

# REPORTS

TO

HER MAJESTY'S SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE HOME  
DEPARTMENT

ON THE

DEAN LANE COLLIERY EXPLOSION,

BY

J. BROS, ESQ.,  
BARRISTER-AT-LAW;

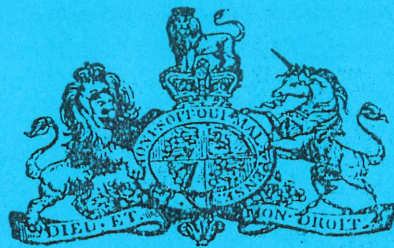
AND BY

T. CADMAN, ESQ.,  
ONE OF HER MAJESTY'S INSPECTORS OF MINES.

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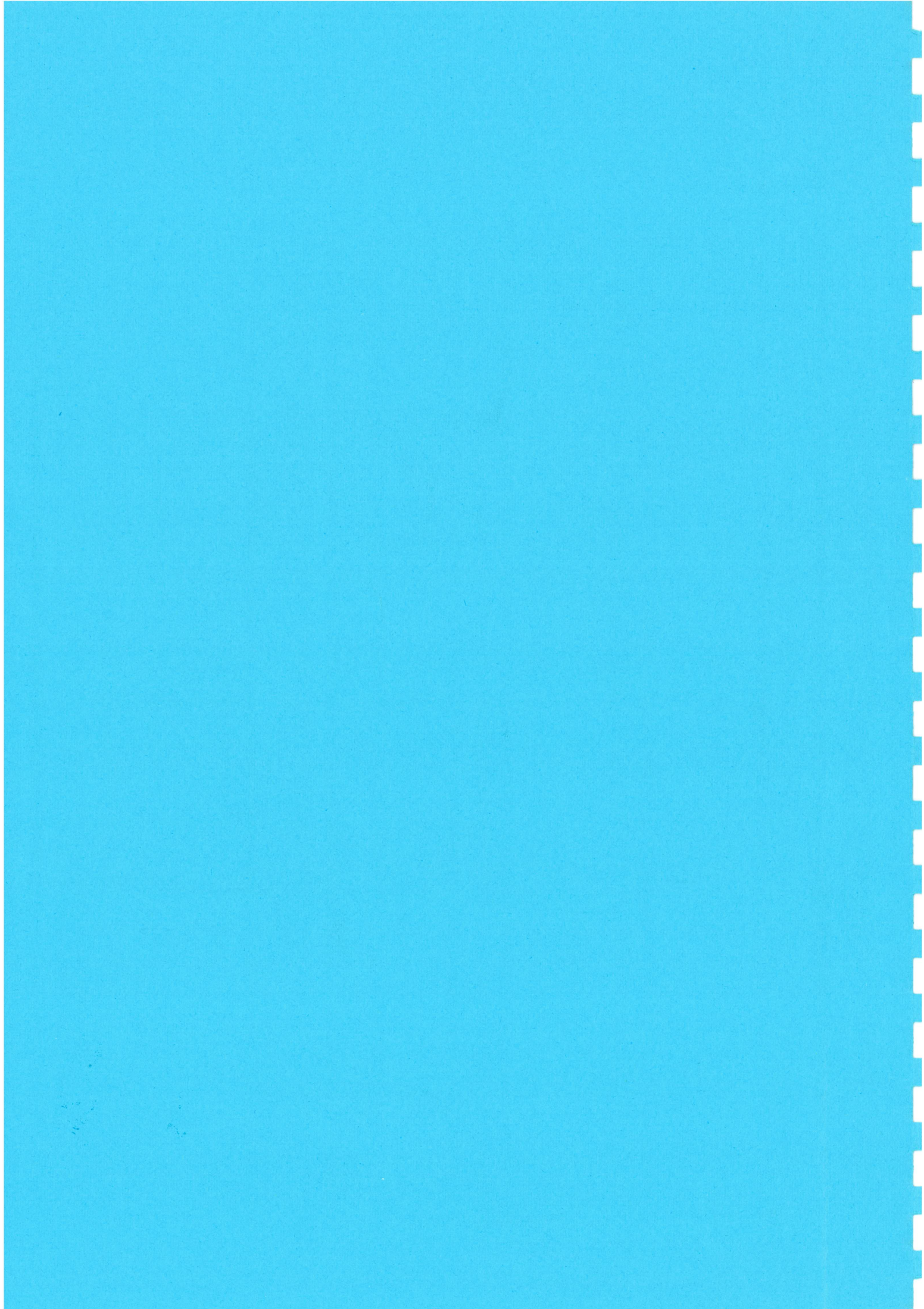
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KILLED IN A COALPIT  
Volume III  
THE BEDMINSTER MINES  
D.P.Lindegaard







D.P. LINDEGAARD

KILLED IN A COALPIT

Volume III

THE BEDMINSTER MINES

*Real Colliery Men from the Managers downwards  
never know what a faint heart means.*  
W. Morgans, FGS. *A Survey of the Bristol Coalfield.* 1884.







## FOREWARD

As with the two previous books in my "Killed in a Coalpit" trilogy, I have to stress I am firstly a family historian and any knowledge of local history which has come to me is purely incidental. I am by no means an expert on the history of Bedminster and should anyone reading my book be interested in finding out more about the suburb, they should contact those more qualified than myself: The Malago Society; the historians who make up C.L.A.S.S.; Leonard Vear, the Bedminster author of "South of the Avon"; my friend Ian Parsley whose history of the Red Cow Pit is eagerly awaited.

Once again I have family history connections with my subject. My great-great-grandmother's brother Thomas Summerill, is amongst the Bedminster casualties, killed at his work, shockingly, at the old age of 73. Two Pillinger's appear in these pages. One, Henry Pillinger was bailiff at the Malago pit when one of the most horrific of the multiple accidents took place. He was tried for manslaughter, but I am glad to say, acquitted. The Malago incident was almost a mirror image of that at Easton in 1838 when Thomas Summerill's brother in law and my great-great-great uncle, Henry's namesake, Jacob Pillinger was killed. I have one more family connection. My grandfather Albert Pillinger's brother in law was Charlie Gill, whose inspiring life story from Bedminster pit boy to Lord Mayor of Bristol deserves to be told at greater length than hitherto.

If anyone reading this book has an ancestor who was killed in the Bedminster pits but omitted from this volume, may I request they contact me in order that I may include the information in any updated edition.

In the absence of either coroner's records or a contemporary diary which assisted me in the compilation of Parts I & II, my debt is more than ever to the 'poor hacks' who brought us the news. I have used the following sources:

Inspectors of Mines Reports  
Contemporary Newspapers  
Miners' Memories [C.L.A.S.S.] [South Bristol College]  
Mr I. Parsley, Unpublished Mss.

### Abbreviations:

BGa : Bristol Gazette  
BO : Bristol Observer  
BMe : Bristol Mercury  
BMi : Bristol Mirror  
BTM : Bristol Times & Mirror  
CC : Clifton Chronicle  
IP : Ian Parsley  
FFBJ: Felix Farley's Bristol Journal  
LT : London Times  
MIR : Inspectors of Mines Reports  
MM.CLASS: Miners' Memories, C.L.A.S.S.  
SFBJ: Sarah Farley's Bristol Journal  
WDP : Western Daily Press







#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

My thanks to the following:

Mrs Bernice Conway, for the information about her kinsman Edwin Garland.

Mr Brian Clark, for the information about his paternal great grandfather Alfred Gibbs.

Mr Les Owen of The Association for the Preservation of Arno's Vale Cemetery for sending me information about John Smith's gravestone.

Mrs Pritchard, for the information about her grandfather, William Crew.

Mr Ken Vickery, whose grandfather's brother James Vickery was killed at South Liberty.

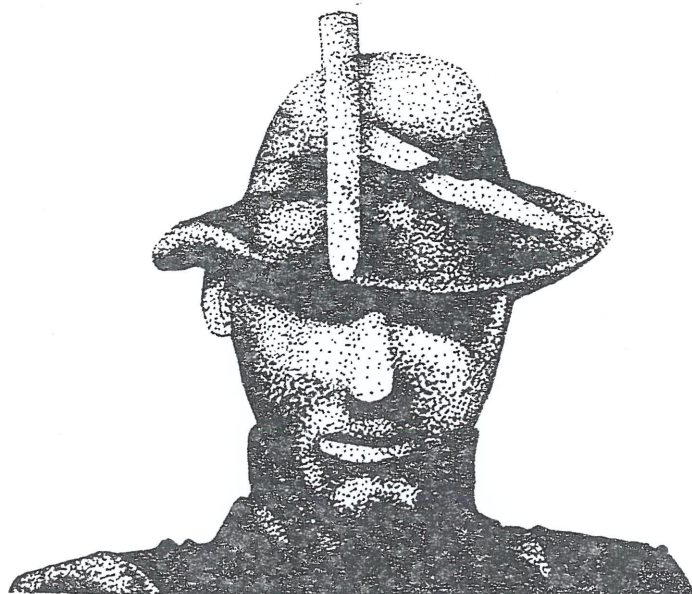
Mrs Margaret Hollier, for the family information concerning her great grandfather, Samuel Moxham.

Mrs Winifred Bishop for the family history of William Sampson, the ancestor of her son in law.

To the local writers of C.L.A.S.S. for their kind permission in allowing me to include extracts from their book 'Miners' Memories' which should be read by anyone with an interest in Bedminster as should their latest publication 'A South Bristol School'.

The Avon County Librarian for permission to reproduce items in his care and to his staff for their always cheerful assistance. The Editor of the Bristol Evening Post for allowing me to reproduce an article published June 13, 1988.

To Ian McEwen for the additional drawings and to Ian Parsley, whose expertise concerning Bedminster far exceeds mine, for his patience, encouragement and immeasurable contribution. And as always, to N.A.F.L.



Ian McEwen





*Died in Bed 1895 (18)  
man 9h*

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*WALTERS 15  
CORRECT*

Richard Abrahams (50) *Wid Sh. Bed, wid. several ch., Bath.*  
Albert Edward Walters (18) *WALTERS 42 Greenway Bush Lane*  
*check*

were killed at the bottom level at Malago Vale Colliery by 'an explosion of fire damp augmented by coal dust caused by the firing of a shot by the deceased, Richard Abrahams'. The bottom level had been driven for several months by three men: Edward Lippiatt and Joseph Pratten, hewers and their carter, Silas Lewis. Both roof and floor had been subject to blasting, sometimes twice in a week. The previous night's attempt had been a failure, owing to a wet fuse. A new fuse was fitted ready to be fired the next day. At eight in the evening of 15th March 1895, two hours before the night shift, fourteen men including Richard Abrahams, Samuel James, John Edgehill and Charles Poultny, examiners, each accompanied by 'their lad', went down to check the workings. Richard Abrahams fired a shot at 9 o'clock, setting off an explosion which was followed by afterdamp spreading up the Argus Dukeway, hampering rescue attempts. Henry Ball, Henry Wilshire, Oliver Stone (23) John Nutson and Henry George Kitchen\* (19) were taken to the General Hospital suffering from the effects of the gas. Henry Wilshire interviewed in hospital, said "About 9.30 pm the pitcher came up from the bottom of the shaft shouting for help. I and my mate Charley Smith were first to be lowered. We got along eight or nine hundred yards. We came upon one of the men but then afterdamp rushed up the passage and almost suffocated us." Wilshire was taken out unconscious. John Edgehill, who said Abrahams was his "butty", heard the explosion with Sam James and his lad, 19 year old Henry Ball. The explosion came from the free road and they could smell the fire. Ball tried to run but was overcome by fumes and fell into a manhole. He had been working at Malago since the last explosion, about three years ago. (This was the Malago disaster of 31st August 1891 when 10 men were killed). Two bodies found in a manhole 22 yards from the shot were brought out at 1 pm the next day. Richard Abrahams and his lad Albert Walters were so badly burned they must have died instantly. Albert Walters' father George worked in the same pit. The two casualties and the rescued men had all been wearing safety helmets. (BO 16.3./23.3.1895.IP)  
(\* called in another report William Henry Kitchen)

Samuel Abrahams (56)

excavator, died from injuries received falling down the shaft at Ashton Gate. A windlass worked by a horse was used to raise and lower materials in the shaft. When Abrahams got into the box, the horse was disturbed by a rustling in the branches of trees in the vicinity and bolted across the meadow. The box was hauled up at a rapid pace and at the top he was thrown out and fell back down the shaft, a drop of 30 feet. He was got up and taken to hospital. The horse had been engaged in the work about a fortnight and was thought to be perfectly steady. Ironically when asked if he would prefer to descend the shaft by the ladder Abrahams had said he would trust his life to the horse and the man at the windlass. (BME 1.7.1871)

John Alford (24)

collier, killed by a fall of roof at South Liberty, 24th July 1877. (MIR)

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William Alford (47) of West Street, married

James Vickery (22) of West Street

James Mereweather (30) "belonging to South Wales", married

These three men were crushed to death at South Liberty Pit at 4.30 am on the morning of 4th April 1889. They were working in the same gub, that is to say an incline with a double tramway. The gub was about 4 foot 6 inches to 5 foot square. There was a line of iron rails in the centre of the roadway and on each side of this as the coal cutting advanced, the men propped the roof with timber supports. One of the others was heard to remark to Mereweather "Doesn't it seem a good thing to have a good top to work under?" Sadly, they came upon a 'soapy joint' and as they cut away, down came the roof, twelve feet long, killing them instantly. Alford had worked in the pit 37 years since the age of ten; Vickery, eight years; but Mereweather had gone down the pit for the first time that night, having come to Bristol to seek work and leaving his family in Wales. The men worked with naked lights which most miners said gave them a better light when examining the roofs. (BO 6.4.1889)

William Ivory (65)

repairer, was engaged with his son in clearing a fall at South Liberty on 30.7.1889 when loose stone fell and injured his spine, from which he died. (MIR)

William Ayres (17)

had worked for Messrs Knight & Co at Long Ashton for 15 months. His fellow workman, Edwin Tucker told the inquest that he had been cutting coal, 115 fathoms deep, 250 feet from the shaft. One man was filling and others were throwing coals for him to fill. A block of coal weighing about one ton fell on William where he was standing. Mr Brough (Mines' Inspector) thought there could have been more propping at the spot but did not think on this occasion it amounted to criminal neglect. (Bmi 2.2.1861)

Henry Baker (65)

was badly burnt about the face and arms in an explosion of firedamp at Malago Vale on 27th May 1887. He crawled back to the Argus incline where he stated that he alone was responsible for the accident. His naked light had gone through a hole in the roof, igniting a small amount of gas. He was employed with three others to take away rubbish and to build stacks to keep up the roof. The spot where the accident took place was a disused airway 50-60 yards away from his work. Only bailiffs and examiners were supposed to go there, but it had not been fenced off. After the accident, no more gas could be detected and it was thought to have been a single release from a roof fall. Henry died in the General Hospital from traumatic delirium due to burns. His injury should not have caused death but he was already in poor health. The coroner said that the airway should be cross-timbered to indicate it was out of bounds as required by law. (BO 25.6.1887.IP)

Alfred Barnes (31)

collier, killed by a fall of coal due to insufficient propping at Dean Lane 28th August 1899. Bm, 31/8/99 8 ft thick ribs, 4 of them broke (MIR)

Mark Barwell, a boy

had been six months employed as a runner at Ashton Vale pit. On Tuesday, 30th January 1866, he took two tons of rubbish in trams to the top of the



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incline. The trams were fastened together by coupling chains connected to a drum. Mark's tugger caught between the trams and he was dragged down the incline. Ten yards from the bottom the tram ran off the rails and fell over. Joseph Gayner went to his assistance and had him taken up the shaft. He died later at the General Hospital. (BO.2.2./10.2.1866)

Silvester Bisdee (63)

lived with his wife, Lydia at Rose Cottage, West St.

He was taken to the General Hospital suffering from broken ribs, collar bone and severe scalp injuries (later found to be a skull fracture) sustained in a fall of roof at South Liberty pit in January 1899. He died in hospital.

George Flowers (63) told an inquest the deceased was his mate and at 2 pm on the day of the accident they were working on the West Level. They had done their own propping. Flowers filled a tram and left Bisdee at the face. He heard the noise of the fall and rushing back to his mate found him buried under a pile of clod. He was conscious right up to the time the overman, Alfred Parker arrived. Mr Moses Cowcill, the manager told the inquest the part where Bisdee and Flowers were working was considered to be the safest in the whole pit. (BO 14.1./21.1.1899)

[One of the saddest entries, for Silvester had survived death by explosion in the same mine, almost a quarter of a century before. See James Willing, 1875.]

George Bissicks (44)

overman, killed by a fall of roof at Ashton Vale, 12th July 1878. (MIR)

[The Bissicks family were well known as colliers in the Kingswood Coalfield in the 18th century.]

Thomas Blackmore (21)

collier at New Marsh Pit, Ashton [Frayne & Co] was stooping to fill a tub on 26th January 1860 when a large knob of coal fell from above killing him instantly. (BO 4.2.1860.MIR)

clbm

Thomas Bolt of Green's Buildings, married

William Henry Clarke of Langton Park

George Burgess of Fairfield Terrace, widower

Henry Foot (35) of Cromwell Street, married with a family

Samuel Durbin, (60) of West Street, married, grown up family

James Woodbridge of Bedminster Down, married, grown up family

George Taylor (40) Pembroke Place, married with a family

William Button of 10 Greenway Buildings, married with a family

Henry Vernon (17) of 1 Clarke's Cottages, Whitehorse Street

Frederick Chambers (22) of Palmerston Street

The explosion was heard as far as Bristol Bridge. There were thirteen men and boys in the New Pit and another twenty two in the workings which were reached from the old shaft when the Malago pit 'went up' in the early hours of the morning of 31st August 1891. It was fortuitous there were so few at work for the company employed 250 hands but had been idle the previous day as most of them had attended a rally at Two Mile Hill in Kingswood addressed by Sir Charles Dilke and Mr Pickard, M.P. who was also President

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of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain. Malago, or to give it its nickname, the Red Cow, was not regarded as fiery but was known to give off the occasional blower. It was not deemed necessary to work universally with 'locked lamps' and naked lights were still the norm. [Other accident reports re-iterate over and over again that the men felt safer with the brighter light afforded by candles.]

The pit was just being brought back to life after the meeting and thirty five men went down to carry out safety checks. George Honeyfield, examiner, found gas in the ventilation and called Richard Abrahams, and they hung up sheets to disperse the gas, which they later maintained was only a small amount, though other witnesses disputed this, saying that Honeyfield had told Abrahams at the time that there was a considerable build up in Argus no 8 level. The explosion occurred there at 3.00 - 3.15 am the next morning when George Burgess and Frederick Chambers, leaving their safety lamps at the entrance, marched in with their candle lights. The level was supposed to have been checked again by William Button, but his chalk mark was never found amongst the collapsed timbers.

Rescue parties were formed with Mr Hope, the pit manager and Joseph Button, the chief overman, the first to go down. Samuel Durbin and George Taylor had been killed in the furnace room, 1,000 yards up the Dukeway. Along Malago no 8 was the burnt body of George Burgess and nearby, Frederick Chambers, then still alive, implied that Burgess had caused the blast. The Argus West levels were relatively unaffected by the explosion but men had walked out into the Dukeway and into afterdamp. Charles Poultney lay collapsed but still alive, while farther down Thomas Bolt and William Clarke were found dead. In no 3, were the bodies of James Woodbridge and Henry Foot, terribly burnt and in no 4, William Button and Henry Vernon, his lad, dead of afterdamp. Of the thirteen men in the Argus side when the explosion occurred nine were dead and Frederick Chambers later died in hospital. Charles Poultney, James Hyman and Edward Priestly (32) of West Street, survived.

Let Charles Poultney, in his bed, very weak, his head and hands extensively bandaged tell his story. "I went round the place in the usual way. I carried a safety lamp. There was no gas as I could detect. I thought all was well. The explosion occurred as I sat down at the bottom of the gug. I saw two men. I told them to take their time and not frighten themselves and see if they could get up the incline. I took the lead on the way up. We passed Tommy [Bolt]. I told him not to hurry. Tommy said "I'm going to fall." I recall saying "I'm not much better myself", and I must have fallen then as I can't remember any more until after I was brought out. I was holding the lamp so tightly it burnt my hand."

James Hyman, said he was over sixty and had been a collier all his life. He and his mate 'Big Harry' [presumably William Henry Clarke] heard the explosion after which came clouds of dust and bits of coal flying about in all directions. Two doors crashed open and the two men rushed through and closed them after themselves. They tried to escape but the air was bad and they were driven back. Hyman had no recollection of being rescued.

Young Henry Vernon had been the sole support of his parents, his father being a cripple and unable to work. A relative of Charles Poultney's had



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died in the pit the previous year. Six out of the ten had been insured by the Prudential Assurance and over £60 was immediately distributed by one of the Company's representatives. The relatives of one man who had been insured for only a week received £22.8s.0d. [Undoubtedly more money than they had ever seen before in their lives. Sadly many people are worth more dead than alive, even today.]

A memorial card issued by West Street Gospel Tent with a verse specially composed by S.T. Crocker reads:

*They left their friends and said "Goodnight"  
Not thinking what would be their doom  
No more to see the morning light  
But hear the death bells solemn boom  
And stretched upon their dreamless beds  
A ghastly sight of human forms  
A stony pillow for each head  
And firmly locked in death's cold arms.*

*The Father ne'er will kiss his child  
Nor say "Goodbye" to wife again  
No "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,"  
Will be to him a sweet refrain  
But when the Lord shall call the dead  
Why, more than once he wept and said -  
"Come unto me" while here below  
And I will give you rest.'*

(MM. CLASS. BO 5.9.1891)

[NB. It would appear that the same Richard Abrahams who had to live with controversy and the possibility he had made a mistake was himself tragically killed at Malago in 1895.]

William Bolt  
Edwin Javins

Three men, the above and Jonathon Burstin who were employed by Messrs Goulstone, Seaman and Co. were lowered down the shaft at Bedminster Northside to make an inspection of the workings. The time was between four and five in the morning. The banksman received the signal to 'haul up' and rapidly drew the bucket to the surface. He had no inkling of anything wrong, then to his horror and distress found the three lying in the bucket with appalling wounds. Bolt was already dead, his head cut open and his body much mangled. The other two were rushed to the Guinea Street Hospital but Javins who suffered compound fractures of the leg and concussion of the brain was found to be dead on arrival. Burstin also had a broken leg and his back was severely injured.

Mr Stewart, the pit agent immediately went down and found that one of the air trucks was pulled out of place. He thought that the bucket must have been swaying about and the ropes became entangled with the projecting end

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[NB. It would appear that the same Richard Abrahams who had to live with controversy and the possibility he had made a mistake was himself

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assault.] According to the newspaper report some of the miners who had 'struck work' were 'going about spreading the most exaggerated rumours of the accident.'

The accident was especially sad for in this pit only a few weeks before, almost the whole of the work force had been successfully rescued, having been buried alive for two days and a night. On that famous occasion William Bolt had been one of the most active in rescuing his fellow colliers. He left a widow and nine children. Javins left a widow and three children. Burstin whose chances of recovery were believed to be slim was likewise a married man with a family. 'All three men stood in the highest estimation of their employers and were much respected for their steady and moral conduct, each of them being members of religious bodies in the neighbourhood. The lamentable occurrence has cast a deep gloom over the whole district.'

The editor of The Times said censoriously that now life had been lost perhaps the Government would send an inspector to the pit.

(LT 16.7.1851.BTM 17.7.1851)

John Brake - see Henry Thomas, 1886.

Henry Britton (48)

collier, killed when he knocked out a prop at Ashton Vale Colliery, 6th March 1863. (MIR)

John Britton (10)

employed at the New Coal Pit, Bedminster. He ventured into a hole in which there was a quantity of foul air and was almost immediately suffocated. An inquest held at the King's Arms, Bedminster heard that he had been cautioned not to go near the spot. (BMe 20.3.1841)

John Budd

a repairer, described as 'a young man' was killed at South Liberty Lane 2nd November 1876 by a fall of stone. (MIR & see Douglas Rennolds, 1876)

George Burgess - see Thomas Bolt, 1891

James Butler (29)

collier at Ashton Vale, was buried under a fall of coal after blasting in a heading which had appeared 'so solid it had not seemed necessary to set sprags' on 13th May 1890. A man called Buck was also caught in the fall but rescued. A statement that 'there was plenty of timber about' was denied at an angry meeting between the men and Mr Whitefield, their Union representative. When he asked if they had ever complained about lack of timber 'every hand was well up'. It was further reported that Mr Whitefield had been refused permission to view the spot where the accident occurred.

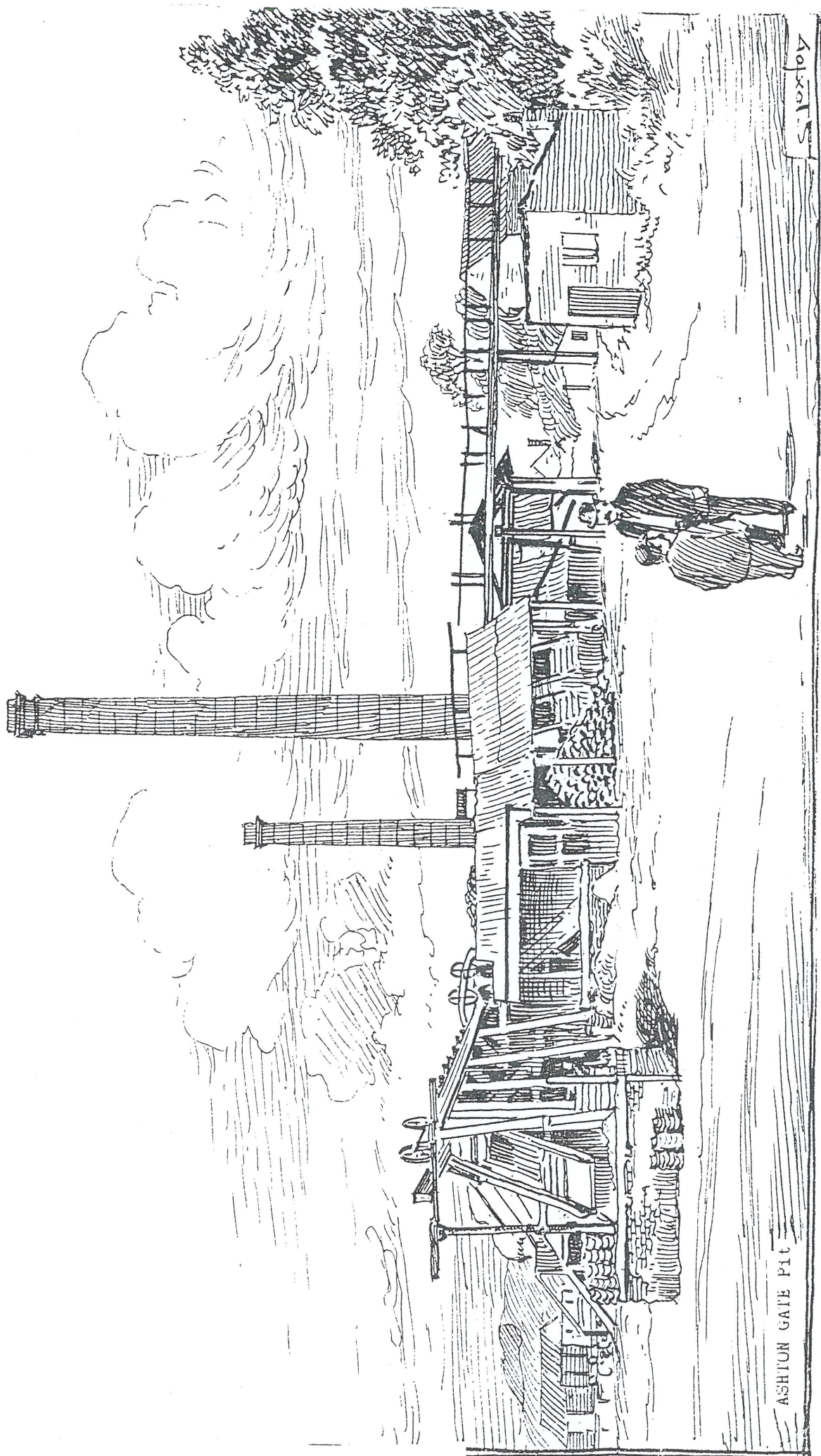
(MIR.BO 17.5.1890)

[In the newspaper report the name of the deceased is stated to be Frank Butler]

William Butler (45)

surface trimmer, was riding an empty hudge against the rules when he came in contact with another, fully loaded at Dean Lane, 17th March 1860. He was 'mortally wounded in the throat'. (MIR.BMe 24.3.1860)









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James Butson (69)

fireman, injured at Ashton Vale on 18th August 1887 when a quantity of stone fell 9 feet on to him. He died on 14th November. (MIR)

William Button - see Thomas Bolt, 1891

William Carey (64)

carter or putter, died in a fall of roof at Ashton Vale, 12th April 1889. Mr J.S. Martin, the inspector said it was 'the old story' of an apparently strong roof having insufficient timber set under it. (MIR)

George Cavill

killed by explosion at the New Coal Pit, Bedminster c1841?

Frederick Chambers - see Thomas Bolt, 1891

George Chilcott (15)

was killed falling down West End Colliery. At this works the engine was used only during the day. At night the men went down 'by thrusting their leg through a noose at the end of a rope which coiled round a drum.' John Parker who was in the rope and descending, was uneasy and called out to the brakesman: "Hold the rope. I'm falling." The brakesman said all was well and held the rope. Parker, apparently satisfied as to safety then called out to George Chilcott who was waiting to descend "Come along, my sonny", and the boy jumped into his lap. The extra weight set the rope spinning and he called to the brakesman for a light, but before the words were properly out of his mouth the rope went rapidly down and he became insensible. He could not tell at which stage the lad fell from his lap. When he recovered consciousness he was lying at the bottom of the shaft with the rope about his head. The boy was dead. He told the inquest he believed the brakesman had been quite sober. He could not account for the accident unless the brakesman had not properly secured the clip. Mr Lionel Brough (inspector) said the whole apparatus used for letting the men down was the rudest kind he ever saw and the mode for fixing the chain governing the descent was very uncertain. He believed the clip *had* been fixed and this only proved the inefficiency of the apparatus.

The coroner said the sooner the arrangement was abandoned the better [but issued no order!] The jury expressed an opinion that only the steam engine should be used for ascent and descent. Mr Bennett (the owner) said the apparatus was perfectly safe otherwise it would not have been used. Verdict - as usual - 'Accident'. (BMe 25.11.1871)

William Henry Clarke - see Thomas Bolt, 1891

Isaac Cleverley (40)

a miner of 44 Myrtle Street, Bedminster, an incline rider, was killed at Dean Lane on 5th September 1906. James Pillinger, a hitcher at the pit was at the scene of the accident. He had hitched up a journey of trams which passed slowly to the door of the incline. The trucks were loaded and nine out of the ten came back. Pillinger became alarmed and immediately went up the incline where he found Mr Cleverley lying with his chest against the side. He was alive, but unable to speak. A front wheel of the tram was lying on him. Pillinger pulled it off and summoned assistance. Mr Cleverley



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was brought up and taken to hospital, but nothing could be done for him. Death was caused from shock following his injuries.

Mr J.S. Martin, Mines' Inspector, told the inquest the deceased's work was riding up and down the 950 yard incline in front of each journey of trams. He could not have known the steel chain which held the trams together had become unhitched or broken. The inside of the chain was 'chrySTALLISED with wear. If a smith had put the chain through a fire he would have been able to detect the flaw. He had not heard of a broken chain outside this one in a period of five years.'

Mr E.A. Painter of the Bristol Miners' Association said it was impossible to do without an incline rider. Mary Jane Cleverley, the widow said her husband had been in good health and had never complained of his work.

(BO 8.9.1906)

[Isaac's daughter, Mrs Baker was a baby when her father died. "On that day, look, I suppose our ma must have been doing summat, and he took me. I was only 8 months old, like, and he come in and he said, 'Here, Gin, take this here maid. I've got to go to work now with a wet shirt.' Because I must have wet it. That's what he said, and that night he never come home. He was killed that night, see...he went to work on the night time, and he got killed, one of the chains broke or something and he used to lead these great big drams down, down a big incline, and one of them snapped and they all come down on him. And that was in Dean Lane Pit, down here.....

"The police come and woke my mother's father up, who lived next door, and he come and got my mother up like, to tell her. And they took her to the General Hospital. And just as our mother got there, he died, and our ma said, well when she got in there, he was all laid on a tressle, she said it was, and she said there was a ball. This is what she told me. There was a big white ball underneath where he was laid, like under his neck, and there was all the blood dripping down. She said he broke every bone in his body. Cause all the drams come back down on him, look. Crush him."]

(MM.CLASS)

Dean Lane Pit ceased working on 3rd November 1906. On 10th November, The Bristol Observer refers to 'The Closing of Dean Lane Colliery'. 'Twenty men have already finished and another hundred will be out in a week or two's time. No stop pay has been distributed yet, as the men who have just come out have two days wages to take this week. After their pay from the colliery has ceased they will receive 7/6d\* per week for thirteen weeks if they do not get employed.'

'When the men left Ashton Vale and got work at other coalfields away from Bristol they each received £2 but this time the miner will get £1 when he sets out for a new place of work in another town and £1 will go to the wife and children when the miner is certified as being at work in his new district. Some of the men from Dean Lane, said Mr Whitefield (Miners' Agent), had already got work elsewhere in Bristol and two had gone to South Wales. The closing of the two collieries had cost the Union £900. A sum of six guineas had been subscribed on behalf of the children of the Ashton Vale miners.'

(BO 10.11.1906)

\*[37½p]

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Blewit Cooper (36)

collier at Knight & Abbott's pit, Ashton Vale, killed 13th February 1861 by a massive fall of coal. *BLEWIT Cooper deelt Ryd Bed* *1860* (MIR)

Richard Cox (60)

a collier of Bedminster Down was walking up the incline at Ashton Vale when he was knocked down and crushed by a coal truck owing to the breaking of the rope which was drawing it up. (BO 9.11.1878)

Joseph Crane (43)

John Thompson

and James Howell were sinking a new pit at Ashton Vale at the end of May 1866. They were working on scaffolding 25 yards from the bottom when Howell noticed that part of it was about to give way. Shouting an alarm to the others he managed to jump clear but the broken scaffold, iron bars and planks pitched down into the water which lay at the bottom of the shaft carrying the two men with it. Men working near, hearing Howell's screams were immediately on the scene but arrived too late to save Thompson. Crane, the foreman was still alive and trying to raise himself out of the water but sadly he too later died. He came from Kingswood and was an experienced sinker in Gloucestershire and Wales. He was the father of eleven children, some of whom were said to be old enough to earn their own livings. This seems to be borne out by his details in the Miners' Fund which allowed £5 to his widow and six children on 24th October 1866. [This fund was started at Bath on 21st March 1865 to compensate the dependants of married colliers killed in pits in the Somerset district with a payment of £5. The last payment by the charity was in 1872 and it was finally wound up in 1889 when Edwin Knight was the sole surviving trustee. The remaining money was divided between colliery districts in England and Wales.] Thompson who also lived in Kingswood was unmarried. If he had dependants they were not compensated. (BO 2.6.1866, MIR)

Joseph Crew (26)

collier at Dean Lane was killed 25th October 1896 by the premature explosion of a shot fired by electricity. *BM 15/11/95 - include* (MIR)

William Crew (38)

killed in a fall of roof at South Liberty 7th April 1897. (MIR)

[Mrs Pritchard, William Crew's grand-daughter, told me he was buried at St Peter's Bishopsworth. He was the father of nine children, of whom the baby was her father, Samuel. William's wife, whose maiden name was Hall, had seen better times. Her parents had owned a haulage business. Now, because of William's death, she was obliged to take in washing to eke out a living for the family. Conditions at Bedminster Down were dire. A few years later she had a stroke. The children used to go round looking in ash bins to see what could be found in the way of food. Samuel was then about nine. "Nobody knows now what poverty was really like" he used to say. Owing to his mother's illness he was sent to an orphanage at Downend. His next brother up, the second youngest was adopted by a family who had a shop in Weston-super-Mare. They knew of each other, but sadly never really got in touch again. At the orphanage Samuel was set to black-leading the heavy old fire grates. Supervision was strict. One of the teachers terrified him so much



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with her shouting and demands that one day he turned on her, seized the poker and in desperation chased her with it. His punishment is not recorded but soon after he was called into the superintendent's room. "Crew," said the beadle, without attempting to soften the blow, "Your mother's dead." Ironically the only person who was sympathetic was the woman he had chased with the poker. Another member of the family, Charles Crew left Bedminster and found work as a miner near Tonypany in South Wales.]

William Dallard (31)

sinker at Ashton Vale, ascending a 'hoppet' was caught under a 'byatt' and crushed, 11th April 1891 according to the Inspector's report. An inquest at the 'Ship & Castle' beerhouse heard that Mr Dallard was working with Frederick Hayman, sinker, at Old Frayne's Pit. They had charged three holes with powder at the bottom of the shaft. They signalled the engine driver four times to confirm all was well. They got into the bucket and gave 'pull up'. When they got to the landing stage, the bucket collided against the timber and was flung on one side. Dallard fell out and cried out "I'm killed". Hayman managed to get him into the bucket again but he spoke no more and was found to be dead. (BO 18.4.1891.MIR)

James Davis (40)

Most of the men had left the pit at Dean Lane when at 8 o'clock on the evening of 21st May 1867, James Davis and three others discovered an obstruction in the air course of the pit. Davis bravely volunteered to move it and leaving his candle behind "to be on the safe side" in case of gas he ventured in total blackness 300 yards down the incline and towards the air course. When he had been gone a considerable time and did not return his mates became alarmed and following him down they found a massive fall of roof. More men returned to the spot and digging commenced in shifts of ten. It was between one and two o'clock in the morning, about five and half hours after the fall when they managed to make out that Davis was still alive and they managed to speak with him. By and by, Davis ceased to speak and it was half past six before they could get to him. He was in a crouched position and had been dead several hours. It is not difficult to imagine the intense grief felt when these heroic efforts were to no avail. It was said that Davis was 'respected as a sober, intelligent and industrious man who leaves behind him a widow and five children totally unprovided for.' His widow was given £5 from 'the Fund' [see Joseph Cranel on 29.5.1867, though his name is given as John Davis. (BO 25.5.1867.MIR)

Richard Davis - see Henry Thomas, 1886

R. Day (47)

fireman, killed at Dean Lane, 19th October 1877, when contrary to orders to took a naked light into a heading. (MIR)

James Dowling (45), 15 Dean Crescent, Southville

collier at Dean Lane injured in a fall of roof, 1st May 1889. He died in hospital on Tuesday, 25th May. William Lansdowne said he was working with Dowling in the East Level Heading. He heard him cry out and went to his aid. There was a large stone, 3 hundredweight, on him.

The Coroner: "Do you know if the roof had been examined?" Witness: "It had."

"Do you on beginning work examine it yourselves?" "Yes, Sir."

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"Had that particular part of the roof been examined?" "Yes, Sir."

"Had you heard any report of it being unsafe?" "Yes, Sir. Dowling had too".

At the time of the accident, Dowling was putting up the timber. George Edgell, overman, said one of the foremen had previously examined the roof and left his mark there. Edgell pointed it out to Lansdowne but didn't tell Dowling. He had ordered an extra prop to be put in on account of the weakness of the roof.

Mr Bain [Inspector]: "It was the duty of the men to set up timber under Edgell's instructions and when he gave orders they must have set to work at once. When Edgell first saw the place he didn't think it too dangerous for the carting boy, Frederick Fowler to go under." Dr W.H.C. Newman said death was due to a fracture of the pelvis. The verdict was 'accident'.

(MIR. BO 25.5.1889)

Robert 'Bob' Duffy (42)

Foreman at South Liberty Lane from 1910. In 1912 he was down the pit to help a fellow workman who was unsuccessfully hewing, when the hammer head flew off, squashing one of his fingers, and led to blood poisoning which caused his death.

(Mrs Kettell, his daughter, reported MM.CLASS)

James Durbin (29)

was killed in a freak blasting accident at Malago Vale Colliery 26th April 1881. He was working with two other men in a topple ('top-hole', the coal face at the top of each hatching) where a fault was to be blasted to extend an airway. They waited ten feet down the hatching, protected from the gob, a wall of waste rock. Despite this precaution, James Durbin said he had been "shot". He managed to crawl out but died shortly afterwards from a fractured skull caused by a piece of stone from the blast which had lodged in his head after twice rebounding.

BM 27.4.81 (MIR. IP)

Samuel Durbin - see Thomas Bolt, 1891

Simon Durbin - see Frederick Pike, 1854

James Flew (16)

labourer, killed by the fly wheel engine, Ashton Vale, 27th January 1855.

(MIR)

James Flowers (27)

John Vaughan (32) hewers

died in a sudden eruption of water from an unsuspected old shaft. Drainage operations were being undertaken at Ashton Vale Colliery near the disused Frayne's Pit, and the men had been unable to work for some little time. On Monday 3rd May 1892, the operations were so far completed as to allow work to re-commence and a hundred men descended, including Moses Cowcill, the manager, and Mr Stone, the under-manager. At about 1.15 pm water broke into the western part of the workings, a mile and a half from the shaft in the direction of Flax Bourton. Above ground, Francis Hobbs, a farm labourer "rolling and dragging, backwards and forwards all morning" in a field on Sir Greville Smyth's land had an amazing escape. Like the roar of a cannon, an explosion ripped through the ground leaving a gaping hole four to five feet wide at his feet. Unsuspected shaft or not, Francis Hobbs said there had always been a depression thereabouts of about a foot in the field.



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Underground, the dirty evil smelling water burst in a swirling waist high torrent along the main level, sweeping many of the men off their feet. Most had been labouring in scanty clothing and had no time to gather up their clothes or implements. The stench was unbearable and many of them were left in total darkness as their candles went out. Three abandoned horses stood in the water for over an hour patiently awaiting rescue. There were considerable falls of roof when the timber supports were carried away. The men were brought to the surface in a pitiable condition and at first it was rumoured that ten or eleven men were missing but it was later confirmed that only James Flowers and John Vaughan could not be accounted for. Several of the men who had narrowly escaped with their lives immediately volunteered to go back down and search for them. A telegram was sent to William Whitefield, the miners' agent and he came at once, anxious to render assistance. Richard Batten, secretary of the Ashton Vale miners' association found the coats belonging to Flowers and Vaughan in the main level. Thomas Dyke, Sir Greville Smyth's agent, went down soon after the occurrence and said he believed an old shaft existed, 200 feet deep and probably at least a hundred years old near the spot where the outbreak occurred. From the stench of the water, it was obvious it had lain stagnant for a long time.

The body of Vaughan was found by William Wedlake at 10.30 pm on the Wednesday night at a spot previously passed by the rescue party. He was lying face upwards, behind a stack of timber, covered in lacerations and with his arm broken. A large stone lay on him. A huge stone had been noted in a precarious position by the rescue party and as soon as they commenced its removal the body was found, supposedly where it had been washed by the rush of water.

An inquest was formally convened on Saturday 7th May so that the relatives could take Vaughan for burial. He was identified by his brother-in-law, Henry Brake. The inquest was then adjourned until the following Thursday. Flowers was not found until the Sunday, lying fifteen or twenty yards from the rise.

The inquest now to be taken on both men resumed at the Star Inn, Ashton Gate on the following Thursday, when Thomas Francis Haynes told of being at work with Flowers and Vaughan on 3rd May. They were working at a hatching in the main level, the deceased men hewing at the face and Haynes carting the coal in a hutch when without warning a bank of water burst in on them. Haynes was knocked over on his back and carried down the hatching into Robert Taylor's shute. He managed to crawl through the dark to Taylor and then lost consciousness. He never saw either Vaughan or Flowers again. Since the accident he had been deaf in both ears from the noise of the water. Before the accident there had been no 'bleeding' of water noticed. There was the mark of the examiner dated 3rd May at the bottom and top of the hatching.

William Buck, a member of the search party told of finding Flowers, his body almost naked, surrounded by rubbish, an old pitchfork, some broken tiles and weeds and turf, which must have come down the old shaft. William Wedlake had worked in the pit 22 years but had never before heard of any shaft at that side.

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Moses Cowcill was talking to Flowers and Vaughan just before the accident. Everything appeared sound and there was no indication of water. He was down a gub when he heard a voice call "Master there is something the matter" and when he enquired what, the man said "The air sheet is blowing very strong, the wrong way." He proceeded towards the hatching where Flowers and Vaughan were working, from which air was coming. Nearby he found a man called Carey with 15 or 20 other men who thought there had been an explosion. James Harford who had been at the bottom of the incline to see if they could get through told them "the water is flying up the incline and you must all rush for your lives." All the men ran away, with the exception of Carey who stayed beside him. They called to Flowers and Vaughan but got no answer. The flood water at last began to subside down the incline. The water had run nearly 2,000 yards and after the first rush, a second smaller rush occurred an hour afterwards.

Thomas Dyke tried in vain to find a plan or any record of the shaft. It had not been shown on the first Ordnance Survey map of 1837. After his research he revised his estimate of its age and suggested it might be at least 140-150 years old. Mr H. Bennett whose family had been involved with the Dean Lane Colliery for generations had no knowledge of it, though Mr Whitefield said he knew of other old shafts in the district and they all ought to be tested.

The verdict was finally and inevitably 'accident'. John Vaughan was a prominent member of the Miners' Association and often presided at meetings at the Albert Hall. Both men left wives and children.

(BO 7.5./14.5.1892, 11.6.1892.MIR)

Henry Foot - see Thomas Bolt, 1891

William James Fudge (29)

was making a new incline with Frederick John Brown at Ashton Vale. Fudge was standing by a trolley when a stone of about 3½ tons fell on him from the roof. He was quickly extricated but found to be dead. Evidence was also given to the inquest by Alfred Dando and Thomas Masters. The jury said more timbering should be used as the ground was of a slippery nature. (BO 7.5.1898)

W. Fussell (43)

miner's assistant, died suddenly at Ashton Vale whilst underground at his work place, one mile from the shaft, 27th October 1898. (MIR)

Edwin Garland (29)

died on 1st May 1903. An inquest held at the Ship and Castle, Ashton Vale was reported on 9th May 1903. Charles Guy, a miner employed at the Ashton Vale Colliery Co. said that on the previous Friday at 1 am he was with the deceased in the west workings, cutting coal in a road about a yard high. Edwin Garland was driving a wedge of coal, when suddenly a large clod, weighing between one and two tons fell on him. Guy, who was injured himself, heard Garland cry out "Take this off me. Quick." He was released in about ten minutes but died before he could be taken up to the bank. They started work at the spot between 9 and 9.30 pm on the Thursday night when they both sounded the roof. It gave no indication of falling. They had sounded it again about five minutes before the accident. The bailiff had also been to the spot, but witness could not recall whether he had also sounded the roof. They had plenty of timber there. 'The witness was deeply



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affected at this juncture when questioned by Mr Walker, the mining inspector, as to the death of his mate and gave way to tears.'

Mr Moses Cowcill, the mine manager, was examined as to the timbering by the inspector who maintained that a plank should be erected the entire width of the road as a greater protection. Thomas Benfield, the pit bailiff deposed on visiting the spot at 9 pm, he made an examination and pronounced it safe. He visited the men at 11 pm. He did not sound the roof himself but saw both Guy and Garland do so. He thought the planking of the roof between billets at the side of the road could be safer.

The witness Guy said that they had no room to put in another 'stick' or they would have done so. They would not have worked in danger. The jury returned a verdict of accidental death. (BO.9.5.1903)

[Edwin Garland was born in December 1873 and christened at Hebron Chapel Bedminster on 13th January 1874. He married Annie and they had children William Edwin, Arthur James, Ernest John and Lewis Fry. They lived at Jubilee Street Bedminster. After Edwin's death, Annie supported herself and the four boys by selling coal from the yard at the back of her house.]

Isaac Garland (48)

presumably the father of the next named. Killed by an explosion of firedamp at Dean Lane on 22nd February 1869. It was stated a broken or cracked lamp caused the explosion but it had blown away and no-one knew what had become of it. Mr Brough, the Inspector believed the case was due to bad discipline and if better order was not observed he would take proceedings against the owners and managers. Isaac's 'orphan child' (also Isaac, doomed to die in 1882) was compensated £5 by 'the Fund' 7.7.1869. [See Joseph Cranel

(MIR.BTM 22.2.1869)

Isaac Garland (30) of Little Paradise, Bedminster.

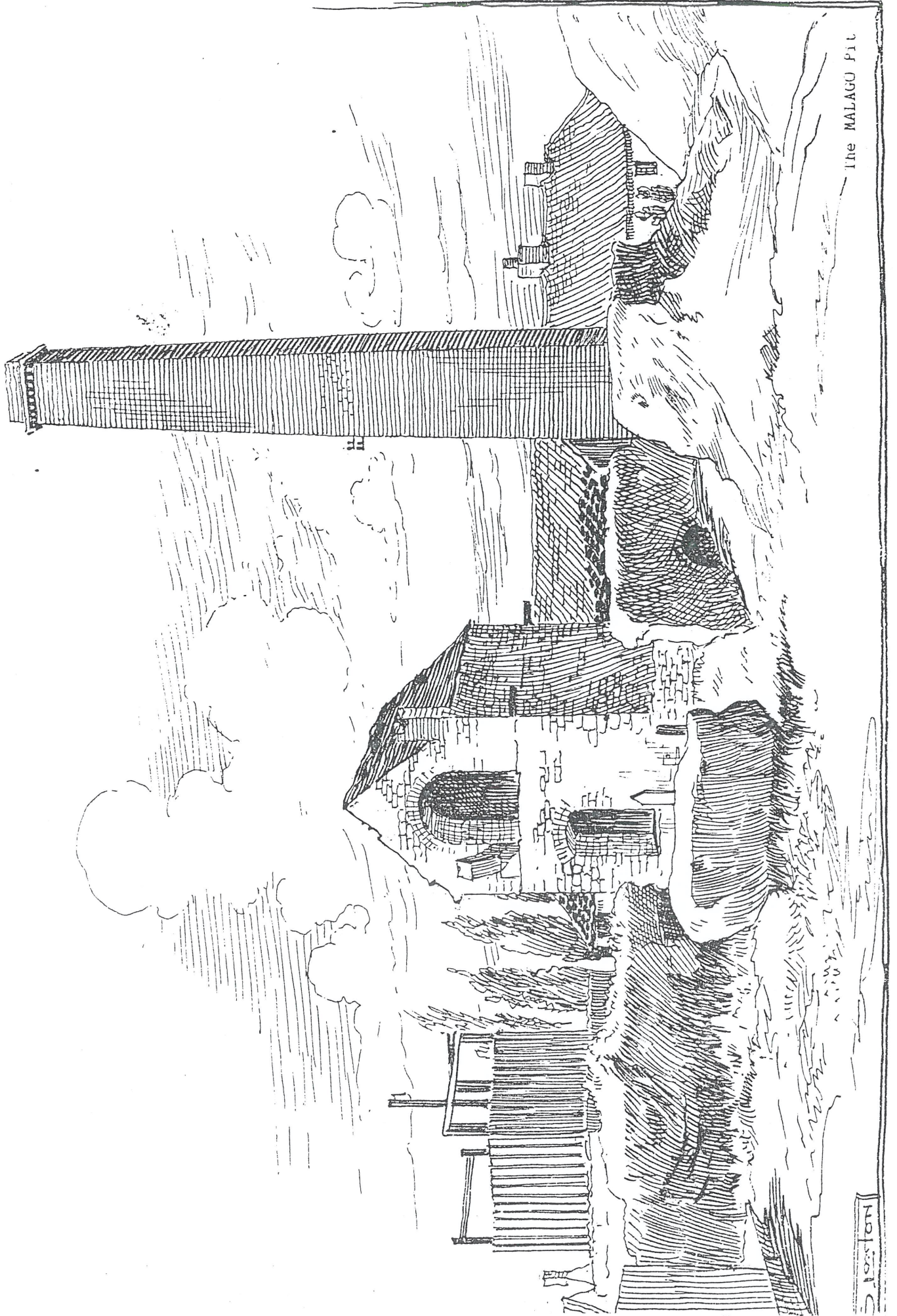
was riding the first of a number of trucks up an incline when the coupling jolted violently and gave way. He was thrown off and killed. William Garland\* identified the body as his nephew and said he had worked at Dean Lane Colliery for Messrs Bennett since he was a boy. Isaac's father had worked at the same pit and had been killed some years before.

Charles Milkins, a boy, said in evidence his duty was to stay at the top of the incline and help push the trucks out when they came to the level staging. On Saturday morning the first hitcher broke and seven or eight trucks ran back down the slope. The boy went hurriedly down the incline to look for the rider but found him dead sixty or seventy yards away from the level.

Thomas Bolt\*\*, deputy overman, said the incline, known as the duke way was 630 yards long and varied in inclination eighteen to ten inches in the yard. In answer to a question from the Inspector, he said it was not strictly necessary for a man to ride in this manner, but the deceased went up when he thought necessary. (BO 28.10.1882)

[\*Perhaps William Garland killed 1890? See below.]

[\*\*killed 1891]



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William Garland (31)

killed at Dean Lane by a premature explosion of shot, 19th March 1874. (MIR)

*Graphic*  
The baldness of the Inspector's tabulated note of this accident is augmented by a ~~heart-rending~~ newspaper report in the Bristol Times and Mirror, which says William Garland was killed blasting a hole at Dean Lane, whilst driving a shaft, half a mile from the bottom of the pit. Thomas Bolt, deputy bailiff said he believed that he used a large sledge-hammer, a 'stemmer' against the rules. The stemmer should never be taken until a few inches of wadding and gravel was on top of the powder and he had repeatedly told the men not to use the iron unless this was the case. He heard Milkins, Garland's mate, now in hospital, cry out "Tom, we are shot and killed." He was out of the branch and crawling on hands and knees. Bolt lifted him up and he said "Go in and find Bill." Groping about in pitch dark Bolt found a hand and arm. He was attempting to drag Garland out when he "lost his senses", overcome by the smoke of the explosion. When he came to, a light had been brought and he saw Milkins, despite his injuries coming back in search of his mate. Bill Garland put up the stump of his arm and said "Go back and see what's the matter of my hand." One of his eyes was out on his cheek. Milkins, in anguish, cried out to him "Oh, Bill, if I had listened to you it wouldn't have happened." (BTM 26.3.1874)

William Garland - see Henry Thomas, 1886

William Garland (72)

collier, killed at Ashton Vale by a fall of clod from the roof, 7th January 1890. (MIR)

Alfred Gibbs (49)

killed Dean Lane Colliery 7th March 1899 by a fall of roof from a slip at his working place. Thomas Worlock working about 12 yards away heard him call "Tom, quick!" and went to his assistance but found him already engulfed. He was dug out in an hour and a half but was dead. According to his workmates he was a steady and competent workman. (BO 11.3.1899)

[Alfred Gibbs was born on 10th May, 1849 at Bishop Sutton in the parish of Chew Magna, Somerset. He married his wife Emma in June 1871 at the Wesleyan Chapel, Clutton. Before coming to Bedminster they lived in the Tollgate House, Sutton Wick where Emma was the toll collector. The accident caused her to have a breakdown and she remained in an institution until her death in 1932. Their large family of nine children was raised by their eldest daughter until they were old enough to follow the family tradition 'down the pit' and they moved variously to South Wales and the North East of England.]

*brian.w.clark@btinternet.com*

Walter Gould (32)

trammer, died at South Liberty, 4th May 1888. When shifting 'drams' through the windroad, his candle was blown out and he fell 200 yards down the darkness of the upcast shaft. His father who was working at the bottom of the shaft heard the fall and ran to the spot, but found him dead, with one of his legs torn off and his head smashed. He was single and lived with his father at Bedminster Down. The Inspector's report noted that he must have crawled over five or six tubs to get to the upcast shaft. 'He was of



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rather weak intellect and was employed as a matter of favour'.

(MIR.BO 12.5.1888)

Henry Gregory (18) collier of Beaufort Street.

trammer at Ashton Vale, was pushing two trucks with a man behind him pushing two more. The first tram went off the rails and before the second man could stop, Gregory was struck and crushed between the two, fracturing his spine.

(MIR.CC 28.7.1886)

James Hall (25)

collier, killed at Ashton Coal Company on 11th December 1855. At an inquest held at the Telegraph Tavern, William Woolbridge who had been working with him described how a large stone "came off to a feather edge and fell from the roof on Hall", breaking his spine and otherwise mutilating his body. The deceased only breathed once. The hearing was adjourned so that Herbert Mackworth, the Mines' Inspector could attend.

(MIR.BGa 20.11.1855)

John Hall (44)

collier, killed in a roof fall at Dean Lane 10th January 1888. - *Bm 14/1/88* (MIR)  
[NB: the evidence of William Selfe refers. see Benjamin Jacobs, 1889]

Henry Harding (44)

collier, injured in a fall of stone at Ashton Vale on 11th June 1887. He died on the 25th of his injuries.

(MIR)

William Hares (27)

horsedriver at South Liberty [where he had been employed sixteen years!] was crushed between two trams when taking a full journey to the shaft, 17.11.1899. Thomas Garland told the inquest he was at the bottom of the shaft hitching empty trams. It was Hares's habit to sit on the foremost tram to drive the pony. He left with twenty trams and when he did not immediately return, Garland with Alfred Gibbs\* went to look for him. He was found pinned against a wall unable to speak. The manager, Moses Cowcill said he was a steady and experienced driver and as a rule did not walk beside the horse. In a heated exchange, Mr Whitefield proposed that a boy should accompany the driver of a tram to carry information in case of an accident but Mr Martin, (H.M. Inspector) said he would not undertake to recommend it. Hares left a widow, Alice.

(MIR.BO 25.11.1899)

[\*Alfred Gibbs mentioned above is possibly the son of the man of the same name killed earlier that year.]

James Harr

miner, employed by Mr Sydney at Ashton, suffered a fit whilst working in the shaft and fell out of the cart.

(BMe 24.8.1847)

George Harris (26)

collier, killed by a fall of stone at South Liberty, 26.6.1886. Another man was injured in the accident.

(MIR)

Frank Harver (38)

was injured in a fall of clod at South Liberty Pit on 2nd May 1882. He died on the 31st. An inquest was told there had seemed no necessity for propping. Isaac Steeds, the overman said he had examined the working only a hour before and had found it apparently safe: "a seam a yard thick and no

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timbering required. I had never seen a better." Joseph Harver, was working close by and said he heard the clod go, about a ton of shale. Some of it was on Frank. He asked if he was hurt and Frank replied "Praise the Lord." He was assisted out of the pit and to the hospital but did not recover from his injuries. Mr Bain, the Inspector said it was the type of accident that would always occur but he was sorry to say they were rather frequent in this district. Verdict: Accidental Death. (MIR.BO 3.6.1882)

John Hayes

coalminer in Grimbush Lane, Bedminster. Missed his footing and fell into a pit of water. His head hit a projecting rock. The inquest was at the Hen & Chicken. (BMe 22.11.1845)

John Hollis

sinker, injured at Dean Lane by an explosion of firedamp on 17.4.1875. He died of his injuries on 28th April. 'Alleged Neglect of Mine Regulations at Bedminster' was the newspaper headline. William Beasley, said they were sinking a new shaft and to expedite matters a new tunnel was run from the old shaft and a shaft was sunk from there as well as from the surface. When he was at the top of the lower shaft, the witness heard an explosion due to "a blower" [a sudden outburst] of gas. They were carrying candles whilst engaged in the work.

Mr J.R. Bennett said in sinking the lower shaft they came to some soft rock and he told Hollis to drive back to the main shaft to get air. He was carrying out this instruction when the explosion occurred. At the time they were using naked lights but hearing some hissing of the coal he sent back for a safety lamp. In answer to Mr Brough [Inspector] he said there were no artificial means to force air into the place the accident occurred. Mr Brough said the dead man had been allowed to go into the workings without a previous inspection, contrary to the Mines' Regulations Act. Mr Bennett replied that this was because they were sinking through stone and no gas was supposed to be present. Mr Brough persisted that there could be no doubt the Rule had not been complied with. The jury brought in a verdict of accidental death but added a rider agreeing with Mr Brough.

(MIR.BTM 1.5.1875)

John Horler (54), 3 Prospect Place, Bedminster

hewer, killed at Dean Lane by an explosion of firedamp 12th February 1884, was identified at the inquest by his son, James Horler. Thomas Wallace was working with the dead man at the time of the explosion. They were using naked lights. The workings had been examined that morning and there was no idea of gas. They were cutting coal, with the deceased a little ahead of him. A piece of coal fell from the roof and the deceased asked for a bar to shore up the roof, whereupon there was another fall and immediately the gas which had escaped ignited. Horler was taken to the General Hospital where he died of his burns. (MIR.BO 23.2.1884)

George Hyman - see Henry Thomas, 1886





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Benjamin Jacobs (30) of 23 Murray Road, Southville, hewer, married  
Henry Jones (49) of Rose Green, St George, hewer, married  
Benjamin Milkins (22) of 1 Arnolds Cottages, hewer, West Street, married  
William Sidney Roberts (also known as Venn), (15) Catherine Mead St,  
Bedminster, gub boy.

At one o'clock on Monday morning 28th January 1889, there was an explosion at Dean Lane when four men and two boys were injured. By the time of the first report three of the men, Jacobs, Jones and Milkins, had died of their injuries. The explosion was in the 'Old Seam' where coal had been cut from time immemorial. It had 'been extremely free from any form of gas and no-one has been injured in any explosion in that pit for more than a year.'

'When the party went down, they were partially stripped for work and carried candles to light them. The place where they were about to cut coal was 6 foot high and 6 foot wide. Just after their arrival the explosion occurred. A boy called William Venn [Roberts] gave the alarm and the man he found went the shortest way against an air current to try to get to the place but he found himself in afterdamp which drove him back. He then had to go a different way, with the current instead of against it, a journey of a quarter of a mile. The injured men were found within 50 yards of where the explosion occurred. All the lights were out and though all were sensible, they were badly burned about the bodies, hands and lips.'

The lad Venn who had raised the alarm was found unconscious from afterdamp as was the other boy, George Hardwick (15). Jacobs, Jones and Milkins with the two boys and Charles Cryer, a thirty one year old hewer, a married man of 21 Brook Street, Bedminster, were taken to hospital. The first three died of their burns, while the brave little messenger, Venn never regained consciousness from the afterdamp.

Work at the colliery stopped for the day and Mr J.R. Bennett, the manager and Mr J.S. Martin [Inspector] made a tour of the workings but failed to discover the cause of the explosion.

An inquest opened on the four fatalities was told that Cryer and Hardwick were still seriously ill in hospital. Mr J.R. Bennett commenced giving his evidence and said the difficulty was the men would not work with safety lamps. Mr Martin reproved him, saying, the manager's responsibility was by no means relieved by the men's desire. Controversy began over whether Frank Turner, the examiner was always sufficiently careful and reliable when checking for gas. It was clear that already rumours were rife.

Jonah Clarke, overman, told of the boy Venn coming up to him, saying that "Cryer and them" had found gas. Shortly after he felt the "slight shock" of the explosion. "There was time for the men to have come out of the working into the incline before the explosion. They would wait and see if it burnt itself out."

A juryman (astute!) said "That would look as if they were used to seeing gas: then waiting for it to burn out." This remark was not taken up.

Clarke continued: "They must have come out of the working place to the entrance of the gub and there sat down until the explosion occurred when

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they were burned. The explosion came several minutes after the boy spoke to me."

Clarke said the roads and ventilation were in good order and in the case of the examiner, he believed Turner understood the use of the lamp, though he had never seen him discover gas with it. Mr Parr [solicitor] clarified: When a man was searching for gas, he reduced the flame of his lamp to its smallest size and then gradually elevated the lamp towards the roof. If there was gas it would be seen by the shade around the top of the flame. Turner had searched for gas properly, but the witness Clarke had not seen him find any.

Clarke eventually got to Milkins and helped him out. Milkins told him they had never shifted after the gas was burning. He said "Why were you so foolish as to stop there?" Milkins answered that they were chatting and did not know. In his experience of gas, it did not remain burning but exploded in a rush.

Philip Collins, overman, said Cryer told him he noticed the air going across the gug instead of going round. He had since been told that the sheet which directed the ventilation was down on Saturday before the explosion and that meant air was not circulating properly. If Turner, going round on Sunday had noticed the sheet down and faulty ventilation then he should have reported it.

James Bull, a boy, truck filler, stated he was last in the spot where the blast took place with Elijah Wyatt on the Saturday. He noticed one of the ventilation sheets had fallen but there was no smell of gas. He re-hung the sheet by securing it with two nails across the top piece. On going to work he saw the examiner's chalk mark on a shovel.

Joseph Bush, banksman, saw the examiner go down precisely at 8.10 pm. He knew the time as he had looked at his watch. It was almost two hours before the night shift was to start. Frank Turner, said he had been employed as examiner since the previous July; before that he was a labourer and had assisted Mr Woffenden, another examiner. Before coming to Bristol he had worked in Mr Batey's 'fiery' colliery at Coleford, Somerset where locked lamps were used and he was well accustomed to safety lamps. He had never found any gas at Dean Lane and he had never seen Woffenden find any. He was accustomed to make his mark on a shovel, "F.T. All right." No date. On that occasion he forgot to take his chalk down with him. Such a thing had never happened before. He examined the district beginning at no 17 and ending no 23. The sheet and ventilation were in order. He noticed a fall of roof after the accident. If that had taken place between his examination and the commencement of work he would have been forced back from the working and across the gug. He told the men all right. He later marked at no 19. He found a piece of chalk in the pit. He was in the pit when the explosion took place and helped with the rescue. The inquest was adjourned until 5th March.

Charles Cryer, survivor, gave evidence. He said he was a coalminer and had been employed by the Bedminster Coal Company for 6 years. He went down the pit on the Sunday evening at about 10 o'clock with Milkins and Jacobs. They met Turner at the safety station known as no 2. The three of them had



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orders from the overman to go to work that night but he did not think Turner knew it. He asked Turner if he had examined the place and Turner said it was all right. Turner had always performed his duties correctly as far as he knew. He [Cryer] had on one occasion found gas in the Great Vein but in a very small quantity. He was examined:

"Have you ever met with falls of roof?" "Not in that place."  
"Did you see an examiner's mark?" "I did not notice."  
"Where was it generally put?" "On a shovel in the roadway."  
"Previously did you always notice the examiner's mark?" "I cannot say."  
"You always work with a naked light?" "Yes."  
"Were you on that occasion working with naked lights?" "Yes."  
"I believe you prefer working with naked lights." "I do, Sir."  
"Did you make any remark about the air being wrong?" "Yes I did. Jones who is dead agreed and said 'Yes, I can feel it at my back.' It ought not to have been coming that way at all."  
"Would it not have been prudent to have told the overman?" "Yes, but we had Turner's word it was all right."  
"When the gas caught, what did you do?" "Run, Sir."  
"Out of the gup?" "To the bottom of it, 60 or 70 yards."  
"Did you remain there?" "We sat down."  
"Did you think it would burn out?" "Yes. I sent the boy Venn after the overman and told him to look sharp. Then the gas exploded. After ten minutes."  
"So there would have been plenty of time to escape if you had been aware of the danger?" "Yes."  
"Was Turner steady?" "Yes."  
"Did he sometimes omit to mark?" "I never noticed him miss before."  
"How often do you detect a bit of gas?" "Not often."  
"Did it not strike you that after Turner had examined-----?" (witness interrupting) "I don't believe he did examine it."  
"He swore he did?" "So he might. Milkins had found gas before, the air going wrong. It was the first day after the Christmas holidays. We sent for the overman, Philip Collins. He didn't come but sent his lamp. There was a goodish bit of gas."  
"Was there a mark then?" "Yes, but I didn't notice whose mark it was, the examiner's or overman's."  
"You would go to work with naked lights?" "Yes if the place was examined properly."  
"If it was examined all right?" "Yes, I don't believe it was examined on this occasion."  
"Do you think you are justified in persisting with naked lights?" "Yes, more would get hurt the other way with falls."

In further replies, witness said he had no fault to find with the management, only with the examiner.

The boy Hardwick could not be called. He was still in hospital. Chorea [St Vitus' Dance] had set in and he had no recollection of the accident. "His memory is a complete blank."

Philip Collins then gave evidence in respect of the Christmas circumstances when he sent a lamp to Cryer's party. A boy called Day came to him to say there was gas and he gave the boy a lamp saying he would come himself in

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five minutes, which he did. Cryer, Joseph Tompkins, James Smith and Ben Milkins told him the place was full of gas, but he found none. They sent for him again and this time he just sent the lamp back.

Cryer disputed this version and the two men began an argument which was stopped by the coroner. William Selfe then gave evidence.

He had worked at the colliery for 35 years and had been there the day before the accident and had found inspection and ventilation very good. He preferred naked lights. He was working on one occasion with a man named Hall\* when he was killed in a fall. He believed more would have been killed if they had not been using the brighter candle lights. He had been working at Christmas when Collins had inspected for gas but had not noticed any. Other evidence was given by William Pulsford, Alonzo Burt, Abraham Boyles, Richard Worlock and Henry Hall.

The jury failed to agree whether or not there was a case to indict Frank Turner for manslaughter. They issued a statement that if the men continued to use naked lights then they should take lamps and check for gas themselves. It should be customary for two examiners to go round together. A rider saying that Mr Bennett should give more training to his examiners was ordered to be struck out. As there was no prospect of the jury agreeing, the case was sent to the next Bristol Assizes.

A verdict was eventually pronounced by Mr Justice Hawkins, who summed up, saying he did not see that anybody could be charged with manslaughter except the man Turner and he might have been guilty of negligence but the men themselves should have noticed there was no mark and complained then. Turner honestly believed the place to be safe. So it was an accident: Jacobs, Milkins and Jones died of burns and Roberts of afterdamp. The inspector had no doubt where the blame lay: he reported that the men "died by an explosion of the damp through the use of naked lights".

As a sorry saga of incompetence and negligence, not to say foolhardiness, when the men sat around chatting waiting for the explosion, it can hardly be improved.

The funeral of Benjamin Milkins took place at Arno's Vale. He had been a member of the Salvation Army for five years and a bandsman in the Bedminster Corps for three. Five hundred army members marched in procession from their barracks to Arnold's Cottage, West Street, where they met with Benjamin's relatives and friends and then proceeded to Arno's Vale. According to their custom they wore white armbands and the Bandsmen, white sashes. An impressive service was conducted by Major Estell.

(BO 2.2./9.2./9.3./30.3.1889.MIR)

[\*John Hall, died 10th January 1888.]

[NB. Charles Cryer is mentioned in 'Miners' Memories' but was described as 'a mystery'. And no wonder. C.L.A.S.S. believed the evidence he gave was to the 1886 inquest. They were looking in the wrong year! Sadly, Charles went blind because of the accident.]



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John Jacobs (29)

collier, killed in a fall of "shab" at Ashton Vale, 25th January 1870. (MIR)

Richard James (26)

on 26th August, 1863 Richard and two other men went into one of the workings at Malago Vale with a naked light, being unaware there was an accumulation of firedamp there. In the ensuing explosion he was severely burnt in the face and hands. Deficient ventilation contributed to the explosion but it was also stated that if the men knew of the existence of gas, they would sweep it out with their jackets! [This activity carried a three months gaol sentence in the South Wales coalfield.] Richard lingered until 4th September. (BMe 29.8.1863, MIR, IP)

William James (19)

repairer, injured in a fall of stone at South Liberty, 21st February 1879 and died at the General Hospital on 1st March. John Henry Davy said the deceased was at work 'filling up' in a part of the workings where coal had been cleared out when a large piece of clod broke away from the roof and fell on his right leg, breaking it below the knee. Medical evidence showed that traumatic gangrene had set in and it was found necessary to amputate the leg. The young man died two days later from blood poisoning.

(MIR. BO 8.3.1879)

Edwin Javins - see William Bolt, 1851

Henry Jones - see Benjamin Jacobs, 1889

Samuel Jones - see Henry Thomas, 1886

Benjamin Ford Joseph (20)

a trammer at Ashton Vale, his duty was to stay a little down the incline to unhitch the trams as they were drawn up by the winding engine. Albert Bissicks who was working with him stated that on this occasion, 9th April 1877 he was caught between the trams and a post by the side of the road. The trams went over his head, killing him at once. (BO 14.4.1877)

Albert Latham - see Henry Thomas, 1886

James Marsh - see Henry Thomas, 1886

Benjamin Marshall - see William Tyler, 1853

Henry Marshall (38)

repairer killed by a fall of the roof at South Liberty 7.5.1896. (MIR)

John Meak (26)

sinker, killed by falling down Frayne's Pit at Ashton Gate Colliery on 6th June 1891. John Phillips told the inquest he and the deceased were enlarging the pit, 100 yards from the bottom. They had made a hole preparatory to blasting and they needed some powder from the top of the pit so they sent for the bucket to go up. The bucket was placed between the scaffold and the side of the pit. At that time the two men were standing together. The man at the top, the engine driver, began to winch the bucket up. It had gone some feet when the deceased left him and stepped on a loose plank which had been placed to steady the scaffold and to cover over a

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hole. Phillips called him to come back and stand with him on the scaffold so that he might catch hold of the chains, but he only folded his arms and laughed, saying "Cousin, you're afraid". Just then the plank lifted up and Meak fell to the bottom of the pit. They had worked together since Easter.

John Jenkins, sinker, with Jeremiah Skinner, a joint contractor of the enlargement of the shaft, said he had worked in various collieries in the Forest of Dean and Pembrokeshire. In enlarging the shaft he had only used this particular type of scaffolding once before and that was a shaft of no great depth and the sides were walled. Nevertheless he did not think it dangerous and said he was not afraid to work on it.

The coroner said the planks ought to be fixed to the scaffolding in some better way to prevent their slipping but he believed the poor fellow was in some way the instrument of his own misfortune and if he had listened to Phillips's warning he might now be alive. Mr Moses Cowcill, representing the company, undertook that steps should be taken to minimise the dangers to the men when they were working in the shaft. William Whitefield, of the Union attended on behalf of the miners and also present was Mr J.S. Martin, District Colliery Inspector. (MIR. BO 13.6.1891)

James Mereweather - see William Alford, 1889

Benjamin Milkins - see Benjamin Jacobs, 1889

James Millard - see Henry Thomas, 1886

William Mitchell (23)

died by an explosion of gas at no 29 heading, South Liberty pit, 21st September 1875. The heading was badly ventilated due to an earlier accident which went unreported by a young fireman - "too inexperienced for so onerous a position" said the Mines' Inspector. There was no danger signal and the area was not fenced off. There was nothing to stop Mitchell from going straight into the open heading with a lighted candle. James Mitchell, his father, working with him, said he went to search for an iron bar to use for propping and he could not tell how far he had gone into the opening but had evidently shifted his position after the blast, presumably trying to crawl out. He was taken to the General Hospital with burns to his back, arms and chest. He died just over a week later from shock caused by the burns. George Parker, the overman said William should have applied to him if he needed propping. He had no business going into the opening. In fact the men had been forbidden to go there. It had not been barricaded off because he was in the habit of going there to check the area himself. Isaac Parker, the young fireman referred to in the MIR report had the previous night noted a slight presence of firedamp. He did not report it but mentioned the air pipe was broken. The jury said when gas was discovered a warning board should be put up. A week later four more men were killed in the same pit. [see James Willing] (MIR. BO 9.10.1875)

William Mitchell (16)

crushed by an escaped tub at South Liberty 28.4.1891 whilst working in the incline 'due to neglect in part of the person at the top.' Three overmen working with the boy managed to escape by throwing themselves into the



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refuge holes. 'It was said that the father of this lad was killed at the same colliery about 16 years ago.' (presumably William Mitchell, above)  
(MIR. BO 2.5.1891)

Robert Moffatt, leaving a wife & 7 children  
Thomas Pike, leaving a wife & 2 children  
William Smith, unmarried  
Philip Pring, leaving a wife and young child  
William Webster (14)

In 1851 our newspapers did not employ banner headlines to scream from the front pages. Tucked away in the middle of the Bristol Mirror of 16th August 1851 is the line

"FRIGHTFUL ACCIDENT AT BEDMINSTER. SIX LIVES LOST."

At Malago coalworks (identified as being 'behind *The Red Cow* Bedminster') at 3.20 am on the previous Saturday morning a shift of men and boys had climbed into the bucket for their descent of 240 fathoms (more than threequarters of a mile) below ground. The flat rope which was attached to the bucket broke at the top. The whole of the rope and the bonnet of the bucket, not less than three tons in weight fell on the men, crushing them to death.

Two men, John Reynolds and Henry Lovell went to investigate but could not get down the shaft. The engineer had seen 'the defect in the rope as it went past, but could not intervene in time.'

The terrifying boom of the disaster gun brought out the people from their cottages and they hurried to the pithead; mothers, fathers, wives and children, their faces harrowed with anxiety, waited with pitiful helplessness. One man, Thomas Parsons, became so agitated with the knowledge that his son was trapped somewhere underground had a heart attack and dropped down dead. Dawn came. And morning. And afternoon. It was more than twelve hours before the first bodies, those of Moffatt and Pring, fearfully mutilated, were brought out. Two women fainted.

An inquest dealt first with the death of Thomas Parsons. Ironically, young Parsons had been working in a lower vein and was brought out alive and well.

Francis Smith, a coalminer of North Street and the brother of William Smith was called. He believed that if a scaffold had been erected over the deep casual water at the bottom of the shaft then three out of the five might have been saved. George Cook, aged fourteen, of West Street, had a remarkable escape. He had been in the bucket with the rest but had been let out at the top vein.

"When I was about 30 yards into the vein I heard the rope break. I was walking down a gang at the time. Fifteen others heard the rope break. We remained in the top vein until the afternoon when we were hauled up by a flat rope and cart."

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Before he went down he heard the engineer, George Parker, say "Be I right or be I wrong? I cannot see the witness of the rope." "The witness", continued this articulate young man, "is a piece of string tied round the rope to tell the engineer when to stop. Six of us told Mr Pillinger about the rope turning round. Mr Pillinger is the foreman. He told Arthur Brittan, a man who works in the pit at night to go and look at the rope whilst we were going down. Mr Pillinger said he would have the rope spliced after we were gone down."

Young Cook stood down and was replaced by John Ellis, of North Street, the banksman at the pit. He denied hearing the complaints when the five deceased and the boy Cook got into the cart. He did not apprehend any danger. He heard neither cry from below nor a splash. He was with seven others when the rope broke; the carpenter and the blacksmith and John Rennolds, Henry Smith, Henry Lovell, Arthur Brittan and Henry Pillinger, the bailiff. There were two bailiffs, Pillinger and John Phillips. They were over Ellis and the other banksman, James Durbin. Mr Stewart the manager was over the bailiffs. He worked nearly all day but was not there at night. Having established the hierarchy of the pit, Ellis stood down and Arthur Brittan of Back Lane was called.

"When I came up out of the pit I was asked by Pillinger to stand by him and examine the splice as it passed by. I had no chance to do it. Before I could see the splice the rope broke. Pillinger said

'Arthur, the rope is turning!'

Commonly after making a joint we examine it for five or six days."

James Parker, the engine driver said he never saw anything the matter with the rope. Two men, Richard Brookman, the blacksmith and a man called Brown had examined the rope just before midnight and had found nothing wrong. He had never heard any of the men complain.

Henry Watts passionately disagreed. "We have been dissatisfied with the rope and spoke about it amongst ourselves but not to any master. It kept on being cut so often. It was not safe. It was an old rope. Men do not like to speak their minds as they ought to do!"

More evidence was given regarding the state of the rope by Inspector Alexander of the Bedminster Police, William Binding, P.C. Brittan, Mr Brookman the blacksmith and William Hazell. After the latest splicing the rope had not been inspected by Pillinger or the manager, Moses Stewart.

The body of the court had been growing increasingly restless and the last remark caused uproar. Mr Bevan, solicitor for the owners rose to his feet and testified he had examined the rope on Friday by the light of a large fire and candles and noticed no mark or fracture in it. Audible breaths of disbelief were drawn at the lawyer's remarks and the court was still noisy, suspecting a whitewash, when Walter Smith was called. He said he had worked at the Malago pit for almost a year and had suspected the rope to be dangerous because it was so often spliced.



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"The rope is bad from top to bottom. We told Henry Pillinger it was not safe. We would never venture down more than four or five at a time. I think there is scarcely a man underground who hasn't complained of it."

This witness as he gave his evidence became increasingly agitated. The atmosphere in the court was volcanic.

"On Saturday morning, just before the accident there were five in the cart and two others got on, but we ordered them off. This was in Pillinger's presence. I am not sure if he heard it."

All eyes swivelled towards Henry Pillinger, as staring at the ground, he shook his head in agreement. The next statement from the box was even more inflammatory.

"I have looked at the two pieces of rope produced. I do not believe either of them to belong to the rope that was broken on Friday night!"

Shouts were now heard from all over the court. One collier voiced the opinion of all. "We dare not speak our minds!" In the general clamour, the witness Watts was heard to say "I shall be turned out of work for what I have said today....."

The coroner considered the evidence he had heard and brought in a verdict of manslaughter against Henry Pillinger, the bailiff and Moses G. Stewart, the manager. The two Malago officials were sent for trial at the next Gloucestershire Assizes. [Presumably it was felt that a calmer atmosphere would prevail in the next county, though trials were usually in the county where an alleged offence took place, in this case, Somerset.] Pillinger and Stewart were held in custody for two weeks and then bailed for £40 each and sureties of £20, by 'four respectable merchants of Bedminster'. They immediately resumed their duties at the pit, where unrest still boiled. A newly obtained rope had been willfully cut and a £30 reward offered for the perpetrator. (B.Mi. B.Me 16.8./30.8.1851)

[The case was not heard until the following April. Pillinger and Stewart were acquitted. It appears Henry Pillinger left Bedminster and went to South Wales. On the death of his wife he remarried a Welsh woman. He eventually returned to Bedminster, and again worked as a coalminer.]

(BGa 8.4.1852)

Thomas Morgan (55)

was working at Dean Lane with Charles Bellringer and John Haskins between 2 and 3 o'clock in the morning. The three were riggers, straining the wire ropes which extended from the top to the bottom of the pit to steady the cage. As this was being done, one of the fastenings gave way, causing 40 feet of slack rope which was hanging over the cage to come up, hitting Mr Morgan on the head and off his perch. He was thrown 50 yards to the pit bank. He died of his injuries. Mr Cadman, the inspector, examined the procedure and recommended [though he could not enforce the ruling] that Mr Bennett, the proprietor should use some other manner of connecting the rope. Bennett retorted that he had studied methods at a pit in Dudley where 500 tons per day were raised and thought it very safe. The coroner, though clearly uneasy, said the jury could bring in no other verdict but accidental death and this they returned accordingly. (BO 21.10.1876)

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Samuel Moxham (or Moxall) - see Henry Thomas, 1886

Sarah Nash

'As some children were playing about a coalpit near Bedminster on Sunday a little girl named Sarah Nash took hold of the rope attached to the windlass to shew her playmates how the men went down into the pit and on letting it go she lost her balance and was precipitated to the bottom. Instant death ensued.'

(Bmi 26.9.1829)

Joseph [or James] Nicholls (37)

coalminer, was at work at New Deep Pit [Bedminster Coal Co.] at the bottom of the shaft and in an attempt to jump a few feet to remove a plank, his foot slipped and he fell violently against a rock, fracturing his skull. He died instantly.

(Bmi 16.4.1853)

Solomon Oatway (48)

was taken to hospital after injuries received at Ashton Vale on 3rd August 1889. Joseph Thompson his workmate told the inquest that they were taking out a pillar of coal. Originally it had seemed perfectly safe and there was a prop under it but they noticed "the stone had gone bad" - there was a great split in it - and were attempting to put another prop under it when it fell on them. They were in darkness when the stone fell and Henry Clark who was with them ran for assistance. Thompson was injured in the body and Oatway in the back and legs. The inquest decided the injuries were not sufficient to cause death and Mr William Newnham, surgeon at the General Hospital disclosed that Oatway had been suffering from long standing heart disease. Natural causes was given as cause of death.

(MIR. BO 10.8.1889)

Edward Oldfield (37)

engine driver, found in the fly wheel at Ashton Vale 21.4.1899 with severe head injuries from overwinding.

(MIR)

John Paget (26)

killed at Dean Lane 4.11.1884 by an explosion of firedamp.

(MIR)

William Painter (17)

stoker, killed on the surface at Ashton Vale by over-winding, 17.9.1874.

(MIR)

----- Parker

a boy, not employed by the works, was drowned in the colliery pond at Ashton Vale on 8.8.1884.

(MIR)

Joseph Parker (14)

was crushed between a railway truck and the screen at Malago Vale [Bristol Colliery Col] on 22nd May 1882. Very seriously injured, he lingered until the following 29th January.

(MIR. 1882)

William Parker see James Willing, 1875

William Payne see James Willing, 1875





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John Pedder (16)

a coal thrower at Ashton Vale pit. A block of coal fell on him whilst working at No 6 vein with Charles Moore, 6th February 1866, causing his death. (BO 6.2.1866, MIR)

Frederick Pike (24) single

Charles Rowland (24) single

John Woodbridge, a lad

Simon Durbin, a lad

were killed in an accident at 7 pm on the 19th December 1854 at Bedminster North Side [belonging to Messrs Garrett] through the breaking of one of the four 'holding down bolts' attached to the plumbing blocks, which caused the drum to become disengaged from the engine. The weight of the rope [200 fathoms of it] together with that of the cart and the four passengers set the drum running, precipitating them to the bottom of the shaft. Broken machinery was scattered in all directions. A large piece of the cog wheel was thrown fifty yards and fell through the roof of a nearby cottage narrowly missing a woman who was putting her baby to bed. One of the pieces of the drum fell a quarter of a mile away in a field called Chessalls and buried itself in the ground. John Milsom who had been employed at North Side for four years and a coalminer from his youth said he was in a "coal house" with his little boy at the bottom of the shaft when the accident happened. He heard a rustling noise and saw the rope pass "in the twinkling of an eye". He heard one of the men cry out. He made his way to the bottom of the shaft, followed by other hands. They commenced moving the rope which took them until 2 o'clock the following morning. The bodies were found in 'the crock' of water at the bottom of the pit. One was still in the cart in a sitting position. (LT.20.12.1854, BO.23.12.1854)

Thomas Pike - see Robert Moffatt, 1851

John Pincott (29)

collier, who 'died at Ashton Vale from injuries received on 3rd March 1887 whilst standing by a prop when part of the roof fell in.' Inquest report in Bristol Observer. (BO 12.3.1887)

Richard Poole

'crushed to death by the sudden fall of a quantity of coal in a pit in Bedminster where he was at work. He has left a wife and two small children to lament his loss.' (FFBJ 5.2.1791)

Charles Poultney (34)

[married to Julia, who gave evidence of identification] and who died from the 'effects of a small explosion' of firedamp at Argus Pit, Malago Vale whilst working with a naked light as did all the workers at this pit. John Batey, mining engineer for the Malago Company told the Coroner "The issue of gas in this unexpected manner has shaken my confidence in working the Bedminster Great Vein with naked lights."

Coroner: "You have never had doubts before?"

Witness: "No Sir, I have not."

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Nevertheless in his summing up the Coroner said "the management knew better than the jurymen what lamps were best used in the pit."

(MIR.BMe.BO 6.9.1890)

[This Charles was perhaps the son of the ubiquitous Charles Poultney, perennial survivor.]

Philip Pring - see Robert Moffatt, 1851

Douglas Rennolds (20)

was at work at South Liberty 6th December 1876 when a large coal fell from the roof striking him on the head and back and killing him instantly. 'It is only about a month since John Budd was killed at the same pit in similar circumstances.'

(BO 9.12.1876)

Henry Reynolds (40)

was a miner in the employ of the Ashton Vale Iron Co. He was knocked down by a runaway tram on 24th February 1897 when going along the top vein of the pit. 'A tram running wild, he became confused and failed to stand out of the way.'

(BO 6.3/13.3.1897.MIR)

Albert Richards (30) - *Herbed St, Bed* 8M 27/11/1891  
banksman at Dean Lane, fell 50 yards from the bottom of the shaft on 25th November 1891 when he and a boy had gone to see to the ventilating furnace.

(MIR)

William Sidney Roberts - see Benjamin Jacobs, 1889

Charles Rowland - see Frederick Pike, 1854

Charles Russell

died in South Liberty Pit in August 1917 by the fall of the roof. "He was somewhere under Bedminster Down when the roof caved in and he was pinned to the ground by a boulder. He died as soon as resuers attempted to move the stone. My mother [his grand-daughter] treasures his brass watch holder which he was carrying in his pocket when he died." (Letter, Mrs Ann Felton)

Frank Russell (22)

was walking with his father along the main level at Dean Lane Colliery when he saw a man cleaning up after a fall. Good naturedly, he said "I'll shovel up a bit if you like." He had scarcely taken the man's place when a stone fell upon him from the roof and he received injuries of which he died in one hour.

(BO 7.5.1892. MIR)

William Sampson (49)

overman or bailiff at Ashton Vale, killed by a fall of roof on the duke way which had been blasted and was considered safe, 27th January 1888. Cornelius Bolt told the inquest that he and Sampson were "coming up the new incline when Sampson stopped suddenly about a yard in front of him and said there was something dropping. Almost immediately a stone weighing 4 to 5 hundredweight fell on him. Other stones amounting to 1 - 2 tons also fell. He was got out within a few minutes but was dead. The accident happened in a main road which was in the course of being made. It was properly shored up but there was no shoring worth speaking of under the stone. From where the stone fell it looked like solid roof. Mr J.S. Martin, the inspector said no blame could be attributed to anyone, not even the man himself. "If



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there were it would be to him." (a strange remark!). The coroner summed up and a verdict of accidental death was reached.

The funeral took place at Long Ashton church on the 5th February with a funeral car and three mourning coaches carrying the family. Ashton Vale Colliery was represented by Messrs W. Evans, W.L. Vaughan and Ernest E. Baker. Messrs Parker, Steeds and Millard represented South Liberty Colliery. Also present were 150 colliers, workmates of the deceased. Rev W. Hugh Falloon conducted the funeral service and a member of the non-conformist chapel, Mr Sampson conducted the service at the graveside.

(MIR.BTM 3.2./6.2.1888)

[William Sampson born 7.7.1839 died 27.1.1888, married Hannah Owen 14.5.1862 at St Mary le Port, Bristol. They had fourteen children. In 1871 they lived at Rackey [West Street] Bedminster and in 1881 at Ashton Vale Coalyard. Hannah Owen was the daughter of John Owen, miner, born Milverton Somerset. From 1841-1871 he lived in or around West Street, Bedminster. Hannah's mother was née Bolt and was presumably a kinswoman of the many Bolts who were miners both in Bedminster and in Kingswood.]

Robert Selfe (58), 3 Berkeley Square, North St, Bedminster hewer at Dean Lane, killed by being struck by a prop brought down by a fall of coal from an exceptionally high place. John Selfe, his son, working with him, told of finding clod on top of coal. At the request of his father, he put his pick into the clod and attempted to bring it down. Whilst so doing, some props were knocked out and his father, in attempting to stand clear, stepped into danger. Albert Bourne the overman, working nearby said they managed to bring him to the pit bank, but he was already dead. Mr J.S. Martin, the inspector said the place had been "perfectly safe" and the coal fell from the side of the face. Mr Bennett the owner, said the dead man was very experienced and had worked at the colliery from boyhood, about 40 years. The accident took place on 29.7.1892. (MIR.BO 6.8.1892)

Robert Charles Selfe (19)

of 8 Albert Place, Victoria Road, Bedminster

killed Dean Lane Colliery on Wednesday 16th October 1904. Arthur George Morgan, the incline rider said the deceased was his assistant and had been employed at the works for five months. Ten trucks were joined to form a train but when they were loaded with 'muck' only eight were supposed to be used. On the night of the accident the train consisted of nine trams; seven with muck and two with coal. They had hitched on the load when the engine suddenly reversed for approximately three yards and then started forward again. The rope which pulled the train came off the hook and the trucks ran backwards with a rush. Morgan was thrown off and went to look for his mate. He found the lad pinned to the ground, partially buried and badly crushed. He was alive when the rescue party arrived a quarter of an hour later but only survived one more minute.

Walter Edward Jordan said he had full steam on the engine but it stopped and ran back. Such a thing had happened before and he had drawn the attention of the manager to it. Mr J.S. Martin, [H.M. Inspector] apparently not enquiring too deeply into this statement, said the accident was incomprehensible.

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The Engine House of this pit caught fire three months later. Fortunately most of the employees were away for the day on their annual outing. Two men had to remain underground for twenty four hours, although it was stated they had been in no danger. They were finally rescued by the 'old bucket' which was still in occasional use, drawn by the machinery which usually powered the fan. (BO 19.3./25.6.1904)

[Nothing is told to us about the annual outing, or where the Dean Lane men had gone. The twenty-odd miles to Weston super Mare on an excursion train is a possibility. For a description of such an occasion interested readers might turn to the chapter entitled 'The Beano' in the wonderful working class novel 'The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists' by Robert Tressell.]

Thomas Selway (49)

an inquest was held at the Plough and Windmill on Thomas Selway, coalminer at work at Ashton Vale 21st July 1875 when a large stone, 5 or 6 cwt in weight fell and crushed him to death. John Tovey who was working near him gave evidence. Several men employed in the pit and Mr Lionel Brough, Inspector of Mines for the district said the roof was well secured and the accident could not have been foreseen. (MIR. BO 31.7.1875)

Henry Smith

was killed during the sinking of the shaft at Malago Pit. When he 'was some way down the pit, a large stone fell on his head and knocked him to the bottom where there was 20 feet of water.' An inquest was held at the Red Cow, Bedminster which recorded an accident verdict. (BMe 30.8.1845)

John Smith, see James Willing, 1875

John Smith (17)

An inquest was held at the Clarence Hotel on John Smith, a blacksmith's striker who died from head injuries received when he fell down Dean Lane Colliery where he was employed. Mr Cadman, the Inspector attended and heard the usual verdict: 'accident'. Young John was buried in the now derelict graveyard at Hebron Methodist Chapel in Bedminster. Carved on his gravestone are the words: 'In loving memory of John Smith, the beloved son of George and Elizabeth Smith, accidentally killed at Dean Lane Colliery April 20 1877 aged 17 years. Parents why weepest thou so sore? I am not lost but only gone before.' (WDP 26.4.1877)

Samuel Smith (52)

of 8 West Street, Bedminster

when working in Frayne's Old Pit had prepared shot for firing but before he could get away a piece of stone struck him in the leg inflicting serious injuries from which he died. (BO 13.6.1891)

William Smith - see Robert Moffatt, 1851.

George Stone

At Messrs Knight's Colliery at Ashton Vale, a furnace which was used for melting minerals had lain idle for a long time. George Stone was ordered to light it. Fumes from the sulphur 'deprived him of his senses and he was precipitated into the furnace'. The foreman, Avon Williams, saw Stone fall and tried to get him out by stretching a ladder into the furnace, but he



Killed in a Coalpit - Bedminster

too was overcome. Williams was dragged out unconscious and then Stone. Both men were taken to the General Hospital where Stone died almost at once and Williams was said to be 'in a precarious position'. The deceased 'lived in a little cottage near the London Inn and has left a widow and six children. We trust the sympathies of the benevolent will be aroused to relieve the distress which must attend their sad bereavement.' (BMe 14.3.1863)

Thomas Summerhill (75)

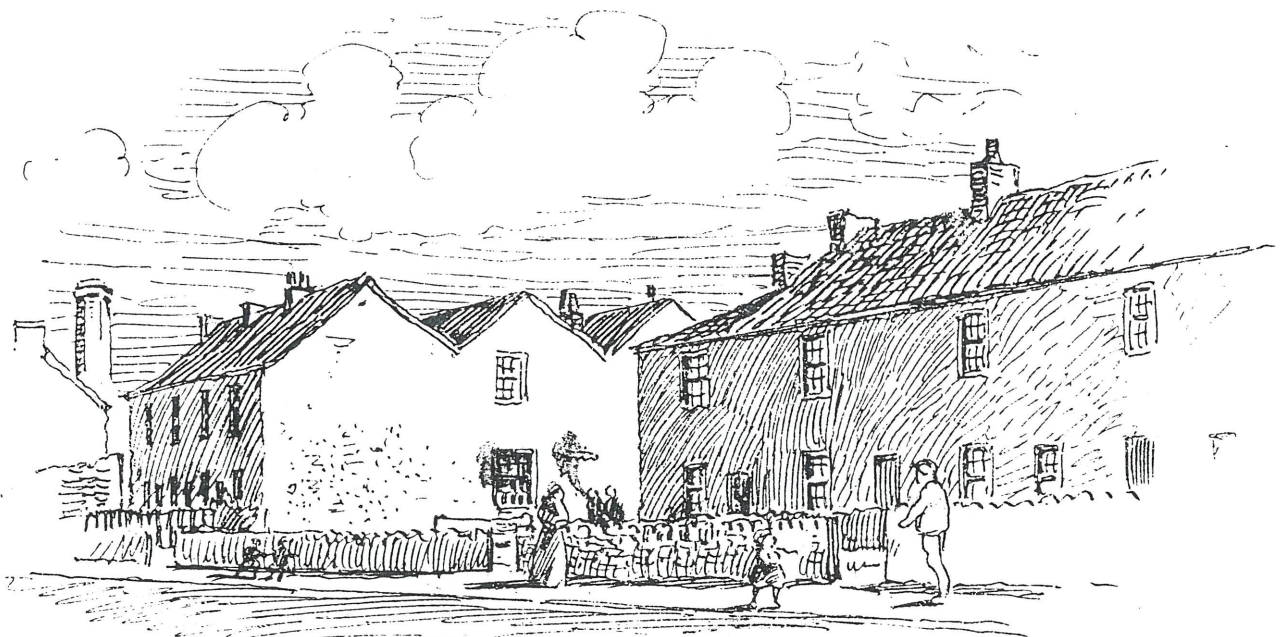
(Summerhill in RM - Regd Bed as Summerhill man 1865)  
The cage at Ashton Vale Colliery had become so 'deranged' it did not catch the lifting gates in a secure manner. When the banksman discovered this he raised the gates high up the pit framing and fastened them there. At half past four on Friday morning Thomas Summerhill went to work. There were no lights near the pit, only a large fire burning near the mouth of the shaft. The fire supposedly dazzled the old man's eyes and he walked right past the watchman who was supposed to keep people from going that way and fell into the pit. All the man in charge saw of him "was his feet as he fell headlong down the shaft" [220 yards]. (BTM 24.1.1865)

[Thomas was born in August 1793 so in fact was in his seventy third year. He was baptised at Bitton, Gloucestershire on 9th February 1794, aged six months, the son of Thomas and Rachel Summerill, nee Skinner. The Summerills had been miners at Siston since time immemorial and Rachel's ancestors, the Skinners and the Coles had mined coal at Westerleigh and Yate since the early 1700's. Thomas was the brother of my great, great grandmother, Jane Summerill, and the brother in law of Stephen Pillinger, my great, great grandfather. Both Stephen and Jane lost brothers, killed in the pits. See 'Killed in a Coalpit I' - the Kingswood Pits].

George Taylor - see Thomas Bolt, 1891

Albert Thomas (25)

carter killed by a fall of roof in a very steep seam at South Liberty Pit  
1st October 1895. (MIR)



Miners cottages at Bedminster Down

Killed in a Coalpit - Bedminster

Henry Thomas (16)

of Stanley Street, North Street

was a tram boy at Dean Lane, clearing rubbish with George Padfield who was making a heading. Philip Collins, the under-bailiff talked of meeting with the boy and asking him how it was inside no 13. The boy replied "All right, Philip." George Padfield was using a Davy Lamp as he had detected signs of gas. In his hurry to escape he stumbled over Thomas. It mystified everybody why Padfield escaped whilst the boy was burnt. The jury deliberated a few minutes before bringing in a verdict of accidental death. A larger catastrophe happened on the next day when the following perished:

~~WAT~~ HIGHNAM a boy  
George Hyman (19) of Beaufort Street, West Street

Robert Tovey (19) of 4 Buckingham Street

John Brake (14) of Mill Lane, tram boy

James Millard (17) of Beaufort Street, West Street, tram boy

William Garland (29) of Bedminster Down, leaving a wife & 5 children

Richard Davis (27) of Bedminster Down, leaving a wife & one child

James Marsh (34) of Leigh Hill, leaving a wife & 7 children

Samuel Moxham (48) leaving a wife & 4 children.

Samuel Jones (26) married, Tovey's Buildings, West Street

Albert Latham (19) of 12 Farley Square, Coronation Road.

'TERRIBLE COLLIERY ACCIDENT AT BEDMINSTER.'

'Eight Killed and Ten Injured.'

'An explosion occurred yesterday at the Dean Lane Pit of the Bedminster Colliery Company. This colliery is one of great importance and has very extensive workings running in various directions beneath the ground. It employs a considerable number of hands who are engaged on day and night shifts. The pit is not included in the list of fiery mines and the miners generally use naked lights in their work. There have been several slight explosions, at long intervals, arising from blowers - the sudden irruption of gas or from carelessness of the men (sic!) but yesterday was the most serious accident that has ever occurred at the colliery. The part where the accident happened is in the lower workings. From the surface a shaft 450 yards deep takes the miners into the pit and a short distance from there a second shaft of 50 yards deep leads to an incline about 300 yards long. The centre of the explosion seems to have been about two thirds of the way down this incline. It was a place admirably ventilated as a rule, the ventilation being obtained by a furnace which draws up the foul air and creates an up and down current. It is a singular fact that lately the miners have been complaining at their candles burning away quicker than usual in the strong draughts through the mine. On Thursday night the place was inspected by Solomon Wright, an overman, and was then all right and at four o'clock on Friday morning when the fireman, Isaac Wright went round, there was no indication of firedamp. The day overman, James Horler came up from this part of the working through the windroad between one and two o'clock yesterday and his report was satisfactory. Even as late as a quarter of an hour before the accident occurred, a workman is said to have come up from a part of the pit near the incline and then there was nothing to occasion alarm. There were in the pit considerably over 100 men but where the explosion occurred only twenty were engaged and these were some little distance from each other. The explosion occurred at ten minutes to three o'clock. It was at such a great depth below ground that there were



## Killed in a Coalpit - Bedminster

scarcely any indications of it on the surface. Some stated they fancied they heard a report, but others heard nothing. Men in other parts of the colliery had the first tidings given to them when they came to the top. The news of the disaster however quickly spread, the district being one teeming with colliers and their friends. In a short time a crowd assembled round the colliery gates. Only those who had business in the yard or relatives supposed to be below ground were admitted, and the upcast and downcast shafts were surrounded by a crowd eagerly anxious for news. Exaggerated reports were circulated and in all directions one heard that 40 or 50 had been killed. Happily things were not so serious as this, though the calamity was sad enough. At the outside, it appeared that but twenty ran any risk. Mr John Bennett, the manager of the colliery, with his brother Mr A.H. Bennett were amongst the first to descend. The exploring party who accompanied them consisted of

Mr W. Morgan, mining engineer  
Solomon Wright, overman  
Thomas Masters  
William Owen  
Alfred Owen  
Charles Willicombe  
Thomas Stone  
John Milkins, fireman  
James Horler, overman  
Jonah Clarke, overman  
William Selfe  
George Rowland, overman  
George Day  
Isaac Hamilton, fireman  
Thomas Nichols  
Philip Collins, overman  
Henry Hall.

'After the descent there was a prolonged wait. The force of the explosion prevented the sufferers being easily reached and the thickness of the afterdamp was another serious difficulty but one which was soon remedied by the admission of fresh air and a restoration of ventilation. Within a couple of hours six of the men had been brought up. One of these was George Hyman, a young man nineteen years of age, who had been killed almost instantly, being dreadfully injured. His body was taken into a shed near the shaft and there allowed to remain. Two young fellows, brothers were brought up suffering shock and the effects of chokedamp. They were Tom and Harry Coles, aged respectively 20 and 18, and both living at 6, Slade's Buildings. Dr Brennan the medical man who attended cases at the colliery looked after these two and in a short time they were sent to hospital. They were unable to walk but were among the least injured. Two other cases were Joseph Jefferies, aged 15 of 3, Parson Street and Moses Rowland, (25), of Mill Lane, both burnt in the face and arms. None were sufficiently well as to be able to make any explanation of what had occurred. Jefferies and Rowland were driven by ambulance to the General Hospital. Edward Summers, of 21, Myrtle Street, burnt about the arms and legs, remained at the works lying in a shed. Mr Henry Bennett, owner of the colliery arrived with his daughter, Mrs Hanes on a visit from Liverpool, who was most kind in her attention to the sufferers. The Reverends C.E. Storrs, the vicar, Weir and

## Killed in a Coalpit - Bedminster

Davies, curates of St Paul's Church and Rev. J. Woolcock [Bible Christian Chapell] were present in case they could give any help and later Rev. A.C. Anstey came.

'Jabez Gilson\*, a boy who normally worked with Summers, although in close proximity of the explosion, escaped injury and was one of the first to come above ground. The men so far recovered were probably employed at the end of the working nearest the shaft. It was a long time before any fresh survivors appeared. As darkness came on, numerous lamps were lit up and then a blazing fire near the shaft illuminated the large crowd and its black surroundings and made one of those scenes which are not easily forgotten. Anxious relatives pressed forward to learn if anything was known of those below and in many cases a feeling that the worst had happened to the loved one found expression. At half past seven Mr John Bennett came to the surface, hot and grimy as a collier and fatigued with the exertions he had been making together with the rest of the rescue party. He had nearly succumbed to the deadly gas and was unable to give any cheering news to the bystanders. Dr Brennan, though unfamiliar with matters underground immediately went below to assist removal of those who were still living. Doctors Logan, Keal and Page [Bristol Dispensary] took charge above ground in his absence. A staff of twenty five police cleared a large space between the shed and shaft, and strewed the ground thickly with straw. It was clear that there were living to be attended to and hammer signals were counted for information on this point: In colliery fashion three blows indicated the cage was coming up in the ordinary manner, four for caution: there was a wounded man in the cage and six for a dead body. Small trams well strewn with straw were used to bring up the wounded and in nearly every case a collier sat in the trolley to support an injured friend. Shortly after half past seven, the crowd pressed forward to witness the latest arrival who was said to be 'Bill Garland'. He was badly burnt and taken to hospital. [Identification being difficult in the poor light, there was a mistake, for Garland was later found among the dead.] Again the cage ascended, and Isaac Gibbs, 27 years of age, married with one child, living at Easton was identified. A powerfully built man, quite unconscious from chokedamp. He was a hewer, stripped to the waist and must have been in the midst of work when overtaken by the asphyxiating atmosphere. Dr Keal by working the arms 'as in the case of a person recovered from drowning' induced weak respiration but the case was a severe one and the artificial breathing was maintained by the doctors for a long time. Then a lad came up, first said to be called Millard, but afterwards recognised as Samuel Bolt, (15) of West Street. He too was choked, but the artificial breathing was effectual and he became conscious in five to ten minutes. He was despatched to hospital. Will Summers, usually known as Collins, a brother of the badly burnt Edward was brought up, unconscious from afterdamp. Respiration was restored in this case also. Samuel Jones, a married man, was lifted from the cage suffering from burns and taken to hospital. This was the tenth injured man brought up and there was one dead. There were supposed to be seven still below, six accounted for and one missing. It was feared all were dead and the melancholy task of bringing these up was commenced at 10 o'clock. The first was Robert Tovey, 'whose calm expression showed that death had been from afterdamp.' John Brake, a boy, was then brought up. This poor lad had been severely burnt nine months ago in the same spot. William Garland had been burnt in the explosion, whilst James Marsh looked quite peaceful. The last to be brought up was George Hyman who had been at



## Killed in a Coalpit - Bedminster

work at the top of the short shaft sunk from the main working and it was supposed that when the explosion took place he was just about to place a tram of coal on the lift. The force of the explosion blew the cage right up the shaft and jammed it in the wheel above and Hyman fell down the opening, meeting with his death in the fall. The bodies of the deceased were laid out in the carpenter's shop where relatives were admitted to view the remains of those who a few hours before had been full of life and vigour.'

In the early hours of Saturday morning, 11th September, two more men died, Samuel Jones, and Albert Latham, aged 19, who at first was mistakenly believed to be William Garland. Maria Wyatt, who kept the lodging house where he had lived with his mother and father for the past fifteen months said the lad was their sole maintainence.

(WDP 11.9./27.9./28.9 1886.BMe 11.9.1886)

[Samuel Moxham's widow Louisa was expecting a fifth child. The baby was born in May 1887 and named Samuel after his late father. Sadly the boy lived only six months. "An allowance of 6d per week per child was made by the Pit Authority to Louisa provided she did not remarry - she didn't. She sold vegetables to supplement this income. It was undoubtedly hard. She was a deeply religious person and for many years cleaned the West Street Congregational Chapel, Bedminster. Eventually when her children were grown up she left the house where they were living at the time of the tragedy and moved into a small cottage belonging to the Chapel."]

(Mrs M.J. Hollier, great grand-daughter of Samuel Moxham)

[\*Jabez is called Gilson by the Inspector, Gibson by the newspaper report]

Messrs J. Bros and T. Cadman enquired into the Dean Lane disaster and reported their findings to the Government.

Dean Lane Colliery Explosion, made to the Secretary of State for the Home Department, by J. Bros, Esquire, Counsel attending the Coroner's Inquest in behalf of the Secretary of State, and Thomas Cadman, Esquire, one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Mines.

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# REPORTS

TO

HER MAJESTY'S SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE HOME  
DEPARTMENT

ON THE

DEAN LANE COLLIERY EXPLOSION,

BY

J. BROS, ESQ.,  
BARRISTER-AT-LAW;

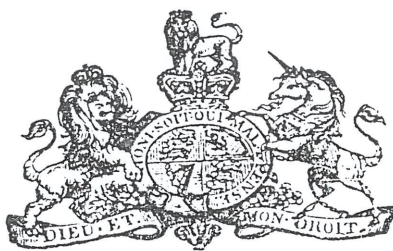
AND BY

T. CADMAN, ESQ.,  
ONE OF HER MAJESTY'S INSPECTORS OF MINES.

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Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty.

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PRINTED FOR HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE.  
BY EYRE AND SPOTTISWOODE,  
PRINTERS TO THE QUEEN'S MOST EXCELLENT MAJESTY.  
BARRISTER-AT-LAW;

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# REPORTS

ON THE

Dean Lane Colliery Explosion, made to the Secretary of State for the Home Department, by J. Bros, Esquire, Counsel attending the Coroner's Inquest in behalf of the Secretary of State, and Thomas Cadman, Esquire, one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Mines.

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From MR. BROS to the RIGHT HON. THE SECRETARY OF STATE.

7, Fig Tree Court, Temple,  
October 19, 1886.

SIR,

ACCORDING to instructions, I attended the inquest held at Bedminster on the 20th of September and following days; the jury returned a verdict of accidental death. I have the honour to report that in my opinion that verdict was in accordance with the evidence.

The explosion took place on Friday, September 10th, about 2 o'clock in the day, in one of the lower seams, at an archway on the landing from the shaft, known as "the tip." This is not the main shaft, but a single shaft worked in connexion with it; the trams of coal are brought up an incline and wait on the landing under the archway until put into the cage or "skip" and sent up the "tip," and thence transferred along a gallery to the main shaft.

The evidence, both direct and indirect, pointed to the archway as the place of the explosion, but it was not clear how the gas collected there. The jury found, as part of their verdict, that there was a sudden irruption of gas from a fissure in the seam above the archway; this was only conjecture. On the other hand, the representatives of the deceased suggested that the gas collected at the workings and came up the incline, but this was contrary to the evidence. According to the system of ventilation the mouth of the archway was the main intake of air, and the rush of air would have swept the gas down the incline.

The explosion was comparatively small in its effects. The man Moses Rowland and the boy Jefferies, who were employed under the archway "skipping" the coal trams, were injured by the explosion, but not fatally; whereas the men who were engaged at the workings, on hearing the explosion, ran out into the incline, and some were killed by the after-damp which rolled down upon them; those who survived remained behind the wind-doors, and so did not come within the influence of the deadly gas. The result of the explosion seems to have been that the coal-dust was fired, and this not only singed the clothes and burnt some of the bodies in the incline, but also consumed the oxygen, so that the after-damp was more fatal than the fire. If this view is correct, and I have no reason to doubt it, the explosion was caused by gas which ignited in the archway, and the death of those men in the incline was accidental.

I may here state that the men were working with naked lights, but as that is the custom not only in that pit, but generally in the whole Bristol coal-field, which is considered non-fiery, there was no negligence on the part of the managers or bailiffs. The Inspectors of Mines have now recommended that lamps should be used in the whole of this seam.

Although in this view the question of ventilation did not affect the accident, for it was not contended that there was not plenty of air in the archway, this matter was thoroughly gone into at the inquest. The contention of some of the men was that the gas collected down in the workings, exploded there and came up the incline; this, however, was not supported by any evidence. The principle of the ventilation of this part of the pit seems to have been



good, but the air-ways on one side were too narrow ; in some places it was with difficulty that a man could pass. There seems to have been sufficient ventilation according to the evidence of those working in the pit on the day of the explosion, but the recommendation of the jury that the main air-way should be kept sufficiently large for men to pass through easily is very important, and ought to be insisted upon especially as that part of the pit is practically worked with a single shaft, the "tip" shaft. There is a communication of sufficient dimensions with another shaft to satisfy the 20th section of the Mines Regulation Act, 1872. The return air-ways form distinct means of ingress and egress available to the persons employed in the seam, for it was in this way that the first of the rescue party went down to the scene of the explosion.

There had been a small amount of gas found on the 1st of September, and the fireman, Isaac Hamilton, whom I consider to be the deputy under the special rules (a copy of which is annexed), on that occasion put up a danger-mark as provided by Rule 25, warned the men who were going down, supplied the man who had to work in that place with a lamp, and reported the matter to the bailiff. The bailiff, in accordance with Rule 15, personally inspected the place ; there was no gas there, it was quite safe. Strictly, under Rule 7, the bailiff ought not to have allowed the men to go down until it had been reported safe ; he, however, considered the danger-mark put up by the deputy a sufficient precaution. I do not consider, under the circumstances, that to be such a breach of the rules as to make it advisable that proceedings should be taken against Henry Hall, the bailiff ; but I have set out these facts, which were not disputed, in order that the conduct of the fireman, Isaac Hamilton, on the 10th of September, the day of the explosion, may be better understood.

Isaac Hamilton, in his examination before the coroner, said that he found no gas on the night before the 10th of September ; he certainly did not report any ; but several of the witnesses said that he had warned them on coming down to be careful, as there was a bit of gas (in the same place as on the 1st of September) ; that he supplied one of them with a gauze lamp to work with ; that he had been seen to test for gas and had found some : this Hamilton denied. There was certainly some ill-feeling between some of the witnesses and Hamilton, but if they spoke the truth Hamilton had neglected his duty, and failed to comply with the special Rule No. 25 in not reporting to the bailiff the presence of gas on the night before the 10th of September.

This is a matter which in my opinion should be inquired into, and on the evidence of these witnesses proceedings taken against Isaac Hamilton.

The neglect of duty on the part of Hamilton, if it should turn out to be so, in my opinion did not affect the accident, as a man had worked at that place and only left the workings a short time before the explosion.

In conclusion, I should like to observe that when this unfortunate accident took place, the conduct of everyone concerned seems to have been admirable, and undoubtedly some human life was saved by the prompt efforts of the managers, overmen, and others to rescue the unfortunate victims of the explosion.

I am, &c.,  
J. BROS.

SIR,

7, Fig Tree Court, Temple,  
October 19, 1886.

On receipt of your letter of the 12th instant, I withheld my report until I had an opportunity of seeing the boy Jefferies, who was not examined before the coroner. I to-day met by appointment Mr. Bain, the Assistant Inspector of Mines, and together we questioned the boy, with the result that our opinion as to the cause of the accident is not altered.

Godfrey Lushington, Esq., Home Office.

I am, &c.,  
J. BROS.

From Mr. CADMAN, Inspector of Mines, to the SECRETARY OF STATE.

SIR.

Lydney, Glos'. November 1, 1886.

I HAVE the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 26th ultimo, B  $\frac{537}{24}$ , enclosing a copy of Mr. Bros's report on the cause of the explosion at Dean Lane Colliery on the 10th September, and I beg to state I quite agree with the conclusion at which he has arrived.

The Dean Lane Colliery is worked by means of two shafts, one up-cast and one down-cast shaft, 500 yards deep, and the seam where the explosion occurred is reached by another shaft 50 yards deep, sunk on the side of the main level, which acts as the down-cast or intake air-way for the seam in question. The return air passing up an inclined road driven on the coal. This pit is known as the "Tip," and at the bottom is a level road about 26 or 27 yards long, on which the full and empty coal tubs stand when waiting to be sent up the shaft; at the end of this level road is an incline to the deep about 300 yards long, worked by an engine at the top of the "Tip." From appearances after the accident it is quite clear that the explosion took place in the level road near the top of the incline, as the archway at this point was blown up; a door was blown towards the return, the cage was blown up into the pulley at the top of the pit, and some charred dust was found on the inside of some timber near the shaft, but all the way down the incline charring and dust was found only on the upper side of the timbers, none on the lower side, showing that the explosion originated above. It is difficult to account for gas being present in the arch in the main current of fresh air unless it came off from a seam of coal which lies over the arch: This is the view which the jury took after hearing the evidence of the skilled witnesses. In my opinion it is impossible that the gas could have fired at the bottom of the incline, as suggested by the men.

With regard to the air-ways, the evidence given at the inquiry showed that the ventilation was sufficient to keep the working clear and free from gas, but on one side of the incline they were decidedly small, so much so that had a fall occurred they might have soon become choked.

Mr. Bain visited the colliery on Saturday, and has reported to me the result of his examination of the air-ways in the gas coal vein where the explosion took place: since the explosion a new wind road has been driven down to the road known as E, and "except for some rubbish which has still to be moved this is complete. Most of the air is now travelling this way but part still goes round the old return which this road has cut off, and the old one will gradually be allowed to close up. The new road will at once be continued to P, and is being made about four feet by five. Below this point the air-ways, which were very contracted at the time of the explosion, have been considerably enlarged, and I had no difficulty in travelling the whole distance along them. Six persons only are employed on the west side below P. The ventilation was good, and I did not discover any trace of gas. The permanent wind way is complete on the east side to the faces where the men work. Fifteen men and boys are employed, and I measured 6,310 cubic feet of air going into the workings. Marsaut lamps are now in use. Mr. Bros, in his report, speaks of the statement made by some of the men that gas was found by the fireman Hamilton in a hole on the morning of the explosion. Solomon Wright was with me yesterday, and he says he was with Hamilton at the time, saw him examine the hole, and that there was no gas there, and he himself went through the place with a naked light. This bears out Hamilton's statement at the inquest."

I submit to you a draft of a notice to the owners of the colliery on this question, which I will send on receiving instructions from you, if you think it desirable. Mr. Bain did not mention the subject when he visited the colliery on Saturday. Immediately after the inquest was over, and before work was resumed on the coal, in accordance with the recommendation of the jury, the air ways were enlarged, and a new one finished which had been commenced before the explosion.

Respecting the caution said to have been given by Hamilton, the fireman, to some men on the morning of the explosion as to the presence of gas in one of the workings, the evidence was so conflicting it is difficult to determine which is correct. The fireman states that he did not find any gas, and he



did not report any; on the other hand the men working in this place say they were cautioned by him before they went in. Considering that Hamilton found gas and reported it and took extra precaution, as was his duty, about a week previously, I am inclined to think that there was a misunderstanding as to the term of the caution, and that it referred only to the state of the roof where a fall had occurred, not to the danger from gas.

I am, &c.,

The Right Hon. the Secretary of State,  
Home Office, Whitehall,  
London.

THOMAS CADMAN.

DRAFT NOTICE (Enclosure in preceding Report).

SIR,

EVIDENCE having been given at the inquest on the bodies of the men killed by the explosion of gas at the Dean Lane Colliery on the 10th September last, that the air-ways in part of the seam in which the explosion occurred were very contracted and small, and that men could only pass through them with difficulty, I hereby give you notice, under the provisions of the 46th section of the Coal Mines Regulation Act, 1872, that I consider the air-ways in part of the mine, owing to their smallness, to be dangerous and defective, and in my opinion to threaten or tend to the bodily injury of the persons employed therein, and by virtue of the power of this section, I require matters complained of to be forthwith remedied.

I am, &c.,

A. H. Bennett, Esq.,  
Bedminster Coal Company,  
Bristol.

THOMAS CADMAN.

FURTHER REPORT OF MR. BROS. TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE.

7, Fig Tree Court, Temple,  
November 27, 1886.

SIR,

IN pursuance of instructions received from the Solicitor to the Treasury, I, with the assistance of the Inspector of Mines, examined the witnesses William Summers and Edward Summers mentioned in Mr. Harty Dunn's letters of October 21st and 27th, 1886, who were not examined at the inquest.

I have the honour to report, for the information of the Secretary of State, that in our opinion they do not bear out the statement of the boy Jefferies (made to his friends), that the fire came up the incline.

Edward Summers, who was in the incline at the time of the explosion, said that "he was engaged with a tram of coal where the P roadway joined the incline, he was in the act of putting the points right when his lamp was blown out, he was thrown against the tram, and while on the ground he was burnt by the gas; he could not say which way the flame came, but he was standing some two yards above the tram and was blown down the incline."

William Summers was in the middle of H roadway, which is on the same side of the incline as P, but further down; he said "the air put out all their candles, he only saw the light in the incline, but could not say which way it went, directly after the light had passed he rushed out into the incline; he heard a noise like a cannon which knocked him off his legs, he got up and tumbled over some men; he remembered getting up before he felt any after-damp; he was not burnt."

Edward Summers made no suggestion that the fire came up the incline, he was blown down the incline, and while on the ground his head and arm were burnt; so the explosion came down the incline, and after it the fire which burnt him.

William Summers could not say which way the light went, but he seemed to have seen it before he heard the noise like a cannon, which he put at an interval of two or three seconds; he was certainly further off the seat of explosion than Edward and close to the bottom of the incline, where the

sound would take longer to reach, and what he called the noise like a cannon might well be the reverberation when the effect of the explosion had reached the bottom of the incline.

We also examined Joseph Jefferies, the boy who was working at the top of the incline; he said "he had his hand on the handle of the points with his face looking down the incline, he was blown with his back against the trams, his hat was blown off, his lamp was blown out, and after that he saw the gas and it lighted up the whole place. He did not see the gas until after he had been knocked against the tram. The effect of the explosion was to blow the trams so that they jumped off the line, and he was blown with them." The boy said fairly enough, he could hardly remember what happened he was so frightened; but he seemed to describe two actions, first when there was a disturbance of the air and he was blown against the trams, and secondly when the trams were driven off the line and he with them. This second action, in the opinion of the Inspector, was the re-action of the pent-up air rushing back towards the place of the explosion, and bringing with it lighted gas or coal-dust at the top of the incline.

Perhaps this is the foundation of the boy Jefferies' statement that the fire came up the incline; that it did not originate the explosion I think is shown by the fact that his hat was blown off and his light blown out and he was knocked against the trams before he saw the lighted gas.

As the question of lighted gas coming from the workings has been suggested, it may be as well to call the attention of the Secretary of State to the evidence given before the coroner as to the condition of the workings at the time of the explosion.

There seemed to have been no gas in the return air-ways an hour before the explosion, for James Horler, the overman, went over part of them with a naked light. James Horler, p. 177, 4th day.

With regard to the workings, to begin with B, Thomas Coles said there was plenty of air. He described the explosion by saying he felt a wind and then pieces of coal flying up; it came through H (i.e., old H), he said he felt a wind with sparks. He was not burned. Henry Coles, who also worked in B, said there was plenty of air up to the time of the explosion, he described the explosion by saying that "dust and bits of coal flied up," he did not see any fire: the bits of coal and dust were blown by the force of the explosion; the force in the air took his hat off; he then heard the explosion. Thomas Coles, p. 4, 1st day. Henry Coles, p. 110, 2nd day.

Isaac Gibbs worked in N. at the bottom of the incline, on the right-hand side he said there was plenty of air; he experienced a rush of wind which blew out their lights; the explosion took place directly afterwards; he saw no fire, he did not know where the explosion took place, the after-damp came down the incline. Isaac Gibbs, p. 17, 1st day.

Samuel Bolt worked in H., where William Summers worked, he said there was plenty of air; his first intimation of the explosion was that the working became suddenly hot, he heard a report immediately afterwards, the rush of air blew his lamp out, he ran out into the incline and became insensible. He saw no flame, there was some coal-dust flying about, he could not say which way. p. 139, 2nd day. p. 142, 2nd day.

In P workings, the place where Jenkins and others said there was gas that morning, Jabez Gilson said there was plenty of air before the explosion, he was lying down as Jenkins and the rest of his shift had gone up, having finished their work. He described the effect of the explosion, for he did not hear it; he felt a concussion of the air, the current blew from the road; he felt the heat go up his leg; there was not much rush of air, it did not disturb the coal-dust, but his candle was blown out. p. 148, 2nd day.

The only working not directly spoken to by a survivor is new K, but there on the wall was found a candle unmelted, also some clothes unsinged, and the cobwebs and fibres of wood showed that fire had not passed over them. John Bennett, p. 56, 1st day.

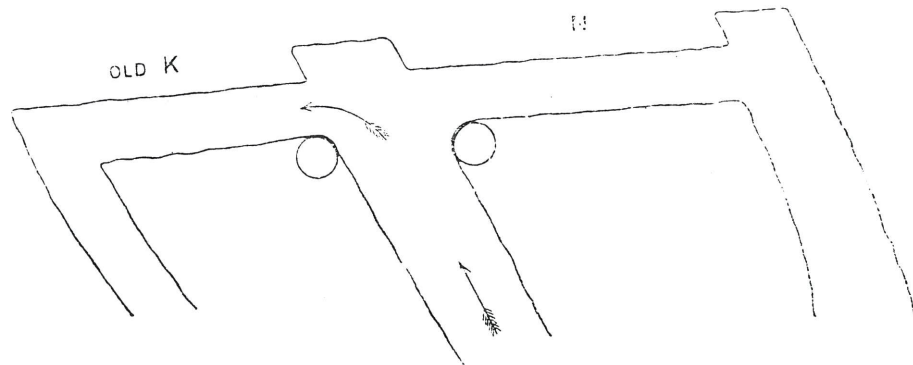
There were no traces of any earlier explosion or lighting of gas, there were no signs of fire in the road-ways, except in old K, which was in the line of the explosion. W. Morgan, p. 222, 4th day.

The immediate effect of the explosion was to drive the particles of coal-dust against the timbers all down the incline, then by the action of the fire the coal-dust became "coked" against the projecting timbers of the roof and sides. Solomon Wright, p. 91, 4th day.



William  
Morgan,  
p. 218, 4th  
day.

The force of the explosion seemed to have exhausted itself at the bottom of the incline after it turned into old K, the corner post was more charred round that side than on the other, being in fact more in the direct line of explosion.



The secondary effect of the explosion was to destroy the ventilation, for the archway being blown up, part of it fell in and thereby made an opening into the return air-way which crossed it at that point; the result was the current of air did not go down the incline.

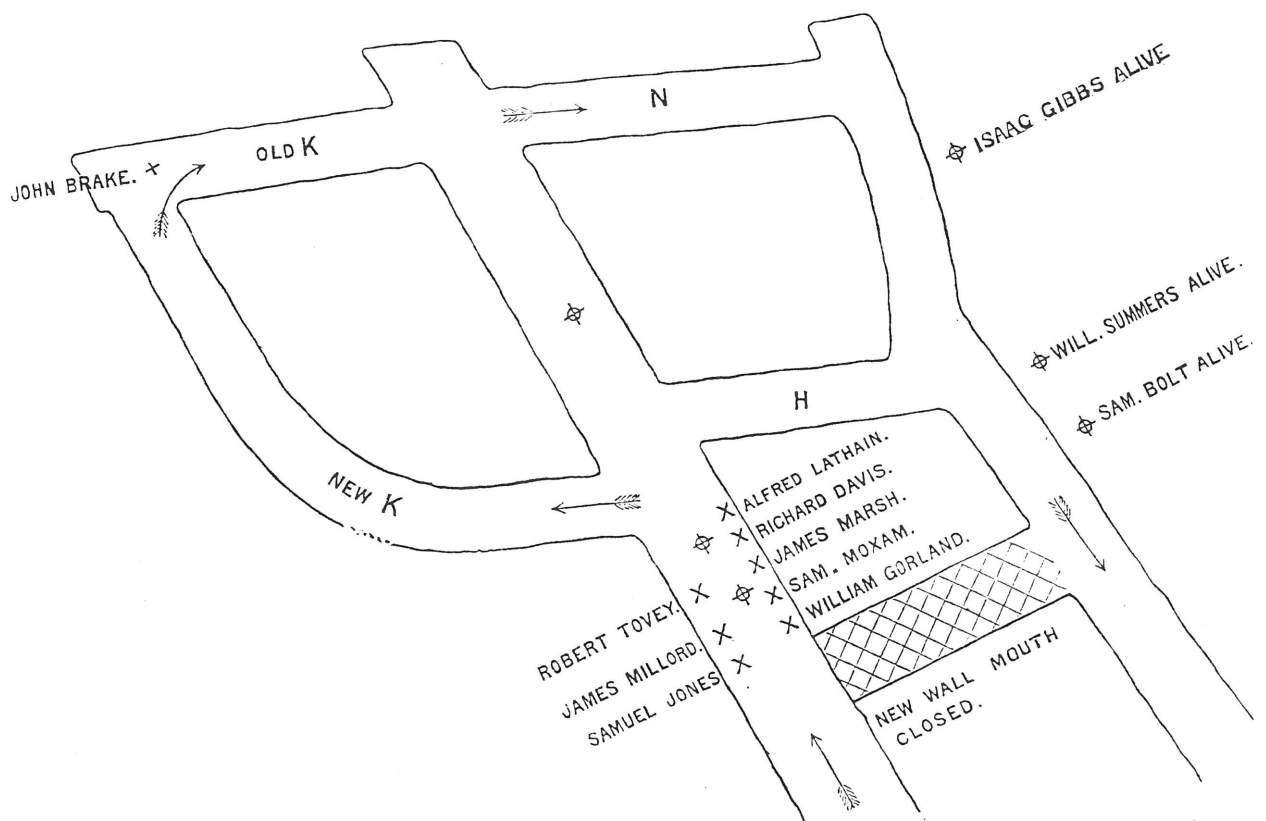
p. 149, 2nd  
day.

After the rescuing party had gone down through this opening into the archway, and sent up the boy Jefferies and the man Moses Rowland, a brattice was put over the opening, and the ventilation was restored. The result of this was to take the after-damp, which had been hanging about the incline, along the line of ventilation, and it began to affect Gilson who was behind the door at P; finding the air getting bad, he came through his door into the incline, which had become comparatively free from after-damp.

The two Coles and E. Summers, who were behind the door at B, were brought out alive; E. Summers was burnt as described before at P, but the two Coles were uninjured, except Thomas Cole, who having been out into the incline to look for assistance was overcome by the after-damp.

Solomon  
Wright,  
p. 81, 4th  
day.

The men who were dead were all found within a space of about five or six yards above H. Isaac Gibbs, who was alive, was found a little below it. The boy Bolt and the man W. Summers were found alive; Samuel Jones was alive when found, but died afterwards. The bodies of the others were found some on their faces, some on their backs, and some against the rock-side.

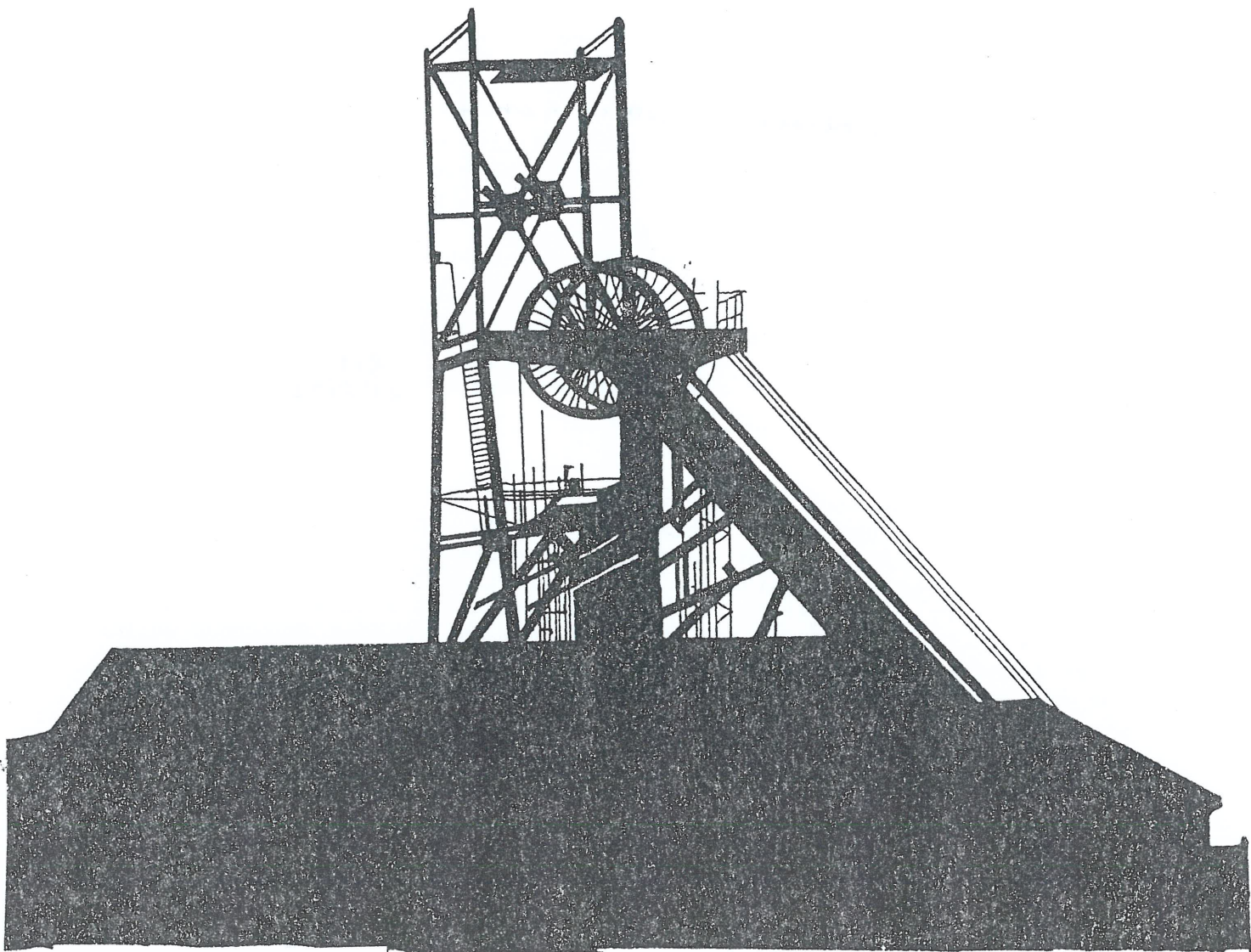


This shows where the bodies were found in the lower workings.

According to the evidence, they all died from suffocation, the result of the after-damp, which being heavy, rolled down the incline, and was not carried away by the in-coming air in consequence of the break in the ventilation; whether the in-coming air would have been sufficient to sweep away the after-damp in time to have saved more lives, it is impossible to say, but it is unfortunate that the return air-way was allowed to cross the intake of air even at a point where an explosion was so unexpected as this archway. I return herewith my rough plan of the workings, also the transcript of the evidence taken by the agent for the Solicitor to the Treasury, and the shorthand writer's notes of the inquest.

The Assistant Under Secretary of State,  
Home Office, Whitehall.

I am, &c.,  
J. BROS.



Ian McEwen



Killed in a Coalpit - Bedminster

John Thompson - see Joseph Crane, 1866

Edward Tovey (31)

working at Ashton Vale reported himself injured 11th August 1899, saying he had been struck when lifting tubs on to some rails. He died 23rd March next but the enquiry decided death was not from a mining accident but from T.B. caused by 'some injury'. (MIR)

Robert Tovey - see Henry Thomas, 1886

John Tozer (31)

was killed at Dean Lane Colliery. John Selfe, the deputy overseer said the roof needed propping and Tozer struck it with his hammer. He advised him to put a stick under it. A lad, working with Tozer said he was trying to clear away the rubbish to make room for the stick. Between 30 cwt & 2 tons fell on him. Mr Wasborough, the coroner, said he had sat for two years and during this time there had been only three accidents at this pit. He thought this "a pretty good proof of its good management." Tozer left a widow who received £5 from 'the Fund' [see Joseph Cranel].

(BO 11.1./18.1.1868)

Enoch Tucker (51)

collier, was working at Ashton Vale in November 1860 when he was severely injured by a fall of stone and rubbish. He failed to recover and died after lingering seven weeks in the General Hospital.

(BO 26.1.1861.MIR)

George Tucker (20), *hewer. INQ at Gen. H.*

was killed by a roof fall at Ashton Vale Colliery when assisting in opening up new workings. Thomas Parsons, his mate, underground all his life, said he knew the roof had been supported with timber but he maintained the earth around had not been properly banked up. Very little time had elapsed between the threatening of the fall and the actual fall. Mr Cowcill, the manager said he always told the men to leave the work if there was any danger. It was the men's duty to see to their own propping. It was decided that there had been a want of judgement by the deceased in leaving the spot.

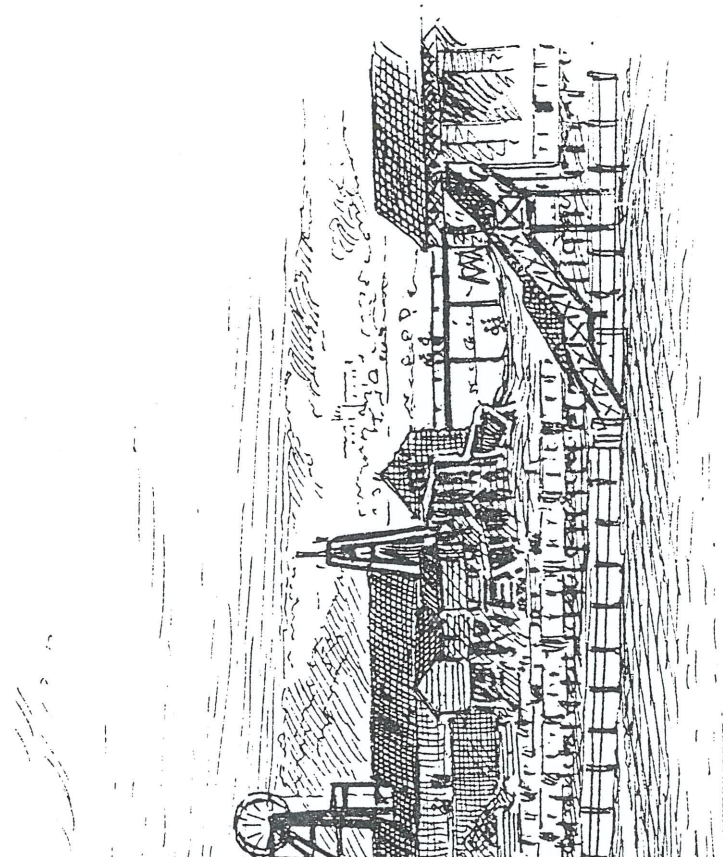
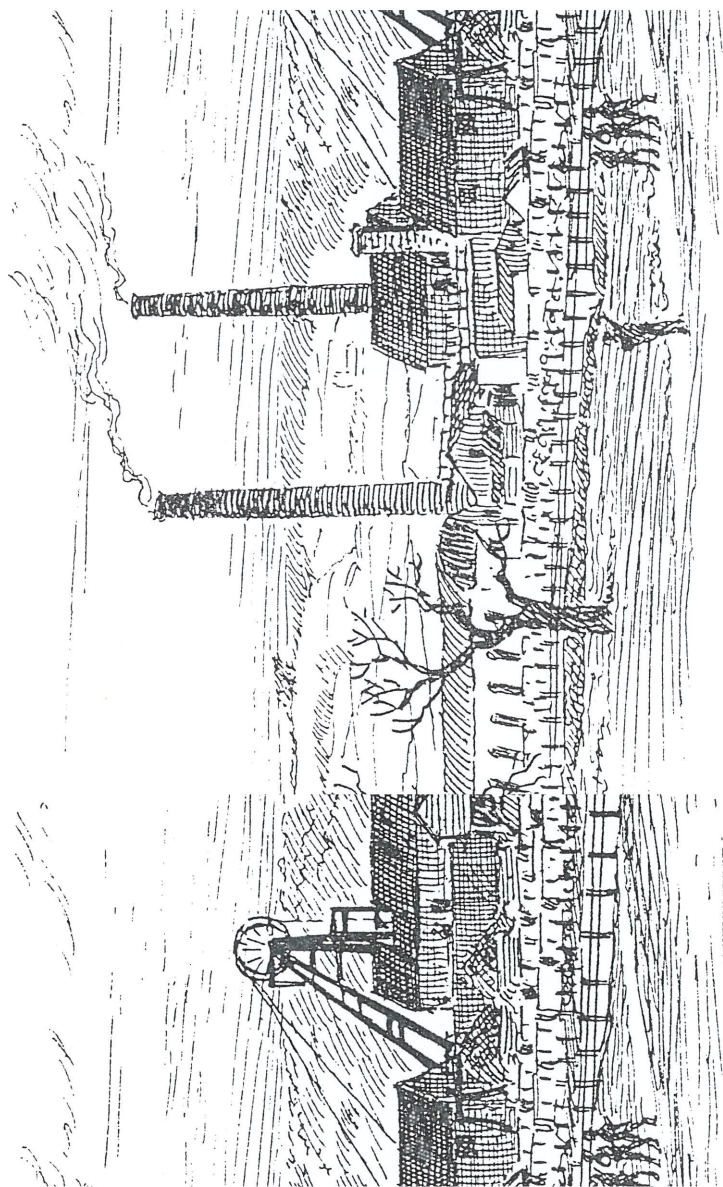
8M  
31/8/72 (BO 7.9.1872)

William Tyler (or Tyley) (22)

Benjamin Marshall

coalminers, in the employ of Messrs Upton, Smyth & Co, were being hauled up the shaft at Dean Lane Colliery 21st July 1853. The top vein - 20 fathoms from the bottom - had almost been reached when the flat rope broke and the iron cart containing the two unfortunate men was precipitated to the bottom. Tyler was killed on the spot. Marshall's back was broken and there was said to be no hope of his recovery. He remained conscious whilst being taken to the hospital at Guinea Street but could give no account of the accident. [It appears from the mine inspector's report that he later died.] At the time sixty men and boys were at work in the pit. They were all rescued in about an hour and a half.

Tyler's father Isaac (44), a vanger at the pit was on duty when the accident occurred. He said he knew of no part of the rope which was defective. He "would not have hesitated to have descended by the rope with







## Killed in a Coalpit - Bedminster

10 or 15 men. My son, with nine others descended by it in the morning. The rope broke in what might have been considered the best part. I was present when the rope broke. Half an hour later I knew my son was killed."

Thomas Morgan, aged 33, another vanger told of the rope being spliced the previous Wednesday by himself, Isaac Tyler [which perhaps goes some way to explain the man's strange sounding quiescence] and James Hicks, the smith. "The upper end was defective and twelve feet were taken off. The rope was then spliced and replaced in the drum. I and Benjamin Jordan went down in the skip to enable the engineers at the top to mark the rope. The next day the rope was used for hauling coal. I saw 68 tons brought up. I was with Isaac Tyler and John Gillard when the accident occurred. We heard a noise and the end of the rope came out of the pit. John Gillard and James Summerwell went down the other pit, about 18 feet from the first. We knew immediately a man had been killed."

Herbert Mackworth, Mines Inspector, issued a courageous and shaming attack respecting the above accident and all others where ropes were involved. The quality of the ropes used in the Somerset and Gloucestershire Coalfields was so bad that in these districts the number of accidents from breakage of rope was THREE TIMES as great as the whole of the other districts he had to inspect. He strongly disapproved of the practice of putting hinges or splices into ropes and said that half the accidents from breakages happened because the rope broke near the splice. Ropes in the district were used for too long a time. No splices should be put into ropes by which men had to ascend or descend. There was more neglect in this district in regard to winding rope than any other in England. He believed the above accident arose from neglect. In response, the coroner directing the jury made the almost unbelievable remark: "Mr Mackworth has said the rope was not as good as it ought to have been but if you recollect it had been in use four years it would seem the danger was more remote than Mr Mackworth supposed, otherwise it would not have lasted so long." Naturally, the verdict was [as usual] "Accidental Death." (LT.23.7./27.7.1853.BM1 30.7.1853)

John Vaughan - see James Flowers, 1892

William Sidney Venn - [alias Roberts] see Benjamin Jacobs, 1889

Henry Vernon - see Thomas Bolt, 1891

James Vickery - see William Alford, 1889

James Wallace (35)

collier, suffocated at Ashton Vale 15th October 1873. George Smith, a lad, said they had been working together. Wallace had charged the place with powder. They had some safety fuses to let off into the powder. They were blasting 30 yards up the level in a passage 4 foot high and 5 foot wide. They put in two charges, fired one and came out. The man returned to fire the second and the fuse blew his candle out. He tried to run back but was caught in the explosion. Richard Melsom, underground bailiff, could not get to him because of the thick smoke, but heard him breathing, very heavily. By the time he got to him, he was dead. The inspector's report said death was due to 'drawing small coal into his lungs after shot firing.'

(MIR. BO 29.3.1873)



Killed in a Coalpit - Bedminster

Albert Edward Walters - see Richard Abrahams, 1895.

James Webb (16)

trammer at South Liberty, crushed by a car against the wall of the pit on 11th September 1876 and it was found necessary to amputate one of his legs. He died on the 17th September from 'exhaustion, subsequent to the operation'. William Say, a collier, said he believed young Webb had forgotten to hook the chain on to the tram. The jury agreed, for this was their verdict. (BO 23.9.1876)

William Webster - see Robert Moffatt, 1851.

George Wilkins (35)

crushed to death at South Liberty Pit by a fall of two to three tons of stone. Mark Denning who was working with the deceased heard the fall which caused his light to go out. Unable to see, hear or find the deceased he called for assistance. After working for about an hour the rescuers found Wilkins's body. *also BS Merc 27/4/1894* (BO 30.4.1898)

James Willing (36), married, 5 children, of West Street

William Payne (26) widower, three small children, of West Street

John Smith, (56) widower, with a family, of North Street

William Parker (16)

Killed by an explosion in the Toad Vein at South Liberty pit in October 1875 when 'between two and three o'clock in the morning, with their naked candles in their hats, they walked into the midst of newly accumulated gas and met with terrible and instantaneous death'.

Sixty yards away two men had a miraculous escape when a large quantity of debris, stone, woodwork and coal, fell on them, trapping them in the narrow working. Silvester Bisdee 'an intelligent collier' told the story of his escape in his own way to the *Observer* reporter. "I was down there and right in the middle of it. As soon as the explosion took place, I felt it and was at once penned into a place. There was a great fall which blocked me and George Abrahams from Nailsea. After a bit, I felt the afterdamp coming very strong. We tried to make our way out but couldn't. I said 'It's a bad job. I think we shall have to die here'. Did we make any effort to get out? Yes we did. I said 'We will have a try and see whether we can get out or not'. I went up and failed and went back. I went up and tried again and came back the second time. I said to Abrahams 'You go up and try'. He went and only stopped a short while and came back. He said 'Oh Sil, do try and find the way out.' I said 'I will try again.' I went right up over the fall and found the way out. We got where there was a little air coming through. I found a bit of a hole and we crawled out of it and came out safe. He caught hold of my leg when I was crawling out and said 'Oh don't leave me behind.' I said 'Oh no, all right, follow me, you're right.' It was dark as it could possibly be. We were well nigh exhausted by that time. We should have been shortly dead if we had not got through the hole. The afterdamp would have killed us. I don't think the least blame attaches to the fireman [the overman]. He is an experienced man and is ever looking into things. I went back in to assist in bringing out the dead. I met Davey [the son] and brought him to the shaft and sent him up. Then Werlock and then John Davey. Some fresh hands came down and I was nearly overcome so I let them have a

Killed in a Coalpit - Bedminster

turn at it. John Smith was disfigured very much and James Willing was badly burnt in the head and hands."

It was conjectured that after having a meal break they had forgotten to check for gas. Bisdee said "We always try for gas after a meal. As soon as we see the gas enter the gauze of the lamp it is time for a man to leave. I cannot say if it was used in this case. The poor man is dead who did, I daresay."

The following were taken to the General Hospital:

John Davey (55)  
Henry Davey (18) his son  
Samuel Werlock (23)  
James Harvar (19)  
George Rummings (25)

George James, George Durbin and Reuben Owen, also at work in the Toad Vein at the time escaped with their lives.

Henry Kew, a miner at Ashton Vale stated that as soon as they could after the explosion, he and Alfred Owen made their way down the shaft. They found Smith lying on his face in the Toad Vein, alive but unable to speak. They fell over him in the total dark. Soon Reuben Owen came with a lamp.

Evidence of identification was given by William Smith, of his father John; Maria Payne of her son William; Charlotte Leigh of her relative James Willing. The boy Parker 'lay in Somerset' and his inquest was heard separately. (LT.8.10.1875. (BO 9/16.10.1875)

[NB: estimates of the ages of the deceased differ in different sources]

The week before William Mitchell had been killed by an explosion in the same pit. A relief fund was set up for all five colliers with the organisers making a point of saying that the Friendly Society money due to John Smith's dependents was not great in case this should deter potential subscribers. Just prior to this incident the Ashton Vale Colliery Company who owned South Liberty gave notice of a 15% wages reduction to their men.

(BO 18.9.1875.)

[Sadly, Silvester Bisdee was himself killed at South Liberty pit in 1899.]

William Woffenden (21)

was working in Frayne & Co's pit when a large stone crushed him to death. 'The accident was quite unavoidable as no amount of propping would have supported its ponderous weight.'

(BM1 9.3.1861)

James Woodbridge - see Thomas Bolt, 1891.

John Woodbridge - see Frederick Pike, 1854.

Thomas Woodbridge <sup>56</sup>

collier, killed by an explosion at Dean Lane 4th April 1875.6

(MIR)

Bm 15.4.76

Albert Wyatt (16)

'Inquest by Dr Craddock, coroner on Albert Wyatt, 16, orphan, drowned whilst bathing in the pond of South Liberty Colliery, Bedminster. Albert



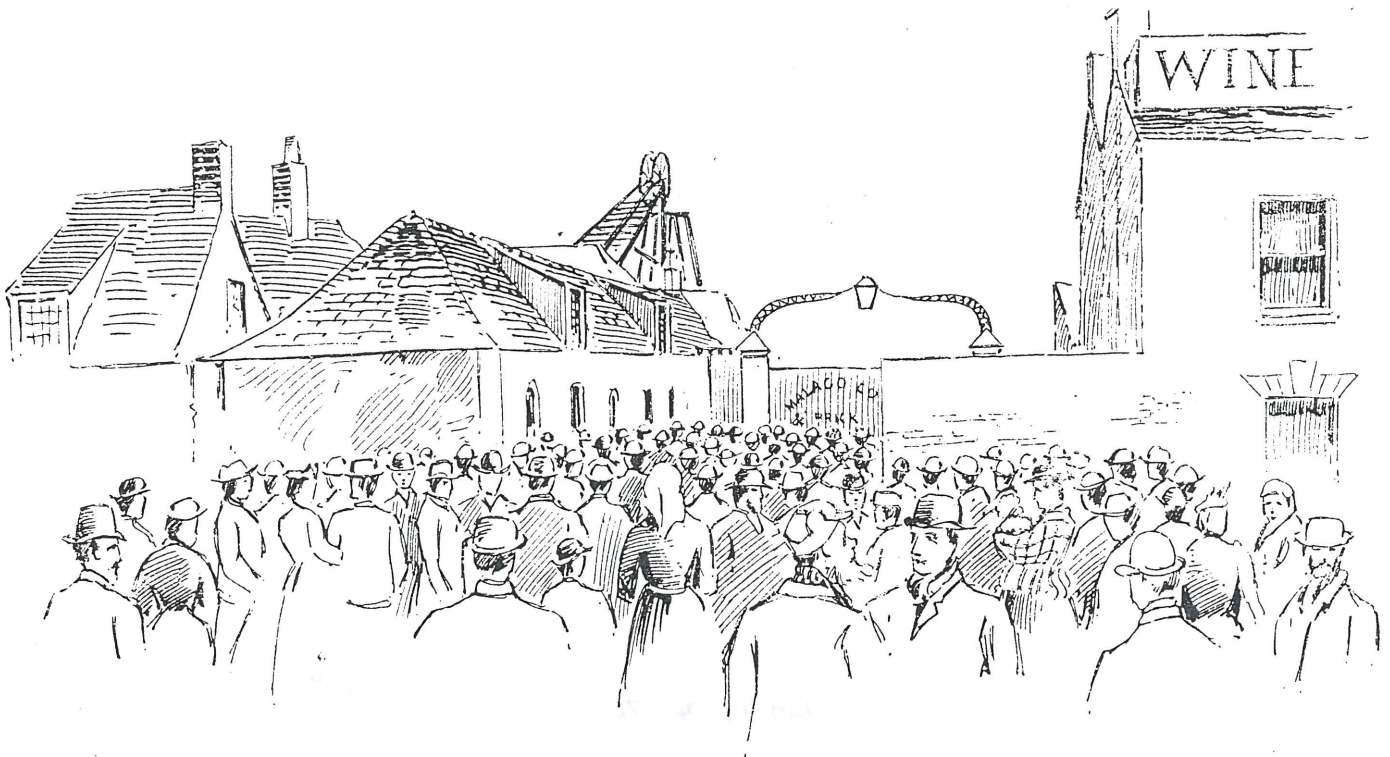
## Killed in a Coalpit - Bedminster

Garland, collier, was bathing at the opposite of the pool when the deceased approached with a halter in his hand and placing it down on the ground, stripped himself of his clothing and said "Here goes for the first time this season," and immediately jumped in the water which was about 10 feet deep. He at once sank and did not rise again. Garland made several attempts to rescue him by diving but without success.' (CC 22.6.1887)

## THE UNKNOWN

'Last Thursday three men were drowned in a coalpit at Long Ashton by a sudden burst of water. Each has left a large family.' (SFBJ 22.1.1774.)

'A melancholy accident happened last week at a coalpit in Long Ashton. A poor man who had come thither from Highbridge to fetch coal, through inattention and heedless of the danger of approaching too near the mouth of the pit fell down to the depth of 35 fathoms and was almost instantly beat to pieces. His remains were taken up, a spectacle too shocking too describe but a lesson to others how cautious they should be when one unwary step is sufficient to plunge them into eternity.' (SFBJ 13.12.1788)



Outside the Malago Pit after an explosion

Killed in a Coalpit - Bedminster

SAVED

The Times of 21st June 1851 reports the remarkable instance of a Colliery accident where a great many men - in fact every man in the mine - were saved. The incident took place at Bedminster North-Side. The men were listed by name:

James Pedder	Charles James	William Gibbings
James Wellon, sen	George Cole	Edward Ash
James Wellon, jun,	James Ridler	James Hall
Joseph Britton	George Edwards	Thomas Iles
John Tovey	Joseph Denison	Edward Woodbridge
Henry Gibbings	Eli Star	Samuel Star
Thomas Boulton	George Willen, sen	Daniel Jefferies
Benjamin Weaver	Edward Gibbins	George Vining
William Braine, jun	John Stilman	Robert Harris
William Bryant	Henry Clark	Samuel Sampson
William Sampson	Aaron Britton	John Rennolds
George Smith	Thomas Sims, sen	Henry Woodbridge
Joseph Tovey	William Braine, sen	
John Britton		William Hoskins

and Morgan Phillips, a Welshman who spoke no English and was "interrogated" through an interpreter by the Times reporter when brought up.

James North, who according to some reports was only twelve, put his own life in danger by descending in a bucket and rescued Braine junior and Phillips. He then went down again, this time with Francis Smith and they succeeded in landing eighteen more men. William Smith, Samuel Page, William Cooper and Richard Pike carried on the valiant work.

Young North, understandably, became a local hero. For a little while he was known as "The Noble North" and became a sort of Grace Darling of the coalpits. The Times's interest hiked his fame about and he caught the country's imagination as far away as Lake Windermere in Cumberland from whence a certain Mr Fletcher despatched £2 "especially to have the brave youth taught to read and write. I hope he will be able to attend an evening school for that purpose so as not to interfere with his daily work as a collier. I do not wish to make him above his business but to enable him to rise in the scale of society in his own line. He has accomplished more than mere learning can ever teach. That noble mindedness that led him to risk his own life and that of others." (BMe 2.8.1851).

[Mr F. meant well but like most middle-class Victorians was apprehensive lest the lower orders might rise above the station where it had pleased Almighty God to place them. Others also contributed and the North reward fund stood at £4.10.0d on 2nd August.]



## Killed in a Coalpit - Bedminster

From Latimer's Annals of Bristol, January 1755:

*An advertisement in a local journal announced that a new road had just been made from Bedminster Bridewell "to the new coalwork there where coal is sold on as reasonable terms as at any other colliery." Previously, Bristol's coal had come from Kingswood and Brislington.*

-o-O-o-

The Population of Bedminster 3rd August 1811 as given in Felix Farley's Bristol Journal:

Male	2156
Female	2421
----	
Total	4577

-o-O-o-

From Bristol Mirror, 22nd December 1855

### CAPITAL AND LABOUR

*A lecture on the above was given by Mr Handel Cossham at the Temperance Hall, Bedminster. In the chair was Mr H. Bennett. Mr Cossham said Labour and Capital were mutually dependent and to speak of either being independent of the other was absurd. The more capitalists there were in a country, the greater benefit for the labourer, since investments would be sought giving rise to more employment. There were many forms of Capital such as money, land, machinery, stock in trade, etc. The Capital of the labourer was his skill and it was the application of this skill to the raw material provided for the labourer that produced all the comforts of his life. He knew of no greater benefaction to the country than the men with extensive capital who used it to give employment to the greatest number.*

[Handel Cossham was an archtypal Victorian "Self-Made Man". He was a Kingswood Colliery owner and self-taught geologist. He became Liberal MP for St George. He believed in laissez-faire capitalism. Karl Marx published his answer, *Capital* in 1867.]

-o-O-o-

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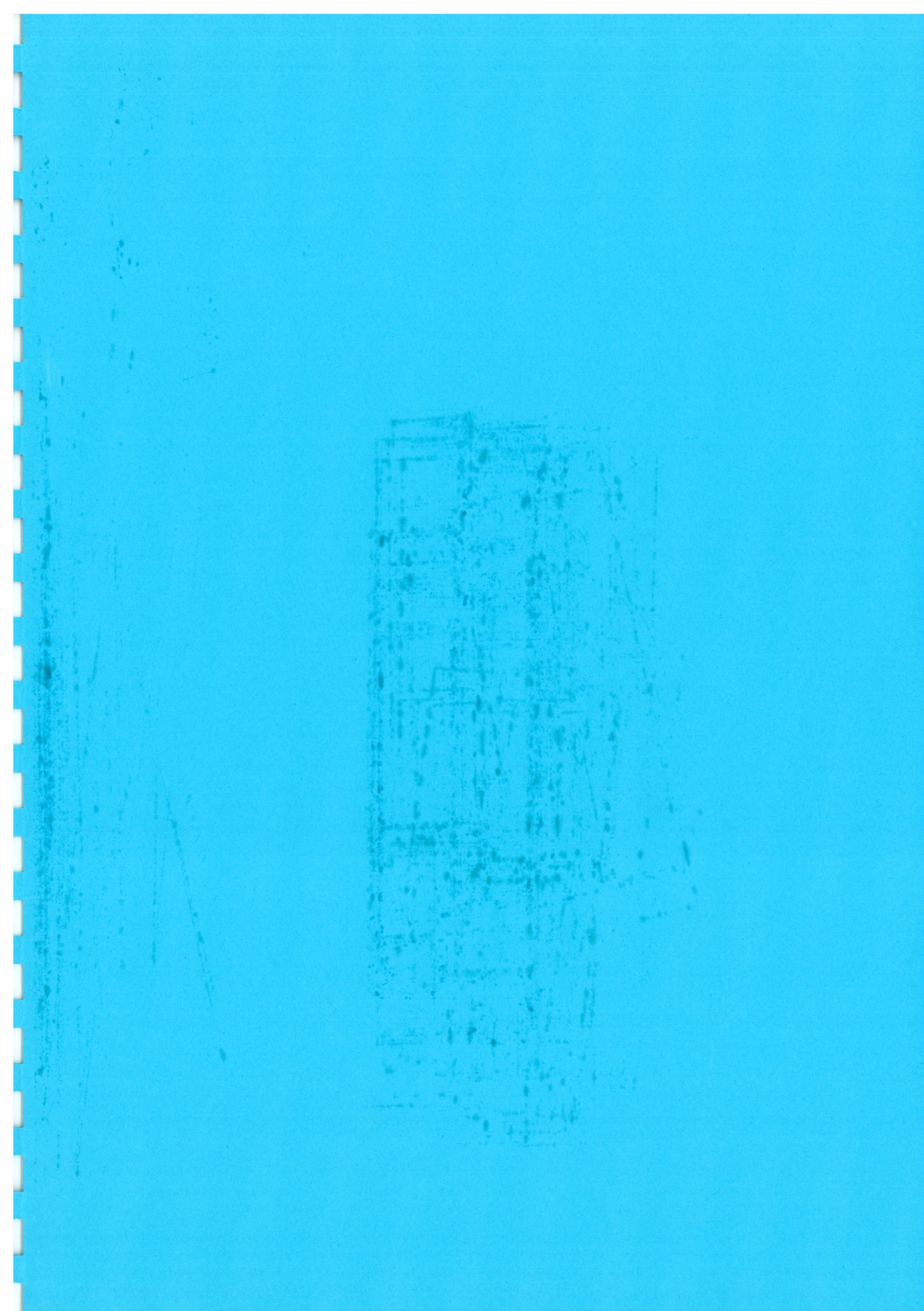
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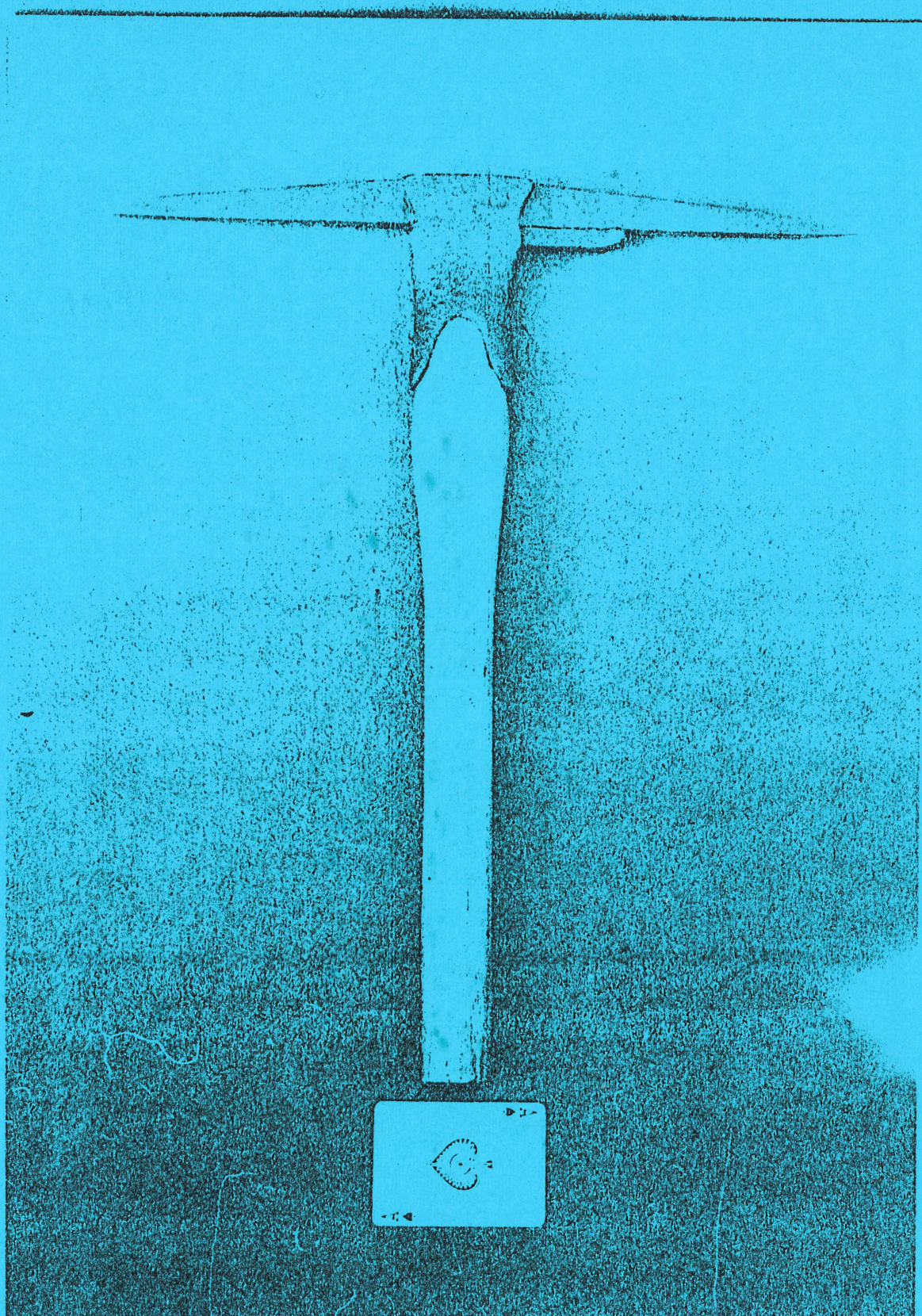
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