

TOWNELEY MAIN or STELLA PIT. Greenside 'A' Pit. Durham. 1801.

An explosion was reported that took several lives. The bodies were recovered by Mr. James Hall, father of Mr. T.Y. Hall, after the underviewer had declined to take on the task.

BARMBY FURSCOPE. Yorkshire. 1803.

The colliery was sunk by the Low Moor Company and land leased from Walter Spencer Stanhope of Cannon Hall about 1802. Between twenty and thirty people lost their lives in an explosion.

WALLSEND. 'C' Pit. Gateshead, Durham. 25th. September, 1803.

An explosion, described at the time as a 'heavy fire', killed thirteen men and boys and burnt and injured twenty others. An outburst of gas or, 'foulness', came from the roof in the pillars behind the workmen and fired at a lamp in the leading excavation. The boards were just turning away out of this place and the fire from the explosion swept along them. To quote Mr. Buddle's words-

"The fire struck all the people who were working in its range. The workings were very dry and dusty and the survivors, who were the most distant from the point of the explosion were burnt by the shower of red hot sparks ignited of the dust, which were driven along by the force of the explosion. The greater number of the sufferers perished through suffocation".

Another list gives the date as 3rd. September.

Those who died were:-

Ralph Dawson, pitman aged 22 years.

Anthony Parkin, pitman aged 18 years.

Cuthbert Mumford, pitman, aged 16 years, son of Cuthbert, labourer.

Nicholas Raw, pitman, son of Hugh, aged 16 years.

Jonathan Beverley aged 16 years, son of Cuthbert.

Thomas Parkin, pitman aged 14 years.

George Fogget, pitman.

Matthew Fogget, son of above.

Jonathan Hann, pitman aged 22 years.

William Kelly, pitman.

Jonas Hammon, pitman.

William Dodds, pitman. Died 24th. September.

HURLET PIT. Paisley, Midlothian, 1805.

An explosion took place at the pit causing the loss of eighteen lives. It was reported that six funerals left the village for Paisley and two for Neilson on the same day.

BARMBY FURSCOPE. Barnsley, Yorkshire. 19th. August, 1805.

An explosion at the colliery resulted in the deaths of seven men. These included John and Mark Teesdale who were brothers and had come from the North of England to sink shafts. The explosion was caused by a naked light coming into contact with gas.

HEBBURN. Hebburn, Durham. 21st. October, 1805.

There are early records of a colliery, 90 to 95 feet deep, sunk at Hebburn in the Reign of James I. It worked a seam near the surface called the Monkton seam after the village of

the same name near Jarrow which claimed to be the birthplace of the Venerable Bede. The coal was shipped to a staith shown on Gardiner's map of the Tyne, 1655 and called the 'Black Steath.'

The colliery exploded with the loss of thirty two to thirty five lives depending on the account.

A physician of Newcastle-on-Tyne, Dr. Trotter, was visiting a sick friend when he passed the churchyard at Jarrow as the victims of the disaster were being buried. The scene affected him so much, even more so when he learned that the mine had left five widows and eighty one orphaned children. He prepared a pamphlet addressed to the coal owners and the Agents, entitled '*A Proposal for Destroying Fire and Choak Damps of Coal Mines*' in which he suggested a scheme of neutralisation of the gases. This was the cause of much discussion on the subject of explosions in coal mines.

OXCLOSE. Oxclose, Durham. 29th. November, 1805.

A steam engine, built by, William Brown, who was the engineer at Throckley Colliery, was installed in 1762. The colliery exploded with the loss of thirty eight lives.

FENTON PARK. Fenton Park, Staffordshire. 1806.

Clanny said that in an explosion at the colliery, seven were killed and several others injured.

MOSTYN. Mostyn, Denbighshire. 1806.

There are two explosions reported at Mostyn in 1806, the first cost a total of thirty six men and the second about thirty lives.

ST. HELENS. St.Helens, Lancashire. June 1806.

An explosion was reported to have taken sixteen lives. A local burial register bears ten names with a note in the margin, 'Killed in a fire in a coal pit at Whiston' and buried in early June, 1806.

William Anderton.

Thomas and Henry Anderton, son of William.

William Manchester.

James and Thomas Manchester sons of Joshua Manchester.

Mary Rylance.

John Rylance, illegitimate daughter of Mary.

Henry Lawrenson.

Lawrence Wainwright, son of Lawrence.

UNNAMED. Dudley, Staffordshire. 1806.

An explosion was reported at a colliery in the neighbourhood of Dudley which killed eight or ten.

WHITEHAVEN. Whitehaven, Cumberland. 1806.

There was an explosion at the colliery which caused the death of eleven men and boys.

KILLINGWORTH. Killingworth, Northumberland. 28th. March, 1806.

In evidence to the 1835 Commission, George Stevenson, the engineer at the colliery gave an account of developments that had taken place there. He said-

“In first going down the Killingworth Pit, there was a steam engine underground for the purpose of drawing water from a pit that was sunk at some distance from the first shaft. the Killingworth coalfield is considerably dislocated. After the colliery was opened, at a very short distance from the shafts, they met with one of the dislocations, or dykes as they are called. The coal was thrown down, I think, about 40 yards. Considerable time was spent in sinking another pit. I forget the distance from the main shaft, but the it was sunk to the depth I allude to. the engine had been erected some time previous to me going down the pits. On my being down the pit, I proposed making that same engine draw the coals up an inclined plane that descended immediately from that place.”

Stevenson was asked if he recollected anything about he accident at the colliery in 1806, when ten lost their lives in an explosion.

The coal was nine and a half feet thick at the site where the explosion was localised which was at a considerable angle and 190 fathoms down. The upcast shaft was 12 feet in diameter and operated by two furnaces. The ventilation air was split four times. Gas had been seen in the workings and the work was being done with the men using safety lamps but the naked lights were left at a nearby door. The leading headways were twenty yards apart and holed at forty yards which meant that there were six yards of brattice to each holing.

In the evidence at the inquest into the disaster, it appeared that a man had taken gunpowder and candles into the working which was against orders. The ventilation dramatically decreased due to the upcast shaft being wet and this caused gas to collect and the man had the means of ignition. The colliery exploded with the loss of the lives (some records say nine).

Mr. George Stevenson was the engineman at the colliery and witnessed the explosion. It was his opinion that the disaster occurred because of the wetness of the upcast shaft. His account says-

“The pit had just ceased drawing coals, and nearly all the men had got out. It was some time in the afternoon a little after mid-day there were five men that went down the pit, four of them for the purpose of preparing a place for the furnace, the fifth was a person that went down to set them to work this man had just got to the bottom of the shaft, about two or three minutes, when the explosion took place I sent the man down myself. I had left the mouth of the pit, and gone about 50 or 60 yards away, when I heard a tremendous noise, looked round, and saw the discharge come out of the pit mouth like the discharge of a cannon it continued to blow, I think, for a quarter of an hour, discharging everything that had come into the current stones came up and trusses of hay, that went down during the day and I think the trusses had in some measures injured the ventilation. the ground all round the top of the pit was in a trembling state I went as near as I durst go, and everything appeared crackling about me part of the brattice which was very strong, was blown away at the bottom of the pits very large pumps were lifted from their places so that the engines could not work.

The pit was divided into four partitions it was a large pit, 14 feet in diameter, and partitions put down at right angles, which formed four. The explosion took place in one of these four quarters but it broke through all the others at the bottom, and the brattice or partition was set on fire at the first explosion. After it had continued to blow for a quarter

of an hour, as I have stated, the discharge ceased, and the atmosphere all round poured into the pit to fill up the vacant place that must have been formerly occupied by the flame. In one of the other pits, that was connected with this one in which the explosion took place by some doors in the drift leading from one pit to another, several men who were in the adjoining pit, were not reached by the explosion and several of them got up safe.

The ropes in the first pit were shattered to pieces by the force of the blasts, but the ropes in the other pits were still left uninjured, at least they were very little injured. Nobody durst go near the shafts for fear of another explosion taking place, for some time at last we considered it necessary to run the rope backwards and forwards, and give the miners, if there were any at the bottom of the shaft, an opportunity of catching the rope as it came at the bottom whenever the rope went to the bottom it was allowed to remain a short time till we considered that there was time to cling to it several men were got out in this way, and another man had hold of the rope and was drawn away, when an explosion took place at the time he was in the shaft, but it was merely like the discharge of a gun, and it did not continue like the former blast. This man, it appeared, had been helped up so far with the increased velocity, the man came up without being injured.

Four of the five men who were reported to have gone down the pit, were found buried among some corves and little carriages at the bottom of the shaft. The fifth man, the underlooker, had thrown himself behind some pillars so that the current passed him. The flame came about him, and nearly all his clothes were burnt off his back, but he was one of those who escaped by the rope after the blast ceased.

The pit continued to blow every two or three hours for two days, the coal being on fire, but some of the explosions were equal to the first. The other shafts became wrecked very soon. The workings were drowned in order to extinguish the fire, and the bodies of the unfortunate victims were not recovered for twenty three or twenty four weeks."

Fire engines were brought from Newcastle and water pumped into the pit to control the fire and Stevenson commented that the disaster cost £20,000, independent of the loss of life.

The following names are from the local Parish Burial Register and are marked 'lost at Killingworth Colliery on 28th March':-

James Jobbs, pitman buried July 9th, aged 56.

Robert Curry, pitman, buried July 17th. aged 60.

William Reed, pitman, buried July 19th. aged 37.

William Mood, pitman, buried July 23rd. aged 44.

William Taylor, buried July 23rd. aged 40.

James Brown, blacksmith, son of Thomas Brown, buried August 28th. 1806, aged 19.

Edward Wales, pitman, son of Edward Wales, buried August 29th, aged 22.

William Brown, pitman, buried September 2, aged 34.

HARRATON COLLIERY. Row Pit. Harraton, Durham. 29th. November, 1808.

The pit exploded with the loss of more than four lives. A report at the time gave an account of the explosion.

"An accident happened to the machinery of the 6th. Pit, sixteen men and boys set out to travel through the old workings to the Row Pit, carrying a torch, or low rope, to light their way. They wandered in the vicinity of a pair of dams, which shut off a considerable tract of the workings charged with firedamp, an accumulation of gas having taken place in consequence of leakage through the dams, which were not provided with a relieving pipe,

an explosion ensued. Such of the party as were lightly injured succeeded in finding their way to the Row Pit, but the greater number, being the more seriously burnt or injured, were left to their fate.

The leakage of gas continued to supply fuel for several successive explosions, at lengthened intervals, which were felt at the top of the pit, though half a mile distant. as soon as they seemed to have subsided, the overmen and others went down in search of the unfortunate people, some of whom were dead, others grievously burnt but scarcely had they reached the vicinity of the dams when another unexpected explosion took place, which killed the overman and his two companions, fire having existed all along the dams. Next day, a considerable party penetrated to the spot, and recovered all the bodies but one (that of a boy) which, however was found the day after. Some of the bodies were very little burnt. The coal, being thought to be set on fire, the pits were closed up for about seven weeks and on the workings being examined subsequently by the light of steel mills, to the surprise of the explorers, a pony was found alive.”

Thomas Defty, overman was reported to have been killed along with three others and fourteen burnt, some of which may have not survived.

EAST ARDSLEY. Barnsley, Yorkshire. 30th. June, 1809.

The colliery was the property of Messrs. Lee, Watson and Company. An immense inundation of water suddenly entered the workings from some old workings. ten men were drowned and four of the victims were entombed for three days and nights before they were rescued alive.

KILLINGWORTH. Killingworth, Northumberland. 14th. September, 1809.

The pit exploded with the loss of twelve lives. The explosion did not reach the shaft and the men that died were killed by the effects of afterdamp.

The local burial register lists those below as ‘pitmen. Killed 14th. September.’

Buried 15th. September:-

Robert Hall aged 34 years.

James Davison aged 23 years.

John Mason aged 50 years.

Moses Stewart aged 32 years.

Robert Wheeler aged 18 years.

Buried 16th. September:-

William Scott aged 31 years.

John Gildroy aged 42 years.

John Burrel aged 39 years.

George Gildroy aged 27 years.

James Cook aged 18 years.

BRANDLING MAIN. Jarrow, Durham. 25th. May, 1812.

The colliery was the property of Messrs. John and William Brandling, Henderson and Grace each of whom had a quarter share and was in the Parish of Jarrow and Heworth of which the Reverend J. Hodgson was the Vicar.

The Low Main Seam was reached in 1810 and at the time of the accident, about twenty five acres had been extracted. The High Main Seam had been won in 1811 when it had

been tubbed off by solid cribbing. The colliery was as equipped with the most modern machinery and used the approved materials and practices of the day. It was worked by two shafts, the John Pit which was the working downcast shaft, 603 feet deep and another shaft about 550 yards away which was known as the William Pit. The ventilation was arranged by the air current passing along two bords and down another through the whole of the workings. There was a furnace at the surface of the William Pit which had a lofty chimney. This provided the power for the ventilation.

There had been no accidents at the colliery with the exception of a small explosion which slightly burned three workmen. Candles were allowed in the mine and smoking permitted. The blasting of the roof in the rolleyway bord was in operation and the mine was considered by the workmen '*a model of perfection in the purity of its air and orderly arrangements.*'

The pit exploded with great violence and the loss of ninety two lives and was one of the most appalling explosions that had occurred in the area. The disaster occurred at 7.30 a.m. when the fore shift was being relieved by the back shift and hence, two shifts of men and boys were in the pit.

When the pit was opened the barrow-way dust was burnt to a cinder and was said to have felt '*like frozen snow under the feet.*'

"By twelve o'clock, by means of the John Pit gin, which was worked by men in the absence of the horses, thirty persons, all that survived, were brought into daylight. At a quarter past twelve, nine individuals descended the John Pit, lighting their way by steel mills, as the firedamp would have instantly ignited at candles but finding themselves unable to penetrate the workings any distance on account of meeting chokedamp, they determined to return to the surface. At two o'clock, after five had descended and when two were in the shaft, a second explosion occurred, through much less severe than the first and fortunately not attended by any serious consequences. The men in the shaft felt an unusual heat but the uniformity of their ascent was not affected. The underground threw themselves on their faces and kept a firm hold of a strong prop and experienced no other inconvenience from the blast than its lighting up their legs and posing their bodies in various directions, in the manner that waves heave and toss a buoy at sea.

After one or two ineffectual attempts to enter the workings, the coal evidently been set on fire, it was determined to close up both shafts in order to extinguish it, which was accordingly done on May 27th. The recovery of the bodies of the unfortunate victims did not begin until 8th. July, the operation being affected by the light of steel mills. On September 19th, the pit was visited by candlelight, which had not been used in it for 117 days. The furnace was re-lighted the same day."

A contemporary account of the disaster has survived in a pamphlet of '*The Liverpool Religious Tract Society*', entitled, '*Narrative of a Dreadful Occurrence at Felling Colliery (Nr. Durham) 25th. May, 1812.*'

"Felling is situated about a mile and half from Gateshead in the county of Durham. It contains several seams of coal. The present colliery is in the seam called the Lower Main. There are two shafts at the pit. One is called the John pit and is situated on the north side of the Sunderland Road, between Felling Hall and the Toll Bar. It was about 200 yards deep. it is used for drawing up coal by means of a fire engine and is furnished with a whim worked by horses, which is useful when the fire engine is unemployed. The other shaft is called the William Pit. it is 350 yards from the John Pit and about 230 yards deep.

The mine was considered by the workmen as a model of perfection in the purity of its air and orderly arrangements. The concern wore the features of the greatest prosperity and, except for two other there workmen being slightly burned, no accident had before occurred. Two shifts or sets of men were employed. twenty five acres of coal having been got. The establishment under the ground consisted of about 128 persons.

The subterraneous fire broke forth with two heavy discharges from the John Pit which were almost instantly followed by one from the William Pit. a slight trembling as if from an earthquake was felt for about half a mile round the workings and the noise of the explosion, though dull, was heard three or four miles distant and much resembled the unsteady fire of infantry. Immense quantities of dust and small coal accompanied these blasts and rose high into the air to form an inverted cone. The heaviest part of the matter ejected, such as corves, pieces of wood and small coal, fell near the pits but the dust, borne away on a strong west wind, fell in a continued shower from the pit to a distance of a mile and a half. In the village of Heworth it caused darkness like that of early twilight and covered the roads so thickly that footsteps of the passengers were strongly imprinted in it. The heads of both the shaft frames were blown off, their sides set on fire and their pulleys shattered into pieces but the pulleys of the John Pit gin, being on a crane not within the influence of the blast, were fortunately preserved. The coal dust ejected from the William Pit into the drift or horizontal part of the tube (i.e. the passage between the pit and the chimney stalk) was about three inches thick and soon burnt to a light cinder.

As soon as the explosion was heard, the wives and children of the men ran to the working pit. Wildness and terror were pictured on every countenance. The crowds from all sides collected to the number of several thousand, some crying out for a husband, a parent or a son and all deeply afflicted with a mixture of grief and horror.

The machine being rendered useless by the eruption, the rope of a gin was sent down the pit with all expedition. A number of men seemed to supply strength proportionate to the urgency of the occasion, put their shoulders to the shaft of the gin and wrought it with astonishing expedition. By twelve o'clock, thirty two persons, all that survived of this dreadful calamity, were brought up. The dead bodies of two boys, who were miserable scorched and shattered, were also brought put of the pit at this time. Three boys out of the thirty two who escaped alive, died within a few hours of the accident, so that twenty nine persons remained to relate what they had observed of the appearances and effects of the subterraneous thundering. One hundred and twenty one were in the mine when it happened, and eighty seven remained in the workings. Eight persons had come up on different occasions within a short time before the explosion.

They who had their friends restored, hastened with them from the dismal scene and seemed to suffer as much from excess of joy as they lately had done from grief and they who were yet held in doubt concerning the fate of their relations and friends, filled the air with shrieks and howlings, went about wringing their hands and threw their bodied into the most extravagant gestures.

Great apprehension being entertained for the safety of the workmen who remained in the mine, nine persons descended the John Pit, expecting to meet with some of the me alive but their progress towards the place where the men had been working, was very soon stopped by the prevalence of choak damp. Firedamp will take fire at a candle, in choak one will not burn at all. In order to prevent the former steel mills were used to give light by turning a thin cylinder of steel against a piece of flint but on coming into choak damp, the sparks fell like dark drops of blood so that the mill became useless and breathing extremely difficult. The probability of their getting to those they were in search for, or finding any of them alive in case they should reach them, was now despaired of. The certainty of the mine being on fire and the probability of a second explosion burying them in its ruins, rendered the case altogether hopeless.

At two o'clock five persons who had gone down having ascended, two being in the shaft coming up and the other two at the bottom, another explosion, much less severe than the first, excited more frightful expressions of grief amongst the relations of the persons still in the mine.

As each party came up, he was surrounded by a group of anxious enquirers. Their reports were equally hopeless and their account of the impure state of the mine was corroborated by the second explosion, that, for the present, their assertions appeared to obtain credit. But this was only a momentary impression. It was recollected that persons had survived similar accidents and when the mine was opened, had been found alive. That in a pit near Byker, three had subsisted on horse beans and candles for forty days. Persons not wanting to excite a disbelief in the accounts given by the persons had explored the mine, it was suggested that the relations of the sufferers, that they might be induced by bribery or want of courage to magnify the danger and represent the reaching of the bodies as impossible. Thus the grief of the neighbourhood began to assume an aspect not only too gloomy but irritable. The proposition to endeavour to extinguish the fire excluding the air from the mine was received with cries of '*murder*' and with determination to oppose them proceeding.

Many of the widows and other relatives of the sufferers continued about the mouth of the John Pit during the whole night, hoping to hear the voice of a husband, a son or a brother calling for assistance.

On the following day, and immense concourse of colliers assembled from various other collieries. they were profuse in reproaching the persons concerned in the mine with want of exertions to recover the men, each one having some example of successful attempts in cases of this kind to relate, and all professing their readiness to assist but with their profession, none were found that would enter the mine. The mixture of conceits and prejudices common with workmen whose experience has only furnished them with a partial knowledge of the nature and peculiarities of their profession, without being acquainted with the connection between causes and effects, appeared to be the ground for their reasonings and assertions. As soon as those who led the outcry could be induced to listen patiently to the relation of the appearances attending this accident and the assigned reasons for concluding that the mine was on fire and that the persons in it dead, they seemed to allow that to reach the bodies of the sufferers till the fire should be extinguished was practicable.

The proprietors of the mine gave the strongest assurances to the crowd, that if any project could be framed for the recovery of the men, no expense should be spared in expecting it and if any person could be found who was willing to enter the mine, every facility and help should be afforded him but as they were assured by several of the most eminent viewers in the neighbourhood that the workings of the mine were in an unapproachable state and that any further attempt to explore it would hold out in reward for the undertaking, they would not be an accessory to any man's death by persuasion of a bribe.

On the 27th. of May, at the clamorous solicitation of the people, two persons again descended the John pit, in order to ascertain the state of the air in the workings. Immediately under the shaft they found a mangled horse in which they supposed they perceived signs of life but they had advanced about six or eight yards before the sparks of the flint were extinguished in the choak damp and the men who played the mill began to show the effects of the poison by faltering in his steps. The other therefore laid hold of him and supported him to the shaft. As the baneful vapours had now taken possession of the whole of the mine and they found it difficult to breath, even in the course of the

atmospheric air, they immediately ascended but the afflicted creatures to whom they told their tale, still clinging to hope, disbelieved their report.

Wishful therefore, to give as ample satisfaction as possible to the unhappy women, two other persons again went down. At thirty fathoms from the bottom, they found the air exceedingly warm. To exist without apoplectic symptoms for more than a few yards round the bottom of the shaft was found impossible and even there, the air was so contaminated as to be unfit for breathing. When they ascended, their clothes emitted a smell somewhat resembling the waters of Gilsand and Harrowgate but more practically allied to that of the turpentine distilled from coal tar.

The report of these last adventures partially succeeded in convincing the people that there was no probability of any sign of their friends being found alive. Some, indeed went away silent but not satisfied. Others, with pitiable importunity besought that measures to recover their friends might even yet be adopted and persevered in and many, as if in grief and rage had some necessary connection, went away loading the conductors of the mine with execrations and threatening revenge. Some were even heard to say, that they could have borne their loss with fortitude, had none of the workmen survived the calamity. They could have been consoled if all their neighbours had been rendered as miserable and destitute as themselves.

For such a multitude, unanimity of sentiment could not be expected. No scheme of proceedings could be invented to meet with the approbation of the men all. In the evening of this day it was therefore resolved to exclude the air from then entering the workings in order to extinguish the fire which the explosion had kindled in the mine and of which the smoke ascending the William Pit was a sure indication. Measures for effecting it were accordingly taken and after experiencing various disappointments from sundry accidents, they ultimately succeeded.

When the preparations were being made for the reopening of the mine, many idle tales circulated through the country concerning several of the men finding their way to the shafts and being recovered. Their number was circumstantially told, how they subsisted on candles, pats and beans, how they heard the persons who visited the mine on the day following the accident and the Wednesday following but were too feeble to speak sufficiently loud to make themselves heard. Some conjurer to, it is said, had set spells and divinations to work and penetrated the whole secrets of the mine. It was reported he had discovered one famishing group receiving drops of water from the roof of the mine, another eating their shoes and clothes and other such tales of misery. These inventions were carefully related to the widows and answered the purpose of every day harrowing up their sorrows afresh. Indeed, it seemed the chief employment of some to make a kind of insane sport of their own and their neighbour's calamity.

On the morning appointed for the entering of the workings, (the mine having been previously opened) the distress of the neighbourhood was again renewed at an early hour. a great concourse of people collected, some out of curiosity, some to stir up revenge and aggravate the sorrows of relatives of the sufferers by calumnies and reproaches, published for the sole purpose of mischief but the greater part came with broken hearts and streaming eyes in expectation of seeing a father, a husband or son, brought out of the horrible pit.

As the weather was warm, and it was desirable that as much air as possible might pass down the shaft, constables were placed at proper distances to keep off the crowd. Two surgeons were also in attendance in case of accidents.

At six o'clock in the morning eight persons descended the William Pit and began to explore the workings. as a current of water had been constantly diverted down this shaft for the space of ten hours, the air was found to be perfectly cool and wholesome. Light was now

procured from steel mills. As the explosions had occasioned several falls of large masses of stone from the roof, the removing of them caused considerable delay. They found, however, one of the bodies.

When this corpse was to be lifted into a coffin, the men stood over it in speechless horror. They imagined it was in so putrid a state, that it would fall asunder by lifting. at length they encouraged each other to begin and after several hesitations and resolutions, they laid it in a coffin which was conveyed to the shaft in a bier made for the purpose and drawn to the bank in a net made of strong cords.

The shifts of men employed in this doleful and unwholesome work, were generally about eight in number. They were four hours in and eight hours out of the mine, each individual therefore wrought two shifts every twenty four hours.

When the first of the men came up at ten o'clock, a message was sent for a number of coffins to be in readiness at the point. These, to the number of ninety two (a most gloomy sight) being at the joiners shop, piled in a heap, had to pass by the village of Low Felling. as soon as the cart load of them was seen, the shrieks of the women, who hitherto continued in their houses but now began to assemble about their doors, came on the breeze in slow fitful gusts which presaged a scene of much distress and confusion being soon exhibited near the pit but happily by preventing to them the shocking appearance of a body that had been found, and the ill effects on their own bodies and minds likely to ensue from sufferings themselves, to be hurried away by such violent convulsions of grief, they either returned to their own houses or continued in silence in the neighbourhood of the pit.

Every family had made provision for the entertainment of their neighbours on the day the bodies of their friends were received and it had been generally given out that they intended to take the bodies to their own houses but Dr. Ramsey, having given his opinion that if such a proceeding, if carried into effect, might spread a putrid fever through the neighbourhood, and the first body when exposed to observation having a most horrid and corrupt appearance, they readily agreed to have them interred immediately after they were found. permission, therefore, was given to let the hearse, on its way to the chapel yard, pass by the door of the deceased.

From 8th. July to the 19th. September, the heart rending scene of mothers and widows examining the putrid bodies of their sons and husbands, for marks by which to identify them, was almost daily renewed but very few of them were known by any personal mark. They were too much mangled and scorched to retain any of their features. Their clothes, tobacco boxes, shoes and the like were therefore the only marks by which they could be recognised. all the bodies except one were found.

Except four, whoever buried in single graves, the remains were interred in Heworth Chapel yard in a trench side by side, two coffins deep with a partition of brick and lime between every four coffins. Those entered a unknown in the burial register have had their names added to them since the search was discontinued."

The Reverend Hodgson offered consolation to the relatives of the victims and conducted the burial services. being close to the pitmen and their families, he knew the dangers of coal mining, The papers of the time were reluctant to print accounts of colliery disasters and Hodgson, against the feelings of the coal owners, set out to make the Felling Disaster a widely known as possible with the hope of getting expert help in preventing similar disasters. He wrote for many weeks on the *'Newcastle Courant'* with an account of the disaster and plans to show how the mine was ventilated. This was published on 4th January, 1813 and was widely circulated. Unknown to Hodgson it was printed in *'Dr. Thompson's Annals of Philosophy'* and read by Mr. J.J. Wilkinson, a barrister of the Temple who, during his long vacation in 1813, he went to the north of England and consulted with his friends on the matter of safety in mines.

Those who lost their lives were:-

P Salt
 John Knox buried May 27 trapper
 Robert Harrison waggon driver
 John Harrison
 George Ridley
 Robert Hutchinson
 Thomas Robson buried July 8 putter
 John Pearson [m] shifter
 Philip Allan
 Geo. Bainbridge, unknown
 Isaac Greener buried July 9 hewer
 James Craigs buried July 13
 Edward Bell buried July 15 horse-keeper
 Ralph Harrison [m]
 Matthew Brown [m] buried July 16
 James Kay
 George Bell
 Thomas Richardson
 Henry Haswell
 Joseph Anderson
 Joseph Pringle
 Dobson, unknown a boy
 George Pearson
 Robert Hall Gregory
 Galley Benjamin Thompson buried July 17 craneman
 George Mitcheson
 Matthew Pringle
 Nicholas Urwin [m] braking inclined plane
 John Wilson [m]
 Thomas Young [m]
 John Jacques, unknown
 Edward Pearson
 William Richardson
 Christopher Culley
 William Boutland crane on-setter
 Jacob Allan Isaac Greener [m]
 Thos. Bainbridge, unknown buried July 18
 Matthew Bainbridge John Surtees
 Ralph Hall
 Paul Fletcher
 William Galley
 John Hunter
 Thomas Bainbridge [m] buried July 22
 John Wood [m]
 Jeremiah Turnbull [m]
 John Haswell [m]
 John Burnitt
 George Culley
 Joseph Wilson [m] July 23
 John Boutland [m]
 George Reay July 24
 William Gardiner
 Thomas Craggs [m]

Thomas Craggs
 John Greener
 Edward Richardson [m]
 Robert Dobson
 William Dixon [m] July 25
 George Robson
 Andrew Allan
 John Thompson [m]
 Thomas Bears [m]
 Charles Wilson
 Michael Gardiner [m]
 James Comby [m]
 Joseph Gordon
 Robert Haswell [m]
 Joseph Wood [m] buried July 27
 John Wilkinson [m]
 John Turnbull [m]
 Matthew Sanderson [m]
 Robert Gordon [m]
 Thomas Gordon
 Christopher Mason [m]
 Robert Gray Leck July 28
 William Jacques [m]
 William Hunter buried July 29 deputy
 Thomas Ridley
 William Sanderson [m] July 30
 George Lawton lamp-keeper
 Michael Hunter
 Edward Haswell buried Aug 1
 Joseph Young buried Aug 3
 George Kay buried Aug 26
 Robert Pearson buried Sept 1
 John Archibald Dobson Sept 19

On 1st. September, 1813, he published proposals for a '*Society for the Prevention of Accidents in Coal Mines*'. The proposals came to the notice of the Bishop of Durham who wrote to the Reverend Dr. Gray who was Rector of Bishopsweirmouth, giving him permission to form such a society. a meeting was held at Sunderland on the 1st. October, 1813 when the Society was instituted and Committee appointed to carry out its objectives. The work of the Committee led to Davy developing his safety lamp.

HARRINGTON MILL PIT. Pensher, Durham. 10th. October, 1812.

The explosion killed four men and twenty four boys.

The local burial registers list the following deaths:-

Robert Wilson aged 14 years.
 William Wilson aged 19 years.
 Robert Sheards aged 7 years.
 John Armstrong aged 28 years.
 John Hutchinson aged 20 years.
 William Hutchinson aged 17 years.
 Andrew Stringer aged 17 years.
 George Carr.
 Daniel Anderson aged 19 years.

John Smith aged 15 years.
 Joseph Foster aged 16 years.
 John Bewick aged 8 years.
 James Cook aged 8 years.
 John Barnes aged 17 years.
 Edward Norton aged 25 years.
 Thomas Welsh aged 15 years.
 William Barnes aged 15 years.
 Edward Welsh aged 8 years.
 Thomas Crosby aged 67 years.
 Robert Gordon aged 61 years.
 Johnson Welsh aged 8 years.
 Ralph Lewis aged 12 years.

COLLINGWOOD MAIN. Burdon Main. Chirton, Durham. 17th. July, 1813.

The colliery was in the Village of Chirton to the west of South Shields and was the property of Messrs. Bells, Robinson and Company. Coal had been worked there since the seventeenth century and the old shafts were reopened in 1814. The Old Pit near the banks of the Tyne had not been used for some time. The shaft went through the coal measures and the first seam that was found was the High Main coal at 50 fathoms. This was about six feet thick but, at the time of the disaster, had been worked out. About 28 yards lower was the Metal Coal Seam but this was found to be unworkable. The next seam was the yard Coal, seven feet thick but the upper part of this was not worked. Eleven fathoms lower was the Five Quarter Coal which was not of good quality and below that was the Low Main seam which was the seam that was being worked and was of excellent quality. The coal was drawn from the 'A' Pit and the West Chirton Pit. The latter was about 110 fathoms deep and the former was 120 fathoms. The workings in the Low Main seam extended under the Tyne to low water mark.

The Old Pit and the Hopewell shafts were a considerable distance to the north and these were the upcast shaft with furnaces which consumed a caldron of coal per day. the mine was said to be 'clean'. Hair states, "*The apparent cleanliness of the mine was inferred from the appearance of the men when they are drawn up from work.*" The coal was brought to the surface by a 30 h.p engine and taken to the 'spouts' at the North Shields Railway, the greater part of which was an inclined plane.

The papers of day recorded that Mr. Hope, one of viewers, Mr. Wild the overman and two young men by the name of Richardson were among those who were killed. The Richardsons had no parents and supported their grandmother who was reported to be in her hundred and second years.

The explosion, which Hair says was in 1815 and Galloway the above date, killed eight workmen and injured two others. The ventilation was obstructed by a creep and candles were in use in the mine. The overman, deputies and others had gone down to secure some timber, iron and other materials which were likely to be lost because of the creep and the gas fired at their lights. There had been no reported accidents at the mine before.

A local Buril Register lists the following names:-
 William Hope of North Shields aged 45 years.
 Ralph Hope of North Shields aged 24 years.
 Joseph Campbell of North Shields aged 26 years.
 Ralph Wile of North Shields aged 41 years.
 George Richardson of North Shields aged 18 years.

William Richardson of North Shields aged 16 years.

Robert Clark of North Shields aged 18 years.

Thomas Miller of North Shields aged 16 years.

FATFIELD. Hall Pit. Chester-le-Street, Durham. 28th. September, 1813.

The explosion at the colliery killed thirty men and boys. A stone falling from the roof was thought to have carried firedamp into the workings and was ignited at the miner's candles.

Those who died were:-

John Curry of Fatfield aged 13 years.

George Oliver of Fatfield aged 51 years.

Johnson Oliver of Fatfield aged 13 years.

Robert Proud of Chartershaugh aged 15 years.

William Proud of Chartershaugh aged 13 years.

Thomas Proud of Chartershaugh aged 11 years.

George Curry of Chartershaugh aged 16 years.

John Siddle of Fatfield aged 22 years.

George Siddle of Fatfield aged 12 years.

Matthew Pearson of Chartershaugh aged 16 years.

Robert Swinhoe of Fatfield aged 40 years.

William Swinhoe of Fatfield aged 40 years.

Wilkinson George Swinhoe of Fatfield aged 15 years.

Thomas Swinhoe of Fatfield aged 15 years.

Thomas Swinhoe of Fatfield aged 15 years.

Edward Soulsby of Chartershaugh aged 14 years.

Joseph Southeran of Fatfield aged 24 years.

Charles Dixon of Fatfield aged 24 years.

John Dixon of Fatfield aged 20 years.

Robert Turnbull Dixon of Fatfield aged 13 years.

Edward Soulsby of Chartershaugh aged 7 years.

William Noble of Fatfield aged 7 years.

George Thornton of Fatfield aged 15 years.

George Pattison of Fatfield aged 16 years.

George Lishman of Fatfield aged 20 years.

John Lishman of Fatfield aged 13 years.

Nicholas Watson of Fatfield aged 13 years.

Michael Usher of Fatfield aged 23 years.

Matthew Soulsby of Chartershaugh aged 9 years.

FELLING. Felling, Durham. 24th. December, 1813.

The explosion killed twenty three, nine men and thirteen boys and injured about twenty more. Firedamp was supposed to have ignited at the crane lamp. Holmes says-

“In no instance has a stronger proof occurred of the inadequate security afforded by ventilation than in this mine. It was reported to be more perfectly ventilated than any other.”

The accident happened at half past one in the morning, when the men were going to work. Ten minutes later and a greater number would have been down the pit. It was reported that Mr. Haswell, the overman was ‘much shattered’. Some said his head was blown off or nearly so and he was thrown out of the pit mouth.

Several of the morning shift were standing at the pit mouth when the accident occurred. Those that had just gone down were among those who took the full force of the blast.

By early the following day, twenty of the bodies had been found, six of whom were buried in Heworth Chapel Yard on Saturday and ten on Sunday. Among the victims were the two overmen, Mr. William Haswell and Mr. Thomas Morrows and two of the deputies Mr. Robert Stoves and Mr. Martin Greener. Some of the men have left large families.

HEBBURN. Hebburn, Durham. 12th. August, 1814.

The explosion killed the underviewer and all his assistants who were in the pit at the time, a total of eleven persons. Elias Mould, the underviewer and the men went in to do the work when the pit fired and all were burnt to death. The men were changing the direction of the air current and it was thought that they had not left enough time for the firedamp to clear away. Evidence given to the Select Committee by John Buddle, who was the head viewer at the mine, said that there were no lamps in the pit and it was thought safe for the men to work with candles.

Most of the victims were buried at Jarrow St. Paul's. They were:-

John Dixon aged 38 years.
 John Rutledge aged 51 years.
 John Johnson aged 29 years.
 Edward Marshall aged 25 years.
 Richard Defty aged 35 years.
 Elias Mould aged 37 years.
 Robert Hepplewhite age 28 years.
 George Smith.
 Peter Pratt aged 24 years.
 Robert Thackwrayferry aged 38 years.

Thomas Johnson buried at Wallsend.

HEATON. Newcastle-on-Tyne, Durham. 3rd. May, 1815.

In the seventeenth century the collieries were drained by chain pumps which were worked by water-wheels but when water could not be had they were driven by horses but not with and great success on account of the cost. It was suggested that wind power could be used which was acted on and there are records of wind power driving the pumps.

The mangers of the mine knew that they were approaching an old waste which dated from 1745. Boreholes were made and plugged when water came from them but the men probably became over confident. The exact cause of the accident was never established but the water came in wither through a fault in the rock combined with some degree of negligence. Suddenly the wall of coal shattered an few of those in the pit had time to escape. There was only one shaft and the working descended at a gradient of 1 in 10. One or two men who were near the shaft did managed to escape but not before the water was chest high. The pit was flooded to a depth of many fathoms and all known exits were sealed.

The Liverpool Mercury of the 16th. June said-

"All hopes of saving any of the poor workmen in Heaton Colliery must now been abandoned for the water drawn by the engines for these last few days has emitted an offensive and putrid smell, which leaves no doubt of the state of the bodies underground. If any circumstances can add to the agonised feelings of the poor widows and children,

or augment the horrors of their situation, it is the water unavoidably flows past many house they now inhabit at the colliery.”

Galloway states that there were seventy five victims but Mathias Dunn, who was a young viewer, examined the mine after the disaster wrote in 1848 that there were about ninety victims.

George Johnson viewer at Heaton Colliery, in evidence to the Select Committee, was asked if he thought that reasonable precautions had been taken. He replied-
 “I was not the viewer of the colliery at that time and I presume that the gentlemen who had the direction took every precaution that his experience would suggest to him and the peculiarity of the situation required. The plans of old workings are not generally perfect but in proceeding in any direction where there is doubt, or indeed whether there is doubt or not, the viewer directs exploring drifts to progress for a certain distance in advance of the main body of the workings, and if a worked out mine lies in that direction, holes are made in that drift to ascertain the old waste and thus prevent any accident occurring by coming suddenly on it.”

In evidence to the Committee, John Buddle said that the water came from an old waste that had been abandoned in 1745 and a barrier of coal had been left. Boreholes were made and plugged and Buddle thought there was enough of a barrier to hold back 30 fathoms pressure of water. the coal that was left was ellipse shaped and the break through occurred at the place of the last tapping where there was a fissure in the rock of which Buddle and the others were not aware. It was thought that the accident could not have been avoided.

Those who lost their lives were:-

Buried at Long Benton, Northumberland.

Matthew Gibson aged 22 years.

Edward Gibson aged 20 years.

Nicholas Gibson aged 18 years.

Ralph Widdrington jnr. aged 28 years.

Shipleigh Mitchinson aged 42 years.

Ralph Widdrington snr. aged 56 years.

Henry Widdrington aged 20 years.

Buried at Wallsend.

Henry Dixon aged 40 years.

Arthur Dixon snr. aged 64 years.

Robert Richardson aged 64 years.

George Laws aged 50 years.

Lancelot Nicholson aged 29 years.

Edward Gibson aged 82 years.

Robert Campbell aged 31 years.

Jasper Gardner aged 24 years.

William Dixon aged 21 years.

William Green.

Robert English aged 36 years.

Andrew Brayson aged 40 years.

William Thompson aged 21 years.

James Dodds snr. 40 years.

David Urwin aged 48 years.

George Steel aged 25 years.

Arthur Dixon jnr. aged 26 years.

John Gordon aged 19 years.

Richard Gibson aged 45 years.
 William Renwick aged 23 years.
 John Readhead aged 22 years.
 William Scott aged 21 years.
 John Newbill aged 37 years.
 John Renwick aged 25 years.
 George Dawson aged 36 years.
 George Thew aged 19 years.
 William Thew aged 19 years.
 Thomas Gardner aged 17 years.
 William Gardner aged 15 years.
 Thomas Lumsden aged 18 years.
 Ralph Hall aged 15 years.
 Robert Steel aged 25 years.
 Charles Gardiner aged 20 years.
 James Dodd jnr. aged 16 years.
 William King aged 16 years.
 John Frame aged 21 years.
 Walter Stokoe jnr. aged 17 years.
 Jacob Curtis aged 15 years.
 Thomas Thompson aged 16 years.
 Thomas Gordon aged 15 years.
 Nicholas Miller aged 15 years.
 Christopher Grey aged 14 years.
 John Watson aged 20 years.
 Robert Southern aged 14 years.
 Thomas Gray aged 12 years.
 Michael Wilson aged 15 years.
 John Pratt aged 10 years.
 William Elliott aged 7 years.
 Thomas Dodd aged 7 years.
 William Graham jnr. aged 7 years.
 Thomas Watson aged 10 years.
 John Watson aged 12 years.
 John Gibson aged 31 years.
 Walter Stokoe snr. aged 42 years.
 John Thew aged 50 years.
 John Robinson.
 William Hall aged 21 years.
 Simon Dodds aged 36 years.
 Edward Robson aged 34 years.
 Matthew Johnson aged 28 years.
 John Reay aged 26 years.
 William Southern aged 25 years.
 Thomas Miller aged 16 years.
 Anthony Southern aged 18 years

HEATON MAIN Newcastle-on-Tyne, Durham, May 3rd, 1815,

A LETTER FROM THE DEAD TO THE LIVING OR THE COLLIER BOY AND HIS
 MOTHER BEING AN ACCOUNT OF THE DREADFUL INUNDATION OF HEATON
 COLLIERY, ON MAY 3RD, 1815, BY WHICH FORTY-ONE MEN AND THIRTY-FOUR
 BOYS LOST THEIR LIVES.

" He being dead, yet speaketh.'-HEB. xi. 4.

PRINTED AT THE OFFICE OF THE GREAT NORTHERN ADVERTISER, 89, SIDE,
AND SOLD BY ALL THE BOOKSELLERS. 1841.

MAY 3rd, 1815, a dreadful accident took place in Heaton Main Colliery, near Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The workings of the colliery at this time were in the Main coal seam, at a very great depth, having a considerable dip, or inclination, from one side to the other, the shafts being on the lower side. This seam had formerly been wrought as a colliery, under the name of Heaton Banks, by shafts distinct from the present workings, and which shafts, when the colliery was given up, were covered over with planks and earth. In the course of time these old workings had become entirely filled with water, which, at about half-past four o'clock on the morning of the above day (Wednesday) broke through the coal in the north-west part of the present colliery, at a point where the strata are disturbed by a dyke, and inundated the workings. Some of the men who were working near the spot where the water forced its entrance, ran immediately to the shaft, and happily escaped out of the pit. On their way they met Mr. Miller, the underviewer, and informed him of what had happened, when he ran to give the alarm to the other men, who were working in the higher part of the pit, in the hope that they might be able to effect their escape also but this, alas ! was not accomplished. The water rushed in with dreadful rapidity, and flowing naturally to the lower parts of the workings, soon cut off the only means of escape, by closing the bottom of the shaft, in which the water soon rose to the depth of nineteen fathoms.

Exertions were immediately made to reach the spot where the men were supposed to be, from some other workings, but without success, as the shafts of the old workings were choked up by the earth, &c., which covered their mouths, and which, when deprived of the support of the water, having fallen in, dragged after it many trees which had been planted in their vicinity. Attempts were made in front of Heaton Hall to endeavour to reach the old workings, through a shaft which had not fallen in but these, also, were unavailing, on account of the shaft being filled with foul air. Three large engines (one of one hundred and thirty horse power) were instantly employed in endeavouring to draw the water from the pit, but without the desired effect, as the water in the shaft, which was at first nineteen fathoms in depth, subsequently gained upon them, from which it appeared that the water was coming out of some old waste into the pit. During Thursday night the water gained upon the engines, notwithstanding they discharged one thousand two hundred gallons per minute and when the lowest shaft was plumbed early on the Friday morning, it was found to be thirty-three fathoms.

By this catastrophe seventy-five persons (forty-one men and thirty-four boys) lost their lives, together with the whole stock of horses, which were down at the time. In the distance, between the back of Heaton and Benton Bridge, seven of the shafts belonging to the workings of an old colliery on Heaton Banks fell in, presenting frightful chasms, of many of these, the surface exhibited not the least vestige, nor was the existence of them known in the neighbourhood.

The old colliery is said to have been discontinued on account of the influx of water, which was so great, that seven engines, of the construction of that day, could not get the better of it. There is a tradition that the first steam engine used in this part of the country was at, or near Heaton, and most probably it was on the colliery, (The engineer was the reputed son of a Swedish nobleman, who taught Mathematics at Newcastle) in the year 1714. From various difficulties, the bodies of these unfortunate men were not arrived at until upwards of nine months from the time of the accident. The sufferers who thus found a

living grave, left twenty-four widows and seventy-seven orphans, besides Mrs. Miller and her eight children, to deplore their untimely fate.

On the 6th of January, 1816, the first human body of the sufferers was brought to bank, in a state of great decay but ascertained by the neckcloth to be that of William Scott, between seventy and eighty years of age, who attended one of the furnaces. Of a knife, which the deceased had in his pocket, the haft only (of bone) was entire, the blade being entirely corroded by the mixtures of the pyrites in the mire with water. His watch was also nearly destroyed by the same cause. It may, however, afford some speculation to the curious, that the articles of linen on the deceased were quite fresh and uninjured, but those of woollen fabric were entirely destroyed. In a few weeks afterwards, the remains of the rest of these unfortunate persons were found in different situations, in the workings of the pit.

There was one part of the workings very much on the rise, where several men and boys had been employed at the time of the inundation. At a crane adjoining the place, there were ten human bodies, and the carcasses of two horses found. The water had never risen so high as the above workings, by eighty or a hundred yards. On proceeding up the rolley-way to within about fifty yards of the crane, there were found two bodies lying near each other and every ten or fifteen yards other. two bodies, from which it was conjectured, that these men had gone, by two at a time, to the tail of the water and their strength failing them through suffocation, they had fallen down and died.

Some bodies were also found among the water in the crane hole and in a nail-chest was discovered the body of one of the lesser boys. Most of the bodies were found in a lying posture but some were found sitting, particularly the body of George Dawson, which was sitting with the arms folded, resting his back against a brick stopping and his features were so entire, that he was recognized at five or six yards distance. Diligent search was made to discover any writing with chalk upon the trap-doors or brattices, but nothing of the kind was found, with the exception of a tin candle-box, in the pocket of one of the boys, William Thew, on which was scratched a very touching letter to his widowed mother, an account of which is contained in the subjoined narrative or memoir.

On the 29th of February, 1816, thirty-nine of the bodies, forming a melancholy procession, were interred in trenches in the south-east corner of Wallsend Church.

MEMOIR OF WILLIAM THEW, ONE OF THE SUFFERERS IN THE INUNDATION OF HEATON COLLIERY, 1815.

WILLIAM THEW was the second son of John and Elizabeth Thew, and was seventeen years of age at the time of the catastrophe. His father, and an elder brother, aged twenty, named George, perished with him. A younger brother, John, was one of those who, on the alarm of the bursting in of the water being made, escaped with others by the shaft. William and John were scholars in the Byker Sunday School at the time, and were steady and well-disposed boys. George and William met in class among the Wesleyan Methodists at the time and the latter also attended Mr. Swallow's evening school at Catterick Buildings, where he learnt to write and cypher but neither his father or eldest brother could write. His mother relates that her sons were very affectionate and steady that after returning from their work, and when cleaned, and refreshed by their meals, they were in the habit of reading the Bible to her and never retired to rest without prayer. Many pleasing anecdotes are related by their mother, particularly of William who seems to have been her favourite son. On one occasion he said to her, " Mother, when I'm a man I'll work hard for you, and keep you like a lady" and the mother observes that his wishes and intentions have been in a manner realized in the support she has received through the letter he wrote to her in the pit. Imagination cannot portray the scene that would take place after the breaking in of the water, and when all hope of escape was cut off. To contemplate seventy-five human beings all at once incarcerated in a living tomb,

with the appalling prospect of a lingering, though certain death. They had not died from hunger, as they had killed one of the horses and had cut slices off its hind quarter, some of which were found in the caps and wallets of the men, unconsumed. They had likewise an abundant supply of spring water. The exhaustion of the atmospheric air by the influx of water bringing with it foul air, was no doubt the cause of death, probably in a day or two at the most. Many of the men, and some of the boys, were pious, and were members of the Methodist Society, and most of the boys attended the adjoining Sunday Schools. It is probable that the pious men would employ their time in exhorting those who were irreligious to repentance and faith in Christ and however simple these addresses may have been, they were no doubt listened to with intense interest and attention. Prayer and even singing were also offered up. A striking distinction appeared in the positions and manner of those who were known to be wicked men from those who feared God and while the former seemed to have struggled hard in death, the latter appeared to have sweetly fallen asleep in Christ Jesus! The person spoken of in the former narrative, George Dawson, was an instance among others of the apparent composure with which he met the last enemy. A placid smile rested upon his countenance and even the arms had not altered their position, being folded across his breast, after remaining nine months under ground.

After the bodies were confined, the relatives were permitted to go down the pit for the purpose of recognizing their husbands or children and Elizabeth Thew, the widow, was among the foremost. She readily recognized William's body by his fine auburn hair but what must have been her transported, yet agonized feelings, when in one of his pockets was found his tin candle-box, on which, in the darkness of the suffocating pit, or only with the dim light of his Davy lamp, the dear boy had, with a nail, engraved on his candle-box, the following touching and consolatory epistle:

" Fret not, dear mother, for we were singing while we had time, and praising God. Mother, follow God more than ever I did" and then on the other side, which, it is supposed, must have been dictated by his father, as it bears his signature, though he could not write : " If Johnny is saved, be a good lad to God, and thy mother. JOHN THEW."

(The annexed is a fac-simile of the box and writing.)

This letter, though short, is full of meaning and to use the language of the Apostle Paul, it may be with truth and propriety said, " He, though dead, yet speaketh." It has cheered the widow's heart in her solitary and destitute condition and the precious relic is treasured with miser care. What could be more consolatory to his mother than the fact that her husband and sons were " singing and praising God," even in the prospect of certain and painful death. Ah ! what meaning is there in the words " while we had time- or while the vital air enabled them to breathe and live. In this we may observe that the same religion which enabled Paul and Silas to sing Psalms in the dungeon at Philippi, enabled these poor colliers to praise God under the most awful and appalling circumstances. Then, again, his humble acknowledgment that he had not served God as he ought, in his exhortation to his mother, "Mother, follow God more than ever I did" a better test of his sincerity than any confident assertions relative to his religious state. Lastly, the anxiety of the father for the comfort of his wife in the simple expression to his son Johnny, that, if spared, he was to be " a good lad to God and his mother." Perhaps, it maybe asserted without the fear of contradiction, that in the whole of ecclesiastical history, or in the deaths of even martyrs, nothing more truly pathetic is recorded and it is one among the many pleasing instances of the blessed effects of Sunday School instruction in the conversion and happy deaths of those who have enjoyed their privileges. May not some useful lessons be drawn from the above narrative. Here were seventy-five immortal beings in health and strength suddenly hurried into eternity, and, it is to be feared, many unprepared for the event. Colliers, above all other men, are exposed to the most imminent danger and emphatically, in the " midst of life are in death." They know not each morning as they go to their work, what the day may bring forth whether they shall

be engulfed in water, or burnt in the flame. How little did these seventy-five persons think that when they left their homes on the preceding day, that they were going to their own funerals, and would be brought home in their coffins! And yet, alas! how careless the most of men so employed are. How soon are the most calamitous events forgotten and how madly do many go on in a course of daring rebellion against God. What would these unhappy men have given for a few days, or even hours, to have sought salvation through the blood of Christ but how soon and how awfully were they summoned to meet their God. May those who peruse this account be led to "seek the Lord while He may be found, and to call upon him while He is near- and may all who are employed in such hazardous occupations, be led to see the need of being prepared for death, have their lamps burning, waiting for the coming of the Bridegroom that they may enter into the marriage, and sit down with their Lord.

The history of this candle-box is remarkable and the circumstances connected with it shew that the Lord can accomplish his object, and his people realize the accomplishment of his promises in a way that appears inscrutable to man's short-sighted vision. Mrs. Thew, the widow, has had much affliction in her family. Another son, named Thomas, was, three years after the above calamity, killed by the rolleys in another pit. Liberal subscriptions were made for the survivors, of which Mrs. Thew partook for a few years but she has had to depend on her own and her children's labour for a long period for her support. A few years after the accident, the Rev. Leigh Richmond, being on a Bible tour to the north, heard of the story of Mrs. Thew's son having written to her when incarcerated in the pit and through the medium of Mr. John Reay, of Wallsend colliery, he got the loan of the box, under the promise, that should he obtain any contributions in the course of his itinerant labours in the Bible cause, he would transmit the amount to Mrs. Thew. Mr. Richmond was in the habit of relating the anecdote, and of exhibiting the box. The remarkable facts of the case excited much interest, and the sum of £16. 10s. was remitted at various times, through the medium of Mr. Batson's family of Newcastle.

At the death of Mr. Richmond, Mrs. Thew wished to repossess herself of the box, and Mr. D. H. Wilson, of Newcastle, kindly undertook to write to the executors of the rev. gentleman. A search was forthwith made among Mr. R.'s papers, and the box was found, and subsequently restored to the widow. About the year 1834 Mr. J. R. Wilson, the travelling agent of the Sunday School Union of London, obtained the loan of the box, under a similar understanding and promise as Mr. Richmond had got it. In his public meetings in various parts of the kingdom, Mr. W. related the story and exhibited the box, which excited much interest, and called forth the spontaneous contributions of the people. In many places the particulars of the catastrophe were printed on a sheet, with a copy of the letter, and given to those who contributed even the smallest sum. In the course of three years Mr. Wilson received contributions to the amount of £115. 7s. 3d., by which he has been enabled to allow Mrs. Thew five shillings per week, and the amount of rent, about £2 per year, for the last seven years, the balance due to her having been deposited in the Newcastle Savings' Bank in the year 1837. In the latter end of 1840 the whole of the fund was exhausted, when her case was laid before the guardians of the Gateshead Union, who have since allowed her two shillings per week. This sum has been found inadequate to support her, as she is in her sixty-eighth years and unable to work. She at present rents an attic at Byker, for the rent of which she is in arrear. The present publication has therefore been got up, from the sale of which, it is hoped, some aid may be afforded to her in her declining years, to enable her to pay her rent and it is hoped that the benevolent public will not grudge the charge made for the pamphlet, though it may be more than the value of the book. Any contribution will also be thankfully received by any of the booksellers who vend the publication.

NEWBOTTLE. Success Pit. Newbottle, Durham. 2nd. June, 1815.

The colliery was the property of Messrs. Nesham and Company. The explosion was very violent and out of the seventy two people in the pit, fifty seven were killed and the remaining fifteen severely burned. The flame did not go up the shaft but a large column of dust indicted to those at the surface that there had been an underground explosion but a dense pillar of smoke came up the shaft and despite frantic efforts, only fifteen were brought to the surface alive but they soon died from their injuries. It was supposed to have been caused by breaking into old workings. All the bodies were recovered by the 4th.

The Liverpool Mercury commented-

“The frequent occurrence of these awful and tremendous accidents, whereby so many unfortunate individuals are left in a state of distress without any provision except the melancholy pittance of parochial allowance, and calls loudly for the establishment of a permanent and respectable fund such as before has been suggested, and it is sincerely hoped that the magnitude of the late losses may promise so desirable and humane an object.”

SHERIFF HILL. Isabella Pit. Gateshead, Durham. 27th. June, 1815.

The colliery was also known as Ellison Main Colliery and was near the summit of Gateshead fell about two and three quarter miles from Newcastle. It was leased to Messrs. Lamb and Hutchinson under Cuthbert Ellison of Hebburn Hall. The Isabella Pit was sunk, about 50 years before the disaster . The High Man Seam was at a depth of sixty fathoms.

On the morning of the 27th. June, 1815 and took place with the loss of eleven lives. Mr.. Scott, the overman, four men and two boys and Mr Froggitt, the viewer of the colliery, was below ground with his two brothers. They were killed by the blast and eight other workmen were suffocated by the afterdamp.

Those who died were:-

George Froggitt aged 70 years.
 William Froggitt, aged 60 years.
 Robert Froggitt, aged 45 years.
 James Jamerson, aged 18 years.
 James Young, aged 23 years.
 William Wind, aged 50 years.
 George Wind, aged 20 years.
 Hugh Barker aged 17 years.

Another man named Froggett went in search of his brothers after the blast and was suffocated. A boy was found to be alive after twelve hours. He was not injured by unconscious. Reports stated that he survived.

COLLINGWOOD MAIN. Newcastle-on-Tyne, Northumberland. 17th. July, 1815.

George Johnson viewer at Heaton Colliery, in evidence to the Select Committee, recalled-

‘The accident happened in consequence of an overman with deputies and others having gone down the pit to secure timber and iron and other materials, that were likely to be lost by a sudden creep having come on in that part of the mine. They were working with candles, the inflammable gas exploded and these poor men were lost.’

It was thought that the gas came as a result of the creep that had occurred.

NEWBOTTLE. Newbottle, Durham. 31st. July, 1815.

The owners of the colliery had purchased a new boiler to provide steam for an engine which was used to draw full coal waggons up the railway. It was being used for the first time and there were many people standing around watching the operation. The engineer is believed to have overcharged the boiler with steam and it burst with a tremendous explosion.

Over fifty people were wounded or scalded. William Sharp, the manager of the engine was killed instantly, his body being blown over a considerable distance and William Nesbitt, an overman and John Holmes, a pit boy were also killed. It was reported that five others died from their injuries.

SHERIFF HILL. Gateshead, Durham. 11th. December 1815.

The brattice at the foot of the shaft caught fire and although every effort was made to get the men and horses out of the pit, five wastemen lost their lives through the interruption of the ventilation by the smoke. All the men and boys got out of the pit but the bodies of the men took some time to recover. They left four widows and seventeen children.

PLAIN PIT. Rainton, Durham. 18th. December, 1815.

Fynes reported that there was an accident at the pit which cost 27 lives.

UNNAMED. Shropshire, 1816.

There was a report of an explosion in what was described as 'a superficial excavation for coal' by which several men were killed and others severely burnt.

ROSCOE'S. Bagillt, Flint. 1816 or 1817.

There is a vague reference to an explosion at the colliery during this period of time but there are no particulars.

WALBOTTLE. Wellington Pit. Walbottle, Durham. 28th. April, 1816.

According to reports, *'the explosion raged with terrific fury through the excavations to a distance of two hundred yards in one continued flame.'* The workmen made their escaped through the Blutcher Pit with the exception of thirteen men and eleven boys who died and were found dreadfully burned and scorched.

WILLIAM PIT. Whitehaven, Cumberland. Between 1817 and 1824.

During this period it was reported that the pit exploded with the loss of thirty three lives, many of them women.

SOUTH SHIELDS. South Shields, Durham. 31st May, 1817.

The colliery was at the high end of South Shields. A corfe in which five men where descending was caught by one of the lining boards, upset and they were all sent down the shaft to their deaths

HARRATON. Row Pit. Harraton. Durham. 30th. June, 1817.

A violent explosion killed thirty eight men and boys. Corves, trams and objects from the shaft bottom, which was 492 feet deep, were blown into the air together with the bodies of two unfortunate workmen, one of whom had his head blown off and was cut in two. Mr. Buddle was an eyewitness to the disaster and reported his experiences in evidence to the Lords Committee in 1829. The disaster was caused by a miner wilfully unscrewing his lamp which was against the Colliery Rules. Mr Buddle commented, '*this is a marked instance of men's wilfulness causing the destruction of large numbers of his fellow workmen.*' Mr. Buddle gave the following account of the disaster.

"There was a very descent man. a comrade working in the same place as him the overman went in with the mine the morning and showed them the danger for although there was no gas in the place they were working in, at about 12 yards from them, in what they called the return from the place, which was the way the current of air was going. He actually took them in and showed them it was explosive. He cautioned them by no means to expose a naked light, inasmuch as they were subject to the operation of what we call backing of the foulness, against the current of the air upon their lights. He gave them this caution and then went about his business. When this headstrong fellow told his comrade that he could not see with that thing, meaning the Davy, and would insist on screwing off the gauze cylinder and taking his candle. He then remonstrated with him, told him he was aware of the danger and he really durst not stop if he persisted in unscrewing the Davy. However, after what I stated, after two or three attempts at the lamp, he obstinately took off the top of it. I am not quite certain whether he lighted a candle, but he worked with a naked light. The other man was so sensible of the danger that he immediately went away, and in going out-bye, he saw the overman and requested him to go immediately to Moody, as he was quite sure he would do a mischief. He then came to the surface and in a very few minutes, the explosion occurred. I happened to be in the vicinity where I saw the explosion it was rather like an eruption than an explosion. It was a most curious phenomena it continued for above five minutes to vomit a column of black smoke, which ascended an immense height into the air, like a water spout. It was a very fine day, there was only a gentle breeze of wind from the west and I saw it feeding till the mass of black smoke and coal dust formed and immense cloud immediately over the pit, with a narrow stalk to it, the diameter of the shaft. A kind of took place at length, which cut off the stalk from the top of the pit and then this immense cloud was carried away by the gentle breeze, and deposited it's contents over the country for perhaps two or three miles. I made the best of my way to the pit, and when I arrived there, everything was blown away from it's mouth the metal pulleys that the ropes go over were carried to a distance, the shaft framing was totally blown away, the ropes were blown out and there were two mangled carcasses lying within a little distance of the mouth of the shaft. There was a body cut in two, the trunk and arms without the head were lying in one place and the legs and thighs lying four or five yards from it. At about twelve yards from the pit there was a body lying without a head."

"What was the depth of the shaft?"

"Eighty Fathoms." (480 feet.)

"How far do you conceive those workmen were from the bottom of the shaft when the explosion took place?"

"We ascertained that accurately afterwards , for one of them was the body of boy whose father was the onsetter at the bottom of the pit and it shows how a little shelter in some cases on those occasions will protect a man. The onsetter always has a little recess in which he keeps what we call a chalking board, on which he chalks down the quantity of work done by each colliery and this little boy (it was his first day of being at work) was at a door very near the shaft, and frequently came to his father in the course of the day. He had just come to him. at the instant the explosion happened, the man held the boy's

hand with one of his, while the other was chalking on his board, his body being within the recess of the niche. The boy was carried up the shaft in what I have described and the man was not in the least injured. The other man, whose name was Allen, I believe, was standing at the bottom of the shaft, leaning on his elbows on a corfe, talking to the onsetter. He disappeared in an instant, and was blown from the top of the pit. It was clear from the appearance after we got down the pit to seek for bodies, that the fire had taken place from where Moody was working, as the very first stroke of the fire had been there, for his body was almost burnt to a cinder and the poor unfortunate overman was found within about 400 yards from him. He never reached him."

Those who died were:-

John Hills and three sons.

Michael Hills, sen.

One son of William Hills.

Three sons of Alexander Short.

Two sons of Job Royley.

Two sons of George Galley.

Three sons of James Allen.

One son of Thomas Cowey.

One son of George Emmery.

One son of Robert Dickinson.

Two sons of Isabella Brown.

Two sons of Alexander Stevenson.

One son of William Jackson.

Two sons of Edward Baker.

One son of Mary Jobling.

John Wardle.

John Parson.

Thomas Ghisholme.

Thomas Grundy.

John Taylor.

John Moody.

William Hardy.

John Whitey.

Seven were brought out alive but there were only three survivors, William Jackson, William Watson and George Fenwick.

The jury at the inquest brought in a verdict that:-

"The deceased came to their deaths in consequence of firedamp occasioned by the using of candles instead of the safety lamps, contrary to the orders given."

NOVA SCOTIA. Harraton, Durham. 2nd. July, 1817.

Two days later, July 2nd., eight men went down the Nova Scotia Pit at the same colliery and were killed by the afterdamp which had entered the workings from Row Pit.

JARROW. Jarrow, Durham. 25th. September, 1817.

An explosion was reported at the colliery which claimed six lives. An early report said that twelve were severely burnt.

RAINTON. Plain Pit. Rainton, Durham. 18th. December, 1817.

An explosion claimed twenty seven lives, eleven men and sixteen boys. The blast occurred before all the men had descended. Had it occurred later there would have been 160 men and boys in the pit. Early reports of the total number of lives lost amounted to twenty six, and those principally boys. The explosion took place at 3 o'clock in the morning, before the hewers had descended the pit and from this circumstance about 160 lives have been preserved. Every exertion was made to render assistance to those in the mine and two men fell having been suffocated by the impure state of the air. The viewers and agents were extremely active and had nearly shared the same fate. The pit in which this accident occurred, was always considered to be quite free from explosive matter and in consequence of this supposed security the safety lamps had never been introduced into it the miners continuing to work by the light of candles.

SHERIFF HILL. Gateshead, Durham. 19th. July, 1819.

A fatal accident from the explosion of firedamp occurred on Monday last in Sherriff Hill Colliery near Gateshead and thirty seven persons, principally boys, besides a great many horses perished by this calamity. The explosion took place half an hour before the pit finished work, otherwise the loss of life would have been greater. About twenty men and boys were in others parts of the mine and they escaped with slight injuries by the blast and the afterdamp. The accident was attributed to two boys having deserted their posts. They were appointed to take charge of two doors, which they were ordered to keep closed and from the circumstance of their being found in a distant part of the mine, there was every reason to believe they had not attended to the instructions given them. Most of the men had left work and ascended the shaft. The shockingly mutilated remains of the sufferers prove the tremendous force of the explosion. The newspapers reported:-

“The mine was always considered one of the best ventilated on the banks of the Tyne and the safety lamp was not considered necessary to be used, as danger was never apprehended. Fatal experience will now perhaps point out not only the propriety of using the lamp in every colliery, but also the accesity of its general adoption.”

LUMLEY. George Pit. Chester-le-Street, Northumberland. 9th. October, 1819.

The explosion was caused by a naked light. Sykes says that thirteen lost their lives but another account gives the death toll as eleven men and boys. The local papers of the time stated that eleven persons from Lumley and two from New Lambton were killed and that therer were about eighty men and boys down the mine at the time.