

Derbyshire Times and Chesterfield Herald.

Saturday 3rd. Jun. 1865.

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Pit on Fire at West Staveley.

On Saturday morning last, West Staveley Pit was discovered to be on fire. It is supposed to have caught fire in the cupola. Situated at Glasshouse Common, it must have been smouldering for some days. Great exertions have been used to cut off the fire without interrupting the ventilation of the pit. The colliery belongs to Messrs. E.M. Bainbridge and Co.

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Railway Accident near Eckington.

On Thursday an accident occurred at the sidings of the Park Colliery of Messrs. J. and G. Wells, Eckington. A man named Charles Crofts was engaged in shunting waggons on the sidings of the colliery along the main line of rails and having disengaged the horses, which he had two, from some waggons proceeded to attach them to some empty ones for the purpose of taking them to the pit. The horses turned round on the main line and at that moment a fast down train due at Mosborough at 11.33 and which does not stop at Eckington came upon them. Before the driver could save them they were cut to pieces. The man escaped. Fortunately the engine kept the rails. The horses were valuable ones and belonged to Messrs. Wells.

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Detection of Fire-damp in Collieries.

Though it cannot be denied that owing to the readiness with which we have become familiar to dangers by which we are constantly surrounded we too frequently expose ourselves to unnecessary risks and often jeopardise, at the same time, lives of others. There can be no doubt that constant warning of the existence of dangers is the best means that can be devised for inducing us to avoid it. Fire-damp has long been regarded as the colliers greatest enemy, notwithstanding that the Davy lamp has done much to prevent explosions in fiery mines. The number of preventable accidents is still far greater than necessary. From time to time suggestions have been made for the detection of fire-damp and the demonstration of its existence in dangerous quantities in such a manner than its presence in any particular part of the pit shall be at once known in the managers office or at some other convenient place on the surface. We have thus had propositions for audible barometers, test-boxes and various other apparatus which although ingenious, were either too costly or too inefficient to obtain general favour. In the past two weeks, however, two inventions of great merit have been brought forward, the one by Mr. Ansell, of the Royal Mint, based upon a diffusion of gasses by osmose force and the other by Mr. Jonathan Wilkinson of Grimesthorpe near Sheffield which operates solely through the different specific gravity of common air and the explosive gasses of coalmines.

An opportunity has been afforded during the past week at the West London Working Classes Industrial Exhibition by Mr. Plimsoll who is exhibiting these instruments for examining and testing both these inventions and, judging from the admirable manner in which the instruments behaved in the presence of air contaminated with the ordinary illuminating gas, no fear need apparently be entertained in their efficiency in the detection of fire-damp in collieries. As Mr. Ansell has undertaken to furnish us with the complete details of his invention we will say no more at present than that, experimentally at least, the apparatus acts as rapidly as could be desired. With regard to Mr. Wilkinson's invention it is as simple as it is efficient and consists of a copper vessel filled with atmospheric air, or in proper parlance an empty copper ball at one end of a scale beam which is weighted at the other. The two arms of the beam being in equipoise the apparatus is then ready for the mine and according as to whether the exterior air is lighter or heavier than that in the copper globe, such globe will rise or fall. From the lower part of the globe there are two small wires and when gravity descends the wire the come into contact with a reservoir of mercury and the electrical circuit is thus made and an alarm bell rings, the ringing continuing until the air in the gallery is purified.

The recommendation of Mr. Wilkinson's invention is that it is does not deteriorate by being brought into use as is the case with some of the inventions for a similar purpose that have been proposed, for, although the presence of fire-damp is immediately shown by the fall off the globe and the consequent ringing of the bell, the whole is restored to its normal position as soon as the air is purified. Mr. Plimsoll has suggested a small addition to this apparatus that will greatly increase its efficiency. It is as follows - that a small vertical dial should be placed behind the ball in the office and the dial an alarm(?) and that the dial should be covered with paper having the circumference divided into 24 equal parts to represent the hours of the day and the deal should revolve instead of a pointer as in the alarm and the hand of the bell should terminate with a pencil so that when the bell is ringing it should press against the prepared dial. By these means if an emission of gas occurred whilst no one was by to hear the bell or in the night they would on returning or in the morning find it recorded upon the paper which would indicate the

precise time at which it occurred and how long it lasted. A further use of these papers might be made. They could be filed for examination by the Mines Inspector who visits are necessary at long intervals as the Inspectors have so many collieries to visit. Mr. Plimsoll has requested Mr. Wilkinson to construct another apparatus on his principle in time for it to be also shown before the exhibition closes. We learn that the price of the apparatus would be no objection to its introduction and would should judge that in the event of use of the instrument becoming general the substitution of a cheaper metal for copper and certain other trifling modifications could be made which would enable the apparatus to be sold even more cheaply than at present. The invention is one which would doubtless ere long be practically tried in a mine and we shall lose no time in making known the amount of success which may be achieved. -

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Barrow's Staveley.

On Saturday morning last a bricklayer was being drawn up the Springwell Pit shaft when the onsetter at the bottom gave the signal to stop. This was instantly obeyed, another signal to lower was then given. On the bank the rope slackened showing that the cage was fast in the slides. Presently the cage fell with great force against the bottom by which the man has his ankle disjointed and received other injuries. As it is only a month since the death of poor Coffey at the same shaft the earnest attention of the consulting engineer of the Staveley Coal and Iron Company is needed to ascertain whether the cage is really deficient in construction. Also that there be a clear understanding of the signals as many men are afraid of descending this shaft.

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Interesting to Coal Miners - Important Decision.

Thomas White versus William Jackson M.P. representing the Clay Cross Coal Company.

Mr. Binney Jnr. represented the plaintiff and Mr. Busby defendant. This case disputed by defendant on principle and not pecuniary considerations. The claim was for £3-4-0d. wages due from the 24th. March last to the 13th. April. Mr. Binney in opening his case said that he thought there would only be one point to consider therefore he would direct himself to it at once. According to the written rules of the Company every man working in the Company's pits was under the control the of Company although the work was let off to what were termed stallmen who were paid a certain price per ton for getting the coal. The loaders were employed by the stallmen and paid by them at a price per day yet all the men employed by these contractors were subject to the approval of the Company and were under the Coal Mines Inspection Bill as referred to in Rule 18. The Company also employed lads of 15 to 17 years of age as putters to take away the coal from the stalls. Every workman being expected to work at any other work (where necessary) that the viewer may think fit. In this case the plaintiff had been ill three weeks prior to the 10th. day of March. On that day plaintiff went into Samuel Hoddishes stall where he usually works as a loader went Peter Robinson, the underviewer, came to him as he was about commencing his work and stopped him and said he would have to putt not only for his own stall but for others. The putters were paid at the rate of 1-8d. per score of corves and each stallman must have a putter and one putter can base(?) three or four stalls according to Rule 10. On Robinson telling him that he would have to putt, plaintiff replied he must have 4-0d. per day the same price he received as a loader as he was so employed. Robinson refused and said that he must do it at the usual rate of 1-8d. per score of corves and that if he earned 6d. he would be paid 6d and no more. The plaintiff then gave a month's notice on the 16th and did not go until the 24th. when he tended his services daily but Mr. Robinson refused to let him go on with his work. The question at issue was whether the Company could legally compel the plaintiff to do the work of a putter and pay him their own price or whether the plaintiff by doing the work could claim the daily wage of a loader. The plaintiff's evidence confirmed these statements. In cross-examination by Mr. Busby he said that boys were generally employed as putters at about 15 or 16 years of age and could earn 1-6d. or 2-0d. per day. He was working with Hoddish and he paid him. He rarely putt his own coals, he had putt from time to time but was paid 4-0d. per day. Peter Robinson put it in for him at the office. A putter is paid 1-4d. per score by the Company but the stallman paid another 4d. He never knew a man who could putt 50 skips and told Robinson that he would not putt unless he had 4-0d. per day. Robinson said that he should have 1- 8d. per score and 1-0d. extra if he putt 40 skips.

Samuel Hoddish deposed that he paid White 4-0d. per day as a loader. A putter can take four stalls in a day reckoning 2 men in a stall.

George Wain corroborated plaintiff as to Robinson's stopping him as a loader and requesting him to putt when White asked what he was going to give him. When Robinson replied: "What you can get", plaintiff's answer was that he would go onto putting if he would give him a days wage. In defence Mr. Busby said that it was not a matter of money but one of principle that prompted the defendants to resist the claim. In the management of the men in the dangerous employment to which they were engaged it was necessary that provisions inserted in Rule 10 should be enforced for preventing insubordination and therefore they should be in

control of the underviewer otherwise they would often be blocked up with the coal already got. Therefore it was necessary for the discipline of the pit that White should be called upon to act as a putter. Mr. Busby continued that a putter could earn at the rate of 1-8d. and the extra even more than he could get at loading. He then called John Brown, the viewer. He deposed that it was the practice for loaders to be called upon to putt when necessary. Mr. Binney here objected to any rule that could not be reduced to writing. Witness continued that a putter could make 3-0d or 3-4d. per day and sometimes 1-0d. was given for extra work. Plaintiff had been employed as a putter and paid at the rate of one. Peter Robinson deposed that he told White that he must do the work of a putter and that he refused unless he was given the same as that for loading. He offered him the same as others. He was there every morning and asked for a job at loading which he refused. This concluded the evidence and after the applicant had replied his honour said that he would adjourn the case for a month.

The Adjourned Colliery Case.

His Honour addressing Mr. Busby who appeared the previous day for the defendants said that although the plaintiff's solicitor Mr. Binney Jnr. was not there he thought that he might as well give his decision now as defer it for a month as previously arranged. He had gone through the case fully and came to the conclusion it was for the defendants to prove that they had the right to take a man from the work which he had engaged to do at a daily wages and impose upon him task-work to be paid at the Company's prices. The question was not whether they were justified in requesting the plaintiff and insisting that he should work as a putter and not as a loader, but whether he should be paid his days wages as a loader. He never refused to work as a putter. The difference in the price was the dispute. A man employed has the right to say that he will work for daily wages and not at task-work. It was for the defendants to show that they had a right to compel him. He saw nothing in the Rules which showed a right for the Company to alter a mans wages. An alteration could only be made by consent of both parties. It was an interference with the ordinary right of how a man should say how he would work and what remuneration he should have for his labour. It does not follow that if you changed a man's work you should change his wages. It would be a greater injustice towards the man to alter their will without his consent. The judgement for the full amount and the costs. The case of H. Limb against the same defendants was settled by the this judgement.

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Death in the Hospital.

On Thursday the 22nd. the inquest was held at the Chesterfield Hospital on the body of Robert Johnson, aged 24 years, a miner, who came by his death through being struck by a mass of rock which fell from the roof of a coalmine called the Nesfield Pit situate at Barlow. The accident occurred on the 7th. inst. and the deceased lingered until the 18th. The Verdict "Accidental Death."

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Frightful Colliery Accident in Monmouthshire.

Explosion at New Bedwelty Pit, property of the Tredegar Company.

(Precis). N.B. 16 killed on 16th. June - explosion - firedamp - ignition caused by naked light.