



One resident who has lived in Tamworth all his life and worked for many years in the mining industry tells us that Belgrave may have got its name from "Bell pits" which were a common early form of mining. This involved digging down to reach a coal seam and the coal was then excavated outwards forming a bell or dome shape cavity. Coal extraction was limited, as if they were dug outwards too far, there was a danger from roof collapse (Illustration courtesy of The Schools Integration Project in Ireland).

Later, mining employed the use of pit props to help prevent collapse and roof falls. Once a seam had been worked and all the coal removed, the props were sometimes recycled in other pits. Props were originally wooden and later replaced by "steel chocks" and "poly props" which had to be jacked up by hand.

Coal types were named after the seams they came from. In Belgrave, coal from the "Ryder" seam was good quality and better than "two yard" coal which also ran through the local area.

"Mining was dangerous work and I should know as my job was involved with pit safety. There were many hazards including those from moving machinery, roof falls and fires. When fires occurred, if they could not be put out using conventional methods, they had to be sealed off and left to burn out. Fires could be started in a number of ways with some caused by the build up of pressure from "pinch points" after coal was removed. Other fires could be caused around conveyors where the build up of coal dust and friction from moving parts caused ignition".

"On Watling Street near Belgrave, places I remember which are now no longer there include "The Pot Thrower" café and Doulton Works which stood back from the road and went nearly all the way to the railway. There was the "Railway Inn" on the other side of the road which was knocked down a couple of years ago and there was also a Dance Hall nearby. Further down the road was the Reliant factory which was built on the site of the Midland Red Bus garage. The factory was built from local bricks made in Alvecote".

"On Kettlebrook Road, opposite to where Tamworth Cruising club is today, there was Turner's asbestos factory which made asbestos cement products until 1942. It was originally a papermill. Tamworth cruising club was an old coal basin, similar to the one at Basin lane where Thompson & Southwick were also based. Glascote Basin is now used by S M Hudson boat builders".

"Further down Kettlebrook road on the corner of West Street there was Woods Furniture yard which later became an electrical wholesalers before being knocked down to build the Woods Court care home".

During the war I remember three bombs that were dropped on Tamworth which I believe were targeted at "the Arches" railway viaduct. Two were dropped in gardens in Argyle avenue and these gardens ended up on the house roofs! Another was dropped on Manor road which took out the road and all the services. Thankfully no one was killed.

August 2013