

## Elsecar Heritage Action Zone Conservation Area

Elsecar is a village in South Yorkshire, six miles south of Barnsley. The village's historic core was designated as a conservation area in 1974. Whilst it is a small conservation area, it contains a well preserved and nationally significant mining village. Small scale coal mining and iron making had taken place in the area since as early as the 15th century, but up until the 18th century Elsecar was nothing more than a series of farms clustered together. However, the arrival of the eighteenth century saw Elsecar transformed into a thriving and bustling village with a canal, a deep colliery and two mighty ironworks at the centre of a great Industrial Age.



Elsecar Heritage Action Zone Launch day. © Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council

The investment and direction for all of this came from the Earls Fitzwilliam – the wealthy owners of Wentworth Woodhouse, the largest privately-owned house in Britain. Standing just a mile from Elsecar, the Georgian residence was included in the Chancellors' 2016 Autumn Statement, with £7.6 million pledged to save the historic building. Its façade is twice as long as Buckingham Palace's.

The Earls regarded Elsecar as an estate village and took a strong interest in local affairs. Guests from Wentworth Woodhouse, including Royalty, were taken on visits to the ironworks, the village and even underground. The conservation area contains all but one of Elsecar's listed buildings. John Carr, architect best known for designing Harewood House and Buxton Crescent, was involved in the design of some of the buildings in Elsecar. This includes the well preserved Miners' Lodging house, which provided accommodation for 22 single miners. The other buildings within the conservation areas

are miner's cottages. When they were built, a great deal of thought was put into the living environments of the workers, and the cottages were provided with gardens and or pig stys!

In Edwardian times the reservoir built to feed the canal became a popular attraction and families from nearby villages and towns flocked to 'Elsecar-by-the-Sea' for swimming and boating. For the first time, tourism began to fuel the local economy. A beach was even built for this 'seaside resort in the heart of the Yorkshire coalfield'.



'Elsecar by the Sea' archive image. © Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council

The Elsecar Heritage Centre forms the hub of the tourism experience in Elsecar. Set in a series of renovated buildings that were originally used for a variety of purposes including an ironworks, forges, a distillery and engineering workshops. The buildings had fallen into decline when the collieries closed. The centre is now home to individual craft workshops, artists, antiques as well as exhibitions and events. It is also the location of the Newcomen Beam Engine, a scheduled monument, and a nationally significant piece of Elsecar's heritage. The Newcomen Beam Engine was built in 1795 to extract water from Elsecar New Colliery to allow the exploration of deeper coal seams. It is the only Newcomen Beam engine in the world that remains in its original location.

The Heritage Centre is also home to the Heritage Railway, this currently offers a passenger service that runs between Rockingham Station, through scenic countryside to the present terminus next to the canal basin at Hemingfield. The railway uses steam and diesel locomotives.



Newcomen Engine House, Elsecar Colliery. © Historic England

Elsecar suffered in the 1980's due to the closure of collieries and the uncertainty that followed. The last colliery in Elsecar closed in 1983 and a few months later, just a mile along the canal from the village centre, the Miners' Strike began. Although things have improved in Elsecar since the 1980's, household statistics reveal that there is considerable social deprivation.

The Heritage Action Zone aims to improve the understanding of the village's heritage, which is largely hidden, extending the visitor experience to include important archaeological sites. It also seeks to increase employment opportunities by turning vacant or underused historic buildings into offices and retail sites. And perhaps most importantly it will encourage local people and community groups to get involved in the village's development – to help them forge new skills, provide rewarding experiences and raise awareness and pride in Elsecar's heritage.

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