

Sheffield Daily Telegraph

Friday 4th. November 1887

Fatal Explosion in a Lead Mine.

Five Men killed near Matlock.

[From our Own Reporter]

An explosion, attended with the loss of five lives, occurred early yesterday morning at Mill Close Lea Mine, near Matlock. This mine, which is worked by the executors of the late Mr. E.M. Wass, J.P., of Matlock, who died about two years ago, is situated about a mile and a half from Darley Station, and is the largest and most important in Derbyshire. The shaft was sunk in 1860, and the venture at first was very costly, a considerable sum of money having to be spent before the ore was reached. Indeed, the preliminary outlay reached such a figure, with little or no prospect of any valuable return, that at one time it was seriously contemplated abandoning the undertaking, but, fortunately Mr. Wass was induced to proceed, and eventually a rich vein was struck, and Mill Close Lead Mine proved to be the last and best of his many ventures, and practically the only lead mine of any value in the county. It employs about 160 men, above and below ground, and it is noted for the quantity and purity of the minerals obtained. It will probably be remembered that about twelve months ago this particular mine was offered for sale at Matlock, but was withdrawn at £90,000, the reserve price being £100,000. Until very recently it was considered to be quite safe, so far as accumulations of gas were concerned and there is no record of any accident of a serious nature until two or three months ago, when a miner named Titterton met his death whilst at work. That, however, was merely a fall of stone in no way traceable to the presence of gas. A short time ago gas was noticed in the workings, and as a precautionary measure naked lights were abandoned for safety lamps. The facts of the fatal occurrence of yesterday morning are very simple. The work is carried on in four shifts of six, and at midnight twenty one men descended. Of those there was a gang of six men under the charge of Benjamin Boam, and they proceeded to their "forestall" in the Warren Carr Way for about 500 or 600 yards from the bottom of the shaft, which is 81 yards from the surface, and which is known as the top level, the bottom level which was also being worked, being 100 yards deep. Before they went down, a deputy, John Heathcote, had examined the level in which they proposed working, and, finding gas, warned them to be careful. They fired several shots with dynamite cartridges, and everything went on in the usual safety until three o'clock, when there occurred the explosion which resulted in such disastrous loss of life. A cartridge was prepared and applied in the ordinary way, the party retiring to a place of fancied safety some forty yards distant. Immediately the cartridge fired there was a terrific explosion, and the entire party, with the exception of a man named Robert Marsden, was buried underneath tons upon tons of stone and earth. Not a lamp was left burning, and Marsden, bruised and battered and suffering from terrible shock, commenced a journey towards the shaft. Men working eighty yards away felt the effect of the explosion, but though not injured, they, in the excitement of the moment, did not fully realise what had happened, and were unable to render any assistance to Marsden. This poor fellow crawled to the shaft, the only knowledge he having of his unfortunate companions being a groan which reached his ears immediately after the explosion, and there he managed to ring the signal bell. The information that something terrible had happened was conveyed to the engineman, who at once aroused the neighbourhood by blowing his whistle. Marsden, after communicating with the engineman, returned below, where he was joined by the men who had been working in another part of the mine. Search parties were hastily organised. When the spot was reached the searchers were horrified to find no trace of their comrades. Tons of stone and "bind" completely covered them, and it was plain that the work of recovering the bodies - for there was no hope of being able to save life - would be one of many hours and great difficulties.

Mill Close Lead Mine is situate very awkwardly for communicating with distant districts. There is no telegraph office within three miles, and the railway service is very meagre; so that a considerable time elapsed before the agent (Mr. Joseph Greatorex) and the general manager (Mr. Alsop, of Wirksworth) were communicated with. In the mean-time the men themselves pushe don as rapidly as possible, and after much labour succeeded in unearthing the bodies of the following miners: -

Benjamin Boam, 23 years of age, single, living at Winster.

George William Allan, 31 years of age, married, Winster.

George Stone, 31, Elton, married, and three children.

Job Stone, 56, Elton, married, three children.

George Needham, 25, Wensley, married, two children.

The work of recovery was not completed until seven o'clock, and in the meantime Mr. Greatorex and Mr. Alsop had arrived and taken charge of the operations. All the bodies brought out were fearfully bruised and mangled, especially about the head; and their appearance at the mouth of the shaft caused a most painful sensation. Notwithstanding the early hour of the morning the news of the accident had quickly spread to the cottages around, and to the adjoining villages, and before the bodies could be recovered there had gathered round the shaft mouth a crowd of men, women and children, who had either husbands, fathers, or other relatives in the mine, and the scene was of a most distressing character. When the bodies were at length brought to the surface the crowd was kept as far back as possible, but it quickly became known who the victims were, and the utmost sympathy was shown with their wives and children. At one time it was reported that all below had perished, and, as may be imagined, it was indeed a great relief to those who had been anxiously waiting and watching on the bank side, when cage after cage brought safely to the top those who it had been feared might have been among the dead. The bodies of the five men were immediately removed to one of the store rooms, and were there laid out ready for identification. As has been said, they were all severely crushed, particularly about the head, and one or two of them had the appearance of having been burnt. Of course, after the accident, work in the mine was entirely suspended, and Mr. Greatorex, the agent, went down and made an examination of the spot where the bodies of the men were recovered, but nothing that was not absolutely necessary was interefered with until the arrival of Mr. Stokes. Marsden upon being examined by Dr. Stubbs and Dr. Cantrell was found to have received a scalp wound beside other injuries, and after a time he was removed to his home by Mr. Bradley, farmer. As to the cause of the explosion, there is little or no doubt that the gas was liberated and ignited by the shot. Every care and precaution seems to have been taken, not only by the officials, but by the men themselves; and the inquest will in all probability add the present to a long list of fatalities which human agency is powerless to avert.

Opening of the Inquest.

News of the disaster was communicated to Mr. A.O. Brookes, of Bakewell, who is deputy-coroner for the district, and he arrived at the mine shortly after three o'clock, and opened the inquiry on the five bodies at the Warren Carr Farm. There were also present Mr. A.M. Alsop and Supt. Borrett. The only evidence taken, however, was that of identification. George Boam, of Winster, identified his brother Benjamin, who was 23 years of age; Joseph Allen, miner, of Winster, identified his brother, Geo. Wm. Allen, who was 31 years of age; Joseph Stone proved the identity of geo. Stone, and stated that he was his brother, and was 31 years of age. He was a married man, and leaves a wife and three children. Job Stone, who is 56, and who leaves a wife and three children, was identified by Benjamin Stone, of Elton, while George Needham, miner, of Darley Bridge, was identified by his brother, William Needham. He was 25, married, and leaves a wife and two children. The evidence of identification having been completed, Superintendent Borrett, in reply to the Coroner, said the principal witness (Marsden) had been

injured, and it would be some days before he could appear to give evidence. The inquiry was then adjourned to the Three Stags Inn, at Darley Bridge, on Tuesday next, but it is possible that this day may be altered to suit the convenience of Mr. Stokes.

Last night a number of men were engaged in clearing away the "bind" that had been blown down.

It is a singular fact that when the unfortunate man Titterton lost his life Benjamin Stone was working with him at the time, and had a narrow escape of his life.

Sheffield Daily Telegraph

Saturday 5th. November 1887

The Explosion in a Matlock Mine

About six o'clock on Thursday night Mr. Stokes and another Government Inspector, with Mr. Alsop, manager, Joseph Greatorex, sub-manager, John Heathcote and Wm. Webster, deputies, descended the mine and found the air pipes disconnected. A hurried view of the scene of the explosion revealed a mass of debris. The woodwork supporting the roof had given way, and a huge portion had fallen in. When they had proceeded about 400 yards, the tramway, it was found, was blocked, and the debris was everywhere scattered along the route. An examination was made at some distance from where the shot was fired, but a hasty retreat was compulsory on account of the air-pipes being broken, and the ventilation thereby seriously impeded. The works, it was reported, were clear for some 300 or 400 yards from the main shaft, but upon entering further along the lead vein, the wooden supports were found torn down from the roof and blown to fragments. Shortly before 10 o'clock yesterday morning a party was organised, and under the direction of Messrs. Heathcote and Webster proceeded to remedy the air tubes, and to clear away the accumulation of stone and earth in order to obtain an opportunity of investigating the further portion of the section. It is considered that it will be three or four days before the place where the dynamite shot was fired can be unearthed. It is only in this extreme portion of the lead mine that gas to any extent has been found. The other workings are said to be almost entirely free from the presence of gas, they are seldom used. The injured man, Robert Marsden, of Birchover, is reported to be going on satisfactory, and it is believed that he will ultimately recover. Lord Edward and Lady Cavendish drove over from Chatsworth to the mine on Thursday morning, viewed the bodies, and made enquiries to the wives and families of the deceased.

The High Peak News

Saturday 5th. November 1887

Shocking Accident at Mill Close Lead Mine

Five Men Killed

(From our Own Reporter)

Darley Dale, Thursday Night

Probably never in its history has the pastoral village of Darley gained such unenviable distinction as it has during the present week. Early on Thursday morning the neighbourhood was startled by a report obtaining currency that a fearful explosion had occurred at the famous Mill Close Lead Mine. The rumour, alas, proved too true. Certainly the facts were exaggerated in the first instance, as those unwelcome reports generally are. However, the disaster has proved very serious, resulting in the death of five men, and injury to another. The Mill Close Mine, noted throughout the Midlands for the purity and prolific yield of its ore, was opened in the year 1860, by the late Mr E.M. Wass J.P. It is a matter of history that in sinking the shaft Mr Wass almost expended his fortune, but eventually a rich vein of ore was reached, and since then operations have gone on without intermission up to the present time.

The celebrated mine is situate in the parish of Darley, being about a mile-and-a-half from the Railway Station, and three miles from Winster. It can be seen from the line which passes through Darley and Rowsley on the main road for Manchester and London. From the year 1860 there has only been one death, which occurred about four months ago. A man named John Titterton, of Elton, was killed by a fall of bind from the roof. From this it will be seen how safe the workings are. On several occasions there have been escapes of gas, particularly in the last year or two. But these have been comparatively of little moment though the circumstances were reported to the Government Inspector of Mines, Mr. A.H. Stokes, of the Midland district.

There are 124 men employed in the workings, which include those who get the ore, waggoners, and deputies. Mr. Joseph Greatorex is what is technically known as the agent, and Mr. A.M. Alsop, of Wirksworth, is the general manager. The mine is worked for the executors of the late Mr. Wass, who died nearly two years ago. There are 40 employees on the bank, which comprise engine men, stokers, washers, and labourers. This makes the total number of hands about 164. From the statements made by the officials it appears that work commences on Monday mornings at two o'clock. This obviates the men having to be in any way engaged on Sundays. Of course there are exceptions, such as the enginemen and stokers, who are constantly at the works engaged in pumping operations. An engine of 200 horse power is unceasingly in motion pumping the water from the shaft. Work goes on night and day from two o'clock on Monday morning until 10 p.m. on Saturday night, when all but those who are compelled to be on the spot leave the premises, and Sunday duty, as far as practicable, suspended. The first shift on Monday morning and the last shift on Saturday night extend over a period of four hours, and the rest are of six hours duration. The shaft is 100 yards deep, but there are two levels, one being at 84 yards. From the main shaft headings or "forestalls" branch off in all directions. Lead mines are very different from coal pits in the mode of working. In the former large cavities are formed, and the ore is extracted as best it can.

From what can be ascertained it appears that a shift was commenced at midnight on Wednesday. There would be twenty-one or twenty-two men on duty. Before they began work the mine had been officially examined by the deputy, William Webster. He found a quantity of

gas in the heading, and duly reported the occurrence to the company who took the particular route in which the explosion happened. The men were in charge of Job Stone, and the company was known as Stones's. They were warned of the presence of gas on going down. It seems they were engaged on the top level, or 84 yards from the surface. The distance they had to travel underground was between 500 and 600 yards before reaching the face of the rock. Upon a portion of the road they would be able to use naked lights, but were compelled to have safety lamps whilst at their work. There were for getters and two waggoners working in the stall or heading, and, unfortunately, all the six were within measurable distance of the force of the explosion. Had it happened a few minutes earlier or later the waggoners would have been away from the spot conveying the ore to the exit from the mine. There was nothing perceptible of the approaching danger when the men began their usual occupation. Several shots of dynamite charges had been fired. This powerful explosive is regularly used at the mine to blow down the rock, with which the ore is mixed. The heading is about six yards high, and a charge of dynamite is inserted into a hole which is drilled for it. The charge is fired with "touch", and the men retire out of danger, as they consider. They would move away to a distance of about 40 yards. The shot went off in the usual manner, and was immediately followed by a terrific explosion of gas. The force of the concussion was felt all over the mine, the head trees, forks, and scores of tons of rock being removed. The fall of bind killed the men, debris covering them. The shock was not felt on the surface, and it was not until one of the men, Marsden, who is injured, made his way in the dark to the bottom of the shaft, that the disaster was known. He was the only one spared to tell of the sad accident which befell his comrades. The men engaged in the heading were Robert Marsden, Birchover; Job Stone, Elton; George Stone, Elton; George Allen, Winster; Benjamin Boam, Winster; and George Needham, Wensley. Boam and Needham were the waggoners. They, as we have previously said, were unfortunately along with the other group when the gas was ignited. The lights were all blown out with the force of the explosion, but Marsden, though injured, made his way in the darkness to the bottom of the shaft. He signalled to be drawn out, and then the intelligence became known. He displayed conspicuous bravery by going down the shaft again along with a stoker named George Boam. These two men were the first to venture down the mine. They were stated to have felt the effects of the after-damp, but not to any serious extent. The explosion took place a few minutes before three o'clock. It was some time before any of the bodies were discovered. Lights were procured and a search party was quickly formed, under the leadership of John Heathcote. He arrived on the premises about five o'clock, and, being one of the deputies, organised the relief party. Messengers were despatched as quickly as possible to Mr. Joseph Greatorex, of Winster, the agent, who was speedily at the mine. A verbal message was also sent to Mr. A.M. Alsop, of Wirksworth, the manager. When Mr. Greatorex arrived he took charge of the search party, and went down, finding the deputy there. It was discovered that the men were almost entirely buried in the debris. The bodies were fearfully crushed. After the bind had been removed the remains were brought out. The first person to be conveyed up the shaft was Job Stone, who could be seen under the refuse, but was quite dead. In the meantime Dr. Stubbs, of Darley Bridge, and Dr. Cantrell, of Winster, were summoned, but their services were of no avail except in the case of Marsden, who was bruised about the head. He was taken to the Warren Carr Farm, and, after attention, conveyed home. The men were sent up as speedily as possible, and taken to the office. There they were stripped and laid on stretchers. The bodies presented a shocking spectacle, being fearfully crushed. It took until seven o'clock to recover all the deceased miners. The last to be brought out was Needham.

When it became known that an explosion had taken place people from the vicinity began to assemble at the works, and by the time the last corpse reached the surface many friends and relations were congregated, being anxious to know who were amongst the dead. Since the mine was opened in 1860 the number of employees have gone on increasing until there are now more obtaining their livelihood at Mill Close than at any previous period. There have been slight evidences of gas in the mine, but not to any alarming extent. The safety lamps used were the

Davy and Marson's. Every possible precaution has been taken to prevent accidents. The list of killed is as follows: - Benjamin Boam, single, of Winster; George William Allen, married, Winster; George Stone, married, Elton; Job Stone, married, Elton; George Needham, married, Wensley. After the explosion the mine ceased working, and will not be started again this week. Job Stone has been parish clerk at Elton for many years, and was quite a noted character in the locality. He was close to the man Titterton, who was killed by a fall of roof a few weeks ago, and gave evidence at the inquest. His body was probably the worst injured of the five. The bruises were most apparent about the heads of the victims. Boam was terribly crushed on the left side. During the day Mr. Alsop and Mr. Greatorex were at the mine directing affairs. It is needless to say that every possible attention was bestowed on those who in any way had business at the works. The theory formed respecting the disaster is that gas was liberated and caused the roof to fall. Up to the present the scene of the occurrence has not been examined. Mr. A.H. Stokes, the Government Inspector, arrived at Darley about five o'clock on Thursday night, and proceeded to the mine. He is expected to make the official examination on Friday morning.

The Inquest

Sergeant Ramshall went on Thursday morning to advise the coroner of the calamity, and Mr. Brookes arrived about three o'clock. He proceeded to the Warren Carr Farm, and swore in the jury as follows: - William Ashton Durden, James Taylor, Joseph Blackwell, Joseph Hardy, John Keane Coleman, Adam Clay, John Derbyshire, William Hardy, George Harrison, Edward Fawley, Charles Potter, and William Wain. Mr. A.M. Alsop, the general manager, and Mr. Greatorex, agent, were present, as also was Mr. Superintendent Borrett. The following evidence of identification was taken: -

George Boam said: I live at Winster, and am a stoker at the mine. The body the jury have just seen is that of my brother Benjamin Boam, of Winster, miner. He was 23 years of age on the 13th of last February. I know nothing of the accident. He was a single man.

Joseph Allen deposed: I live at Winster, and am a miner. The body the jury have seen is that of my brother, George William Allen, late of Winster. He was 31 years of age on the 25th of September. He was married. I know nothing of the accident.

Joshua Stone stated: I live at Elton, and am a miner. The body the jury have just seen is that of George Stone, late of Elton. He was 31 years of age on the 29th December last. He worked at the Mill Close Mine. He was married, and leaves three children.

Benjamin Stone said: I reside at Elton and am a grocer. The body the jury have just seen is that of my brother Job Stone, late of Elton, miner. He was 56 years old on the 21st March last. He was married, and had three children.

William Needham deposed: I live at South Darley and am a miner. The body the jury have seen is that of my brother George Needham, who was a miner. He was married, and had two children.

The Coroner then said: Gentlemen. This is all we can do today in this unfortunate affair. You have had the bodies identified, and it will now be our duty to adjourn the inquest for the presence of the inspector of mines. I understand he is coming here this evening, but it would be impossible to continue the inquiry, inasmuch as the principal witness was injured when these poor fellows were killed. He will be some few days before he is able to appear.

Superintendent Borrett: It will be several days at least.

The Coroner: Perhaps about a week. I would suggest that the inquiry be adjourned from this house to the Three Stags Inn, at Darley Bridge, as it will be more convenient to the witnesses and ourselves.

Superintendent Borrett: What hour will you fix?

The Coroner: We will say eleven o'clock this day week.

The Inquest was then formally adjourned until next Thursday, at eleven o'clock.

A later account says that it is improbable the inquest will be held on the day arranged, as Mr. Stokes has occasion to be at the Home Office during the whole of next week.

Sheffield Daily Telegraph

Monday 7th. November 1887

The Mine Explosion near Matlock

Narrative of a Survivor

The remains of the deceased men who were killed by an explosion of gas in the Mill Close Lead Mine, near Matlock, on Thursday morning were on Saturday interred. Much sympathy was shown the wives and families of the men. The various officials of the mine and the executors of the will of the late Mr. E.M. Wass, J.P., were present at the interments.

The condition of the only man (Robert Marsden, of Birchover) who sustained very serious injuries is now very satisfactory, and he appears to be making rapid progress. He has given the following particulars of his marvellous escape: - The "shift" in which I was engaged, numbering six men, descended the warren Carr shaft of the Mill Close Mine at midnight on Wednesday, and we proceeded to our fore-stall, which is nearly 600 yards from the shaft. We commenced working in the top level, which is about 90 yards from the surface, and is seven or eight yards wide and six yards high. At a little before three o'clock we had a "shot" or cartridge ready for firing. Two waggoners came up to fill their waggons. and they, with the three other of my companions and myself, retreated some distance after the torch had been applied. A tremendous report was heard, and the explosion threw us down. I was sometime insensible. Upon reviving I felt that my head was bruised, and my arms badly burnt, but I could see nothing of my companions, as the place was in total darkness. I fancied I heard a groan, but I was too dazed to distinguish from what part it proceeded. I released myself from the debris and groped my way as best I could to the shaft, and was drawn to the surface. Search parties were instantly ready, and I accompanied them to the scene of the accident, and the bodies were ultimately unearthed. Feeling very weak and exhausted from the severe shock, I was conveyed to the surface, and was attended by Dr. Stubbs.

Owing to a metropolitan engagement, Her Majesty's Inspector of Mines (Mr. A.H. Stokes, of Derby) will not be able to hold the inquest on Thursday next, as directed by the coroner. The work of clearing the debris from the scene of the catastrophe will take some few days, it is expected, after which the official inspection will be proceeded with.

Sheffield Daily Telegraph

Thursday 10th. November 1887

Accident at Monk Bretton

A slight accident occurred yesterday at Monk Bretton Colliery to a lad named Sylvester. The lad was reaching some small piece of wood from off the circular saw bench, when by some means the saw caught his hand near for his thumb. He was taken to the Beckett Hospital but he was allowed to return home again, as the injury was not serious.

Sheffield Daily Telegraph

Thursday 10th. November 1887

The Explosion at a Matlock Mine

Mr. Southern, Her Majesty's Inspector of Mines, on Tuesday again descended the Mill Close Lead Mine, and examined the scene of the catastrophe. All naked lights are now strictly forbidden in the pit, and in future the cartridges will be fired by an electric battery, instead of a fuse. It is not expected that Robert Marsden, the injured man will be able to attend the official inquiry for some days, and the adjourned inquest, which was fixed for today has been further postponed until Tuesday.

High Peak News

Saturday 12th November 1887

The Mill Close Disaster

Interment of the Victims

There has very little transpired with regard to the disaster which occurred at the Mill Close Lead Mine at Darley Dale since last Thursday night, which will be of interest to the public. Mr. A.H. Stokes, Her Majesty's Inspector of Mines for the Midland district, arrived on Thursday night at five o'clock, and was met by Mr. A.M. Alsop, manager, and Mr. J. Greatorex, agent. Mr. Stokes descended the mine, and it was found that a large quantity of bind had fallen. He gave orders that this should be cleared away as speedily as possible. Work was commenced to remove the debris the next morning, and by Saturday all the rubbish had been shifted so as to enable the official investigation to be made. On the return of the Inspector to the surface Mr. Stokes gave orders that naked lights must not be used at present. Whether this injunction will be permanently carried out remains to be seen. No doubt this matter will be considered at the inquest. Should a hard and fast rule have to be observed with regard to the use of naked lights it will materially affect the working of the mine. Up to the time of the lamentable explosion, unprotected lights have been employed in the greater part of the works. It was found that beyond the point where the gas must have been fired that the air was very bad. The ventilation has been interfered with, and it will take some time to restore this. Lord and Lady Edward Cavendish have visited the mine, and expressed their condolence with the bereaved families. After the formal inquiry on Thursday, the deputy coroner issued his certificates of burial, and preparations were made for the removal of the deceased men. The coffins were ordered at the expense of the executors of the late Mr. E.M. Wass, and the bodies taken home prior to interment.

On Saturday afternoon the village of Winster assumed a mournful aspect, the occasion being the funeral of one of the ill-fated miners, George William Allen. At the time announced for the burial, there were numerous groups of people in the thoroughfares and at the church. The shops were closed temporarily, blinds were drawn, and every manifestation of sincere sympathy was apparent. The funeral was of a very simple character. Following the relatives were Mr. Denman, London, one of the executors of the late owner, and a partner in the mine; Mr. Alsop, head manager; Mr. Greatorex, agent; Mr. Miers, manager of the Lea portion of the works; and a representative body of Odd Fellows, of which the deceased was a member. The service was conducted by the Rev. H. Milnes, vicar, in a very impressive manner. The same afternoon the funerals of Job Stone and George Stone were conducted at Elton Church. The Rev. J. Johnson officiated. The remains of George Needham were interred also on Saturday afternoon at Cross Green, the Rev. J.N.W. Booth officiating. The last funeral was on Sunday, when George Boam was interred at Winster. The survivor of the explosion, Robert Marsden, a young man residing at Birchover, has been under the care of Dr. Greenhough, of Youlgreave. His injuries are chiefly about the head. On Friday he was visited by the manager of the mine, and a great improvement was apparent in his condition. From what he has related of the occurrence his sufferings must have been great, and the narrative which he gave to the manager was of a very thrilling character. Marsden says: - "On Thursday morning I was working along with the three deceased miners and the two waggons. We were working in a place seven or eight yards high. There were no other miners close to us. We had been driving a shot, and at a little before three o'clock it was ready to fire. The two waggons came up and joined us at this time to fill their waggons, and the shot having been touched we all stood together out of reach of the splinters. As far as I can say the lighting of the shot and the explosion were simultaneous. I heard a tremendous report, and felt myself thrown down to the ground. I was insensible for I should think twenty minutes. When I came to myself the place was in darkness, the lamps having been blown out. I

could not see anything of my companions. I felt the air to be very heavy and sickening and I had great difficulty in breathing. Feeling about the place carefully with my hands I found out that there had been a fall from the roof. I was bleeding from a wound on the head and my arm was badly bruised. In feeling about I discovered quantities of rock all around me, and on my hands and knees I dragged myself along over the obstruction. I at length reached the way leading towards the shaft, but I was a very long time in doing this. The exertion rendered me very weak and confused. I was the first man to reach the shaft, and signalling, I got into the cage and was drawn to the top. I then told a man of the explosion, and we descended the shaft together. Other men had by this time collected, and had commenced the search. I was then taken back to the surface, and my wounds attended to".

A statement is made that the Mill Close Mine may be lighted with electricity, and the dynamite charges for blasting will be fired by the same process, so as to reduce the chances of accident to a minimum. We are not able to affirm or contradict the report. Publicity is also given to the following rumour, the truth of which will probably be ascertained at the inquest, which is fixed for Thursday next, at the Three Stags Inn, Darley Bridge, at eleven o'clock: - "A report has gained currency which, if true, will throw a different light upon the circumstances attending the cause of the explosion, and have an important bearing upon the case. This statement, which has been made by one connected with the inquiry, is to the effect that the unfortunate miners in firing the shot left their remaining supply of dynamite in proximity to the spot, and that this was ignited. The disastrous effect of the explosion coincides with this opinion, and the report of the sub-manager (Mr. Joseph Greatorex) after visiting the scene, asserting that there was no "after-damp" noticeable in the workings, also bears out the statement. The man Robert Marsden, one of the miners, and the only survivor of the explosion, will doubtless be able to clear up the mystery, as he would know where the supply of dynamite was kept".

The Craven Herald

November 12th, 1887.

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Swaledale - Starting of the Lead Mines -

On Tuesday a commencement was made to re-open the extensive lead mines in Swaledale. The Manager, Mr John Rodwell, of the Keld Heads Mine, Wensley, started 8 men to commence the opening out and it is hoped that within a few days more men will be employed. The mines will, it is expected, afford employment to a large number of men in the district, who have up to now been dependent upon agriculture, which has hardly yielded them a living.

Sheffield Daily Telegraph

Friday 18th. November 1887

The Fatal Explosion at Mill Close Mine

Dangerous Shot Firing

Adjourned Inquest and Verdict

[From our Own Reporter]

The inquest on the bodies of Job Stone, George Stone, George Allan, Bryan Boam, and George Needham, lead miners, who were killed by an explosion of gas in Mill Close Lead Mine, on the 3rd. inst., was resumed yesterday at the Three Stags' Heads Inn, Darley Bridge, before the Deputy Coroner for the High Peak Hundred (Mr. A.O. Brooks).

Amongst those present were Mr. Denman and Dr. Buzzard, executors of the late Mr. E.M. Wass, the owner of the mine; Mr. A.H. Stokes, Government Inspector of Mines; Mr. A.M. Alsop, and Mr. Jos. Greatorix, manager and agent respectively of the Mill Close Mine.

Robert Marsden, Birchover, miner, said he was working with Job Stone at Mill Close Mine on the 3rd. inst. They and the men killed descended the mine at twelve midnight of the 2nd. George Needham and Benjamin Boam were waggoners, and witness and the others were miners. They were working altogether in the Forefield part of the mine. No men were at work in the place when they got there. Each man had a safety lamp except the waggoners, who used naked lights, but no naked lights were allowed within ten yards of the end of the Forefield. On the way to the working place they met William Webster, deputy, who asked, "How is it tonight?" and he replied, "It is very bad. There is more gas than usual." He further said they must be very careful. Webster also spoke to Job Stone, but witness did not know what was said. They then left Webster and went forward. The height of the working place would be from eighteen to twenty feet, and the width perhaps rather more than twenty feet. There was an upper roadway in the place, formed of timbering, covered with stone, from one side to the other of the vein. The height between the floor and the upper roadway would be about eight feet. The thickness of the stone on the upper roadway would be about two yards, and it was simply used for ventilation and as a travelling way, no waggons being on it. They had a fixed ladder to get to the upper roadway, and a hole through the timbering and the stone. The ladder would be twenty yards from the end of the Forefield where they were working. They all four miners went to work on the top roadway. The waggoners, who had nothing to do with "getting" the ore, were never on the upper roadway that night. When they got to the top Job Stone, who had a second and a Davey safety lamp, tested the place for gas, and witness saw gas in the lamp. That would be about half-way between the Forefield and the top of the ladder. A second test was made at the end of the Forefield, where again gas fired in the lamp. They then began to work, and got off the loose ore. Then they bored a hole, and Job Stone fired a shot, which went off all right, no gas being ignited. Witness and Job Stone bored another hole, and the other two men bored two more. All three holes were charged with dynamite witness' and Stones' with one packet containing about 3.5 oz. He did not know how much was put in the other holes, but it was possible they might use a packet and a half. They were fired with a fuse and a detonating cap, the fuse being fired with a touch-paper, which in turn was ignited at a candle on the ground, near the bottom of the ladder, on the waggon way. George Allan and Job Stone were left to fire the three shots, George Stone took the lighted touch-paper to the hole in the upper roadway, and the shot firers lighted a piece of touch paper in their possession from the pice held up by him. After the shots were lighted they all retired for a distance of fifty yards along the waggon way. Witness heard one shot go off and

immediately afterwards a very powerful "rush" like the sound of a strong wind or a blaze, but he saw no blaze. The "rush" knocked him over; but he could not say he heard any fall of roof or timber. The next thing was he found himself in the dark at the edge of a fall of stone. He called out, asking if any of the others were hurt, but he got no reply. He crawled over the fall of stone, when he saw George Bateman coming with a lighted candle. They went back together for some distance, and met another man. They gave witness a light, and he came up the shaft and told those at the top what had occurred. Witness and the stoker got lamps and went down the mine again, but came up again, without quite getting to the scene of the accident. He was injured, and after being seen by a doctor he was taken home. The dynamite box was kept in the upper roadway, about four or five yards from the top of the ladder, and further back than the Forefield. There would be ten or a dozen cartridges and part of a ring of fuses in the box. There would be 30 or 40 detonators in sawdust in a small tin box. He did not know of any other dynamite in the place. No naked lights were allowed in the upper roadway; but about ten weeks ago he saw a lighted candle there. It was stuck at the top of the ladder, where they could sometimes light a fuse at it. Mr. Heathcote had since forbidden naked lights in the upper roadway, and that was the only time witness had seen such a light there.

By Mr. Stokes: If three or four candles had been found about the dynamite box, on the upper roadway, he could not account for them. He should think they must have been left there for a great while, perhaps since they had worked at that particular part.

Mr. Stokes: Supposing a candle has been found with new clay - you know clay gets hard when left in a mine for some time - supposing a candle nearly burnt has been found with new clay on it, where the dynamite box was, you can give no account or explanation of that.

Witness: No, Sir. We did not take any there.

By. Mr. Denman: Job Stone was the oldest of the party, and they were guided by his experience as a very old miner. Two or three shots had been fired before those which immediately preceded the explosion, and nothing followed but what they expected. Job Stone did not test again after the first shots, although he thought he did test after the first shot. They had fired shots there before, and they expected no danger.

Witness, in answer to Mr. Stokes, said gas was present three feet from where they bored, and they kept the lamps low in consequence. They had often fired shots within three feet of gas before the accident. Where the shot was fired they might have got some of the ore without blasting, but not so easily. No official visited the working place during witness' shift. The accident occurred about three o'clock in the morning. There was a natural cavity at the end of the forefield, in which they expected there was gas, but they did not try it. The nearest shot would be three feet from that hole. There was a row of iron pipes to carry the ventilation into the forefield, and there was good ventilation coming through the pipes. All the men were perfectly sober. Witness' arms and sides were burned.

John Heathcote, Winster, miner at Mill Close said he went down the mine about two hours after the accident. He assisted in removing the fall and recovering the bodies, and afterwards the same night he made an examination of the scene of the accident. He then found gas. A door had been blown outwards a dozen yards, and there were some other indications of a severe explosion. The dynamite box was blown to pieces, and they found from seventeen to twenty unexploded cartridges scattered about on the top roadway. They had not been able to find detonators either exploded or unexploded. Pieces of fuses were found all burnt, and the box itself had been on fire, but they could not say whether the fuse or the explosion had ignited it. Some of the dynamite bore traces of having been on fire. His daily reports of his official examination of Stone's place showed that from the 26th. to the day preceding the explosion gas

was daily found there - in some cases a great deal. He was not aware that men were using naked lights within a few yards of the gas, but he knew they were firing shots where the gas was. The orders were that no naked lights had to be used beyond the ladder, either top or bottom. He had since seen candles found near the dynamite box, but he could not say how they got there. The candles were found about fourteen yards from where the gas was in the forefield. Having found gas, as shown in his report, he did not stop the shot firing, as he had no orders to do so. He could not say why he did not stop the shotfiring, or why, if he had not the power, he did not go to his superior officer and ask what to do. There had been shotfiring all along.

Mr. Stokes said that he did not answer the question, and witness must explain the matter to the Coroner.

Witness said they had no orders to stop firing when gas was found. Shot firing had not been stopped before when gas was found.

Mr. Stokes: Must I take it you have no explanation to give?

Witness: Yes, if you like, Sir.

Mr. Stokes: No, not if I like; it must be what you have to say.

Witness: I cannot say why I can give no explanation why I did not stop them.

Mr. Stokes: Can we say that you have no explanation to give why you did not stop the shot firing or ask the manager for instructions.

Witness: Yes, Sir.

By. Mr. Denman: The gas he had spoken of as finding was not in the waggon but in the upper level. Only two shots were fired, for he had found an unexploded cartridge in one of the holes. Nine feet of timber and stone had fallen, and had the men been a few yards to one side or the other they would not have been buried. The men had always fired their own shots in this mine. It was five or six years since dynamite began to be used. He had known shots fired frequently when gas was about, within the past eight or ten weeks.

Mr. Denman: Was it is consequence of that experience without damage resulting that you did not stop shot firing on this occasion. I suggest that as an explanation.

Witness: Well, I cannot give you any other explanation. I did not consider there was any danger in using a naked light in the waggon way. There was no change in the general condition of the mine during the last 10 weeks; and we had never known gas fired by a shot before.

By. Mr. Stokes: There had been three small explosions during the last 12 months, and in consequence safety lamps were ordered to be used in all parts of the mine where gas was found. They had had more gas in Stone's place lately than ever they had before. He was not aware that shots would light the gas.

William Webster, Wensley, one of the deputies in charge at Mill Close, said that from twelve midnight of the 2nd. until half-past five on the morning of the 3rd. there was no one in charge of the mine. He visited Stone's place shortly after six o'clock on the 2nd. The shift came out at six, and the places would "stand" until midnight. He visited the place again a little after eleven. He generally corroborated Marsden's evidence as to the conversation about the gas in the place, and the necessity for being very careful. He told them to have no naked lights anywhere

near to where they were filling the waggons. He could not account for the candles found on the upper roadway, and he did not think they had been used that night. He should think shot firing caused the explosion. He expected the men were going to fire shots that night. Some of the gas he discovered was on a level with one of the shot holes. He thought none of the men had had drink when he met them going in.

Mr. Stokes, who was examining the witness, said his only object in putting that last question was to protect the characters of the deceased.

Witness, continuing, said that in spite of his report "Stone's place full of gas," he did not think it his duty to prevent the men going to work. Hundreds of shots had been fired. He had no orders to stop them. He had no rules to go by.

Mr. Stokes: You had the rule of common sense which is a very good rule in the absence of printed rules.

Witness: The men had fired shots there before. (After a pause) you ask me why I did not stop them. I say now, I ought to have stopped them.

Mr. Stokes: There is no doubt about that.

Witness: There had been as much many a time before, and the reason I did not stop them was they had worked there before. They had fired shots so often I did not think there was any danger from shot firing in gas. In other words I did not think shot firing would ignite gas.

Mr. Stokes: You have quite changed that opinion now?

Witness: Yes, Sir.

Joseph Greatorex, agent of Mill Close Mine, said he though they had found all the dynamite that was in the box at the time of the explosion. He could not account for the fuse and detonators becoming ignited, except by the flame of the explosion. They had recently had three explosions in the mine, and it was in consequence of those that he ordered safety lamps for the gassy parts of the mine. They had had one or two visits from the inspectors of mines lately, and they were sinking a new shaft for the purpose of ventilating this place. Witness daily saw the reports of his deputies. Considering thoses reports, he still did not think it his duty to stop the shot-firing, because he did not think the shots would ignite the gas, and he had been present during shot-firing. Apart from the shot, he did consider the gas dangerous to the men, and they had worked when there was more gas present. He did not consider it his duty to consult anybody as to whether shot-firing would light gas. He had spoken to Mr. Alsop about it. He thought they were complying with the Mines Regulation Act in respect to this place. He believed now the explosion was caused by the firing of a dynamite shot. He did not think the candles near the dynamite were lighted at the time or that they had anything to do with the explosion. They had no business there, of course. If there was a lighted candle the shot might waft the gas to it.

By Mr. Denman: With ther exception of a year or eighteen months witness and his father had been agents of the mine for 27 years. The previous explosions were caused by naked lights. The safety lamps were immediately got on the suggestion of the Government Inspector.

Mr. Stokes said that every suggestion made to the owners by the Government Inspector had been promptly carried out.

Witness in answer to Mr. Denman, said a tobacco pouch and box of matches were found in the clothes of one of the deceased. Smoking was strictly forbidden in their mine.

Marsden, recalled, said the candles found in the mine were hard, and must have been lying a long time.

Mr. Stokes pointed out, and Mr. Greatorex admitted, that the candles were harder than when found in the mine.

Marsden, further examined, emphatically denied that there was any naked light whatever on the upper level on the morning of the explosion.

Mr. Denman, addressing the Court, said that it had not been proved conclusively what fired the gas, but he himself thought it was the off chance ignition by the firing of the shot: and while urging that officials, with their experience of the mine, were not to blame for allowing the men to go to work, and that since the explosion the Government Inspector had been in conference with the managers of the mine, and whatever prudence could suggest to prevent similar occurrences in the future would undoubtedly be carried out.

After a few words from Mr. Stokes and the Coroner, that latter of whom said that in his opinion, the explosion was a purely accidental occurrence, the jury retired at a quarter past four o'clock. After a quarter of an hour's consultation, the jury returned a verdict of "Accidental Death caused by an explosion of gas ignited by the firing of a shot".

Mr. Stokes took the occasion to announce that the trustees of the late Mr. E.M. Wass had behaved most kindly in ???????? to each widow 4-0s. and each child 1-6d. a week.

High Peak News

Saturday 19th November 1887

The Mill Close Disaster

Inquest and Verdict

Full Report

On Thursday the adjourned inquiry respecting the death of the five men who were killed at the Millclose Mine, on the 8th inst., was resumed at the Three Stags' Heads Inn, Darley Dale, before Mr. A.O. Brookes, deputy coroner, of Bakewell. The deceased miners were Job Stone, Elton; George Stone, Elton; George Allen, Winster; Benjamin Boam, Winster; and George Needham, Wensley. Mr. A.H. Stokes, of Derby, Inspector of Mines for the Midland district, was present; and Mr. Denman and Mr. Buzzard, executors of the late Mr. E.M. Wass, watched the enquiry on behalf of the trustees. Mr. A.M. Alsop, of Wirksworth, manager; and Mr. Joseph Greatorex, agent, were also present. Mr. Superintendent Borrett was in attendance. Mr. William Wain was foreman of the jury. Marsden appeared with his head enveloped in surgical bandages. The following evidence was adduced: -

Robert Marsden said: I live at Birchover, and am a miner. I recollect the 3rd inst. We went down the mine at twelve o'clock at night. There were Job Stone, George Stone, Benjamin Boam, George Needham, George Allen, and myself. I and Job Stone worked together, and George Allen and George Stone together. The other two were the waggoners. We went to the part of the mine known as Stone's place, which is called the forefield. We all went to work together. There were no men at work at that place when we got there. We had each a safety lamp, and Job Stone had a Davy lamp. The two waggoners had naked lights. Naked lights were allowed to be taken to within about ten yards of the end of the forefield, but no nearer. On our way to our work we saw William Webster, a deputy. He was on the way to the workings. I said to him "How is it tonight?" and he replied "It is very bad; there is more gas than usual. He told us we must be very careful. That was all I heard. Webster had said something to Job Stone, but I did not hear it. I did not hear him speak to the waggoners. He left us and we went forward. I was leading the way for some time but Job Stone caught me. The place where we were working is cut out to a height of about six or seven yards from the waggon gates to the roof. The width would be about 20 feet. We had a lower level and an upper level, with a roadway between. This was formed by timber being put across the roadway from side to side, and stone was put on the top of the timber. From the floor forming the lower way the height would be about eight feet, and there would be two yards deep of stone on the top of the lower way. The upper road was not used for a waggon way, but simply for the men to travel upon and for ventilation. To get from the lower to the upper way we had a ladder fixed, and a hole through the timber and stone. The stone at the point where the ladder was fixed would be about a foot thick. The ladder would be rather more than twenty yards from the end of the forefield. All four went to work on the top roadway, the waggoners being below. The waggoners did not come up to us that night. The waggoners had nothing to do with the getting of the ore, their duty being to convey the ore to the shaft bottom. Job Stone had another lamp beside the one he worked with. This was a Davy lamp, used for testing for gas. I saw him testing, and observed gas fire in the lamp. The first place used from the end of the forefield where Stone tested would be about ten yards. It was between the ladder and the forefield. The lamp was held very high and there was a little gas. The next place tested was at the end of the forefield, where there was also a little gas. We got all the loose ore first, and then began to bore shot holes. Job Stone and myself bored one shot hole, and it was charged and fired by Job Stone. That went off all right, no gas being lit. We cleared the stuff away. Job Stone and I had one, and the others a couple of holes to bore. All

three holes were charged with dynamite. Job Stone had put one packet in the hole we drilled. There might have been more put in the other holes, but I don't know. There is about an ounce-and-a-half in a packet of dynamite. When the dynamite is fired it is done with a fuse and detonating cap. [The process was described by Mr. Stokes]. The fuse was lighted with touch-paper, and the touch-paper was lighted with a candle, which was fixed near the bottom of the ladder on the floor of the waggon way. At this candle we light the touch-paper. After the touch-paper is lighted we carry it on a bar or shovel and hold it to the hole where the ore comes down. There were two men left in this case, George Allen and Job Stone. George Stone put the lighted touch-paper up the hole, and the shot firers lighted their touch from the piece he put up the hole. We all came down the ladder and went along the waggon way to a distance of about 50 yards from the end of the forefield. We did this to keep clear of the shots, and thought the place quite safe. We all stood together, the two waggoners being with us. I heard one shot go off, and the next I heard, immediately after, was a rush like the sound of wind or blaze. There was no blaze that I saw. The rush was very powerful and knocked us over. I did not hear the fall. I don't think I was rendered unconscious, but I did not hear the break in. The next thing I found was that I was at the edge of a fall of stone. I was in the dark. I asked if any of them was hurt, but got no reply. I then crawled over the fall of stone, and made my way direct to the pit bottom. I met a man when I had just got over the stone. It was George Bateman. He had a candle with him. He went back with me to the next gate end. Then we met another man. They gave me a light, and I went forward to the shaft. I don't know what these two did. I went up the shaft and made the people on the top acquainted with what had occurred in the mine. I and the stoker got lamps and went down the shaft again. We went towards the place of the accident, and called out to other men on the road. They had left their work. I went nearly to the place of the accident and gave up the safety lamp, and returned to the shaft and to the surface. I waited until the doctor saw me before going home. I have not been down the mine since. The dynamite box was kept in the upper roadway. The box was about four or five yards from the top of the ladder, further back from the end of the forefield. There would be about a dozen charges of dynamite in this box. The box would be about two feet by one foot wide, and about a foot deep. There was some fuse in the box, part of a ring. The detonators were kept in a small tin box in the wooden box. There would be 30 or 40 detonators in the tin box, along with sawdust. I am sure there was sawdust in the box. Am quite sure the dynamite and detonators were all in one box. I don't know that there was any dynamite about the place, excepting that I have told you of. There were no candles or naked lights of any description allowed in the upper roadway. I have not seen a lighted candle up there lately. About ten weeks since I did see a lighted candle up there. It was stuck against the hole we went up. John Heathcote stopped us from doing this again. There was only one candle in this position. I went to the dynamite box myself that night. We take the charges out of the box as we want them. We don't take the box away.

Mr. Stokes: Would you be surprised if three or four candles had been found near this place?

Witness: I would.

Mr. Stokes: Well they have been found.

Witness: I cannot account for them unless someone had left them there. Perhaps they may have been left from when we worked there.

In reply to Mr. Denman, witness said Stone was the oldest man in the company, and they were accustomed to be guided by his experience. There had been several shots fired before the explosion occurred.

In reply to Mr. Stokes, Marsden said: Stone did not test again for gas after the first time on entering the place. I have often fired shots before when I have seen gas as near, and nothing had happened. I was not expecting any danger.

Mr. Stokes: You know when the last three shots were put in?

Witness: Yes. Proceeding, witness said: Gas existed within three feet of the hole I fired. It was higher. I did not notice gas in the lamps. We kept the lamps low because of the gas. We have often fired shots within three feet of the gas before the accident. The stuff we got could have been obtained with the pick. We might have got some of this without blasting. No official visited the working place during our shift. The accident was about three o'clock. There was a natural cavity at the end of the forefield. We did not try for gas, but we expected there was some of it. That hole would be about three feet from the nearest shot. There was a row of iron pipes to carry the ventilation into the forefield. The air blew right in the front of us. The pipes were about a foot diameter. There was a good ventilation coming through that night. All the men were quite sober who were working in the place. There was not a sign of them having had drink. I heard Job Stone ask George whether he had been in anywhere. The reply was "No, I have a deep burn under the arm and on the side."

John Heathcote said: I am a miner, and went down the shaft about two hours after the accident. I heard of the accident as I was going to the mine. I made all the haste I could and went down. When I got there one of the men had been brought up. Three or four of the head-trees had fallen, and all the stone above. I assisted in removing the fall and getting the four men out. I first found George Allen. He was dead. The body was flat on the face. There was sufficient on him to kill him. The fall was quite heavy enough to kill him. I next got to Benjamin Boam. He was dead. The body was buried with bind. The fall was quite sufficient to kill him. The next man we found was George Stone. He was dead, and under Boam. He was cut about the head. Needham was the next man found. He was dead, face downwards. His legs were fast, but there was nothing on the body. He had a cut on the head. The last three were within a distance of six feet, and Allen was about two yards further off. I saw Job Stone on the surface after all the men were got out. He was cut about the head, and one arm was nearly severed. An examination of the mine was made. We looked at the place where the explosion occurred. We found nothing disturbed. There was gas in the place. A door had been blown out a couple of yards from where Allen lay. It was blown from the forefield, and down the road about a dozen yards. We found another door damaged, about 60 yards away from where Allen was found. It was blown out of its position, and smashed to pieces. There was timber blown down five or six yards from where the deceased were killed. The air pipes were broken where the men lay. The dynamite box was blown to pieces. I found dynamite, from seventeen to twenty cartridges, scattered about amongst the stone on the upper level, and near the broken box. The cartridges we found had not been exploded. Some of them have been exploded since. We cannot find any detonators. Four men have been looking this morning, but could not find any. The fuse was all burnt. We have found pieces of it. The dynamite box had been on fire. We could not say whether the fuse or explosion had set it on fire. The dynamite cartridges show traces of having been on fire. I make a report of the condition of the mine every time I come out of it.

At this stage the report book of the witness was produced. Requested by the Inspector to read extracts, it was found that the presence of gas was reported on the 26th, 27th, 28th, and on the 29th also. All the other places were free. On the 1st inst it was reported "a deal of gas has been found in Stone's place". On the night of the 2nd the report was as follows: "I have examined the place and found nothing near so much gas as yesterday."

By Mr. Stokes: I was not aware the men were using naked lights within a few yards of the place where the explosion occurred. I was aware they were firing shots where this gas

existed. The order was that no naked lights were to go beyond the ladder, either top or bottom. That was the order from the agent. They were not allowed to have candles on the top of the ladder. I saw candles found on the top level yesterday, by the side of the dynamite box. I cannot account for the candles being there. I have never seen anyone take them up the ladder. The candles were found twelve or fourteen yards from the forefield.

Mr. Stokes: Considering these reports about gas, did you think it right to let them go on firing shots?

Witness: We had no order to stop them.

Mr. Stokes: But you are an official and ought to stop anything that is wrong. Why did you not go to your superior and ask him for orders? If you have not power you could have done that.

Witness: I cannot say why I did not stop the shots.

Mr. Stokes: But you are in charge of these things. You are one of the responsible persons.

Witness: Shots have always been fired.

Mr. Stokes: That is no answer to the question. It is no reason why shot-firing should go on because it is custom. There was danger you know.

Witness: We had had no orders to stop shot-firing.

Mr. Stokes: I have no doubt you have carried out your orders. You are in a position to look after the safety of the men. I want you to give an explanation why you did not stop this shot-firing.

Witness: Shot-firing has never been stopped in the mine.

Mr. Stokes: We may take it you have no explanation to give?

Witness: If you like, sir.

Mr. Stokes: It is not for me to say.

Witness: I cannot give an answer as to why I did not stop them.

Mr. Stokes: Don't let me put words into your mouth.

In answer to Mr. Denman.

Witness said the gas was in the upper level.

Witness: I have found one hole unexploded this morning, so that only two shots had been fired when the explosion happened. This was the middle cartridge I found.

By Mr. Denman: There was no gas about in the wagon way. The length of the timber and stone that had fallen was about nine feet. If the men had been standing anywhere else than where they were they would not have been buried. Had they been right or left of this particular place the fall would not have caught them. I have been a miner ever since I could work. I have

worked at Mill Close twenty years. For about two years I was away at Riddings, when the mine was full of water. This process of shot firing by the men had gone on always, but not with dynamite. It was five or six years since dynamite was first used at Mill Close. Previous to that we had powder. I have know shots to be fired when gas was about. This has occurred within the last ten weeks. In consequence of experience that damage had never been done before, I allowed gas firing to go on. We have never had as much before as we have had in the last ten weeks. Some time ago I found a man using a candle on the top of the ladder. I promptly put it out, and asked what it was doing there. I don't consider there is any danger for a naked light used in the main road as far as the ladder. For the last ten weeks, though gas was about, naked lights were used. Some days we could not find gas. The condition of the mine had not altered in any way in the last ten weeks up to the 3rd inst.

Mr. Stokes: Does it refer to ventilation, the working of the mine or the roadway.

Continuing, witness said: I have never known gas fired from a shot before. We have had little explosions before. We have had three within a year, but not from shot firing. In consequence of these explosions, that part of the mine was placed under the use of safety lamps. We had more gas within the last few weeks in Stone's place than was noticed formerly. I was not aware that shots would light the gas.

Mr. Stokes: Why did you not go to the manager and consult him.

Witness did not reply.

Heathcote proceeding, said three of the men who were killed were working in the place where he found the lighted candle, on the top of the ladder. I think the gas must have been fired by the shot as all the men had gone into the waggon when the shots were fired. The candles found in the level yesterday must have been taken there since I discharged them for taking naked lights on the top level.

William Webster deposed: I live at Wensley, and am a miner. I am one of the deputies in charge of the mine. I went to work at 5.30 on the night of the 2nd inst. I left at 12 midnight. There would be no one left in charge of the mine until 5.30 the next morning. I visited Stone's place a little after six at night. The shift came out a six, and it would stand till midnight. I visited Stone's place about 6 'clock, and then again shortly after eleven p.m. When I came out of the mine it would be about 11.45. On my way to the shaft I met the deceased persons coming to work. I saw Marsden and he asked me how the place was. I replied that there was a deal of gas in the place, and told him to be very careful. My report on the night of the 2nd inst. says: "I have examined the places, and find no gas in Pott's or Webster's places, but Stone's place was full at near on 12 o'clock." Job Stone came to me and asked how I found the gas. I told him the place was full, and that he must be very careful, and not let the two waggons take their naked lights nowhere near when they were filling the waggons. Job Stone asked me if I had told Boam, the waggoner, and I replied "No, he went with the waggon whilst I was talking with Robert Marsden." Stone said, "Then I must go after him," and he went. I have seen the place since the accident. I know some candles have been found at the top of the ladder, but I don't think they were used that night. I think shot-firing lit the gas. I believe about twenty charges of dynamite have been found. I picked seven up. I found gas a couple of yards from the top of the ladder on the night of the 2nd when I put my lamp up to the roof. I found gas about four feet from the floor of the upper level. I think this would be about level with one of the shot holes. I expected the men would fire shots in the forefield that night. I could not tell but why they were sober. I could not tell that any of them had had drink. I think they had not had drink.

Mr. Stokes said his only object in putting the question was to clear a report that the men had had drink. It was due to the deceased that this rumour should be contradicted by a competent witness.

Continuing: I did not think it my duty to stop the men from firing shots. Hundreds of shots have been fired in gas.

Mr. Stokes: Did you not think it proper to stop them?

Witness: No.

Mr. Stokes: Your report about gas shows the men were actually breathing it.

Witness: I had no rule to stop them.

Mr. Stokes: You have the rule of common sense. You knew that after you left there would be no official in charge. Why did you not stop the men going on until you had consulted the manager?

Witness: There has been as much gas before many times. The men would have to breathe the gas. The reason why I did not stop them was because they had worked like that before. I did not think there was any danger from shot firing in gas. I have quite changed by opinion now.

Joseph Greatorex stated: I am agent of the Mill Close Mine. I have heard the evidence given. I think there would be about thirteen packets of dynamite in the box that were there at the time of the explosion. I cannot account for the fuse having gone off and not finding any detonator caps, unless the explosion caused it. We have had one or two explosions recently. In consequence of these we place part of the mine under safety lamps where the gas was. All the men where the explosion occurred worked with safety lamps, except the waggoners. We have had one or two visits from the Inspectors of Mines lately. We are sinking a new shaft for the purpose of ventilating this part of the mine. I see the report book of my deputies daily. Considering the reports I have read I thought shots would not fire gas. I have been in the mine when shots have been fired, and I should not of stayed had I thought there was any danger. Myself and my deputies had talked the matter over, and none of us thought shots would fire the gas. We have had the mine worse for gas lately than it was on this night, and have continued to work. I did not think it my duty to consult anyone. Mr. Alsop approved of us firing gas in this place. I thought we were complying with the Mines Regulation Act with respect to our mine. I am clear in my own mind that the firing of this gas has resulted from the firing of a dynamite shot. I should not think the candles near the dynamite box had anything to do with the explosion.

In reply to Mr. Denman, witness said: My father and myself have been at the mine for twenty-eight years. The previous explosions were from naked lights. Against a recurrence of these, safety lamps were provided.

Mr. Stokes said the owners of the mine complied with the regulations at once when suggested.

Greatorex said: A tobacco box was found amongst the men's clothes, and also a box of matches and a pipe.

Mr. Stokes said there was not much more to question. A great deal would depend upon whose clothes the things were found. No smoking was allowed under any circumstances. There

are already two shafts, and another is being sunk. Air is driven through into the shaft at 500 feet per minute.

Mr. Stokes did not admit the evidence. The witness had not measured the current of air.

On the 27th January 1887, a letter was written to the owners of the mine asking them to make a shaft. The shaft was commenced three weeks ago. It was only fair this should be stated.

Marsden, recalled, said: I was at the dynamite box within a few minutes of the explosion. During that night there were no candle or match alight on the top level. I saw the shots fired. I am sure there were no naked lights near us.

This concluded the evidence, and Mr. Stokes remarked that all the witnesses had given their evidence very straightforward and correct.

Mr. Denman then said he should like to say a few words upon the death of these unfortunate men, an event to be deplored by all of them. There had been rumours that some of the jury had expressed opinions upon the cause of the accident since the adjournment of the inquest. He gave these rumours no belief. He did not think any gentleman of the jury would so far go contrary to the well-known course of English justice as to offer an opinion upon the matter. He merely mentioned this for the same reason that the inspector did of certain reports having been circulated, that which ought to be cleared up. The evidence was the only thing upon which the verdict could be given. He proceeded to review the facts as detailed by the witnesses. The cause of death was pretty plain to them, the fall of roof having killed them. How came the roof to fall? There had been a report that something like 200 tons of earth and debris had buried the men. There was no doubt the roof was driven down by the force of the explosion of gas, popularly known as fire-damp. It was the explosion in the upper level which unluckily brought down stone and rubbish at the exact spot where the five men were standing. Had they been a little further away from the forestall, or even nearer, they would have escaped being crushed. As to the presence of pipes, tobacco, and matches being found in the clothes, he only wished to say that notwithstanding all regulations miners would break through them. These things had no business there. Marsden had told them there was no light. Then the conclusion they must come to must be that a shot caused the firing of the gas and the explosion. They would not forget that this was a lead mine, and that explosions in them had up to the present been an unknown occurrence. This mine had been at work twenty-seven years, and during that time the miners had been in the habit of firing shots with gunpowder up to five or six years ago. Since then dynamite had been used, and they could take it that no danger was apprehended. For the present, arrangements had been made to alleviate the wants of the families of those unfortunate men. For the future, the Inspector, who had so ably conducted the inquiry, would be in conference with the manager, and whatever experience would suggest would undoubtedly be carried out. The officials were not to blame, and what could be more conclusive than the statement made of this by Mr. Greatorex, that he had been in the mine when shots were fired.

Mr. Stokes remarked that Mr. Denman had said one or two things which were astray, but this was from a want of practical experience. What was the primary cause of the death of these men? It was his opinion that the explosion came into the bottom level, lifted up the props and let the debris through. The men stood at the junction of some roads, and thus stopped the air. The enemy had been there ten months, of which Mr Denman spoke about. He held that the danger of firing a dynamite shot where there was gas should have been known.

After the room had been cleared the jury considered their verdict. A consultation of about a quarter of an hour took place, and then the following verdict was returned: - "Accidental death, caused by an explosion of gas ignited by the firing of a shot in the mine."

Mr. Stokes said: I am very pleased to hear that the trustees of the mine had so nobly provided for the widows and children. They have allowed the widows 4-0d per week and the children 1-6d per week each, and I think this should be known. I knew Mr. Denman would have some delicacy in mentioning this to you, and I have done it.

The jury said it was very handsome conduct indeed.

This concluded the inquiry, which lasted about six hours.

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Ingleton - Wreck of the Collieries

On the 11th of last August, the plant and colliery (with the exception of the royalty) were sold by public auction. A few Ingleton gentlemen who had been unsuccessful in buying the plant and royalty through an adverse decision of the Court of Chancery, still thought that after the sale the Trustees and parties concerned might deal with them for the royalty. On the event they purchased a considerable portion of the plant and afterwards made an offer for the royalty. Interviews with the solicitors for the estate and negotiations by letters continued until the end of September last, when the offer for royalty and pit houses was withdrawn. The parties in the estate had always the objection - the offer was too small, and they would not mention what sum would be accepted. The consequence was the gentlemen, who in the first instance had invested their money for the good of the working men of Ingleton and the neighbourhood, were forced to break up their portion of the plant and to sell what they could piecemeal. As this slow way of making away with the material had been going on for over a month, it was decided to have a clearance sale, which took place on Monday last. There was a very large concourse of people from Yorkshire, east and north Lancashire, and Westmorland. Mr Turner, the auctioneer, was the salesman and he had a brisk sale, which did not end before night set in.