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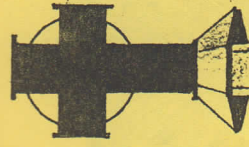
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Centenary Commemoration



1896
MICKLEFIELD
PIT DISASTER



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PIT DISASTER
MICKLEFIELD

POEMS
BY DENNIS BEST

STORY
KEITH RHIND

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D. Bismans

Preface by the present Vicar of Micklefield

No-one could fail to be moved by the following account of the disastrous Pit explosion in Micklefield 100 years ago. If it were a piece of fiction it would tug at the emotions. The fact that it is history, and a tale that was told by villagers of the time within the living memory of our eldest residents makes it all the more evocative.

You will read about the heroic attempts to find survivors. You will read about a village devastated by grief. You will share in the community's pain as expressed vividly in poetry. And you will see how people turned to the Church for comfort and some sort of answer to the question 'Why?' Keith Rhind gives us the factual causes of the blast, and, no doubt, the villagers of the time would have had a fairly clear idea of these. But the other question of why God should have allowed such an awful thing to happen remained largely unanswered, despite the tireless efforts of Fr. Charles Farrar and the other clergy involved in the funerals.

This has a lot to do with the thinking of the day. In the England of a century ago there was a tendency to accept one's lot in life. And when things went badly wrong, you did not cry about it. Fr. Farrar said in his sermon of the time that 'Christians' grief should be like the gentle April shower'. This, of course, was said in an age before we knew about post-traumatic stress, and the value of counselling and giving vent to our grief. Perhaps if he were alive today, Fr. Farrar would have adopted a different approach. Maybe he would have been bold enough to admit that sometimes we find ourselves angry with God. Maybe he would have suggested that God grieves with us on such occasions. He might have said that it is not human to receive such burdens 'willingly and cheerfully'.

As expressed in the poetry, the Pit is no longer there, but the memory remains. Many families that would have been sharing in the life of this village today had their future blown apart by that blast. The direct causes of it, as you will read, have more to do with human failings than with an act of God. Maybe our prayers should be that society and its values should change for the better so that human life, upon which it is impossible and immoral to put a value, should be treated as a sacred gift from our Creator - a gift that should never be put at risk for the sake of profit or power.

Fr. Douglas Moore

INTRODUCTION

It is sad that human endurance has to be taken to the limits of suffering, for the capacity of our true nature to be revealed for all to see. The blame for man-made disasters can securely be placed upon men, without being sexist. Up until now, at least, the overwhelming majority of such disasters has been the responsibility of men rather than women. The unfortunate consequences of these self-inflicted disasters, however, invariably falls upon women to redress.

Women, as in this disaster, are the ones left to fend for ageing parents of the last generation, together with the children of the generation to follow, against appalling odds. Man-made disasters have invariably been brought about through a combination of greed and ignorance, with the emphasis on the former.

Time and time again, chances are taken, against strong indicators of accidents waiting to happen, or, as in the case of this tragic event, explosions, that were happening, in a constant repetition with great loss of life.

An explosion occurred at Peckfield Pit in 1896, through a convenient ignorance of the evidence of the deaths of thousands of miners gone before, convenient that is, for those making large profits. It happened then, and it is happening today on a global scale, where techniques, not fully understood, are used in the guise of progress, all too often at the expense of the future, of our planet, and of its people. Mines continued in a remorseless progression to blow, and kill miners, well into the 20th Century, through the fatal combination of heat, gas, and dust.

Modern safety methods seem to control this threat in mining today, but shortcuts are still being taken to appease the god of productivity. In the year 1896 it was known that there was a risk in using candles or any naked flame below ground. However the 22 year old history of Peckfield Pit, up until the disaster, had produced little evidence of methane presence, excepting one previous explosion described as of a trivial nature.

The pit would have become increasingly befouled in the absence of toilet facilities.

Old workings, areas used as toilets, would be the least likely to be tested for methane, though methane is known as a product of such decay, that is, sewer gas, marsh gas, firedamp. It is known now, and it was known then.

An explosion is guaranteed in air, where a 7 to 14 % content of methane is subjected to a flame or spark.

The so called demands of the market place and competition seem to encourage an irresistible force in favour of the risk-takers then, and now. Understandably those at the sharp end all too often have no alternative, they are not made aware of the totality of the risk, and there is little alternative but to support the risks, in order to earn a livelihood. The safety lamp had been invented in 1815, and 30 such lamps were said to be held at Peckfield, prior to the disaster.

DISASTER DAY

Thursday the 30th of April 1896 at Peckfield Pit

Owners Joseph Cliff and Sons

The pit was tested for firedamp (methane) by Deputies, Lilleyman, Hopkinson, and Backhouse on the night-shift, three hours prior to the day shift going down. Candles were used for lighting as they had been for the 22 year old existence of the pit, except at the foot of the shaft, where, they had oil lamps installed. Peckfield was considered one of the safer pits. The pit was not coaling, and a comparatively small work force of 98 men had descended, to prepare the way for coaling on the following day. In mining parlance this was a "talk" day, many more would have been killed had the pit been in full production. There were two shafts, upcast, used solely for the conveyance of men, and downcast used for coal and supplies. The downcast shaft went as far as the Beeston Seam only, and from there a drift gave access to the Black Bed Seam. The Beeston Seam was 175 yards from the surface the Black Bed 240 yards from the surface. The time of the explosion was said to have been at approximately 0720 hours, twenty minutes after the men had descended to start work. The explosion was heard as far afield as Selby and Leeds. People rushed from their homes to the pit-head, which was practically demolished and spewing out black smoke. It is hard to imagine the distress of wives, children, and mates at this stage, for it was said that it seemed impossible for anyone to have survived. The cage had been blown into the headgear on the upcast shaft and obviously eliminated as a means of escape. The shaft was said by Deputy Lilleyman "to be upcasting like a furnace". The first rescue party was organised by Mr Houfton, Manager of Peckfield Pit, and Mr Lilleyman, Deputy, to include miners, Cawood, Robertshaw, Steel, Plum, Ball, Moakes, Warwick, Wallis, Gregory, Limbert, and Grimbley. Miners Wallis, Ball, Moakes, and others had close relatives amongst those trapped or killed. They entered by the up-shaft, despite the great heat generated, having heard shouting from below, but were stopped by debris. However they persevered and removed the obstruction to gain access to the Beeston Seam. This would be no mean feat, given that they were working 18 foot above the gate to the seam. Mr Houfton and Mr Clough (engineer) managed to pass the obstruction first, and met several men who had been trapped at the foot of the shaft. They were brought to the surface at once, three were badly injured. The party now including Mr Parkin (Deputy Kippax), continued, to find the bodies of Radford (under-manager) and Wallis (deputy), badly burnt in the "cabin", said to be completely wrecked. Apparently a large quantity of oil had been stored near the cabin for lighting purposes, and this had been ignited by the explosion. They continued further to find another two men alive, and directed them out. At this stage they were driven back by after-damp, and Lilleyman was taken ill requiring instant removal, a difficult process at the time.

The party returned (Lilleyman having been left receiving attention in a place of safety) for further exploration around the stable area, where the horse boy was found dead, and out of 14 ponies in the stable two in the centre had survived. Nearby they came across a man named Pickard badly burnt.

As they continued with the search they found only dead bodies, as described by witness, "A boy and his pony, both dead, three men together dead but no sign of injury, two men on their knees, (Stead and Barker) dead, no sign of injury". Partial ventilation was restored at 2pm.

The party returned at 3pm to come across a tremendous fall of stone, thousands of tons, and tubs smashed to smithereens. In one of the tubs they found the Benson boy, nearby his father Deputy Benson.

Next they found Noah Ball who was not in any way marked, then they came across Deputy Shillito, Simpson, a boy Simpson, and a boy Godber, all dead, the bodies badly burnt.

The injured miners had been taken to the Leeds General Infirmary by horse ambulance at 12 25pm, their names and injuries :- Thomas Turner age 38 a blacksmith from Ledsham, suffering from severe burns, George Hick 36 Micklefield, severe burns, Robert Nevin, Deputy, Micklefield, after-damp, Edward Simpson, Micklefield, after-damp, William Holden, Micklefield, Burnt beyond recognition.

Turner, Hick and Holden were in a dangerous condition. They were accompanied by miners Joseph Atkinson and John Walton, who were said to be in tears when told that it was unlikely that their friends would survive. Turner was said by the doctors to have been a magnificent specimen of manhood.

Of the nine Aberford men to go to work that day only four survived, they were Thomas Nutton, Tom Freeman, William Campey, Joseph Wilson the younger. The dead were Joseph Wilson senior, Alfred Wilson, William Stead, Arthur Howson, Sam Goodall. James Howson had come off the night shift as his son Arthur had gone down to be amongst those killed.

The decision was made to bring the bodies out in the middle of the night, ie, at 3am. The dead horses were beginning to smell requiring their removal as soon as possible.

DISASTER SECOND DAY Friday May 1st

Two parties of explorers continued to probe the pit workings with little rest. One party, led by Mr Parkin found four more bodies. A search party was said to "take the air with them".

Charles Ball, one of the rescued, returns to search for his missing relatives.

A message of sympathy is received from the Secretary of State, Matthew Ridley.

A letter is received from Mr W D Cliff (Pit owner) to say that he is not well enough to attend, and that he thought such a calamity impossible, also to tell our poor people I am sorrowing for them. He went on to say "I trust that all will go well and no other

accident may come to us from the disarrangement of the workings". His sons were in attendance at the pit head.

The explorers worked in relays though the night

The Yorkshire Post published a "colliery warning". Attention to miners the barometer is rising and anti-cyclone conditions are expected every where.

DISASTER THIRD DAY Saturday May 2nd

Exploration continued, they were joined by Dr Haldane (Oxford University Lecturer) a pit explosion expert also Dr Griesbach a Garforth GP, Routledge, Parkin, Wilson, Simpson, Dumbleton, Mills, Firth, Mosby, Goodall, Evans, Turner, Cawood. The repetition of names is noticeable and many were searching for relatives. More bodies found, they were, a boy called Simpson at the side of his dead pony, Talbot, Longden, James Wilson, Josh Wilson, Dan Taylor, George Shillito, Amos Whitaker.

Found alive at 3pm. A party led by Mr Parkin found Naylor Whitaker alive but unconscious. He was brought to the surface, and this gave great hope to people waiting at the pit-head for those still missing. Twenty to thirty were still missing. On the first day of the disaster, explorers had passed to within twenty yards of Naylor, he was treated with oxygen by Dr Griesbach and Dr Haldane.

The North Eastern Express was stopped at Micklegate and he was taken to the L.G.I. Great crowds watched his movement from station to hospital.

At this time it was said that Micklegate was thronging with people, as many as twenty thousand people were in and around the village and pit-head, many on bicycles. Four parties of explorers were now down the pit, a total of 40 men.

More bodies were found, they were the Winfield brothers, and miners Maggs, and Johnson. There were signs that they had made a desperate dash for life only to be overcome by fumes. Six others had also moved from gate to gate, finding each way blocked, and they too had eventually succumbed to the heat and gas to die together, they were Wilks, Oakley, Clarke, Whitaker, Joseph and Walter Jackson (brothers).. Ambrose Bellerby and his wife gave constant vigil at the pit-head, hoping for their two sons to be found. In his younger days Ambrose had worked at the pit, but now he and his wife were in their seventies and totally dependant upon their sons. The rescuers told them gently that there was little hope of finding their sons alive.

Mrs Bellerby said " If only I could see one of them I'd be content to go home".

A large wagon from Leeds drew into the yard loaded with coffins, this added to the intensity of the grief of those still waiting. An old chemical plant was used as a mortuary, and this place gained the description as the "Death House". Relatives were now involved in the identification of the bodies, hope was fast fading.

Robert Routledge, the manager of a Garforth Pit, and George Cawood had been with the exploring parties from the start, they were overcome with after-damp, but responded to treatment.

It was said that miners at the pit head were itching to be accepted as part of the exploration, their specialist knowledge was invaluable, to say nothing of a personal commitment to relatives and friends.

The Yorkshire Post appealed for contribution to a Disaster Fund for the widows and children

DISASTER FOURTH DAY Sunday the 3rd of May

A Funeral Day in Micklegate Garforth Aberford

An estimated 20 to 25000 people attended the funerals in Micklegate, the day was fine and sunny.

Nineteen horse drawn conveyances journeyed between homes, Chapel, and Church.

Two journey's were necessary in some cases.

At 3pm the Bishop of Beverley, Dr Crosthwaite conducted the service at St Mary's Micklegate, he was assisted by the Reverend C D Farrar, Vicar of the church.

The pit owners, who had paid for the coffins and floral tributes were present.

A long strip had been prepared to receive twenty of the deceased. Ten were buried simultaneously, some others into private graves. Nine were buried, that day, from the Wesleyan community, with a special service at the Chapel conducted by the Reverend H J Atkinson and the Reverend E Clapham.

According to the Yorkshire Post the Reverend C D Farrar of St Mary's Micklegate spoke as follows.

"Try to exercise control over grief however great. Christians' grief should be like the gentle April shower, not like the wild storms in December. The great end and purpose in sorrow was that we might be conformed more to the life and image of Christ. There are many purposes for which all sorrow was sent by God, and amongst them was that of enabling us to share the suffering of Christ. Your resolve should be to take up the light crosses and burdens which God has laid upon us, so that, when a great overwhelming cross was laid upon us we might be able to, willingly and cheerfully receive the burden. Father not my will but thine be done".

Naylor Whitaker died at the L.G.I at 10pm, there were many tributes as to his popularity in the village, his active support of the brass band, and any charitable cause. The doctors commented upon his strong constitution, Naylor having survived 54 hours in a toxic atmosphere without moisture to his lips.

Still poorly in hospital were Turner, Hick, and Hunting, said to be as well as could be expected.

DISASTER FIFTH DAY Monday the 5th of May

The Yorkshire Post printed the following message. From Mr Wardell, Her Majesties Inspector of Mines :-

The Queen (Victoria) has heard with great sorrow of the dreadful disaster at Micklefield.

Her Majesty commands me to convey an expression of her deep sympathy to the widows and children, and other relatives of those whose lives have been lost.

Most of those killed were insured through the Yorkshire Miners Association, and dependants received six pounds for a full member, three pounds for a half member.

CONCLUSIONS VERDICTS REPORTS INQUESTS AND WHITEWASH

Dr Haldane lecturer at Oxford University and a definitive expert on underground explosions, was quoted by a reporter in the Yorkshire Post as saying :-

"After-damp only appears in the actual track of the explosion; and in the return airways, there is, as a rule, a sufficient quantity of air to sustain life for days. But men who try to escape by the haulage roads, which have generally been fired, will be overcome and die".

Dr Haldane had examined the plans of 13 exploded pits, from the Seaham disaster in 1880, to the Tylerstown disaster that year (1896). He said that 785 had been found dead in the haulage roads against 205 at the working faces and 103 in the return faces. It therefore follows that the men have roughly one in four chances of escape if they avoid the haulage road.

His instructions :- The presence of after-damp, even when it is not easily indicated by a dry mouth and smarting eyes (and these indications may come too late), may be detected by carrying white mice, as they will succumb to after-damp far quicker than men.

Home Office Report Conclusions By H M Inspector of Mines Mr Wardell

"The safe and proper course to take would be to prohibit naked lights in every pit and restrict the mode of shot firing to the use of high explosives. The question of dust requires serious consideration. We are unanimous that the explosion was caused by gas, and purely accidental, and no blame is attached to any person".

The source of the explosion was Goodalls Gate, where the body of George Whitaker was found. He had apparently gone beyond the fresh air current to perform a natural function, and his candle had fired a small amount of firedamp.

HINDSIGHT IS TOO LATE

Virtually a holocaust of miners throughout the world, eliminated through the insatiable demands of an industrial revolution.

Miners killed in Yorkshire prior to the Peckfield explosion :-

58 Warren Vale 1851 10 Elsecar 1852 189 Lundhill 1857 13 Higham 1880 59

Edmunds Main Barnsley 1882 352 Oaks Hoyle Mill 1866 34 Morley Main 1872 23

Rawmarsh 1874 143 Swaith Main 1875 21 Deep Drop Wakefield 1879 20

Wharnccliffe Carlton 1883 33 Altofts 1886 189 Combs Thornhill.

Nearly a quarter of miners employed in Britain worked in Yorkshire at that time.

The industrial revolution continues as the dominant emphasis of human development, or, is it of human extinction. We are nearer to the answer, but no nearer to asking the question.

As opposed to the cynicism of the exploiters of human suffering it is heart warming to record the response of ordinary people to this tragic event.

It is noticeable that some money was contributed by those who may have had consciences to placate.

Here follows a random selection of contributors to the Micklefield Disaster Fund :-

Miners at Allerton Bywater agreed to a levy of one shilling a week from the men and sixpence a week from the boys to be deducted from their wages. Their aim 1000 pounds.

Miners at Acton Hall Featherstone gave 65 pounds. Lord Masham gave 100 pounds. Churches of all denominations contributed and organised fund raising events.

Glee Clubs, Brass Bands, The Halifax Disaster Fund 1500 pounds,

At the Theatre Royal Wakefield and The Empire in Leeds special fund raising concerts were arranged.

Programme :- Songs Bohemian Girl, Haley, Softly Falls, Where Art Thou Beam of Light, Pearl Fishers, Come where My Love Lies A Dreaming,

Recitations :- King Robert Of Sicily and How the Miners Of Pontypridd Fought with Death

The final sum collected I am told was 40,000 pounds. The dispersal of the fund is another story, and we would appreciate any information from the descendants of the surviving families, as to how they, and the community coped with the aftermath of the disaster.

The villagers of Micklefield in coming to terms with their great loss instituted an annual event for charity "Joshes Wedding." The proceeds of this event were given towards the maintenance of a bed at Leeds General Infirmary for any miner in need.

PostScript

Two pit ponies were found alive fourteen days after the explosion. They were found nearby where Naylor Whitaker had been found. The last body recovered was that of George Shillito aged 50 found on May the 16th. October, Sherburn Petty Sessions Sam Greaves and Jim Plum were charged with breaking the glass of their safety lamps with pick axes. The defence of both men was that it was accidental, and occurred whilst they were working in a 2 1/2 inch seam, this was not denied by Mr Houlton who nevertheless, brought the charges, calling Mr Westerman (lampman) as witness. The men were found guilty and fined a weeks wages.

Comment

This indicates to some extent the level of fear that must have followed the disaster, and in modern terms we can only wonder at the level of Post Trauma Stress that prevailed throughout the populace. Men having to force themselves to descend daily into that place of mass slaughter, and women having to see them off in the knowledge of what had happened on the 30th of April 1896.

It is evident that knowledgeable men of that era had a blinkered approach, because of the cost of safety. They were gambling with lives and the easily replaceable resource, manpower.

Time and time again, those in authority indicated that perhaps it would not have happened if miners had taken a little more care, or perhaps, if the weather had not been anti-cyclonic.

No reprimand was made. However the owners had ordered candles to be used, allowed large quantities of oil to be stored at the foot of the shaft for lighting purposes, the dust had not been moved for six months, and not watered for a fortnight. Peckfield was regarded as one of the safer pits at the time!

Inspectors Report :- A miners calling is a dangerous one, but only 27% of all accidents come from explosions. There would be still fewer accidents if miners would resist a blind panic rush to the cast shafts. The omission of due precautions in the past has been a simple affair of ignorance, it does not need an Employers Liability Act to lessen the peril.

Comment

There was no evidence of blind panic amongst those brave men who fought their way back down the pit to rescue their mates

Legislation and Wages

Collieries Act 1842 Prohibiting the employment of women and girls underground. 1833 Slavery Abolished throughout the British Empire. To compensate the Government paid slave owners 20 million pounds, an average of 37 pounds a slave. 1893 Coal Pit Owners cut Miners wages by 25%. Miners Federation calls for strikes. Two bystanders shot by soldiers at Lord Masham's Pit Featherstone. (Justifiable homicide) Rippers, stonemen, and trimmers earned one pound nineteen shillings in 1892, reduced to one pound twelve and sixpence in 1893. Labourers one pound eight and fourpence in 1892, one pound three and four pence in 1893.

Moses Evans Interviewed by the press at the inquest.

" Aw went to wuk dahn t'pit when ah wu seven year awd. Mi faether wu killed by mi side dahn t'pit when ah wu nobbut eleven. Twice ah've bin left fu deard, fust at Denaby Main then at another pit. Another time I ad all t'air blawn of mi eard. Aye aye Gods bin good "

DON'T GO DOWN THE MINE DAD

A miner was leaving his home for his work
When he heard his little child scream
He went to his bedside, his little white face
Oh, Daddy I've had such a dream
I dreamt that I saw the pit all afire
And men struggled hard for their lives
The scene it then changed, and the top of the mine
Was surrounded by sweethearts and wives
A miner was leaving his home for his work
When he heard his little child scream
He went to his bedside, his little white face
Oh, Daddy I've had such a dream
I dreamt that I saw the pit all afire
And men struggled hard for their lives
The scene it then changed, and the top of the mine
Was surrounded by sweethearts and wives
He could not banish his fears
He returned home again to his wife and his child
Those words seemed to ring in his ears
And ere the day was ended the pit was on fire
When a score of brave men lost their lives
He thanked God for the dream the child had
As once more the little one cried
Dont go down the mine dad

Don't go down the mine Dad
Dreams very often come true
Daddy you know it would break my heart
If anything happened to you
Just go and tell my dream to your mates
And as true as the stars that shine
Something is going to happen to-day
Dear daddy, don't go down the mine
Dont go down the mine dad
Whilst waiting his turn with his mates to descend
This song written by Robert Donnelly, composed by Will Gedder, arranged by Lawrence Wright, was thought to be inspired by the experience of a deputy at Peckfield called Hemsworth from Garforth, whose child had a dream and begged him not to go to work. Apparently he went to work told the men going down of the warning and returned to his home prior to the explosion.

WE WERE NOT THERE

We were not there to know you
'twas so long since that you died
yet we remember you with sadness
and talk of you with pride

We were not there in your day
to see all that you went through
we have only heard the stories
that make us forever feel for you

We think about your tragedy
and all the dying that was done
and all the hurt you left behind you
we think God bless you each and everyone

Your widows and your children
and all the families left to mourn
we feel as if we knew you
though we were yet to be born

We were not there in your day
for 'twas a century ago
we can only vaguely imagine
all the heartache pain, and woe

When Peckfield Pit Exploded
it must have sounded like a million guns
and a proud coal community
Lost many of its sons

The pit that you lived and died for
no longer does it stand
there is no trace of where its been
its surface is now industrial land

Yet your day shall stay remembered
even though we were not there
for we feel as though we knew you
and we offer to you our prayer

God bless you all who perished
and those you left behind
may your memory stay cherished
may you be thought of most kind

We hope you found perfect heaven
for on earth you suffered much
God bless you and God keep you
we feel your presence and your touch

THE PECKFIELD SACRIFICE

Micklefield - a farming hamlet abundant
with woods and fields
home to a population too small to man a
sailing ship
later to swell as the area transforms into a
mining community
with the coming of Micklefield Pit

As the coal mining at Micklefield
progresses
Peckfield Colliery is sank and the coal
community
now stands equal alongside the farming
industry
that was the heart and soul of Micklefield

As the Nineteenth Century draws towards its
conclusion
tragedy strikes Peckfield Pit creating havoc
and horror
the pit explodes with a terrible bang and in
doing so
it wipes out the lives of many comrades in
coal

Miners died instantly leaving behind shock
and disbelief
as sadness and horror rained heavily on
those left to mourn
whole families felt the force of this sad and
merciless loss
and for the living, life never again would be
the same

Peckfield Pit had demanded and claimed a
great sacrifice
that fatal explosion that shook the very
bowels of the earth
had also shaken the foundations of faith in
coal
and the souls of a now devastated community

THE PECKFIELD PIT EXPLOSION

There was fire and gas and a terrible noise
it killed sixty three miners some of them
boys
down in the darkness in that black hell
came the explosion and sixty three fell

Up on the surface all heard the sound
of that terrible bang deep down underground
smoke and flame belched from the pit
and for sixty three miners sadly that was it

It all happened so sudden where all had
been calm
A bang and a flash, no time for alarm
sixty three died as death suddenly struck
proud mining men down on their luck

What of their families, how shall they cope
without their menfolk where is their hope
what of the future what shall it bring
death has been delivered leaving its sting

The bellowing smoke spirals into the sky
the villagers see it the women folk cry
A terrible tragedy has to be faced
miners lie dead what a tragic waste

Up to the pit head folk make their way
oh what has gone wrong some are heard say
loved ones stand grieving around the pit
head
but nothing can be done their menfolk are
dead

A SORRY DAY OF SADNESS

A sorry day of sadness
a day of danger and woe
before this day is over
Peckfield Pit will blow

The bang shall be enormous
and deafening to the ears
as Peckfield Pit explodes
cancelling out many miners years

A sorry day of sadness
a price to be paid for coal
death is lurking all around
down that deep dark hole

Men and boys and ponies
death shall claim them all
ne-er shall they know what happened
for all shall so swiftly fall

A sorry day of sadness
A terrible time of tears
loved ones shall mourn their lost ones
then spend lives in empty years

For some who work this sorry day
ne-er shall they know
that this day their lives will be over
for this day Peckfield Pit will blow

A RECORD OF THE COST

In the Church yard is a memorial
for many years there has it stood
carried upon it are the names of miners
who paid the price of coal in blood

Victims of the pit explosion
so many lives were lost
the memorial records it
a price list showing the cost

These names shall be remembered
as though it happened only yesterday
for ne-er shall their memory
dim, nor fade away

WHY

They were honest hard working miners
doing what they did best
and what was about to happen
no one would have guessed

It was just another weekday
like all the ones before
there was work to be done
and each man had his chore

Not everyone worked upon that day
which turned out for the best
for the sixty three who worked
they were very badly blessed

Each man went about his business
each took up his work load
not knowing that so suddenly
the pit would ignite and explode

Their poor lives would be over
and their toils of that day
would all have been in vain
and ne-er would they draw their pay

No more would they see daylight
and the green fields up above
their wives, sons and daughters
and all those whom they love

They were honest hard working miners
who did not deserve to die
and their sad loved ones left behind
keep asking WHY oh Lord WHY

CRUEL COAL

You've enjoyed what we've endured
for black are the fruits of hell
for what we've suffered can't be cured
what comforts you, for it we fell

Warmth within your fire grate
welcoming, a sight to see
yet see it in it's natural state
Oh how cruel coal can be

Flickering flames and embers red
in innocence how it glows
yet how many miners now lie dead
you feel coal's warmth but not our woes

Tonight you'll sit in your safe armchair
enjoying the comfort of your fire side
sitting there without a care
Yet your coal can't comfort we who died

MY FATHER MY MOTHER

My father died down the mine
A victim of a disastrous bang
he gave his life for a pittance
and died with the rest of the gang

My mother was widowed too young
she should not have been widowed at all
'tis the pit owners who make all the money
and the pit men who take the fall

My father was proud and upright
though his pay was less than his pride
he needed his wages to live
so in doing his duty he died

My mother still grieves for her man
the years keep her sad and forlorn
after ten years she still misses him so
and ne-er did he know the son that was born

My father died when the pit blew
oh what a sad and sorry waste
many men died on that day
leaving widows with sad futures to be faced

My mother now takes washing in
she struggles so we can get by
her life too was destroyed by that bang
At night I can oft hear her cry

My father died down the mine
My mother died a little too
They were happy just being alive
it all ended when the pit blew

TEARS IN THE VALLEY

There are tears in the valley
and still more to be shed
the people are mourning
for those who lie dead

A small close knit coal community
dwell in the valley below
now all shed their tears
and all show their woe

Many of the menfolk have died
down in the mine deep
the pit has blown up
Oh how their families weep

A sad valley of tears
this is now Mickelfield
all the hurt and the anguish
is so sadly being revealed

The pit was yielding its bounties
how it seemed to thrive
then bang, it exploded
and sixty three didn't survive

Unfortunate ill-fated mining men
went to work and died
who shall look after their dependants
for upon these men they relied

there are tears in the valley
and more still to be shed
the explosion killed the men folk
now only emptiness and loneliness lies ahead

THE MICKLEFIELD MINING DISASTER

Deep black turns to white heat
red devils dance as death snatches
the once mortal miners into the
uncharted realms of immortality

Lethal dust and smoke kill the foul
weak air
fire eats the remains of fatal gas
thunder echoes into deaf ears
as lifeless becomes the hell hole
where seconds before men had futures

Horror and surprise create shock
as tragedy blatantly trespasses without mercy
into the realms of reality and awareness
fragile emotions are in chaotic confusion
this is the plight of loved ones left behind

Death was the devil in the darkness of a
colliery

this was the cruel fate of unfortunate men
living death creates gruesome ghosts and
devils

to torture and torment the earth bound spirits
of those for whom life goes on

Before the echo of the explosion had died
death had devoured the futures of mining
men

horror and agony and soul destroying grief
shall be followed by miserable years of
emptiness

Before widows and daughters and sons
mothers fathers and friends and relations
can ever come to terms with so tragic a loss
of so many, tears shall wash many a lonely
pillow

MRS BALL

'T'is so sad Mrs Ball
that your husband had to fall
and that your son Elias would never know
his dad
for the pit explosion claimed your
husband's life
leaving you a grieving widowed wife
with babe in arms you look so forlorn and
sad

But Mrs Ball I know
that you shall overcome your woe
and raise your son with respect and pride
and all those other sad widows around
whose husbands perished that same day
underground
shall also come to terms with how their
menfolk died

Given time Mrs Ball
your son Elias shall grow tall
and a mining man he shall come to be
he too shall dig the coal
give the pit his heart and soul
for he is his father's son you shall see

Pray don't worry Mrs Ball
your son Elias shall not fall
yet you'll not see this through your tears
as a miner he shall strive
he shall do so and survive
and live a lifetime spanning over ninety
years

You cannot know this Mrs Ball
but I am the future come to call
and all I that I have said shall come to be
when a hundred years have passed
from the time of that fatal blast
you shall live in the prayers of future folk
like me

A CRY FROM THE GRAVE

Your father was a miner
he was strong and proud and brave
can you hear him calling
calling from his grave

Can you hear his whisper
at night time in your sleep
telling you he loves you
can you hear him weep

Your father was a miner
who worked the mine and died
he weeps because we lost him
for upon him we relied

Can you hear him calling
telling you he is near
telling you he loves you
saying never fear

Your father was a miner
and he's trying to explain
can you hear him within your silence
can you understand his pain

He died in the pit explosion
and he's wanting you to know
that life goes on no matter what
so melt away your woe

Your father was a miner
and his pain wont go away
until he knows you hear him
and understand what he has to say

He knows that you grieve bitterly
as he knows that so did I
He's saying heaven is so wonderful
and a home for all who die

Your father was a miner
and he needs you to hear
that he didn't want to die
for he held his life so dear

But the pit explosion killed him
and he knows you grieve his loss
but he cannot rest in peace
whilst you son bear the cross

Your father was a miner
so let him rest in peace
and this can only come about
if you let your grieving cease

Can you hear him calling
saying son be strong and brave
then I can find my peace
and rest easy in my grave

PITY

Oh how I pity Mrs Benson
for her husband James is dead
so is her son George
and his younger brother Fred

A husband and two sons
'tis pity and a shame
it must be hell for Mrs Benson
her life ne-er shall be the same

Oh how I pity Mrs Ball
she looks so sad and forlorn
The day that her Noah died
her son Elias was born

Noah would ne-er know Elias
Elias would ne-er know his dad
A fact that Mrs Ball must face
and this fact leaves her very sad

Oh how I pity Mrs Wilson
for her husband Joe has gone
He's now at peace in heaven
Yet she must suffer and live on

I pity poor Mrs Shillito
Mrs Moakes and all the others
All who lost their loved ones
husbands fathers and brothers

Yet what use is all my pity
it can't do them any good
my man didn't work that day
so he's still here as flesh and blood

'tis guilt I feel for being thankful
that it's their pain and not ours
I can bestow on them my pity
send them sympathy and flowers

Sorry am I for their sadness
for I too feel so sad
yet we escaped what they endure
for this mercy I am shamefully glad

Oh how I pity those poor widows
for the pain they must go through
yet I thank the lord in heaven
that my man did not die too

YOUNG FRED BENSON

Young Fred Benson
was a fourteen year old lad
who was killed down Peckfield Pit
with his brother and his dad

He went to work that morning
and ne-er did it enter his head
that this day his life was ending
and soon he would be dead

Young Fred Benson
was at the pit employed
unlike the lads of modern days
who have more freedom to be enjoyed

Manhood was placed upon him
at a very early age
put aside was schooling
so a lad could earn a wage

Young Fred Benson
took pit-life in his stride
never knowing death was lurking
So he went to work and died

The Health and Safety Regulations

were yet to be born
and many slaves to industry
were oft cut down like corn

Young Fred Benson
was a victim of a day
when lads were men before their time
and childhood went astray

A young lad of innocence
saw nothing of a life
ne-er would he become a father
Ne-er would he take a wife

Young Fred Benson
what would you think today
if you saw the lads of fourteen years
still at school, still at play

Still thought of as children
not looked upon as men
not working down a coal mine
from the early age of ten

Young Fred Benson
I find it very sad
that industry could kill you
whilst you were still a lad

And no matter what the cause was
or who or what it was to blame
Young Fred Benson
He is dead just the same

Young Fred Benson
never knew that he was meant
to have his name carved upon
the pit explosion monument

For Peckfield Pit exploded
and young Fred died age fourteen
if this had occurred in modern times
school is where young Fred would have been

NAYLOR WHITAKER

They searched long and hard for Naylor
Whitaker
in the hope he would be found
for Naylor was still missing
in that deep dark underground

T'was hard for those in the rescue party
for such horrific sights they'd seen
men laid dead in dozens
and hardly any had died clean

Bodies strewn all over the place
mutilated and in such a mess
who was who was hard to tell
At a glance all one could do was guess

Crimson shirts where men had bled
bloody pulp where once a head
arms torn away and legs the same
T'was beyond belief the way death came

Bodies black and red and charred
it sickened men known to be hard
yet the search party did all they could
searching, groping, amid scorched flesh and
blood

Miners were brought out of the pit
With bodies broken bruised battered and
black
recovered by men sickened with shock
Yet time after time, they kept going back

But what of Naylor Whitaker
and what shall be his state
is he still alive
just what shall be his fate

Keep on looking keep on groping
keep praying and keep hoping
no news is good news so they say
Keep looking for Naylor we might find him
today

When they found Naylor Whitaker
he was barely alive
and everone hoped and prayed that
Naylor would survive

So off to Leeds Infirmary
they took him on a train
hang on hang on they whispered
Yet their hopes would be in vain

Once there in Leeds Infirmary
they put him in a bed
keep alive keep him alive
all around, this was being said

One man who was left living
amidst the dead, a living soul
all willed Naylor to make it
his LIFE, his LIFE the doctors goal

They gave him medication
did all they really could
oxygen was pumped into his lungs
morphine injected into his blood

Poor Naylor didn't make it
luck was not his friend
prayers were left unanswered
as Naylor met his end

When they found Naylor Whitaker
They hoped he would be saved from death
Yet their hopes prayers and wills
dissolved with Naylor's last dying breath

Perhaps he wasn't meant to make it
even though everything was tried
Naylor was no longer of this world
Alas poor Naylor died

BRAVE MINING MEN OF YESTERYEAR

Brave mining men of yesteryear
we think of you today
and hope your souls found sanctuary
and for you we pray

You died in the pit disaster
of a century ago
and ne-er shall you be forgotten
we will not let it be so

Brave mining men of yesteryear
your sad story we tell
of how you lost your lives
down in that deep dark hell

Fatal accidents can happen
'tis part of the miners plight
yet yours killed so many
when the colliery did ignite

Brave mining men of yesteryear
we shed for you our tears
you've been remembered and respected
through a century of years

You died within an industry
where men must be tough and brave
the explosion that claimed your lives
left no one for to save

Brave mining men of yesteryear
you left your loved ones behind
they too suffered your tragedy
and we think of them most kind

The industry you lived and died for
can ne-er repay its debt
now you are a sacred piece of history
that never shall we forget

NAMES OF VICTIMS (Pit D 1896 @ Peckfield)

Micklefield dead

1. Noah BALL 37 Wife Jane + 9 children 1 born since explosion 2 lodgers killed also Elias Clark and Charles Swift
2. William BARKER 40 W + 1 child
3. (Deputy James BENSON 56 Wife Mary and 9 children)
- Sons :-
4. George BENSON *24
5. Fred BENSON 14
6. Elias CLARKE 20
7. William DEAN 37 W + 4 children
8. Thomas EVERETT 27
9. Sam GODBER 16
10. George HAYES 17 Mother Clara
11. William HERRING 31 W + 1 child
12. Sam JAMES *W + 2 children
13. Jos JOHNSON 50

14. (Tom LONGDEN 43 Wife Mary + 6 children)
15. Edward MAGGS 26 W + 2 Children
16. HENRY MARTIN 56
17. Son HAROLD MARTIN
18. John MEAKIN 34 W + 9 children + widowed mother
19. Job MILLERSHIP *52
20. George MOAKES 55 W + large family, girl in domestic service

21. Charles NOBLE 33 (Iron Man) Wife Jane + 4 children
22. Thomas OAKLEY 50
23. William SHELDON * 34 W + 4 children
24. (Charles SHEPHERD 68 W + grown up family. Son:-
25. Richard SHEPHERD 28 Wife)

26. James SHILLITO 50 Deputy cousin to
27. (David SHILLITO 53* W + 3 children and Brother
28. George SHILLITO Wife 5 grown up Children)
29. John SUTTON Deputy W + 5 children
30. Charles SWIFT 35
31. Dan TAYLOR *25 Wife Ann
32. William VAREY
33. John WALLIS 48 Deputy. Wife Ann Agnes + 9 children, working partly supported by small shop
34. Robert WESTERMAN 36 W + 6 children
35. Joseph WHITAKER 55 uncle to William
36. Amos WHITAKER 32 Wife Ruth Ann cousin to George (37. William Naylor WHITAKER LGI 48 hours later)
38. George WHITAKER 22 *
39. William WILKS 47 Wife Jane
40. (Joseph WINFIELD Widower Mother + 3 children Brothers :-
41. Walter WINFIELD W + 2 Children)
42. Herbert WINFIELD *Wife + 2 children

Garforth dead

43. Edward GOODALL W + 4 children
44. Joseph JACKSON 30 W + 1 child Brother
45. Walter JACKSON 28 W + 1 child
46. Rayner SCRIMSHAW 22
47. (Arthur SIMPSON Brother 24

48. John SIMPSON 26)
49. George SIMPSON 21
50. (Henry TALBOT 41
- Wife Mary Ann + 7 children

Aberford dead

51. Sam GOODALL * W + 9 children
52. Arthur HOWSON 18
53. William STEAD
54. JOS WILSON 60 *
- Grown up family of 9 Children
55. Alfred WILSON 19*

Kippax dead

56. Harry BELLERBY 19
57. Fred BELLERBY
58. Frank EDWARDS 35
59. Alfred NORTON 28
60. M RICKARD

61. James WILSON 30 W + 3 children

Sherburn dead (Newthorpe)

62. George DUNNINGTON 20

Tibshelf (Notts)

63. William RADFORD 56 (Under Manager)

Names of those rescued

- 1 William Holding 2 George Turner
- 3 Tom Crosswaite 4 Fred Shillito
- 5 William Dobson 6 Sam Marriot
- 7 Joseph Day 8 Thomas Freeman
- 9 Richard Watson 10 Reuben Winfield
- 11 Daniel Warwick (Sen) 12 Henry Rawnsley
- 13 Lot Mosley 14 Fielding Pickard
- 15 William Attack 16 J Hardwick
- 17 James Edgington 18 George Hick
- 19 R Simpson 20 R H Newton
- 21 William Appleyard 22 Caleb Attack
- 23 Isiah Evans 24 John Simmons
- 25 John Render 26 Joseph Wilson (boy)
- 27 Sidney Revis (boy) 28 Fred Nutton
- 29 Henry Hague 30 Fred Atkinson.



A. Biscoe