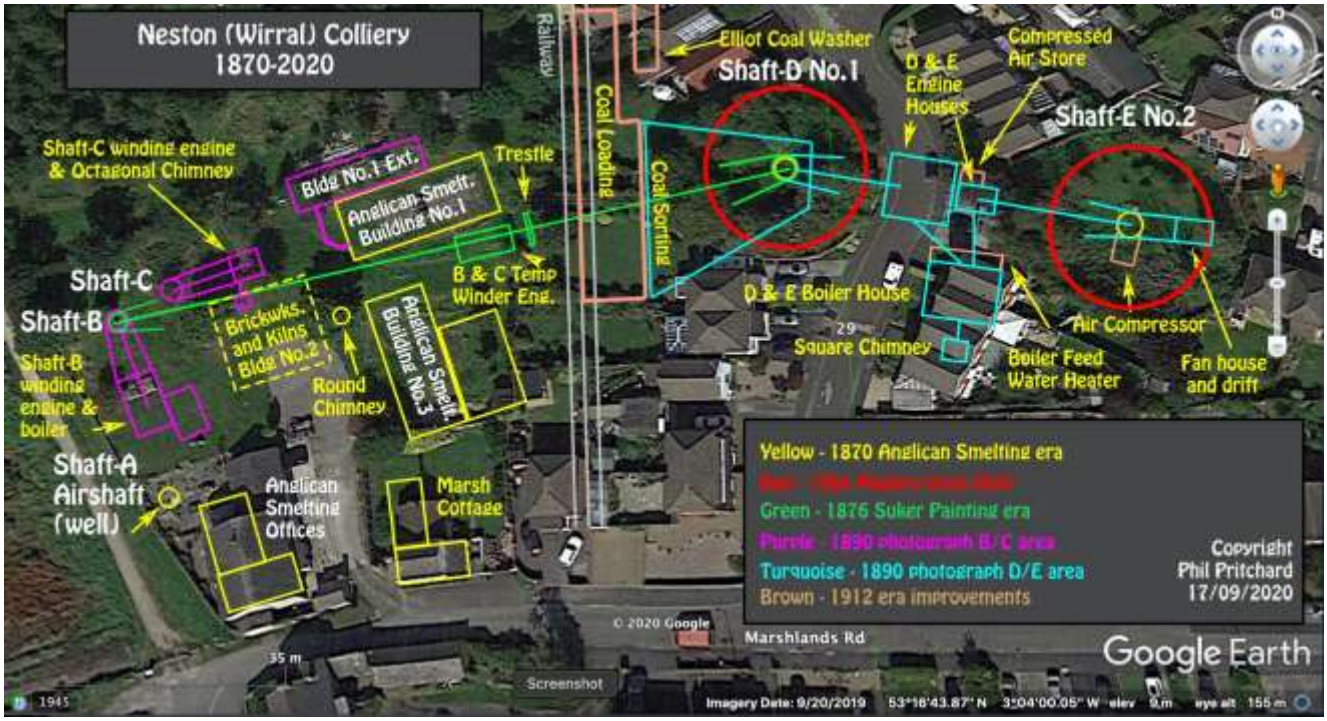
Colliery Location and Plan – 1850-2021

A Google Earth view of the colliery location, with locations identified as to what would have been there from the Anglican Smelting days, to the present.



Development Timeline

The Anglican Smelting, Reduction and Coal Company Ltd.

1. **1858 –** 6th August 1858 [001] (Morning Chronicle – London) - Formation of the "**The Anglican Smelting, Reduction and Coal Company Ltd" [005].**

2. **1862 –** The "**Anglican Smelting, Reduction and Coal Company Ltd"** was wound up after a short period of existence [004]. Auction sales of the land, machinery and buildings took place in 1863 [002] and 1866 [003].

3. **1863 –** There was an auction sale of some of the assets of the "Anglican Smelting Company". These items were almost certainly the contents of the two smaller buildings just inside the site entrance, namely the offices and the laboratory.

4. **1866 –** There was a further sale of assets of the "Anglican Smelting Company". The sale items this time included: coal mining equipment, a 'Double powered winding engine', boilers, smelting equipment, a 'blowing' engine, blast pipes, smelting pans, de-silvering pans and the contents of the blacksmiths and carpenters' workshops. The 'Double powered condensing winding engine' would be most useful for the future developments of the new colliery.

Neston Colliery Company Ltd.

5. **1866 –**The newly formed colliery company is assumed to have been the purchaser all of the "Anglican Smelting Company" land, buildings, contents and machinery.

6. The new colliery company, now named as the "**Neston Colliery Company Limited**" took over the site and the colliery operations, with a view to expansion and development.

   The site had three shafts. Shaft-A was an older shaft and is marked on the much later 1912 Ordnance Survey map as an "Air Shaft" – as used for ventilation and emergencies. At the time of Suker's 1876 painting, it had wooden headgear. The shaft played no further part in the history of the colliery after having been filled in at some later, and unknown date.

Shaft (C) was approximately 8 feet in diameter (measured in a clearly visible circle in the newly mown grass during a on-site visit in 2020), Shaft (B) would have been about the same diameter.

Acknowledgements to Phil Pritchard.

The major new development was to be two new shafts that would require sinking (D&E), they would have been wider, and deeper than the two old shafts (B&C). The two new shafts would need two new sizeable winding engines, two new boiler houses, and better underground ventilation. This represented what would be a significant investment.

While constructing the new colliery buildings and sinking two new shafts, the new shareholders would keep the old Anglican Smelting coal mining operation going as a viable concern, so as to provide an income to partly fund the developments. The construction of the new colliery, and the sinking of the two new shafts was to take a lot longer than what would have been initially envisaged.

The plans for the new colliery operation included a new railway branch line and sidings to give the new colliery better, and cheaper access to new markets, these new markets could also be further away, rather than the colliery only serving the local area.

The railway access would be via the new Hooton-Parkgate branch line (opened without any fanfare on the 1st of October 1866 **007**), and which at the time terminated on the southern side of Parkgate Road. The line would be extended to West Kirby some twenty years later, opening on the 19th April 1886 **007**, again without any fanfare. Although not relevant here, Parkgate Station was then moved to the other side of Parkgate Road.

The two new shafts (D&E) would be quite substantial, they were approximately 17 feet diameter and 150 yards deep **008**. Having to make land available for the new railway branch and sidings implied that the two new shafts (D&E) would have to be on the eastern side of the planned railway. It would be essential for the old coal mining operations to continue, using the two old shafts (B&C), so that they could provide an income until the new shafts were in operation. Therefore, the one winding engine that they had in their possession (which fortunately was a double winding engine and could wind two different shafts) would have to wind both Shaft (B) for coal production, and also Shaft (D) as a

temporary arrangement to wind the excavated material out of the new shaft as it was sunk.

The winding engine was relocated to a new position in a small new building, between buildings (1&3). This was aligned so that it was in a straight line between Shaft (B), and the new Shaft (D). The new alignment involved the demolition of the old brickworks (Building-2 **009**); however, the brickworks chimney was not demolished until much later, indeed not until at least after 1890. The new winding arrangement also involved having to use a wooden trestle to keep the Shaft (D} winding rope high enough to make clearance above the location of the proposed new railway sidings. This is exactly the situation captured by Suker's painting in 1876.

7. **1875 –** The sinking of Shaft (D) began on the 17th April 1875, with a small sod cutting ceremony, which was recorded in the Wrexham Advertiser **006**. There are no specific records for the start, or the completion of shaft sinking operations for Shaft (E). There were numerous problems sinking one of the shafts, because of rock falls and bad ground – the two shafts were entirely different geologically, despite being only 60 yards apart. Shaft (E) was the first to be completed with winding gear and would become the ventilation downcast and emergency shaft. Shaft (D) would be the transport shaft, for miners, materials and coal, and would also be the upcast shaft for ventilation. Curiously, Shaft (E) was fitted with a continuous rope winding arrangement (known as a "Koepe" method), hence the tandem arrangement of the two winding wheels above each other that is so obvious on many of the contemporary photographs.

8. **1876 -** There was a serious accident when sinking one of the shafts on the 8th May 1876 **010**, the report in the newspaper stated that the shaft was only 30 yards deep, however, it did not specify the shaft.

   In the same year, a landscape artist, George Suker, visited the site, and painted a scene depicting the landscape looking south down the English side of the Dee estuary, from a point just north of the colliery.

9. **1881 –** There is an advertisement in the Liverpool Mercury **014**, for a "Fully practical fitter, - One accustomed to Lathe and Locomotives, and competent to take full charge of all machinery at Neston Colliery, Cheshire".

10. **1882 –** An advertisement in the Liverpool Mercury (dated 28th August 1882) offers for sale "A pair of excellent 14-inch winding engines, with drum, 6 feet in diameter, and reversing gear, nearly new. Will be sold for a bargain, having to be removed for more powerful engines, Apply to Neston Colliery" **011**. This implies that the ex-Anglican Smelting "double Winding Engine" was no longer required, and therefore the 'excavation' part of the sinking of Shaft (D) was complete. If so, it had taken an excessive period of 6-7 years to sink Shaft (D).

    Even worse, the 1890 photograph shows that the Shaft (D) headgear, winding engine house, boiler house and chimney was still not complete, completion would be another 7-8 years later. The advertisement was being slightly generous with the description of the engine as 'nearly new', as it was possibly

as much as 24 years old, dating from the formation of the Anglican Smelting Company in 1858.

It may well be that the long period of time to complete the new undertakings was not so serious, as they were still producing and selling coal using Shafts (B&C) for the intervening years. A more likely explanation is the effect of another local engineering work that was taking place, specifically the construction of the Mersey Railway Tunnel, between Birkenhead and Liverpool, in the period 1881 & 1886, with other associated works not completed until 1892. This would have required the same skills, namely shaft sinking, tunneling & brickwork, causing a local shortage of manpower and materials, the Mersey Railway tunnel eventually using over 40 million bricks.

There was also a fatal accident reported [027] in the Cheshire Observer (Chester, Cheshire, England) 10 Jun 1882, Sat· Page 8. Mr Shone was fatally injured after being moved to Chester Infirmary; he was brother to two other men who had also had fatal accidents a short while earlier in the same colliery. It was not a particularly safe colliery to work at, but there was little other work in the area.

1888 Lease - Wirral Colliery Company Ltd.

11. **1884 – 1885** – The Neston Colliery Company Ltd was not doing too well and was eventually wound up [017], and then put up for sale [018]. A new company, **The Wirral Colliery Company Ltd,** purchased [019] (for the sum of £7,750) the freehold colliery property and assets of the recently liquidated **Neston Colliery Company Ltd,** and took over the operation.

12. **1888 -** There was a new lease signed in July 1888 by the (now) **Wirral Colliery Company Ltd**, between “The Honorable Edmund Bernard Talbot (commonly called Lord Edmund Bernard Talbot)” of the first part, “James Henry Johnson of Southport” for the second part and “The Wirral Colliery Company Limited” for the third part.

    The lease document includes a map showing the state of affairs at the time of the 1888 lease. It confirms the location of the new double winding engine which was suggested by Suker’s 1876 painting, and the location of the new Shaft (E), but the new Shaft (D) location is either obscured or simply missing off the map.

13. **1890 –** A travelling photographer (name unknown) was journeying, taking photographs of industry along the North Wales coast, and fortunately also included “The Wirral Colliery – Birkenhead” in his photography. The 1890 photograph clearly illustrates the state of developments, Shaft (E) is obviously complete with its own winding engine, the headgear for Shaft (D) is almost complete with roofing in progress, but with no indication of a winding rope having been installed. It cannot be determined as to whether or not the new Shaft (D) boiler house has been built, but obviously the chimney had not been built.

14. An extension had been built onto the Anglican Smelting Building No.1 to sort and process coal from Shafts (B&C), it has a higher-level narrow-gauge railway entering it. This coal operation would be essential to keep the company running while the new Shaft (D&E) developments were being built as they were well behind schedule, shaft sinking having been started as long ago as 1875.

15. The extreme right-hand edge of the photograph is historically interesting as it shows developments taking place around Shaft (C), which would be a little unexpected given the new developments around shafts (D&E) – except if it were to improve capacity as an interim measure. However, the tall new octagonal chimney for the boiler house would suggest that it was a longer-term development. The visible evidence also includes a new wooden winding house for the Shaft (C) winding engine, and also some new wooden headgear support trusses for the same shaft – none of which was present in 1876 on Suker's painting.

    The colliery would have been in full operation by sometime around 1891, using both sets of shafts – (B&C) and (D&E).

    1892 - The 16th July 1892 edition of the 'Cheshire Observer' has Mr. James Platt, the Colliery Manager as having been presented with a new Gold watch in commemoration of the successful installation of new pumping engines at the colliery – which suggests that there were some serious water issues requiring a lot of pumping out.

    The manager, Mr. James Platt was also a qualified first aider, and which skills were frequently put into practice **028.** On the 4th June he saved the life of a young worker who had suffered a head injury and was bleeding badly, again evidence that it was not a particularly safe colliery.

16. **1895 –** Coal production must have been going very well, because in 1895 a single "Elliott Coal Washer" was installed into a new long and narrow building on the eastern side of the railway sidings in an effort to improve coal quality. The new building was built with enough space for two trough washers. The new trough washer was deemed to be a great success, and accordingly, soon afterwards, a second washer was installed alongside the first, each of them being sixty feet long. The water used in the washing was directed into a settling tank and pumped back up to be reused many times over. The maximum throughput was in the region of 11 tons of coal washed per hour for each of the washers. The washer was only used only for the smaller coal. Evidently, it was one of the first to be installed in the country and attracted many visitors to view it in operation. The first washer at Neston was installed as a trial, and the second was then also installed, as it was dependent upon the working success of the first example **012**.

17. **1910-1920 -** The Alwen Pipeline was being built from Alwen Reservoir (nr Ruthin) to the new Crosshills Reservoir for Birkenhead. It was buried a few feet underground through the colliery land, alongside what is now known as Holme Croft. This was not an area that would affect colliery operations, being on the eastern edge of the waste tips **031**.

18. **1911 –** The colliery was offered as being for sale [023].

1912 Lease - Wirral Colliery Company Ltd.

19. **1912 -** This was a significant year for the colliery. A new lease was signed, with the "**Wirral Colliery Company Ltd**.

    This lease was between "The Honorable Edmund Bernard Talbot (commonly called Lord Edmund Bernard Talbot MP)" of the first part; "William Orme Johnson of Abram Colliery, Wigan, Alfred Earlam Johnson, Edmund Litler Johnson, Robert Thorley Johnson and James Henry Johnson" (known as the Johnson Trustees) of the second part; and "the Wirral Colliery Company Ltd" as the third part [048].

    A number of major developments took place at the colliery site in Little Neston [029]. These included:

    - Installation of a boiler feed water heater using waste boiler exhaust heat to heat the cold water used to fill the boiler.
    - Two air compressors and storage reservoirs installed on the surface, to allow compressed air to be fed underground to power water pumps, improve ventilation, and to power machinery.
    - A new building covering the space between the old Shaft (D) headgear coal preparation area and the railway sidings, and also covering two of the three railway tracks. The area to be used for a new coal separation and sorting area.
    - Installation of an automatic system for handling coal tubs in the Shaft (D) headgear area.
    - An electrical dynamo was installed to provide power for lighting and machinery.
    - The company's fleet of 10-ton mainline wagons were repaired as they were in a perilous condition.
    - The railway sidings were re-laid because they, like the wagons, were in a poor state of repairs.

20. **1914 -** The company again had financial difficulties and closed. The colliery was offered again as being for sale [024].

Wirral Colliery Company (1915) Ltd.

21. **1915 –** The colliery was reopened, with the company renamed as "**Wirral Colliery Company (1915) Ltd**". The company was then taken over to support the 'The Great War' of 1914-1918. After the war was over, it was handed back to the "**Wirral Colliery Company (1915) Ltd**".

22. **1925 -** An agreement was sought with the Birkenhead Brewery Company for permission to drive two tunnels beneath the Harp Inn on Quayside to connect

with the older (pre-1855) workings. It is not believed that this came to fruition [030].

23. **1926 -** The miners took part in the General Strike, which did not help the colliery at all, the miners went back into work at the colliery afterwards on reduced pay, with redundancies, but that did not help the poor economics of the colliery either.

24. **1927 -** 12th March - The colliery finally closed, never to reopen. There was a small token attempt to re-open some of the pre-1855 workings of the Ness Colliery near the old Little Neston pier on Quayside, but it came to no avail [015]

Post-Closure – Neston and Parkgate Housing Society

25. **1928 –** On the 3rd December, there was a conveyance of the colliery site between **"The Right Honourable Edward Bernard Viscount Fitzalan"** of the first part; **"The Honourable Edmund Fitzalan Howard"** of the second part, and "**Wirral Colliery (1915) Limited**" of the third part. [025]

    The Fitzalans also go under the name of "Talbot" as seen on previous leases of the colliery.

26. **1932 -** At the end of 1932 (December 24th), the colliery land was conveyed to the "**Neston (Wirral) Council of Social Service "**– a voluntary body**.** This was to enable the organisation to build some smallholdings, and associated housing. The semi-detached houses built for the smallholding tenants are still in existence along Marshlands Road and Holme Croft [013]. They are easily identifiable by being semi-detached, usually painted white, with hipped roofs, and alternate brickwork around the doors and windows.

    At an unknown date, the voluntary organisation "**Neston (Wirral) Council of Social Service"** became **"The Neston and Parkgate Housing Society",** which is the name that appears on later conveyances.

    At some later (unknown) date, after WW2, the smallholdings were dispensed with, and the associated land was sold to a building developer for the construction of the "West Vale" housing estate, but that is outside the scope of this colliery history.

    The land conveyed to the "**Neston (Wirral) Council of Social Service"** appears to have been the entire colliery site, except for the railway sidings, which were still owned by the railway companies (this area was also later sold by the railways to the housing society in 1937). A newspaper article stated that the Marsh Cottage and the Offices / Laboratory (Building-5) were not to be demolished, but the remaining buildings were to be demolished, as well as the Shaft (D) Boiler House Chimney. There is an undated contemporary photograph of the demolition of the Boiler House chimney, using the 'Fred Dibnah' method of hacking the bricks away at the chimney bottom, supporting the chimney on props of wood, then firing the wood supports so that they

burned away, leaving the chimney to collapse. The same photograph also shows the three remaining shafts surrounded by tall brick circular walls as a safety precaution.

Eventually, the **"The Neston and Parkgate Housing Society**" development only used a small portion of the colliery site, namely along Marshlands Road and Holme Croft, leaving a large unused colliery site, with unfilled and uncapped mine shafts [025] . The open shafts were made safe by surrounding them with tall circular walls.

27. **1937 –** On the 10th of November 1937, there was a conveyance between **"London Midland and Scottish Railway Company and the Great Western Railway Company"** of the one part, and **"The Neston and Parkgate Housing Society Limited"** of the other part, which would have been to pass ownership of the Colliery siding land from the railway company to "**The Neston and Parkgate Housing Society Limited"** [025]

28. **1942 –** There was a conveyance on December 11th, between **"The Neston and Parkgate Housing Society Limited"** of the one part, and a private individual in Ellesmere Port, believed to be for the remainder of the colliery site which was unused by the housing society [025]**.**

29. **1942 -** During the early years of WW2, the colliery waste tips were removed by an excavator and a fleet of 18 road wagons, the waste was transported offsite and used to build RAF Wrexham and the airfields in Shropshire, which were in turn used to retrain aircrew from the USA in flying in poor weather conditions, as the attrition rate of aircraft and crews freshly trained from the USA was quite horrendous [020] [026]. The American aviators had their initial flying training in fine and sunny weather back in the USA, which was unlike what they would experience in Britain.

    The colliery site was also used to hide vehicles that came over from the USA on convoys to Liverpool, in preparation for D-Day.

30. **1958-1960** There were a number of conveyances between the private individual of Ellesmere Port, and a number of private individuals in Neston, for various parcels of Colliery land.

31. **1967-** There was a conveyance between one of the private individuals in Neston and **"Page-Johnson Construction Limited"** for part of the site, believed to be in the area of what is now Riverside Walk, with a western boundary of the eastern edge of the old colliery railway sidings [025].

32. **1973 –** Page-Johnson Construction went out of business around 1972, the business was taken over by Bovis Homes Investments Ltd, and a series of bungalows were built along the western side of what is now Riverside Walk. These homes were sold to the general public, in the range of £8-10,000 [025]. The land around shaft (E) was fenced, and that around shaft (D) was walled off with a gate on Riverside Walk. It would appear that the circular areas around shafts (D&E) was not included in the transaction with Bovis.

33. **1974 - 1982 –** There were a number of small conveyances between one of the private individuals in Neston**, "Bovis Homes"** and Riverside Walk property owners for extra building land & small plots of land for garden extensions [025]

34. **1983 –** During February 1983, the three surviving open pit shafts (Shafts B, D&E) were filled in and capped off by the NCB[008]. Shaft (C) had been filled in a number of years earlier, certainly prior to the formation of the NCB in 1947. The writer has been advised that there was a general operation to secure old mine workings and entrances around that period.

35. **2019 -** The land around shafts (D&E) was fenced / walled off in the 1970's, but the two mineshaft areas appeared more recently (during 2019) in an auction sale of the assets of wound-up businesses in the Midlands (as being owned by "Summit House Nominees") and were purchased by a private individual in the Midlands [021] with a view to a small housing development.