

IHBC East Midlands Branch – CPD event

September 2011 - Visit to Creswell Model Village and Creswell Crag, Derbyshire

Our visit started with a tour of Creswell Model Mining Village to see the successful results of a major Townscape Heritage Initiative to rescue this historic settlement. Chris McKinney, the former Project Officer, explained how the Model Village – built in 1896-8 by the Bolsover Colliery Company and comprising almost 300 properties – was an early example of the principles of the Garden City Movement. In its day, the Model Village was an exemplar sustainable community with its Institute, the Co-operative Stores and recreational facilities such as the central village green, allotments and cricket pitch, all built within walking distance of the colliery.

However, Chris explained how the Model Village fell on hard times when Creswell Colliery was closed and those who could find work elsewhere left the village. This led into that depressing downward spiral of empty properties becoming boarded up and vandalised properties, meaning a lack of income for the owners and so lack of money for maintenance and needed repairs. At its lowest ebb, the Model Village reached 50% vacancy and with the housing market collapsing, those remaining residents were trapped.

Despite the scale of the challenge, Chris told the Branch members that with the support of the [Heritage Lottery Fund](#) the Model Village has been saved and all of the properties have been repaired and restored and the Model Village is now a vibrant community again.

It was clear that this project, which ran for almost 10 years, had overcome a number of set backs along the way and could provide lessons for others looking to use heritage assets to bring about considered regeneration.





The second part of the visit took in the wonderful Creswell Crags, a dramatic limestone gorge occupied during the last Ice Age which is now on the UK Tentative List for World Heritage Site status. Ian Wall, Director of the Creswell Heritage Trust that manages the Crags, led the Branch members from the state of the art new Visitor Centre down to the gorge itself, explaining along the way how the Trust and its partners have managed to restore the integrity of the site by securing the removal of the road that ran through the gorge (yes really!) and the waste water treatment works from between the gorge and the visitor centre (the green space behind the Branch members).

Once down at the gorge, Ian gave the Branch members a quick run through the timeline for the Crags and how the Crags were formed at the end of the last Ice Age (glacial melt water finding weak spots in the magnesian limestone and carving out caves and ultimately a gorge – think Frozen Planet but on a bigger scale and visit the [Crags Visitor Centre](#) for the full story).



As with most East Midlands Branch events, extra special access was provided to the Branch members and Ian led the group into Church Hole Cave where the world famous engravings of animals, carved in to the walls, were found in 2003. Whilst difficult to make out to start with, once you got your eye in being so close to Britain's only known Rock Art was an amazing experience. In addition to this, Ian led the Branch members into Robin Hood Cave, the largest cave at Creswell Crags and the wider limestone area.

Once back into the open, Ian explained how Trust and its partners were using the interest of the Crags to take on the baton from Bolsover District Council's village project to continue the regeneration of Creswell.

All in all, this visit to Creswell to see the inspiring work going on to give new life to the local area was very interesting and I'd recommend that anyone who couldn't make it this time, put it on your to-do list for 2012.

Chris McKinney