

VESTING DAY TO DOOMSDAY

A pictorial history of the
Cannock Chase Coalfield



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This page of photos are also from around 1963. They are taken in the data inputting room. As mentioned before most of the input clerks were women who being more dexterous than men were speedier at inputting the information required from the punch cards received from the various collieries in the division. The top photo shows the ladies at their work station. Note the smart uniforms they are wearing, whereas men working down the pits had to wait until the 1980's for their smart new orange overalls.



The second photo shows the work station from the operators side, these were also IBM machines. The bottom left photo shows the computer centre dispatch area.

The bottom right photo shows a computer engineer making some adjustments to the system. If during normal working an error was detected the computer would stop allowing the error to be rectified. This was an early form of what in modern automated processes would be called error proofing, or, as the Japanese who perfected the system would say "Pokeyoke".





This top left photo taken in 1965 shows Lord Robens on the far right on a visit to the computer centre. Here he took part in a stone laying ceremony at the new training centre being built on the site. This centre was one of the first in the world of the United Kingdom dedicated to computer studies.



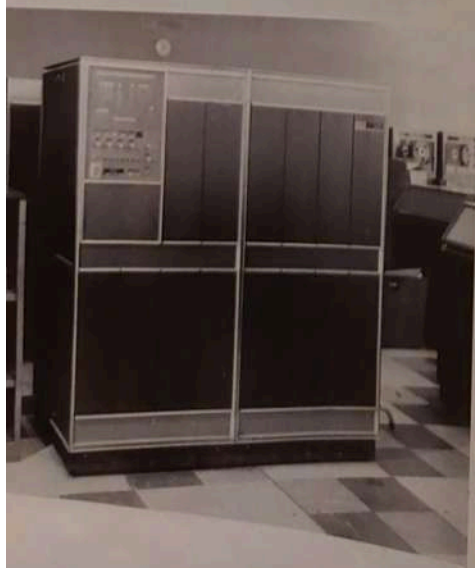
NUM President **Joe Gormley** seen here on the left of this photo, visited the Computer Centre during a tour of the Cannock Chase Coalfield in 1976. Here he is talking to Mrs **Eileen Quick**.



Visitors from overseas were frequent guests at the computer centre. This group of French Journalists shown in the photo on the left were no exception. This is one of the many success stories of nationalisation of a strategic industry. Because of its size and therefore budget. The NCB were able to undertake the development of new technology for use in its coal mines and as a consequence the NCB were only too happy to show off to the world what could be accomplished if there was political backing for a strategic industry.

This photo on the right shows a group of Saudi Arabian meteorologists visiting the computer centre. They are being briefed by the head of training **Derrick Willie** seen on the far right. The Saudi's were soon to have a similar main frame computer built in Jeddah.





In total around 250 staff would be needed to run the system. To obtain sufficient qualified staff for the Bridgtown centre, the NCB recruited graduates and engineers, from all over the British coalfields. In addition to specialist personnel, data input clerks were recruited locally, these were mainly women who had attended secretarial colleges and were therefore familiar with keyboards. The heart of the operation was the computer room, it would house three IBM 1401 series computers, hired at an annual cost of £150 000. These computers were able to handle the calculation of over 150 000 employees wages per week, doing over 54 million calculations in the process. In addition to this several thousand dispatch notes were sent out daily and thousands of invoices per month were also processed.

By 1972 the Bridgtown site housed the NCB's national computer headquarters, the wholly owned subsidiary Computer Power which provided computer services to industry, which had to be hived off as the Tory party claimed that the coal board were able to throw funds at computing facilities with "taxpayer's money" to the disadvantage of private companies. The midlands regional computer and a training school were also located on the site.

The centre was also responsible for the development of Digital Character Reading. This technology allowed handwritten or typed documents to be fed directly into the computer where it would be read by scanners.

This group of photo's show the computer room at the centre, all were taken in the early 1960's.

The top photo shows the main frame computers with magnetic tape reels onto which data was inputted.

The middle photo shows a magnetic tape reel being prepared for use.

The bottom photo shows another view of the computer main frames.

