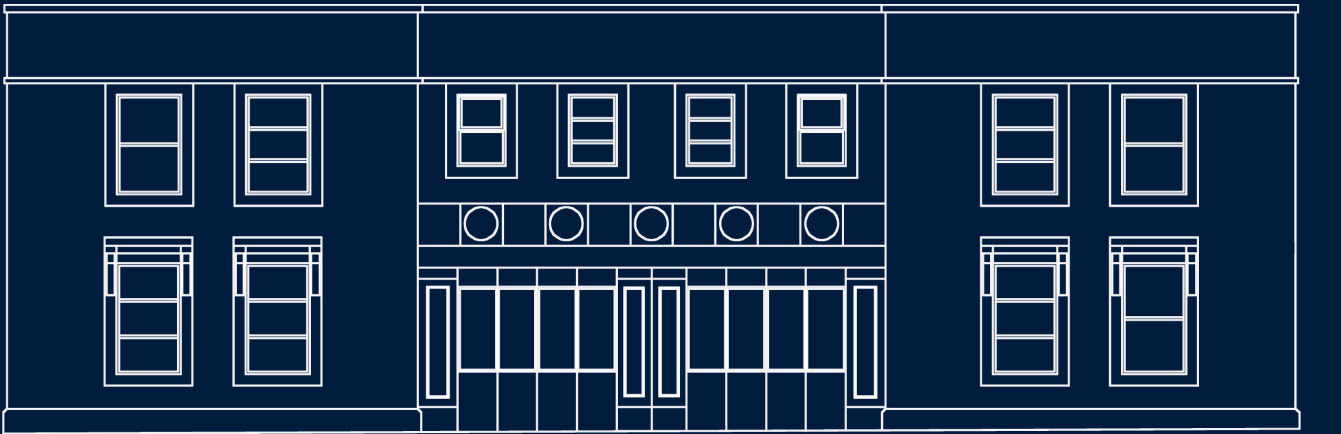




THE MINES RESCUE SERVICE CHESTERFIELD



A brief history of The Chesterfield Mines Rescue Station told through the recollections of those that lived and worked in this remarkable building

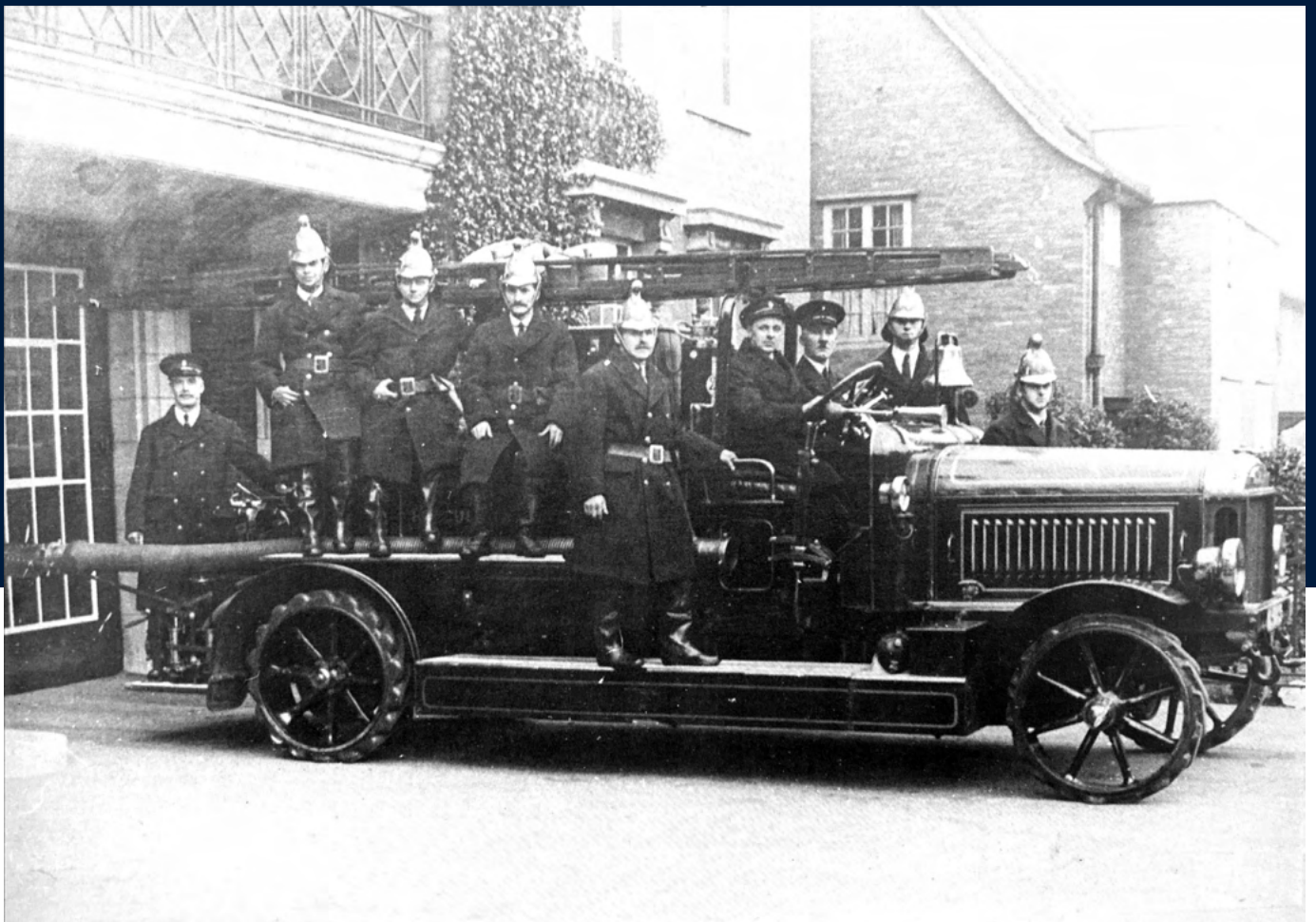


*This photo shows the first rescue team c1918 including Bart Wilson Chief Superintendent and his team **Credit Jimmy Morse***

Remembering all those who lived and served at Chesterfield Mines Rescue Station, many of whom lived their lives helping others.

Introduction

In operation for almost 75 years from 1918 to 1992, the Mines Rescue Station in Chesterfield provided the principal emergency service to all coal mines, private mines, and other establishments in the local area. For those that lived and worked there it was more than a job, it was a community. Capturing first hand reports of life at the Station, through interviews with Brigadesmen, their wives, and children who grew up on Infirmary Road, this booklet and the partner website (www.chesterfieldminerescue.co.uk), aims to preserve the important social history of this remarkable building and keep those memories and voices alive for generations to come.



Crew outside the Chesterfield Rescue Station in 1924.

Credit: When Coal was King

A Brief History of Mines Rescue Stations

At the turn of the twentieth century, coal mining was at the heart of British industry with coal production peaking at 292 million tonnes in 1913. There were 1.2 million people employed by UK Coal in 1920, and mining was a dangerous job. Tunnel collapses and explosions from build up of gases were frequent, and between 1873 and 1853 there were 85,000 deaths. A great many of these deaths arose due to the complexities of accidents arising underground and subsequent rescue efforts. In 1908 alone there were 1,345 deaths from accidents and 143,258 workers injured or disabled.



c1915 Some young Denby lads about to ascend the shaft and barely tall enough to hold the safety bar.

Credit: When Coal was King

Across Europe, major powers had begun to seriously consider provision for the rescue of mine workers and indeed in Britain, a Royal Commission had suggested rescue stations as a necessity as early as 1886. There was a great deal of political lobbying, largely supported by MPs from mining heartlands, such as the politician and industrialist Sir Arthur Markham of Brimington, Chesterfield. The first official mines rescue station opened in Tankersley, South Yorkshire in 1902 and the building still stands today. Eventually, through an act of parliament in 1911, the government insisted that mine owners had to provide trained rescue workers and apparatus.

Inside the Station

Chesterfield Mines Rescue Service was based at one of the first Rescue stations in the UK. In 1914 it was announced that Chesterfield would be the headquarters for a rescue station; building work began on the chosen site of Infirmity Road, and by 1918 the station was open. Despite delays from the war, the station was

eventually fully equipped with no expense spared for modern equipment. The basement was designed to resemble a mine, to train men based at the pit in how to rescue, with tunnels and fires started to create smoke. Canaries were bred at the station, and this continued until its closure.

The station was developed over the years to include more housing for the station Brigadesmen and their families.



Miners Rescue Station and Cottages, Infirmity Road, Chesterfield, 1930s

Credit: Picturethepast.org.uk

Wages were lower than working on the coalface, but accommodation was included. After being appointed a Brigadesmen, families would often be moved into the flat above the station whilst waiting to move into one of the Coal Board houses on Infirmity Road. The station employed a team of full-time service men, who

worked alongside volunteers from the collieries. Station staff worked a duty roster to give immediate cover of at least one Officer and 2 Brigadesmen, backed up by the colliery part-timers. The schedule was designed to provide a constant state of operation 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

The working days were regimented by a 14 week timetable and consisted of a wide variety of jobs concerned with the maintenance of the safety and rescue equipment, the buildings, and also their own fitness. A significant amount of time was also spent on training exercises in the tunnels specifically constructed in the cellar of the station and also training the volunteer miners from the pits themselves. Brigadesmen were also charged with the welfare of the canaries.

”

“It was a bit cushy at times apart from when you got a call out. You didn't know where you were going or when you were coming back”

- Eric Mellish

When not out on a rescue operation, many days were spent training and cleaning equipment and the station. This was often preferable to the conditions on the coal face and,

along with the provided accommodation, it made the comparatively low pay of the mines rescue an appealing option.

”

When I came out the Pit I was only 11½ stone when I worked the coal face, and then I went up to 14 stone, believe it or not. All you were doing was cleaning windows, mopping floors, when the part-timers come in you'd have them to train, and then you'd clean the apparatus after they'd gone.

- Eric Mellish

As a Brigadesman, there was the daily routine of cleaning the vehicles and testing the equipment to keep the station in tiptop condition, going

to the colliery to train the part-time men and working on practice scenarios and incidents in the training gallery.

Each man would have a number on a board associated with a daily duty, and every week they moved to a

different number, ensuring everyone was skilled in all areas of responsibility.

”

8 o'clock we started work and we'd be in the meeting room and given our jobs. 'You two go and do that, you're going to the colliery today, you're going to oversee the teams going to the colliery, you need to clean the vehicles...

- Dave Archibold

When the teams came back from the colliery or the mines, the equipment had to be cleaned, tested and refilled. The team also undertook all the cleaning, painting and decorating

duties that were needed, including each other's houses. The station, equipment and surroundings were immaculate, and every duty was assigned.

”

number 1 had to clean the fires out and the boiler, feed the birds and make the tea and that was his job. And also, if someone had been in the shower, on a Friday was clean day and you was on your hands and knees with a mop, with a bucket should I say, a scrubbing brush and a cloth

- James Chadwick

..yeah, and you had to clean everywhere through. Then at 3 o'clock when you'd had your tea, was about quarter past 3 was and it was fine, it was out for volleyball. And we played volleyball everyday by the garages

- James Chadwick

As well as cleaning and maintenance, the days were busy with visits to the collieries to train staff and test equipment. The visits to mines to seal

off old coal faces were increasingly frequent, as the mines in the area were starting to close.

”

...we were one of the stations that did a lot of stoppings, which is partitioning off an old working in a mine to improve their airways and what have you... and what we did was we had to go build stoppings and they exploded them to see how much they could take before they would go

- James Chadwick

Among the other services provided by the team were specialist equipment and emergency support.

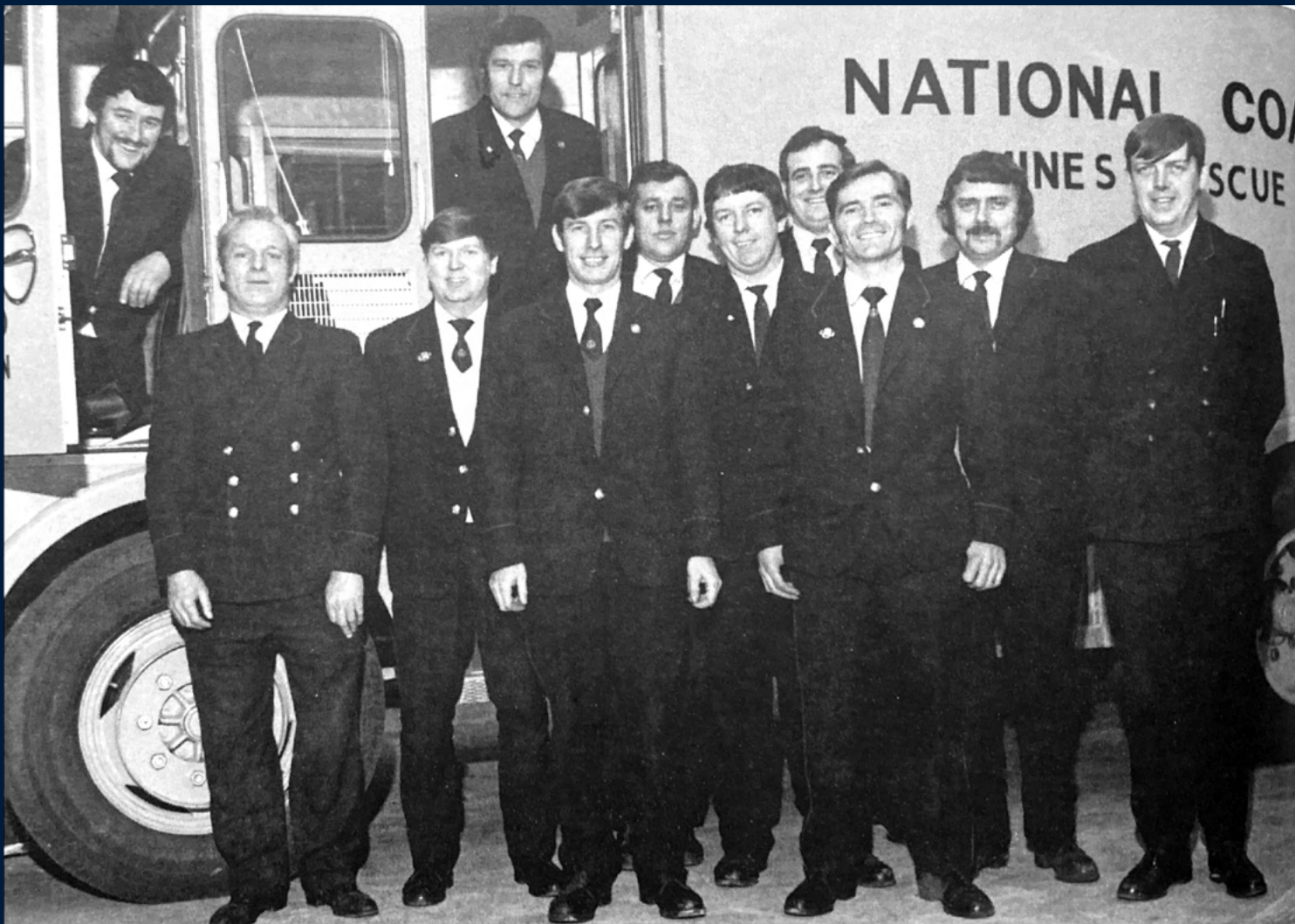
- ✓ The use of a mobile winding engine which could travel to collieries where there was an obstruction in the shaft.
- ✓ The Grundomat mole
- ✓ Cutting and Lifting equipment
- ✓ Working with the British Coal Medical Services to provide the movement of emergency blood transfusions, surgical kit and resuscitation apparatus
- ✓ Training in the use of self-rescuers for all underground workers
- ✓ Provision of radio communications in the event of telephone breakdown at British Coal sites
- ✓ Maintenance of fire-fighting equipment at collieries.

When it came to getting paid there were traditions that were very much alive.

”

... two Brigadesmen had to go to Mansfield to pick the wages up. And then they'd bring it back and .. you had a hat, a cap. And you had to tip your cap before they paid you your wages to the Superintendent.

- James Chadwick



Members of the Mines Rescue Service c1965. Left to Right: A Wright, G Colley (station officer), R Cartledge, T Halfpenny, P Mallen, F Skingle, E Mellish, G Swindell, T Griffiths, V Hind, G Wilkinson (station officer)

Credit: Alan Wright, When Coal Was King

Equipment

One major new development in Health and Safety for the service was the introduction of Selected Elevated Flow Apparatus (S.E.F.A) which kept the UK at the forefront of the world for safe operation and was fully managed and maintained at the station.



The equipment these heroes are wearing is a very early version of the Aerophor liquid air set. The picture is taken at Chesterfield Rescue Station c1920.

Credit: JW. Bech - www.therebreathersite.nl

This picture shows the smoke fighting helmet, the CO₂ detection birds, the liquid air flasks and the Aerophor. This picture taken at Chesterfield Rescue Station c1920

Credit Christopher Green, Mr Harrison, JW. Bech www.therebreathersite.nl





Eric Mellish Wearing apparatus c 1980
Credit: Eric Mellish

To maintain the 24/7 operation of the service, all breathing apparatus was kept and maintained at the station and regular training given to the permanent staff, Brigadesmen and the part-time rescue men. Members of staff also visited the collieries regularly to carry out underground training sessions. They also frequently inspected the rescue facilities and equipment at each colliery.

By the 1980's two types of self-contained breathing apparatus were held at the station: The Proto MK IV 1980 and the S.E.F.A; both used compressed oxygen.

Liquid oxygen was stored at the station in 'The Aeroloft' and had to be carefully handled. Stored in vats, tested for quality at a nearby lab, and transferred to canisters using

vacuum flasks, the liquid Oxygen was -210C. Many of the team remember the dramatic effect and potential for serious injury.

”

I remember watching it, pouring the oxygen into where it was stored, and it was like watching a Frankenstein movie. Vapours coming out of the top, and I remember you saying that if it got on your arm it would freeze and burn you. It could knock your finger off

- Craig Mellish

”

We demonstrated it with a flower, a daffodil. Dipped it in and then it shattered

- Eric Mellish

I mean that liquid oxygen...burned my head many a times. Used to have to wear a helmet when we done liquid oxygen because as they filled up the duo flasks with liquid oxygen, it used to stick out the top and it used to go on your head. And it didn't half burn. You know it was, when you think about it, you'd never get health and safety doing it now.

- James Chadwick



Eric Mellish with an immaculate rescue vehicle 1980's Credit: Eric Mellish

Also kept ready for immediate turn-out were 3 specially designed rescue vehicles maintained to perfection for speedy transport of men and apparatus.

The teams were also responsible for fire extinguishers for both the collieries and other companies in the area.

”

we used to charge our own fire extinguishers. We used to have our own pump and someone in the week would get the job to go and do a hundred of these little capsule things, and you used to fill them with CO2 and put a cap on them, and ready to charge another extinguisher to take it to a pit or whatever

- James Chadwick

Yeah, the companies round and about, if they wanted the fire extinguishers recharging like the canisters, they'd bring them to us, and we'd swap them and things like that

- Glyn Jones

One of the most famous pieces of 'equipment' used in mines were canaries. Birds were bred and housed at the Station and, due to their extreme sensitivity to Carbon Monoxide were used as an early detection system.

”

We had us own aviary. And I took that, and I read a lot of books and the Superintendent asked me to go down to Ilkeston rescue station where there was a old guy who was Brigadesman at one time but retired. He was the bird keeper, he used to keep the birds down there. So I spent a full day down in Ilkeston and he taught me all about how to breed canaries, what to look out for and how to look after them.. then we were successful. We had lots of canaries

- Glyn Jones



Pete Barton (Dick), from Chesterfield Rescue Station, fitted up 1980's style with breathing apparatus and holding one of the station's canaries.

Credit: When Coal Was King

When there was a call out, canaries accompanied the team on the rescue vehicle and had their own oxygen cages.

”

They fell off their perch, then you'd turn the oxygen on, and it would revive them. All it done you see is, they are sensitive.

- James Chadwick

In addition to being an early warning system, the Canaries offered company to the miners when working alone.

”

I went to an incident at Nottingham Pit and I went down there to get samples for 8 hours on my own. I sat there and all I got was a canary. Just listening to that bird while I didn't see a soul for 8 hours – I was just taking samples. The canary came in handy because it kept chirping.

- Eric Mellish



Coal Miner underground with a pit canary **Credit: Miningheritage**

In February 1996, the use of canaries in British collieries came to an end following the 1995 Escape and Rescue from Coal Mines Regulations. The phasing out period had been ongoing over the previous decade. They were replaced by a hand held carbon-monoxide detector, known in the coal industry as the 'Electronic Canary'.

This will have been a welcome development for one young lady who had her childhood at the Station

”

“The guy who lived at number 1 had canaries in his garden, in a bird cage, and I hated that. I knew one day that they'd gone out so I went over and knocked on the door, and I chucked the ball over deliberately. So I went round and let the canaries out. But somebody spotted me from the flat top and told my dad that I'd let the canaries out. I hated seeing them there. It was so cruel but they needed them, didn't they? I just let them go

- Linda Cheetham

The Training Galleries

Sometimes the Colliery teams came to the Rescue station, used the training galleries, lit fires, had dummies, and did all the training

there. The galleries were set out to give as realistic an experience as possible with tight working spaces and uneven flooring.



Pipe used to simulate crawling space and access in the training galleries

”

On that bottom face line, just inside that first door on the left-hand side. We had to go in there for 2 hours and lay in there for 2 hours. The captain would take your readings and you'd have to stop in there for 2 hours and then every year they'd said right we want to see how long the apparatus will last and you had to sit in there for 5 hours

- James Chadwick



Corridor in the Training Galleries

”

We all used to train, and we had everyone come round from all over to come see it and see how it worked. We had lifting equipment, liftingbags...Airbags...Cutting equipment, we had all the things for the country

- James Chadwick



Volunteers from South Normanton and Staveley during a training session at the Chesterfield Mines Rescue Station (1929)

Credit: When Coal was King

The training galleries were used for testing the equipment as well as training scenarios.



Lifting equipment and weights in the Training Galleries



One of the training tunnels

Since the station closed, the basement has remained closed off and untouched. Most of the training layout remains and signs of the training exercises and work completed are plentiful.

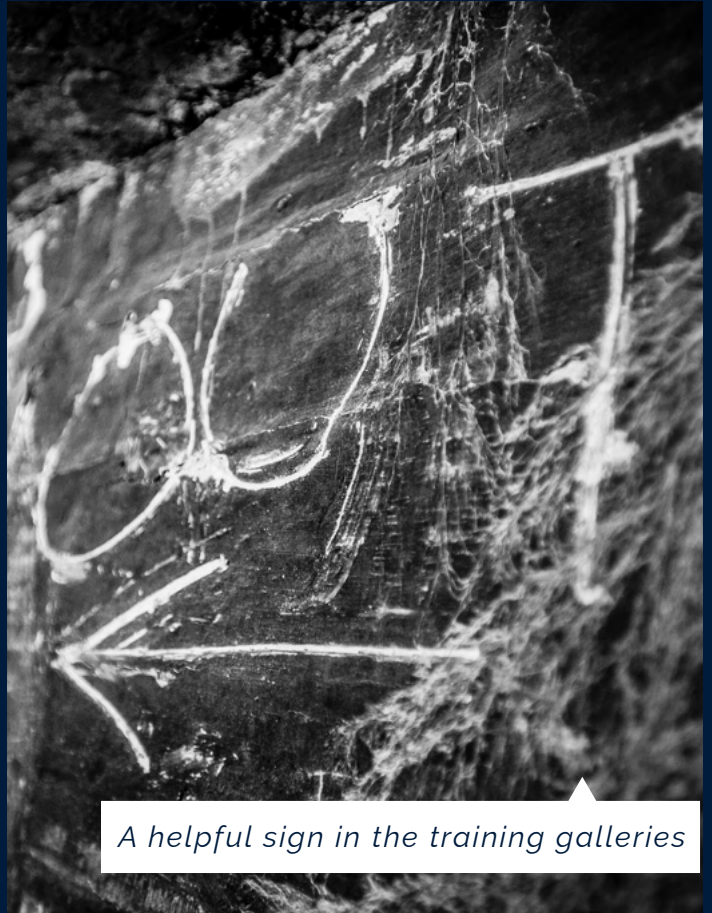


Tagged Bottles found in the basement

A shovel found in the basement



A helpful sign in the training galleries



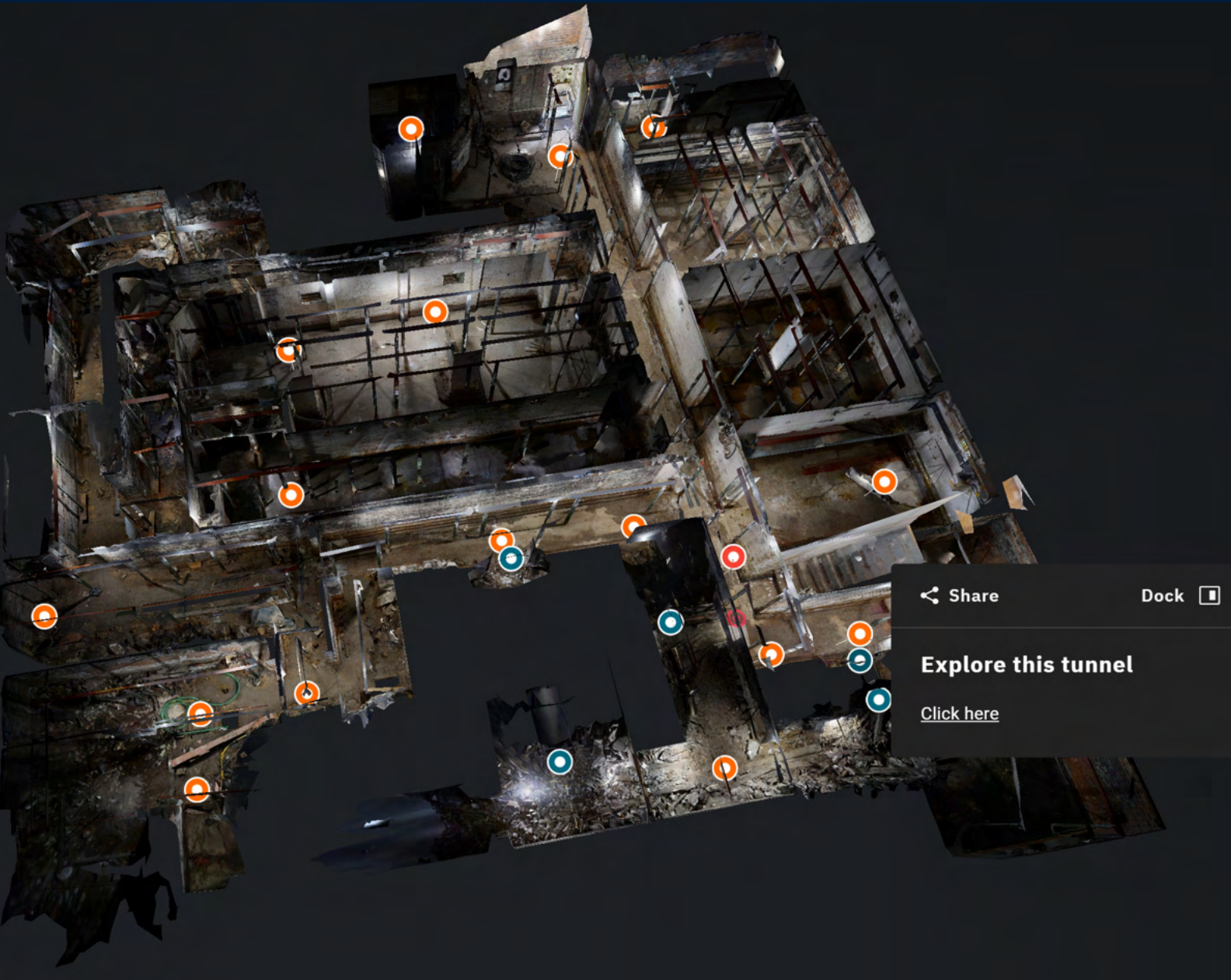
The Fire brigade also used to use the galleries for training, but eventually had to stop due to the extreme nature of the scenarios the mines rescue worked with.

”

...and then it came to a point when they said we can't train in your galleries no more cause its too toxic...because we used to burn everything. You name it, from blankets to tires you name it...and we used to have to go in there and some people used to side breath through their mouthpiece and you've only got to side breathe once and you're down because of the carbon monoxide. The fires we've got and the teams that used to come in and curse you cause you lit a fire

- James Chadwick

Training Galleries – Virtual Tour



To get a real feel for the training galleries and an insight into the working environment please visit the interactive Virtual Tour available on www.chesterfieldminerescue.co.uk. Explore the tunnels and rooms of the training galleries and imagine the place black and full of smoke for a glimpse of the training regularly undertaken by the Chesterfield Mines Rescue Service.

Keeping Fit

All rescue men were selected with particular emphasis on their character and a high degree of physical fitness. An annual medical

exam and exercise tolerance test ensured all the team were fit and healthy to continue with the service.

”

We had a medical every year, and some of us would do marathons. I did 12 marathons. I used to do 7 miles in the morning before work, and 7 miles after work. And Sunday mornings I'd sometimes go running 15 miles. That was just to keep fit so we could pass the medical. If you couldn't pass the medical then you're back to the colliery.

- Dave Archibald

When I first started, we had a box test, which was about 14 inches high a box. Then you had a metronome, and it did 150 beats...and you had to do 150 steps in three minutes and then after,...your heart rate had to be back to normal within 2 minutes of you getting back off it.

- James Chadwick

The officers found other creative ways to keep the team fit, and humble!

”

One of the lads come from one of the mines in the peak district, so an officer entered us in a carnival, a tug of war. And we got pulled around like ragdolls 'cause we turned up in training shoes and stuff like that. This was a proper tug of war team that just grinned at us. Let us win the first pull but never won after that. They pulled us along the grass!

- Glyn Jones

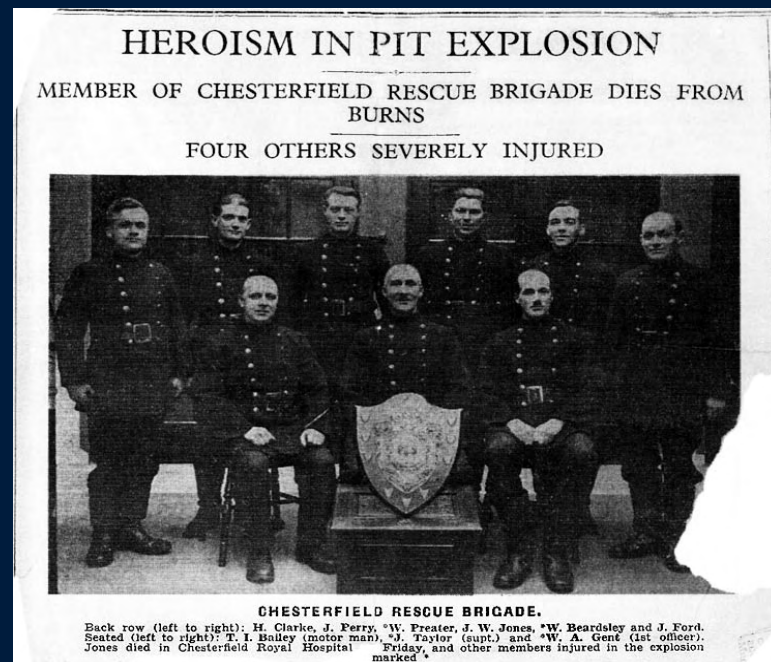
The Mines Rescue Community

A tight bond formed within the rescue service stations in the area. Brigadesmen knew that their lives depended on each other and built a strong team based on trust and respect. Morale was very good in all stations. The teams would get a call out and there could be two or three

other stations there. It felt like a specific community together with a true bond. It is clear that real camaraderie was present between the men; as one Brigadesmen put it **“Everybody helped each other and when you help each other it works.”**
- James Chadwick

Amenities at the station included snooker tables and a gym which were made full use of. Billiards tournaments where the 4 local rescues competed for a shield were regular fixtures, along with other team sports.

There are many stories of daily sporting activity at the end of a working day in the station yard, including cricket, volleyball and football – at the expense of the odd smashed window – and there was still room for some friendly competition between stations.



Newspaper report following Bilsthorpe Disaster, 26th July, 1934 | Credit healeyhero

”

The only thing is with the cricket we won Creswell cricket trophy and we had that many players at the end that they got a bit upset with us. Cause we kept bringing them in and one of the lads was quite a good cricketer, so he knew some people what were quite good, so we kept sneaking them in

- Glyn Jones

During the miners' strike, operations at the Rescue Station continued as normal. The team were still on call as they had a responsibility to property

as well as lives. The respect for the Rescue Service amongst the miners was clear and the rescue was able to continue operating.

”

We used to have to go and do examinations even though the miners were on strike. We still had to go and check for fires and everything. They let us straight through the picket line, no problem. Because we were safeguarding their jobs for when it was over

- Dave Archibold

Though for the Brigadesmen there were cutbacks, such as no bonus, or fuel, the team still got a wage when their colleagues at the collieries didn't. Being fully aware of the

hardship the colliers were experiencing the Mines Rescue team pulled together and collected money to provide food and essentials to those that were striking.

”

The Rescue Station used to have a collection on a Friday... and we would go to Tesco and fill 17 trolleys, and we'd take it to the nearest place where they were feeding miners

- Dave Archibold

Getting the Emergency Call

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When you got a call out you could be gone – there was one where we were out 21 hours. I went out on Boxing Day, on a Sunday afternoon at teatime... You never knew when you'd be called out. It was only as soon as the bell went – 'where are we going?'

- Eric Mellish

In amongst the day to day bustle of the Station, the need to be ready for a call was never far from mind. The team had a day off every 3rd day, and a weekend off every 3rd weekend and, if on duty, would have to be at

the station. If on stand-by then they had to stay on the premises; this could be at someone else's house or at the station, as long as they could hear the bell.

”

We all had a bell in our house, and we all had to be on call. If the bell rang you'd go straight to the station and officers would be there. They'd say, 'you four, or five, go to number 1 vehicle, you're the first on-call.' They might say to another four or five of us, 'get the number 2 van ready and fill it with equipment, you're going as well'

- Dave Archibald

When the duty officer received an emergency call, he rang the alarm bells to muster the standby brigadesmen. Within a matter of

minutes the rescue vehicles would be on their way to the incident, with the supporting part time crew being called simultaneously.



The Assistant Superintendent, Mr. A. Sheffield, using the high frequency wireless in the van, driven by Les Havill, leaves the station to answer an emergency call.

Credit: Healeyhero

”

I drove the emergency vehicle to a few collieries with the sirens on at about 5 o'clock at night. So everybody could do every job. There was always one person that took charge when we got to the colliery. But it was – we didn't have many call-outs, not serious ones, anyway. Your heart starts pumping, though

- Dave Archibold

Once at the colliery, the officer reported to the incident control room and was updated on the situation while the Brigadesmen checked and fitted their breathing apparatus and other equipment. The team was briefed by the officer and would then proceed underground to the scene of the incident.

”

You were all responsible for each other. You worked as a team, and you went as a team. There was no one going off on their own and this that and the other. You worked as a team. You had your own number in the team...I mean you could be captain one week and then you could be right at the back or vice-captain or one of the members...

- James Chadwick



”

They'd get all that way cause it is very claustrophobic. You got to be, you got to trust each other, work as a team

- Glyn Jones

The Superintendent, his job, his role was a big role as he had to get the teams underground, know what the teams were doing, and make sure he's got spare teams on the surface to go down if anything happened to the teams that were down there

- James Chadwick

Everything that you took on a training underground you had to take with you all the time. So, if you had any apparatus on, then you had stretcher, first aid, reviver which was a cylinder in a bag so you could revive someone, and you had to check readings every now and again to see what the air was and see the condition of it

- James Chadwick

You'd be unsure what you were going into, but most incidents were apparatus-involved. It was more or less a first-aid and stretcher scenario...

...When you go down, you don't know what's happened. When you're going down the other cage you're oblivious to what's going on. It's the same when you've done your duty and you come back up, you never think about what might happen.

- Eric Mellish

But sometimes, the worst did happen and Chesterfield Mines Rescue attended a number of serious incidents, two of which were the Cresswell Colliery Disaster of 1950 and the 1973 Markham Colliery Disaster.

1973 - Markham Colliery Disaster

Markham was the scene of three major underground accidents in 1937, 1938 and 1973. Nine miners were killed in a firedamp (methane) explosion in 1937 and in the following year 79 miners were killed following an underground coal dust explosion after a runaway tub struck some pipes in a roadway causing sparks to ignite the coal dust.

For most people in the region, and within living memory for many older people, was the tragic winding accident at Markham No. 3 shaft on 30th June 1973. Part of the braking system of the winding engine failed which resulted in the cage full of miners plunging to the pit bottom, killing 13 of them instantly. 5 more miners died as a result of their injuries. It was one of the few modern day disasters in British coalmining, but it brought home the danger of the

A memorial now stands at the site of the former Markham Colliery to the 106 miners killed in the three separate major underground accidents.

job to many people in Britain.

Chesterfield Brigade attends.

• "it was the cage had gone down because the rope snapped. I remember Dad telling me: number 2 Pit and number 4 Pit at Markham. The number 2 cage had gone down and the only way of getting the men out was to go to number 4, and it was connected with a drift. I remember Dad telling me, 'my ribs are aching from carrying stretchers down', and it was wet and slippery. The mad thing was, that my last job at Markham Pit was on that 2 to 4 drift. As a child and your dad tells you what they've been through, you don't put it into much of a perspective until you're actually at that Pit. And number 2 was the intake shaft, where the air would immediately come down, and it was cold and slippery and wet."

Craig Mellish



Markham Colliery Memorial

Credit: MuBuMiner

1950 - Creswell Colliery Disaster

On 26th September 1950 Creswell Colliery was hit by a coal mining tragedy which claimed the lives of 80 miners. An underground fire started at 03.45 at a conveyor transfer point in the High Hazels seam, which led to toxic fumes travelling to several working areas. 232 men were working underground at the time. Because of a breakdown in communications and a failure of firefighting equipment, 80 miners were killed through the effects of carbon monoxide poisoning.

Mines Rescue teams from Chesterfield and later from Mansfield and Ilkeston Mines Rescue Stations attended the scene and three bodies were initially brought out before the heart-wrenching decision was made to seal off the affected area of the colliery. This difficult decision was reached following a quickly convened conference held between

management, trade union representatives and Mines Inspectors, as further rescue attempts would inevitably lead to a greater loss of life. Dozens of other miners and volunteers helped fill sandbags on the surface which were sent underground to help build the stoppings.

Later that day another forty-four bodies had been recovered but it was discovered that the underground fire was more extensive than first thought and the affected area was resealed. It would be almost six months later that the next twenty-seven bodies were recovered on 25th March 1951. The final six bodies were not recovered until almost a year later, on 11th August 1951.

As word got around about the disaster, a crowd of two thousand miners and their families gathered at the Creswell pit head awaiting news.

”

When I was at Creswell, when I was nine years old the Creswell disaster happened. You've heard reports of it, where 81 men died. I lost a brother, brother-in-law and uncle in that, when I was nine. My niece, Diane, always asked me, 'Is that why you joined the Rescue?' I said, 'I don't know, I never really gave it a thought.' You don't know, with what you're going through, how hard it must have been. I was only nine. I remember that we were at school, and afterwards I walked to the bridge and watched the whole commotion, not knowing what had happened. My brother was sealed in until the following Easter. He was 32. I was the youngest out of 10, my mum was 48 when she had me. You always think what she must have gone through - that her son was still down there...

...I went down there in '57 and you could still see the scorch marks where the fire was. You just don't think about it

- Eric Mellish

A memorial to the eighty victims was erected in the Skinner Street Cemetery at Creswell. The Mines Rescue Station Service planted two holly trees at the front of the Chesterfield Station in memory of the victims who died that day, these are still standing today.

The underground fire at Creswell Colliery resulted in the development of non-flammable PVC conveyors to replace rubber ones, other means of

egress in the event of underground fires, and trials in the development of self-rescuers, a type of respirator used in underground fires and a key piece of equipment for the Mines Rescue to train and maintain over the following decades. After Creswell and following the Auchengeich Colliery and Michael Colliery disasters in the Scottish coalfield in 1959 and 1967 respectively, the use of self-rescuers would be universal in British collieries by the early 1970's.

Station Community Life

"It's a community. The 'Station' is the houses as well as the building itself."

Yvonne Jones

Under the Mines and Quarries Act, the permanent Brigadesmen must live close to the rescue station and to achieve this, British Coal provided suitable free accommodation. At Chesterfield, the brigadesmen lived within one kilometre of the station. The families that moved in were welcomed into a very special community.

"When a Brigadesman moved out, after an officer moved out, we went in and painted it and things like that

ready for the next family to move in."

Glyn Jones

The brigade, whilst not at the station 24/7, needed to be ready for deployment at all times. This meant that even when at home the men could be called to work, there was even an alarm fitted in every home connected to the station. There are stories of 'getting cover' from another brigadesman to be able to go for a run, to go to the shops to go to the pub and even to run a local scout group. Such coordination meant that the workers and indeed their families became incredibly close.

”

*I suppose in some places you wouldn't know your neighbours, would you?
... You know there, if you were pegging your washing out, somebody would
go, 'I've got the kettle on,' and you'd all go 'round to whoever's...*

- Yvonne Jones

*In the middle of the night you'd get the police come in for a cup of tea
cause they knew we were in there*

- Glyn Jones

*I had a parrot. You know the balcony, on the front? Wife used to put the
parrot out there and it used to wolf whistle at passers by going down the
road. (Superintendent) Gordon was stood out front one day - and they
called him a dirty old man, he nearly choked on his pipe and he had a
right go at me*

- James Chadwick

A Happy Childhood

The interviews all have a common thread throughout – sharing just how solid, caring, and happy the community at the station was. Stories of how all adults at the station were known as “auntie” and “uncle” by the children despite having no relation, and continue to do so now, nearly thirty years after the station's closure.

“Everybody was your aunty and uncle. All the kids grew up together,

went to school together. Everybody was like your brother and sister. Yes, there were arguments and falling outs but you had that security there. We looked out for one another. A happy childhood, happy memories.”
Craig Mellish

The community of the mines rescue meant a great childhood in the extended “family”. Happy memoirs of mischief and games, and a sense of pride in what the service stood for.

”

As a child being brought up on the Mines Rescue, you hear a lot about it (the work). You sort of understand, but you don't and you're quite proud that your dad's this rescue man and you've got this nice house

- Craig Mellish

We all liked to meet up around the back of the station, us kids. Play a bit of tiggy or hide-and-peek, or play football. .. They put goal post up, too, so we'd play there. Sometimes cricket. I used to help Dad with gardening as well

- Craig Mellish

Oh (my childhood) was fabulous. Just absolutely fabulous. We were all good friends, and I can remember that the people who lived in number 7 had some dressing up clothes. We would dress up and play Miss World. We'd walk along to number 11 from the yard where the lorries were kept and we'd play Miss World, it was brilliant

- Linda Cheetham

The rescue itself was also a central point for the families, who didn't have their own land lines at home; a signal system was set up with the bell which rang continuously in the event of an emergency, but had a code for social calls!

“So the bell would ring once and stop, ring twice and stop, ring three times, and if it rang once it was Auntie Phyllis, twice it was for Tony and three times it was for my dad. We'd know and have to go up to the Rescue and speak to them.”

Craig Mellish



*Childhood friends of Brian Robinson
at the Rescue Station c1968*

Credit: Brian Robinson

A bit of mischief was never far away from the kids of the station.

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Security chased us around the back of Lavers. We used to play between bloody stacks of wood and you think nowadays, if one of them fell it could have killed one of us kids. And security had an Alsatian and they'd let it go, so we'd be sprinting back out

- Craig Mellish

Greasing Maureen's cat.

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Their cat used to come and dig our garden, so as a kid you think you're doing a favour. Nearby there was Vin's garage and it was open, and there was a tub of rope grease that they use for the Pit. It was horrible black grease. So me and Steven Griffiths caught the ginger cat and put grease on it. I don't know why. Fred and Maureen's house, inside it was immaculate. I remember Maureen coming to the end of the path with the cat saying, 'Look what your Craig's done.' Dad said, 'have you done that?' and I said, 'No.' Apparently she caught it laying on the bed and it was covered in grease

- Craig Mellish

But like with any family, there were no hard feelings.

”

It was one big family. Maureen, whose cat I greased, I've actually stripped her walls and you show up like, 'all right Auntie Maureen?' and it's still the same. She'd do dinner while I was working there and give me a cuppa

- Craig Mellish

What a childhood I had, all us kids were privileged to have that. The kids that lived up the street didn't have what we had. You felt safe, everybody looked out for you

- Craig Mellish

Celebrations

This was a community that came together to celebrate the key events of the year such as Bonfire night celebrations and Christmas parties that are still fondly recalled by those who spent their childhood there.

"There was always something to look forward to. Bonfire, Christmas... We'd have new clothes to wear for the Christmas party. And as you got a bit older you went to the grown-ups party." Craig Mellish

"They were fantastic. Best dos we'd ever been to, the Christmas and New Year's parties." Dave Archibald

Bonfire Night holds special memories for those that spent their childhood at the Station.

"Us kids used to go round and fetch the firewood in the run-up to Bonfire Night for two or three weeks. We'd

put it on the biggest garden on the station ... We'd pile the wood on and then the men would build it up while we were at school. We'd come home and the first thing we did was go and look at the bonfire. Every household (joined in) .. toffee apples, parkin, jacket potatoes. Every family put money together for fireworks and we'd gather around on Bonfire Night and the kids would sit on the wall. One of the brigadesmen was there and he'd get us to sing songs and we'd have sparklers, it was fabulous. Everyone made food, mushy peas, pies... and that was the same for Christmas." Linda Cheetham

"Sometimes I do wonder, if I didn't live there, what would my childhood be like?... We were one community, it was always there, we were always doing something together."

Craig Mellish

Retiring from Service

British Coal's Medical Department recommended that no man may wear a self-contained breathing apparatus after the age of 45, so rescue men

were then required to leave the service. They found alternative employment and for many this was back to coal face.

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“I went back to the Pit at 45, and I was back on coal face ... conditions were rougher than what I left behind at Creswell. Creswell was rough on coalface but this was worse, it was like we were back in the Stone Age.

But I went

- Eric Mellish

In a declining coal industry finding work wasn't always easy.

“When I went back to the colliery in '86, there were 11 collieries in the Derbyshire area. By the time it closed in '92, when I was working I left at that time and there was just 1. I had to move to Yorkshire and worked

down a mine for 18 years. Then I went to a little place in Eckington, a private mine.” Dave Archibold

A few lucky rescue men were able to continue their rescue work as officers if they obtained the relevant qualifications.

Service Awards

Due to the low retirement age of 45, it was rare for a serviceman to receive the 15 year Service Award, a beautifully detailed statue of a Brigadesmen in full apparatus. A replica of the statue has been commissioned by Dovedale to display in the refurbished station building. Servicemen also received award medals for 5 and 10 year service.



Award medals for 5 and 10 year service
Credit Eric Mellish

15 year Service Award Statue
Credit Eric Mellish



In all the interviews, we asked what those who lived at the station would wish to share with future generations. All were passionate about letting others know just how extraordinary the community of people who lived at Chesterfield Mines Rescue Station were, and what a wonderful place it was to live.

Following the closure of the mines, the Rescue Station closed in 1992. The building has had various uses since but is now being developed by Dovedale Property who are

determined to preserve the building's history, and the stories of those who worked there.

“You’ve just brought everything back, I feel old now. I just have to thank you for bringing these memories back to us. In keeping this station alive – I know it’s not alive – you’ve kept the memories alive of all the people who were there. When I saw that plaque the other day for the first time I thought, ‘fantastic.’”

Dave Archibold



Left to Right: Glyn Jones and James Chadwick



Left to Right: Gemma Styles, Holly Froggatt, Yvonne Jones, Linda Cheetham, Karen Archibold, Dave Archibold, Rick Cusimano



Left to Right: Gemma Styles, Craig Mellish, Eric Mellish, Holly Froggatt and Rick Cusimano

With thanks to

James Chadwick Glyn Jones	Yvonne Jones Dave Archibold	Karen Archibold Linda Cheetham	Eric Mellish Craig Mellish
<p>The Mines Rescue Service - Chesterfield – Information leaflet – British Coal Mines Rescue Service Miningheritage.co.uk Mansfield Training & Rescue Station - www.mrsl.co.uk When Coal Was King – Derbyshire Times Publication</p>			

Provision of Images

JW. Bech Healeyhero	Brian Robinson Eric Mellish	Linda Cheetham PictureThePast	Woody-iow MuBuMiner Red Snapper Photography
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And of course, Gemma Styles, Holly Froggatt, Rick Cusimano and Sarah Trier for helping to remember the story of the Mines Rescue Service at Chesterfield. **More information and fascinating history can be found at www.chesterfieldminerescue.co.uk**

In memory of former Brigadesman Glyn Jones, and all those who are no longer with us.



Writing on the walls in the Training Galleries

