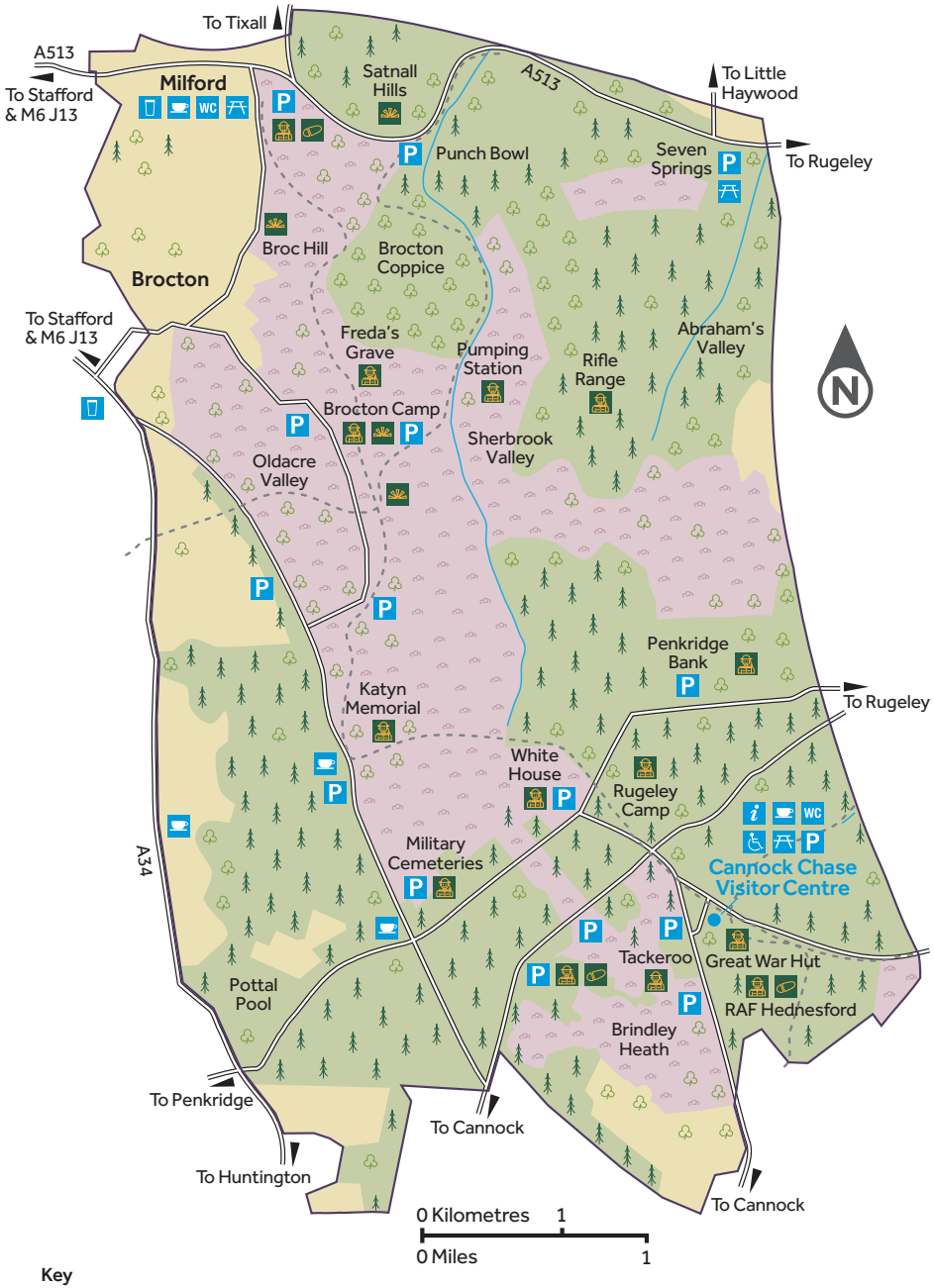
The Chase at War



Cannock Chase National Landscape



Key

Information	Picnic site	Viewpoint	Heathland
Café	Main car parks	Military heritage site	Farmland and other open country
Toilets	Pub	Military heritage trail	Deciduous woodland
Toilets (for disabled)	Road	Recreational trail	Coniferous woodland

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The Military and Cannock Chase

Cannock Chase National Landscape is a great place to find out more about our military history with walks and trails to enjoy.

Cannock Chase has a long, proud association with the armed forces. During the 18th and 19th centuries, grazing and woodland clearance created an open landscape suitable for training large bodies of troops. The Chase's supportive landowners, a central position in the country and close proximity to good road, rail and canal infrastructure made it an ideal location for military use.

Written accounts suggest that local troops and militia may have used the Chase during the Napoleonic wars (1803-15). In 1860 a proposal was put forward in parliament to consider creating a new central arsenal or fortress on Cannock Chase, but this was never progressed. Photographs show large-scale military manoeuvres by the Regular Army taking place in 1873 and 1894, but no physical remains survive from this period as the troops would have occupied tents and existing buildings.

The outbreak of war in August 1914 created the need to accommodate and train troops quickly and on a huge scale, and camps sprang up across the United Kingdom to take in the reservists and volunteers of Kitchener's New Army. The Earl of Lichfield offered his land on Cannock Chase and construction work began immediately. Between Autumn 1914 and May 1915 two huge camps were built along with rail links, a power station, water and sewerage systems, a road network and military hospital.



The map shows the location of the training camps and other military sites from both World Wars. Most are close to car parks, but the rifle range and pumping station are in vehicle free areas, and you should allow up to an hour to visit each of them. Please wear suitable footwear for walking on stony tracks and dress appropriately for the weather. Many of the places you will explore are home to rare or endangered plants, animals and birds so please take nothing but photographs and follow the Cannock Chase Code. Metal detecting is generally not permitted on public land on Cannock Chase.

Brocton and Rugeley Camps could hold 20,000 men each, along with thousands of horses. By the end of hostilities over 500,000 soldiers from all over the United Kingdom and parts of the Dominion had been trained on Cannock Chase for fighting in the trenches. The camps were quickly dismantled after the war, and much of the landscape regenerated as heathland and scrub woodland. Buildings from the military hospital at Brindley were adapted to accommodate miners and their families in the 1920s, becoming known as Brindley Village and remained in use until the 1950s.



Rugeley Camp, c. 1916-17

Later when the Second World War seemed imminent, RAF Hednesford was built between 1938 and 1939 close to the south of the former Rugeley Camp and many thousands of service personnel, men and women, served and trained here both during the conflict as well as in the following years as part of their national service. The training focussed on the maintenance of air frames and engines of RAF planes. The Chase was also used as a testing ground for tanks, as well as for training the Home Guard, harking back to the days of volunteer and militia training in the 19th century.

After the war the War Office wanted to establish a permanent camp and small arms range on the Chase, but neither were implemented and, once again, tranquillity returned to the area. Cannock Chase is considered to have one of the best-preserved Great War landscapes in England.

Investigate the Chase's military history

You will get the most out of your visit if you keep to the main paths and take time to reflect on what life was like for the soldiers and other military personnel who were stationed here. Practice trenches from the Great War are widespread so don't stray from the paths; many are hidden by heather and bilberry and can trap the unwary. Close your eyes and imagine the sounds and smells, open them and see what is left. Many local people helped around the camps and if someone in your family was trained or stationed here we would love to hear from you.

Separate trails, leaflets and videos are available for Brindley Heath and RAF Hednesford. Pick up trails leaflets from Cannock Chase Visitor Centre.

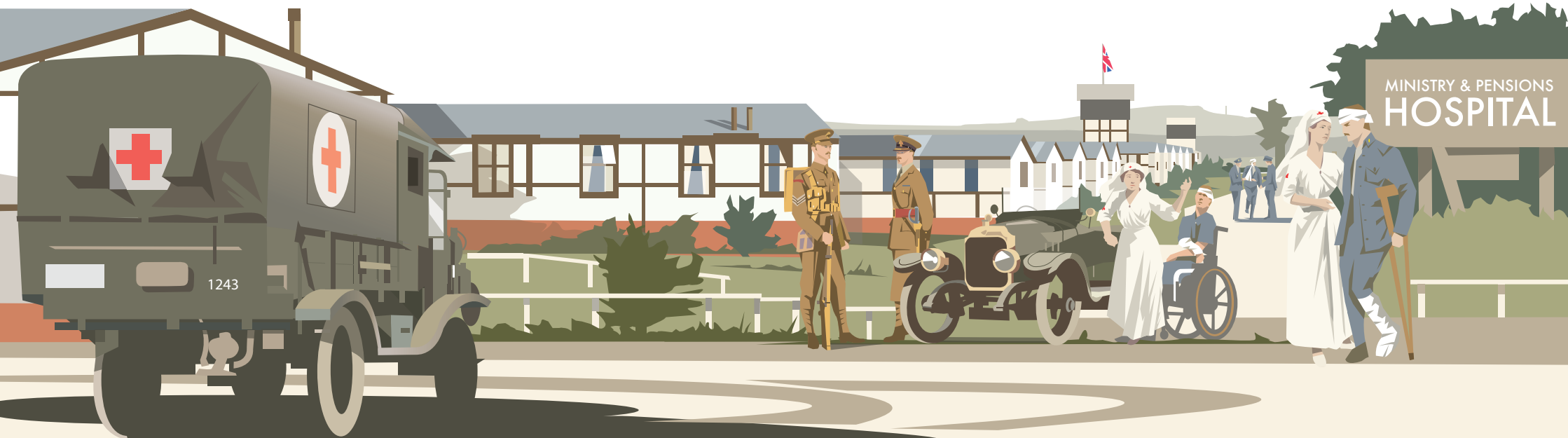


Brindley Heath Trails – the trails provide more information on the site of Brindley Village, built as a military hospital during the Great War and later used to house miners and their families. See page 7 for more information on the hospital.



RAF Hednesford Trail follows level, well-surfaced paths for most of the route and is accessible to all. It's a circular walk around a former RAF Second World War training camp. RAF Hednesford was one of several training centres built during the war. See page 9 for more information.

There are videos to watch of these trails that you can find on our YouTube channel.



Historic Military Sites on Cannock Chase

Discover and explore some of the military heritage of Cannock Chase National Landscape.

Brocton Camp *(Great War)*

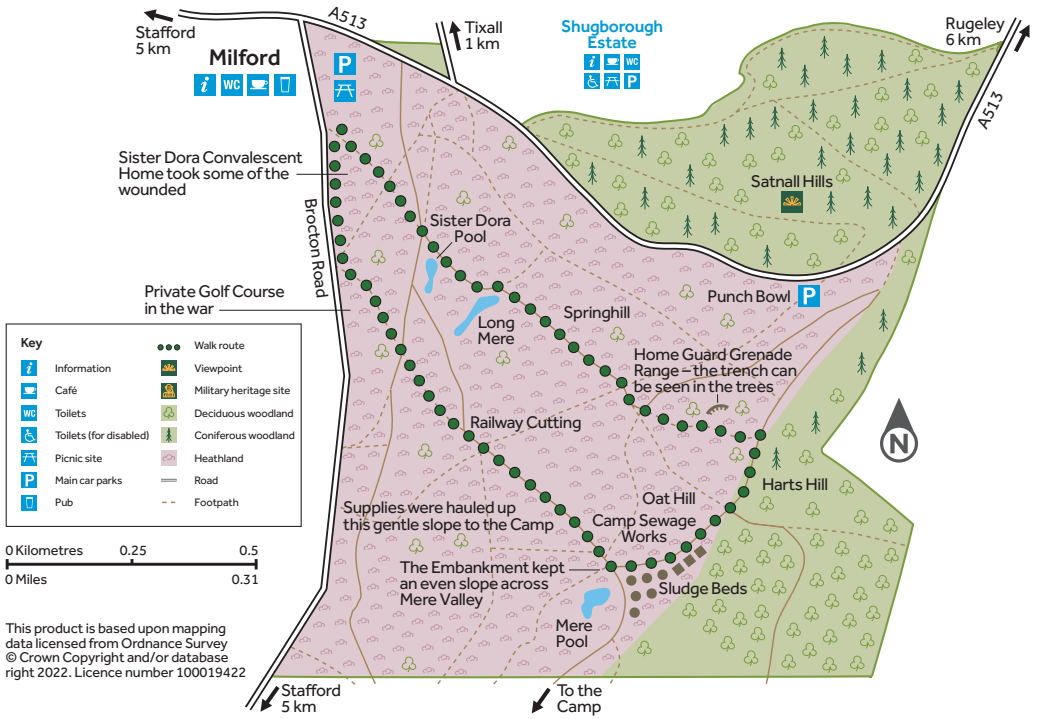
Brocton Camp became one of six training camps for New Zealand servicemen in England. On 27th September 1917, 1,925 men of the 5th (Reserve) Battalion of the New Zealand Rifle Brigade arrived here for training purposes, joining men of the 27th Reservists who had come from New Zealand via Liverpool ten days earlier. Recruits were trained in the latest skills, including operating the new-fangled tanks that were beginning to appear. Like many units they had an animal mascot, in their case a Harlequin Great Dane named Freda. Freda died in 1918 and her grave is now a site of pilgrimage for visitors.



Brocton Camp, c. 1917-18

Milford Circular Walk

Park at Milford Common and follow the circular walk around the Common (1½ miles). The walk can be extended by a mile to pass Freda's Grave and on towards Brocton Camp (3½ miles in total).



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The Great War Hut *(Great War)*

Head to Cannock Chase Visitor Centre at Marquis Drive to visit one of the last surviving barrack huts from the Great War camps. It has been fitted out as it would have been when enlisted men occupied it, whilst the officers enjoyed a greater degree of comfort. Hundreds of similar huts were erected at both camps on the Chase, only to be removed in the 1920s and used for a wide range of purposes, from houses to sheds, farm buildings and village halls. This particular hut was used as the parish hall and meeting room in nearby Gayton. In 2006 Gayton Parish Council offered the hut to the Friends of Cannock Chase who, in partnership with Staffordshire County Council, moved it to its current location. Today the hut is used as an interpretation and education facility and is opened by volunteers at weekends and Bank Holidays from 11am to 3pm.



Great War Hut, Marquis Drive

The Tackeroo *(Great War)*

The camp railway was essential to keep the two huge Great War camps on the Chase supplied with rations, stores, coal and other supplies. The line was originally laid by gangs of Irish labourers in 1915 and eventually ran the length of the Chase between Milford in the north and Hednesford in the south, where it connected with the main London and North-Western line near 'Tackeroo' just north of the town. The line of the railway can still be followed in the landscape.



Tackeroo Express, 1916

Rifle Ranges *(Great War)*

There were eight rifle ranges across the Chase and one of the primary training courses for the recruits was how to competently fire a rifle. If the new recruit had never fired a weapon before, they would firstly use a small calibre rifle in one of the indoor ranges. Once they were proficient, they would then progress on to the standard British Military rifle the Lee Enfield.303. Of all the Rifle Ranges on Cannock Chase, the best preserved is 'D' Range. The sand and gravel embankments were called the 'Stop Butts', with the targets placed in front of the embankment on wooden posts.

Glacial Boulder and Water Tower *(Great War)*

The highest point of Brocton Camp was dominated by the water tower. Today, the concrete bases for the legs can be easily seen surrounding a granite boulder that was brought to the area during the last Ice Age and erected on this spot by the Friends of Cannock Chase. The water originally came from the Sherbrook stream in the valley below. Three large wells were sunk close to the tower and water was pumped to the surface powered by the nearby power station.



Water Tower and Brocton Camp, 1916

Messines Terrain Model *(Great War)*

This is a Scheduled Monument constructed in two layers of concrete, with features picked out using brick and pebbles. The model depicts the Belgian town of Messines, the German defences, and the New Zealand section of the Allied Line during the Battle of Messines on 7 June 1917. It was used to prepare those training on the Chase for trench warfare. The New Zealand Rifle Brigade gifted the model to Stafford when they left Cannock Chase in May 1919, and it became a tourist attraction. It later became overgrown and a protective layer of quarry waste was spread over it. The model was revealed again by a dig funded by Natural England in 2013, which was led by Staffordshire County Council. The model was subsequently reburied to preserve it.



Messines Terrain Model, 1918 © National Library of New Zealand

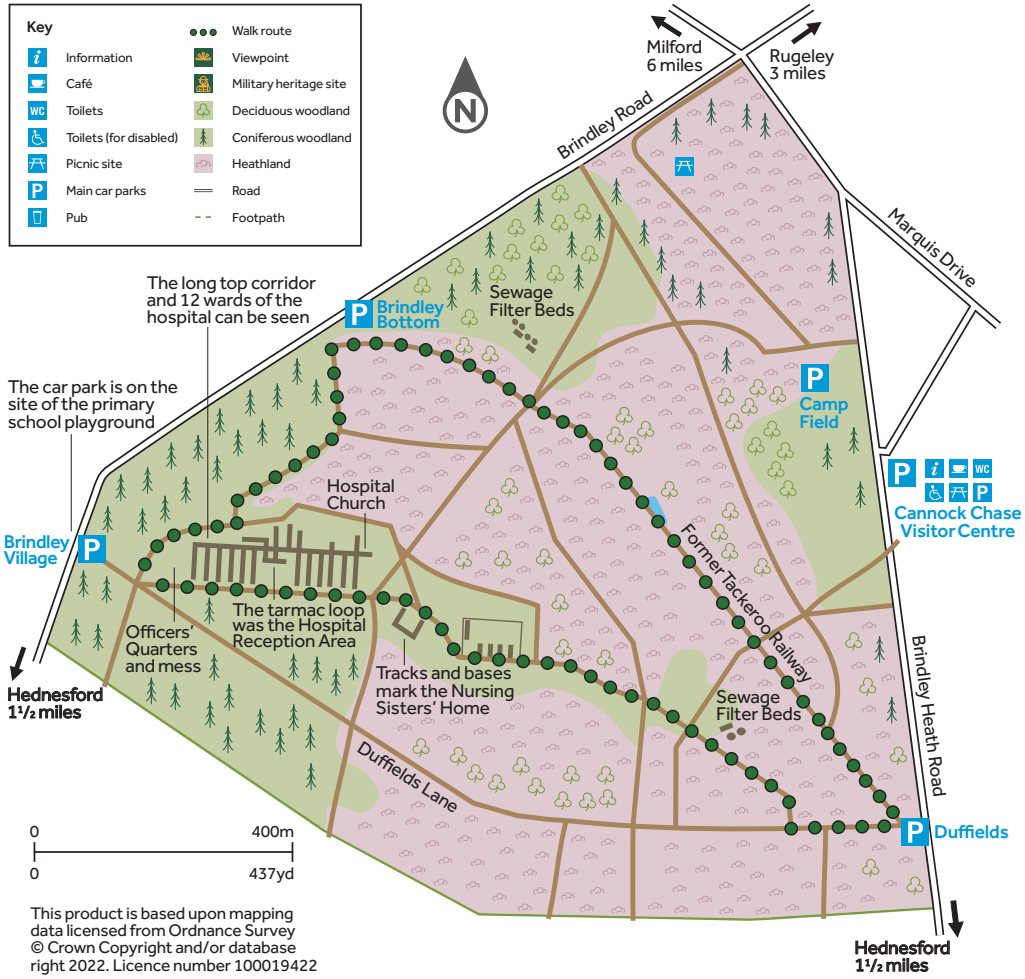
Military Hospitals *(both World Wars)*

When the Great War camps were first built, the local Sister Dora hospital tended to casualties. However, it became clear that a larger hospital was needed and by January 1916 work was underway to build a 1,000 bed hospital at Brindley Heath. The majority of patients had either suffered from poison gas or from what was called shellshock.

During the Second World War, the 312th Station Hospital was built in Shugborough Park in 1943 for the United States Army and specialised as a psychiatric unit. The thousand-bed hospital had over 500 medical officers, other ranks and female nurses. Between 1945 and 1948 the hospital was taken over by the War Office for use as a war crimes hospital. After 1948 it was proposed to use the hospital for civilian patients, but nothing came of these plans.

Brindley Village

Three waymarked walks (1¼ to 2¼ miles) provide good access to the Brindley Heath military hospital site. A self-guided walk leaflet is available from the Visitor Centre.



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Military Cemeteries *(both World Wars)*

Unlike France and Belgium, the United Kingdom has relatively few military cemeteries. Cannock Chase is home to two of them, including the principal cemetery for German military personnel and civilians who died in Great Britain during the First and Second World Wars. The Commonwealth War Cemetery, established around 1917, commemorates both New Zealand and German casualties, including many who died during the Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918 to 1919. The Cannock Chase German Military Cemetery was inaugurated and dedicated in 1967 and contains the remains of nearly 5,000 German soldiers and civilian internees from both world wars who died on British soil. Those buried here are predominantly German and Austrian nationals, with a small number of Ukrainians. Take a few moments to reflect on the lives lost and the sacrifices made by those whose final resting place is here.



German Military Cemetery

Katyn Memorial *(Second World War)*

This memorial was erected in 1979 in memory of 25,000 Polish Prisoners of War who were murdered on Stalin's orders in 1940 at the Katyn Forest near Smolensk in Russia.

The White House *(both World Wars)*

A few hundred yards from Marquis Drive is the White House, now a Christian Centre. From the car park opposite, it is only a few steps north to the base of a number of huts, built as part of the Second World War RAF Hednesford. The track itself was probably laid during the Great War, elsewhere smaller concrete blocks once supported Great War barrack huts while another hut remnant has a series of square bases that identify it as an ablutions block.

As you look around, more bases peek through the grasses and it is not hard to imagine them extending for hundreds of yards in all directions.


The footings for a Great War bath hut, Rugeley Camp, c. 1980-81

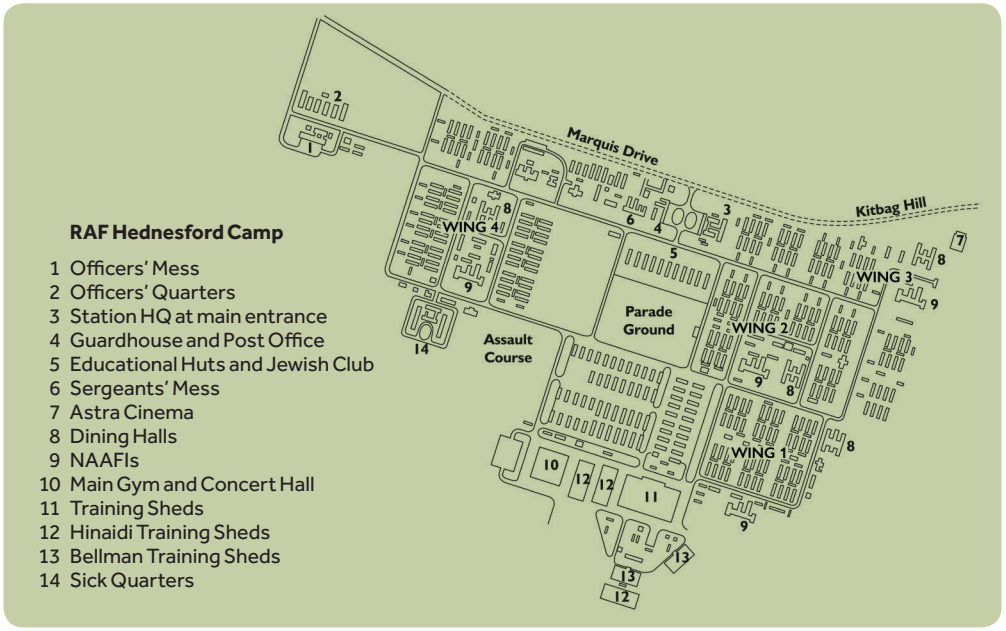
RAF Hednesford *(Second World War)*

RAF Hednesford was built in 1938-9 as a training centre for key technical support staff (flight mechanics, flight riggers and fitters) essential to the war effort, enabling the RAF to successfully defend the skies over Britain. Many thousands of personnel from the RAF, the Navy's Fleet Air Arm and the Women's Auxillary Air Force (WAAF) served here. At its height the Camp was the size of a small town with its own cinema, NAAFI, YMCA and churches. A railway halt was built at Moors Gorse on the line between Hednesford and Rugeley, and the long trudge up the hill to the Camp for the recruits became known as Kitbag Hill.

After the war the Camp was used as a training camp for young men on National Service until it closed in 1956. Shortly afterwards, the Camp was home to 1200 Hungarian refugees seeking asylum following the resistance to the Soviet invasion of Hungary.

RAF Hednesford Trail

Follow this circular walk from Cannock Chase Visitor Centre on level, well-surfaced paths (2 miles). A self-guided walk leaflet is available from the Visitor Centre.



Prisoners of War *(both World Wars)*

In 1917 the northern part of Brocton Camp was turned over to a Prisoner of War camp comprising one guard and six prisoner compounds. With the cessation of hostilities in 1918, the camp continued to be used as a staging post for the repatriation of German soldiers. On the demolition of the camp, one surprising discovery was an escape tunnel, which remained open and viewable to passers-by for some years afterwards.

During the Second World War a Prisoner of War camp was built on Cannock Chase at Flaxley Green, just south of Rugeley. After the war, part of the military hospital at Shugborough Park was briefly used as a Prisoner of War camp before the site was returned to parkland.

protect · respect · enjoy

























Be a Chase Champion – Follow the Cannock Chase Code

Find out more

If you would like to see or have images of the Chase during war time, please see the website www.search.staffspasttrack.org.uk which has an extensive archive from the period and may be interested in including your photographs.

www.jakewhitehouse.org.uk is another site to visit where you can learn more about the county's contribution to the war effort.

For more information about the Chase's military history

- Cannock Chase National Landscape Partnership www.cannock-chase.co.uk
- The Imperial War Museum www.iwm.org.uk
- Commonwealth War Graves Commission www.cwgc.org
- The Chase Through Time - Cannock Chase. There is lots more information with links on this page www.cannock-chase.co.uk/projects/the-chase-through-time

To keep up to date with the work of the Cannock Chase National Landscape Partnership visit www.cannock-chase.co.uk and sign up to receive our e-newsletter.

Cannock Chase National Landscape

cannock-chase.co.uk

Photographs by Ian Marshall, Staffordshire County Council, Staffordshire Past Track and History Centre.
Illustrations by Dave Thompson. © Cannock Chase National Landscape Partnership 2026