Mills, Mines And Murder
A Bretby Estate Walk

The Magic Attic

Environmental Education Project South Derbyshire

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HERITAGE FUND

South Derbyshire VISITOR INFORMATION Centre

Mills, Mines and Murder
A Bretby Estate Walk

A figure of eight walk from The Delph, Swadlincote's Market Place, DE11 9DA

Distance – Swadlincote loop – 2¼ miles, Bretby loop – 3½ miles. A total of 5¾ miles.
Terrain – town pavements, field paths, tracks and bridleways. These can be muddy after rain. Some ascents and descents.
A moderate walk with 5 stiles. Walking shoes or boots are essential.
Ordnance Survey Explorer map 245 – National Forest. It's useful to carry binoculars.

Take advantage of Sharpe's Pottery Museum & Heritage Centre, on West St, before beginning the walk. The complex was founded in 1821 by Thomas Sharpe. His son, Edmund, patented the first flushing water closet rim in 1855. Household pots and utensils were manufactured and sold throughout the British Empire, Russia, Germany and Holland. The works eventually closed in 1967. After the Great War, the company recognised those employees who had served by making a clay roll of honour. Sadly this has either broken or been misplaced but we have a photograph of it.

ARTISTIC MEMORIAL AT SWADLINCOTE.

(From Burton Observer 17/4/1920) Block by "Burton Daily Mail."
War memorial erected in the offices of Messrs. Sharpe, Bros. and Co., sanitary pipe manufacturers, Swadlincote. Designed and modelled by Mr. C. Soar.

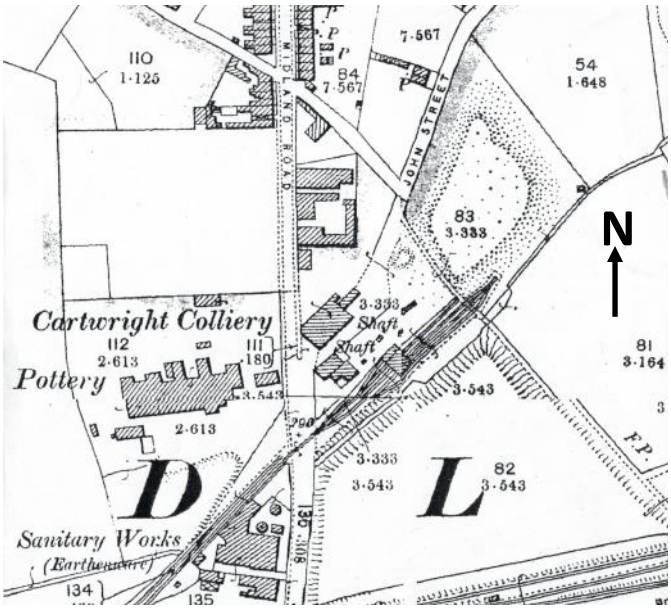
1 From the Delph (the market square). Pass in front of the Town Hall, note Time the Avenger, the motto on the clock, then turn left into Midland Road. Walk down to the junction with Civic Way and use the pelican crossing in front of the fire station. Bear right then keep the fire station on the left and descend to Lower Midland Road below the blue engineering brick wall on your right. **Look** left along the jitty. Swadlincote Railway Station platform used to be down there. Cross the road to the Memorial Gates at the entrance to Eureka Park. (*Read more about these in the Commemoration walk leaflet – **Footsteps around the park – Eureka Park's Past**. This is available on line or from the Visitor Information Centre)*. Pass through the gates. On the left is the site of the former Shoddy Pit.

Shoddy Pit

"Owd Shoddy" pit was developed before1860 to mine coal seams of the South Derbyshire Coalfield. Swadlincote is on the exposed

section of coalfield, the seams being close to the surface. It is clear to see the 'pit bonk' to the right of the winding gear in the photograph above. The chimney was part of the complex too. It had a number of formal names – Oldfield Colliery, New Hall Fields, Brotherhood and Cartwright's Colliery named after the owner, Moses Cartwright but was known by locals as Shoddy Pit. It was given this name because of its poor condition in comparison to others in the district. It was very difficult to work because of flooding, faults and short seams.
At one point, a co-operative was formed by the miners who then called it Brotherhood mine. This was because the colliery was operated by a consortium of workmen or brotherhood. Miners were paid in tokens that

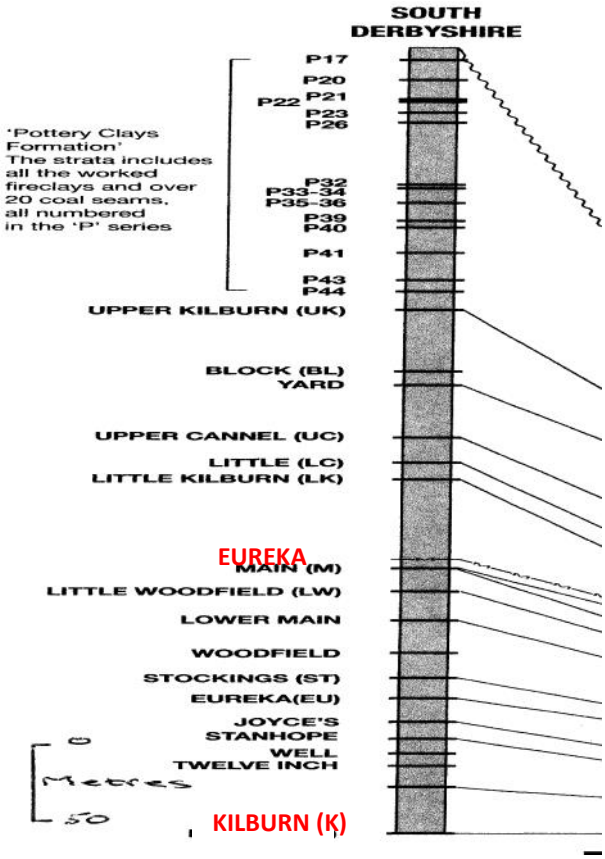
they could use to buy provisions from 'The Tommy shop' across the road. This was owned by the mine. The practice was illegal as they should have been paid in cash! The venture failed in 1896 when the pit shaft collapsed, followed by a lawsuit.
The colliery was taken over by Robert Cartwright and Edmund Sharpe (of Sharpe's Pottery). The mine was pumped out and repaired and continued to produce coal until 1897 when the firm went into liquidation.
The mining rights were sold to a sanitary pipe making firm – Wraggs. Finally the mineral rights were leased from Wragg's at £120 per year for 15 years, plus royalties per ton of coal and clay worked. However the enterprise failed again in 1906 and the business was bought out by the Granville Colliery Company.
The mine was served by a mineral line from the main railway that ran through Swadlincote, south of the present park. Remains of an old railway bridge can be seen on the access path from Belmont



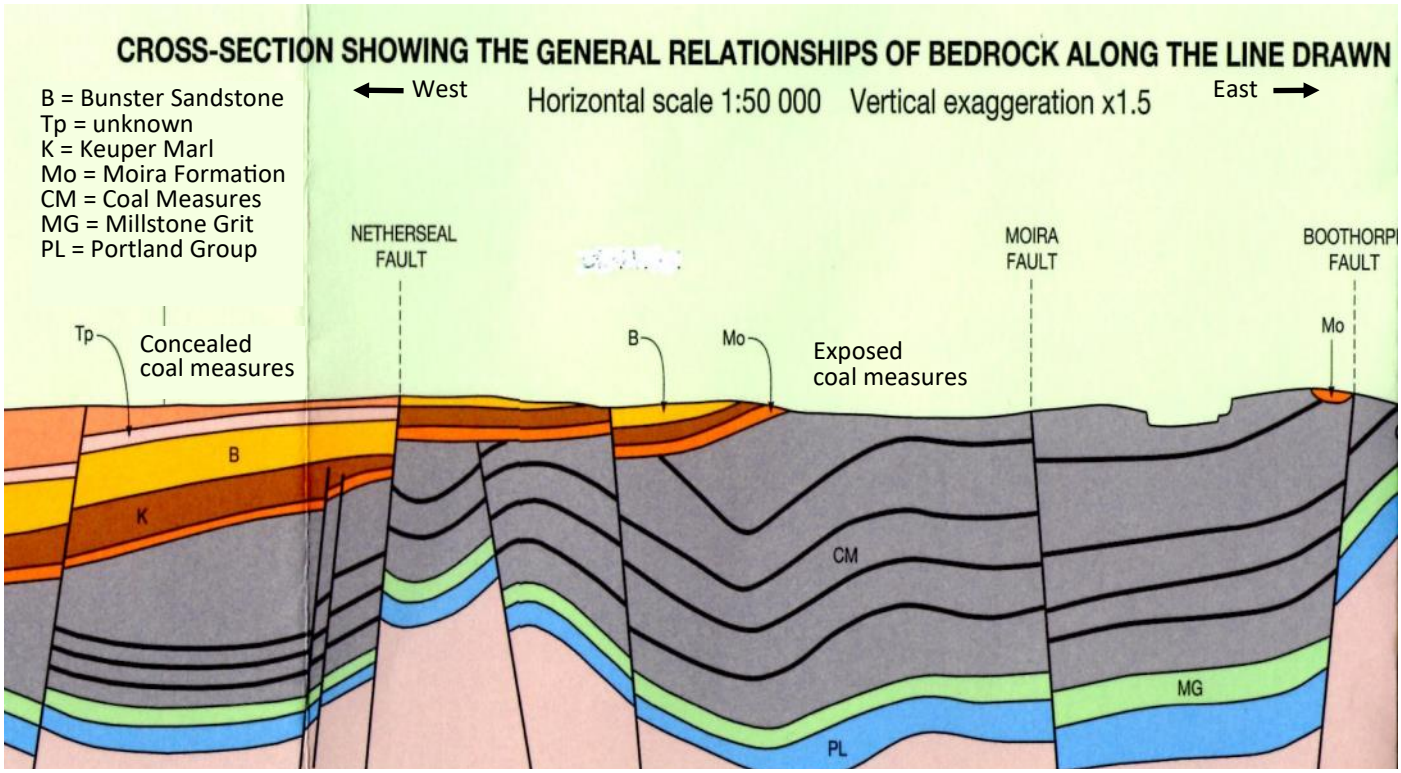
Street. The mine shafts were capped off as shown in the photographs opposite from Burton Mail dated 6th June 1938.

Eureka coal seam was named in the early nineteenth century. It is between 1.2 and 1.5 metres thick and lies about 460 metres below where you stand. The coal is sandwiched between grey sandstone and mudstone and occurs in Eureka Rock that is twelve to eighteen metres thick. The coal seam was mined from Shoddy Pit but –as discussed above- the seam had limited productivity as the mine kept closing down.
The name of the recreation ground was changed to Eureka Park in 1937.

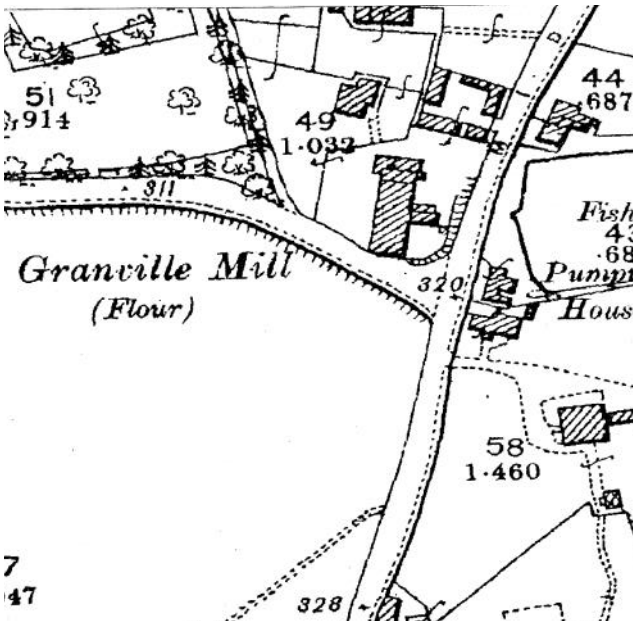
Coal seams of the South Derbyshire Coalfield lie below the clays



A general cross–section showing how close the coal seams are to the surface in the Swadlincote areas



2 Continue straight ahead passing the sundial below you on the left; through the park then cross Newhall Road to face the old mill.



Granville Colliery owned the mill in Victorian times. It produced flour for bread making. Today it is protected from development as a Grade 2 Listed Building. The fish pond across Midway Road on the right provided a head of water to operate the mill wheel and received water from the Pumping House that drained Granville Pit.

During the Great War after initial panic buying of food, people settled down into a routine and food was not a problem until 1916. In April Britain only had six weeks of wheat left and bread was a staple part of most diets. Fines were issued for making white flour instead of wholewheat and for allowing rats to invade wheat stores. It was a bleak year for families - with the news from the Battle of the Somme and with food in short supply, suddenly the war was brought home to most families. Food prices rose. It was not easy to encourage poor families to eat less bread. The rich could afford the higher food prices and could buy food on the black market but ordinary workers couldn't. Food rationing began in 1918.

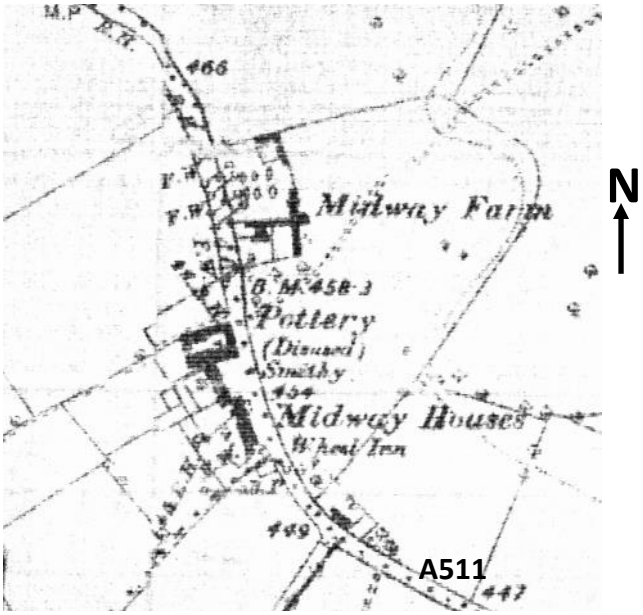
3 Turn left and after 50 metres take the tarmac jitty (alley) to reach a housing estate.

4 Keep straight on to join another signed public footpath at a T junction. This leads into Sandholes Open Space. Use the wide grassy track keeping

hedgerows and fences to the right. Several springs occurred along the line you are walking. The track bears left with a view of a sandstone outcrop on the right. At the highest point stop and turn round to enjoy a retrospective view over Swadlincote. Keep hedges and back gardens on your right the grassy path leads to a gap on to Eastfield Rd. Turn right if you want to complete the full walk, this takes you to the A511.

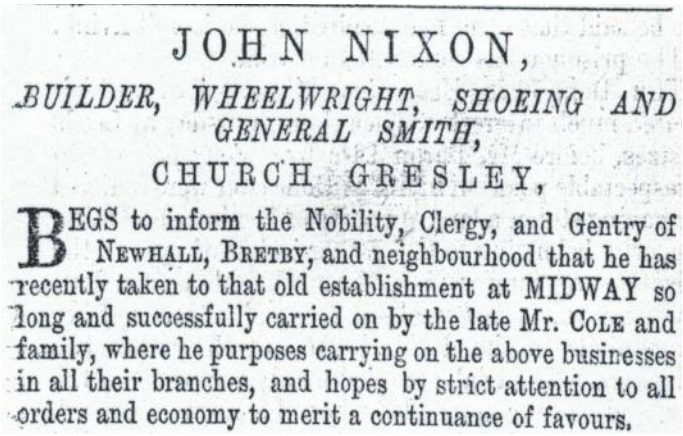
If you wish to complete the shorter Swadlincote loop, turn left downhill on the poorly surfaced lane (Eastfield Road) and follow the instructions from point 15 below. To continue to the Bretby Estate read on:

5 For the longer walk, turn left when you reach the A511. Cross the A511 at the pelican crossing near the Wheel Inn. Turn right then left onto the public footpath. 35 metres after joining the footpath (after stile), pause and turn round, looking back towards the road, then look at the map



below.

The map above, dated 1883, shows the setting of the next two stories. The Wheel Inn is located south of a row of cottages with Midway pottery to the north. The pottery had a wheelwright's and smithy too, as described in the advertisement printed in the Burton Chronicle on April 8th 1869 (see opposite). This was a type of transport cafe and garage of the day, when carriages were horse drawn and people stopped for refreshment, to rest or change horses and for wheel/ carriage repairs.
The A511 we have just left follows the route of



JOHN NIXON,

BUILDER, WHEELWRIGHT, SHOEING AND GENERAL SMITH,

CHURCH GRESLEY,

BEGS to inform the Nobility, Clergy, and Gentry of NEWHALL, BRETBY, and neighbourhood that he has recently taken to that old establishment at MIDWAY so long and successfully carried on by the late Mr. COLE and family, where he purposes carrying on the above businesses in all their branches, and hopes by strict attention to all orders and economy to merit a continuance of favours.

the Burton to Ashby-de-la-Zouch turnpike which opened in 1753. Horse-drawn traffic including The Red Rover, a light post coach that travelled regularly between Liverpool and London. Look at a national map and see how we were bypassed by the motorways—the SE/NW journey would previously have come straight through Swadlincote. Several toll gates lay across the route. The image shows a well laden carriage and four, part of Clements painting dated 1837.

On the snowy night of February 4th 1841 a terrible tragedy took place. Four miners were drinking in The Stanhope Arms in Newhall – John Adey, Henry Hoskison, Robert Staley and Henry Eames. From their conversation it was clear that they were going poaching and they left at 10.30pm.
Earlier, at 9pm, George Hill, gamekeeper to the 6th Earl of Chesterfield and his assistant, Robert Harvey had begun patrolling an area of Newhall Manor, part of the Bretby Estate. Hill and Harvey called in at the pot-works next to The Wheel Inn for a smoke and a warm by the kiln. Hill took a walk onto the footpath coming up from Newhall where he saw four men, two carrying guns. They crossed the road. Hill went back to the pottery to fetch Harvey and left his gun behind and took his stick. Harvey followed the men and Hill watched. A few minutes later there was a gun

shot. Two men came running across the fields and Hill gave chase. He lost them on the turnpike. He ran back over the fields and found Harvey, lying on his back with a stick clenched in his hand, and his clothing on fire. He was dead.
By midnight Constable Charlton had arrived from Newhall and followed their tracks in the snow. ‘’Wanted’’ notices were put up and by the 6th of February the men were arrested. Two were found at Matt’s Yard mine in Newhall. A gun, shot bag and a flask of powder were found in Hoskison's home.
A post mortem was held which concluded that Harvey had been shot at point blank range. A large charge of powder had set him on fire.
The trial at Derby Assizes in March found 23 year old Hoskison guilty of manslaughter. The sentence was that 'he be transported beyond the seas for the term of his natural life'. A few weeks later he was sent to Australia aboard the frigate Westmoreland. He was sent to work in the coal mines but tended to cause trouble. Records show that he was insolent, idle and caused numerous disturbances. Robert Harvey was laid to rest in a quiet corner in St. John's, Newhall, churchyard.
Many of the locals continued to take game off the estate without going to such lengths. Charlie Hextall, was a regular poacher and is described in the ***Footsteps around the park – Eureka Park's Past*** trail. Having served King and Country as a farrier in the trenches, he returned to his former life, which included poaching. Poaching a rabbit or pheasant was a wonderful addition to the meagre stew-pot of vegetables and scraps eaten by working class families.

As you descend the slope with the fence on the left, enjoy views over Hartshorne and the broad valley of Repton Brook.

6 Pass through the gate and continue along the grassy track to a stile and gate by silver birch trees. Stay along the woodland edge, cross another stile and walk directly ahead through a gap and descend towards woodland and Repton Brook. When you reach the woodland, bear left and walk along the woodland edge until you reach a wide track on the right hand side. Go down the track c 50 metres to view the ruins of a mill on the right - then retrace your steps.

Hudson's Mill, one of several mills along Repton Brook, ground corn for use in bread making. The millers who worked here scratched their names into the wall of the

building. The mill stopped working in 1916 during the Great War. It is likely that the mill closed as a result of a shortage of labour. Even though it was likely that a miller was a reserved occupation (exempt from military service), men still chose to go to fight. This was the result of camaraderie, patriotism and people pressure: the fact that those who did not go were regarded with suspicion or accused of cowardice.

The old tree by the brook is a hornbeam. It can be identified by the jagged edge and deep veins on the leaf. The tree has a silvery grey bark and its trunk is deeply fluted. In summer the seeds hang in clusters as shown in the picture below.
Until the end of the 19th century hornbeams were coppiced (cut down to ground level) or pollarded (cut to head height above the reach of browsing animals). The fresh shoots gave firewood, charcoal and bean sticks. The name hornbeam refers to the tree's tough wood –'horn' meaning hard and 'beam' -tree in old English. As it resists heavy blows, the wood is used for making chopping blocks, mallets, balls and skittles. Before the days of cheap steel it was made into spokes and cog wheels. An ideal tree to grow close to a mill.

Hornbeam leaf & seeds

7 Return to the arable field and turn right, following the fence line towards Hoofie's Farm

Sometimes there are rare breed sheep grazing here.

8 Keep Hoofie's Farm with its barn conversions on the right and pass through a couple of gates.

Sometimes pigs forage in the woodland on the right.

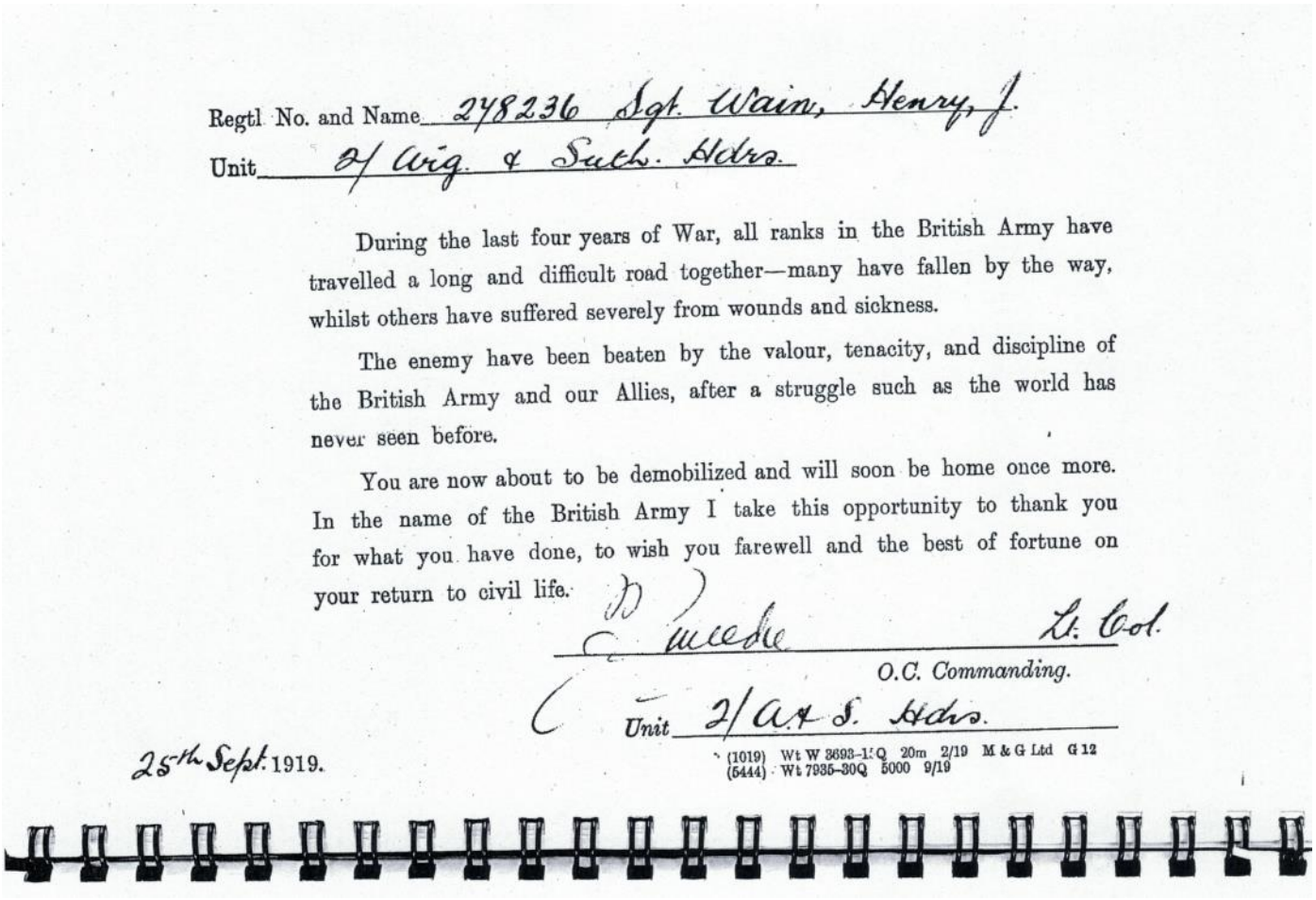
9 Where the tarmac drive bends to the right, turn sharp left to ascend a muddy bridle path through Hoofie's Wood. (Ignore the track that goes up to the right).

The path you are now on was the original main road through Bretby and was closed in 1805. Buzzards often fly overhead and their mewing can be heard. Listen for the drumming of the great spotted woodpecker and the piercing alarm call of the jay.
The Bretby Estate was owned by the Earls of Chesterfield from the 1580s until the 1870s (see Point 10). They planted many large trees on the estate in the late 18th century – beech, elm, horse chestnuts, lime, plane. In the early 19th Century, the estate land agent, Frances Blaikie, was very fond of forestry and was responsible for the parkland planting. However many trees were felled for the Great War effort (1914-18) and then others were felled during the Second World War (1939-45)

Mr Henry John Wain (Jack to his friends) was born in Bretby. His grandfather had been gamekeeper to the Earl of Carnarvon. Jack joined the Argyle and Highland Sutherlanders in December 1915 and recorded his memoirs of life at the front. His book WWI Memories which can be found in the Magic Attic contains sketches, cartoons and poems of events and characters of his time serving King and country. Having joined up he did a musketry course and went to the Somme in March 1917 where he immediately did a sniper's course. By November 1917 he was wounded and returned to the UK. In 1918 he was a sergeant instructing staff in signalling. He was demobilised in December 1919 as shown on a copy of his paper below. He was looking forward to civilian life and readers of the Burton Mail will recall his excellent articles about local heritage and natural history. He died on 28th February 1986, 2 days after his 90th birthday.

10 Take a rest at the top of the hill beyond the edge of the woodland.

Carrion crows, rooks and jackdaws feed in the fields. Beyond the wood at the highest point, wide ranging views over the Trent



Regtl. No. and Name 248236 Sgt. Wain, Henry, J.
Unit 2/ Arg. & Suth. Hdrs.

During the last four years of War, all ranks in the British Army have travelled a long and difficult road together—many have fallen by the way, whilst others have suffered severely from wounds and sickness.

The enemy have been beaten by the valour, tenacity, and discipline of the British Army and our Allies, after a struggle such as the world has never seen before.

You are now about to be demobilized and will soon be home once more. In the name of the British Army I take this opportunity to thank you for what you have done, to wish you farewell and the best of fortune on your return to civil life.

C. Wiede Lt. Col.
O.C. Commanding.
Unit 2/ Arg & S. Hdrs.

25th Sept. 1919.

(1019) Wt W 3693-1 Q 20m 2/19 M & G Ltd G 12
(5444) Wt 7935-30Q 5000 9/19

Valley and beyond to Derby and the Peak District can be admired. Look out for evidence of the former gallops on the left created by the 6th Earl of Chesterfield in 1815. They cross the bridleway at the top of the hill and were 2 miles in length being used to exercise his many horses. No expense was spared in the stables and many eminent people visited with champion jockeys to try out horses. The best horse Chesterfield owned was a filly called Crucifix. She won the 2000 guineas, 1000 guineas and The Oaks in 1840. However he had sold her as a two year old before these races for £60!

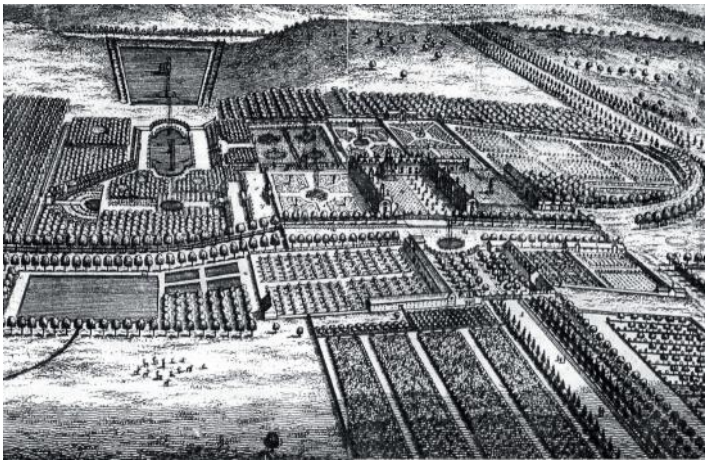
A Model Farm - Home Farm - was built at the same time and had the most up to date equipment. Selective breeding of cattle, new farm machinery, new crops and crop rotation were at the heart of the estate management

Disraeli, Prime Minister in 1868 and from 1874-1880, was a friend of Lady Anne Chesterfield, wife of the 6th Earl, and her sister Selina - and a regular correspondent and visitor to Bretby Hall. Following one visit he said that *'you have fed me with unrivalled delicacies, not least of which was the produce of your most unrivalled dairy. I will back Bretby butter against Paris'*. In 1874, he wrote that he longed to see the farm again with its room full of cheeses.

Lady Anne's son, the 7th Earl of Chesterfield, died in 1871 and the estate was inherited by Lady Anne's daughter Evelyn, sister to the 7th Earl, and her husband Lord Porchester of Highclere, near Newbury (now known as the setting for ITV's 'Downton Abbey').
He later became the 5th Earl of Carnarvon on the death of his father.
The Earl of Chesterfield title could not pass down the female line so went to a distant cousin in Ireland. So the family at Bretby stayed the same but the Chesterfield title did not remain there.
Lady Anne remained at Bretby until her death in 1885 and Disraeli continued to visit regularly.
The 5th Earl of Carnarvon stayed there regularly but his main residence was Highclere.
In 1910 outlying parts of the estate at Hartshorne, Boundary, Midway and Newhall were sold off.
In 1915 most of the remainder of the Bretby estate was put up for auction; the major part being bought by John Wragg, the clay works owner from Swadlincote.
In January 1918 the Burton Chronicle reported the further breaking up of Bretby Park. *'An estimate was laid before the Derbyshire War Agricultural committee. To provide more agricultural land 400 trees would have to be felled costing £400 whilst fencing would cost another £900 to £1000. In the circumstances the committee deferred the action until all other possibilities for increased wheat and oats cultivation had been exhausted'*.
In 1922 Burton Golf Club bought the plot of land that Lord Carnarvon—a keen golfer and their first president– had leased to them since 1907.
The remaining Bretby estate is over 2000 acres, still owned by Wragg's descendants: the Perkins/ Macdonald family, and is managed as a mixture of arable, grassland and mature mixed woodland.

11 Stay on the bridle path and descend to pass between two lakes.

Look out for the resident water fowl: coot, mallard, heron and tufted duck are some of the species. Yellow water lilies flower in the summer; dragonflies and damselflies flit amongst the plants of the lake margin too.
In the 18th century this part of the estate was completely different with formal gardens of 600 acres rather than landscaped woodlands. 'The very large park is stored with several sorts of deer and exotic beasts..... ' . Celia Finnes wrote 'In one garden there are three fountains *wherein stands great statues, each side on their pedestals is a dial, one for the sun, the other a clock which by the water work is moved and strikes the hours and chimes the quarters and when they please play Lillibullero on the chimes....*' Woolley wrote the following description in his History of Derbyshire dated 1715, *'the gardens, fountains, labyrinths, groves, greenhouses, grottoes, aviaries but more especially the carpet walk and situation of the orange trees, waterworks before the summerhouse which is built of marble.....*'



The waterworks, which include canal, lakes and a spectacular fountain were constructed in 1684 – 1702 and were the work of Grillet, who was working at Chatsworth about the same time. The estate rivalled Versailles as can be seen on the drawing below by Kniff and published in 1708. The string of six lakes still exist.

The 4th Earl of Chesterfield, having preferred the high life of court circles in London rather than living at Bretby, neglected the estate. The first house was beyond repair and the gardens no longer fashionable. All was ripped out and replaced by parkland when the 5th Earl inherited in 1773. He retired from court to devote himself to life at Bretby and rebuilt the house of local sandstone. Today the Grade 2 listed building has been redeveloped as 29 luxury apartments looking out over the parkland.

12 At the top of the hill take the stile on the left. Pause and look across when the hall can be seen— through shrubs on the right.

A cedar tree seedling, reputed to be one of the first in the country, was planted as a memorial to the 2nd Earl's second wife who died following a miscarriage in 1677. As it grew a legend evolved - When a branch fell off it foretold the death of a family member. The tree grew to the east of the house and was felled in 1954. It didn't bring the Wragg family any luck either. John D. Wragg lost two sons in the Great War and his wife in 1916 and he passed away not long after in 1919.

In Victorian times there was a strong shooting tradition. Pheasant and partridge provided record bags of 3000. Partridge are shot from September to mid-November and then pheasant shooting takes over. The estate was used for agriculture and the shooting of game birds continued.
The herd of 200 deer were culled in 1916 and the deer park was cultivated as part of the Great War effort.
The income from the venison was used to fund the expeditions to investigate the treasures of Ancient Egypt at Thebes and in the Valley of the Kings near Luxor.
Howard Carter was a regular visitor to Bretby as he discussed and planned the expeditions with the 5th Earl of Carnarvon who was a keen archaeologist. He acquired the concession to excavate the valley in 1915 and he employed Carter to explore it. Bricks made in the Earl of Carnarvon's own brickworks on the estate on the edge of Newhall, were used in the

construction of Howard Carter's house in Thebes, although local bricks were plentiful in Egypt . *Ref: The Earl and the Pharaoh by the Countess of Carnarvon*
The house was named Castle Carter .
The bricks are dated ten years before the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb.

After a systematic search the tomb of Tutankhamun was discovered on November 20th 1922. On 19 March 1923 Carnarvon suffered a severe mosquito bite infected by a razor cut. On 5 April, he died in the Continental-Savoy Hotel in Cairo. This led to the story of the "Curse of Tutankhamun", the " Mummy's Curse". His death was likely to have been caused by blood poisoning which developed into pneumonia. However the tenants went to check the cedar tree. It had lost a limb!
Today, the Carnarvons still live at Highclere.

In 1925 Bretby Hall was sold to Derbyshire County Council and became an orthopaedic hospital that closed in February 1997 when treatment was transferred to Derby. Fortunately, despite all the merciless onslaughts during its long history, Bretby park remains very attractive. It is no longer well wooded but, as Stebbing Shaw noted, *'the terrain is pleasantly undulating, formed by nature with much variety to please*".

13 Continue, to cross another stile where you turn left to follow the surfaced lane towards the A511. Pause and enjoy the view over the next lake on the left and look out for grey squirrels eating beech mast in the woodlands. When you reach the A511 look right towards Burton upon Trent (but don't turn right)

One of the estate collieries was located half a mile down the road. Shafts were sunk in 1855 to reach the Kilburn coal seam 300 feet down. The seam was productive being 1.5 metres thick. 60 men and boys were employed at the colliery and cottages were built for them. Working conditions were difficult and after an accident, the Kilburn seam was abandoned and then the Eureka seam was worked until the mine finally closed in 1874. A branch line had been built from the Leicester to Burton railway to serve the colliery but also for guests visiting the hall. They were collected from the platform and driven by carriage up to the hall.

Following the establishment of The National Coal Board in 1948 a testing site and research and development establishment was set up on the west side of the road. Much work was done here that has benefited mining globally. Today the site is Bretby Business Park developed after denationalisation in the 1990s.

Also along the road to the right, around 1km towards Burton, is another legacy of the time of Lord Carnarvon's tenure at Bretby. In 1907, he leased c.80 acres of land, 'Bretby Links' to Burton Golf Club for £200/year to develop a Clubhouse and Golf Course. He used to bring his friends up from Highclere for the golf, fishing and shooting and organised an exhibition Golf match with the famous golfer Ben Sayers. He also caused a stir as the first to play on a Sunday.

When the Bretby Estate was broken up, he sold the land to the club. He was patron of the Club and their first President, holding the role from 1907-22.

The Club hold an annual tournament in his honour, awarding the magnificent 'Carnarvon Cup', which he presented to the Club in Sept 1907, to the winner.

In 2023, the Club erected a plaque to commemorate his involvement on the 100th Anniversary of his death.

14 Turn left along the A511 and walk to reach the pelican crossing just before the Wheel Inn. Cross over the A511 and after 250 metres turn right into the poorly surfaced lane (Eastfield Road). You are following the original main route into Swadlincote.

15 Walk downhill passing the Sandholes on the left to a cross roads. Cross over into Westfield Road. Continue on to the Catholic Church identified by the green glazed tiled roof. Cross Newhall Road into Darklands Road. Carry on downhill to Sainsbury's roundabout. Turn left to use the pelican crossing into the Leisure Centre Car Park. Walk through it, keeping the Council Offices and then the Leisure Centre on your left. Continue up to the junction and turn left along West Street to return to The Delph.

The research for this walk revealed a great contrast in the lives of local people from miners, millers and estate workers to the landowners and mine owners both before, during and after the Great War.

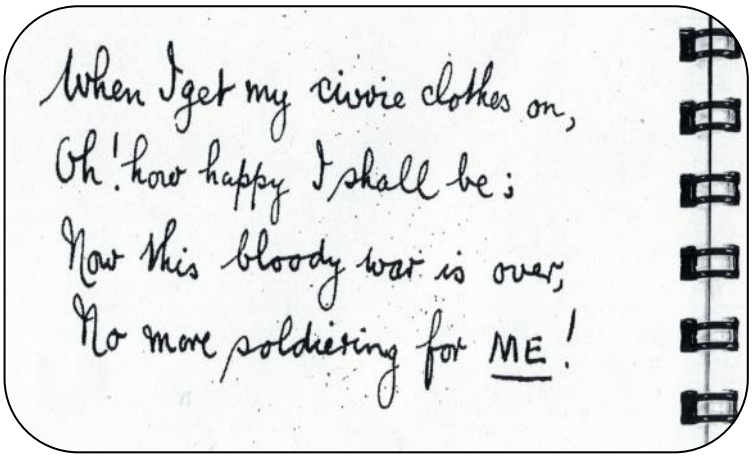
Miners and other land-based workers like Charlie Hextall could have remained working in the pits during the Great War. Their jobs were reserved occupations. However they joined their pals and went off to serve their King and Country.

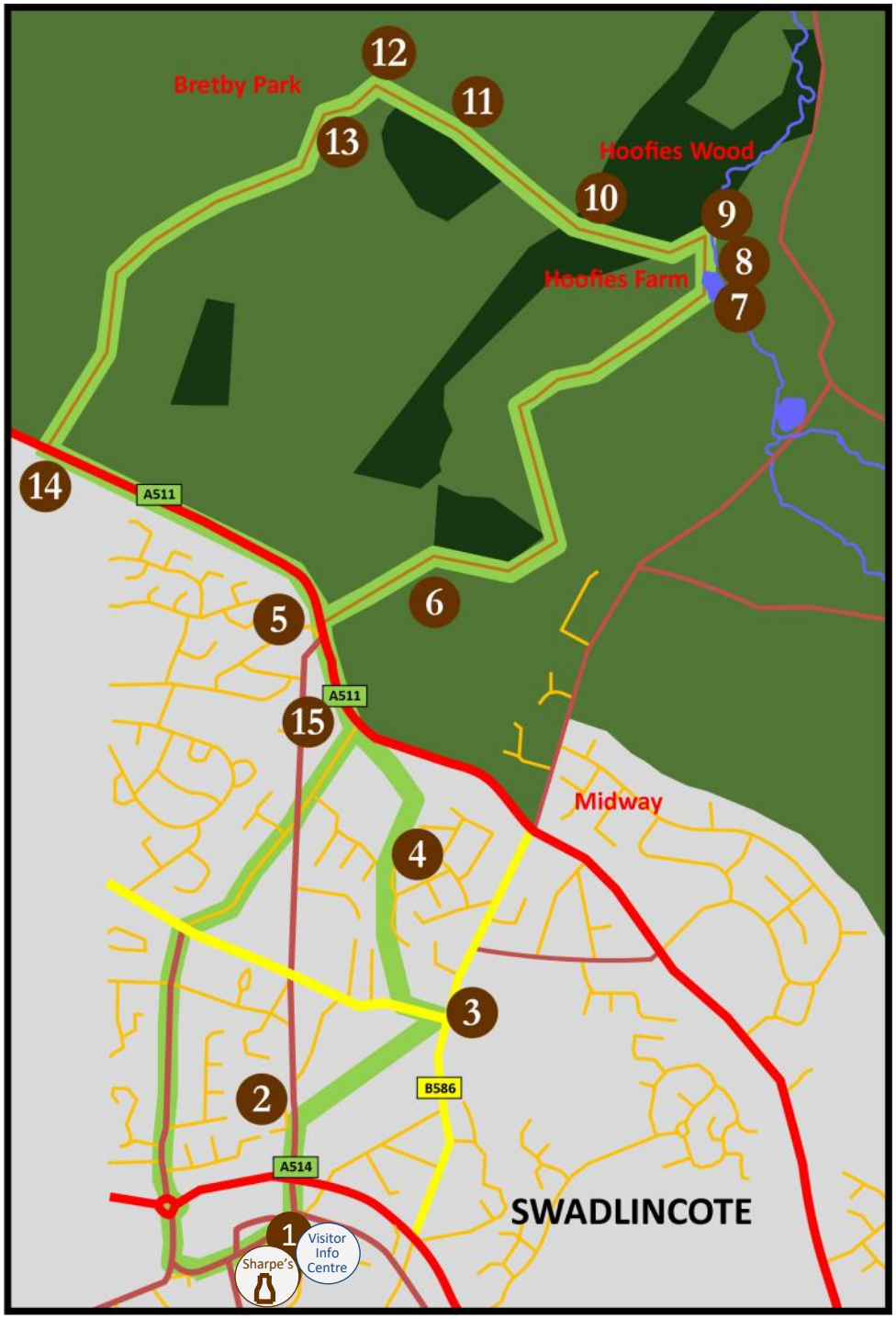
Hudson's mill had to close as a result of lack of workers. This added to local food shortages as bread was the staple diet of the time.

Bretby estate workers went off to fight too. In contrast, the Earl of Carnarvon sold Bretby Hall and used the money to continue to pursue his passion for archaeology, becoming a household name.

Howard Carter was working in the Valley of the Kings, Egypt, exploring the ancient site using funds raised through hard work and sales from the Estate at Bretby whilst former Bretby boy H. J. Wain (see Point 9) was looking forward to normality as reflected in his notebook:

From J. Wain's notebook, by kind permission of the Wain family:





Acknowledgements

Walk created by Dot Morson with help from: Graham Nutt of The Magic Attic for advice and local knowledge

Sources

Bretby, The Earls of Chesterfield published by Ticknall Preservation & Historical Society
Magic Attic Archive.
South Derbyshire District Council website.
Derbyshire Records Office website.

Research by Malcolm Howells & the team from Burton Golf Club

Leaflet Design
Alan Bates

Map: use alongside OS Explorer 245 'The National Forest'

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Download this and the other WW1 Commemorative walks here:
www.southderbyshire.gov.uk/firstworldwar

South Derbyshire VISITOR INFORMATION Centre

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For more information about this project contact The Environmental Education Project team:

rosliston@southderbyshire.gov.uk or 01283 535039

For events at Rosliston Forestry Centre, across The National Forest and beyond go to:

www.roslistonforestrycentre.co.uk
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If you require this information in large print or in another language please phone:01283 595795 or email: customer.services@southderbyshire.gov.uk

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