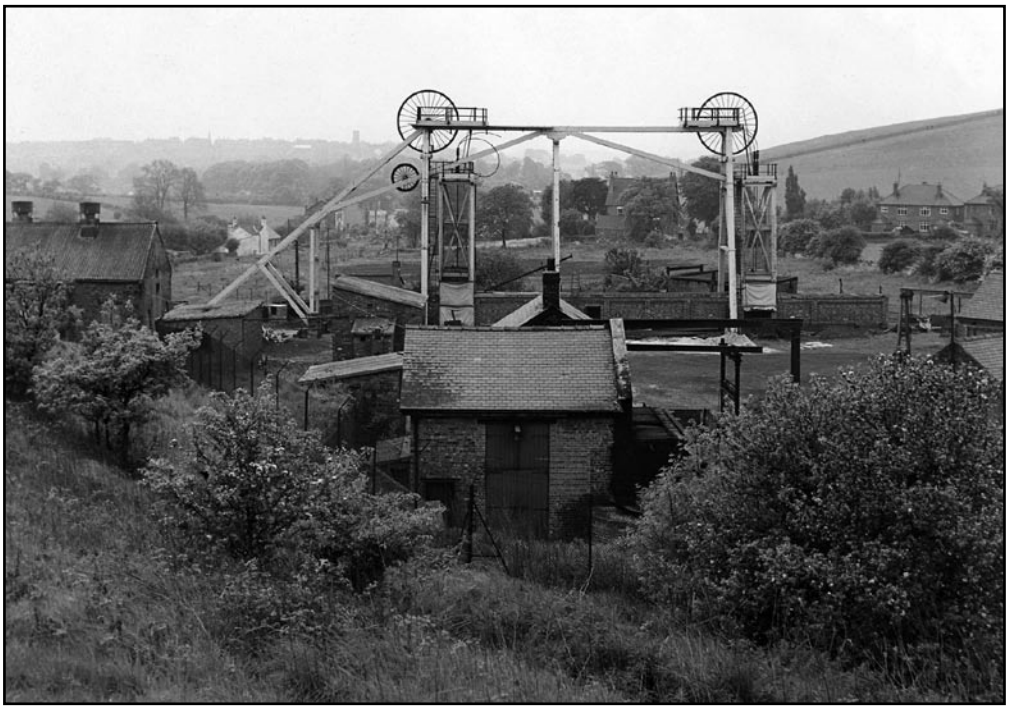
The opening scene of the 1960 film of D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* presents an idyllic view of sheep grazing contentedly on a hilltop in the shade of an overhanging tree. As the camera slowly pans right we see a pleasant rural valley revealed, which then unexpectedly gives way to a scene of stark industrial activity, at the centre of which stand the iconic tandem headstocks of Brinsley Colliery.

Situated some 2.5 km north of Eastwood, in Nottinghamshire near the Derbyshire border, Brinsley and the surrounding area had been at the heart of coal mining activity for over 700 years. The last Brinsley Colliery (there has been more than one) was established sometime after 1842 by Barber Walker and Co.. A company report dated April 1855 records that Brinsley Colliery had been deepened to the level of the Deep Soft Coal, having previously worked the Top Hard Coal. In 1872 working was extended to the Deep Hard Coal at a depth of 780 ft, and a second shaft, adjacent to the first, was newly sunk. The Coal Mines Regulation Act of 1872 commanded that no person should be employed in a mine unless there are at least two shafts in communication with each seam being worked. The tandem headstocks date from that time.

D. H. Lawrence's father worked at Brinsley Colliery, which in *Sons and Lovers* is called 'Beggarlee' (there had formerly been a mine of this name located near Moorgreen Colliery), and later 'Bretty'. The novel, which is largely autobiographical, was published in May 1913. Brinsley Colliery also features, under its proper name, in an earlier short story by Lawrence entitled *Odour of Chrysanthemums*, which he wrote in 1909. The story opens with a description of the colliery as seen from the cabin of a coal train approaching from the north: 'The fields were dreary and forsaken, and in the marshy strip that led to the whimsey, a reedy pit-pond, the fowls had already abandoned their run among the alders, to roost in the tarred fowl-house. The pit-bank loomed up beyond the pond, flames like red sores licking its ashy sides in the afternoon's stagnant light. Just beyond rose the tapering chimneys and the clumsy black headstocks of Brinsley Colliery. The two wheels were spinning fast up against the sky, and the winding engine rapped out its little spasms. The miners were being turned up.' In Lawrence's day the timber framing above the shafts, which supported the cages, was partly clad and thus appeared more 'clumsy' than the elegant structure that can be seen today.



Surface plan of Brinsley Colliery (modified from Ordnance Survey map of 1938).



Brinsley Colliery looking to the south. This picture, by an unknown photographer, was probably taken shortly before the headstocks were dismantled in the first week of June 1970. The building on the far left contained the winding engine. During the making of the film Sons and Lovers (1959–60) the headstocks were painted a light blue colour to make them stand out. Eastwood church is just visible on the skyline (photo: British Geological Survey archives, P711164).

After 1918 Brinsley was connected underground to neighbouring collieries at Underwood (Selston) and Moorgreen. Activity became focused at Moorgreen, with the result that Brinsley was abandoned for coal winding, but the shafts were kept open to provide access and ventilation to adjoining collieries. In 1930 its winding engines were converted from steam to compressed air for hoisting men and materials only. The colliery finally closed in 1970. The headstocks were dismantled and moved to the National Mining Museum at Lound Hall in the north of the county. When the museum closed in 1989, British Coal acceded to a request from Nottinghamshire County Council to reassemble the headstocks at their original location, now landscaped, where they would become the focal point of a park and serve as a reminder of the county's industrial heritage. By this time much of the original timber was rotten and had to be replaced or conserved. The restored headstocks were reassembled on their original site (more or less) on 30 July 1992 at a cost to British Coal of more than £70,000.

Since 2008 a group called The Friends of Brinsley Headstocks has been working to develop the area as a heritage and nature reserve with the support of Nottinghamshire County Council and Broxtowe Borough Council.

Bibliography

Storer, R. W., 1985. *Some aspects of Brinsley Colliery and the Lawrence connection.* Selston: Ronald W. Storer, 109 pp.

Whitelock, G. C. H., 1957. *250 years in coal: the history of Barber Walker and Company Limited, colliery proprietors in Nottinghamshire & Yorkshire, 1680–1946.* Derby & London: Bemrose, 256 pp.

Newspaper articles: *Nottingham Evening News*, 31 Jan 1908 (description of Brinsley Colliery); *Nottingham Evening Post*, 3 June 1970 (dismantling of headstocks); *Nottingham Evening Post*, 30 July, *Eastwood & Kimberley Advertiser*, 14 Aug 1992 (Brinsley headstocks reinstated).

David G. Bate, British Geological Survey

The reassembled headstocks at Brinsley, now within a picnic area and nature reserve.

THE RECORD

Our membership now stands at 334, including individual, joint and institutional members, and we welcome the new members who have joined the Society during the year.

Indoor Meetings

Following the Annual General Meeting in March Ian Sutton discussed New Zealand's major historic earthquakes in the country's tectonic context.

A Members' Evening in April had three presentations: by Don Cameron on the BGS Mines and Quarries Database (BRITPITS) from 1845 to the present day; by Geoff Warrington on the legacy of mining at Alderley Edge in Cheshire; and by Richard Hamblin on the Upper Greensand of the Haldon Hills in Devon.

The winter season of lectures started in October when Keith Ambrose brought us up to date with a revised lithostratigraphy for the Triassic Sherwood Sandstone Group of England and Scotland.

To mark its centenary in November, the story of the infamous Piltdown forgery was unfolded by David Bate.

In December, Colin Small described 56 years of flying aircraft into ash clouds, before everyone retreated to enjoy the Christmas Buffet.

January 2013 had Mike Searle's lecture on the thermal and structural evolution of the Himalayan and Karakoram continental crust.

At February's meeting David Tappin described his research into recent devastating tsunamis, and this was followed by the Society's Annual Dinner.

Field Excursions

A combination of circumstances left the Society with an atypically short programme of just three field trips in the summer season.

May saw a day-visit to the Wren's Nest at Dudley and the Saltwells Local Nature Reserve, led by Graham Worton, and also an evening walk led by Albert Benghiat to the limestone reefs of the Manifold Valley.

Tim Colman and Neil Turner led an evening walk around Nottingham Rock Cemetery in June.

Council

With the large increase in postage, this year's copy of Mercian Geologist was available for collection at the first indoor meetings in an effort to reduce costs. This proved very successful with 50% received by members post-free. Our thanks go to those members who delivered Mercians to others.

As a result of a generous bequest from the estate of the late Beryl Whittaker, the Society proposes to offer a Regional Geology Student prize of £250 in her name.

Rock boxes continue to be distributed to schools and community groups in the region. More than fifty have been given away so far.