

Derbyshire Times.

Saturday 7th. November 1857.

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No Headline.

Hugh Roberts, of Hasland, was committed to prison for one month, charged with disobeying the rules adopted for the management of the colliery belonging to Messrs. Barnes and Company at Corbriggs, near Chesterfield.

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Miners and their Masters.

Important Decision.

Before the West Riding Magistrates at Wakefield, on Monday, the following case, adjourned about a fortnight ago for the purpose of taking counsel's opinion with reference to it, was gone into. At the period of the adjournment, George Illingworth, a coal miner, and about a dozen of his fellow-workmen, were summoned for having left their work without giving a fortnight's notice. As the case of Illingworth was precisely similar to the whole of the others, his only was taken into consideration. At the previous hearing, the complainant's attorney proved defendant's signature to a book, and put in the rules and bylaws attached thereto. He also proved, by the agent of the colliery, the terms of Illingworth's verbal contract, that he entered the complainant's service by virtue of it. The defendant's attorney objected to the book and the rules and bylaws attached being given as evidence, on the ground that this was the "contract of service" and being in writing, ought to have been signed by the colliery owners, as well as by the defendant, and that not being so signed, it was a NUDUM PACTUM, and void for want of mutuality. The complainant's attorney replied that there was a verbal contract of service, under which Illingworth entered, and that the signature in the book was merely an acknowledgement by the defendant that he had received the rules required to be given to him in accordance with the Colliery Act of Parliament. The coroner referred to Mr. Blanchard, the leader of the Northern Circuit, and the following is a summary of his opinion: - Question: Is the memorandum signed J. Illingworth in the book before alluded to a contract in writing within the meaning of the Act 4 Geo IV? Answer: I am of opinion that it is not, on the ground that the contract in writing spoken of in the Statute in this place must be signed by the contracting parties. The memorandum here spoken of is for the protection of Messrs. Hudson, and furnishes ready proof that the General and Special Rules of the collieries are supplied to their miners. Question: Would the verbal contract under which Illingworth is serving, previous to the signature in the book before referred to be sufficient, under Section 3 of the Act 4 Geo IV, C 34, to bind him to the performance of the bylaws, assuming him to have received a copy of the bylaws? Answer: It would, if at the time of the verbal contract he received a copy of the bylaws. It was now proved that every man had received a copy of the bylaws, if not at the time of his engagement, still during the interval, and the Bench decided this was sufficient, for although the men were engaged by day work, it would never do, because such was the case, that they should be allowed to leave their employer at a moment's notice, bring his business to a complete standstill, and, it might be, entail ruin on him. The magistrates gave the men an opportunity of returning to their work the following morning, when, if they choose they might give a fortnight's notice, if not he would send them to the House of Correction. The men agreed to go to their work and pay the costs.

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Colliery Accidents in Yorkshire.

From the reports of Mr. Charles Morton, the Government Inspector of Collieries for Yorkshire, which has just been published, it appears that during 1856 there have been in Yorkshire collieries 47 fatal accidents, involving the loss of 52 lives. The number of collieries in Yorkshire during the past six years has increased from 260 to 340, being an increase of nearly one third. A considerable addition has been made to the hands employed, and to the quantity of coal raised. It is therefore satisfactory to observe that since 1851 the fatal casualties have been reduced from 106 in that year to 52 last year, or nearly one half, the largest items being in the mortality arising from gaseous explosions and suffocation - the number of lives lost in 1851 having been 71, while in 1856 it was only 4.

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Fatal Coalpit Accident

Mr. Busby also held an inquest on the 7th. instant, which was adjourned until the 10th., at the Tiger Inn, Somercotes on the body of James Chater, who was killed by a quantity of coal falling upon him whilst working in a coal pit at Alfreton, on the 6th. instant. From the evidence it appeared the occurrence was purely accidental, and the jury returned a verdict accordingly.

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Colliery Accidents.

On Tuesday last the adjourned inquests were held at Swanwick, before Mr. Busby, on the bodies of George Gyte and William Walters, who were killed in the recent explosions at the Ripley Colliery, belonging to the Butterley Company. The inquests had been adjourned to this day, at the request of Mr. Hedley, the Government Inspector, in order to secure the attendance of Mr. John Smith, the underviewer, and other witnesses, who had been hurt by the explosions, and who had not sufficiently recovered to attend at the first hearing. From the evidence of Mr. Smith, Mr. William Clark, his deputy, and Mr. Cresswell, it appeared there had been a considerable want of duty on the part of all, in not sufficiently examining the works, and knocking a hole through a brattice, which had the effect of interrupting the ventilation, in not providing danger boards with the word "Fire" painted on them, where danger was known to exist, and in allowing naked candles instead of safety lamps to be used in the pit after danger was apprehended. On Thursday, the 1st. of October, a hole was knocked in the brattice. On Saturday, the 3rd. of October, the fan in one of the headings had fixed the safety lamp; still no precautions were taken. On Monday, the 5th. of October, Gyte, who was working in a cross heading, was about to fire a blast about noon, when he stepped into the main heading. The blast did not go off, but the gas in the main heading exploded, and Gyte received injuries from which he subsequently died. On Tuesday, Messrs. Smith, Clarke, and Cresswell examined the works, and upon Clarke holding a naked candle against a loose brick wall, which was built across the heading some gas escaped through the bricks, it fired with the candle, and hurt Mr. Smith severely. The door, intended to close the hole in the brattice, and restore the ventilation, was not completed until Friday morning, the 9th. of October. On that morning a slight explosion of gas took place in a cross heading, where a man was working. The explosion appears to have set in motion the gas which had accumulated in the main heading, and a serious explosion took place, by which several lives were lost, Walters being one of the men killed, and other were dangerously burned. The Jury returned in each case a verdict of Accidental Death, and at their request the coroner severely reprimanded Smith, Clarke, and Cresswell for their violation of the printed rules of the colliery, and the neglect they had shown in not taking proper precautions to secure the ventilation of the pit, and the safety of the men as soon as danger was apprehended.

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Immense Nugget.

We had on Thursday the satisfaction of inspecting an immense nugget from the Australian mines in the shop of Mr. Muirhead, Goldsmith, Buchanan Street. This nugget weighs 400 ozs., is of pure gold, without any apparent admixture of quartz, and is in the condition in which the luck digger discovered it. It is valued at about £1,600, is the largest but one ever brought to this country, and is certainly a curiosity worthy of the inspections of the citizens. We believe it will remain on view for a few days.

Glasgow Daily Mail.

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No Headline.

Ventilating fans for the better protection of human life are about to be erected in several of the leading collieries in South Wales. The model is to be the one now in use at Abercarne, which has been found by experience to be the most efficient. A fan of 14 feet in diameter, with eight vanes, each 3 feet and a half in width and three feet in length, is driven by a small steam engine at a speed of 60 revolutions per minute, capable of being doubled in case of emergency, and the current of air thus produced will render any seam safe and workable.

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No Headline.

The half-yearly meeting of the Ashover Milltown Mining Company was held at the Greyhound Inn, Milltown, on Thursday. There was a full attendance of shareholders; C. Binns, Esq., in the chair. The accounts for the past half-year were presented, and being considered highly satisfactory, were unanimously passed. During the last month ore to the value of £300 had been raised, whilst the total working expenses did not exceed £157. Although the funds of the Company showed a very considerable surplus, it was resolved that no dividend should be declared until the next half-yearly meeting. At three o'clock the shareholders sat down to an excellent dinner, and a vote of thanks to their excellent chairman terminated the meeting, the general prospects of the Company wearing a very promising aspect.

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Robbery of Brass Fittings.

In the night of Thursday, the 19th. inst., the workshops of Mr. Charles Wharton, engineer, situated at the bottom of Hady Hill, Chesterfield, were entered by thieves, who, in addition to the property carried away, did such serious damage to the machinery as to render it necessary to stop the works until the repairs have been made. Brass seemed to be the object of the thieves and they succeeded in getting away with about twenty pounds worth, having stripped the engine and most of the machinery of the brass fittings, etc. This is the third time within the past eighteen months these works have been robbed of the engine brasses and fittings.

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Inquests before Mr. Busby, Coroner (part).

On the same day, at Wheeldon Mill, Brimington, on the body of Zaccharias Allsop, of that place, ironstone miner, 40 years. Deceased worked at the Hopewell Pit at Handley Wood, Staveley. The coal has been got from the ground, and ironstone is now being got from the same ground. The ironstone is about 27½ yards above the coal. They are working the ironstone by means of the same shafts by which they formerly worked the coal. On the 11th. inst., deceased was left in the pit by himself. He had but a small bit of candle, which went out, and deceased missed his way and fell down into the coal bottom. He died on the 14th. inst.

Verdict, "Accidental Death".

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Chesterfield Police (Part).

Mr. John Firth, of the East Whittington Steel Works, was summoned for £3-5-0d. wages alleged to be due to Edward Davies, for work performed at the new furnace. A contract having been admitted, the Bench dismissed the matter, the County Court being the proper tribunal for recovery.

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Page 2 Col. 5.

Chesterfield Police (part).

Wm. Cocking and Lewis Ashmore were charged with stealing two picks of the value of 3-0d. belonging to Wm. Ball, ironstone-getter, at Tapton, on the 20th. October. Mr. Waller appeared in defence of Ashmore, who seemed to have had no connection with the theft, and he was accordingly discharged. The evidence against Cocking, a lad of not more than 15 years, developed a career of mendacity and cunning lamentable in the extreme in one so young. Committed for 2 months with hard labour.

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Page 3 Col. 1.

Dreadful Occurrence at Staveley Collieries.

12 Lives Lost.

On Sunday morning last a very serious accident occurred at the Staveley Works, near Chesterfield, the property of Richard Barrow, Esq., occasioning the death of 12 men and involving serious injury to property.

The colliery is known as the Hollingwood Pit, and is the largest at these extensive works, employing about 300 men, and the coal raised is about 300 tons daily. There are about 600 safety lamps in use at the colliery. The men left the pit on Saturday afternoon, at four o'clock, their usual time, when everything appeared to be safe, the furnace-man being the only person left in the colliery. The duties of the furnace-man commenced at six o'clock, and terminated at six on Sunday morning. Whilst he was in the pit he thought he smelt a strong smell of smoke, but took no notice until another man came to relieve him. At seven o'clock the furnace-man was called away by a workman connected with the colliery. At four o'clock the same morning a son of Fowkes, a horse-keeper, was down the pit, and he noticed some smoke issuing from the lamproom or cabin in the pit bottom. He communicated what he had seen to some other persons, who conveyed the information to Mr. Daniel Cooper, the resident principal underground steward. Mr. Cooper then selected 12 of the most experienced men at the works to accompany him into the pit to put out the fire. They each took a bucket and descended the shaft, when instructions were given by Mr. Cooper to Charles Vardy, a deputy, to open some air doors. A consequence of this was that the ventilation of the pit was stopped. Every possible exertion was subsequently made to prevent the progress of the fire.

On Monday morning Mr. Woodhouse, mining engineer, arrived at the colliery, when Mr. Jeffcock, Mr. Hedley, and Mr. Buxton went down the pit, and found the air circulating through its proper course. Another dam was put in about 900 yards down the incline. Mr. Woodhouse and Mr. Hedley then went to the bottom of the incline, close to the seat of the fire, and finding it dangerous to proceed further down, they retraced their steps, and between the bottom of the incline and the last dam which had been put in the following bodies were found: - Daniel Cooper, resident head underviewer, married, with no children; Alexander Cooper, colliery viewer, brother to the last named, who was on a visit to his brother; Alexander Scott, manager of the ventilation of the pit, married and left a widow and two daughters; Thomas Scott, son of the last named deceased; Joel Walters, deputy, left widow and eight grown-up persons; George Wagstaff, collier, left widow, but no family; William Chapman, collier, left widow and eight children; Thomas Truman, lamp-cleaner, married, but no family.

The following persons are still in the pit, and no doubt is entertained about their lives having been lost: Joseph Corns, collier, married, but no children; Richard Fowkes, horse keeper; Richard Fowkes, son of the last named; William Truman, collier, married, widow and seven children. The bodies were found in the position of men escaping from suffocation, and the distance from the first to the last discovered was 200 yards.

Mr. Woodhouse and Mr. Hedley held a consultation after visiting the seat of the fire, and it was decided to build a strong brick wall, or dam, across the engine plane, and thus cut off the air going into the fire. Mr. Woodhouse and Mr. Hedley were in the mine the whole of the time to

see that all arrangements were satisfactorily completed. This was effected by about eleven o'clock on Monday morning.

The inquest on the bodies was opened on Monday by C.S.B. Busby, Esq., Coroner, to identify and have the bodies interred. It was adjourned till Thursday, the 26th. inst.

The bodies were interred in the Staveley Cemetery on Wednesday in eight graves, four of them side by side, and the others at the foot - The eight graves forming a square. Each coffin was attended by twelve workmen, the whole of the works being stopped during the funeral, which was attended by a large concourse of mournful spectators. We understand that Mr. Barrow, the proprietor of these works, has personally visited the relatives of the deceased workmen, and expressed a willing desire to contribute to their immediate wants.

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Eyam Mining Company.

The committee held their meeting on Thursday at Eyam, and sold 43 tons of ore, raised during the past three weeks. The ore works are looking well. A few days since the workmen cut a very rich deposit of ore.

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No Headline.

The Earl of Durham, one of the great coal owners of the County of Durham, is understood to be making arrangements to work many of his mines with increased vigour. Several of his tenants have received notice to quit, in order that mining agents and viewers may occupy the houses.

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On Tuesday last, an explosion of fire damp occurred at Edge Lane Colliery, a few miles from Wigan, at a time when all hands except four were out of the pit. As soon as it was safe to descend the pit after the explosion, some men went down, when they found that all four men were killed by the explosion.

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Page 3 Col. 1-2.

The Staveley Tragedy.

The adjourned inquest was held at Staveley before C.S.B. Busby, Coroner, on Thursday last, on the bodies of Daniel Cooper, John Cooper (his brother), Joel Walters, Alexander Scott, Thomas Watson Trueman, William Trueman, George Wagstaff and Wm. Chapman, the eight men who lost their lives on Sunday the 15th. instant in the Hollingwood pit, Staveley. The following are some of the facts adduced at the inquest.

William Frederick Howard, of Chesterfield, land and mining surveyor, produced a plan of the Hollingwood Colliery, showing the working faces, gates, ventilation, and the whole pit.

Robert Fouck, aged 13 years, son of Richard Fouck, went with his father down to the little drift, going to the back of the stables, near the bottom of the plane, and saw smoke coming out of the little drift.

Joseph Trueman (aged 14 years), son of William Trueman, deceased, went with his father down the pit on Sunday morning. His father went to the lamp cabin and opened the door, when the smoke rushed out all at once. He did not shut the doors again, he said they should be open, that the smoke might come out. Witness and his father then left the pit, and went to Mr. Cooper.

Robert Scott, of Hollingwood Common, Staveley, stated that Vardy came to him and told him that he was going to open the doors between the down cast and the cupola, and asked witness whether there were any other doors than those two there. Witness said, "Certainly not". As they proceeded along, Vardy said, "To open those doors will never answer". Witness asked him what were his orders. Vardy said, "Mr. Cooper's orders are that I am to open the doors between the down cast and the cupola". Witness then said, "Then I have nothing to do with it: I won't interfere: I am not here to contradict Mr. Cooper's orders: He can do as he likes." Witness then left him.

Charles Vardy, of Railway Terrace, Staveley, shotfirer at Hollingwood Pits - I was assistant to Joel Walters. On Sunday the 15th. November, about twenty minutes past 7 o'clock, I was just getting up when William Trueman came to my door - he went to Robert Foucks. When I got downstairs Trueman came again, and said the lamp office was on fire. I came to the pit. As I passed the office it was twenty-five minutes past eight. I went down into the pit by myself directly. I went down the main plane to the intake (No. 3 doors), intending to go down the back plane from that point. I expected the fire to be at the post of the back plane. The smoke was up at the No. 3 doors, and the back plane full, so that I could not go down it. That would be about 12 or 15 feet (the thickness of the post) from the front plane. I ran from the front plane to Mr. Cooper, who was 30 yards from the bottom of the front plane beside the little heading at the back of the stables. As soon as I got there, Mr. Cooper pushed me forward to fetch some hay or straw out of the stables to put across the front plane just below the little heading. The mouth of the little heading was also filled with straw. Thomas Trueman stood just below Mr. Cooper, who told me that the flames in the lamp office were as large as five or six cupolas. I went forward with Thomas Trueman and others into the stables three times to fetch hay and straw. I brought six trusses of straw. When I returned the third time Mr. Cooper said, "Make your way up to the top of the plane and open the two main doors going to the cupola pit." Only Mr. Cooper and his

brother were there. The straw stack was then about breast height. I sprang over it, and when I got to the opposite side I turned round to Mr. Cooper and said, "Is it the two main doors, sir, you mean between the downcast and the cupola pit?" He answered, "Yes". I had not said anything to Mr. Cooper about the state of the smoke in the back heading. I asked him a second time about the doors, because it looked a singular thing in my eyes to open the doors at the pit bottom. It was cutting the ventilation off, and I dreaded danger. I dreaded filling both planes with smoke. I thought there was danger as I was going up the plane, but I had not presence of mind to think so when I received orders from Mr. Cooper. I was only a very few minutes with Mr. Cooper. In going up the front plane there was not any smoke coming out of the bolt holes (No. 3 doors). I didn't know that Mr. Cooper had been down the back plane that morning. If the man across the front plane had been an air-tight dam the effect of opening the main doors would not have been different. It was shutting off the fresh air in either case. After Mr. Cooper had answered "Yes", I went up the front plane and met Robt. Scott near the top end of the pass-by between No. 2 and No. 3 door. I spoke first to Scott. I asked him where he was going to. He said the master had sent him for the fire engine, and he was going to see him about getting it down, as he was afraid it was too large for the shaft. William and George Trueman were with Robert Scott. They had four iron buckets with them. I said to Scott, "You're useless down there without the engine - if you can't get it down with the wheels on, you had better take the wheels off". Scott sent off the two Trueman's during our conversation. Scott and I stood still a few minutes on the plane. I can't say what orders Robert Scott gave to the Trueman's. It was something respecting the fire engines. I said to Scott, "Mr. Cooper has sent me up here to open the two main doors leading to the cupola pit. If we do, we shut the thing up as sure as we're here men". Scott said, "Whatever orders your master's given you, go and obey him - he must know what arrangements he made before he sent you away". I said again, you may depend upon it, Robert, let him have made what arrangements he will down there, the moment we take the air off, the smoke comes on this plane - (meaning the front plane). Robert Scott said something more respecting the master must know better than me. I answered him back, "Well, stop here and watch, while I go to the top of the plane and ease the doors, and you'll see how it operates on the smoke, and if the smoke offers to come out, ring the bell, and I'll close the doors." Scott said, "No, you've received your orders, go and obey them - and I've received mine, and I'll go and obey them". We then walked forward to the top of the plane - I told Scott how the smoke was at No. 3 bolt hole. We went to the main doors, Robert stood on one side - I opened the first door, and I said to him "It'll never do to open these doors". I said so twice over. He said, "If your master has ordered you to open the doors, open them". I then laid hold of the other door and pulled it open. Scott stood by. I closed the two doors again, and said with an oath, "I'll be d----- if I'll open the doors". Scott turned himself round and went up the pit for the fire engine, and I ran down the plane, leaving the doors shut, intending to go down to see my master, Mr. Cooper. The doors were only open the time a man might go through - not more than a minute. I had pulled both doors wide open and let them go again. I ran down the front plane. When I had got as far as No. 3 door, I couldn't get further for smoke. The smoke had faced the wind up the plane to above twenty yards above No. 3 bolt hole. I had been away from that point a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes, and it was half an hour from when I had left Mr. Cooper. I then came back up the front plane to the pit bottom, and called for Robert Scott to come down. I stood at the pit bottom a few minutes, considering what to do, when I thought the master had ordered me to open the main doors, and I went and opened them wide, and propped them open. They stopped open ten minutes or more till Scott came down with the fire engine. Scott was out of the pit about a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes. As soon as Scott came down again the doors were shut by his orders. I was never on the front plane when the doors were open. Wm. Watson and I immediately followed Scott down the front plane to No. 3 doors. We found the smoke about 30 yards above No. 3, and it continued so until the water was put on. There was a little space under the smoke as far as No. 3, but it was quite full at No. 3. Robert Scott attempted to put some straw in No. 3 bolt hole to prevent the smoke from coming out, but it was to no purpose. There were only Scott, Watson and myself there. If I had opened No. 3 doors on the back plane,

instead of the main doors, it would have driven the smoke from the front plane, along the return drift. If my orders had been to open No. 3 doors instead of the main doors, I could not have got to them at that time. I remained there till Buxton came down the pit about ten o'clock. Buxton took charge of the pit when he came down. If, after first seeing the smoke on the front plane, I could have opened No. 3 doors, in the back plane, it would have cleared the front plane of smoke down to No. 3 bolt-hole. I did not make any attempt to get to these doors after I was stopped by the smoke. If I could have done so, the effect would have been to drive the smoke out of the front plane up the return drift instead of down the plane where the people were working. I can't tell the state the smoke was in at No. 3 bolt-hole. There was no possible means of getting to the No. 3 back plane doors - because above and below them were full of smoke. From the point where we were putting in the two stoppings at the heading at the back of the stable, outwards and upwards, to No. 3 bolt hole, there were no unclosed openings.

William Buxton, of Barrow Hill, Staveley, underviewer, went into the pit a few minutes past ten, and found there was not much air going. He ordered the fire-engine out of the pit to pump water to throw down the pit to increase the ventilation. He went down the pit again to examine the main separation doors; they were closed. After he had examined the two main doors, he found that the engine pit, which was a down cast, had become up cast, and he put up a door with straw, and reared metals against it to prevent this.

Israel Dakin, Barrow Hill, Staveley, coal miner, lamp-cleaner at the Hollingwood pit, spoke to leaving the lamp cabin safe on Saturday night.

Robert Boardman, Barrow Hill, Staveley, was in the lamp cabin when a boy, named Jacques, let some snuff from his lamp fall to the floor, and it fired some waste; he put it out with his foot, and let it lay on the floor.

Parkin Jeffcock, of Derby, mining engineer, of the firm of Woodhouse and Jeffcock; George Elliott, of Houghton Hall, Durham, colliery viewer; John Thomas Woodhouse, mining engineer; Stuart Smith, of Derby, assistant to Messrs. Woodhouse and Jeffcock; and John Hedley, Government Inspector of Mines, Derby, were on the spot after the accident, and used their best endeavours to put out the fire and extricate the men.

The coroner having summed up at some length, the Jury returned a verdict - "That the said Daniel Cooper, John Cooper, Joel Walters, Alexander Scott, Thomas Watson Trueman, William Trueman, George Wagstaff, and William Chapman, were accidentally suffocated and killed by smoke arising from a fire in a coal pit".