

= Brownhills =

Brownhills is a town in the West Midlands , England . Located on the edge of Cannock Chase near the large artificial lake Chasewater , it is 6 miles (9 @. @ 7 km) north @- @ east of Walsall and a similar distance south @- @ west of Lichfield . It is part of the Metropolitan Borough of Walsall and the Aldridge @- @ Brownhills parliamentary constituency and neighbours the ancient villages of Pelsall and Stonnall . Before boundary changes in 1974 , it was in the county of Staffordshire .

The town lies on the ancient Watling Street , but is not recorded before the 17th century , although Ogley Hay , which in modern times is a district of the town , is recorded as a settlement in the Domesday Book . Brownhills quickly grew around the coal mining industry , especially after it became linked to the canal and railway networks in the mid @- @ 19th century , and by the end of the century had grown from a hamlet of only 300 inhabitants to a town with a population of over 13 @, @ 000 , of whom the vast majority were employed in the coal industry . Mining remained the town 's principal industry until the 1950s , but the subsequent closure of the area 's pits led to a severe economic decline which has continued until the present day . The local authority has instituted a regeneration programme which it is hoped will revive the town 's fortunes , providing better transport and leisure facilities .

= = History = =

Brownhills is situated on the ancient Watling Street and there is evidence of early settlement in the area , including an ancient burial mound and a guard post believed to date from Roman times and later dubbed Knaves Castle . The name Brownhills , however , is not recorded before the 17th century . The most popular suggestion for the origin of the name is that it refers to the early mining spoil heaps which dotted the area .

The settlement is first recorded (as " Brownhill ") on Robert Plot 's 1680 map of Staffordshire , at which time it was a hamlet within the manor of Ogley Hay , which in turn was part of the parish of Norton Canes . Ogley Hay itself had existed since at least the 11th century and is mentioned in the Domesday Book , although the 1801 census lists it as having a population of only 8 people . Beyond Ogley Hay lay Catshill , another hamlet which pre @- @ dated Brownhills and which lay within the parish of Shenstone .

During the 17th century , shallow mine workings began to develop in the area and in 1759 a turnpike was erected in the Catshill area . A local legend claims that Dick Turpin once vaulted the barricade on his horse to avoid paying the toll , although this is demonstrably false as Turpin was executed in 1739 , twenty years before the turnpike 's construction . In 1794 Brownhills (now in the plural) was included in a list of local settlements mentioned in an Act of Parliament concerning canals in Staffordshire , and three years later the Wyrley & Essington Canal , nicknamed the " Curly Wyrley " by the locals due to its winding course , was opened . In 1799 Norton Pool , later to be renamed Chasewater , was created to serve as a reservoir for the canals .

Early in the 19th century , a horse @- @ drawn tram system connected the mines to the wharves on the canal . In response to the growing population of the area open land in Ogley Hay , up until then merely heathland , was enclosed and converted to farmland in 1838 , the same year in which the area was first declared a parish , although no church was built for another 13 years . Charles Foster Cotterill , a former mayor of Walsall who had purchased the manor of Ogley Hay in 1836 upon the death of former lord Phineas Hussey , saw the potential of the area and sold off large tracts of his land for private farming and the construction of a flour mill and a foundry . The remaining land of the former manor was progressively sold off through a series of indentures of questionable legality until 1846 when Cotterill sold the last 135 acres (0 @. @ 55 km2) and moved to London .

The South Staffordshire Railway reached Brownhills in 1850 and led to a huge expansion of the local mining operation and with it a population explosion in the area , with the population increasing from 305 in 1801 to over 13 @, @ 000 in 1891 . In 1858 a branch line was constructed through the heart of what was then the hamlet of Brownhills , which led to a migration of the population eastwards , leading to the formation of mining slums in the Ogley Hay area . Eventually a new town

centre developed , complete with library and theatre . This led to the gradual amalgamation of Brownhills , Ogley Hay and Catshill into one town .

Mining was to remain the principal industry of Brownhills until the last pit closed in the 1950s . During the 18th and 19th centuries the area known as Coppice Side was the hub of the mining industry , and the census of 1841 showed that over 80 % of the population of the area which makes up modern Brownhills lived and worked there , with up to ten pits active in the area at any one time . As in other mining areas , several men lost their lives in the Brownhills pits . Seven miners , including a boy aged 11 , died in an accident in 1861 , and in October 1930 an explosion at the Grove Colliery killed fourteen miners , ten of them from Brownhills .

In 1877 the town of Brownhills was officially recognised for the first time after a new Act authorised the amalgamation of rural districts into larger local government areas . An order was issued on 29 September stating :

After the First World War , the Urban District Council , which had replaced the District Board in 1894 , began a programme of urban improvement . Large areas of open farmland were purchased for the building of council houses , and a notorious slum area , Ogley Square , which had been declared unfit for human habitation , was demolished after a long legal dispute and the tenants rehoused . The final farmland within the boundaries of Brownhills was sold for redevelopment in 1952 .

By the time of the Second World War the mines of Brownhills , being amongst the oldest in the area , were largely exhausted , and following the nationalisation of the mining industry the final pit on the Common was closed in the 1950s . Following the demise of the coalfield the town experienced a severe economic slump , with many high street shops closing down . A wave of new development in the 1960s and 1970s saw a new shopping precinct planned , which it was claimed would incorporate a cinema , bowling alley , hotel and bus station and would completely revitalise the town . Despite the developers ' grandiose claims , the project was not a success and ultimately consisted solely of shopping units , many of which stood empty for up to five years . There was little further development in the 1980s and 1990s , and the feeling of the local council is that the town centre is in need of improvement . To this end the council has created a " Townscape Masterplan " for the redevelopment of the town .

= = Governance = =

Brownhills is represented by three tiers of government , Walsall Borough Council (" local ") , UK Parliament (" national ") , and European Parliament (" Europe ") .

The Brownhills District established in 1877 remained in existence until 1894 when it was superseded by Brownhills Urban District . In 1966 the Urban District merged with that of Aldridge to form the Aldridge @-@ Brownhills Urban District , in accordance with a recommendation of the Local Government Commission for England . This in turn was amalgamated in 1974 , under the Local Government Act 1972 , into the newly formed Metropolitan Borough of Walsall , under whose jurisdiction the area remains to this day . As a result of this amalgamation Brownhills also became part of the West Midlands county , having previously been part of Staffordshire . Today Brownhills constitutes a ward within the Borough of Walsall and has three seats on the Borough Council . As at the 2008 local elections two of these seats were held by the Conservative Party and one by Labour .

Wendy Morton , representing the Conservative Party , has been the Member of Parliament for the constituency of Aldridge @-@ Brownhills since 2015 . Before the creation of the Aldridge @-@ Brownhills seat in 1974 , the town had been part of the Walsall North constituency since 1955 , when it had been transferred from the now @-@ defunct Cannock constituency .

Brownhills is part of the Walsall council counting area of the West Midlands European Parliament constituency , which elects six MEPs . In the 2009 election the Conservatives gained 26 @.@ 8 % of the vote in this counting area , ahead of UKIP 24 @.@ 5 % and Labour with 18 @.@ 9 % .

= = Geography = =

Brownhills is located at 52 ° 38 ' 49 " N 1 ° 55 ' 58 " W on the edge of Cannock Chase and lies mostly at a height of approximately 150 metres (492 ft) above sea level , although there is a sharp incline to nearly 180 metres (590 ft) at the eastern end of the town . The highest point of Cannock Chase , standing at 244 metres (801 ft) above sea level , lies approximately 4 miles (6 km) from the town . Although a small river called Crane Brook flows slightly to the east of Brownhills , the only significant bodies of water in the area are human made , namely the canal and the 3 km² (1 @. @ 2 sq mi) reservoir Chasewater , which lies to the north , between Brownhills and Cannock Chase . The reservoir was constructed in the 18th century and reshaped by reclamation schemes as recently as the 1970s .

Immediately to the west of the town is Brownhills Common , a 100 @-@ acre (0 @. @ 40 km²) heathland which once formed part of Cannock Forest (also known as " Canke Wood ") . Although the forest was felled in the 15th and 16th centuries , the spread of heather and the grazing of sheep led to the creation of a huge area of heathland . The area was affected by mine workings but has now returned to a more natural state and lizards and dragonflies may be observed . The area now supports various habitat types , with the heathland mixing with marshy grassland , with scattered scrub and pools . In 1926 , when ownership of the Common was transferred to the local Council , a large area of barren land at the eastern end , closest to the town , was landscaped , with new trees planted . Lying south of the Common , Birch Coppice is a large area of predominantly oak and birch woodland , which , although crossed by a now @-@ dismantled railway line , mostly escaped the destruction caused to other wooded areas by mining and other industry .

To the south , Brownhills is separated from the nearby village of Clayhanger by Clayhanger Common , which is designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest and considered " one of the best wetland sites in the county " . In 2007 , a new £ 445 @, @ 000 bridge was erected across the canal at Brownhills , providing pedestrian , disabled and cycling access to the Common and to the village of Clayhanger beyond . To the east lies the village of Stonnall and a large area of green belt land .

The geology of Brownhills comprises mainly red clay marl overlying Triassic sandstone and deposits of coal . The town is on several fault lines , the main one being the Vigo Fault , a branch of the larger Eastern Boundary Fault , which runs from Birmingham to Rugeley . On the western side of the fault , in the area of Brownhills Common , the marl is over 1 @, @ 000 feet (305 m) thinner than on the eastern side , bringing the coal seams significantly closer to the surface . The presence of the faults and the effects of mining mean that subsidence has been a major problem in the area for many years .

The land within the town is made up of approximately 62 % greenspace , 18 % domestic gardens , 7 % roads , 4 % domestic buildings , 3 % non @-@ domestic buildings and 6 % other uses . Since the 19th century , trade in Brownhills has been centred on the High Street . As the canal and Clayhanger Common lie immediately to the south of the High Street , the town 's housing areas are mainly to the north and at the eastern and western ends of the town . Brownhills has 5 @, @ 152 residential dwellings , of which 47 % are semi @-@ detached houses . Selling prices for all types of property within the town have risen significantly since 2000 ; in August 2007 the average selling price was £ 137 @, @ 600 , compared to £ 59 @, @ 596 in 2000 , a rise of 131 % . The Aldridge and Brownhills Housing Trust owns and manages those properties formerly owned as council houses by Walsall Council .

In the West Midlands , the warmest time of the year is July and August , when maximum temperatures average around 21 ° C (70 ° F) ; the coolest months are January and February , when minimum temperatures average around 1 ° C (39 ° F) . The area 's average maximum and minimum temperatures are almost exactly in line with the national average . The average annual rainfall is about 676 millimetres (27 in) , the wettest months being September to January . This is lower than the national average annual rainfall of 838 mm (33 inches) .

See Penkridge weather station for details of average temperature and rainfall figures taken between 1971 and 2000 at the Met Office weather station in Penkridge (around 11 miles (18 km) from Brownhills) .

= = Demography = =

At the 2001 UK census , Brownhills ward had a population of 12 @, @ 637 , and a population density of 17 @. @ 45 persons per hectare .

Of the town 's 5 @, @ 151 households , 40 @. @ 7 % were married couples living together , 10 @. @ 4 % were cohabiting couples and 10 @. @ 2 % were lone parents . 25 @. @ 9 % of all households were made up of individuals and 12 @. @ 8 % had someone living alone at pensionable age . 31 @. @ 8 % of households included children aged under 16 or a person aged 16 to 18 who was in full @- @ time education . The average household size was 2 @. @ 5 .

The ethnicity of the town was 97 @. @ 4 % white , 0 @. @ 6 % mixed race , 1 @. @ 2 % Asian , 0 @. @ 5 % black and 0 @. @ 3 % Chinese or other . The country of birth of residents was 97 @. @ 8 % United Kingdom , 0 @. @ 4 % Republic of Ireland , 0 @. @ 2 % Germany , 0 @. @ 2 % other Western European countries , 0 @. @ 2 % Eastern Europe , 0 @. @ 2 % Africa , 0 @. @ 3 % Far East , 0 @. @ 4 % South Asia , < 0 @. @ 1 % Middle East , 0 @. @ 2 % North America and < 0 @. @ 1 % Oceania . Religion was recorded as 79 @. @ 6 % Christian , 0 @. @ 6 % Muslim , 0 @. @ 2 % Hindu , 0 @. @ 1 % Buddhist , 0 @. @ 1 % Jewish and 0 @. @ 3 % Sikh . 12 @. @ 5 % were recorded as having no religion , 0 @. @ 1 % had an alternative religion and 6 @. @ 5 % did not state their religion .

For every 100 females , there were 98 @. @ 04 males . The age distribution was 6 @. @ 6 % aged 0 ? 4 years , 15 @. @ 0 % aged 5 ? 15 years , 4 @. @ 2 % aged 16 ? 19 years , 36 @. @ 3 % aged 20 ? 44 years , 23 @. @ 6 % aged 45 ? 64 years and 14 @. @ 1 % aged 65 years and over . The mean population age was 37 @. @ 5 , lower than the national average of 38 @. @ 6 .

The economic activity of residents aged 16 ? 74 was 43 @. @ 2 % in full @- @ time employment , 12 @. @ 3 % in part @- @ time employment , 6 @. @ 1 % self @- @ employed , 3 @. @ 8 % unemployed , 1 @. @ 3 % students with jobs , 2 @. @ 3 % students without jobs , 13 @. @ 5 % retired , 7 @. @ 3 % looking after home or family , 6 @. @ 9 % permanently sick or disabled and 3 @. @ 3 % economically inactive for other reasons . The percentage of people in full @- @ time employment was significantly higher than the 39 @. @ 1 % average for the whole of the Walsall district . Of the town 's residents aged 16 ? 74 , 8 @. @ 5 % had a higher education qualification or the equivalent , compared with 19 @. @ 9 % nationwide . According to Office for National Statistics estimates , during the period of April 2001 to March 2002 the average gross weekly income of households in the Brownhills area was £ 460 (£ 23 @, @ 920 per year) .

= = Economy = =

The decline of the mining industry in the 1950s caused a severe economic slump in Brownhills , which continues to this day . The local authority has created a " Townscape Masterplan " for the regeneration of Brownhills , which involves increased leisure provision , the improvement of the town centre 's shopping facilities , a new transport interchange incorporating Park and Ride facilities and cycle links to the town centre and the National Cycle Route , and the refurbishment of run @- @ down properties . The plan also involves the potential construction of a bypass to relieve the heavily congested High Street . In addition to these developments , a grant of over £ 350 @, @ 000 was obtained to fund the creation of a new " mini town square " , and the demolition of blocks of high @- @ rise flats in the town has begun .

At the 2001 census , Brownhills had 5 @, @ 768 people in employment , of which the largest percentage (28 @. @ 85 %) worked in manufacturing , followed by retail (19 @. @ 35 %) and construction (8 @. @ 93 %) . Compared to the national average , the town had a relatively high percentage of workers in the construction industry and a relatively low number in real estate and financial intermediation . The average distance travelled to work by Brownhills residents was 10 @. @ 36 km ; the vast majority (62 %) travelled to work by car .

One of the town 's largest employers is T & S Stores , a subsidiary of Tesco plc , whose depot in the town employs approximately 1 @, @ 000 people . Brownhills was also formerly home to the wirings manufacturer Electrium 's last UK @- @ based factory , but this has closed , with manufacturing shifted overseas and commercial staff moved to a new site in Cannock . In 2006 , the

site was converted into a mixed @-@ use facility dubbed Toll Point , with Walsall Council among those moving to the site . Many people are also employed at the town 's large branch of Tesco which is open 24 hours a day on weekdays and is large enough to have its own petrol station . Before being taken over by Tesco , the store was a branch of Hillards , and an earlier Tesco store in the town had been forced to close as it could not compete with Hillards .

The High Street retains various independent shops , including a cobbler and a butcher , but is seen as in need of improvement . Walsall Council 's regeneration programme includes extensive redevelopment of the High Street ; the council 's view is that retail investment should be focussed on the existing shopping area rather than encouraging new developments outside this area as , based on consultants ' studies , the council believes that the town could not support large @-@ scale retail development . Specific development opportunities within the vicinity of the High Street have been identified , with particular focus on land on Silver Street , adjacent to the canal .

= = Transport = =

= = = Road network = = =

Brownhills is served by the A5 and lies close to a junction of the M6 Toll motorway . National Express West Midlands bus services connect the town with Walsall , Arriva links to both Cannock and Walsall , and Diamond Bus to Aldridge and Birmingham . Choice Travel and ATZ Travel did link services to Brownhills before being taken over by the present Diamond Bus . The nearest National Express coach stops are in Walsall , Bloxwich and Cannock . See also Bus Routes 10 & 10A and Diamond Bus .

= = = Canal network = = =

The Birmingham Canal Navigations ' Wyrley and Essington Canal passes through Brownhills and meets the Daw End Branch Canal at Catshill Junction . The Lichfield and Hatherton Canals Restoration Trust is in the process of restoring the Lichfield Canal from Ogleby Junction , Brownhills , to Lichfield .

= = = Rail network = = =

Brownhills formerly had two railway stations . The first , on the South Staffordshire Line (later part of the London , Midland and Scottish Railway) , opened in 1849 but was closed as part of the Beeching Axe in 1965 . The line remained open for freight until 1983 , but the track was lifted in 1985 . The other , on the Midland Railway , was open for passengers between 1884 and 1930 and for freight until 1960 , when the track was lifted . The local authority ultimately aims to create a new station and re @-@ open passenger rail links to Brownhills as part of its " Townscape Masterplan " . Within a 6 @-@ mile (9 @.@ 7 km) radius of Brownhills there are six Network Rail stations , at Walsall , Lichfield , Cannock , Bloxwich , Great Wyrley , and Shenstone ; of which Shenstone (about 3 @.@ 5 miles (5 @.@ 6 km) away) is the closest .

= = Education = =

The town 's main secondary school is Brownhills School (formerly Brownhills Sports College , Brownhills Community Technology College , Brownhills Community School and Brownhills Comprehensive) , a mixed @-@ gender school with approximately 1 @, @ 000 pupils . In 2002 the school was designated a technology college and since 2005 has been affiliated to the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust . In 2006 , only 28 % of the school 's pupils gained at least five GCSEs at grades A * ? C including English and maths , ranking it 12th out of Walsall 's 19 secondary schools .

Although officially located slightly outside the town 's boundaries in Walsall Wood , Shire Oak School (the former Shire Oak Grammar School) takes many pupils from Brownhills . Approximately 6 % of children from the town attend selective schools elsewhere in the borough of Walsall .

Watling Street Primary School , situated on the A5 at the western end of town , has approximately 200 students between the ages of 3 and 11 . In 2006 Watling Street 's Key Stage 2 results were the best in the Walsall LEA . There are four other primary schools in the town , St James ' Primary School , St Bernadette 's Catholic Primary School , Brownhills West Primary School , Millfield Primary School and one in Clayhanger , Holy Trinity Church of England Primary School .

= = Religious sites = =

Brownhills has a Church of England church (St James) , a Roman Catholic church (St Bernadette) , three Methodist churches (including one in Clayhanger) , two Spiritualist Churches , and a Pentecostal church .

Brownhills has had strong links with the Methodist faith since the 19th century . The current Silver Street Methodist church was built in the 1960s when two other churches were compulsorily purchased and demolished due to their sites being identified as prime locations for additional town centre car parking under a council redevelopment scheme .

= = Culture = =

= = = Attractions and landmarks = = =

One of Brownhills ' most prominent landmarks is a 46 feet (14 m) stainless steel sculpture of a coal miner , erected in May 2006 on a roundabout at one end of the High Street , where the A4124 Pelsall Road and High Street A452 cross . The colossal sculpture , by John McKenna ARBS , commemorates the town 's mining tradition . A competition was organised to choose an official nickname for the statue . The winning name was Jigger after Jack " Jigger " Taylor who died when the roof of Walsall Wood pit collapsed in 1951 .

Chasewater in Staffordshire lies on the edge of Brownhills , with the area surrounding it , which is designated as a country park , officially falling within the Brownhills postal area . The reservoir supports a variety of activities including water @-@ skiing , sailing , angling and bird watching . The Chasewater Railway , operates a heritage rail service on the line of the former mineral railway around Chasewater between Brownhills and Chasetown , north of the former Brownhills Watling Street station . The railway 's main station is designated Brownhills West .

On the opposite side of the A5 , Brownhills Common , where a wide variety of birds can be observed , is a designated nature reserve , as is Shire Oak Park , approximately 0 @. @ 9 miles (1 @. @ 4 km) from the town centre . Holland Park , on the edge of the Common , has a skate park and multi @-@ sports area , which were created as part of a £ 95 @, @ 000 environmental regeneration project and opened in 2002 . The final stage of the project will see the building of a new " youth shelter " .

The town is home to what is reputed to be the oldest fingerpost in the United Kingdom .

= = = Cultural events and venues = = =

One of the major concerns of the local council is that the town is " particularly lacking in leisure provision " . At one time the town had two cinemas , but the last of these closed in the 1960s and a plan to build a new one never came to fruition . Although the town 's theatre also closed down many years ago , the Brownhills Community School 's theatre stages productions by local groups such as the Aldridge Musical Comedy Society and the Walsall Gilbert and Sullivan Society .

Brownhills holds an annual canal festival in June with stalls , entertainment and boat trips , and there is an active Community Association which organises a range of events , including a weekend

@-@ long military display event in 2006 . The town has a weekly market which is popular but suffers from a reputation for the sale of counterfeit goods . In 2005 Trading Standards officers seized over £ 40 @,@ 000 worth of fake goods in a raid on the market .

Brownhills has several public houses . Although some older ones , such as the Victorian @-@ era Jolly Collier in Coppice Side , were demolished in the 1980s , several dating from the 19th century still stand comparatively unchanged , including the Shoulder of Mutton , which still bears windows etched with the emblem of the brewery which owned it in the 1850s . The Station Hotel in the High Street hosted concerts , including an appearance by Black Sabbath in 1968 .

= = = Sport = = =

Brownhills does not currently have a Saturday men 's football (soccer) team , the nearest being Pelsall Villa F.C. , Heath Hayes F.C. and Walsall Wood F.C. of the Midland Football Combination . In the 1990s Brownhills Town F.C. competed in the Combination but folded during the 2003 ? 04 season . During the 1950s Ogle Hay F.C. were a strong local team , reaching the final of the Walsall Senior Cup on three occasions . Currently , the main football club in the town is Brownhills Community Colts , a youth club which has existed since the 1970s and fields teams in various age groups , as well as teams for children with disabilities .

The Brownhills Canoe and Outdoor Centre opened in 2006 , funded by British Waterways with the assistance of partners such as Sport England , the European Regional Development Fund and Walsall Council , and offers canoeing and kayaking lessons on the canal , close to the centre of town . Nearby Chasewater is a prominent watersports site , with the Watersports Centre offering a variety of water skiing facilities , including the largest children 's coaching scheme in the UK , and the sailing club providing year @-@ round windsurfing and dinghy sailing .

The local community association organises a range of sporting activities for members of the public , including activities as diverse as yoga , badminton and kickboxing .

= = = Media = = =

Brownhills has no dedicated local newspaper of its own , but is covered by newspapers published in Wolverhampton and Walsall . The most popular paid @-@ for local newspaper is the Express & Star . Free newspapers with significant circulation in the town include the Walsall Chronicle , Walsall Advertiser , and Walsall Observer . Similarly , the town has no dedicated local radio station but receives the stations broadcast from the Sutton Coldfield transmitting station , including BRMB and Kerrang ! 105 @.@ 2 .

= = Notable people = =

Three members of the Dorsett family from Brownhills played professional football . George Dorsett (1881 ? 1942) and his brother Joe (1888 ? 1951) both played for West Bromwich Albion and Manchester City in the early years of the 20th century . Their nephew Dicky Dorsett (born 3 December 1919 , died 1999) played over 250 times for Aston Villa between 1946 and 1952 and also played for Wolverhampton Wanderers in the 1939 FA Cup Final .

Supermodel Erin O 'Connor (born 9 February 1978) grew up in Brownhills .