

(Note: the following is an unabridged and slightly modified version of a paper published in *Mercian Geologist*, vol. 18, part 2, October 2013, pp. 88–89, there entitled ‘Headstocks at Brinsley Colliery’)

The tandem headstocks at Brinsley Colliery, Nottinghamshire

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 2.5 km north of Eastwood 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 feet, and a second shaft, adjacent to the first, was newly sunk. The Coal Mines Regulation Act of 1872 stated 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 presumably from this time.

D. H. Lawrence’s father worked at Brinsley Colliery, which in *Sons and Lovers* is called first ‘Beggarlee’, and later ‘Bretty’ (Beggarlee was actually the name of another colliery near Moorgreen). 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.

After 1918 a series of underground connections was established between Brinsley and 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 the 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.

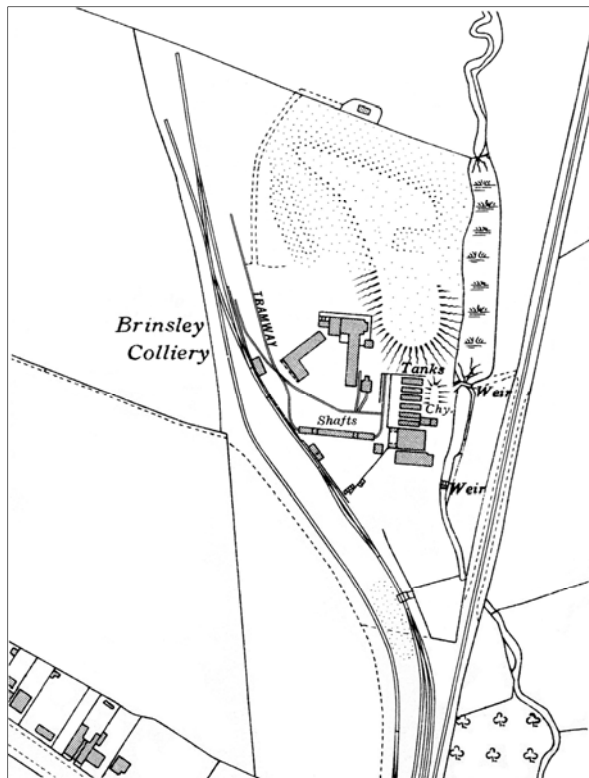
Since 2008 a group called The Friends of Brinsley Headstocks has been working to develop the area as a heritage and nature reserve with the support of Nottinghamshire County Council and Broxtowe Borough Council.

Bibliography:

Storer, R. W. 1985. *Some aspects of Brinsley Colliery and the Lawrence connection*. Selston: Ronald W. Storer, vi,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: Printed by Bemrose & Sons Ltd., xv,256 pp., plates & folded plans.

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).



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



Brinsley Colliery looking 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)



The reassembled headstocks at Brinsley looking north. The 'pit-bank' described by Lawrence (*Odour of Chrysanthemums*) can be seen in the background, now covered by woodland (Photo: David Bate, April 2011)

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