

CUMGWACH. Neath, Glamorganshire.9th. June, 1820.

An explosion resulted in five dead of which two were girls, Elizabeth Pendry aged 6 years and Annie Tonks aged 12 years.

NORCROFT. Cawthorne, Yorkshire. 23rd. May 1821.

Eleven people were ascending the shaft when the chain broke and they were thrown to the bottom, a distance of 60 yards, Seven were killed in the accident and two later died from their injuries.

NESHAMS. Newbottle, Durham. 19th. October, 1821.

Six men were suffocated by noxious gases in which their candles continued to burn and so gave them no warning. One of the brattices erected close up to an old working was broken and gas came from the old workings. Among those who died were, Steel and Curry who left large families.

The local burial registers record:-

Buried 20th .October.

James Burnip of Newbottle, aged 36.

Matthew Anderson of, Newbottle aged 50.

Buried 21st. October.

Robert Smith of Philadelphia aged 47

Robert Currey of Nesham's, Cross Row, aged 45.

George Beaney, of Houghton, aged 32.

The burial Register states that they were 'accidentally suffocated in the coal mine called Elizabeth Pit.'

FELLING. Gateshead, Durham. 23rd. October, 1821.

An explosion was reported at colliery resulting in the deaths of six people.

WALLSEND. 'A' Pit. Wallsend, Northumberland. 23rd. October, 1821.

The colliery was known as Russell's Colliery. At the time of the disaster there were 56 men working in the Bensham Seam to which the 'A' Pit had been sunk the previous year and the workings extended no more than 100 yards in any direction from the shaft. It was reported that 52 were killed. The 'A' shaft was divided into an upcast and a downcast section by timber brattice which was destroyed in the explosion so there was no ventilation. The blast was stated to have "*shook the ground like an earthquake and made furniture dance in neighbouring houses.*"

Those who lost their lives were:-

James Kelly, son of William aged 20 years.

Samuel Lowrey aged 5 years 6 months.

Christopher Waggets agd 31 years.

John Norman aged 30 years.

Robert Bowden aged 27 years.

George Thompson aged 12 years.

Nicholas English aged 32 years.

William Roddison aged 75 years.
Thomas Hault aged 41 years.
George Kyle aged 11 years.
Robert Ilap aged 25 years.
Robert Bainbridge aged 7 years.
Edward Campbell aged 35 years.
Roger Buddle aged 17 years.
John Smith aged 21 years.
Henry Bowlam aged 77 years.
Michael Moon aged 44 years.
Michael Moon aged 12 years.
Peter Hays aged 19 years.
John Ferry aged 26 years.
Thomas Wagget aged 34 years.
James Walker aged 22 years.
William Smart aged 34 years.
David Smart aged 31 years.
John Pindley aged 33 years.
Thomas Lowery aged 3 3years.
William Bell aged 43 years.
William Bell aged 16 years.
William Jackson aged 21 years.
Tochard Hepple aged 17 years.
George Pendley aged 50 years.
William Johnson aged 26 years.
John Johnson aged 23 years.
William Hutton aged 25 years.
John Hutton aged 22 years.
Thomas Davison aged 36 years.
John Shotton aged 18 years.
Edward Shotton aged 20 years.
John Bickley aged 12 years.
John Gordon aged 20 years.
George Longstaff aged 46 years.
George Mason aged 21 years.

Mr. Buddle visited the workings and learned that there was gas in the pit before the explosion by accidents had been prevented by the vigilance of the two young overmen at the pit. With the danger known, they had been put in charge because of their experience. Fifty two men and boys were killed including all the deputies and there were but four survivors The victims were scorched and strangely distorted. Forty six were buried at Wallsend in one grave since they were all related and of the rest, they were buried at Ballast Hills and at old Wallsend Church..

The cause of the accident was thought to be that *'lights were not put out at the time'*. In an account of the disaster published after his death, Buddle ascribed the accident to a furnaceman who went to what was described as a *'secret feast'* and left a door open. The brattice in the shaft was destroyed for 30 fathoms from the bottom and any of the victims died from suffocation. Mr. Buddle thought that 40 to 50 may have survived if there had been two shafts at the colliery.

EBENEZER. West Bromwich, Staffordshire. Late October, 1821.

About thirty tons of coal and ironstone fell and killed six men. Those who died were James Nash, Thomas Lawson, John Cotterell, John Butler, John Hicks and Rowland Morris. Morris was heard to cry out after the accident but he later died.

UNNAMED. Sheffield, Yorkshire. July 1822.

Five men were reported to have been killed in an explosion of firedamp.

WALKER. Walker, Durham. 1823.

In evidence to the Committee, George Johnson, a viewer at the Heaton Colliery, remembered that six lives had been lost at Walker when men were cleaning rubbish from the bottom of an old shaft when there was a fall of stones and rubbish and six men were killed.

The local burial registers give the names killed as:-
William Southran, of Bigges Main, buried 22nd June, aged 28.
Forest Mitcheson, of Walker, buried 22 June, aged 35.
William Bambridge, of Bigges Main, buried 22 June, aged 31.
Thomas Copeland, of Bigges Main, buried 23 June, aged 26.

RAINTON. Plain Pit. Rainton, Durham. 3rd. November, 1823.

There was an explosion at colliery and Sykes records the number killed as fifty nine, fifty three men and six boys but the *'York Courant'* stated that 55 were killed in the explosion and two later died which made a total of fifty seven men and boys. The safety lamp was used at the pit but there was some uncertainty whether lamps or candles were used in that part of mine where the occurred.

Those who died were:-

Charles Harburne, putter of Collier Row.
John Pudley, hewer of Houghton.
John Cowie, putter of Collier Row.
George Armstrong, putter of Collier Row.
Francis Lowrey, putter of Hetton
John Hull, hewer of Middle Rainton and his two sons, one a putter and one a waggon driver.
John Welsh, hewer of Collier Row.
Henry Dinning, hewer of Collier Row.
Edward Ramshaw, putter of Houghton.
John Mason's boy, putter of Houghton.
William Short's two boys one a putter and one a driver of Collier Row.
John Ord, hewer, of Middle Rainton.
Two Johnson boys, both putters of Houghton.
Thomas Hall, shifter of Collier Row.
Wardle Elliott, hewer of Middle Rainton.
John Hann and son, hewer and putter of Mitchinson's Farm.
Three named Golightly, brothers, all putters of Low-bud-mire.
Christopher Smith, hewer of Nicholson's Pit.
Matthew Dial, hewer of The Knot.
Joseph Harrison's two sons.
George Nealson, putter of Collier Row.

Cuthbert Pratt, putter of West Rainton.
John Anderson of West Rainton.
Robert Gibson and son, hewer and putter of Collier Row.
Robert and James Shield, hewers of Collier Row.
George Elliott and son, deputy overman of Collier Row.
Two others, unnamed.
William Dawson, overman, Overman's Row.
Thomas Dawson, deputy overman, Middle Rainton.
George Thompson, putter.
Joseph Roddson, hewer.
Richard and Thomas Carr, hewer and putter.
Thomas Crake.
Another, unnamed.

Nine of the victims were interred at Houghton-le-Spring on Tuesday and on the following day a further 35 were buried. Eight were buried at Penshaw and three others at Chester-le-Street. Thomas Adamson and William Hutchinson, who were brought out of the pit alive, died on Wednesday and were buried on Thursday. Of the eighteen horses that were in the pit, twelve were killed and of the others three were in the workings and three in the stables and they escaped unhurt.

The inquest into the disaster was held before Peter Bowley, Coroner of the Easington Ward and a jury on the body of Thomas Golightly and the others. Nicholas Dixon, collier, descended the pit on Sunday evening and remained there until two hours before the explosion and he told the court that the air was good all the time. he had examined the air course and found it all right and the doors were in proper order.

Richard Cole, on-setter, descended the pit about 3 o'clock on that Monday morning. He was employed to corves to the chain of the rope from the pit from that time until about 6 o'clock when the explosion took place. A short time before the accident, three boys named Johnson, Lowton and Robinson came to the shaft and told Cole that the Davy lamps were 'standing on fire.' After about one minute, an explosion took place, followed immediately by a second blast and smoke and fire ascended the shaft. Cole told the court that he was stupefied by the blast. The first shock threw him down but he was back on his legs when the second came. He washed his moth which revived him and he and several other men and boys were able to ascend the pit by means of the rope which brought down the empty corves.

It was reported that one of the survivors made his way to the shaft and took hold of the rope which would take him to the safety of the surface. Just as he was about to go up, he saw a small boy within his reach and almost overcome by the afterdamp. He grabbed him by his collar and held on to him until they reached the surface.

It was supposed that the accident was caused by an overman going through a ventilation door into an explosive mixture and that he either dropped his heated lamp on some hay or had blown the flame through the gauze in trying to extinguish it.

After hearing all the evidence the Coroner summed up and the jury brought in a verdict of 'Accidental Death.'

LUMLEY. George Pit. Chester-le-Street, Durham. 25th. October, 1824.

The colliery was reported to have exploded with the loss of fourteen lives.

NEWBOTTLE. Dolly Pit. 19th. November, 1824.

The explosion caused the deaths of eleven men, including eight overmen and wastemen. Three others, out of the five who descended in search of the bodies, became victims of the afterdamp and lost their lives. The shaft was divided by brattice which was blown out by the force of the explosion and fell to the bottom of the pit.

Those who died were:-

William Farley.
Matthew Armstrong.
John Scott.
Thomas Watchman.
Henry Thornton.
Thomas Charlton.
John Anderson.
William Smith.
George Johnson.
Edward Hodgson.
Benjamin Moody.

They left ten widows and about fifty children fatherless.

CWNLLYN. Swansea Valley, Glamorganshire. 1825.

An explosion killed fifty nine people. To this date, this was the largest explosion in South Wales.

GARFORTH. Middleton, Yorkshire. 12th. January, 1825.

There was an explosion at the colliery in which twenty five men and boys were killed.

FATFIELD. Judith Pit. Chester-le-Street, Durham. 3rd. July, 1825.

Fatfield formed part of the original Harraton Estate and the explosion caused the deaths of eleven men and boys. It was referred to in some old records as the Judeth Pit, Harraton Outside. The colliery was the property of W.M. Lamb and Co. and the explosion killed all down the pit including eleven horses.

Those who died were:-

Mark Curry, overman.
William Gray, overman.
John Solsbey, stoneworker.
Joseph Harrison, waggonway wright.
George Hambling, hewer.
Edward Ranson, stoneworker.
Joseph and Robert Brown, brothers, granemen.
Robert Robinson, wasteman.
William Simpson, wasteman.

No cause was found for the disaster and at the inquest at Fatfield a verdict of accidental death was returned.

JARROW. Jarrow, Northumberland. 17th. January, 1826.

The colliery was owned by Messrs. Thomas and Robert Brown of London and an explosion killed thirty four men and boys and burned others . The accident happened in the Bensham Seam which had been reached a short time before. According to one source, the accident was caused by a boy leaving a door open but there was evidence of a sudden discharge of gas. The inquest was held by Mr. Hall upon Richard Bell when a verdict of 'Accidental Death' was returned.

Those who lost their lives were:-

Willis and his son.

John Gibson who left a wife and three children.

John Lowton who left a wife and three children.

Joseph Bloomer snr. who left a wife and two children.

George Ledger, a young man who left two children.

Robert Casper who left one child.

John Stewart who left one child.

John Norman.

R Fletcher who left three children.

John Willis.

John Brown who left a wife.

Snowdon Brown a young man.

William Arnott, a young man.

George Summerson, a young man.

William Smith, a young man.

Stephen Scott, a young man.

John Watson, a young man.

Richard and John Bell, brothers.

Thoms Summerside.

John Johnson.

William Tate.

Thomas Halland.

Robert Norman.

William Fletcher.

Thomas Miller.

John Thomson.

John Clark.

Andrew and Isaac Scott, brothers.

James and Joseph Boomer, brothers and sons to Boomer snr.

Ten years afterwards it was recorded that a sample of gas obtained from the Bensham Seam at the colliery was collected from a blower which caused the accident in 1826.

TOWNLEY MAIN. Townley, Durham. 30th. May, 1826.

The pit was known as the Straw Pit and the pit exploded with the loss of thirty eight lives. Heads, arms and legs were thrown out of the shaft.

Those who died were:-

Thomas Liddle aged 40 years.

Michael Wheatley aged 59 years.

Philipson aged 24 years.

John Errington aged 24 years.

Thomas Robson aged 17 years.

William Robson aged 11 years.
Thomas Howden aged 18 years.
Joseph Howden aged 16 years.
John Forster aged 18 years.
Leonard Dowsey aged 38 years.
Richard Dowsey aged 28 years.
Thomas Waugh aged 10 years.
John Hale aged 10 years.
Joseph Wheatley aged 19 years.
Thomas Stokoe aged 48 years.
Matthew Stokoe aged 15 years.
John Parkin aged 48 years.
Cuthbert Turnbull aged 12 years.
Isaac Taylor aged 46 years.
John Gray aged 23 years.
John Robson aged 17 years.
Thomas Brown aged 60 years.
Thomas Robson aged 43 years.
Thomas Robson aged 15 years.
Thomas Robson aged 25 years.
Richard Smith aged 78 years.
Thomas Clayton aged 13 years.
Thomas Wheatley aged 21 years.
William Scott aged 19 years.
John Robson aged 21 years.
James Robson aged 15 years.
William Taylor aged 36 years.
Thomas Robson aged 39 years.
Matthew Newton aged 41 years.

The inquest was opened on Thomas Liddell and the others by Mr. Hall one of the County Coroners. William Waugh, a pitman, said he was down the pit on Friday and it then in a good working state. They knew that the seam had gas. They worked with candles on Friday and Davy lamps had been used in the seam but not lately. Mr. James Hall, the viewer of the colliery said that he had not been down the pit for two weeks but he had a daily report from the under-viewers. The jury returned a verdict of 'Accidental Death'.

HEWORTH. Heworth, Durham. 5th. September, 1826.

An explosion took place in the Hutton Sean at a depth of 164 feet as a result of which five persons lost their lives. The cause was given as open lights. There were about sixty men in the pit at the time and two men and a boy were killed outright and several others badly burnt.

An early report of the disaster appeared in the local press:-

"About half past 6 o'clock on Tuesday morning last an explosion of firedamp took place at Heworth Colliery near Gateshead which proved fatal to 3 persons, Joseph Hunter, of Wrekenton, pitman and John Scott, the master wasteman, (who have both left families) and a boy. Several others were scorched and bruised, and some had limbs fractured by the shock which dashed to pieces the stoppings, brattices, and props, and brought down the roof in several places. Hunter was not burnt, but died from the effects of the choak-damp before he was got out of the pit. Mr Scott was much scorched

and it is supposed that the ignition took place as he was examining some leaky water pipes. A boy named Tulip was burnt and had a thigh broken. The last two men who came to bank were working in a distant part of the mine and were unhurt and even unconscious of the accident having happened. There were about 60 persons down at the time of the blast.”

The inquest held on 6th. instant on the body of John Scott. It appeared there was no suspicion of any thing wrong. The pit was well ventilated and in a very good state. Verdict:- Accidental death.

UNNAMED. Near Llanelli, Glamorganshire. About 1827.

It was reported that thirteen men were very much burned in an explosion.

JARROW. Jarrow, Northumberland. 15th. March, 1828

The colliery was reported to have exploded with the loss of eight lives. The local papers record the fact that six men were killed in the explosion and two others severely burnt, one of which later died.

FLINT. Flint, Flintshire. 20th. May, 1828.

The colliery was the property of Mr. Thomas Eyton and was one of the pits of the Dee Green colliery. It was reported that an explosion claimed between nine and eleven lives and injured eleven others. The firedamp had collected in a part of the pit unobserved by the workmen and a boy incautiously took a naked light to the spot and a tremendous explosion followed immediately. There were upwards of thirty men and boys in the pit and nine were killed on the spot and eleven others dreadfully wounded. Most had broken limbs and were badly scorched. Some of the unfortunate men had large families and a woman who lost her husband and son had given birth only a few days before.

HOUGHTON-LE-SPRING. Houghton-le-Spring, Durham. 1st. September, 1828.

The explosion occurred on a Monday morning in the New Pit at Houghton-le-Spring belonging to Lord Durham. Three men and four boys were killed. The names of the unfortunate men were:-

George Smith aged 32 years of Houghton.

Thomas Bradley aged 28 years of Houghton.

John Wilkin of Philadelphia, aged 24 years.

The names of the boys were not learned

The accident is attributed to the men themselves having incautiously left open a door in the mine on Saturday night. The foul air had by this means accumulated in the workings and on the return of the pitmen on Monday morning with their lights it exploded. A coroners inquest was held on view of the bodies, and a verdict returned of Accidental Death.

WASHINGTON. 'I' Pit. Washington, Durham. 20th. November, 1828.

At the time of the explosion there were fifteen in the pit and fourteen lost their lives. The sole survivor was badly burned. Sykes reported-

“The report was awfully loud, and the blast so powerful that the machinery at the mouth of the pit was blown down and scattered some distance, with corves

and other weighty bodies thrown from the bottom of the shaft. The colliery had been examined in the morning and was considered to be in a safe state.”

A gentleman from Newcastle gave the following account of the explosion:-

“I was at Little Unsworth, a short distance from the pit in the company of another gentleman, about three o'clock on Thursday afternoon when our ears were assailed with a report like that of the firing of a very heavy artillery gun making the whole earth shake, as it were, beneath us. We saw an immense volume of smoke rise from the pit and stand in the air like a dense cloud. It seemed to remain for a minute or two then it broke away in an northerly direction covering all the lands as it passed with soot and giving it the appearance of an entire black surface.”

Those who died were:-

Henry Hitchinson, aged 8 years.

Henry Galmey, aged 9 years.

Charles Hall aged, 16 years.

Stephen Falmer, aged 63 years.

Peter Hall aged, 11 years.

Thomas Cox, aged 55 years.

George Dawson, aged 16 years.

Joseph Davison aged 16 years.

Edward Elliott aged 16 years.

John Gray aged 16 years.

Thomas Carter aged 7 years.

James Gaviston aged 17 years.

John Gaviston aged 15 years.

Michael Hall, the onsetter, escaped but he was severely burned. The inquest was opened on the body of John Hall by Michael Hall, Coroner. The cause was thought to be an outburst of gas, '*a bag of foulness*' that came from the roof which stopped the ventilation. A verdict of 'Accidental Death' was returned.

PEMBERTON. Wigan, Lancashire. 24th. April, 1830.

There was an explosion at the colliery with the loss of nine lives.

JARROW. Jarrow, Northumberland. 3rd. August, 1830.

The explosion which took place at 5.40 a.m. in the Bensham Seam when there were seventy men working. There were 120 men and boys in the mine in total and of the seventy in the Bensham Seam, forty men and boys lost their lives. The cause was put down to a sudden outburst of gas and the area was lit by naked lights.

An account of the disaster was read by Mr. Buddle to the Natural History Society of Northumberland on the 18th October. He said-

“Though so fatal in its consequence, the range of the fire was not of very great extent. The hewer was working at the point where the burst took place was not burnt and no marks of the fire appeared for about eight yards back from the face where, at the end of the 'stenting' or crossholing, the gas had become sufficiently mixed with air to render it explosive.”

Mr. Buddle presented The Society a piece of charred coal dust which he had found deposited throughout the workings. He continued-

“This dust flies in all directions like luminous sparks, similar to those discharged through the chimney of an engine, which are consequently propelled by the force of the explosion at a considerable distance beyond

where the flame was the ignited gas advances. They scorch and wound those who may happen to be within their reach and frequently set fire at any combustible substance they might fall upon, sometimes the coal itself.”

Of the fifty two victims, twenty were married men and left widows and sixty children fatherless. A Subscription Fund was set up for the families which amounted to over £900.

HAYDOCK. Haydock, Lancashire. May, 1831.

The victims of a disaster buried at St. Thomas' Ashton-in-Makerfield. The Burial register states that they were '*all killed by the explosion of inflammable air in a coal pit.*' The victims were buried between the 18th and 24 th. May

Those who died were-

Mary Cunliffe aged 14 years.

James Cunliffe aged 12 years, collier.

Thomas Cunliffe aged 9 years, collier.

John Owen aged 13 years, collier.

Peter Litherland aged 12 years, collier.

John Litherland aged 9 years, collier.

William Litherland aged 9 years, collier.

Thomas Martlew aged 40 years, collier.

Thomas Owen aged 20 years, collier.

Edward Cunliffe aged 27 years, collier.

In evidence to the 1832 Commission, George Stevenson recollected hearing of an explosion at the colliery which he had visited which had claimed the lives of twelve men.

WILLINGTON. High Pit. Willington, Durham. 20th. September, 1831.

The colliery was the property of Messrs. Bell and Dixon and the Bensham Seam was 39 fathoms below the Main High Coal and was reached by a staple which was sunk some distance from the shaft. A large blower was encountered in the seam and Mr. Johnson gave orders that the seam should be allowed to fill with water. This was done but the gas forced it's way through the water and entered the High Main Seam where it ignited at the naked light of the men who were working there. There was no warning.

In evidence to the Select Committee, George Johnson, recollected the explosion which claimed the lives of eight, four men and four boys and scorched several others. The whole of the workforce was in the pit at the time and most of them escaped by another shaft. After the accident, the staple was covered by a strong iron cap in which there was a three inch pipe through which the gas was taken to the surface and burnt.

Those who died were:-

Thomas Nichols

Joseph Armstrong.

Michael Martin.

Thomas Cowell.

Benjamin Twigs.

Nichols left a widow and five children and Armstrong and Cowell each a widow and three children.

The inquest was held before Mr. S. Reed at Mr. Wardel's house when it was heard that candles were used in the mine. Had safety lamps been used, the accident might perhaps have been avoided. The jury returned a verdict of 'Accidental Death'.

CROFT PIT, Whitehaven, Cumberland. 15th November 1831

CUMBERLAND PACQUET,
Tuesday, 15th November 1831

MELANCHOLY ACCIDENT.

We have this week the painful duty of recording one of the most distressing accidents of a local nature that ever appeared in the columns of our paper. About three o'clock in the morning of Saturday last, an explosion of hydrogen took place in Croft Pit, to which twenty-two human beings, men and boys, have fallen victims. The cause of this heavy calamity must ever remain unknown, as no one has been permitted to survive to disclose the fatal tale. It appears, however, from the evidence given at the Coroner's inquest, that no blame is not even of the slightest nature is attached to any of the viewers or deputy overlookers of the pits. Two of the overseers, were in another part of the pit at the time the accident occurred, and one of them had just visited and examined the working where the explosion took place, and found all perfectly safe. The discharge therefore must have been sudden as well as considerable, but as the situation was a very confined one is all the men being killed within the space of two hundred yards is the effect was of course proportionally powerful. From the whole of the evidence, indeed, it is sufficiently plain that the accident was one of those inscrutable decrees of Providence, which no human prudence could either guard against or avert. It is so painful to dwell upon matters like this, that we would willingly close the recital of this tale of woe by a brief enumeration of the names and ages of the sufferers but in justice to the overmen at that time in the pit, and others who act in the same capacity, though the nature of these accidents are well known to every one residing in a mining district, we deem it proper to give the following evidence, from which it will be seen that the Pit was in the most admirable state of ventilation, and that no attention whatever was wanting on the part of the overseers. The lateness of the hour, indeed, prevents us from doing more but should we afterwards see the necessity of so doing, we shall publish the whole of the evidence in our next number. We may observe, however, that the whole of the witnesses corroborated the testimony, which we subjoin: -

JOSEPH BATES sworn: - Is a deputy overlooker at Croft Pit, and saw the place where the accident happened about six o'clock on Friday evening. At that time all was apparently as safe as could be. He was told that there had been a fall from the roof, and went and examined the place. He found it of a very trifling nature nothing but a piece of following stone. There was no explosive air in the place: It was then as clear as the house in which we assembled. He believed that there was not a better ventilated pit in England, and of this the men were also aware. Never heard any one object to work in Croft Pit, but, on the contrary, they had had more applications than they had room for. If any danger be apprehended, the overmen always order the tops of the Davy lamps to be locked on, and locks are kept under ground for that purpose. He could not tell how the accident happened but it was unquestionably an explosion. He had been at the place since the accident occurred is had examined it minutely is but could not tell from whence the foul air had been

dislodged. At this time there was not the least symptom of inflammable air. There was nothing to indicate the place where the foul air had come from but he thought it had come either from the roof or the thill. Inflammable air seldom accumulates in the old workings and in some instances it is more dangerous to work at pillars than at new work. As a precautionary measure, when the men go to work at pillars, all the lamps are locked and made safe but if it be found, after the experience of two or three days, that there is no danger, the tops of the lamps are removed, and the naked lamp is used the same as in new works.

Such was the healthy state of the mine at the time when this fatal event took place, and proves, we think, to a demonstration, that no care is sufficient to provide against these sudden discharges of inflammable air.

The following are the names of the unhappy sufferers:-

TURNER Patterson Ginns aged 28
McMINN John Ginns 17
MORRIS Cormick Front-row 60
McCALLISTER Hector Front-row 20
GARROWAY Robert Bellís Lane 12
BOLTON John Bellís Lane 35
DAVEY Michael Back-row 26
PARTLETON George Back-row 32
FITZSIMMONS Christopher Middle-row 14
INGLEBY Clement Middle-row 20
TAYLOR Abraham Middle-row 40
COOK Robert Front-row 19
QUEEN James Middle-row 40 and
QUEEN Arthur (his son) 9
HANNAY Hugh Middle-row 25
SMITH Hugh Middle-row 27
McGAUGHIN Archibald Middle-row 23 and
MCGAUGHIN John (his brother) 13
GRAHAM John Middle-row 17
WOOD Thomas Middle-row 26
LITTLE William Gainbriggs 21 and
LITTLE Robert (his brother) aged 20 years.

The bodies of the unfortunate sufferers were yesterday interred twelve of them at Trinity chapel, eight at St. Nicholas's, and the remaining at St. James's. Six of the men were married, and have left 17 children, eight of them under ten years of age. The wife of Turner has been brought to bed since the accident happened. It may seem unnecessary to add, that the verdict returned by the jury was 'Accidental Death.'

WHITEHAVEN HERALD,
Tuesday, 15th November 1831.

EXPLOSION OF FIRE-DAMP IN LORD LONSDALE'S COLLIERIES

TWENTY-TWO LIVES LOST!

It is this week our painful duty to record on of those sudden and terrible events which so frequently occur in coal working, and of which the consequences have plunged between twenty and thirty families into the most agonising distress.

About half-past two on Saturday morning an explosion of inflammable air took place in Croft Pit, about a mile to the south-west of Whitehaven. Various reports of the nature and extent of the accident were, in the course of the morning, current in Whitehaven, and excited an intense interest. But though the interest in the event, and the sympathy with the sufferers and their families was great, candour obliges us to state, that nothing seemed do extraordinary to us as comparative strangers in Whitehaven, as the very little excitement if occasioned. An event so awful in its nature, and so dreadful in its effects, would, in any but a colliery district, have excited feelings of horror and amazement, of which the effects would have been visible, in the most unequivocal manner, to the most cursory observer but though the event was indeed a subject of general conversation, it did not seem in the least to disturb the ordinary course of business, and the destruction of from twenty to thirty individuals seemed to excite less interest, than in other places we have seen occasioned by the untimely death of a single human being. Even the mystery which hung over the causes of the terrible catastrophe seemed hardly to excite a desire to penetrate it and though we cannot believe that if active exertions could have been of any benefit, they would not have been spared, still, the apathy which prevailed, seemed to us a strange contrast to the deep feeling of awe and interest which elsewhere would have been occasioned by a loss of life to one tithe of the amount. About one o'clock in the afternoon we learned that the raising of the bodies of the sufferers had commenced, and we accordingly repaired to the mouth of the pit. On our road thither we saw none of those symptoms of public interest in the fate of the sufferers, which in other towns would have turned out thousands, eager to learn the least tidings of the fate of so many fellow creatures, cut off by so sudden and dreadful a calamity. The streets bore their ordinary aspects of business or of listless indifference. As we receded from the town we met successively four cars, which contained each something covered with straw, and as we learned from casual passengers, the bodies of the wretched victims. On reaching the pit we understood that five bodies had been raised, besides two living men, of whom one had since died. Fifteen or sixteen were collected at the bottom of the shaft ready to be raised, and two or three persons supposed to have perished, were yet missing and unaccounted for. About fifty or sixty persons were collected on the spot a number of carts were ready to carry away the bodies as fast as raised, and one was pointed to us as containing the body of a young man and waiting to receive the body of his brother, who had perished along with him. Deep agony was painted in many a countenance round us and one poor young creature who had lost her husband rent the air with her wailing's. The corpses were momentarily expected to be raised to the surface but we turned our steps from the scene of horrors. On enquiry we learned that the depth of the shaft was 160 fathoms (one third of the height of Skiddaw!) and that the working, where the explosion took place, was more than a mile, some said two from the bottom of the shaft. A coroner's jury, we further learned, was already summoned, and would meet as soon as the bodies were all raised.

About three in the afternoon we were informed, that the inquests were about commencing, and we repaired to the quarter of the town where we were informed they were to be held. We were prepared to find a large concourse of people attracted either by sympathy, or curiosity, to the scene of an investigation so solemn and momentous, as an enquiry into the cause of the deaths of twenty two human beings, must be in the eyes of all who are duly impressed with a tender regard for the life and happiness of their fellow creatures and who are aware that in the Whitehaven collieries alone, many hundreds are daily making their bread with a similar calamity impending over them, but our eyes could discover no trace of any event which might excite human sympathy we saw no passenger who did not seem passing on his usual avocations, and the inhabitants of the houses around were as

usual in the evenings, carelessly lounging at their doors. Our readers will scarcely think it credible but we can assure them of the fact that within one hundred yards of the spot where the inquest was sitting, we enquired of two persons who could not direct us to it, and we only obtained the information from a person officially acquainted with the fact. When we arrived at the spot, the coroner's gig at the door was the only indication of any thing particular going forward within. These may seem but trifling facts, but to us who are unused to such dreadful scenes, they seemed lamentable indications, if not of a want of feeling, at least of the suppression of it. We have seen enough of the men of Whitehaven, in cases of shipwreck, to know, that where active exertions can be useful, they are not slow or timid in affording them, but still it was not the less incomprehensible to us, that on this occasion, no little feeling or sympathy should be visible.

On entering the public house, where the inquest was sitting, we found its apartments occupied by a number of persons, principally colliers (Saturday is pay day at the collieries) spending their evening, as usual, in boisterous drinking. The Landlady conducted us to the room in which the coroner was it was a small back parlour, and letting us into it with a snap-key, she informed us that it was shut in order to keep the room clear from the intrusion of the people drinking in her house, which we have no doubt was the case. We found the coroner, Peter Hodgson, and his clerk, with twelve jurors and a constable at the door, the room being barely sufficient to hold the party.

The Coroner was busy swearing in the jury, and on our entry he enquired our name and if we were one of them. We gave our address, and stated that we attended as a spectator- as one of the public. Mr. Coroner immediately replied that perhaps we would like to be on the jury ourselves, and then we could see that every proper investigation was made? Mr. Coroner observed, that in the inquisitions before him the names of twelve jurors ere already recorded, but that we might be included in the next one.

The following jury ñ

Richard Curwen, assistant overseer, Foreman.

John Bell, Keeper of the house of correction.

David Frears, auctioneer, and sheriff's office.

Jonathan Boadle, publican.

Oliver Ussinson, late a clerk in an attorney's office.

William Leslie, pensioner.

Joseph Jackson, watchman.

Phillip Jackson, sheriff's officer

Jonathan Burnyeat, joiner.

William Kewley, policeman.

Thomas Trohear, clogger.

Jonathan Bowman, shoemaker.

were impannelled, successively, to hold inquests on the causes of the deaths of Christopher Fitzsimons, Abraham Taylor, Hugh Hannay, Hugh Smith, John McMinn, George Partleton, Archibald McGahan, John Graham, Thomas Ward, Hector McAllister, and John Graham.

Whether the above Jurors were selected by the overseer, or by the Coroner, or by what rule the selection was guided, if by any, we do not know.

Mr. Coroner then with great civility, requested us to take a seat at the table, in order to report every word he said and was kind enough to say, that he would speak slow on purpose to enable us to do so. We were the only reporter present, and indeed the only individual in the room except the Coroner, clerk, jurors, and constable.

Mr. Coroner then proceeded to charge the jury. The charge he had to make to them would be a very brief one indeed. They were assembled on one of those melancholy occasions, which unfortunately but too often occurred. It appeared to be one of those awful and sudden events, which sweep off their victims in numbers, and leave none behind to tell the tale. And it was utterly unknown how it had happened, and it was to be presumed that it was accidental but if the jury found that any man had willfully ignited the air in the pit, that person would be guilty of the crime of murder, and if they found that any man had willfully taken off the top of his lamp without looking to consequences it would amount to manslaughter. His official duty had at times and times required his attendance on many similar occasions but never yet could he satisfactorily ascertain the cause of the explosion, for all who were within its reach invariably perished, and he feared that no more light could be thrown upon it now. The most probable cause, and he feared they could arrive at nothing nearer than probabilities, was, that this dreadful explosion which in one foul swoop had hurried so many human beings to their long account, was some individual's opening his lamp to get more light than he could otherwise be enabled to have. Mr. Coroner then proceeded to explain to the jury the different circumstances connected with the use of lamps which would warrant them in bringing in a verdict of murder, manslaughter, or accidental death.

The charge being over, Mr. Coroner turned round to us rather abruptly, and enquired if we had put down every word he said? We replied that we feared we had not, but that we thought we had got the substance we should, however, be happy to submit our report to his correction. This proposal was courteously declined.

The jury then proceeded to view the bodies of the eleven unfortunate beings above named. They had to pilot their way through those almost interminable rows of squalid cottages called the New Houses and the Ginns, which belong to Lord Lonsdale, and are exclusively occupied by his workmen. None of these buildings seem very modern, and we have rarely seen any dwellings even of the lowest class of artisans so destitute of comfort or convenience. Whether it be from poverty or from improvidence, their interior and exterior, with the exception that they are all carefully whitewashed, are naked, desolate, and filthy in the extreme a yet more disgusting circumstance was that a large portion of their inmates both male and female, were either intoxicated or in a state bordering on intoxication. It was the duty of the jury and of the Coroner to take a view, as it is technically termed, of the bodies and in the discharge of this painful duty they had to traverse the whole of those buildings, and dive into many a recess of wretchedness, and witness the agonizing grief of the widowed, the fatherless, and of destitute old age. The majority of the victims were unmarried, young men or lads. They in general seemed little disfigured, though a respect for the feelings of their relations, and the necessity of getting through the preliminary part of the business that night, if possible, in order to enable the coroner to issue his warrant for their burial on Sunday, prevented anything beyond a very superficial examination. They had been taken out of the pit before the limbs had got permanently contracted, and perhaps the foul air had retarded that process they were all washed and straightened, and were laid out with that decent regard for the obsequies of the dead, which invariably distinguishes even the poorest of the poor.

On the return of the jury, the investigation commenced with chilling evidence respecting the death of John McMinn.

James Floody called. It would be difficult to give our readers any idea of this man's appearance and conduct. He commenced a very rude expostulation with the Coroner, who was about to swear him. He declared that the Coroner had asked him something or other (we could not catch what) before, and he had no business to ask him again - he would not take the oath - his conscience pricked him - he

would tell the truth first and than swear to it after. The Coroner expostulated with him the jury expostulated with him. Both reminded him that he was bringing great suspicion on himself. The Coroner threatened to commit him he told the Coroner to do so if he liked. Neither threats nor reasoning could induce him to take the oath he protested that he was sober ñ had not been an hour out of the pit ñ he would tell the truth but he would not swear. The Coroner ordered him into custody. There was some delay in finding a constable, and in the mean time the witness persisted in talking, and stated that he was going down the pit and felt the blast ñ that OíBrien and he both found it. This person did not appear to be drink, or at least not particularly so.

Two witnesses now appeared, Thos. Dryden and another, both to them manifestly intoxicated. The former was sworn. He went to the pit about half-past four in the morning ñ deceased was a taker off in a little pit ñ a hagger. The coroner expressed an anxiety to get deceasedís proper designation, and commented severely on the intoxication of the witnesses. Heard no blast ñ the man was scorched and burnt - blood came from his head. Was certain there had been a fire in the Croft Pit. Witness here showed strong symptoms of drunkenness, was very impertinent with the coroner, and insisted on leaving the room the Coroner threatened to commit him, expostulated with him, but all in vain. All that could be extracted from him was that he believed there had been a ìstrong blastî and that deceased had died from its effects.

During this examination the service of the only constable in attendance on the court being required, the Coroner desired him never to mind the fellow that had run away, (Floody) he was not worth keeping ñ that he would report him and see that he never was employed again.

Intelligence now arrived that the bodies of two brothers, William Little and Robert Little were got out and taken home. A jury were impannelled, including the same jurors as in the preceding inquests, excepting that James Hewitt, ex-huntsman to Lord Lonsdale (we believe) was substituted for Joseph Jackson, watchman, and Robert Abraham was substituted for Phillip Jackson, sheriffís officer.

The jury proceeded to view those bodies, which lay at a little solitary cottage, in the field, about a mile and a half out of Whitehaven. We had an opportunity of examining them more carefully than the others. William, the elder brother, was a little scorched in the face, but not so much, and his breast, where his shirt had probably been open, showed a little appearance of scorching likewise the skin of his breast had just that rough reddish appearance which marks the incipient stage of confluent small-pox. His face was very livid, which, with the redness of his breast were pretty certain signs that he had, not died suddenly, but had lived long enough for the blood to get carbonized, and the skin to inflame. His brother Robert showed no exterior sign of injury he was neither discoloured nor scorched, and it might be difficult for the physiologist to conceive what could be the proximate cause of that swift destruction, which had left so little trace of its agency. His manly countenance had that ìmild and placid air, that rapture of repose,î which often marks the recent dead.

ìBefore decayís effacing fingers, have swept the lines where beauty lingers.î They were both fine young men, remarkable for personal appearance, and were in a great measure, if not wholly, the support of their aged parents, and bore an excellent character. There was not much difference between their ages, and they strikingly resembled each other. As they lay side by side in the humble bed of their lonely cottage, we thought we had seldom seen a more affecting spectacle.

The jury returned in the dark and lowering night from this melancholy errand, and on their return found that Patterson Turner, Robt. Garraway, John Bolton, Thos. Daly, Robt. Cook, Jas. Queen, and Clement Ingleby, had been carried to their several houses from the pit. Being sworn on those inquisitions, they proceeded again to

search out for the houses of mourning. It would be impossible for us to give any lengthened detail of the appearance of the bodies, and indeed this part of the business was got over as speedily as possible, for the reasons we mentioned above. Some of the bodies appeared much scorched and bruised, especially those of the two Queenís, father and son, the latter a mere boy, who both lay in the same bed. On their return to the inn, the jury were apprised that the body of Cormack Morris was found. This was the last victim known to have perished and they proceeded to the house where the corpse was lying. On our arrival, we found this poor fellow exactly in the state in which he had been taken out of the pit. He was all blackened over with coal dust, his clothes burnt, and his skin looked as if he had been scalded, but from there being no discolouration it was evident he had died very suddenly ñ that is before re-action could take place. As he lay on his back before us he seemed to be in the position in which the last mortal agony had come over him his limbs contracted, his countenance sternly fixed.

The bodies (twenty-two in all) having been now all seen, and one of the jury having suggested to the foreman that it would be as well, on resuming the enquiry, to have in attendance every one who could throw any light on the subject by a proper account of the preventive measures usually adopted of the state of pits, and especially of their ventilation, in order that no time might be lost in sending for witnesses, the Coroner said that in such cases it was invariably the custom to make such a full investigation and that it was strongly the interest of the noble proprietor of the pits to prevent the occurrence of such accidents, as he made a practice of allowing the widows of the sufferers each a house and coals free for life, with a pension of two shillings a week, and employment to the children on very favorable terms.

The Coroner then, in a very handsome manner, suggested that Monday morning at eleven o'clock, at the public office, in Lowther Street, would be a suitable time and place for reassembling that for himself he was a public officer, and that his time was at the service of the public, and that if any jury could suggest any other time or place as more convenient for their attendance, he should be ready to afford them any accommodation in his power.

This proposal being assented to, after a little conversation, the names of the jury were called over and Mr. Coroner proceeded to charge them. He said that this was a case attended with loss of life to a most terrible extent. At present the state of the only witnesses who were likely to throw any light on it, was such that it was utterly impossible to impress on them any adequate idea, either of the solemnity of the occasion, or of the solemnity of an oath. He believed that under all the circumstances it would be better to adjourn, and that on Monday it was to be hoped that the witnesses would be impressed with a due sense of this awful event.

The jury were then bound over in their own recognizances of ten pounds each to appear at the police office in Lowther Street, on Monday morning, at 11 o'clock. Thus terminated the preliminary part of this investigation. At it is hardly probable that the inquest will be terminated time enough on Monday (if at all on that day) for us to give so full an account of it as its awful importance demands, and as it would be highly improper in us, pending the enquiry, to offer any comments of our own, our readers must not expect to read in our paper of this week, any further particulars of the investigation, or of the presumed causes of the accident. We have only to add, that though we have in our time seen many a dismal spectacle of human misery and mortality, we never witnessed one, which left on our mind such deep impressions of horror, as that of Saturday night.

WHITEHAVEN HERALD,
Tuesday, 22nd November 1831.

THE WIDOWS. ñ An honest man called on us one day this week and asked us if we had not stated in our paper that 'Turney Hodgson' had said, that Lord Lonsdale allowed the widows of the men who were killed in his collieries eight shillings a month and a cottage and coals rent free? We told him that Mr. Hodgson had said so. He said then that he had come to tell us that it was a mistake, (he used a shorter and more expressive word, but that does not matter.) That Lord Lonsdale might order it, but they did not get it. He told us that he knew Jane Scott, who was left a widow many years ago with three children that she had eight shillings a month allowed her for three years then she got four shillings a month for two years and then two shillings a month for one year, and then her pay was stopped altogether and that with respect to coals, she was only allowed one cart load in the year. She made several applications to the agents but all in vain. He added that he believed that the pensions were totally taken from the widows on the Whingill side, but that the Howgill widows had some trifle continued to them yet.

We have to record the death of an additional victim to the explosion of Saturday week. On Friday, Alexander Garraway died of his injuries he had received making the number of lives lost twenty-three in all. An inquest was impanelled, in which of course we were not included, and the usual verdict returned.

WHITEHAVEN HERALD,
Tuesday, 22nd November 1831.

ADJOURNED INQUEST ON THE BODIES OF THE PERSONS WHO PERISHED BY THE EXPLOSION ON SATURDAY WEEK IN CROFT PIT.

We stated in our last week's publication, that the inquest was adjourned until eleven o'clock on Monday morning. At that hour we repaired to the public office. In about a quarter of an hour the jury assembled. Five or six witnesses likewise dropped in, and Mr. John Peile, Mr. Williamson Peile, (his son) and Mr. Jackson, Lord Lonsdale's colliery stewards, took their seats on the bench, near the coroner. The names of the jury were then called over, and the coroner then proceeded to charge the jury. They were now reassembled for the purpose of making inquiry, and ascertaining, if possible, the cause of the deaths of the individuals named in the inquisitions before them. If it appeared to them, as he told them on Saturday night, that any one had willfully ignited the air in the mine, the persons who had done so would be guilty of murder. But he believed that they might fairly lay that out of their consideration, as besides the unlikelihood of it, nothing of the kind had even been hinted at. However, if they met with any circumstances leading to any suspicion that such a crime had been committed, they would doubtless feel it their duty to investigate them narrowly. It was utterly impossible to ascertain what took place at the time of the accident, but the shortest method, he believed, would be, to call those who knew the state of the pit immediately before and immediately after the accident. If he heard evidence as to those points and found it impossible to get at evidence showing exactly how the accident happened, he thought they could only come to one conclusion.

William Nicholson sworn, and examined by the coroner. I only go occasionally to this pit, and happened to be there on Friday. I go once a week. I am ordered by Mr. Peile to visit it once a week. Was there on Friday at ten o'clock, at the place where the accident happened. The pit was quite clean of any inflammable air. Considered it in perfect safety. Fresh air was going round it as usual. Have been there since. No inflammable air now. It is now well aired. Was in it as soon as I could conveniently get on Saturday. I think the mischief had arisen from a sudden gush from some part, but cannot ascertain from where of inflammable air, I suppose, which had touched some of the men's lights. Are the men more or less cautious on

Saturday nights? I don't know any difference. Some of those men should have been there on Saturday, but were there on Friday to meet their pay. Friday night is a regular working time.

Here some of the jury expressing themselves satisfied with the evidence, the deposition was read over to witness, as usual.

Mr. Peile (Lord Lonsdale's principal colliery agent) and the coroner, had here some conversation. The witness added, that at other times Wilson Pit was the one he visited.

Mr. Williamson Peile sworn and examined by the coroner. "Was at Croft Pit after the accident happened. Went immediately on hearing of it. At that time the air was going round. Went down with my father. Found the air restored "not going entirely round all the parts it formerly went round, but round the principal parts. Considered the pit perfectly safe previous to the accident "the ventilation, especially in that part, was particularly good. I saw the bodies of all the deceased, (here Mr. P. enumerated them) excepting McMinn and Morris.

Mr. Peile suggested here that Mr. Jackson could speak to the same facts.

The Coroner thought it quite unnecessary to hear Mr. Jackson. He did not think the inquiry could be prosecuted any further. It was clear that the explosion was the effect of accident, and he did not know what further could be made of it.

To this opinion the jury seemed generally to assent, but after a pause, Mr. Peile's examination was resumed. - The cause of the accident was mere conjecture. It left no traces behind -no traces before. No inflammable air had been seen before, and none after.

The whole of the evidence on these inquests was little more than answers, yes or no, to questions put by the coroner. Not a single question was put by any of the jury.

The Coroner charged the jury. They had now heard the whole of the evidence that could be adduced, and it had just turned out as he expected it would, and left them just as much in the dark as they were before. He would read them an inquisition which he had prepared last night, and he presumed that the rest would be much the same, though there might be some difference in specifying the exact causes of their death, whether by suffocation or scorching.

An inquisition on Christopher Fitzsimmons, ready filled up with a verdict to the effect, that, Christopher Fitzsimmons being employed in Croft Pit, as a driver, it so happened that on Saturday the 12th of November, a great quantity of inflammable air caught fire, burning and scorching the said Christopher Fitzsimmons, on the back, breast, loins, and various other places, and that he met with his death casually, and by misfortune, and not otherwise, was then read, and the jury declaring themselves satisfied, it was signed by them immediately.

It was here incidentally stated by the foreman, Mr. Curwen, that seventeen children were left without fathers, ten of them under eight years of age.

The jury impanelled on Hector McAllister was now called over. This was one of the inquisitions, which included our name.

Mr. Coroner charged. The jury had heard the evidence on the other inquests, and the same evidence was applicable to all. The death of Hector McAllister had been proved by Mr. Peile, who identified the body. He (Mr. Coroner) supposed that the deceased was very likely known to Mr. Curwen and others of the jury, which would remove all doubt of the death of the party.

The foreman read over an inquisition, filled up exactly like the others, affirming that the death of Hector McAllister took place "accidentally, casually, and not otherwise."

Mr. Peile here observed that Mr. Jackson, and the viewer, and all the deputies, were present in case any of the jurors wished for further information. Another person (whom Mr. P. named) could also give some account of the circumstances

connected with the accident. Mr. Coroner said, he thought further evidence quite unnecessary.

We here rose and stated to the Coroner that we ourselves had not heard any evidence touching the inquisition.

It would be difficult for us to describe the alteration that took place in Mr. Coroner's demeanor upon our making this remark. It would be altogether impossible for us to give anything like an exact report of the series of violent altercations (violent at least on one side) which from that moment commenced, between him and us on almost every point of what we considered the discharge of our duty as juror. We endeavored throughout to treat Mr. Hodgson with the respect due to his judicial position, and trust that we did do so, though our patience was often sorely tried. Engaged as we were for three hours that morning, in an arduous investigation, and in an active contest with the Coroner, it is entirely out of our power to give a verbatim report of some speeches which we were compelled to listen to, and which we would have given worlds to have had upon record, as illustrations of a "Coroner's quest." With the exception of the evidence, which we took down very minutely, we can give nothing but the faintest outline imaginable of the other proceedings. Besides many things were done and said so extraordinary, that as a party in the contest, we find a delicacy in publishing them on our own sole authority. In reply to our observation, Mr. Coroner said that we had heard the evidence on the preceding inquests, and proceeded at much length to enlarge on its conclusiveness. We replied that there was no evidence before us in our capacity of juror that even if the evidence we had just now heard were before us in our judicial capacity, it would not satisfy our mind, and that we had firmly resolved that we would not sign a single inquisition until we had heard all the evidence which could be produced, and which we thought necessary to satisfy our doubts.

Here a long discussion took place, and Mr. Peile earnestly advised the Coroner to suffer us to have the evidence we wished for.

Mr. Coroner at last enquired what witness we wished to be called, and we named Jas Floody.

Floody was not in court notwithstanding he was one of the witnesses on account of whom intoxication the Coroner had adjourned the court! Indeed at that time there was nobody whatever in the court, except the Coroner, his clerk and constable, the jury, three colliery agents (on the Magistrates bench), and five or six overlookers, & c., brought as witnesses, and a gentleman connected with a paper of which one of their agents was lately proprietor.

So little interest did the enquiry excite in Whitehaven, that there was not a single person in the room as a mere spectator. The unpleasantness of our situation may be better conceived than described.

We then desired to see William Nicholson, who was re-sworn and put into the box, but not before Mr. Coroner had made a long speech expressing his conviction that the "Stewards were anxious for a full and fair investigation."

We were at length about to put a question to the witnesses, when to our great surprise, and indeed indignation, on turning round we saw the jury signing the inquisition, and five or six of them had already got their name down! We immediately remonstrated with the Coroner, and told him that we considered it a most indecent thing for a jury to be signing an inquisition while the inquiry was pending. This was put a stop to.

We obtained the following evidence from William Nicholson. I have generally gone to Croft Pit once a week, but sometimes I have missed. Am regularly employed at a weekly salary, to examine the pits and see that they are safe. Am five days in the week generally at Wilson Pit, and the sixth day generally at Croft Pit. What reason have you for devoting five days to Wilson Pit and one only to Croft Pit?

The Coroner would not suffer this last question to be put ñ we had nothing to do, he said, with Wilson Pit.

Examination resumed. When at Croft Pit employs himself solely in seeing that it is safe. When apprehensive tries it with his lamp. Am I to understand that you try the pit with your lamp once a week? Yes. How do you judge whether it is safe or not? I judge by the spire that goes off the top of the light.

Here we asked the witness what were the appearances in the spire itself by which he judged. To this the witness, encouraged, we do not doubt, by observing the contempt and rudeness, to use no harsher terms, with which we were treated by the coroner replied ìI am not called here to learn you to be a collier.î Mr Coroner told the witness he need not answer the question that he had no occasion to state how he arrived at his conclusions. Mr Coroner also remonstrated with us in no gentle terms on our ignorance and impertinence in asking such irrelevant questions, and told us the business of the court was to ascertain ìthe when, the how, and the whereî the person met his death, and not to instruct us on the working of collieries and the use of Davyís. We possibly knew more about the use of a safety lamp than either Mr. Coroner or the witness suspected, but we contented ourselves with coolly making a note of the question and enquiring, if we were allowed to have an answer to it. At last, at the earnest request of Mr. Peile the examination was allowed to go on.

If the light had enlarged I would have considered it dangerous, and if it had burned blue. The pit works night and day by alternate shifts of workmen. Can you give me the names of some of the men who worked on the shift before the accident?

Mr. Coroner ñ You need not ñ it is not relevant ñ it is idle waste of time.

We did not press this question, as we knew that we could obtain the very important information the answer would have involved from other sources.

Examination resumed ñ I was there at ten o'clock on Tuesday morning. Was on the very spot. It is no part of my duty to examine the safety lamps.

Here Mr. Coroner observed that we were ìputting the cart before the horse,î that we should first have ascertained that there were safety lamps, and he asked a question to that effect. This we understood to be done in ridicule of our enquiries.

Examination resumed ñ Are the safety lamps, do you know, made at the pit, or are they bought of some manufacturer, or where are they made?

This question was also very much laughed at by the coroner, who professed himself quite unable to see the object of it.

Examination resumed ñ The lamps are made in the town ñ at the granary yard. The men were not invariably in the way of taking safety lamps with them, the place being considered particularly safe.

Mr. Peile here made a remark, the purport of which we missed noting.

Examination resumed ñ Those men behind me were employed to go on regularly in their turns. Am sent to see that they do their duty ñ am an overman ñ find fault if I see anything wrong. What do you mean by the place being well aired ñ how do you know when it is? I mean there was a good strong current of fresh air.

Mr. Coroner, who had frequently interrupted us with expressions of contempt and impatience, at our asking such absurd and unusual questions. Here read us a long lecture on the folly of our proceedings.

Examination resumed ñ I cannot say where the inflammable air came from. No part of the works had fallen in to interrupt the ventilation, nor was it interrupted. Could not discover any communication with any place in which inflammable air had been known to exist. (The coroner was very humorous on the idea of the air having found its road into that level from any other working, and ironically asked the witness if it could have come from William Pit.) In this case the witness could trace no fresh irruption of inflammable air. They were splitting up one or two of the pillars, but not regularly taking them away.

We were enquired if we could see a plan of the working, but the coroner told us that was impossible. He then proceeded again to charge the jury, persisting that there had been no fresh information elicited, not was it possible to get any, that there was no reason to think any body to blame. Several of the jury, if not the majority, expressed their concurrence with this view of the case. We persisted, however, in calling for further evidence as to the state of the pit, and we obtained from this witness the names of three persons who had been in the pit on the previous shift. Mr. Williamson Peile re-sworn ñ (A prodigious loss of time was occasioned by the innumerable speeches of the coroner, who now told us that we might be allowed to ask a few questions, he would not tolerate such rigmarole. Mr. Peile in the most handsome manner expressed his anxiety to give all the information in his power.) He went down to the pit about six o'clock in the morning. William Nicholson was correct in his statement of his duties ñ (Here one of the jury observed ìOh, his evidence is quite clear.) There are others whose duty it is to inspect the pit better able to inform you than I am. Mr. Jackson is the viewer of the colliery. I hold an official situation connected with the colliery.

Mr. Coroner said that he would let us into the whole secret of that part of the business. Mr. Jackson he stated was the viewer of one part of the collieries, Mr. Quayle of the other. Mr. Peile was over all, and Mr. Williamson Peile was a general assistant to his father.

Examination resumed ñ Does not know that there was any surgeon present when he arrived at the pit. Two boys had been removed alive about half-past four. Mr. Mossop is one of the surgeons. Was there any one at the bottom of the pit capable of distinguishing between a case of asphyxia and one of actual death?

These questions raised a storm of indignation on the part of the coroner, which it is impossible to describe. He threatened to make short work of the case he proceeded in a strain of vehement invective, so rapid that we had only time to note down the expressions ìwaste of time,î ìrigmarole,î ìimpertinence,î ìaudacity,î and ìimpudence,î during which, Mr. Peile expressed a wish that we would put the questions to Mr. Jackson. Mr. Coroner here hastily swore Mr. Jackson, and appealed to him if the pit was not well ventilated, particularly well ventilated -ñnever heard any one complain, and no one had any cause for complaint, all which Mr. J. confirmed. He then made another speech to the jury, in which he denounced the ìvillainyî and ìirascibilityî of the person who had ìdared to impeachî the gentlemen whose evidence they had heard, and he called on us for the name of the ìcalumniator.î

To all this we replied, that we had a duty to perform as well as he that that duty was narrowly to sift the circumstances of the case ñ which we fully intended to do, and that by interrupting the examination, he was only wasting time. We persisted in being allowed to re-examine Mr. Peile, to which, at length, the coroner assented. We inquired how long it would take to raise the body of a person really or apparently dead, to the top of the pit? Mr. Coroner declared this to be a most ìridiculous ì question but at last Mr. Peile was allowed to tell us, that it was a mile from the bottom of the shaft to the place where the accident happened ñ that the pit was 152 fathoms deep ñ he could not tell how long it might take to raise a body ñ great delay often was unavoidable ñ could not name any definite time. Mr. Jackson has the general superintendence of that colliery. The blame would, in the first instance, rest on Mr. Jackson, if the pit was in a foul state. Can only discover a trace of an explosion. No receptacle discovered whence foul air might have issued. Have examined the place pretty carefully since. No considerable fall of roof. If there was a foul state of the pit, would not the blame rest between Mr. Nicholson and Mr. Jackson? (Mr. Coroner made great objections to this question.) Not on Mr. Nicholson certainly I have already told you that Mr. Jackson is the steward. Would the responsibility rest on Mr. Jackson if the pit were in a foul state? (Mr. Coroner

insisted on our defining the word responsibility.) It would rest on Mr. Jackson. He is responsible for keeping the pit in a proper state, as far as is within his control. The fresh air reached the place by the gallery ñ not by boxes ñ they were not used ñ they were not needed. I was there by six o'clock. The whole day was occupied in finding the bodies, and sending them out, I personally examined each man. No surgeon went down into the pit to ascertain that the bodies were dead. (A long and tedious interruption by the coroner, who accused us of brow-beating the witness.) The bodies were cold and stiff.

Mr. Jackson called. Is viewer of the colliery. I reside in Whitehaven. Was called on at half-past four. Went to Mr. Peile, and then went to the colliery. The spot on which the deceased were working was about two hundred yards in extent. The effect of the blast extended all the way to the shaft the man riding down felt it. I visited the place about a week before the accident. Four or five men are employed under me to inspect the state of the pits. I considered this part of the pit safer than other parts in the ground ñ it was better ventilated ñ had fresh air direct from the shaft ñ the air descended direct on the men ñ it would have to travel a mile and a quarter before it reached them. There were side galleries, but they did not interrupt the current of the air. The men had their safety lamps, but we did not tie them to work with the tops on ñ there was an overman to look to them ñ their working with or without the tops of the lamps was left to the discretion of the overman, excepting I saw it necessary to order different. None of the overmen were killed. These four overmen have all the pit to superintend. There is nobody alive to tell whether they were working with tops to their lamps or not. The overman, whose duty it was to see, was not on the spot. There are locks to put on the lamps, and the overman puts them on if he thinks necessary, or may be directed. The workmen will smoke, and can contrive to light their pipes through the gauze by holding the lamp obliquely. (We expressed some surprise at this statement, but Mr. Peile, sen., confirmed it.) No person ever objected to me to going into the pit. Robert Ellwood is the overman, and is present. Have since examined the place, and found no trace of any explosion of confined air. Cannot form the slightest idea how it collected. Have you any classification of workmen, according to their experience or inexperience?

Mr. Coroner here lost all patience. He insisted that we wanted to know the expense of working the colliers, and that we had no business to inquire into such matters. Of course we disclaimed any such intention, and Mr. Jackson took advantage of the first pause, to inform us that the men went into the pit indiscriminately and each man chose his own partner. Mr. Coroner went on, vehemently insisting that it was not necessary to ascertain how the colliery worked. After much invective against us, he declared that we would suffer no more questions to be asked. He once more began to charge the jury we tried to stop him, but finding remonstrance vain, let him go on. He told them that all they had to try was the how, the when, and the where, the subject of the inquisition met his death. He appealed to the jury if they were not all satisfied. When he had done, we coolly asked him if we were precluded from asking any more questions of the witnesses. After a little consideration he told us that if we could confine ourselves to pertinent inquiries he would not prevent us. We told him that we thought that no enquiry could be efficient, unless the men who were at work in the pit, on the shift that was on immediately before that which was blown up, were examined. He assented and told us to give him the names of the persons we would like to call, and reminded us that we had some of the names down in our notes of Nicholson's evidence. We told him that if we had, he ought likewise to have them in Nicholson's deposition, and that if he persisted in defiance of us in not taking down the answers to the questions he suffered to be put, he could not expect us to assist him. We also told him that before we could agree to any verdict, we must see a young man named Gallagher or Garraway, who, it was currently reported, had been prevailed on by his brothers (who lost their lives in the

pit) not to go into it on account of its foulness. The foreman undertook to have this young man and half a dozen of the shifters in attendance on the afternoon. It was half-past two, and Mr. Coroner then adjourned the jury until four o'clock, with another speech. He exhorted them, for at least the tenth time, to confine their attention to three points only—the when, the how, and the where—that that they should not allow it to be diverted by chimerical ideas, and that they might as well suppose that he set the pit on fire as that there was any thing to blame in the conduct of those who had it in charge.

In the course of the morning we had two or three times to remonstrate with the coroner, for only putting down such parts of the evidence of the witnesses as he thought fit, and for suffering persons present to interfere in the business of the court.

ADJOURNED INQUEST

Monday at four o'clock.

On entering the room we found Mr. Coroner and about 8 or 10 jurymen. He was repeating very earnestly his exhortations to the jury about the how, the when, and the where—enforcing on them his own views of the evidence, and his conviction of the folly of pursuing the inquiry any further. As soon as the jury had assembled and had been called over, he charged them again in his usual style but on this, as on some other occasions, as we have no notes of the epithets applied to us and our conduct, we will not venture to quote them from memory. He stated that he had made up his mind that he would make short work of it that he knew what course to pursue, and would pursue it. He then read the verdict with which he had filled up the inquisition, and addressed the juror at the extreme end of the jury bench.

“William Leslie, are you satisfied with the inquisition I hold in my hand, and which I have just read to you?” Mr. Leslie, who is a man up in years, very mildly replied, that he would wish to have a question or two asked if any complaint had ever been made to the overseers. This rather posed Mr. Coroner, who directly commenced a speech to Mr. Leslie, to the effect that as there was no evidence that any complaint ever had been made, it would be foolish to expect it to be proved that complaint had not been made, as it was impossible in the nature of things to prove a negative. Before he had got to the end of his speech, Mr. Robinson and Mr. Mossop, the surgeons to the pits—entered Mr. Robinson (who is in the commission) he invited to take a seat on that bench, with some other allusions, which nobody acquainted with Whitehaven politics could misunderstand, observing that he himself sat on that bench once a month to administer justice, and trusted that he did so, and should do so impartially. He then turned to Mr. Mossop, and told that gentleman that he must be prepared for a very severe examination.

Mr. Coroner again charged the jury. They were again assembled for the purpose of investigating the cause of the death of Hector McAllister. He had already told them that the object of their inquiry was exclusively what kind of violence the deceased had perished from. That it was quite unnecessary for them to take into consideration the assertions that the pit was in a foul state, or that Mr. Williamson Peile was mistaken as to the men being dead when taken out, because nobody had come forward to prove either the one or the other. (Mr. Coroner either would not, or could not, comprehend that we had made no such assertions, but merely wished to ascertain that due care had been taken.) He should not have thought it possible for any one to bring forward so heinous a charge against honorable men. I have no objection to the most ample investigation especially if it were necessary to satisfy the public mind, and though I am not accustomed to make the usual proclamations, I have no doubt that the affair has become so public that we have heard every thing any body has say. But I will not suffer indefinite, ridiculous, and impertinent, enquiries. Mr. Coroner here proceeded at great length to prove that there was no

means of ascertaining how the inflammable air became ignited, and finished with his usual exhortation respecting when he died, where he died, and by what means. The foreman here whispered with a part of the jury, and stated to the Coroner that he thought that most of his brethren was agreed.

Mr. Coroner observed that his mind was perfectly made up he would ask a question, and it would be his duty to take a course, which he had made up his mind to. He then read his own ready prepared verdict, and explained the meaning (after his own ideas of course) of each clause. He thought, he said, there could be no objection to the inquisition, and he should be governed by the majority, and not be the individual. The foreman here stated that himself and ten of his brethren were agreed. We appealed to Mr. Leslie, who again repeated his wish to know if any body had ever made any objection to the state of the pit.

The officer of the court was here ordered to make the usual proclamation for all persons to appear, concerned in the matter before the court. We protested against closing the inquest until the witnesses, for whose evidence the court was adjourned, were called. After a long contest of which we were unable to preserve any minutes, a witness was put into the box.

David Johnston sworn. The witness answered in the affirmative to the following questions from the Coroner. Are you in employment in the pit where the accident happened? Were you employed there on Friday last? Were you in the place where the accident happened? Was it well aired? Yes, there was a good air, a capital fine air. I considered (here a bystander interfered to explain witnesses meaning) the pit in perfect safety. We worked with the lamp tops on, opening a pillar, and found no dirt (bad air). We left the pit at six o'clock. Question put by Mr. Robinson. In what state did you leave the pit? I had no idea of any danger.

Here a running conversation, which lasted some time, took place among Mr. Coroner, Mr. Robinson, the witness and somebody else.

Mr. Coroner made another speech in which he accused us of having come for the purpose of making wanton and foolish delay.

Examined by ourselves. On Friday we worked with the tops of our lamps both on and off. We were working with our tops off, but there was some road roven up not far off, and we heard it beginning to rustle, and we blew our lights out we called out, and then went and got fresh ones, with the tops on, and examined if there was any dirt. We had no reason to fear any danger of any accident happening.

By the Foreman. I never complained of danger, nor ever heard any one complain. Here Mr. Coroner declared that he would tolerate no more. That we ought to pay the witness for his loss of time. That we were bound in honour to pay the expenses of those to whom we gave the trouble of coming and addressing the witness he said "you'll call at the Herald Office for half-a-crown, in the morning."

Peter Andrew sworn. Examined by ourselves. Do you recollect making any complaint to Mr. Coroner on Saturday evening?

Here Mr. Coroner interfered and would not allow the question to be put. He said he would allow none but substantive questions to be put which he explained to mean, questions immediately relating to the fact of the death of the party. He took the examination into his own hands. I was employed at Croft Pit, know the Pit ñ knew it last Saturday ñ saw it this day fortnight. It was properly ventilated that day. It was aired then, and is now according to the master's regulations sometimes four-air was suffered to fall down.

This spontaneous statement of the witness occasioned a great sensation, and a very irregular examination of the witness by Mr. Coroner and Mr. Jackson took place, of which we were quite unable to preserve any intelligible notes. On this as on other occasions, we protested against interruptions, but in vain. The Coroner commenced a very solemn speech to the witness "Peter Andrew, did I not see you

on Saturday evening in the front of one of those rows of buildings which a benevolent master allows for the use of his dependents free of rent. You were complaining of some air pipes, and did I not tell you to apply to the proper tribunal? Did I not meet you wandering about drunk, and with a pipe in your mouth? here the speech of the Coroner was rather ludicrously cut short by some of the Jury exclaiming "it is not the man, it is not him Mr. Hodgson," and the witness gave vent to his astonishment and indignation at the charge in no measured terms. When order was at length restored, we asked the witness if Croft Pit was reputed more or less dangerous than other Pits?

The coroner would not let this question be answered. He characterised it as "foolish, ridiculous, nonsensical, and absurd." He again took the examination of the witness into his own hands and elicited from him that he did not usually work at that pit, but had worked there that day fortnight.

We here thought it our duty to make a formal remonstrance to the Coroner on his proceedings. We told him that we were willing to take it for granted, that he was acting in what he conceived to be the discharge of his duty but that we also had a duty to perform, which was to inquire into every thing connected with the death of the person named in the inquisition that this duty we had fully resolved to perform, and that his interruptions might delay our getting the information we wished, but could not prevent it, since we knew well that he could not complete a single inquisition without our signature, which he most certainly should not have while any part of our duty was left unperformed.

Mr. Coroner treated our statement of the law with great contempt, and told us that we were far mistaken, that there were two ways of getting rid of a refractory and obstinate juror - one by applying to the court of King's Bench for a Mandamus, and the other by suing out a writ de rebus inquirendo., (as we understood him to call it.) Now that we had heard so much evidence, the Jury should be locked up till they came to a conclusion, only there were one or two old men, and it would be punishing them, not us.

The Coroner was on this as on other occasions, earnestly remonstrated with by Mr. Peile, Mr. W. Peile, and Mr. Jackson, who seemed dreadfully annoyed at the suppression of the evidence. At last he suffered Chas. McGahan to be called, and we were suffered to examine him without interruption.

Chas. McGahan sworn. It is unnecessary to give this witness's replies to the interrogatories, but he clearly and distinctly declared that there was no foundation for the report of his having been prevented by his deceased brothers from venturing into the pit, as was currently reported. Mr. Robinson, Mr. Peile, Mr. Heywood, and another legal gentlemen (the Coroner's friends) joined in a most long and earnest remonstrance with the Coroner, on the inexpediency and impropriety of interrupting us, and on the necessity of making every investigation which the state of public opinion rendered necessary, and reminded him of the prodigious loss of time he had occasioned.

By this time, rumours of the extraordinary enquiry that was going on had spread over Whitehaven, and the room was filling with respectable and influential gentlemen, whose presence had a manifest influence on the Coroner's tone. He asked us what other evidence we would like to have.

We reminded him that on Saturday night, when the Jury were viewing the bodies, a poor man who had lost a relative, complained bitterly of the conduct of the Stewards and of the want of pipes, as we were able to understand him, and that we thought that the ends of justice would not be answered if this man were not produced and heard.

The great difficulty was to find out this man, for nobody knew his name. Mr. Williams Peile was particularly anxious that he should be found and made every exertion to identify him. We then said that while this witness was searched for, we

should employ the interval in examining the medical witnesses, to ascertain that proper care had been taken to examine the bodies of the deceased, and to distinguish the cause of death from those of asphyxia.

This the coroner declared to be of no importance, and under his directions the officer of the court again made the usual proclamation for witnesses to appear. We desired to see Thos. Graham.

Thos. Graham sworn ñ Was at work at Croft Pit on Friday. No danger was apprehended on that day.

James McCabe sworn ñ (examined by Mr. Coroner) ñ Is a collier. Was at Croft Pit last Friday. Worked where the accident happened. In the forenoon we worked with the tops off until this place began to fall. Then heard a rush and put them on. Tried and found it safe after. Did not consider it material to examine it. The pit was well aired. Have worked there about six months. Always considered it a safe place to work in. The overseer was diligent in looking after the spot. All ordinary caution was used to prevent accident.

By ourselves ñ What do you mean by a rush? The rush was a fall of stone. These rushes are not common ñ only in a robbery. By a robbery I mean taking away pillars. In a general way it is considered more dangerous to work pillars than the main coal. Would you rather work at the pillars than at the main coal? I would not. And are you better paid for working pillars? I am. Is not the danger owing to the roof falling in in places, and liberating inflammable air?

The coroner would not let this question be put. A long conversation ensued in which we protested against the interruption. At last the witness was allowed to answer, and he said it did arise from that cause. They then usually work with the tops on their lamps. An overman is employed to see that the tops of the lamps are on if necessary. We were working on Friday with the tops of our lamps off and did not put them on until we heard the rush. We blow out our lamps sometimes when we hear the rush. The rush might be about 50 yards off. The rush gives warning we hear the roof fall. Do you think there is any danger in working at robbery of pillars from the inflammable air catching? Not unless in dangerous workings. The overlooker was there on Friday, - once in the forenoon and once in the afternoon. We take off the tops of the lamps to have more light. We told all the men of the rush. We did not tell Mr. Jackson, but we told Joseph Bates, the evening overman, of the rush. We told the men that have lost their lives that a rush had taken place. Bates went and viewed it.

Joseph Bates sworn ñ Is an overman. Saw the place last Friday. Left it about a quarter past six in the evening. All was apparently safe. I heard before I got to McCabe that a rush had taken place ñ a fall from the roof. I went to examine it. Nothing but a piece of following stone. No explosive air. Place quite clean, never heard of any one objecting to go into this pit. Always directed the Davyís to be locked when I apprehended danger. To what do you imagine this catastrophe to be owing? Canít tell that. To the ignition of inflammable air? Yes. Have been there since, and have examined it. We examined with a light every place in the works to see if there were any inflammable air in it. Examined every place strictly, and saw no place whence it could have come. I think it had come out either at the roof or at the sill. Have seen inflammable gas accumulated in old workings, but rarely. It was my business to see that this place was in a state fit for working. Sometimes working at pillars is more dangerous than working at the main coal. When the roof falls, or the sill heaves, it is more dangerous. As soon as ever we start with such a concern our lamps are locked and made safe. After we have repeatedly examined and found all clean (safe) and sometimes not for two or three days after that, we take the tops off. But you have no possible means of knowing that an irruption will not take place? None. If the top is off is there an increase of light, and can the man work more? He can. Are they paid by the piece? They are. The people who were

killed were over an extent of about 200 yards ñ 24 of them in all. Every collier had safety lamps. The youngest boy there, was about 8 years old. Two of the boys had lamps. Could these boys take the tops on and off the lamps as they liked? They could.

Hugh Smith sworn ñ (This was the man who had complained on Saturday night, and about whom so much inquiry had been made.) Examined by the Coroner. I know the place where the accident happened. Saw it about half an hour after the men were lost, and also about ten weeks before. I was not working there ñ went to inspect - to see if I was able to work there. I considered the work too heavy ñ it was for able, stout men. I had also an objection to working there on account of so many accidents having happened ñ men scorched and burned, found alive, and who died afterwards. They were found alive and died afterwards. Dan Maclaughlen and Mike Smith were lost there, working the solid coal. When I saw the pit last, it was in a middling way, some men working with open tops, and in some places they were working with them shut. I could work in some places in safety, in others I could not. They worked with or without tops to their Davyís according to the deputyís directions. I saw danger in some places, one within sixteen yards of where these people were lost. It was not a regular working ñ it was where they were taking pillars- it was where I would not work.

Most of these statements were made, not in answer to the questions of the Coroner, but spontaneously. The Coroner accused him of drunkenness, and asked him why he had not told him and the jury of these things before. The witness repelled the charge of having been drunk on Saturday night with great indignation. The poor fellow said, that his own cousin was among those who were lost, that he had been 26 hours in the pit, and had not left it until he was in danger of his own life from the effects of the foul air, in his attempts to save his relative. He complained bitterly of the composition of the jury, which he assigned as a reason for not complaining to them more particularly on Saturday night.

Examination by ourselves ñ Did not know that an inquest was sitting now. Was in the pit on Saturday night, in a different working ñ was about a mile from where the explosion took place ñ it was about three when it happened. Went with the deputy as fast as he could. Did not hear the explosion ñ was in a separate air. Met two boys carried out alive. Was terribly exhausted with making three attempts to get at his cousin. There was great delay, for want of wood to restore the air. (We believe that ìthe airî is restored by setting wooden partitions in the different galleries, so as to direct the atmospheric current into the part of the works where ventilation is wanted.) Computes there were four hours lost for want of means of restoring the air. There was plenty of experienced people, but they had not stuff to make their experience of any use. No complaint can be made of the conduct of the deputy overman in restoring the air. Was overcome by exhaustion. I saw there was no air, and no means of getting it. Saw it was all of no use. They had to send to the granary yard for wood ñ about three miles. I think four hours were lost.

Mr. Jackson here addressed the court, and denied that the air was cut for four hours ñ the current of air was continued.

The Coroner thought the statement of the witness worthy of no credit as he asserted that the air was not restored until six or seven o'clock, which was quite contrary to the statements of Mr. Peile and Mr. Jackson.

Here Mr. Williamson Peile made an observation, which though quite extra-judicial, we considered it only due to him to record, and handing him our notes, we requested him to note it down, which Mr. Peile was kind enough to do. It stands as follows: -

ìThe current of fresh air was never taken off the men, excepting for the instant of the explosion, and wood on the place was uselessly used to replace doors in attempting to send it forward.î

We here again repeated our determination to sign no more inquisitions without more evidence and especially that of the surgeon.

Mr. Mossop, surgeon, sworn. Is surgeon along with Mr. Robinson, attached to the pits. Made an external examination of the body of Garraway. The whole body was burnt. What organic changes do you consider indicative of the body being burned? The skin was reddened and inflamed, and especially on the hands, it was thickened and hard like leather. I was called at six several men had been burned, and brought to the place kept by Lord Lonsdale for receiving them on these occasions. I saw one boy with his thigh broken. Those persons are doing well. About half-past seven or about eight o'clock, went to the pit top to make inquiry. Have you ever in your own practice or in you reading, met with a case in which animation was suspended for want of fresh air, or that the person seemed dead, but was not really so? (The Coroner would not suffer the witness to be questioned, as to his information derived from reading but he was allowed to answer that he had never meet with such a case in his own practice) Are you aware that it is an established rule of practice not to consider any one dead of asphyxia, until putrefaction has commenced? I believe no man ought to be considered dead whatever disease he may have died of, until putrefaction takes place. In cases of asphyxia is not more precaution required, than, when a person dies of chronic disease? It is ñ but I was told I could be of no service.

The Coroner here objected to the use of the word asphyxia, as unintelligible to any but medical men, and while we were considering how to frame our questions, so as to dispense with this obnoxious word, a pause took place. Poor Hugh Smith, a simple-minded man of warm feelings, to whom all this was quite unintelligible, had, for some time, been sullenly eying the jury, who were in a row in a corner of the room, with the exception of ourselves, who were at the table making notes. He took advantage of the pause to address the coroner ñ 'Please sir, is them yer jury?' 'Yes they are.' 'Did any body ever see such a set? What can they know about it! Thereís not a qualified man among them!' The Coroner ordered him to be silent ñ lectured him ñ reiterated his accusation of drunkenness on Saturday night on this Smith replied with more warmth than decorum, and the scene, which convulsed all the spectators with laughter, ended in Smithís being ordered into custody, from which, however, he was soon liberated.

Mr. Mossopís examination resumed. ñ Did not consider it any part of my duty to ascertain, when the bodies were accessible, whether there were cases of suspended animation or of death. There is no man attached to the colliery whose business it is. With the exception of Garraway, I do not know whether they died of contusions, burning, or from the want of fresh air. If you were to see a corpse, with the lips and face livid, and blue, and burned, what would think the person had died of? For what of fresh air, or from strangulation. We here, with some opposition from the Coroner, put a question in the following terms. 'I and several of the jury saw the body of Cormack Morris the clothes were burned more or less, the surface of the body was pale, and the skin was peeling off as if it had been dipped in boiling water of what would you think Cormack Morris had died?' From the effects of fire. You saw on Garrawayís body marks of inflammation? I did. Is inflammation a process, which takes place before or after death? It takes place before death, not after. Then Garraway must have lived long enough after the infliction of the injury, for that reaction, which constitutes inflammation, to take place. It is not inflammation, but a common appearance after burning. If you were to see a body, with the face blackened and bruised would you think that the person had lived long enough after the receipt of the injury for reaction to take place? I should hardly think so, but I should imagine he had died from want of circulation in his lungs. If you saw a body with face much bruised, and reddened about the bruises, would you

think that the man had lived long enough after the receipt of the injury for reaction to take place? I will not answer ñ if I had seen the men I might have told you.

The Coroner here told witness that he need not answer the question that he wondered at his patience in submitting to be catechised so long. He insisted that we were merely putting these questions for the purpose of showing our learning, and enlarged very humorously on that point.

We stated that we considered it a matter of the highest importance to ascertain whether any of the unfortunate persons could have been saved by prompt attention. The coroner said he positively would not suffer the time of the court to be wasted by such foolish and impertinent inquiries. He accused us, for the twentieth time, at least, of obstinacy, obtuseness, and stupidity, of wishing to insult Mr. Williamson Peile and Mr. Jackson, talked again about applying to the superior courts for a writ de rebus inquirendo, and threatened to put a stop to the inquest. He then took the examination into his own hands. Was every thing done that could possibly be done? Yes. Do you believe it possible to have restored any of the persons to life? I think not, but I did not see them.

Finding it absolutely impossible to effect any thing like a minute inquiry, subject to the innumerable interruptions, and interminable speeches of the coroner, of which, and of the epithets he applied to us, we could not note one tenth, we offered to strike a kind of a bargain with him, that if he would let us ask one or two more questions of Mr. Mossop. We would have done. Several of his friends near him, and especially the gentlemen, connected with Lord Lonsdale's colliery establishment, urgently requested him to let us make whatever inquiries we thought fit, and, at last, he assented, telling Mr. Mossop, that he need not answer any questions unless he liked.

We then proceeded, having previously written our questions. ìIf Mr. Mossop-----ì

Here Mr. Coroner again interfered he would suffer, he said, no hypothetical questions to be put at last he was persuaded to let us put it our own way.

ìIf Mr. Mossop had had the superintendence of the pit, would he or would he not, have considered it his duty to have had a professional man on the spot, immediately on the bodies being accessible, to ascertain whether any or them were suffocated and recoverable, or not?ì

Here another long, irrelevant, unreportable (to coin a word) conversation took place, during which Mr. Coroner treated with much ridicule, the idea of a surgeon going to the bottom of a pit on such an errand.

We explained, as soon as we could get a hearing, that we meant ìaccessibleî to medical aid, and did not care whether that were at the top or the bottom of the pit, and read the following question: -

ìWould you have considered it your duty to have a surgeon to them immediately on their being accessible to medical aid?ì

The witness declined answering the question. The coroner commenced a rapid ironical monologue directed to the witness of which we made the following note: -

ìMr. Coroner ñ It would be a very great insult to send for a medical man under such circumstances.î Thinking it of importance to verify this observation, we read our note to Mr. Coroner, and asked him if we were to consider that a faithful record of what he had said. Mr. Coroner said that he had not said anything of the kind, but he would tell us what he had said, and would talk slow, that we might note it down. We wrote down as follows from his dictation. ìI said to Mr. Mossop ñ If you are informed by a person who has charge of a colliery, that half a dozen persons had lost their lives in the colliery, would you deem it necessary to go to see if they were dead or not? Mr. Mossop said No. Then I said would you deem it an insult? Mr. Mossop said Yes.î

Here Mr. Mossop, who did not seem to relish having his name tacked to such a monstrous absurdity, denied that he had said yes, and said he merely meant that it might be unnecessary.

Another long conversation in which Mr. Coroner observed, that the object of all this was to fill the columns of the Whitehaven Herald. We replied that it was too late for that week's publication. He said that was no matter, - it would keep until next week. We replied that we believed it would, and a great deal longer. He observed that he should be laughed at for allowing so many foolish questions to be put. We assured him that if he were laughed at, it would not be on that account.

We now intimated that we had no more questions to ask.

The jury was once more called over, and Mr. Coroner once more charged them. He said that they had heard all the evidence, which was necessary to enable them to come to the conclusion recorded in the inquisition he had read to them in the morning. (He here recapitulated those parts of the evidence, which were to that effect.) He had previously stated that all must be left to conjecture. As for the actual causes of death, the only way by which you can come to any conclusion, whether the parties were burned or suffocated, is by the external appearance. If any of you have any doubts of the propriety of the verdict, it has already been signed by persons long more conversant with those things, than the individual who has occupied your attention so irrelevantly and impertinently. (Here Mr. Coroner was very hard on that individual, but we were only able to get down the following sentence.) There was no aspersion now rested on the characters of the gentlemen who had come so roundly forward in the face of day - the calumny had recoiled on the head of the infamous calumniator. It was brought home to the most ordinary understandings that no human means could have been devised to save them. In all probability it was a pure accident there could be no design of setting the pit on fire and it has long been known that on the part of the colliers in general there is a carelessness, a headlessness, a recklessness of their own safety, which yet cannot be considered felonious.

Mr. Coroner here turning round to us, and showing us his ready-prepared inquisition, asked us if we were now ready to sign it.

We said - that we had one very strong objection - namely, that 5 of the jury signed it before they had heard the evidence. (A laugh.)

Mr. Coroner. - Oh! that is immaterial! (Laughter.)

We replied - that we begged to be understood as formally making the objection. It was within his discretion to entertain the objection or not.

Mr. Coroner here said something about his own impartiality and legal precision. Here entered Mr. R. Sherwin, solicitor. - Mr. Sherwin, said Mr. Coroner, - have you seen any thing illegal in my conduct. - I beg to decline answering, Mr. Coroner. - Oh! You don't want to be interrogated, do you not? Mr. Coroner now erased the names from the inquisition with his pen, and handed it down, directing the Jurors who had previously signed to sign again, and all the twelve put down their names, ourselves last.

While the signing was going on, Mr. Williamson Peile enquired of us, with much courtesy and with a degree of feeling which did him honour, if we really believed that any lives had been lost for want of medical assistance? We replied that we could not form any decisive opinion on that point, as we had made a very superficial examination of the bodies, never suspecting in the least that medical assistance had not been had but that we had every reason to believe, from the appearance of inflammation on the bodies, that many of the deceased had lived for some time after the explosion and that the bodies of the two Littles exhibited no indications of scorching sufficient to account for their death - one of them indeed none whatever, and that if they had died of suffocation, there was no saying whether or not they might have been recovered, unless proper means had been tried.

The inquisition on Hector McAllister having been signed a new difficulty occurred. It having been clearly proved that some of the bodies showed appearances of suffocation and others of burning, it was plain that the standing verdict of "burned and scorched on the hip, back, breast, &c." would not fit all the cases with any decency, so it was agreed to adjourn until the morning, against which time the Coroner and the foreman could get inquisitions ready filled up, and the jury might then assemble formally to sign them.

Previous to separation, Mr. Coroner turning round to us said, "Perhaps Mr. Abraham you do not know that it is not usual to have a parchment inquisition filled up, and signed by twelve jurors, but the inquisition is often written on a piece of paper, and signed only by one of the jury. You may not know that this is law, but it is law I can assure you. To which we replied. "Sir, I did not know that it was the case, though, I do know that crown's law has been a proverb, ever since the times of Shakespeare." "Oh that's all your learning is it" replied Mr. Coroner, "Why Mr. Shakespeare's quite a modern author. Crown's law, as you call it, sir, goes back in " Here Mr. Coroner's memory failed him, and turning to his books, he quoted an act of the Edwards some way about 1500, but we are not very sure of the chronology, nor does it much matter.

CUMBERLAND PACQUET,
Tuesday, 29th November 1831

ACCIDENT AT CROFT PIT

The adjourned inquest upon the bodies of the unhappy sufferers in the late melancholy accident at Croft Pit, was resumed on the morning of Tuesday last, the Coroner having adjourned the Court for a week, in order to gratify one of the jurors, who wished for additional evidence. The rest of the Jury, however, had long been satisfied upon the case, and expressed great unwillingness to be kept so long in attendance and shortly after the commencement of the proceedings the foreman handed a memorial to the Coroner, signed by himself and ten of his fellow Jurors, in which they expressed their perfect conviction that "the sufferers in Croft Pit lost their lives by an accident over which no human being could have had any control" "that they could come to no other conclusion" "that "the conduct of their fellow-juryman, Mr. Robert Abraham, was not calculated to elicit the true state of the case" "and that "the adjournment he had requested was to answer some vexatious design, and not to promote the ends of Justice." The memorial concluded by requesting the Coroner to discharge them as soon as possible.

In the course of this day's proceedings, as on the prior investigation, frequent discussion took place between the Coroner and the dissatisfied Juror, but as they were almost entirely irrelevant to the inquiry, we think we shall best consult the feelings of our readers by omitting them altogether. Upon so painful a subject we have no desire to touch upon any topic in the lightest degree irritating. As soon as the Jury had taken their seats, the Coroner proceeded to address them. As the inquiry, he said, had already been prolonged in so unnecessary a manner by the obstinacy of one of their body, it was his intention, in order that they might not be put to further inconvenience, to swear in a thirteenth Juror. It was perfectly competent in him to do so and as Joseph Jackson had seen the whole of the bodies, and was able to judge from personal inspection of them, he would swear him as a Juror, in order that they might not be any longer detained. He could not conceive how any person could ever entertain the slightest doubt upon the case "the evidence was so clear and unvarying. He then proceeded to explain the law as regards Coroner's Juries, observing, that be the original law that officer might summon four, six or more, and he was not aware of any statute which went to take

away that discretionary power. In cases of murder it was not unusual to summon fifteen, sixteen, or seventeen jurors. In cases of manslaughter twelve was the usual number. Lest therefore any further impediment should be thrown in their way, he would take thirteen and twelve of them would be competent to return a verdict. The appointment of an additional juror did not, however, at all interfere with Mr. Abraham's power to act he was still as much a juryman as ever he was, and he begged he would exercise his rights. He (the Coroner) was there for a purpose, not of stifling inquiry, but of causing the fullest investigation and should be glad to hear any evidence that could be added.

JOSEPH JACKSON was then sworn and added to the Jury upon which the dissatisfied Juror observed that it was an unprecedented proceeding, and a mere expedient in order to silence his voice and stifle inquiry. He had witnesses whom he had intended to have examined, but after the course which Mr. Coroner had thought proper to pursue, he would take no further part in the proceedings. He was relieved from a heavy responsibility for which he was thankful. He should not of course be expected to sign the inquisitions.

The CORONER said he had no interest but in the fullest investigation, and characterised the expressions of the juror as a vile insinuation, repeatedly urging him to give the names of his witnesses, which was as often refused.

After some further altercation, the following witness were called JAMES DODD sworn. He is a collier, and was in Croft pit at the time the explosion took place, which, to the best of his judgment, happened about half-past two or three o'clock. He was in the air course, and was not injured, though he felt the blast, which blew out their lights. A boy who was behind a door preserved his light, and gave one to them. Witness proceeded into the Bannock Band, and met two men, William Simon and Daniel Kean, of whom he asked what had happened. Proceeding on, witness came to a door which he found tight opened it and passed through, taking care to secure it after him. Met some men coming up the inclined plane, which leads from the main band. The men whom witness met advised him not to go any further, as the stithe was very strong he determined, however, to go on and see what was the matter, and upon the rocky roads met Thomas Benson, who was the first man he spoke to. Shortly after Joseph Fox came up, and after holding a short consultation, they proceeded on and came to two doors, both broken - one shattered to pieces. Witness and Fox pushed forward, and found Joseph Freckleton lying upon the ground. They helped him up, and found that he was able to talk and walk. A little further on, they found a boy named Alexander Garraway. During the whole of this time, the air was going the right road, and to the best of his belief, it was about four o'clock. Still further on they found another boy, Alexander MacMean, who was lamed. They sent the two boys towards home. Proceeding on they found a dead boy, John McMean. Came to the air course pit, which they examined, and found that the air was going as usual. Witness held up his lamp, and the air was strong enough to blow the flame to the side of the cylinder. Witness then came back to the points, and went a contrary road to look at a stop. Found a door open, which they shut. Pushed forward, but found the stithe very strong. Met Robert Ellwood, an overman, and told him what they had done. Ellwood went and examined. With some difficulty, they got to the top and found several of the men laying dead.

This might be about six o'clock. The first that witness came to was Robert Little, who was burned. Lifted his hand and found that he was dead. Heard some one shouting, to whom he replied and found it to be Mr. Peile, Mr. Jackson, and Mr. Williamson Peile. At the place where witness then was, fourteen or fifteen of the bodies were found and amongst these was the other Little. The air was going as usual, during the whole of this time. A tight door sent it direct to the place, and it was never off even for a moment. The explosion made the road dusty, and the air

was very thick. When Mr. Peile and Mr. Jackson come, he had nothing more to do, but he assisted in removing the bodies. If Mr. Peile had not come he considers that they could have done, as the air was never off the ground.

Examined be a Juryman - Has been a collier for 50 years, and has worked in Croft Pit for several months. Always considered Croft Pit worked in a proper manner. All the head masters in his time have been anxious to render the pits safe. The Stewards always attended well, and cautioned the men when any danger was apprehended. They were ordered to work with their lamp tops on, on the day the accident happened, as a fall was expected but some men are bigoted and will not attend to what is said to them. Cannot tell how the accident happened, but thinks the lamps, when found, will show whether the tops have been on or not. In the previous shift they were expressly ordered to keep them on.

THOS. BENSON sworn - Is a blaster, and was employed in Croft Pit, on Saturday morning, at the time the accident happened. After the explosion, witness went to the break pit top, and saw two bodies, said to have been those of John Graham, and Christopher Fitzsimmons. Went down and saw John McGaughan lying on his left side dead. The two Littles were lying at the steath bottom. Partleton was lying on his back, with his head downwards, over the remains of a wall, which had been blown away. James McQueen was lying on the steath head with his face in the dust, and witness turned him upon his back ñ he was dead. Hector McAllister was the next he came to and Clement Ingleby the next. Witness turned each of them over on their backs to see if they were dead. One of the bodies was stripped, but does not know how it came to be so. ñ The pit was well aired, and properly wrought, and witness had been employed in it three years and a half. Had been in the pit on the previous shift, and was on his road there when the accident happened but having gone into Kells pit for a spade, he escaped the danger. The pit, in his opinion, was in a good state and he saw no danger or he would not have stopped there. Witness is a blaster. There was plenty of wood to repair the damage, it could have been got at, and no time was lost.

JOSEPH FRICKLETON sworn: - Was in the pit at the time the accident occurred, and was struck down by the blast. He does not know who helped him up, but he was carried away by James Fox and James Dodd, who took him down the main band stage, and he was restored. Can give no account how the accident happened. He was sitting between two doors when the explosion took place, and immediately ran, but was overtaken by the blast and fell. He rose and ran a second time, and fell again. At the third time he fell insensible. The distance, which he ran, might be about thirty yards. Has worked in Croft Pit two or three years, and never heard any one object to work in it on account of its being considered dangerous.

WILLIAM SIMON sworn: - Was in the pit at the time the explosion took place, and saw Hugh Smith about three quarters of an hour after the accident occurred.

At this period, the Coroner again pressed the dissentient Juryman, with great eagerness to produce any witnesses whom he might wish to call, but he declined to do so, alleging as his reason, that the Coroner had sworn the additional Juror for the express purpose of stifling the inquiry.

This expression, which was heard with much surprise by the Court, was ordered by the Coroner to be taken down, with a view to ulterior proceedings against the speaker, for impugning his honesty and impartiality as a Judge.

WILLIAM POSTLETHWAITE was the next witness sworn, and being asked if there were any want of wood in the pit, he replied that there was twice as much as was wanted, if it could have been got at. He considers that no one can live longer than three minutes in such an atmosphere as results from an explosion of foul air in a coal pit, and he has been burned two or three times a single mouthful of foulness is sufficient to make a man fall when a feed is accidentally cut, even though it be not fired, and witness has himself fallen several times from that cause.

ALEXANDER GARRAWAY sworn: - He lost two sons by the late explosion in Croft Pit, which in his opinion, was a pure accident, not resulting from any bad management, but from causes which could not be controlled by human means. The evidence of the witness, who seemed much affected, produced a strong sensation in the Court, and the Jury unanimously expressed their unwillingness to hear any further testimony, having long been perfectly satisfied that, the melancholy occurrence was purely accidental.

The Coroner then read the inquisitions, which were signed by twelve of the Jurymen, the dissatisfied individual still objecting to the verdict 'accidental death.' Upon being asked by the Coroner why he refused to sign he replied that that was an illegal question!

WHITEHAVEN HERALD,
Tuesday, 29th November 1831.

ADJOURNED INQUEST ON THE DEATHS OF THE PERSONS KILLED IN CROFT PIT, HELD NOV 22nd

The jury began to assemble on Tuesday. About ten o'clock. A good deal of delay took place before they were all collected and called over. Several of them, we observed came out of an adjoining room, and two or three were called out singly. We did not, at first, understand this proceeding, but it was soon sufficiently intelligible to us.

As soon as the Jury, was called over, we addressed ourselves to the Coroner, and told him that some of the witnesses were present, and some were not, but that we would give him a list of those we wished to see, to prevent any delay in producing those who were not present.

Mr. Coroner desired us to tell him the objects we had in desiring to see them. We told him that our general object was inquiring into all the circumstances attending the catastrophe, and that with respect to the light which each witness could throw upon them, that would be learned from the witnesses, when they were produced.

Mr. Coroner was very indignant at our answer, and said that he never heard of such a thing as refusing to inform a counsel of the objects for which witnesses were to be called.

We told him that we did not regard him as a counsel, but as a judge.

Mr. Coroner expressed great displeasure at our reply, and said, that as a judge, he had the more right to ask any question or make any observation.

Mr. Coroner then proceeded to charge the jury. He said they were again assembled in consequence of a note addressed to him by Mr. Robert Abraham, stating that he must hear further evidence before he could sign any more inquisitions. (Mr.

Coroner here proceeded to enlarge on the conclusive nature of the evidence they had already heard.) Lest any inconvenience should arise from the obstinacy of that individual, he would make such an addition of the jury as would put it out of the power of any man to protract the investigation any further than was necessary.

The jury as well as another individual behind them, had all seen the bodies, and it would have been competent in him to have sworn in the whole 13 in the first instance, and there could not have been any difference of opinion to prevent their coming to a verdict, for he was sure there could not possibly be more than one man who could hesitate after the evidence they had heard. Indeed he usually impanelled a Jury of sixteen or seventeen when there was any suspicion of murder or manslaughter, but in this case where there was no reason to suppose that any one had contemplated either of those crimes, he thought it quite unnecessary to trouble more than twelve. 'But I now find it necessary to swear in an additional

Juror, that the Jury many not be detained any longer by the obstinacy of one individual.

Mr. Coroner here called Joseph Jackson.

Jackson is so well known in Whitehaven that it would be quite unnecessary to say any thing about him, except for the information of our readers at a distance. He was, we believe, originally a farmer, then became a policeman. He was defendant in an action brought against him for an outrageous assault, and was imprisoned for the damage. He came out under the insolvent act, and is now a watchman, and we believe ekes out a living by officiating, as bellman, distributing hand-bills, and acting as assistant to the sheriff's officers.

This person was then sworn and placed in the Jury box, and being asked if he had seen all the bodies, answered in the affirmative.

Mr. Coroner here looked at the Foreman of the Jury, and Mr. Foreman getting upon his legs, made a speech to the Coroner. He said, that he, as foreman, and the rest of the jury, thought the enquiry had now been persisted in long enough to enable them to come to a conclusion on the verdict required that they thought they had been very unnecessarily detained by Mr. Abraham, to answer purposes of his own, and he (Mr. Foreman) would just hand in a few lines expressive of their feelings on the occasion.

Thereupon Mr. Foreman handed in to Mr. Coroner a bit of paper, which the latter opened and read aloud. We were unable to obtain a copy of this precious document, but the purport of it was as follows: - That eleven of the Jury had all made up their minds to sign a verdict, but that Mr. Robert Abraham from party motives refused to do so that the Jury were very much inconvenienced by being kept so long from their houses and their business, and they prayed the coroner to take such steps as he thought fit to terminate the investigation. It also made sundry other imputations on us, the words of which we do not so distinctly remember as we do the charge of party motives, and it was signed by the whole eleven Jurors.

We remonstrated with the coroner and with the Jury on these extraordinary proceedings, of which we cannot pretend to give any report, took place. The Coroner asked for our list of witnesses, which we declined giving him, and called on us to proceed with our inquiries, which we also declined we told him that after the extraordinary step he had taken, after the indecent charge which eleven of the Jury had brought against us, and his own still more indecent and illegal conduct in reading it, that the investigation could not be prosecuted to any useful purpose but that if he would fill up the panel to the full number of twenty-three, and make up the addition with names of respectable people, that we would be willing to go on. This Mr. Coroner declared to be impossible, as Jackson was the only man who had seen the bodies. We then told him that as far as we were concerned, the investigation was at an end and that he had put a stop to it, legally perhaps, but quite effectually.

Mr. Coroner here read our note, which he observed 'could tell no lies' the note stated that witnesses whom we wished to examine would be in attendance he accordingly enquired if any one was in the court who had any complaint to make. No answer was returned by any body. Here the Foreman stated to him that he and eleven of the Jury were agreed.

Mr. Coroner now, who seemed not a little vexed at the turn affairs had taken, reproached us with bringing him and the Jury there for nothing.

We accused him of swearing in an officer of his own court, for the express and avowed purpose of getting quit of us when our enquiries might be displeasing. Here a discussion took place, as to whether Jackson was or was not an officer of the Coroner's court, which was denied. The Coroner declared he had done it at the request of the Jury, to relieve them from a duty, which as men living by their industry, might prove oppressive to them, and to prevent the court being adjourned

from day to day on frivolous complaints. The discussion continued very regularly, and after several attempts to explain our reasons for refusing to name any witnesses, in which we were always interrupted by the Coroner, and not always in the mildest manner, we sat down and took advantage of the first pause to say, that we had no right to reply on the court, and certainly would not presume to do so without his permission, but that as soon as we had that permission, we were prepared to assign our reasons for the course we were pursuing, but that we begged he would not let us begin unless he was disposed to hear us out. Mr. Coroner requested us to proceed.

We then rose and stated to him, that he had now got a jury, of whom twelve had expressed their willingness to sign the verdict which he had prepared for them ñ one of them even without having heard it read to him, and without having heard a tittle of the evidence. That by so doing he relieved us from the responsibility which rested on us as long as there were only twelve men on the jury ñ which twelve men must necessarily be unanimous that we felt sincerely obliged to him for having released us from a laborious and painful duty, and that as he could now do without our signature, there was nothing to prevent his getting such a verdict as he wished and that as we did not mean to sign it, there could be no use in detaining, with our doubts, the twelve who had made up their minds to sign it. That we certainly neither would sign the verdict, nor pursue the investigation. That for our not signing the verdict we would give no reason whatever, because we were not bound to give him any, and it was no business of his what our reasons were. That for our not pursuing the investigation, as we had promised, our reasons were these: That his ideas of law and justice, and of the proper course of enquiry, and of the method of obtaining evidence were so different from ours, that even on Monday week, when we were so circumstanced that he could not possibly get an inquest without us, we were perpetually impeded and obstructed by him in what we considered our duty that to some important questions he would let us have no answers, and that to others we only got answers by positively telling him that we would sign no inquisitions until we had such answers. And that now when we had no such means of enforcing the production of evidence, - now that eleven of the jury had formally declared that they wanted no more evidence, - now that he had sworn in a thirteenth juror, for the express and avowed purpose of stifling our enquires if they grew disagreeable ñ and now that all the twelve had expressed their willingness to sign the verdict, he had tendered to them ñ that any further investigation would be worse than a mere loss of time it would be an absurdity, a mockery of justice to which we would not lend ourselves.

Mr. Coroner, after hearing us out, replied rather angrily. He told us that it would not end here that he would apply to the Court of King's Bench, for a Mandamus to compel us to give our reasons for not signing the verdict.

We replied, that we had not the least objection to his doing so. That we should be very happy to meet him in the Court of King's Bench, and did not doubt but that we could give the Court very good reasons for withholding our signature.

Here Mr. Coroner again called on any person who had any complaint to make to the court to come forward. Nobody volunteering, he cast his eye upon a man in the crowd and called him forward.

James Dodd sworn, and examined by the Coroner ñ Is a collier was in Croft Pit when the explosion took place. ñ The blast happened a little before three ñ about half-past two. We were in the air course then ñ I was not hurt. It blew our lights out ñ we got our lights again and proceeded to the Bannock band. The lives were lost in the main band. William Symon, Danial Cain and I went on to the Inbank head proceeded to a door which we found tight we secured the door. Met some men coming up the inclined plane leading from the main band. They recommended us not to go on the stifle was strong we persuaded them to turn, and they all went back

with us. Met Thos. Benson in the main band met with Joseph Fox and we all went forward together. We met two doors broken open a little shattered. Went on and found a man called Joseph Freckleton, on the road. We helped him up, and he could talk and walk. Further on we found Alexander Garraway (the father.) The air was going on the right road all the time. This might be about four o'clock. Then we went further and found another lying, McMinn we took him up and sent him off towards home. Went forward and found a dead body. We proceeded to the air course pit ñ examined that ñ the air going as usual ñ came back to the points ñ took on another contrary road to a stop ñ found a door open and shut it. Went forwards to the brow foot. Found the stithe strong. Another hour was gone. Met Edward Fox and I told him what we had done. Afterwards got to the top and found several of the men lying dead. ñ This might work on until six o'clock. The first man we found was a man named Little, who was not burned. The air was then as usual and had been. Found he was dead. We looked for more. Heard a shout ñ it was from Mr. Peile, and Mr Williamson Peile, and Mr. Jackson. The air was never off the spot ñ going about the right road ñ the stithe raised a great dust. Mr. Peile and Mr. Jackson arrive about six I staid about till late on the day
His Deposition was here read to witness.

By a Juror. ñ I have worked 50 years in those pits never in any other. Always Croft Pit worked in a proper manner. Whenever I applied to the head master, had redress. Never wanted stone or wood. The stewards were regular in attending, for anything I knew to the contrary. We warned each other when we apprehended any danger. That day a man told me they were ordered all to work with their lamp tops on ñ they apprehended a fall. The lamps are not found ñ do not know whether the tops were on or off. They were ordered to work with their tops on ñ I think.

Thos. Benson was then called, we think on the suggestion of Mr. Peile. ñ Am a collier ñ employed in Croft Pit ñ I left home at one. (Witness proceeded in his narration too rapidly for us to write all he said the Coroner making no minutes.) I went down ñ the stithe was too strong ñ could not proceed. Air was going its right course. While I was there, attempts were made to get up to the pit top ñ up to the bodies. Those attempts were several times defeated. I saw two bodies got.

This examination so far, was not taken on oath, but the Coroner now observed ìI'll begin there.î and swore the witness, and examined him as follows ñ Can't tell when I got to the brake pit top I had no watch, I saw bodies lying on their faces ñ Saw different bodies round them. ñ (Mr. Peile here explained that by the ìbrake pit topî was meant the area round the top of the pit, which ascended from the level where the witness was, to that in which explosion happened.) The two Little's were lying at the steer bottom, and Partleton between them, on his back with his head downwards, on a wall, which had been blown down. James Queen was lying on the steer head I turned him over on his back. The witness here named the persons whom he had found most to them it appeared were lying on their faces. Hugh Hannay was lying on his back. Bolton was lying on his back with no breeches on. Mr. Coroner ìWhat has that to do with it, Thomas?î Witness ìI dunnet know indeed ñ his britches were gone.î The pit was well aired ñ was skilfully wrought. I have been employed three years and a half in this pit.

Mr. Coroner ñ ìHave you any thing more to add?î ìI have not.î Here a juror expressed very loudly his opinion of the conclusiveness to the evidence.

Mr. Peile here made an observation. Witness ñ ìI would have been among them, if I had not gone to Kells for a spade

Mr. Coroner here asked Mr. Peile if he had anything more to ask of witness? ìMr. P. said he had not.

By the coroner. ñ ìWas the pit in a good state?î ñ ìYes.î

By a Juror. ñ There was no danger that I saw. I was a joiner but now am a blaster. There was plenty of material in the pit if we could have got at it for the stithe. We

worked with our tops off about 200 yards from where the explosion happened.

They worked with their tops on in the shift where the accident happened.

Mr. Coroner here called for Joseph Fox to appear. One of the jury observed, that they had had Fox before and that his evidence was very short. Mr. Peile observed that Fox was the deputy-overman.

Joseph Freckleton sworn. ñ Was struck by the blast. Was helped up, but does not know by whom. Two men carried me away. Know nothing how this happened. I was sitting betwixt two doors, and it came and knocked me down. I got up and was knocked down I was knocked down a third time, and after that I knew no more.

By Mr. Peile. ñ What distance did you run from your being knocked down the first time, to your falling down at last? Witness ñ ìFifty or sixty yards.î Mr. Jackson observed it was about thirty yards. The Coroner said fifty yards would be about twice the breadth of the street. The witness said then it could not be less.

By the foreman. I have worked 2 or 3 years in the pit. I never heard any of the men object to working in it from its being considered dangerous.

Mr. Foreman here observed that the testimony of all the witnesses was alike on that point, and, from the first, one confirmed the other and he thought Mr Abraham must now admit that his doubts were unfounded.

We declined making an answer, or taking any part in the investigation.

Mr. Coroner here asked Mr. Peile if there was any further he wish to adduce. There had been insinuations, to call them no worse, but he thought them direct charges, of something amounting to culpable negligence. There had been no evidence of anything of the kind yet adduced. If Mr. Peile thought it necessary, on that account, to call any more witnesses, he thought the Jury would not grudge the time necessary for hearing them.

Mr. Peile said, he was always desirous of the fullest investigation that the witnesses who had been first on the spot, had been produced, and he was ready to give any further information in his power.

Mr. Coroner said, that from the first, he had always foreseen how it would end, and that not a tittle of evidence had been brought forward, to support the imputations that had been made.

We here stated that we had made no imputations whatever against Mr. Peile. That imputations had been made, which, from the extraordinary measure adopted to stop the investigation, were yet hanging over the gentlemen connected with the collieries but that all that we had done, was to insist on examining whether there was any ground for imputation or not and we appealed to Mr. Peile if we had cast any imputations on him.

Mr. Peile acquitted us of having done so.

Mr Peile observed, that he thought if Hugh Smith had any thing to say ñ If he had any charge to make ñ he ought to come forward.

Mr. Coroner here read his deposition.

Mr Peile said, that Smith was only there for a very short time, if there at all. A number of witnesses then had questions put to them, on this point. James Dodd did not know ñ Smith might be there for any thing he (Dodd) knew. James Fox did see him, but could not recollect at what time. William Symon recollected seeing him about three quarters of an hour after the explosion. Coroner ñ ìYou must have been misinformed Mr. Peile.î Mr. Peile here objected to Smithís statement that four hours had elapsed.

Smithís deposition was read,

Mr. Coroner - ìHave you any thing further to add to this deposition, Smith?î Smith ñ ìI have nothing to add to my first evidence.î

Here a long and very irregular conversation took place between Mr. Peile, Mr. Jackson, and Hugh Smith. The Foreman of the Jury asked him what time he was at

home on Saturday morning? Smith said, he believed about six, but he had no clock or watch.

Here another irregular conversation took place, in the course of which, we whispered jocularly to the Foreman and the Jurors near us that we thought that they had used us unpolitely, in imputing motives to us for differing with them, while we had carefully refrained from imputing motives to them. Mr. Foreman took this up rather warmly. The Coroner insisted on knowing what the Jury were whispering about and said he would allow no whispering in Court. He was told, and the Foreman proceeded to say, that he thought we had used the Jury unhandsomely by printing their names, with their descriptions (such as publicans, police officers, and the like) in the Herald that when they were all met on Saturday night on the first adjournment of the inquest, they had sent to us to request the perusal of the Herald, which Mr. Foreman continued, to do us justice, he must say, we had sent and that, on seeing the way in which their names were printed, they had felt very much offended.

Mr. Coroner ñ But that did not influence you to send me the memorial?

Mr. Foreman ñ Oh, no, our minds were made up as to the verdict, and to Mr. Abrahamís conduct.

We here observed, that we did not doubt that, as Mr. Coroner and the Jury had taken very opportunity of telling us, that their minds were made up from the first, to agree to a certain verdict, and that the consequence was that Mr. Coroner had sworn in a thirteenth juror, for the purpose of stifling any inquiry which might lead to an opposite conclusion.

Mr. Coroner was very angry at our making this charge against him, and threatened to put down our words.

We told him that we would not shrink from what we had said ñ that he had sworn in a thirteenth juror, for the purpose of stifling inquiry.

Mr. Coroner directed his clerk to take our words down, which was accordingly done. While this was doing, we told him, that he had imputed to us improper motives, for persisting in the inquiry, and that we considered ourselves quite justified in telling him what we considered to be his motive for a step, which, he avowed, was for the purpose of stopping the inquiry. That if he chose to go to the courts above, they would protect us in our rights as a juror, which he had invaded, as much as they would protect him in his office as coroner, as he knew full well.

Mr. Coroner here addressed the crowd below the bar, with much animation. If there was any of them who had any thing to say let them come forward? We wish to come to a proper conclusion. We wish to have every one from whom information can be obtained. Is there any of you that has anything to say to the court, let him come forward.

A man, who gave his name Robert Macdonald, said, that he knew a collier who had told him, that there was a want of wood in the pit, in consequence of which, relief could not be had in time. But he would not tell his name, for fear he should forfeit the manís work. Mr. Peile, casting on Macdonald a searching glance, asked him at what pit he worked to which Macdonald replied, ìOh! I donít work at any of your pits at all!î The manner in which the question was asked, and the answer was given, excited much merriment. The Coroner here read a deposition to witness, and had some discussion with him. Mr. Coroner urged him to reveal his informantís name. This Macdonald declined ñ said that the manís living depended on it ñ but that if the Coroner would insure the man a hundred pounds in case he was turned out of employment, in consequence of his evidence, that he should have his name. Mr. Coroner told the witness, that he would not give a hundred pounds for them both, ìclothes and all.î

Here the Coroner again addressed the crowd below the bar ñ ìIf any on you have any complaint to make, let him come forward boldly and manfully.î

Here was a long pause.

Mr. Coroner here observed, that he should be glad to hear any further evidence. That he was sure that this adjournment of the inquest had only been for the purpose of keeping up excitement. That no one could suppose that the pit had been set on fire on purpose.

Mr. Foreman observed, that, with respect to any charge of recovering the men, experienced colliers all said that no man could live three minutes after being struck by the fire damp.

Here a long, disorderly conversation took place, in the course of which, somebody said that Dr. Fox was of the same opinion.

Mr. Coroner now put Alexander Garraway into the box, who answered in the affirmative, the following questions by the Coroner. You lost two sons in Croft Pit on Saturday week? No body can speak more feelingly on the subject than you can? Is it ascribable to accident? Pure accident? No bad management of the pit? Could not have been controlled by any body? And then turning round to the jury, Mr. Coroner said, 'Can there be any testimony stronger than that?'

Mr. Coroner here asked the Jury if they were all satisfied? The twelve replied, 'All! That it was accidental?' 'Yes, of course!'

Mr. Peile here made a speech to the court and to the Jury. He said that an idea might go abroad, that there was a scarcity of wood in the pit, and that lives were lost in consequence. Now it might not happen that the wood was lying where every might lay his paw upon it, just at the moment when it was wanted but there was at least 300 dozen of wood lying about the pit. That they always kept 40, 50, or 100 dozen ready cut in the granary yard, ready for giving out, and such a quantity at every pit as was likely to be wanted, but it was impossible to have it lying just on the very spot where an accident might occur.

The Coroner here read the inquisition on Cormack Morris, which he had filled up with a verdict, stating that Cormack Morris, in consequence of certain burns, met with his death 'accidentally, casually, and not otherwise.' He also read an inquisition on William Little, filled up with a verdict to the same effect, substituting suffocation for burning as the cause of death. He then turned to his clerk, and said, 'James, you'd better go round and get the verdicts signed and tender each to Mr. Abraham, as you come to his name.'

The clerk accordingly offered the first verdict to us we read it, and as soon as we came to the words 'accidentally, casually, and not otherwise,' we declined signing it. Mr. Coroner, who was at the other end of the room, talking to Mr. Peile, inquired of his clerk, 'What is it? What does he mean?' To which the clerk replied, that we objected to the words 'accidentally, and casually.' Mr. Coroner observed, 'Oh he means intentionally then ñ that's murder.' We remonstrated with Mr. Coroner ñ told him that he acted illegally in dictating to the jury their verdict, and in commenting on the refusal of a juror to sign ñ that we were not accountable to him for our reasons for not signing, and that we considered his observation a very improper one.

The remainder of the verdicts were then tendered to us, read by us, and rejected, one by one. We observed, that they were most, if not all, ready signed by the Coroner and the Foreman, and several of them had five or six names besides, affixed to them, among which we read that of Oliver Ussinson.

When they were all signed, and laid on his desk, Mr. Coroner resumed his seat.

'Gentlemen of the Jury, hearken to your verdict.'

Here the inquisition on Cormack Morris was read.

'Is this your verdict?'

Jury ñ 'Yes.'

The same formalities were gone through with the verdict on William Little and his brother.

“Your other verdicts (naming them) are similar, namely, that they died by being burnt?”

Jury: “Yes.”

“Gentlemen of the Jury, I thank you you are discharged.”

We asked the Coroner if he would allow us to copy the memorial, handed in to him by the Jury. His reply was “Certainly not it was merely meant for the court.” The Foreman likewise refused to give us a copy of it.

We may add, that all the verdicts are, setting out of the question the manner in which they were obtained, informal. One of the Jury could not write, and they only contain eleven names of Jurors, the twelfth signature being merely a cross, without attestation. This makes the inquisitions mere waste paper. (See the case of *Rex v. Bowen & Carrington and Payne*’s Rep. Vol. 3, part 3.) This cannot be remedied now, as the jury is discharged and to alter a deed after execution, amounts to felony, and any one making the experiment, might run the risk of becoming practically acquainted with the nature of asphyxia.

THE EXPLOSION AT CROFT PIT

The termination, for the present, at least, of the investigation of the circumstances connected with the dreadful catastrophe which occasioned the loss of twenty-three lives, has left us at liberty to enter upon the subject, and to lay before our readers our own ideas of its causes and nature, and of the credibility and tendency of the evidence adduced.

There are three distinct questions to which the attention of the public will be and ought to be directed. The first is the composition of the court before which, and by which, the investigation was made the second, is the conduct of that court, whether impartial and legal or otherwise and the third, is the evidence on which the court decided.

With respect to the conduct of the coroner and the jury, as we shall feel it our duty to bring it before a superior legal tribunal, it would be highly improper for us to appeal to public opinion. Of it we shall therefore not say one word. It is true that we have not been treated with equal delicacy. The coroner, who ought to have known better than the jury, of whom nobody could expect any thing better than and the editors of two newspapers, who ought at least to have affected some regard for decency, have assailed our conduct even while in the discharge of a solemn duty, which, in the eyes of the most unprincipled and most ignorant men, ought to have been a protection to us, at least so long as we were actually invested with the judicial function these persons have assailed us with the foulest imputations, in the most unqualified language. For what can be a fouler imputation against any man, than to say that he has carried “party motives” to the judgment seat, and after he has sworn to do justice without fear or favour “to present no man through hatred or malice,” to accuse him of prostituting his brief authority to the gratifying of his private vengeance? No, if we felt ourselves capable of doing any thing so base, if we were conscious of having done any thing to warrant such an accusation, we should feel our-selves clothed with “infamy, as with a garment,” and we might then stoop to extenuating our own conduct, or criminating others. But reposing as we do on the purity of our motives, and the correctness of our conduct, we feel no solicitude respecting the opinion of that public whose sympathy we know well is ever on the side of those who brave obloquy and insult in the cause of justice and humanity and knowing as we do, that it is impossible in a country, where there is even a shadow of respect for the forms of justice, for such conduct as that of the parties who signed the verdict of Tuesday, to pass unnoticed by the superior authorities, we willingly refrain from saying one word to add to the indignation which the bare narration of their proceedings will excite.

Before proceeding into the details of the case, it may be as well to observe that it is invested with an awful interest. The destruction of twenty-three human beings, is in itself no light matter but the suddenness of the catastrophe renders it still more painful to contemplate. It is an awful thing even for one human being to be hurried to his last account, without one moment for penitence or prayer. In all times, even up to the present, it has been held to be the greatest aggravation of the crime of the murderer, that his stroke leaves the victim no time for repentance. Even our great dramatist has painted a son, burning to avenge his father's death, hesitating to strike the murderer, lest he should plunge a soul into eternity loaded with the weight of the mortal sin he was about to avenge. The sentiment is based alike on natural feeling and religious principle. There are few religious creeds, which do not enjoin it as a pious action to pray for the souls of those who are cut off by sudden death. Many an antique oratory and mouldering fane attests the piety of our Romish fathers, who accounted it a holy deed thus to purchase forgiveness for those who had died unshriven and unabsolved. And though our reformed churches have rejected the doctrine, that mortal intercession can avail between man and his creator, there is yet more urgently imposed on them the duty to omit no effort to save their fellow creatures from that sudden destruction, which thus renders all human efforts unavailable.

And though the death of twenty-three human beings is a matter of such grave importance in the eyes of all who are endowed with human sympathies, it is not to this alone that our view of the case must be restricted. This is but one of a series of catastrophes scarcely differing in their nature, some more, some less, calamitous in their effects. The number of persons who have perished in the collieries round Whitehaven, is almost incredible. Upon the most moderate calculation, not less than ONE HUNDRED AND SIXTY persons have been killed within the last sixteen years, principally by explosions, and of these nearly a third in Croft Pit alone. This is an average of about ten annually, and estimating the actual number of persons employed in the collieries at one thousand, it is a fearful average. Lord Lonsdale draws a great revenue from the people of Whitehaven many advantages from eight or nine hundred families their living, from these collieries but this periodical immolation this annual sacrifice of the blood of nine men, is a fearful price to pay even for those advantages, great as they are. There is an awful responsibility both as members of a civilized community and as accountable moral agents, upon those who drive the bargain of human life against gold. There is a responsibility, not less awful, shared by all, who, whether as proprietors of such pits, or as judges, or as mere spectators possessing a moral influence, have the means in the smallest degree of controlling the operations of a system which, like the idol car of Juggernaut, crushes a human victim at every turn.

The law of England has wisely provided that no man who has come to a violent end shall be buried without a judicial investigation into the causes of his death. The principal object of this investigation, is to present such individuals, if any, as by force or by neglect, more or less criminal, may have been accessory to the death of the party, in order that they may be punished or absolved by a superior court or in case there be neither violence nor criminal neglect, so to distinguish the causes of death, as to insure the prevention, as far as human exertions may, of the occurrence of similar calamities.

Now the duty of an inquest holden upon the bodies of the persons who perished in Croft Pit, was of a very important nature. Among other matters, it was especially their duty to look into the general system of working the coal, and to ascertain both the general causes which rendered accidents so frequent, and the particular causes which led to this accident to ascertain that the pit was not worked on a system necessarily destructive to human life to ascertain that proper persons were

employed to discharge every duty connected with the management and working of it, and that, individually, they did discharge their duty properly.

In order to answer the ends of justice, it was necessary that the Coroner and Jury should be intelligent and independent men. First of all, it was necessary that they should be intelligent because, if not so, they would be incapable of entering into so extensive an inquiry as it was their duty to enter on, with any prospect of their coming to a proper conclusion. It was necessary that they should be independent, because they had to examine and to judge the conduct of powerful men and of the agents and underlings of such men if they were not independent, and it became their duty to censure, perhaps to accuse, to impeach of crime, their duty would place them in painful conflict with their interest of feelings, to which their duty might possibly yield and if they saw no reason, otherwise than for a verdict of acquittal, of absolution, such verdict coming from men who were not independent of the influence of the parties they were judging, would command neither respect nor confidence, and the whole transaction might be regarded as a mere trick to protect powerful criminals.

If the parties, who might be criminated or censured, had any influence over the appointments of their judges, a strong argument as to their innocence or guilt might be drawn from the manner in which they used that influence. If they were honourable men conscious of innocence, they would naturally be desirous of being tried by a court, which from character and station might be expected to make a full and impartial enquiry, and whose verdict, if in their favour, would carry with it such authority as would absolve them in public opinion as well as in the eye of the law of men above the suspicion of servility or interested motives. But if they wished to conceal negligence or misconduct, to smother investigation, and to be allowed to persist in a guilty career, they would instinctively shield themselves behind a tribunal, if such could be found, which from its composition might be expected to be under their own influence.

It is impossible for us to say whether the colliery agents or their underlings had or had not any influence over the selection of the jury, which sat on the 12th of this month. We should hope that they had not because if they had, their making such a selection, would be the strongest evidence, that they durst not trust to a jury of men likely from station and character, to come to an impartial and enlightened judgment. The Coroner of the Court, (Peter Hodgson, Esq.,) is one of the legal agents of the Earl of Lonsdale and is the steward of his Court Baron. In local and general politics Mr. Hodgson is a strong, not to say a violent partisan of Lord Lonsdale.

The officer who returned, or ought to have returned, the list of jurors, is Mr. Curwen. Mr. Curwen is assistant overseer or constable, if not both, in Preston Quarter a district where Lord Lonsdale is predominant and is the principal ratepayer. Mr. Curwen, it is quite notorious, is only kept in his office by the influence of Lord Lonsdale, the proprietor of the pit, wielded by his agents, who are responsible for its management.

John Bell is the keeper of the House of Correction he was placed in office by the Magistrates, who are nominated by Lord Lonsdale.

David Frears is an auctioneer and a Sheriff's officer, that is a bailiff.

Jonathan Boadle is a publican and one of Lord Lonsdale's tenants. It was at his house that the jury and witnesses had their guzzle, usual on such occasions in Whitehaven. This has been usually charged to the parish, which has latterly refused to pay. Who paid for the entertainment on this occasion we do not know, though it might be an interesting subject of enquiry, especially as all the witnesses were not invited to it.

Oliver Ussinson is an individual whose profession it is rather difficult to describe. He has been occasionally employed as a copying clerk in several attorneys' offices.

William Leslie is a pensioner (on Chelsea Hospital, we believe) occupying a small house in Preston Quarter, where he has not resided more than two or three months. Joseph Jackson is now a watchman, bellman, bill-distributor, and bailiff's assistant. He was a policeman, and was discharged, after being imprisoned for a violent assault.

Philip Jackson was formerly a staithe-keeper of Lord Lonsdale's is now a sheriff's officer or bailiff.

Jonathan Burnyeat is a joiner, and son-in-law to one of Lord Lonsdale's farmers. William Kewley is a Whitehaven police-officer and in constant attendance at the magistrate's office.

Thomas Trohear is a clogger somewhere about the Ginns.

Jonathan Bowman is a working shoemaker, some where in the same neighbourhood.

James Hewitt, formerly huntsman to Lord Lonsdale, or to Mr. Peile. Was formerly a collier, and has now the care of one of Lord Lonsdale's waggon-ways, and is in his Lordship's pay.

There is one other circumstance, which we mention here to avoid any thing like offensive personal allusion. One of the Jury is a near relation of the gentlemen on whom a large share of the criminal responsibility (if any) of this calamitous affair rests. Now, without meaning to say that there was any probability of such an event occurring, we will ask could there be a more scandalous outrage on decency and justice, than to place a father in a situation in which, by any possibility, his duty might call upon him to criminally accuse his own son?

We are informed that the only persons in this list who are rated ten-pound householders, are the Coroner and Jonathan Boadle. We are sure that it would puzzle Mr. Coroner and Mr. Foreman to account for the impanelling of this jury on any recognisable principle. We say Mr. Coroner, because as he did us the honour of turning out of these gentlemen to make way for us, he might just as easily have turned out the other eleven if he had not liked their character & appearance. We do not by any means mean to say that this Jury could not, or did not, act impartially but we do say, that if the persons whose conduct they ought to have reviewed, were not entirely blameless, a conflict must have taken place between their duty and their inclinations ñ and whether they were likely to sacrifice their duty, is not for us to judge. Nor do we mean to accuse Lord Lonsdale or his colliery agents of any thing like direct or indirect interference in the appointment of this jury. We believe the abuse has arisen from the improper and illegal practice of treating these Juries at the public expense, which has made it an object with low hungry dependants to be on the panel, and has driven away respectable persons. But we do say that if such another melancholy case occur, and alas it is but too certain that such a one cannot be far distant, and if Lord Lonsdale or his agents have any direct or indirect influence over the constitution of this court ñ we think they will not deny that they have some. ñ And if, after this exposure, they do not exert that influence to procure a Jury of the most respectable and intelligent men that Whitehaven contains ñ we do warn them that the public will conclude that they are conscious of some crime of so deep a dye, that they are willing to suffer public infamy as the price of concealment. But we hope better things of them.

So much for the constitution of the court the conduct of the court, as we observed, is a subject for the consideration of another tribunal than public opinion the general nature of the enquiry, and the tendency and credibility of the evidence, we must defer until next week. Sure we are that the subject will not speedily lose its interest.

WHITEHAVEN HERALD,
Tuesday, 6th December 1831.

EXPLOSION AT CROFT PIT (Concluded from our last)

Having now disposed of the question of the composition of the court, we shall proceed to an explanation of the nature, tendency, and credibility of the evidence adduced, and of the general scope of the inquiry. Neither our time nor limits, nor indeed, we may add, our information, permit us to examine systematically all the minute bearing of the case, which we shall be obliged to despatch with a brevity not at all commensurate with its importance. But we trust we shall experience not great trouble or difficulty in showing, that the most important questions to which the attention of an intelligent jury should have been directed, were either left wholly uninvestigated, or else that the evidence was of such a contradictory or inconclusive nature, as to involve the affair in deeper mystery than ever.

From the system of terrorism which prevails in coal pits (at least in those where the men have no combinations to protect them) from the despotic power possessed by the principal agents, which they delegate to little subordinate tyrants called overmen and deputies from the general impression among the workmen, that any one who may say or do any thing offensive to these people is a proscribed man - there are difficulties innumerable in the way of getting at the truth of any matter, in which the truth may possibly be offensive to any one of these little despots. It is a thing quite notorious and obvious to any man or common sense, that an explosion cannot well, happen in a coal-pit, without the general management being faulty, or some underling neglecting his duty. Now which ever of these be the case and whether one or both, there is always somebody who has an interest and an influence in suppressing the truth there is somebody whom the poor collier dare not offend by speaking out and though the men will talk boldly enough where they think they can do so safely, nothing but a rigid cross-examination before an impartial judge can get the truth out of them in public, to their employers' faces. And if the judge of the court be not impartial and discerning if he do not conduct the inquiry with a rigid determination to get at the truth, and to reject all interested testimony, the thing is absolutely impossible one can get nothing but general protestations that every thing was right.

Having thus far premised, we shall now briefly recur to the different points of inquiry, in numerical order.

Is the system on which the pits are worked necessarily destructive to human life, and can the loss of life be obviated by an alteration in the system?

This was the question entirely untouched at the inquest. That the system is destructive to human life to a horrible extent, the blackened corpses of ONE HUNDRED AND SIXTY victims, in about sixteen years, furnish a damning answer. That it is necessarily so, Mr. Coroner Hodgson in effect affirms, because he the said Mr. Coroner, with the assistance of twelve good men and true, each time, has never been able to discover how the explosion originated so that, unless the managers of the coal-pits know more than Mr. Coroner, no man can penetrate further than the bare fact of these inevitable consequences of working on the usual system. That they can be obviated every body knows. Force through the workings such currents of air as will sweep away all foulness, and the danger will be much diminished, if not altogether removed. If, after this is done, a single life is lost which even the most stupid and obtuse of jurors cannot clearly make out to have been lost from unavoidable accident, then let every man be compelled to work with the top on his lamp, and let his wages be raised, so that he may make, under that disadvantage, as much as he makes now.

If these precautions were taken, not a single life could possibly be lost from explosion. But they would be expensive, and as long as ever interested parties can persuade the public that all is right, colliers will be burnt and suffocated by dozens.

When the public become properly informed on the subject, the law will interfere and put a stop to this revolting traffic ñ these holocausts to Mammon. The most effectual plan would be the levying of a deodand of one, or if need be, of ten thousand pounds for the death of each collier.

Was the pit properly ventilated?

Mr. Williamson Peile and other witnesses stated that it was. Mr. Peile, we suppose, meant that it was so in his opinion, and that it was as well ventilated as the rest of Lord Lonsdaleís pits. This is, we doubt not, all correct enough but repeated explosions, and especially in this very pit, have proved to a demonstration that, though Lord Lonsdaleís pits are well enough ventilated to enable him to get his coal out of them, they are not so well ventilated, as to enable the workmen to get at those coals with any tolerable degree of safety and more especially the loss of well on to FIFTY lives in this very Croft Pit, within the last fifteen or twenty years, is a proof that it is no better, and perhaps something worse than the rest.

We should have conceived it to be the duty of a coroner and judge to examine the pit, or plans of it, so as to ascertain the direction of velocity of the different currents of air in it, their direction, and the means of acceleration or regulating them to have trusted nothing to report or opinion, but to have got directly at the facts. Doubtless Mr. Peile and his friends thought the ventilation adequate but the question for the jury was, were they correct in their judgement or not? Were their ideas of what was necessary, sufficient? It was on the conduct of those gentlemen, and their subordinates, that the jury were sitting in judgement.

On the present dangerous system, was due care taken to prevent unnecessary risk, and to obviate the effects of accidents when they occurred? This question divides itself into a number of distinct queries.

1st. One great point is the comparative safety of the working. On this point, all the interested witnesses, that is, those on whom the responsibility rested, chime in with each other wonderfully. Mr. Peile and Mr. Jackson thought it particularly safe but some things came out in the evidence rather incompatible with the opinion. The fact of the explosion itself is presumptive proof that there was something wrong. David Johnstone stated that an alarm had been given in consequence of a rush to the preceding shift. Peter Andrew stated, that some times foul air was suffered to fall down. James McCabe stated, that working at pillars was reputed dangerous (a fact every body knows), and that though he could make more money by working on them he would not prefer such work. Hugh Smith stated that two men had been killed by an explosion in the same place not long ago. Joseph Bates admitted that there was never any entire security against the explosion of inflammable air. And James Dodd stated, that a man (of the shift that perished, we suppose), told him that they were ordered to work with the lamp tops on, and that they apprehended a fall. It would require something more than the testimony of interested persons to get over these circumstances quite satisfactorily. Mr. Peile and Mr. Jackson knew nothing of the matter personally. This part of the business lay with the subordinates the leading witnesses in their own favour.

2nd. The next point is, what were the precautions taken against explosions? The most extraordinary circumstance is that though the bodies were found, and both Mr. W. Peile and Wm. Nicholson swore that they had examined the place very carefully, no evidence was given to prove whether in point of fact, the lamp tops were on or off, nor does it appear that they are yet found (see the evidence of James Dodd). This is to us quite inexplicable. It appears clearly that their lamps were unlocked. It also appears that they were working with the tops off, and that if a rush of inflammable air took place, their only security was blowing their lights out if they heard it coming but if they did not hear it ñ the much more probable event of the two is they would be all involved on one common destruction. It also appeared that there was no classification of workmen (a thing much complained of,) and that they

worked in large gangs or shifts, as they are called, in which the young and old, the experienced and the inexperienced men all mixed indiscriminately, and an ignorant foolish or rash man might peril the lives of all. It appeared that there was and is a continual temptation for men to run risks in dangerous atmospheres, because they can make more money by working with a full light than they can with the gauze tops on their lamps. It appeared that in this instance, among twenty-four people, there were several boys, the youngest 8 years old, and that two or three had safety lamps, and consequently the lives of the whole twenty-four at their disposal. We should think that such a system, as this cannot long be tolerated in a civilized community.

We have also been informed (and but for circumstances detailed in another place, we should have enquired into the fact,) the proper care was not taken in this pit to keep it clear of foul air that foul air was often suffered to accumulate. We think this might have been got at by cross-examination. We have also been told that if the colliers do not make up a certain quantity of work in the week, they are fined so much per basket, and that no abatement is made, even though they have left their work on account of foul air. If this be true, there is another direct stimulus to self-murder. And yet it seems a man is to be accused of party motives because he insists on hearing and on examining the evidence before he signs a ready made verdict of death casually, accidentally, and not otherwise!

3rd. Another important point is, whether or not the persons in charge of the pit were competent to the task. On this point, though no pains were taken to put the Jury in possession of direct information, a circumstance came out sufficiently conclusive. We do not speak here of Mr. W. Peile and Mr. Jackson, whose duties of superintendence seem little more than nominal — one had not been on the spot for about a week, and it did not appear when the other had been there. But Mr. Peile said the ventilation of the working was complete except at the moment of the explosion, and that the attempts made to send the air forward were useless. Now the persons who made these useless attempts were principally the overlookers and the deputies of the pit, so that either Mr. Peile was wrong, and the ventilation was incomplete, or the persons to whose charge the pit was committed, were ignorant of the ventilation and lost several hours in idle attempts to restore it. We leave him the choice of the dilemma. No attention whatever was paid to this point during the inquest.

4th. Another point is, what time elapsed between the explosion and the getting at the bodies? Smith estimated it at four hours, but he stated that he had no clock or watch, and guesses under such circumstances must necessarily be vague. Dodd, whose narrative was more precise, called it three hours and a half, which is probably correct the explosion is commonly believed to have taken place at half past two, and Mr. Peile confirmed him in the fact of the bodies being got at about six. Smith, against whom perjury was more than insinuated, seems to have been very nearly, if not altogether correct, on the showing of the parties themselves.

5th. What time, if any, was lost unnecessarily? It appears that they had to send to the Granary yard for wood. Now without reckoning the time they might lose in seeking for wood before they sent, and without examining if it was skilfully applied when they did get it, (which Mr. Peile's remark might make one doubt,) not less than two hours could be lost in the journey to the Granary yard and back. Two hours in many cases will make the difference between life and death. Either this two hours was lost by the want of wood, or else through the ignorance of those who had charge of the mines, in sending for the wood unnecessarily. There is no getting out of this dilemma. The Jury were put in possession of no information to enable them to judge whether this time were lost through neglect on the one hand or ignorance on the other.

6th. Since it appears on all hands, that under the present system there is no effectual security against these explosions, and that when they take place, wood is more or less indispensable to the relief of the sufferers, for restoring the door or partitions which are blown down by the explosion, and for directing currents of air to sweep away the stithe or stife which prevents access to the bodies - was there such a quantity of wood in such proper places, under the care of such proper persons, as to ensure the speediest relief possible? - On this point the evidence is incontrovertible, - that if wood were there the persons under whose immediate charge the pit was, did not know where to find it as to the fact of wood being there or not, nothing appeared on oath but mere vague assertions both ways. But whether it was there or not, makes no matter, if it was not placed so as to be instantly found by those who might momentarily want it. It does however appear a little extraordinary, that a parcel of witnesses should one day swear that they sent to the Granary yard for wood, and the next that they had always plenty close at hand. Mr. Peile, in his address to the Coroner and Jury, observed, that there was always 300 dozen of wood lying about in the pit, though it might not happen that the wood was lying where every man might lay his paw upon it, just at the moment it was wanted. Lay his paw upon it! It is an ugly phrase and considering that Mr. Peile was vindicating himself from being accessory to the death of three and twenty men, he might have chosen one more decorous. But let that pass. Setting out of view the question whether or not the number of planks he mentioned were adequate to the wants of the pit, of which the immense galleries traverse in the three levels an extent of very many miles, which we have heard disputed, and which ought to have been enquired into putting this question out of view, we should like to ask Mr. Peile, of what use was the wood in emergencies, it was not placed where every poor creature whose filthy paws were earning him a subsistence in those dens of wretchedness, and who might rush to save the life of a son, a brother, or a friend, could be furnished without a moment's loss of time with the means of rescue? Of what use was it, when the overmen and deputies preferred sending to the Granary yard, to continuing the search for wood in the pit? That there was wood in the pit sufficient to enable the men to get at the coal is certain enough, and if Mr. Peile meant to state that, he might have spared himself the trouble of doing so but if he meant to say that there was a supply adequate to those emergencies which it was either his duty or that of some body else to provide against, and that supply distributed in a proper manner, the bare fact proves him in error, and his own statement confirms the fact for, since an explosion might occur at any moment, the wood should have been placed so that any man might lay his paw on it at any moment.

If Mr. Peile had a vessel which drifted upon a lee shore, without dropping her anchor, and the captain on escaping, were to tell his owner that he had plenty of anchors on board - half a dozen or so in the hold or about the deck, but there was not one where a man could lay his paw on it at the moment it was wanted - what would Mr. Peile think of his story? Is not a supply of wood the sheet anchor in collieries where the ventilation is weakened or interrupted? If Mr. Peile had a friend who fell down in a fit of apoplexy, and the surgeon on being sent for were to be unprovided with a lancet, and if two hours were lost by the neglect, would Mr. Peile think it any excuse, if he were to say that he had a dozen lancet in the house, but not one that he could lay his paw upon when it was wanted? If the surgeons of the Infirmary were to set to work to extirpate a tumour from the neck of a patient and in so doing were to wound a deep seated artery, and the patient were to die for want of a ligature being put round it - what would the Governors of the Infirmary think of the operators, if they were to allege that there were plenty of ligatures in the place, dozens of hanks of yarn, cotton or silk, but not one where the Hospital Dresser

might lay his paws on at any moment it was wanted ñ even though patients in such a case join in a verdict of died ñcasually, accidentally, and not otherwise? 7th. Was there any medical care taken of the bodies of the persons suffocated? On this point there was a very explicit answer - no care was taken, absolutely none. There was no professional person about the pit who considered it his duty to attend to this business. There was no one there who was competent to distinguish between recoverable and irrecoverable asphyxia. The solitary Surgeon who attended did not get there until eight o'clock and he did not see the bodies. And yet the bodies were, notwithstanding all the delays, recovered much within the time, which medical men consider as limiting the possibility of resuscitation. Orfila the greatest modern authority on the subject, says, and a host of other writers unanimously confirm him, that attempts at resuscitation ought never to be abandoned until at least six hours after, to all appearance, life is extinct. This rule is acted on in England, in France, and in every civilised country where the life of men is thought worth the trouble of preserving. Mr. W. Peile indeed says, that when he got there the bodies were cold and stiff. Mr. Peile, it is highly probable, was in a certain degree mistaken on that point, as he easily might be in the hurry and agitation of the moment. Supposing that they were all instantaneously killed (which we shall presently show was highly improbable) it is impossible that in three hours, or three and a half at most, the limbs should have entirely lost heat and flexibility. A human body retains a large part of its heat for many hours after death, and the muscles do not become permanently contracted for even a much longer period than that mentioned. An uninformed observer easily mistakes the inertness of suspended animation for an unequivocal indication of death. If the limbs of any of them were really stiff at that period, it should rather be taken as an indication that they were alive - rigidity of the muscles is a very common symptom of asphyxia the little manual of Orfila, which is in the hands of almost every medical man, is very particular on this point. And there is nothing on which all medical authorities are more thoroughly agreed, than that for a great many hours after the accident ñ some say so many as twelve, it is impossible for the best physiologist to say, by mere inspection, whether a suffocated person is recoverable or not.

8th. Was there any probability that life was lost for want of due expedition? We have just shown, which indeed is obvious to common sense, that there was a possibility the question is now as to the probability. To come at this we must take into consideration all the circumstances. Suppose that two or perhaps three hours had not been lost in what Mr. W. Peile declared to be useless efforts to restore the circulation of air suppose that they had been got at, as on Mr. W. Peile's showing they ought to have been got at, by four o'clock or so. Suppose that those who perished by mere suffocation, like the Little's, had been raised by that time is it not highly probable that those persons might have been saved? ñ Those who answer in the negative must, we humbly submit, be entirely ignorant of the nature of human life. A certain portion would doubtless be utterly and irremediably destroyed by the flame of the explosion but of those who showed no symptoms of having been burnt, of those who had clearly died from suffocation and nothing else, if there be any truth in theory or experience, the great majority would have had a fair chance of being recovered by prompt and skilful application of remedial measures. Mr. W. Peile himself says, and we believe him to be so far perfectly correct in his judgement, that the circulation of air, or the very spot of the explosion, was restored immediately after the moment of the explosion, so that, there was nothing to injure or suspend vital motion beyond the immediate effect of the first blast of foul air which overwhelmed them. If any man chooses to say that a person who is recovered within two hours of his being suffocated by foul air has not a fair chance of being resuscitated, he only displays his own ignorance, if not something worse. But as Mr. Mossop ingenuously admitted inflammation is not a process which takes place

after death, and as the majority of the bodies showed unequivocal symptoms of inflammation, it is highly probable that a large portion of the sufferers were actually alive at the time, when, with reasonable expedition, the bodies ought to have been recovered. It is true that on William Postlethwaite, who swore, according to the Pacquet, that there was twice as much wood in the pit as was wanted, if it could be got at, (!!!) says that nobody can live more than three minutes in such an atmosphere as results from explosion of foul air, and he quoted Dr. Fox in support of his opinion, and stated that he himself had been burned two or three times. We know nothing whatever of Dr. Fox, whose name we never heard in our life before, but if he be a man of common sense and information, he must be ashamed of hearing an ignorant creature like Postlethwaite, who according to his own story, must have had as many lives as a cat, gravely setting his authority against that of all the physiologists in Europe. Out upon the nonsense! It would move the bile of Job himself to listen to it.

We have thus, calmly and dispassionately, travelled over the leading points of this momentous enquiry. Of its awful importance we entertain a deep and overwhelming sense. Other times are at hand, and we indulge a hope that we shall yet live to see the day, when the life of man shall not thus idly be sported with. But deeply impressed as we are with the solemn duty, we have suffered no extraneous sentiments to interfere with the discharge of it. We believe that the gentlemen connected with the colliery, if appealed to as gentlemen, and men of honour, will cheerfully acquit us (as indeed they have done) of travelling one step out of our road of fair and impartial investigation and we, on our part, should be wanting in candour if we did not publicly acknowledge that their conduct throughout the investigation was fair and manly. It is true they were guilty of some interference, which, though perhaps neither strictly legal nor proper, a natural anxiety rendered excusable. How far the blood of these three and twenty men rests on their heads, or on the head of others, This let the world, which knows not how to spare, Yet rarely blames unjustly, now declare.

NEWBOTTLE. Fencehouses, Durham. 15th. June, 1832.

An explosion was reported to have taken place in which 70 lives were lost.

HAYDOCK. Haydock, Lancashire. September, 1832.

The victims of a disaster buried at St. Thomas' Ashton-in-Makerfield. The Burial register states that they were '*all killed by the explosion of inflammable air in a coal pit.*' The victims were buried on the 25th. September.

Those who died were-

Peter Cunliffe aged 13 years, collier.

John Martlew aged 16 years, collier.

Daniel Holding aged 13 years.

Peter Cunliffe aged 14 years.

William Forshaw aged 14 years.

Thomas Forshaw aged 9 years.

KINGSWOOD. Kingswood, Northumberland. 2nd. May, 1833.

The pit was inundated and five persons drowned.

SPRINGWELL. 'B' Pit. Gateshead, Northumberland. 9th. May, 1833.

The explosion occurred in the 'B' Pit which was owned by Lord Ravensworth and Partners. The pit was worked with open lights but on the morning of the disaster, a blower was opened by one of the workmen and the overman ordered the workmen to use safety lamps.

The explosion occurred the Hutton Seam at 720 fathoms and killed forty seven, ten men and thirteen boys and injured another of others. Nine of the victims bodies were not recovered until 27th. July when they were reported *'to have been reduced to skeletons.'*

At the inquest into the death of James Oliver, one of the deceased, William Stokoe, an overman at the pit said he went down the pit on Thursday morning at two o'clock and visited all the workings in the course of the day and found the pit in a very good state. He continued:-

"A man, while at work in the south east way, pricked a blower which emitted inflammable air. It shot out on the man and he was removed from the place. George Oliver, the father of the deceased, was set to watch and observe if it grew worse. He is still in the mine and supposed to be dead. The men at the time were working with candles owing to the supposed safety of the pit. Mr. Dodds, the under-viewer accompanied by me went to examine the blower but we did not consider it of consequence. Safety lamps were however sent for to be used by the workmen in the adding part of the mine."

John Liddell, a pitman said that the pit was in good order on the Thursday morning and it was good when he left about one o'clock. The explosion occurred about two o'clock and he went down again about six in the evening and found all in confusion. He found three bodies.

The coroner remarked that a garbled account of the disaster had been printed and hawked in Newcastle which charged an unfortunate stranger who was said to be a Welshman, as the cause of the calamity by taking off the top of his lamp.

Thomas Turner, from Staffordshire was then called and he stated that he was at work in the pit but he had not taken the top off his lamp and he would never ever do such a thing. he was aware of the reports but he said they were completely unfounded.

The coroner returned a verdict of 'Accidental Death.' Every effort was made to recover those bodies still in the pit and nearly fifty bodies were brought up but when a second explosion threatened. operations were suspended when there were supposed to be seven bodies still down.

LINDLEY TOP. Huddersfield, Yorkshire. 30th. May, 1833.

The colliery was the property of James Waterhouse of Lumley. There was an explosion at the colliery in which five lives were lost including that of the lessee, James Waterhouse. The others who lost their lives were Thomas Crosby of Elland, George Batley, John Tiffany and Edward Booth, both from Lumley.

BELLA PIT. Workington, Cumberland. 20th. September, 1833.

The colliery was the property of Mr. Henry Curwen and an explosion occurred when there were thirty eight persons working in the pit. Twenty five were rescued of whom, two, John Deacon and John Hayes were badly injured. Fifteen were killed in an explosion. Every effort was made to restore the ventilation in the pit and to recover the bodies. The inquest into the disaster before Mr. W. Bragg, Coroner. *'The Cumberland Pacquet'* did not publish a list of the victims as they were not sure that the list was correct.

MOORSLEY. Moorsley, Durham. 22nd. November, 1833.

An explosion was reported in which six lives were lost. The reports of the day state that Mr. Dawson, the overman and Embleton, Brown, Errington and Dawson were dreadfully burnt.

APEDALE. Staffordshire. 1835.

There is a reference to an explosion at the colliery in which ten or more lives were lost.

SHELTON. Staffordshire. 1835.

There was reference to an explosion at the colliery in the 1835 Report in which a number were burnt and four or five died.

LITTLE LEVER. Bolton, Lancashire. 1835.

Evidence was given to Committee by Robert Grundy of Green Hayes, Manchester who owned a mine in partnership with his brothers . He told of an incident of which he had heard in a Mine belonging to Mr. Fletcher which killed about seventeen people, The mine was near a river and the water broke through at a fault that they had failed to find and probably not looked for.

ST.HELENS. St.Helens, Lancashire. 1835.

It was reported that seventeen persons were drowned when water from a river went into the mine.

UNNAMED. Wigan, Lancashire. 1835.

There was a reference made to Committee of an accident at a Wigan colliery in which a considerable number of lives were lost.

HETTON. Downs Pit. Fencehouses, Durham. 3rd. February, 1835.

There was an explosion at the colliery in which 22 lost their lives.

WHITLEY, Durham, 1st. May 1835.

A man named Robinson and five other boys were killed at three o'clock in the morning while they were descending the pit. The hook was not connected to the bow of the corf which the man and boys were in and it fell down the shaft, a distance of forty five fathoms. It was thought to be the first fatal accident that had occurred at the colliery. At the inquest a verdict of 'Accidental Death with the deodand of one shilling upon the corfe' was recorded.

WALLSEND. Wallsend, Northumberland. 18th. June, 1835.

After the disaster of 1821, improvements had been made to the ventilation and for fourteen years there had been no accidents at the colliery until this one. The

explosion caused the deaths of 102 men and boys and four others were seriously injured. eleven horses were also killed.

The pit had been examined by the viewers and it was considered safe for the men to go down and work. There were four very experienced overmen and deputies down the pit at the time of the explosion. Two hundred and fifty men and boys were in the mine at the time of the disaster. The hewers had started work early in the morning and had finished getting coal. It was then brought to the bottom of the shaft by the young men and boys during the day. This was the customary way in which the colliery worked.

The explosion occurred in the Bensham Seam at about 2 p.m.. About 60 hewers had left the pit after their morning's work and the majority in the pit were young persons, putters, drivers and trappers who were getting the coal out. Six hewers were working in the coal with candles. There were few indications of the disaster at the surface. One of the banksmen at 'G' Pit, John Patterson, had just unhooked the lowest full corve from the rope and placed an empty corve in the pit, when a gust of wind blew it out and carried his hat over the headgear. Just after this the men saw smoke coming from the Pit. he described it as '*a lightish colour*' and as '*a puff that ceased almost immediately*'. .

The two furnacemen employed in the 'A' Pit succeeded in escaping through the 'C' Pit and four persons were found alive at the bottom of 'G' Pit but one of the men died soon afterwards. Eight men immediately volunteered to go down but at the bottom of the shaft, afterdamp drove them back up again and were almost insensible when they got to the surface. Mr. Buddle and his assistants went down the 'C' shaft but there was so much damage that they had to go to the surface without recovering any of the bodies. The day the bodies of two men and nineteen boys were recovered Some had been burned but the majority had died from the effects of the afterdamp..

At about 10 a.m. on 20th. June, three men were brought out of the mine alive. They had been entombed for 65 hours and it was said that they did not suffer from hunger. One of them had to have his leg amputated and died as result which brought the final death toll to 102. There were seventeen women widowed, eight mothers who lost sons and forty eight children under 14 years of age left fatherless.

The men who died were:-

Thomas Simpson aged 62 years, overman, left a widow and twelve children.
Joseph Lawson aged 63 years, deputy overman, left a widow and ten children.
William Crister aged 56 years, deputy overman, left a widow and six children.
William Crister jnr. aged 17 years, crane-man, son of William.
John Robson aged 35 years, deputy overman, left a widow and five children.
Andrew Robson aged 12 years, trapper son of John.
Matthew Usher aged 12 years, trapper.
Peter Green aged 16 years, stone stower.
Luke Mason aged 19 years, putter.
Peter Mason aged 17 years, putter.
William Mason, aged 15 years, trapper.
Robert Mason aged 13 years, trapper. The four 'Masons' were brothers.
Martin Brown aged 33 years, hewer, left a widow and three children.
Robert Clarke aged 21 years, putter, brother-in-law of Martin Brown.
William Dinning aged 17 years, putter.
Bate. Dinning aged 12 years, putter, brother of William.
Christopher Ovington sen., aged 67 years, door-keeper, left a widow and five children.
Christopher Ovington jnr., putter Son of Christopher.
John Stanness aged 20 years, putter.

John Reveley aged 12 years, trapper.
Edward Combey, aged 22 years, putter.
Robert Combey, aged 20 years, putter.
James Combey, aged 11 years, trapper. The three 'Compeys' were brothers.
Francis Bell aged 22 years crane-man.
Richard Bell aged 19 years putter.
William Bell aged 16 years rolley-driver.
Robert Bell aged 13 years rolley-driver. The four 'Bells' were brothers.
John Gillis aged 20 yaers, putter left his mother with three of his children.
Robert Roseby aged 8 years, trapper.
John Lowry aged 15 years, lamp attendant.
Cuthbert Reavely aged 43 years, hewer, left a widow and seven children.
John Reavely aged 20 years, putter, son of Cuthbert.
Thomas Reavely aged 16 years, helper-up, son of Cuthbert.
John Hepple aged 12 years, trapper.
John Roseby aged 12 years, putter.
Joseph Roseby aged 10 years, putter, brother of John, cousin of Joseph and Christopher.
Joseph Roseby aged 15 years, rolley-driver.
Christopher Roseby aged 13 years rolley-driver, brother of Joseph, cousin of John and Joseph.
Henry Giles aged 21 years, putter
John Giles aged 19 years, putter.
Andrew Giles aged 16 yaers, rolley-driver. The three 'Giles' were brothers.
Edward Combey aged 12 years, rolley-driver.
John Buddle aged 19 years putter.
Michael Buddle aged 17 years putter.
Matthew Buddle aged 14 years putter. The three 'Buddles' were brothers.
Henry Appleby aged 17 years putter.
James Appleby aged 11 years, trapper, brother of Henry.
Joseph Harbottle aged 72 years, trapper, left a widow.
Thomas Swan aged 13 years, rolley-driver.
R. Pendleton aged 15 years, rolley-driver, left his mother with five children.
Thomas Ellerton aged 14 years, lamp attendan, left his mother with three children.
John English aged 19 years, putter.
Roger Sharp aged 19 years, putter.
Hutton Raite aged 18 years, putter.
Christopher Raite aged 13 years, brother of Hutton and left their mother with three children.
W. Thompson aged 53 years, sinker, left a widow and eight children.
James Thompson aged 13 years, driver, son of W. thompson.
J. Thompson aged 14 years, rolley-driver.
George Kennedy aged 16 years, rolley-driver.
John Croser aged 23 years, hewer, left a widow and two children.
Thomas Mason aged 12 years, trapper.
James Green aged 19 years, crane-man.
Thomas Reavely aged 34 years, hewer, left a widow and five children.
John Reavely aged 11 years, son of Thomas.
Thomas Moore aged 14 years, helper up.
James Moore aged 12 years, way cleaner, brother of Thomas.
Joseph Wright aged 21 years, putter.
John Chicken aged 19 years, putter, left his mother with four children.
John Soulsby aged 16 years, way cleaner.
George Soulsby aged 14 years, trapper, brother of John.

William Johnson aged 47 years, sinker, left a widown and two children.
James Giles aged 19 years, putter.
Edward M'Nay aged 18 years, putter.
Ralph Waggott aged 75 years, trapper, left a widow and ten children.
Matthew Soulsby aged 31 years, onsetter.
George Kyle aged 9 years, trapper.
John Waggott aged 21 years, putter, left his mother with three children.
John Hall aged 18 years, putter.
George Hall aged 11 years, putter, brother of John.
Joseph Wanlass aged 10 years, trapper.
William Reay aged 24 years, hewer, left his mother with a child.
Andrew Reay aged 28 years, hewer, left a widow and three children, brother of William.
Thomas Huggup aged 11 years, trapper.
David Collins aged 19 years, putter, left his mother with two children.
Luke Watson aged 15 years, trapper.
Francis Haxon aged 14 years, trapper.
James Cousin aged 20 years, putter.
George Miller aged 16 years, putter.
John Miller aged 12 years, trapper, brother of George.
Thomas Sharp aged 19 years, putter, left his mother.
Edward Bell aged 19 years, helper-up.
Ralph Waggett aged 16 years, driver.
J.C. Waggett aged 14 years, driver, brother of Ralph.
William Patrick aged 17 years, trapper.
David Patrick aged 15 years, trapper, brother of William.
R. Wilkinson aged 21 years, trapper.
W. Wilkinson aged 17 years, rolley-driver. the 'Wilkinsons' were brothers.
Robert Dawson aged 13 years, trapper.
Percival Reed aged 15 years, way cleaner.
John Reed aged 13 years, way cleaner, brother of Percival.

John Reed, father of Percival and John was one of four who were got out of the mine alive and had his leg amputated.

The Coroner's inquest continued until the 29th. June and an examination of the mine found that the explosion had not originated in any part of the workings. The indicatiosn of the greatest violence were near the 'G' shaft and the source was trace to a point where two men were blasting down roof in roller-way leading to the 'B' Pit to make the height necessary for a horse to pass. These men had been allowed to use naked lights where blasting was going on but they had been restricted to safety lamps where the stones were deposited. Near where they were working there were doors which led to a highly dangerous part of the mine and form the position of the men's lamps it was concluded that they had approached one of these doors with a naked light which caused the explosion of the gas that had accumulated in the workings.

A fatal feature of the was the blowing out of the brattice in the 'G' Pit. From the experience at the 'A' Pit in 1821, Mr. Buddle sunk the 'G' form the Main Coal in two shafts, six feet in diameter, separated by a partition of rock but this arrangement failed to answer his expectations. One hundred feet of timber brattice above the Min Coal was carried away, fell down the shafts and close the mouths of the two shafts to the Bensham Seam. If this had not occurred, Mr. Buddle was of the opinion that the death toll would have been halved. The accident was cited as one which occurred in a mine where safety were lamps used.

After hearing all the evidence the Coroner summed up by saying-

“Gentlemen, this unhappy occurrence which has take place, might any day, any instant of time, or these last fourteen years, have happened and it can therefore be said that providence has been unwatchful of the lives of numerous individuals who have gained their bread in their perilous employment. For reasons of infinite wisdom, inscrutable to the human mind, it had been suffered to take place. The fire went forth and one hundred human beings have instantly been swept form the face of the earth. But are we to suppose that this awful visitation will pass away without anyone ultimately benefit? May it not be he means of leading to investigation in the highest quarters? Men of science and leering will devote their thoughts, their energies, to the inquiry and who dare deny that the same Providence that so long arrested, and had now willed this deplorable event, may direct on some superior individual, whose gigantic mind may suitably grapple with the latent foe, and generations yet unborn look back with gratitude to the cause of future protection. Thus may good spring out of evil.”

The jury returned the following verdict-

“We find our verdict to be Accidental Death, arising from the explosion of inflammable air but how, or in what part of the mine it originated, there is no evidence to shew. In recording the verdict, the jury express their full conviction, that there has been no want of due care and precaution on the part of those who have direction and management of the mine.”

Explosions in coal mines were becoming more frequent and the fact was being noticed by parliament. A motion in the House by Mr. Pease, M.P. for South Durham resulted in a Select Committee to inquire into the subject to be set up on the 2nd. June 1835 to-

“Inquire into the nature, cause and extent of those lamentable catastrophes which have occurred in the mines of Great Britain with the view of asserting and suggesting the means of preventing the recurrence of similar fatal accidents.”

PUMPHOUSE. Dudley Port, West Bromwich. 2nd. November, 1835.

At the Majors colliery at Tipton an explosion was reported in which sixteen men were killed and five others burned. The colliery was the property of Sir Horace Paul and worked by two ‘butties’ James and Thomas Barlow. The shaft was 280 yards deep with two works one 160 yards and one 120 yards from the bottom. The banksman at a neighbouring pit heard the explosion two miles away and it was described as *‘like the discharge of a cannon’*. Smoke and burning coal were flung up the pit when 30 men and boys wee below. Thirteen were initially reported killed and eight badly burned. One man died going down the shaft in a rescue attempt. Three horses were also reported killed.

BURDON MAIN. Burdon, Durham. 19th. November, 1835.

An explosion at the colliery claimed the lives of eleven, three men and eight boys. It was thought to have been caused by a door being left open. It occurred at about three o’clock in the afternoon in the Low Main seam. The pit was divided into two districts and the explosion occurred in the new north district. There was a door in this to drive air into the three innermost boards and it was thought that this door had been left open. There was a blower in another part of the seam and it was thought that this gas was ignited in the unventilated part of the mine.

James Campbell, the deputy-overman entered these three boards and the accumulated gas ignited at his candle. The blast was very great with stoppings

being blown out together with the trap door and sections of brick walling on each side of it.

Those who died were:-

James Campbell, aged 26 years, deputy-overman, who left a widow .

Robert Pearson, hewer aged 30 years, who left a widow and five children.

James Wood, hewer, aged 30 years, who left a widow and five children.

Richard Athey, putter aged 20 years.

Samuel Robson, putter aged 20 years.

George Whitfield, putter aged 15 years.

John Coxon , putter aged 15 years.

George Clark, putter aged 15 years.

Ralph Hill, putter aged 13 years.

Thomas Pinkney, way cleaner aged 10 years.

Joseph Arkley, trapper aged 10 years.

At the inquest, three deputies, Thomas Cramman, Ralph Stoker and Robert Hall agreed that the mine was reasonably free from gas on the day of the disaster and that the explosion could be attributed to the opening of the trap door. They stated that the trappers sometimes attached strings to the doors to open them without raising from their seats and also agreed that the boys sometimes fell asleep or the string got entangled leaving the door open. From their inspections they were inclined to think that the little boy Arkley had opened and fastened back the door to let the putters through and had either fallen asleep or gone to play.

After hearing the evidence the jury returned a verdict without retiring that:-

“The deceased came to their deaths by an explosion of fouled air and the afterdamp occasioned by it, the explosion having been caused by the opening of a trap door but whether intentionally or accidentally, no evidence appeared to show.”

During the investigation the coroner asked whether it would not be better to employ able bodied men at good wages as door-keepers instead of boys. Mr. George Johnson, the viewer of the colliery answered that they had found from experience that boys from eight to twelve years of age were much more attentive than youngsters from twelve to eighteen. As to employing able bodied men it was doubtful that men could be found who would be willing to accept this employment.

Mr. Reed, the coroner said:-

“There appears to be much practical good sense in what has been advanced but I think that the men might be reasoned into a conviction that the careful performance of a trapper’s duty is so essential to the safe working of a mine and so important to the preservation of human life was one of the most honourable situations at which they could be appointed.”

DOWNS PIT. Hetton, Northumberland. 28th. January, 1836.

The accident happened on Thursday afternoon and claimed the lives of twenty men and boys. There were over eighty others working in the mine but they managed to escape thorough another part of the workings. It was thought to have been caused by a boy leaving a ventilation door open when gas accumulated and was ignited at a naked light. There had been some small explosions at the colliery before. The South Shields Report gives the date as 3rd. February, 1835 and the number of lives lost as twenty two.

The explosion occurred at about half past one and those who died were:-

George Newton aged 40 years of Low Downs who left a wife and five children.

Thomas Kay aged 38 years of Low Dows who left a wife who was expecting their eighth child. She died and was buried with him.

William Wears aged 35 years of Houghton.

Richard Findlay of High Downs who left a wife and two children.

Simon Tate aged 33 years of Hetton who left a wife and three children.

James Cowens aged 25 years of Downs Lane who left a wife and one child.

John Milburn aged 23 years of Hetton who left a wife and one child.

John Cleghorn aged 30 years who left a wife.

John Gleghorn aged 24 years, cousin of John.

Thomas Findley.

Richard Findley aged 27 years, brother of Thomas.

William Halliday aged 19 years of High Downs.

Mark Dodds aged 18 years of Hetton.

William Surtees aged 17 years of High Downs.

William Henry Blake Costdle aged 17 years of High Downs.

John Gardiner aged 16 years.

Anthony Cummings aged 10 years.

The following were taken out of the pit alive but died later:-

Robinson Harland aged 23 years, a single man of Hetton.

John Walton aged 14 years of Downs Lane.

Edward Dodds aged 14 years of Hetton.

Mark Dodds brother of Mark.

William Ward aged 20 years a single man from Hetton.

The inquest was held at the New Inn, Hetton before coroner T.C. Maynard. John Kendal of Brick Garth, Easinton Lane, the deputy overman at the colliery told the court that he had been through all the workings previous to the disaster and none of the men had made any complaint about them being in a foul state. The men on the second shift had come in before he left the pit at ten past ten. The mine was worked with candles and there was an air-door necessary to pass the air into the workings. The trap-door was in the charge of a boy of ten years of aged named Anthony Cummings. About eight in the morning, Mr. Kendal found the door open though it had been closed a few minutes before. The tubs that were on their way to the shaft had been placed so that the door would not shut. Mr. Kendal admonished the putters for this but they said it was s the fault of the trapper for not keeping the tubs back. He pointed out the danger and the putters and trapper said that it would not happen again. Despite this, he thought that the cause of the explosion was the door being left open.

After hearing all the evidence, the coroner summed up and the jury retired to consider their verdict. They returned and stated 'that the deceased had come to their deaths by accident and causal explosion of a quantity of inflammable air in the pit'.

ROBIN HOOD. Wakefield Yorkshire. 16th. February, 1836.

The colliery belonged to Messrs. Charlesworth and it was reported that several were killed in an explosion. There are other references giving the same date and month but in 1838.

HEBBURN 'B'. Hebburn, Northumberland. 19th. July, 1836.

The accident happened about 7 a.m. and there were two explosions one after the other, the first in the B Pit which was closely followed by another. The pit had not been fully worked for some time. There was little damage to the fabric of the mine.

Those killed were listed as:-

Cuthbert Short aged 30 years.

Thomas Lamb aged 7 years. These two were killed in the explosion.

Thomas Fairs, overman was severely burnt and later died.

W. Taylor, viewer aged 65 years and Thomas Cowley were severely burnt.

John Owens aged 20 years, Andrew Maddison aged 14 years, Robert Maddison aged 12 years, Thomas Bell aged 12 years and Angus Lamb aged 12 years were slightly burnt.

WEDGEWOOD'S. Burslem, Staffordshire. 26th. September, 1836.

It was reported that eleven lost their lives in an explosion.

BLACKROD. Bolton, Lancashire. 6th. October, 1836.

The colliery was the property of Mr. Blundell and the pit was worked with lamps but naked lights were taken in as well. The fireman, Thomas Challender, made his inspection and let the men down.

James Garswood said that he was working with James Green when there was a gust of wind and he tried to make his way to the pit bottom but was greatly affected by the afterdamp. He came across the bodies of Thomas Challender and Alice Wilkinson as he made his way out of the pit.

Those who died were-

Thomas Challender, fireman aged 38 years.

Catherine Wilkinson aged 16 years.

John Marsden aged 17 years.

William Moor aged 38 years

Edward Bentham aged 56 years.

James Gore aged 72 years.

Margaret Anderton aged 16 years

Alice Anderton aged 10 years.

Thomas Moss aged 60 years

James Grayson aged 16 years.

Sarah Grayson aged 20 years.

Ellin Sherrington aged 18 years.

Official records say that eleven lives were lost in the explosion but from the local press reports of the inquests at Adlington, New Springs and The Cock Inn, Blackrod under three different Coroners, twelve victims were listed. At the inquest at the Side of the Cock Inn at Blackrod before William Smallwood, Coroner, a verdict of 'Accidental Death' was returned.

BOG. Wakefield, Yorkshire. 13th. December, 1836.

The colliery was the property of Mr. Fenton and an explosion was reported that claimed several lives. The colliery was worked in shifts and it was thought the ventilation was so good that it was worked with candles and the use of lamps had been discontinued.

The men who worked the last shift on Monday night left a trap door open in a roadway and gas collected. On Tuesday morning Richard Auty aged 40 years one of the bottom stewards accompanied twelve men and six boys into the pit. He saw the door was open and instead of ordering the men and their candles out of the pit, he, he went to close the door without any light so that the air could circulate. He then went to try it with a candle and a tremendous explosion took place. The report was heard a distance away and all below ground were injured.

Thomas Bedford, another steward led a party into the pit and found Auty dreadfully burnt but alive. He was reported to have said, "Oh, Thomas! Pray for me!".

The inquest was held at the Shovel Inn, Carr Gate before Mr. Thomas Lee and a verdict of 'Accidental Death' was returned

OLDBURY. Oldbury, Straffordshire. February, 1837.

Five were killed and five others deadfully burnt in an explosion caused by the unsewing of a Robbert's safety lamp.

ARGOED. Mold, Flintshire. 10th. May, 1837.

The colliery was the property of Messrs. Hampton and the colliery was inundated with the loss of twenty lives. Ten others were rescued after being in the pit for three days. Water had been coming into pit from old workings for ten days before the disaster but work continued as the pumps were able to cope with the water.

On the day of disaster the flow suddenly increased and the men in the engine pit, eighteen in number, managed to climb to safety on machinery in shaft. By the following Monday ten bodies had been recovered.

Three days later sounds were heard in shaft and four men and six lads were rescued alive. They were exhausted and wet but happy, Roberts, one of those recovered said:-

"I heard the alarm from a collier named Jones calling me to leave the seam as water was flooding in. I thought it a false alarm and went on working for a few minutes until a second alarm was given. I went to Engine shaft and found the water too high and returned passing through the air cut into Bye shaft but the passage was too small and I stayed where I was. Three others named Ither, Williams and Jones were swept away by the flood trying to get to place. The boys were crying for food and Kendrick and me found some slices of bread and butter in out pockets and shared them out. Three days we were trapped but the water did not go up. Two elderly men, Robert Owens and William Williams died and we stayed together and prayed."

A first-hand account of the disaster written by one of the survivors who was 14 years old at the time but written in 1862, captures the horror of the imprisoned miner.

"TRANSCRIPTION of the JOURNAL of HENRY HUGHES

Henry Hughes - June 15 1862

I, H Hughes, the son of Robert Hughes and Martha Read, Born in Flint Shãre, near Mold, North Wales, on December 25th. 1825 and lived at Mold until I was 15 years old and worked in the Coal mine when I was 9 years old and did not see day light only on Saturday and Sunday in the winter season. I felt thankful to the Lord for my mountain home, where I can bring my family up without sending them to the coal pits, for I had many narrow escape for my life on which I report to here. Which takes place in 1837 on the 9th day of May at the

Argoed Colliery, about 1 mile distant from Mold. On the 9th day of May, in that year thirty two souls, men and boys, including myself, descended the shaft, which was seventy yards deep, to work. There was an old deserted pit close to the one where we worked, which sixty five years before, had suddenly filled with water. Some of the men, had been warned not to work to near to the old pit, for fear the water would break through and flood the one where we were working. At about eight o'clock, on the morning of the above date, the men and boys were called out as the water had begun to break through from the old pit and was coming in on us. When, however, we got to the shaft, to be hoisted up, a man named John Owens told us to go back as there was no danger. So we returned and resumed work. In two hours, afterwards, the water rushed in, in such quantity and force that seven of our number were drowned. And the rest of us, with the exception of two, rushed to a position in the highest part of what is called, the air course. Twenty two of us all huddled together without any way of escape, with no air to breathe and nothing to eat. Death seemed to stare us in the face. In a short time, our lights went out for want of air and to add to the horrors of the situation, we were left in total darkness. Never shall I forget the fearful picture of human despair which was presented by a young man named William Haliute. When he realized his awfull situation he uttered shrieks of agony. He called over the names of his young wife and his little children and plunged his hands into his hair and tore it from his head in handful's. Some sat silent and gloomy, speaking not a word. Apparently awaiting the visit of the grim monster, death. Others wept and I noticed two men, named respectively, Thomas Jones and William Williams. They went off a few feet, aside from the others and prayed. These two last died in a few hours afterwards. To add to the horror of our position, the mud was six inches deep where we were. Among our number was a young man named John Jones who had always manifested great interest and affection for me. This affection remained with him till death, as will be seen by the following incident. In order to keep me out of the mud, he took me in his arms and laid me across his lap. In this position, I went to sleep and when I awoke, my dear friend was dead. The breathing of the gas, which had gathered in the place where we were imprisoned, caused a kind of stupor to come over us. And it was well that it was so, else we might have been tempted to drink some of the sulfuric water, with which the pit was flooded. Which would have proved certain death. As it was, our minds were so deranged, that although, suffering with burning thirst, we did not know enough to go and drink it.

We remained in this terrible condition for three days and two nights. During which time, twelve of our number died. A portion of the time, I lay on four dead bodies. The people outside, meanwhile, had not been idle. They had been doing all in their power to rescue us by emptying the pit of water as fast as possible. On the third day, relief arrived. The first person who came to us, was my brother, John Hughes. Who was then a young man. The first man he reached was John Candrick and the first word he said to him, were, 'is Hemy alive?' Candrick answered, 'He was a short time since.' My brother, John, continued to crawl over bodies, of my fellow workmen, shaking them as he went, to see whether they were alive, until he got to myself. He shook me and called me by name and I answered by making a mourful wailing noise. He took me in his arms and as the water was only about a foot from the roof, he got on his back and paddled himself alone holding me above the water, till we got to the shaft. Those of us who were alive, were taken up a short distance at a time. If we had been taken up to suddenly, into fresh air, it might have caused instant death. After we were taken up, we were carefully nursed and fed sparingly, until our strength returned I was among the first to recover. The

incident caused great excitement all over that part of the country. There was a great Fair being held at Mold, on the 12th. of May, when we were being taken out of the pit. And all the people left the fair, so that it was completely deserted and came to see us. And when we reached the top of the shaft, the assembled crowds rent the air with deafening cheers and many of the people, wept for joy. Two men who were in another part of the pit were found dead, 11 days after we were taken out. During all the time I was imprisoned in the pit, I had no fear of death. And in fact, an idea of it never entered my mind.

At the inquest into disaster a verdict on the men was that they 'died from suffocation.' At a public meeting at the Black Lion Inn on 16th. May, 1837 John Wynne Eyton chaired a meeting which set up a relief fund for dependants of victims and £595. 11s. 0d. was collected.

BRIGHT SOFT PIT. Shipley, Nottingham. 13th. June, 1837.

The pit exploded in the afternoon. No cause was ever established but eight people lost their lives and twelve others were injured. Five or six asses were also killed.

OLD COAL PIT. Blaina, Monmouthshire. 17th. September, 1837.

Twenty one lives were lost in an explosion caused by naked lights.

ISABELLA, UNION and LADY PITS, Workington, Cumberland. 28th. July, 1837.

Up to ten months before the accident, Mr. Mathias Dunn was the manager of the collieries which were on the Cumberland coast and the workings went under the seas for a considerable distance. At about 1,500 yards from the shaft the strata rose rapidly so there was only about 150 feet of rock above. After Mr. Dunn departed there had been a considerable robbing of pillars and there was common talk of the danger in the town. Ralph Coxon was the manager and it was under his instructions that the pillars were robbed. There were many falls of roof but Coxon persisted. A number of colliers had refused to work and a man named Bowness had written to Mr. Dunn-

“Unless some interference can be made, a very few days or weeks will most assuredly bring down the waters of the sea and that opinion is now greatly expressed, that men are leaving the colliery every day.”

Dunn referred the matter to a north of England coal owner, who wrote to Mr. Curwen, a manager of a colliery, drawing his attention to the risks that were being run. No action was taken and the sea broke into the workings on the evening of the 28th. July. Men standing on the shore could see 'the swirl of waters'. a whirl pool, several hundred yards out to sea. No rescue operations were feasible but some men did escape from a day hole in the rise workings.

The disaster occurred in Mr Curwen's Lady Pit which extended a long way under the sea and the Camperdown Band runs rapidly towards the surface in the direction of the shore and had been worked for a long time and the workings had greatly reduced the thickness between the workings and the sea. When the accident occurred it was supposed that to have been about fifteen fathoms with only four fathoms of rock and the rest of loose gravel and sand. The roof gave way and the sea rushed in and three other mines, the Lady Pit, the Isabella Pit and the Union Pit were rendered forever useless. At the time the seam broke in there were fifty seven in the mine, thirty of whom managed to escape but twenty four men and two boys were overtaken by the water and perished.

Those who lost their lives were:-
 Thomas Green, wife and family.
 Robert Green, son of Thomas who left a wife and four children.
 Thomas Green, grandson of the first.
 John Magree left a wife and two children.
 John Mulligan, left a wife and family.
 Robert Mulligan, a young man.
 Richard Craney, left a wife and family.
 Daniel Frill, left a wife and family.
 George M'Kitte, unmarried.
 Thomas Ditchburn, unmarried.
 Joseph Sharp, unmarried.
 Hugh Cain, unmarried.
 William Hayton, unmarried.
 Jeremiah Murrow, unmarried.
 William Wilkinson, left a wife and eight children.
 James Gambles, left a wife and family.
 Thomas Allison, left a wife and family.
 Thomas Johnstone, left a wife and family.
 Philip Dobson, left three children,
 Thomas Huids, left a wife and family.
 John Sides, left a wife and a large family.
 Jonathan Brough, left three orphan children.
 John Brough, left a wife and family.
 William Stubbs, left a wife and family.
 John Young, left a wife and family.
 Robert Mountjoy, boy.
 Martin Darling, boy.

Twenty eight horses also perished but it was fortunate that the disaster took place when it did, at the hour of changing the shift when there were comparatively few in the pit. Several of the survivors were within 300 yards of the place where the water broke in and it had the effect of changing the air and going suddenly very coal and many of them took the warning and started to try to get out of the pit. The air current was so great as they ascended the inclined plane that they had great difficulty in keeping their footing. The force was so great that a man named Bland who tried to get down to help found he could not get an air door open as he was returning. He persevered and at last removed a board. The rush of air was so great that it carried him out of the pit.

The place where the water broke in was nearly a mile and half from the shaft between Salterbeck and Harrington and about forty or fifty yards below low water mark. The three pits were filled with water by half past ten, about an hour and a half from the time the roof gave way. The hole was very large. A vessel sailed over the opening on Saturday and the captain supposes the aperture to be little short of an acre in extent from the discoloration there was in the water.

The workmen had frequently cautioned the viewer, Mr. Ralph Coxon of the danger but their counsel was disregarded. There was very strong feeling in the town against this man and Mr. Curwen dismissed him.

SPRINGWELL. Gateshead, Durham. 6th. December, 1837.

There was an explosion at the colliery between 9 and 10 a.m. when there were 29 men and boys in the mine. Twenty seven lives were lost, fifteen men and twelve

boys. lives. George Southern was the resident viewer and Mr. C. Steel, the overman. The mine was 128 fathoms deep to the Hutton Seam in which the explosion occurred. There had been great improvements made to the mine since an explosion in 1832.

Those who lost their lives were:-

Thomas Hedley aged 15 years.

Alexander McGee aged 50 years who left a wife and a large family.

George McGee aged 18 years, son of Alexander.

Edward Price aged 40 years, left a wife and eight children.

Robert Price aged 24 years, nephew of Edward.

George Hunter aged 17 years.

William Fenwick who left a wife and five children.

William Fenwick jnr.

Mark Fenwick, brother of William and son of William.

G. Ridley aged 16 years.

Todd Wakefield aged 32 years, wife and four children.

T. Wear aged 24 years.

Andrew Awfflick aged 27 years, wife and four children.

Jospeh Ramsey aged 37 years, left a wife.

James Beedling aged 22 years.

George Simpson aged 31 years, wife and five children.

Lionel Robinson aged 17 years.

Foster Banks aged 26, wife and four children.

James Henderson aged 30 years, wife and four children.

Joseph Rushey aged 30 years, wife and child.

Luke Rushey aged 18 years brother of Joseph.

Samuel Hood aged 12 years.

THE 27 MEN AND BOYS THAT LOST THEIR LIVES

Thomas Hedley. aged 14.

George Hedley, aged 10.

Thomas Wears, aged 24.

James Beedling. aged 21.

L. Robson, aged 17.

Samuel Hood, aged 12

William Hunter, aged 40. Deputy Overman.

Henry Gray, aged 25.

Alex McCree. aged . and George McCree. his son, aged 18
(the former left a wife and large family)

Edward Price. aged 40, (has left a wife and eight children)

Robert Price, aged 24. Nephew of the above.

William Fenwick, William Fenwick Jnr, and Mark Fenwick, father and two sons.
(the former leaving a wife and five children)

Todd Wakefield. aged 32. (has left a wife and four children)

Andrew Afflick, aged 27. (has left a wife and four children)

Joseph Ramsey, aged 37. (has left a wife)

George Simpson. aged 41, (has left a wife and five children)

James Simpson, aged 31. (has left a wife and five children)

Foster Banks, aged 26, (has left a wife and child)

James Henderson, aged 30. (has left a wife and four children)

Joseph Mason, aged 32. (has left a wife and large family)

Joseph Ritchie, aged 30. and Luke Ritchie, aged 18, brothers.
(the former leaving a wife and child)

The inquest was held before Mr. Michael Hall at Springwell Inn when it was heard that Edwin Price's lamps was found in a damaged state. Three horses were also killed and the jury brought in a verdict of 'Accidental Death'.

SPRINGWELL, Gateshead, Durham. 6th. December, 1837.

The pit was the property of Lord Ravensworth and exploded with the loss of twenty seven lives. The blast took place in the Hutton seam.

Those who lost their lives were:-

Thomas Hedley aged 15 years.

Alexander McCree aged 50 years left a wife and a large family.

George McCree aged 15 years, son of Alexander.

Edward Price aged 40 years left a wife and six children.

Robert Price aged 24 years nephew of Edward.

George Hunter aged 17 years.

William Fenwick father of William and Mark, left a wife and five children.

William Fenwick jnr.

Mark Fenwick.

George Ridley aged 16 years.

Todd Wakefield aged 32 years wife and four children.

Thomas Weir aged 24 years.

Andrew Awfflick aged 27 years wife and four children.

Joseph Ramsay aged 37 years left a wife.

James Radley aged 21 years.

George Simpson aged 31 years wife and five children.

L. Robson aged 17 years.

Foster Banks aged 26 years wife and child.

James Henderson aged 30 years wife and four children.

Joseph Mason aged 32 years wife and large family.

Joseph Richey aged 30 years wife and chils.

Luke Richey aged 18 years brother of Joseph.

Samuel Hood aged 12 years.

There were two survivors, Robert Puncheon, boy and George Oliver, boy. The inquest took place before Mr. Michael Hall, Coroner for the Chester Ward and a jury at the house of Mr. Thomas Maughan, the Springwell Inn.

Nicholas Wood, the colliery viewer and general manager to Lord Ravensworth, Mr. George Southern, the resident viewer, Mr. C. Steel, the overman at the colliery and several colliers who had worked in the colliery gave a description of the workings. The Hutton seam was at a depth of 128 fathom and the coal dipped to the east at one in sixteen. After the accident in 1832 every available means had been adopted to improve the ventilation, the most expensive and effective had been had been the driving of a road which now connected the Springwell shaft with the Back Fell shaft. The Springwell shaft was the downcast and the men deemed the pit as safe.

In the district where the accident happened, about half a mile from the shaft, operations were was ging on in the whole and the broken coal. In doing this the men worked out portions leaving pillars of coal to support the roof. Eventually the pillars are removed and the roof supported with wooden props which was termed 'working the broken'. This part of the work was always considered dangerous by the miners

and the work at the colliery was carried out with safety lamps but the custom was to blast down the pillars with powder.

John Todd and William Pratts, pitmen spoke of finding a broken lamp and tracing the explosion from the northern extremity and from there to the west and through the whole workings to the shaft. The lamp belonged to Edward Price and was found to have a defective glass and gauze.

The jury consider their verdict and returned that:-

“Three horses and the unfortunate men were killed by the explosion and came to their deaths by accident.”

The workings of the pit were less injured than might have been anticipated.

NANTYGLO. Blaina, Monmouthshire, c.7th. December, 1837.

An explosion was reported at Bailey's mine that claimed seven lives. From the Burial Register at St. Peter's records eight burials at that time. an eruption of gas was said to have been ignited at a candle.

Those who were buried on the 8th. December were:-

John Parkes aged 46 years, David Parkes aged 18 years and John Parkes aged 16 years all of Garnfach, Thomas Jones aged 20 years, of Gwainhelygan and Morgan Lewis aged 31 years of Brynamawr.

Those buried on the 10th. December:-

Margaret Davies aged 18 years and Jane Legg aged 13 years of Nantyglo and Griffith Davies aged 23 years of Penygarn.

ROBIN HOOD. Wakefield Yorkshire. 16th. February, 1838.

The colliery belonged to Messrs. Charlesworth and an explosion was reported in which a boy was instantly suffocated. Of the ten men and boys who were in the pit, all were burnt to some extent but five so badly that they died. Smith, Wade and Hopton all of Rothwell and Blackburn of Carlton have left widows and fourteen young children and another named Arundel aged 18 years was supporting his mother whose husband had been killed in the same pit.

There are other references giving the same date and month but in 1836.

RUSHY PARK. St.Helens, Lancashire. June, 1838.

A curtain had not been removed over the weekend and the resulting build up of gas was ignited when the men resumed work on Monday morning. Six lost their lives and several others were burned.

HUSKAR. Moorend Pit. Silkstone, Barnsley. 4th. July 1836

The Huskar Colliery was joined to the Moorend Colliery for the purposes of ventilation and was the colliery was the property of Mr. R.C. Clarke of Noblethorpe. The day was hot and sunny but a violent thunderstorm raged from about 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. Hailstones and about two to two and half inches of rain fell.

The pit had a shaft used for pulling coal to the surface by a steam engine and in a wood there was drift which was used for ventilation. The rain put out the boiler fire and the engine could not be use to take the men to the surface and a message was sent down the pit for all the miners to make their way to the pit bottom.

The children, boys and girls, who worked in the mine, decided to wait until the engine was working again. They had then spent nine hours underground. Forty of them decided to go out of the pit by way of the ventilation drift to Nabbs Wood. At

the bottom of the drift, there was an air door and the children went through this. As they made their way up the drift, a stream which was swollen into a rushing torrent by the downpour, overflowed down the drift. The children were washed off their feet and down to the door through which they had just passed. The water rose against the door and twenty six children were drowned. Some of the older children managed to escape along a slit which lead to the Moorend Colliery.

James Garnett, the father of one of the children, was one who went in after the water had subsided and he found the body of his child. It could not be recovered until all the twenty six had been removed. They were taken to Thostle Hall where George Teasdale and a man named Buckley washed their faces and then they were taken to their homes in carts.

The boys who died were-
George Burkinshaw aged 10 years.
James Burkinshaw aged 7 years, brothers
Isaac Wright aged 12 years.
Amos Wright aged 8 years, brothers.
James Clarkson aged 16 years.
Francis Hoyland aged 13 years.,.
William Allick aged 12 years.
Samuel Horne aged 10 years.
Eli Hutchinson aged 9 years.
John Simpson aged 9 years.
George Barnett aged 9 years.
George Lamb aged 8 years.
William Walmseley aged 8 years.
John Gothard aged 8 years.
James Turton aged 10 years.

The girls who died were-
Catherine Garnett aged 8 years.
Hannah Webster aged 13 years.
Elizabeth Carr aged 13 years.
Anne Moss aged 9 years.
Elizabeth Hollin aged 15 years.
Hannah Taylor aged 17 years.
Ellen Parker aged 15 years.
Mary Sellars aged 10 years.
Sarah Jukes aged 8 years.
Sarah Newton aged 8 years
and Elizabeth Clarkson aged 11 years, who was buried at the feet of her brother.

Those from Dodworth were-
William Attick aged 12 year,
Samuel Horne aged 10 years and
Charles Hutchinson aged 9 years and

three from Thorgoland-
Mary Sellars aged 10 years.
George Garnett aged 9 years and
John Simpson aged 9 years.

Benjamin Mellow, aged 46 years old., examined on the March 18th., 1841 told the Children's Employment Commission:-

"I am under ground steward to four of Mr. Clarke's pits and I have the superintendence of above 90 colliers. We have had but one bad accident and that was on the 4th. July, 1838. It had been raining hard during a thunder storm to such an extent that the water came into the sough of the engine house and the engineer gave the alarm to the banksman who shouted out incautiously to put the light out and come out of the pit. The children and people were frightened, not knowing what was the matter. A number of children, either from the fright of from a desire to get a holiday, ran from the shaft towards the pittrail which forms a second outlet and this, together with the water escaping from the old workings, rushed down the pittrail and met the children who had passed a trap door, against which they were driven by the water and being unable to open it, 26 were drowned, 11 girls and 15 boys. The water by the marks it left could not have been above six inches deep in its stream down to the pittrail but it rose at the door and there they were drowned. Fourteen had got on before and they had passed sufficiently far to be safe. I am quite sure that the stream had never overflowed before. No man can prove it. The stream is very small and is dry nine months out of the twelve. If the children had remained in the pit or at the shaft, they would have been quite safe, the water never rose anywhere except just where they were drowned."

The inquest into the disaster was held at the Red Lion Inn, Silkstone By Mr. Badger of Sheffield, Coroner. The bodies had been viewed at their homes and Joseph Huskar who lived in Huskar, told the court what happened on that fateful day.

"Eleven of us were together and they all drowned but me. The water swam me down the day hole and through a slit into another bord gate."

William Lamb said-

"We did not know what we were going out for. We thought it was fire. The water washed the children down the day hole against a door, through which we had just come, and they were all drowned. If we had stopped at the pit bottom we should have been saved."

Uriah Jubb stated that-

"I was coming up the dayhole with Elizabeth Taylor and some other. We heard the water coming and me and Elizabeth Taylor got into a slot in the dayhole and we stopped there until we could get put. The water met the others as they were coming up and drove them against the door where they were drowned."

After hearing all the evidence and the accounts of survivors, the jury returned a verdict of "Accidental Death".

Queen Victoria took an interest in the disaster and the loss of so many young lives in a pit was a factor in the setting up of the Royal Commission to enquire into women and children working in coal mines.

There is an inscription on the old monument in the churchyard of the Parish Church, Silkstone which records a disaster in the district. It reads-

"Take heed, watch and pray, for ye know not when the time is."

The inscription on the east side reads-

"This monument was erected to perpetuate the remembrance of an awful visitation of the Almighty, which took place in this Parish on the 4th, day of July 1836.

On that eventful day, the Lord sent forth his thunder, lightening, hail and rain, carrying devastation before them, and by a sudden eruption of water into the coal pits of R.C. Clarke Esq., twenty six beings, whose names are recorded here were suddenly summoned to appear before their maker.

Reader remember:-

Every neglected call of God will appear against thee at the day of Judgement. Let this solemn warning then sink deep into thy heart and so prepare thee that the Lord when he cometh may find thee watching."

The inscription on the north side-

"Boast not thyself of tomorrow".

The mortal remains are deposited in the grave as under-names.

First grave beginning at the North End.

G. Birkinshaw Age 10 years.
J. Birkinshaw Age 7 years Brothers.
J., Wright Age 12 years.
A. Wright Age 8 years Brothers.
J. Clarkson Age 16 years.
F. Hoveland Age 13 years.
W. Attick Age 12 years.
S. Horne Age 10 years.
E. Hutchinson Age 9 years.
G. Garnett Age 9 years.
J. Simpson Age 9 years.
G. Lamb Age 8 years.
W. Womersley Age 8 years.
J. Turton Age 10 years.
J. Gotherd Age 8 years.

The inscription on the west side-

"There is but a step between us and Death".

The inscription on the south side-

"Therefore be ye also ready".

The mortal remains of the females are deposited in the graves at the feet of themselves as under-named,

O. Garnett Age 11 years
H. Webster Age 13 years
A. Moss Age 9 years.
E. Parker Age 15 years.
E. Hollings Age 18 years
T. Taylor Age 17 years
M. Sellars Age 10 years.
E. Clarkson Age 11 years.
S. Newton Age 8 years.
S. Jinks Age 10 years"

One hundred and fifty years after the disaster, funds from the Silkstone Parish Council made available for the upkeep of the Old memorial to the children and a new memorial was dedicated at the site of the disaster.

LOWCA. John Pit. Whitehaven, Cumberland. 24th. October, 1838.

The colliery was situated on the left hand side of the Whitehaven to Harrington road and was the property of Mr. H. Curwen of Workington Hall. It employed about 100 men and boys with Harrison Kay and William Hetherington as the overmen.

The colliers left the pit at dusk the day before and some returned at 5 a.m. Two hundred yards from the bottom of the shaft along a rolley way, there was a 'steer' when the men waited until the overman had completed his inspection. Thirty four were waiting when the explosion took place. From the steer there were two drifts, one to the north, 200 yards long and one to the south 300 yards long. Hodgson's Pit was the upcast shaft.

The shaft was 90 fathoms deep and two men and two boys were descending in a basket. They were six fathoms down when the explosion occurred and they were blown into the air. A man named Nutter was rescued alive but the bodies of William and Robert Nicol were recovered at the bottom of the shaft.

Thirty four bodies were found in the 'steer', all blackened and badly mutilated. A boy was found lying near his horse in the stables. Kay was found in the south drift and Hetherington in the north drift

The fireman went down the pit in the morning while thirty eight men and boys were waiting for him at the pit bottom, to complete his examination, when-

"the explosion of firedamp from his light drove them in an instant into the corners of the spaces about them, jamming them into each other in a mass. Two men and a boy were, at the time, in the act of descending, near the pit's mouth all were driven up into the air, but the boy and one of the men, falling outside escaped the other fell into the pit, making, with the fireman, forty who perished. Since that memorable day, the fireman and deputy go down by themselves before the men came to work and not so much as a bone has been broken since."

Those who died were:-

Thomas Addison aged about 24 years, of Distington, single.

William Addison aged about 14 years, cousin of Thomas.

Eldred Burnett aged about 18 years of Harrington Harbour.

Joseph Cape aged 52 years of Distington, left a wife.

George Grellan aged 12 or 14 years of Distington.

Robert Dunn, a lad about 14 years.

John Dunn a boy, brother of Robert.

George Edgar aged about 17 years, of Harrington.

Joseph Gilminson aged about 22 years, single of Distington.

Harrison Kay aged about 26 years of Distington, left a wife and two children.

Joseph Metcalfe aged about 25 years of Distington, left a wife.

Robert Nichol aged 41 years of Lowca, left a wife and child.

John Richardson aged 22 years, of Pies Houses left a wife and two children.

John Relph aged 20 years of Harrington, single.

Robert Wyan aged About 25 years of Distington, left a wife and three children.

John Wyan, aged 21 years, single.

Jorden Wyan a lad of about 16 years brother of John and Robert.

John Wilson aged about 30 years of Pies Houses left a widow and three children.

James Wilson aged about 35 years left a widow and five children, brother of John.

Johnathan Wilson a lad of about 12 years, son of James.

Henry Peel aged 50 years of Pies Houses, left a wife and child.

Robert Peel aged about 11 years, son of Henry.

John Kelly a boy of about 12 years of Distington.

John Benson aged 19 years.

Johnathan Benson about 14 years and Fletcher Benson aged 15 years, brothers of Workington who mother was living and whose father was killed in a Workington pit.

Johnathan Hayton and Nicholas Hayton of Workington who left a widowed mother.

Their brother was drowned in a Workington pit.

Ralph Sanderson aged about 11 years of Ferry Houses.

William Hetherington aged about 33 years, of Fox House, close to the pit, left a widow and three children.

Richard Donald and his unmamed cousin of Frostoms aged from 12 to 16 years.

John Ditchburn aged 12 years of Harrington.

James and William Moore from Workington brothers aged from 12 to 16 years

Richard Seruggan aged 10 or 12 years of Workington.

Robert Frodale aged 10 to 12 years from Workington.

Peter Dobson aged about 30 years of Harrington left a wife and family.

Henry Ward aged 25 years of Workington left a widow and four children.

The inquest into the disaster was held in the house of Mr. Carr before William Bragg, Coroner. The disaster was supposed to have been caused by an accumulation of gas being ignited by the Hetherington's candle as he carried a lamp but use it only for examination.

CINDER PITS. Blaenavon, Glamorganshire. 28th. November, 1838.

The Cinder Pits lay about 100 yards from the left bank of the Afon Llwyd. Higher up the hill side, a number of feeder ponds were being constructed and were fed from the many drift mines in the area. The ponds provided water for the increasing number of balance pits, forge hammers, mill wheels and furnace charging planes that were being developed.

The colliery had two vertical shafts which dated from about 1818. The disaster as precipitated by torrential rain and deep snow fall which cause both shafts to be swamped by the water running down the hillside. Fourteen men and two women lost their lives.

The Burial Register at St. Peters, Blaenavon records those buried that had been '*drowned in the mine works*'.

They were, of Blaenavon:-

Elizabeth Havard aged 9 years, daughter of John and Mary,

William Evans aged 10 years,

Thomas Alsop aged 21 years,

George Taylor aged 21 years,

Caleb Cresswell aged 12 years,

Henry Jones aged 15 years and

David Evans aged 30 years.

Of River Row:-

John Jones aged 38 years,

Thomas Thomas aged 60 years,

Mary Hale aged 16 years ,

James Ashman aged 24 years and

John Sutton aged 26 years.

And John Morris of New Row,

Edward Jones aged 33 years of Bunker's Hill and

Philip Prince of Engine Pit.

WALLSEND. Gateshead, Northumberland. 19th. December, 1838.

The pit was called the Wallsend 'G' Pit or Church Pit and was the property of William Russell Esq. The furnace pit for this was 'A' Pit which was about a mile away. Three years before 140 lives had been lost in explosion at the same colliery.

The explosion occurred on a Wednesday evening when eleven shifters who had gone to work after the pitmen to repair and prop the roads and remove stones were at work. There were only eleven men in the pit.

About 6.30 the furnaceman saw foul air coming out and raised the alarm. It was found that there had been an explosion and all in the pit were killed but the force of the blast had not reached the shaft.

Those who died were:

Thomas Dinning, left a wife and five children

Matthew Towns, single.

Jacob Maddison, single.

Joseph Roseby, left a wife and several children.

Thomas Rutherford, single.

William Smith, single.

Hugh Row, single.

William Ellerington, single.

T. Wilkinson, left a wife.

John Leighton, left a wife and five young children.

Robert Bones, left a wife and nine children.

Bones had kept a public house in Throckley but had found the income insufficient to support his family and had gone to work in the pit. He had worked there for only three days when the disaster occurred.

The furnace was extinguished and a party went down the pit. Rutherford's body was found near the pit eye. He had been to bringing 162 props down the shaft. The others were later found burnt and mutilated. At the inquest before Steven Reed, Coroner for the district, a verdict of 'Accidental Death' was returned.

WILLIAM PIT. Whitehaven, Cumberland. 18th. February, 1839.

There was an explosion at the colliery about 2 a.m., about one and a half miles from the shaft bottom in the direction of Parton which claimed the lives of nine men and twelve boys.

The chief overman examined the mine on Saturday morning and found no firedamp. On Monday morning, Topping, an overman examined and found that all was safe and the men went to work. It was believed that a boy named Kennedy followed Topping into the works with a naked light and gas fired at the candle.

One account stated that-

"On the Saturday before, there was no appearance of damp and the 'waster,' as the person is called whose business it was to examine, had on Monday found all the places safe till he came to the last, by which time the people had gone to their work but on going into the last with a boy, who, besides his safety lamp, had an open candle in his hand, the damp, which had accumulated since Saturday, exploded at once. These two were much scorched but escaped with their lives. The others that were in the pit perished, with the exception of one man who was recovered."

Those who lost their lives were:-

George Scott aged 60 years of New Houses, left a wife.

William Davidson aged 41 years of New Houses left a wife and four or five children.

Hugh Raney aged 46 years of Banks Lane, left a wife and four children.

Barney Cairn of Tangier Street, single.

William Smith aged 22 years of New Houses, married for three months.

Felix McGinnis aged 33 years of Tangier Street who left a wife and two children.

Richard Harrison aged 43 years of New Houses left a wife and four children.
John Tordiff aged 31 years of New Houses, left a pregnant wife and four children.
John Firth aged 33 years of Charles Street left a wife and two children.
Thomas Gilmore aged 60 years of Tangier Street, left a wife and three children.
John Fisher aged 10 years of New Houses.
William Doran aged 14 years of New Houses.
Richardson Shields aged 16 years of New Houses.
Michael Wheatley aged 13 years of New Houses.
John Dunn aged 11 years of New Houses.
William Atkinson aged 14 years of New Houses.
Robert and James Tear aged 12 and 18 years of Addison Alley, brothers.
Christopher Pearson aged 14 years of New Houses.
John Ross aged 18 years of Charles Street.
William McMullen aged 11 years of New Houses.
Joseph Clark.

The local paper said:-

“The accident is one of those awful circumstances which spread misery and distress throughout the whole of the neighbourhood and leaves many a house in wretchedness by depriving them of protection and support. It is also one of those occurrences against which no human foresight or precaution could have effectually protected those who became its victims.”

KINGSWOOD. Kingswood, Somerset. 27th. May, 1839.

The colliery was the property of Messrs. Braine and Company and eleven were reported to have drowned in the pit when water entered the workings.

When a vein of coal was exhausted it was the usual practice to make a cutting 8 to 10 fathoms at the end of which another vein was usually found. The men were cutting from an explored vein when they holed into a vein that had been worked fifty years before and was filled with water. Thirty six men were at work. Twenty five were saved but all those in the lower workings lost their lives.

ST.HILDAS. South Shields, Durham. 28th. June, 1839.

The colliery was first won by Simon Temple on the land belonging to the Dean and Chapter of Durham and originally was called the Chapter Main Colliery. Coal was first found, among great rejoicings, on the 23rd. April, 1810. The original Company had financial problems and the colliery was bought by Messrs. Brown, of London who were also the proprietors of the Jarrow Colliery and they sold on the lease to Messrs. Devey. At the time of the disaster the colliery belonged to Robert, William and John Brandling.

The pit reached the Bensham Seam in July, 1825 and the shaft, which was short distance from St. Hildas Church, South Shields, was 143 fathoms deep and was divided into an upcast and a down cast by wooden brattice. The average thickness of the seam was about 6 feet thick and the workings extended from the shaft, southwards to a rise towards the sea. The colliery had a pumping engine of 90 h.p. and two drawing engines each of 30 h.p. There was also a 20 H.P. engine in the mine.

The colliery had always been considered as safe and when the explosion occurred at about 9 a.m. on a Friday morning in the western workings of the colliery At the surface, smoke mixed with small coal could be seen coming from the furnace shaft. the mine was worked by candles and blasting was used. Davy lamps were used only where the coal was softer. There were about one hundred men and

boys in the mine and about half of the were able to escape as they were working some distance from the explosion area but the disaster claimed fifty one lives. Most of the dead were killed by the afterdamp and thirty of the deaths were ascribed to the fact that an air crossing was blown away and the ventilation stopped. When the smoke was seen coming from the shaft, crowds of people from the miner's cottages that were close to the pit, assembled at the pithead. They stood in mute despair and there was frantic grief as the bodies were brought to the surface and the relatives took them home in carts.

William Anderson, a viewer at the colliery, went down soon after the disaster happened and he stayed until 2 p.m. when he was brought to the surface, exhausted. Mr. Mather, a wine merchant of South Shields, also went down the mine to give restoratives to any of the men who showed signs of life and medical gentlemen of the town went to the pit to give their services both above and below ground. Most of the men who came out of the pit were suffering from the effects of gas and when they had rested at the surface they were able to continue their work underground. One man who came out of the mine almost unconscious, did not regain consciousness as quickly as the others and when asked how he was he replied, *"I am not well, Sir. I have two sons in there"*. In the course of the day, fifty one bodies were recovered from the mine.

Those who lost their lives:-

Thomas Harrison, wasteman.

Thomas Horne, wasteman.

John Dickinson, rolleywayman.

John Dickinson, his son

Matthew Gibson, left a family.

Thomas and Jonathan Ellison, father and son.

Benjamin Gibson and two sons. He left a wife and family.

John Scott, Andrew's brother, left a wife and child.

Andrew Scott, John's brother, unmarried.

John Dinning, left a wife.

George Calvert, left a wife and one child.

William Young, married.

John Stephenson, married.

Thomas Mould, married.

W. Lamb, married with four children.

H. Lamb, his brother.

W. Wright, left a wife and family.

John Snowdon, left a wife and two children.

W. Hall, left a wife and two children.

Roger Spence, married.

James Ranson, married with one child.

George Longstaff and his two sons.

William Longstaff.

James Longstaff

W. and Patrick Ramshaw, brothers.

John and George Hall, brothers.

Edward Hardy.

William Hudson.

Thomas Gibson.

George Walker.

Sandy Forsyth.

Andrew Stephenson.

Alexander Falconer.

Michael Brown.
W. Todd.
Robert Johnson.
W. Rogerson.
John Fairley.
John and James Moody, brothers.
Joseph Argyle.
Thomas Cooper.

Mr. Mather, in the Report for 1852 stated-

“On one unfortunate occasion a fall of roof took place, within a couple of yards of the mouth of the pit, and we found fourteen or fifteen men lying dead together. They had come up at a fair speed for almost a mile, had passed through a portion of the afterdamp and had got there, but being exhausted, they failed and fell down.”

In evidence to the Children’s Employment Commission a boy who escaped stated-

“It came like a heavy wind it blew all the candles out and small coal about and it blew Richard Cooper down and the door upon him.”

Richard Cooper said- “I was cut on the head, not very bad.” He would have lost his life if one of the putters had not carried him out of the pit.

Mr. Mather gave his account of the disaster-

“The deadly gas, the resulting product, became stronger and stronger as we approached. We encountered, in one place, the bodies of five who had died from the effects of gas and had apparently died placidly without one muscle of their faces being distorted. Then there were there more who had been destroyed by the explosion their clothes burned and torn and the hair singed off, the skin and flesh torn away in several places with an expression as if the spirit had passed away in agony. Going with a single guide we encountered two men, one with a light, the other bearing something on his shoulders. it was a blackened mass, a poor dead, burnt boy he was taking put. A little further on, we found some waggons that had been loaded, turned bottom upwards and scattered in different directions. A horse was lying dead, directly in the passage, with his head turned over his shoulders as if in the falling he had made a last effort to escape he was swollen in an extraordinary manner. At one point, in another passage, we suddenly came amongst 12 or 15 men, who, in striving to reach the places where the bodies of survivors might be found, had been driven back by the surcharged atmosphere of this vast common grave. Their lamps were burning dimly and sickly and a dying red light glimmering as though through fog, as they were feeling the effects of poison. One poor men especially was so sick and ill that he had to be brought out in a fainting condition and after having been given assistance to his recovery, he still seemed much affected. The men were exerting themselves for the recovery of their unfortunate friends, acted with a solemn high-wrought, steady courage without bustle, scarcely without a remark and what remarks were made were necessarily brief and decided and generally in a subdued time such as human nature and it’s most vigorous perfect and ennobling moments. we beheld there the deepest sympathies of the heart combined with a courage that had never been surpassed. Their companions were brought out insensible from the overcharged atmosphere struck down at their feet almost without life.”

The inquest was opened the day and adjourned until the following Monday when it was established that most of the men died from the effects of gas and a very

small proportion from the effects of blast. The blasting in the mine had been carried out by gunpowder and it had been found necessary to use candles in that part of the pit. In other parts the coal was softer, Davy lamps were used. The blast in the western workings was attributed to gas from the wastes having been ignited by a candle. the jury brought in the following verdict-

“Accidental Death with a special recommendation from the jury that the practice of working on coal mines with candles be abandoned, and lamps adopted in their stead as, from the evidence taken at the inquest, it evidently appears that the explosion, causing fearful loss of life, has been caused by the incaution of the workmen, in going with a lighted candle into what is called the tenth bord of the mine, which had become foul.”

The disaster left nineteen widows and forty four children without fathers. A meeting was held on the 1st. July at South Shields with the Reverend James Carr in the chair. It was resolved to start A Subscription Fund for the relatives of the victims which, in March, 1840, amounted to £1.500.

At the suggestion of James Mather, a committee was appointed soon after the disaster to investigate the causes of accidents in coal mines. As a result of a Public Meeting held in South Shields, a Committee with Mr. Ingham in the chair and Dr. Winterbottom and Messrs Shortridge, J.W. Rixby, J. Clay, E. Ball, R.W. Swinburn, W.K. Edwards and A. Harrison with Mr. Mather and Mr. Salmon were the secretaries. the Committee made experiments in mines and talked to practical pitmen and viewers and contacted the scientific men of the age. They also looked at mining legislation in other countries. They published a Report in 1843, a document that was well before it's time. Their recommendations were sound, correct and practical was proved by later events. The disaster gave rise to the establishment of the South Shields Committee on Accidents in Mines.

KINGSWOOD. Kingswood, Somerset. 27th. May, 1839.

The colliery was the property of Messrs. Braine and Company and eleven were reported to have drowned in the pit when water entered the workings.

When a vein of coal was exhausted it was the usual practice to make a cutting 8 to 10 fathoms at the end of which another vein was usually found. The men were cutting from an explored vein when they holed into a vein that had been worked fifty years before and was filled with water. Thirty six men were at work. Twenty five were saved but all those in the lower workings lost their lives.

Those who lost their lives were:-

William Johnson who left a wife and four children.

Samuel Wiltshire, Johnson's son-in-law who left a wife and three children.

William Johnson aged 20 years.

Jospeh Goolden

Stephen Goolden.

William Framcom.

John Dursley.

George Palmer, a lad.

George Francom, a lad.

John Holbrook, a lad.

A local report of the accidents said:-

“On Monday afternoon, about one o'clock, an immense body of water broke into the coal-pit. We hear that the pit completely filled, and that it will take many days to take the water off before the bodies of the sufferers can be brought up. Had the water broken in an hour earlier, the loss of life would have

been much greater, many of the men and boys having left the pit to take their dinners. On Wednesday the water had gained on the engine, which had been incessantly at work since the accident and 120 feet of water was in the shaft. The workmen had broken into an old pit which had been close for nearly 100 years and the first intimation of danger was the extinction of the candles from the foul air which preceded the water. The man nearest the pit mouth rushed to the rope and clambered up in a cluster, two of them in a state of nudity. Twenty five was thus saved from impending death, but the number before stated, the greater part of whom had been employed in a lower part of the work, perished."

WELLSWAY Midsomer Norton, Somerset. 5th November 1839

These men and boys were hooked to the top and when their weight was felt fully on the rope it broke asunder precipitating the twelve to the bottom of the pit, some 756 feet. Only one body was sufficiently whole to be recognised. The rest were smashed and desevered, limb from limb. The unthinkable was suspected for the rope nearly new after six months of being worked with 37 hundredweight had the appearance of being cut with a knife or chisel passed over the fibres. Despite an astute newspaper reporter's discovery that the previous night sixteen had been brought up when usually only ten were allowed and this meant that the dead shift had been overmanned by two, the rumour was allowed to persist.

George Kingston, the bailiff told an inquest the rope had seemed perfectly secure. He was at the pit when the accident occurred. All of a sudden the rope broke and the end came with a great crash on the shed where he and others were standing. The rope was made ready again and three men went down as soon as possible. He thought somebody must have injured the rope to make it break. He left the pit the night before at a quarter past eight and had seen nothing untoward. He slept at the works and heard no noise in the night. He knew of no ill-feeling between the men. (You can almost hear the sadness and bewilderment in his voice at what was being covertly suggested). He had always believed them to be on a friendly footing.

Thomas James was in the pit at 4 o'clock in the morning. The twelve were about to descend. Just as he pulled back the runner he heard Will Summers say. 'How the rope jumps,' and with that they all fell to the bottom. The rope must have been tampered with. John Fricker confirmed the statements of Kingston and James.

Thomas Hill described how he had descended with two others and found the bodies, in a scene resembling an abattoir. 'It presented a mass of steaming human gore', he said. The rope had been cut by a person or persons unknown was the verdict though there does not seem to have been any hue and cry raised to search for the alleged culprit. In all probability there was no culprit but the merest suspicion that one existed would prevent any prosecution for manslaughter due to negligence.

Those who died were:-

James Keevill aged 41,
Mark Keevill aged 13,
James Keevill, Jun, aged 13,
Richard Langford aged 45,
Farnham Langford aged 15,
Alfred Langford aged 13,
James Pearce aged 17,
William Summers aged 24,

William Adams aged 20,
Leonard Hooper Dowling aged 13,
Amos Dando aged 12,
John Barnett aged 41,
killed in the Wellsway Pit disaster of 1839.

Thus saith the Lord, set thine house in order for thou shalt die and not live - so reads the inscription on their mass grave in Midsomer Norton churchyard.

Four thousand people attended the funeral. Rain descended in torrents from the sky, its dark and murky character appeared to sympathise with the heartrending grief and agony of the deceased's relatives.

The Wellsway proprietors supplied the coffins, each having a velvet pall. The vicar of Midsomer Norton gave the ground free. Funeral knells were rung in Kilmersdon and Radstock as well as Midsomer Norton. Mr C. Ashman, the works manager, led the procession and a clerk and bailiff preceded each coffin which was carried by four and supported by six miners one hundred and twenty pall bearers in all. Major Savage, Captain Dickson, Messrs V.G. James, Eustace Scobell, B. Smith, J. Hill, S. Palmer, Biggs J. Smith and T. Hollway, neighbourhood proprietors, joined the mourners as they entered the church. The Keevills and the Langfords, along with their mates were buried in one grave.

A stone was erected in the churchyard at the expense of the masters of the Wellsway Coalworks. The inscription reads:

In this grave are deposited the remains of the twelve undermentioned sufferers all of whom were killed at Wellsway Coal Works on the 5th November 1839, by the snapping of the rope as they were on the point of descending into the pit. the rope was generally thought to have been maliciously cut.

The original stone was renewed by the Somerset Miners in 1965.