



TERRIBLE PIT ACCIDENT AT COLEORTON

Leicester Guardian 10th October 1863

Intelligence was received in Leicester at a somewhat late hour on Thursday, to the effect that a most alarming and fatal coal pit accident had that day taken place at Coleorton (a village noted for its collieries, equidistant from the Swannington and Coalville stations on the Midland Railway, and about, 11 miles distant from Leicester), through the giving way of a "coal wall" in one of the pits and the flooding of the same by a large influx of water from an old working.

Reports were also current that the same had been accompanied with an immense sacrifice of human life, and that a considerable number of the colliers had had a narrow escape of being numbered with the dead.

As might naturally be supposed, the receipt of intelligence of so sad an event connected with the county of Leicester - where colliery accidents have happily, through the mercies of an Almighty Providence, hitherto been of but very rare occurrence - was necessarily calculated to cause no slight degree of excitement ; but although we are sorry to state there was a great deal of truth in the statement we are pleased to say that the rumours as to the damage done were certainly exaggerated, and the loss of life not near so great as was at first supposed or have been anticipated considering the jeopardy in which a large number of the colliers were placed at the time of the accident.

On hastening to the locality, we soon learned from the excitement of the people, and the hurrying of large numbers of persons towards the place in question, that the reports as to a serious accident, involving a loss of life, having taken place was correct, and on arriving at the spot, we found the bank of the pit crowded with hundreds of persons - wives anxiously waiting for any intelligence of their husbands and missing friends, who were supposed to be confined in the workings.

The pit with which this melancholy accident is more particularly associated, is known as the Califat No. 2, situated about two miles to the north west of Coalville station, and is connected by means of underground roads with the Calcutta pit, No. 1, about three-quarters of a mile distant in a south east direction the California, at a distance of about 700 yards to the north east, all of which belong to the Swannington Coal Company, (Messrs. Walker and Worswick, the extensive colliery proprietors in this county).

The Califat pit like the others with which it communicates, is worked by a double shaft, and is about 130 yards in depth, while the roadway from the bottom of the shaft to the other pita above mentioned - the California and Calcutta - is down an incline which has a graduation of one in twelve. There is also in an easterly direction from the bottom of the shaft of the pit in question, a working extending down a like incline to a considerable length, and regarding this, which is called the "dip," we shall often have occasion to refer in the course of this report.



Another working goes from the bottom of the shaft in a contrary direction to the latter - to the west - and this, unlike the others, is up an incline of a like gradation to the other roads, so that the whole of the ground from the west to east (where the "dip" is located) is down a continuous incline, intercepted with "stalls" in almost every direction.

Having now briefly described the position of the workings, we will now go on to state, so far as they have come to our knowledge, the facts of the accident, which took place at the summit of the hill, if such it may be called.

It seems that during Wednesday night and Thursday morning, a large number of men were engaged at their labour in this western road, at the "topside," or No. 8 stall, when about 3 o'clock in the morning an alarm was raised that they had approached close upon an old working, which was supposed to be somewhere in that locality, known as the Linby Hall workings, which had been abandoned about 70 years ago, and consequently were known to contain immense volume of water.

This unexpected discovery, as may be supposed, caused considerable astonishment and this was heightened the more from the fact that in adjoining stalls the cutting away of the coal had been pursued to about 80 yards further from the place where the men were at work on Thursday morning, without meeting with the slightest signs of falling in with the confined mass of water.

On a report, being raised that they had broken into the old working not much notice was taken of it, as from the slight way in which the water oozed through the crevices made by a row of about 20 men with their "mandrills" or picks nothing serious was apprehended, and the night men continued at their work till about 6 o'clock, when a shift took place and the day men went on.

On these men entering upon their duties they noticed a rumbling noise, that the crack had become considerably enlarged and that the water came through it a kind of small stream. This caused considerable fear, and information was immediately given to the "under viewer" or ground bailiff, Wm. Lewis, who happened to be down at the time and he having examined the place considered that there was no ground for serious apprehensions, and set "plugs."

This, however, proved fruitless for with the continual rushing through of the water, the crevice became enlarged, and consequently the influx considerably increased. In the meantime, however, many of the men had refused to remain under ground any longer, and about 50 or 60 were brought up to the top, while messengers were despatched to the "dip" and other parts informing them of their imminent danger.

After the men had continued at their work for some time the crevice sadly burst open, and a large body of water rushed forth, sweeping all its front. A scene of indescribable consternation then ensued men and boys in the pit rushed about in almost every direction - making their way as quickly as possible to the bottom of the shaft, but having about a mile to run before they came to the place of their deliverance, the water, favoured in its progress by the slope extending to the "dip," rushed down the incline with considerable rapidity till it overtook them, and in some instances carried them off their feet.



Added to the perils they had to undergo of being carried away by the rushing stream - the water became so high that all lights in the pit became extinguished, and men had to grope their way as best they could in the dark, and ran a great risk, if not of being drowned, of knocking their heads against the sides of the roads and becoming entangled amongst the gear belonging to the horses which had with the hurry and excitement of the moment been left by their drivers fastened by means of their tackle to the tubs of coal which they were in the act of drawing at the time of the occurrence, and one or two of the men are believed to have lost their lives through these circumstances, as one man, on making his escape parted company with a fellow workman who became thus entangled and who has never been heard of since.

But to return :- Some of the men did find their way to the bottom of the shaft where, after remaining for a short time up to their arms in water, which rushed by them and down other roads in torrents, they were rescued from their perilous position and brought to the surface by means of the cage, alive! But six others, four men and two boys were still known to be in the pit, and fears began to be realized that there was no probability of ever rescuing them alive.

On the news of the accident becoming spread, the bank of the pit was soon crowded with hundreds of persons, relatives of the miners, whose grief at the idea of some of their friends - it might be a husband, a father, or a brother - having met with so premature and shocking a death, was almost uncontrollable.

To endeavour to allay those fears, some of the miners who had just escaped from an apparently inevitable death, very praiseworthy volunteered to make a decent to search for their missing companions, while the pumping engines connected with the pit, and those of the California and Calcutta workings were set to work to reduce the depth of water in the pit, which had in a very short time nearly touched the roof of the shaft, a height of over six feet.

Decent after descent was made in search of the missing men, but still without success, in consequence of the depth of water in the workings ; but subsequently, flood having subsided - the men were enabled to pursue their search up the "roads," and in the course of the afternoon, one man when wading up to the arms in water, kicked against something, which on examination, turned out to be the lifeless body of one of the boys - Clement, 16, of Linby-hall, Swannington.

Another descent was made, and in about half an hour afterwards the men came across three other men - Joseph Marsden, of Swannington ; Frank Doman, of Colourton ; and Thomas Bird, of Worthington, whom they found alive, but in a very exhausted state about twenty yards from the bottom of the shaft.

When these were landed at the top another gang was sent down to make further search, but not meeting with any more of their fellow workmen they engaged in rescuing about 10 horses, which though about covered with water made their position known by "blowing".



While engaged in this occupation a smell of sulphur or "choke damp" was perceived by the men, and it rose so quickly and continued to increase so much in strength that they were compelled to abandon their labours, and it was with considerable difficulty that they got up the shaft without their lights being extinguished by the "damp."

Further descents were continually made and the pumps kept continually at work throughout the whole of the night, but up to the time we left the spot (yesterday, Friday morning), notwithstanding that the miners carried with them Day's safety lamp they have been unable to proceed in any direction whatever up the workings, in consequence of the lights becoming immediately extinguished by the foul air. Fresh descents will continue to be made at intervals for the recovery of the men still in the pit.

It is not expected that they will be got out alive, as if not drowned, they most undoubtedly have got stifled with the "choke" damp. It is not expected that further search can be made till the foul air has escaped, which will not be till the water is lowered by the pumping engines (which raise from 15,000 to 16,000 gallons of water per minute), as the ventilation of the mine is stopped, in consequence of the water blocking up to the roofs the roads leading down to the other pits, the shafts of which served as air shafts.

As is customary with live reporting during the chaotic aftermath of a major incident there are a few inaccuracies, but most of the report is verified by other newspapers. This report also describes some of the layout of the mine and its operations.

Newspaper articles used paragraphs very sparingly, with columns of more than 100 lines of text without a paragraph break. Paragraph formatting has been added to make it easier to read and digest the article.

In addition to the engine pumps employed at the California pits, large barrels are also being used to assist in hauling out the water, but at the time we left, the water was still a considerable height up this shaft - about 9 feet 6 inches - so until that gets considerably reduced, there is no chance of rescuing the bodies still in the pit, as ventilation is entirely prevented.

The names of the men still missing are - Thomas Bird, 50, of Newbold, who leaves a wife and nine children ; and Jeremiah Rows, 50, of Belton, who leaves a wife and six children. Sixteen horses are still in the pit.

Owing to the withdrawal of water from under the old Linby Hall workings, the ground in that locality is now observed to be falling in, and fears are apprehended as to further damage being sustained by the giving way of the ground. The stock, however, has been taken out of the field, and during the night men have been stationed with fires to warn pedestrians of the dangerous parts which is situated close to the foot road leading from Ravenstone to Coalville.

An inquest on the body of the youth was formally opened in Swannington, before the coroner, J. Gregory, Esq., yesterday (Friday), but adjourned to a future day.