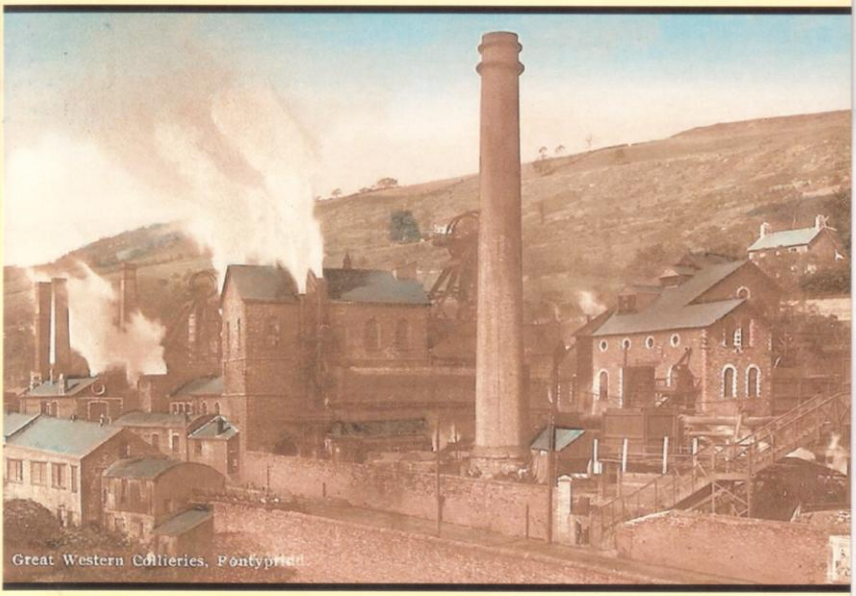
The Great Western Colliery Disaster



by
Gareth Harris

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Forward

by Brian Davies
Curator of the Pontypridd Museum

The remains of the Great Western Colliery are a familiar sight to anyone who travels between Pontypridd and Porth though very few know it by its name. About a mile out of Pontypridd, just past Hopkinstown, a tall stone engine-house and headgear stand between the main road and the railway, opposite the entrance to the Barry Sidings Country Park. Some know it as the 'Hetty' Pit, and remember that it was the ventilation shaft of Tymawr colliery, which closed in 1983. By now there may be no-one left who remembers the 'Hetty' as one of the three pits of the Great Western Colliery, which stopped producing coal as far back as 1926.

Yet the 'Western' played a vital part in the history of Pontypridd. This was the first of the deep pits that caused the growth of the town in the years before the First World War. At its peak the three pits of the 'Western' employed over 2,000 men.

It is a story that has almost been forgotten, overshadowed by the horror of the even worse disaster at the Albion Colliery, Cilfynydd, soon afterwards. Yet it is a story that deserves to be remembered.

Gareth has reconstructed the events of that fateful day at the 'Western' from newspaper reports, and given us a thought-provoking account of the dangers, some avoidable, which were faced by that generation of men who went underground to provide the essential fuel for Britain's industry and empire. - **Brian Davies**

Introduction

By the author

On the maternal side of my family my great-grandfather, John Locke, and grandfather, William Henry Locke, all worked at the Great Western Colliery, Hopkinstown, near Pontypridd. Another grandfather, William Henry Smith, who also worked in the same pit, actually married Hannah Osborne, the widow of Mark Osborne, who was killed in the disaster.

As a young boy for a short period my mother and brother and I lived at 5 Henry Street, Hopkinstown. I can still remember watching the coal trucks in the sidings being shunted bysteam-trains, and the noise and that was emitted from the nearby Tymawr Colliery.

When my mother remarried in 1966, she married Matthias Parry, who had been working in the Albion colliery as a fitter for many years, and worked the last days of the colliery in the bathhouse. I deeply regret not taking photographs at the time!

Those days are long gone, but I hope that perhaps if my ancestors are still watching, they would approve of my writing about the place where they had worked while trying to raise a family.

The embryo of this book had been on my computer for several years, and it was only a matter of time before I turned my full attention to it. When I did, I discovered that the easiest way of telling the story was to use the newspaper reports of the time to give the true description of what had happened and what followed that fateful day on April 11th 1893. – **Gareth Harris**

Chapter one

The early years

The official opening of the Glamorganshire Canal from Merthyr to Pontypridd in 1793 and Pontypridd to Cardiff in 1794 brought the small hamlet of Newbridge

(later renamed Pontypridd) into prominence. Notwithstanding the great mineral riches of the district, little had been done to develop them before the advent of the canal. Despite this some men dug about the hillside looking for coal, driving in their little levels, and working the outcrop. Even today many years later there are many small tips and holes that strengthen this belief. (1*)

The first pioneer of coal-mining in the Rhondda Valley was Dr. Richard Griffith of Pontypridd. Born at Gellifendigaid in the parish of Llanwonno near Pontypridd in 1756, he became a doctor and practiced medicine in Cardiff, and was a well-known figure in what at the time was a small town. The Griffith's family owned considerable property near Pontypridd, Gellifendigaid, where they lived - Glyncoch, Gelliwasted, Gelliwion and Typica - all properties that would soon become very valuable, both as mineral takes and places where the town of Pontypridd was built. (1*)

A mile or two northwest of the junction of the River Taff and the River Rhondda there was nothing but fields, and some of the earliest small levels were opened there. Many local history books claim that Dr. Griffiths opened the first level at what would become known as Gyfeillon. However, Dr. Griffiths himself denied ever working any levels there, but he did make important decisions that shaped the future of the district.

In 1798 he leased the coal under the Hafod and Llandraw farms belonging to his brother-in-law, Evan Morgan of Hafod Fawr, for 99 years, at a rental of £40 a year plus 400 loads of coal per annum. This was a stroke of genius by Dr. Griffiths and was the means of amassing a fortune for his family. Under this lease, or subleases from it, John Calvert, and the Great Western Colliery Co. worked all their minerals for the next century. Whereas the unfortunate ground landlords - the Wayne Morgan family - received a paltry £40 a year, increased in 1855 by 2d per ton on all coal worked. Dr. Griffiths and his heirs received many thousands of pounds in royalties. Dr. Griffiths died in 1826 and was buried at Llanwonno, where there is a memorial to him in St. Gwynno's church. (1*)

After taking the initial lease Dr. Griffiths then granted subleases in 1809 to Sir Jeremiah Homfray and others and the same year built a three-mile-long tramroad along the west bank of the river Rhondda from Gyfeillon that ran through Hopkinstown, along Sardis Road, through Pontypridd, passing down the tramroad (what is now known as Broadway) to Treforest to the weighing machine near Taff House. The tramroad then passed over a three-arched bridge that Griffiths had paid for himself that became known locally as Ponty-y-doctor (Bridge of the doctor) now called Machine Bridge, to a length of canal that he had also had built, and which became known as the Doctor's Canal, which

conveyed the coal to the Glamorganshire Canal, and from there to the docks at Cardiff.

A year later this tramroad linked up at Gyfeillon with another built by Walter Coffin, which ran down from Dinas, further up the Rhondda Valley. (1*) For many years this tramway was the only communicating link between the villages of the lower Rhondda and Pontypridd. It was a great convenience to the country folk and miners and was the means of bringing much trade to Pontypridd and Treforest. Up to that time Llantrisant had been the chief market town within reach, but it was a long way over 'hills and dales' and the tramway soon became a way of people getting a lift into Pontypridd, a town that soon had its own market, that was to compete with another established one in Treforest. (1*) All together Dr. Griffiths was one of the most important benefactors of Pontypridd and neighbourhood in its early development. He was a man of great initiative and foresight in realising what a great future might be in store for the district after the opening of the canal. Those who were awake to the opportunities in these early days had chances of making their fortune.

Most landlords had no idea of the value of their mineral rights - and the shrewd and farsighted men who were ready to take the risk, were able to profit thereby.

(1*) John Calvert had been born in 1812 and was the son of George Calvert, of Nettlewell, Yorkshire, a land and mineral agent. John was a timekeeper on the Birmingham Railway line until the contractor for that railway gave up his undertaking. The engineers, George and Robert Stephenson persuaded Calvert to take up the contract which he did with conspicuous success and soon established a good reputation.

The Stephensons then advised him to tender for the building of the Taff Vale Railway in the south Wales valleys, from Llandaff to Merthyr, which he did. However, after completing his contract, he began his first mining venture and in 1844 began digging at what became known as the Gelliwion Colliery or Newbridge Colliery on the Gelliwion and Lan Farms, just outside Pontypridd, and eventually found the No. 3 Rhondda seam. This was an immediate success and from its profits he decided to lease 333 acres of mineral rights at Gyfeillon and started to sink a pit in 1848. After three years of tremendous difficulties he struck the No.3 Rhondda seam at a depth of 149 yards. (1*)
The opening of the Gyfeillon pit in August 1851 was a red-letter day in the district.

Many hundreds were to derive a modest living from it. The day before it opened, Calvert gave a feast to all his friends and workmen, when a prize Hereford ox

was roasted whole in a specially prepared oven and a huge procession passed with banners, emblems and bands from Pontypridd to the appointed place. Immediately after opening this shaft, a great battery of coke ovens was set up at a cost of £17,000. Calvert continued to work the colliery until 1854, when he began to have financial problems. Around this time Daniel Gooch, Chief Mechanical Engineer of the Great Western Railway decided that it would be cheaper to produce their own coke than to buy it, and they agreed with Calvert to lease the pit for three months on a trial basis. This trial must have proved successful for then they purchased the Gyfeillon pit for £31,000 and it was renamed the Great Western Colliery. Ten years later the company sold it back to John Calvert, who paid a much greater price than when he had sold it to them. (2*)

Mr. Calvert must have been a genial and kindly man and did not lose an opportunity to have another festive occasion. Once more he gathered his colliers, who, shouldered with picks, marched from Pontypridd for the great meal that he had once again prepared for them. Calvert soon ran into financial problems and the colliery once more returned into the hands of the Great Western Colliery Co. In 1874 the new company sank the Hetty and No.2 pits to get to the deeper steam coal seams. (1*)

Calvert was a notable man in many ways. Very enterprising, his connection to Pontypridd was a lasting benefit to the community. He amassed great wealth and as we have seen, was noted for his lavish hospitality and reckless generosity. He made his money easily and disposed of it in the same manner, but despite his great successes he died a poor man. In his later years he became even more reckless and indulged in costly eccentricities, which coupled with bad luck in business, completely lost his fortune. His last days, due to his reckless spending, were lived in comparative poverty at Llantwit Fardre, where he died in 1890 at the age of 78. (1*)

The early fatalities

By the mid 1850s thousands began to be drawn to the district seeking employment. Some had never worked in the mines before, while others with previous experience were aware of the dangers faced underground and on the colliery surface, but despite this found little alternative but to seek work in the collieries. Here are just a few of the fatalities that occurred in the early days:
The first five years of the Gyfeillon Colliery were death free, though no doubt there were men and boys who were maimed or crippled that were never recorded. Roof falls were the most common reasons for death or injuries, while the coal trams, pulled by ponies in these initial days, werea constant source of

danger to new miners. Here are the recorded deaths and other incidents that occurred at the Gyfeillon / Great Western Colliery pre-1881: On June 27th 1855 David Jenkins, doorboy, aged 13, became the first fatality when a tram of coals passed over his head.

The second to die was John Israel, a haulier aged 20 who was crushed between trams on June 26th 1859. Death was not instant, however, and it was not until November 17th, almost five months later, that he died what must have been a long and painful death. (3*) For nearly two years there were no more deaths, but on August 3rd 1861 there was a fall of stone in the No.3 Rhondda seam, which resulted in the death of two colliers, Isaac Charles, aged 15 and John Morgan aged 13. The 13th proved unlucky for Thomas Williams also aged 13, a doorboy, who was also crushed by trams on that date in September 1862. A month later, on October 23rd 1862, Samuel Brown aged 42, labourer, was killed by a fall of roof. The same fate befell Thomas John, collier, aged 30, on February 4th 1863 and John Morgan at Gyfeillon on May 20th 1864. Samuel Forge, collier, aged 15, was killed on November 11th 1864. The following year, on April 6th 1865 Robert Maddocks, aged 25, haulier, was killed when trams passed over him while he was on the surface and remarkably, Maurice Bryant aged 15, suffered the same fate almost a year later to the day, on April 2nd 1866. (3*) From 1866 until 1874, eight long years, no one was killed at the Gyfeillon Colliery, now called the Great Western Colliery, a remarkable fact that spoke volumes for safety there, or were they just lucky?

On December 4th 1874 a 35-year-old stoker named H. Marlsyn, was killed by falling down the pit while engaged in disconnecting drams. July 5th 1875 saw a 34-year-old fireman, J. Prosser, killed by a fall of stone. (3*) Following the death of Edward Morgan on March 27th 1878, a collier, aged 62, was killed by a fall of roof and an inquest into his death was held at Pontypridd Police Station a few days later, before Mr. Thomas Williams, deputy-coroner, and a respectable jury, which Mr. Aaron Cule (a close friend of Evan James, who in 1856 had written the words to what would become the Welsh national anthem) was foreman. Edmund John, called as a witness, said: “I am a collier working at the Great Western Colliery. I work in a stall close by that in which the deceased worked. The seam of coal that I work is a 6ft vein. The coal is worked upon the long-wall system. Ten yards was the distance between the deceased and myself. We were working in adjoining stalls. The accident happened between twelve and one in the day. Deceased was filling his tram when I heard the fall. My boy ran down to the spot, I followed immediately. I found the deceased on the ground, but nothing was on top of him. A stone weighing about 1½ cwt. was close by him, from under which he had apparently extricated himself. The top is composed of cliff.” (*4) The coroner in summing up said that the feature of the case was that

there was no doubt as to how the deceased met with his death. He (the coroner) had frequently remarked that the security of a collier depended upon his own individual judgment and care. He returned a verdict that: "the deceased had met his death by a fall from the roof." It was interesting that Mr. Harrison, the manager, the night before poor Morgan's death, had a premonition that a fatal accident would happen on the following day. Twelve o'clock arrived and Mr. Harrison's dream had almost been dispelled when he was informed of the sad accident that had befallen Edward "the park" Morgan. (*1) On Dec. 19th 1878 Evans Williams, a collier aged 19 years of age met his death.

A serious accident

A further three-year lull was followed by several deaths in 1880. The year got off to a bad start when a haulier, William Phillpotts, aged 26, suffered horrific death when he was crushed by a descending cage at the bottom of the shaft. On February 17th William Morgan, a collier, aged 62, was killed by a fall of roof. In April, Thomas Williams, a lad about 17 years of aged, met with an accident. A fall of coal struck him down and fractured a limb. The lad had only started work a few days before. On July 31st John Davies, another haulier, aged 45, died under a roof fall. (*2)

On the morning of Sunday, August 1st 1880, what was described at the time as a 'disastrous accident' occurred at the Great Western Colliery. An explosion was heard for miles around and brought thousands of people to the scene in a short time, under the impression that something terrible had happened. The head-frame at the top of the shaft was shattered, portions of the roof of the engine house were knocked away, and other damage was done. A number of men were employed at the time in doing some repairs below, and a mechanic and several men were employed on the surface in laying pipes, connecting them with boilers for a new engine. The engineman of the colliery engine had left the engine-house for a few minutes when a mechanic opened the valve of the steam main boiler for the purpose of testing the new pipes. The colliery engine valve was open, and the steam darted through and set the engine going at full speed.

Before anyone could reach the engine-house the ascending carriage, on which the men descended into the colliery, shot up from the shaft through the timber head-frame at the top with terrific force, shattering beams as large as a man around the body, like matchwood, and bounding over the top of the engine-house at a height of over fifty feet, smashing into several pieces and then flew over the road, where several people were at the time, knocked down the side of a house of one William Howell, the ostler at the colliery, whose wife and four children were in the house at the time, but who escaped uninjured, and fell into

the river. The other carriage fell into the shaft, which was 392 yards deep, and, of course, was smashed to atoms.

The men employed at the colliery heard the terrific roar caused by the falling carriage, wire ropes and beams, and concluded that an explosion had taken place. They ran for their lives to the bottom of the No.2 pit, and before they reached it a smell of burnt wood and clouds of dust met them but they remained uninjured. (*3) However, just a month later there was another fatality. About half-past-two on Thursday morning, September 30th 1880, John Harris, a timberman employed at the colliery and living at Llantwit, met with a very sad accident by a fall from the roof. The poor fellow was under the debris from about 2.30 until quarter-to-ten, when he was released. The attempts made to rescue the man were for sometime baffled by the repeated falls that took place. He was removed to the GlanRhondda Inn, where he lay with very little hope of recovery. Dr. Leckie, the surgeon of the works was in the pit from six o'clock to the time the poor fellow was brought up. Harris later died from shock. A day later John Davies known as John Kidwelly, who lived near the Red Cow Inn, Hopkinstown, met with an accident. A stone fell upon him and when it was removed was found to be dead. The poor man left a widow and seven children. November 1880 turned out to be another bad month.

On the 4th Dr. Leckie was sent for again to see another man who had met with an accident from a fall of roof. On reaching the colliery he found the poor fellow dead, his neck having been broken. His name was James Wrentmor, a collier, and he was 28 years of age. (*2) Alfred Thomas, a lad of 14 years of age living behind the Colliers Arms, Pontypridd, met with an accident at the Great Western pit on Wednesday, November 29th 1880. He was employed as a door boy, and fell under a tram. His thigh above the knee was shattered and his hand injured. Dr. Leckie was soon in attendance and set the fracture, but the boy later died. The lad was an orphan and he was educated in the Ely schools. This was the final fatality of a year that no doubt the colliery officials were glad to see the back of. (*3) There was an explosion at the Naval Colliery, Wattstown on December 10th 1880 depriving 101 men of their lives and 68 families of their breadwinners. These 68 families consisted of 64 widows and 177 children. This caused hysteria in some places and the '*Pontypridd District Herald*' of January 1st 1881 carried this report:

A prophetess in Hopkinstown

A female of lively imagination residing in Hopkinstown has been scattering prophecies as to colliery disasters. She is more composed and more exact that the 'Priestess of Apollo' in her oracular utterances. For instance she actually ventured to announce from her inner consciousness we suppose, a terrible

explosion in the Great Western Colliery on Wednesday week. It is said that many credulous minds believing her, did not go to work on that day. She also it appears, while reveling in her forebodings of prospective slaughter announced that the Clydach Vale and Llwynypia collieries would be blow up, and that the Navigation Colliery at Hafod would be inundated. As so far none of her predictions has been verified, would it not be safe to prophesy that she is likely to spend the rest of her declining years in a gaol or a lunatic asylum?
The Great Western Colliery company always tried implementing safety rules, but clay-pipe smoking was so popular, even underground, that trying to stamp it out to reduce the risk of a spark causing an explosion was very hard. Here are just a few cases recorded in the '*Pontypridd District Herald*' of February 5th 1881.

Important colliery prosecutions

At the Pontypridd police court on Wednesday, before Mr. G. Williams, Stipendiary, David Davies, collier, working in the Great Western Colliery, was summonsed for that he, being employed in a certain coal mine, known as above, did not comply with one of the special rules, duly established for them in force in the said mine, by having a pipe for smoking in his possession on the inside of the lamp-station. Mr. W. Williams appeared to prosecute. The defendant was undefended. The case was conclusively proved in evidence. The Bench said it was necessary to deal in the decisive manner with cases such as these. "On previous occasions I have indicated the heaviest penalty I could, short of sending a man to gaol. In the present case there was some extenuating circumstances. I am not satisfied with the evidence of one of the witnesses, Henry Williams. I think the notice of the case will be met by inflicting a fine of £1, and costs of 19s-8d." The amount was paid.

The next case included summonses against Howell Jones, John Davies, David Lloyd, and William Roberts, all working in the Great Western Colliery, and whose clothes contained pipes had been found on the side of the lamp-station, expressly mentioned in the rules. The defendants pleaded guilty, but said they were not aware that they had brought their pipes down with them. Lloyd said that the day they went down, and he was searched, was his first experience of colliery life, and he was unacquainted with the rules. Roberts did not answer to his name. The Bench observed that it was quite necessary to deal with these cases promptly. The appeal of Lloyd for leniency on the ground of ignorance of the rules was inadmissible as he ought to have known what the rules were before he went down the pit. Besides, in a district like this everyone knew that taking pipes down a pit must be wrong. Each defendant was ordered to pay £1 and costs, and Roberts, who was not present, was fined £1-10s and costs.

Further fatalities

Another fatality did not occur at the Great Western Colliery until Wednesday afternoon, November 15th 1882, when John Williams, Tramroad Side, a hitcher employed at the bottom of the shaft, aged 21, was killed by a lump of coal falling from the top of the pit. On Saturday, January 13th 1883 William Bennett, a labourer working in the yard, from Mill St, Pontypridd, 38 years of age, died after he was badly injured by the hook of the horse-tackle used for drawing trams entering the abdomen. He was carried home, and inflammation supervened and the sufferer lay in a precarious position and eventually died.

Five days later Frederick Charlton, a hitcher aged 23 met his death at the bottom of the shaft by the fall of a lump of coal. It was stated that death was not instantaneous, but that the poor fellow had died upon being removed. The body was followed to Pontypridd by scores of his fellow workmen, who left the colliery as soon as the accident happened. (5*) A week later a man named Thomas, living in Llantwit Vardre was injured in the pit by an iron bar striking him in the stomach, causing him considerable suffering. The same day a lad named Mitchell, living in Zion St, Pontypridd, had met with a bad accident to his foot, and had to be carried home

Tragically, on January 1st 1884, a Tuesday morning, two young stonemasons, one named Griffith Davies, a native of Cardiganshire, and the other named Alfred Cornish, a native of Somersetshire, met their deaths suddenly at the Great Western Colliery. They were 'arching' underground when a prop gave way and the arch fell upon them. They were immediately killed. As soon as the debris could be removed, the bodies were conveyed to their lodgings and the relatives were communicated with. Both were single men. At the inquest two days later the jury returned a verdict of 'accidental death.'

On November 25th 1885, John Palmer, a collier, aged 17, died in a roof fall. Three months later, February 2nd 1886, David C. Lewis, aged 18, a collier, died in another roof fall, as did, John Mason, a collier, aged 40. In May 1886 John Richard Morris, 15, died from the effects of his injuries. He was the son of the late Mr. Richard Morris, living with his mother near the gasworks in Pontypridd. He was her only son.

February 18th 1888 saw the demise of haulier, Arthur Williams, aged 16. These are the other recorded deaths that year: - July 5th, Thomas Stevens, doorboy, aged 15; August 22nd, William Watkins, repairer, aged 26; December 20th, George Lewis, collier. An inquest was held at Pontypridd on Friday, Dec. 20th 1888 before Mr. E. B. Reece, District Coroner, over the death of George Lewis,

aged 20 a collier. The evidence given was that while the deceased was at work on Thursday, Dec. 19th 1888, a huge stone fell upon him in his stall, and crushed him so terribly as to cause immediate death. The jury returned a verdict of accidental death. (*7) On December 29th, John Reed, labourer, aged 50, was killed. (*6) The year 1889 got off to a bad start when James Minham, doorboy, aged 13, was run over by a tram of rubbish, but the only other fatality that year saw Frank Brimson, a collier, aged 25, die in a fall of rocks. (*3)

In April Mr. J. Piggot, contractor, was made the recipient of a silver plate by the directors of the Great Western Colliery for the work he saw satisfactorily carried out on his contract of deepening the Tymawr Pit from its former depth of 200 yards to 500 yards. The work was done in the short period of six months. (*6) The 11th ordinary meeting of shareholders of the Great Western Colliery was held at the Exchange, Bristol early in March 1889. The meeting was told that the coal output for the year was 387,230 tons, a decrease from the previous year of 40,339 tons. The deepening of the two Rhondda valley pits (No.1 & 2) had been completed and preparations were being made to materially increase the output. The remaining old coke ovens had been replaced by fifty new ones and a new machine for washing and grinding small coal sent to the coke ovens was being erected.
Eighteen-ninety saw no deaths at all but 1891 saw four more. John Pearce, labourer, aged 28 was killed on March 23rd; Henry Matthews, labourer, aged 26 on April 3rd; Fred Hardwick, a doorboy, aged 13 and Fred Crooker, collier, aged 21, were the last fatalities of the year in August. There were no fatalities at all in 1892. (*3) Close to the colliery had grown a new village, Hopkinstown, which was built to accommodate the colliers. Initially there was one long road facing the River Rhondda, called Hopkinstown Road, but gradually other streets were built behind it and the village continued to grow. Hopkinstown, named after Evan Hopkin, owner of the Tymawr estate, on which Tymawr colliery and the village of Hopkinstown was later built, lies at the north western outskirts of Pontypridd at the gateway to the famous Rhondda valley. By 1893 it was a microcosm of a typical Welsh mining community. Situated in a steep sided valley, it had a river, road and two railways squeezed into it, plus collieries, a locomotive shed and several rows of terraced dwellings that vied with the other occupants for space on the flat valley bottom.

The Great Western Colliery by now was considered well equipped with modern machinery and appliances for producing a large output of steam coal, and both the Hetty (No, 1) and No.2 pit had been safely and successfully worked since 1877, when these shafts were sunk to the steam coal measurers. Prior to this the house coals had been worked.

There were now three pits in the colliery: (1.) The Hetty Pit, which was the downcast shaft. (2.) The No.2 Pit and (3.) The Tymawr Pit, both of which were upcast shafts. The Tymawr Pit had been acquired by the company in 1889, and deepened to the lower steam coal seams. Previous to this the east workings in the Four-feet Seam had been extended beyond the Tymawr pit, and since the latter was an upcast shaft, it became more convenient to connect these workings to it for the purpose of ventilation; so that now one large district of Four-feet Seam at the Hetty Pit had a direct communication with the Tymawr upcast in that seam. Haulage by machinery was largely adopted and in common with many of the larger collieries compressed air on the surface was used to work the underground machinery. There were no less than fifteen haulage engines provided by steam-powered air compressors, in the whole of the seams in connection with the colliery, and it was at one of these engines that a disastrous fire would originally start.

By 1892 the heady days of the coal industry was in decline and this was reflected in the low price of coal throughout the country, caused by a surplus of coal reserves. The '*Pontypridd District Herald*' of Saturday Nov. 6th 1892 gave this report which tells of how the Great Western Colliery had been affected.

The Nine-feet seam to be abandoned

On Monday evening notices were fixed on the pit-top of the Great Western Colliery, Pontypridd, notifying that all contracts existing between the company and the workmen in the Nine-feet Seam of the working would cease on the 30th of November. The news has created great consternation in the district, for the action of the company would have the effect of throwing nearly 250 men out of work at the end of the month. This added to the 500 men and boys idle through the unfortunate stoppage of the Maritime Colliery, would bring the total of men unemployed in Pontypridd to close-on 1,000. The posting of the notice, it appears, was the result of the decision of the company that, owing to the exceedingly depressive state of the coal trade, the working of the Nine-feet Seam, otherwise known as the 'Red Vein' must be abandoned - for some time at least, as being none remunerative. It was hoped some of the men thrown out of work in the Red Vein may be employed in other part of the workings, but in any event, the number unemployed would be considerable. It was stated on good authority that, in order to find employment for some of these men, the company were considering the advisability of adopting the double-shifts in the Five-feet Seam.

A month later, however, the same newspaper reported that although the seam had been abandoned, perhaps temporarily, it was gratifying that work had been

found for nearly all the workmen in other parts of the pit, and that only six or seven had been paid off.

In 1893 the average number of men and boys working in the South Wales coalfield was: Underground 77,196, aboveground 12,733, making a total work force of 89,929. And working down the mines was just about the only employment available. The early months of 1893 were unusually dry in the south Wales valleys, and there was even talk of a water shortage. Meanwhile the miners wages seemed ever to be declining and the following meeting was reported in the '*Pontypridd District Herald*' Saturday of February 11th 1893

Unrest in the coalfield

A well-attended meeting of the workmen engaged at the Great Western Colliery, Pontypridd, was held Monday last at the Workmen's Hall, Hopkinstown, Mr. James Richards presiding, and, in his opening speech, declared that in 1879, owing to the rotten scale that was agreed to, hundreds of men were driven to seek a livelihood in other lands. Were the men of Wales going to allow this to be repeated on this occasion? Let them stand firmly together to protect themselves against the manner in which they were being treated by the employers.

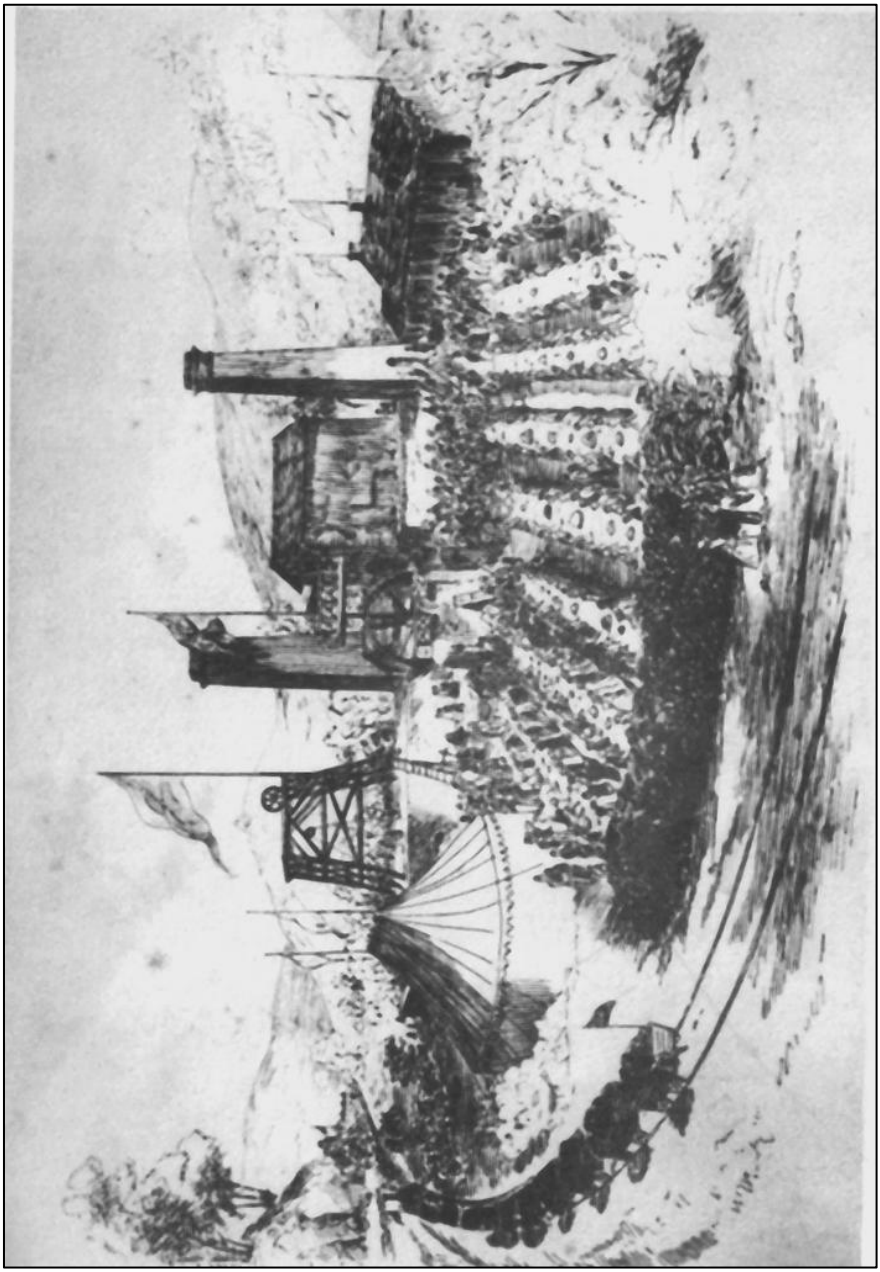
Mr. John Goodwin followed, and with vigour denounced Mabon (the miners' leader) and his colleagues who represented them on the sliding scale. Were Sir William Thomas Lewis and Mabon placed on the same box, and he (the speaker) were asked to pick out the worse of the two, he would really be unable to do so (laughter and applause). Mr. W. Davies declared that the workmen of the Great Western Colliery did not at present earn as much on average as 18s a week, and yet Mabon tried to console everybody by stating that they were better off than Radstock or the Forest of Dean men (shame). Even if they had a strike they could not be worse off than they were at present, for they were now starving, and knew not one day where to find food for the next (hear, hear).

Mr. Ben Davies, the Welsh Agent of the Federation of Great Britain, then spoke at considerable length in English and Welsh. Referring to Mr. David Morgan's definition of the laws of supply and demand as divine laws, the speaker said that if this was so, then Sir William Thomas Lewis was the divine being in south Wales (laughter and applause). He hoped, however, that they would be able to tell this divine being shortly that the miners of Wales were of some account in the history of the world after all (cheers).

The reductions forced upon the men of Wales, including the allowances that had been taken away, amounted really to 50% and not 35% as under the scale; so that if the price of coal had been reduced to only 2s - 10d per ton, wages had been reduces one half (shame). He ridiculed the idea of offers made by employers as being an 'amended scale' in any form - (here, here) - but it was evident that if the workmen did not interfere, the new scale would contain not one of the amendments claimed, but simply what Sir William Thomas Lewis wished to give them.

He advised the men of Wales to join their fellow workmen in the Federation of Great Britain, and so would be able to ascertain their rights and resist the threatened reductions. True, they had already in south Wales eight different associations of miners, but of what value were they in the days of the storm? They were no more use than tissue-paper to force back the waves of the sea (hear, hear). But their power for good in the interests of the miners at large was small. Lord Aberdare and others advised the men of Wales to adhere to the Sliding Scale, but would his Lordship apply the same principal to his own affairs, and sacrifice his royalties and his rents on the altar of the scale? (hear, hear). Were this attempted they would soon find that even Lord Aberdare and Mr. Chamberlain would be Federalionists (laughter). Votes of thanks to Mr. Ben Davies terminated the proceedings.

1* Pioneers of the coalfield by Elizabeth Phillips BA (1925)
2* Early history of the Rhondda Valley by Rev. BD Johns.
3* Inspector of Mines reports
4* Pontypridd Herald April 6th 1878.
5* Pontypridd Chronicle Jan 20th 1883
6* Various copies of Pontypridd Herald and Chronicle 7* Pontypridd Chronicle Dec. 28th 1888 8* Pontypridd Chronicle March 15th 1889
Many of the technical terms used in the mining industry are given in a glossary and map near the back of this book, and this may help readers understand more fully what would occur on that fateful day in 1893.



The grand opening of the Gyfeillon (Great Western) Pit in 1851

Chapter two

THE GREAT WESTERN COLLIERY DISASTER

South Wales, and particularly Glamorganshire, had barely recovered from the shock of the terrible colliery disaster at Tondu, on August 26th, 1892, when 112 men and boys had died came the sad news of another calamity of like nature, like, that is, in so far as a gruesome holocaust of humanity was concerned. This time it was the home of the South Wales mining industry, the Rhondda Valley, that was effected at the well-known Great Western Colliery, situated near the mouth of the valley, and about two miles distant from Pontypridd. All who travelled to the Rhondda Valley by the Taff Vale Railway at this time could not fail to have noticed the extensive offices, sheds, engine houses, and tips of the Great Western Colliery, situated on the left of the line travelling from Pontypridd to Porth. Here are placed the No.1 and No.2 pits, some 70 yards distant from each other. What had happened here would shock everybody and the death of 63 miners in one incident would see countrywide reports and newspaper headlines such as:

APPALLING DISASTER AT GREAT WESTERN COLLIERY
FIRE AT THE PIT - FRIGHTFUL SACRIFICE OF LIFE

Tuesday, April 11th, 1893

On Tuesday afternoon, April 11th, 1893, a report reached Pontypridd that a terrible explosion had taken place in the Great Western Colliery, and with that minuteness which false reports often assume, it was added that forty men had already been brought up dead. Experience warned against crediting fully the first reports of colliery disasters. It was not that persons in such cases set themselves willfully and deliberately to tell falsehoods. Naturally, everyone becomes greatly excited, and fears are aroused, and under the influence of these strong feelings, lively and vivid imaginations paint a disaster in the darkest colours. What was spoken by some as probabilities were caught at by others as facts, so reports passing from one to another got mixed up, the imaginary with the actual, in this way false and exaggerated reports got into circulation. Prompt inquiries by the local press quickly disposed of the explosion part of the report, but only to substitute something just as bad; that the pit was on fire, and a large but uncertain number of workmen were, to say the least, exposed to a great peril.

In many cases of colliery accidents it was possible to arrive at some close approximation to the number of men down the mine at the time of the accident

and how many were missing by the number of lamps given out. But this could not be done in this instance because the men were in the habit of taking their lamps home with them. The total number of men engaged at the pit at the time was around 900, but happily a large portion of these were not exposed to any danger at all. Of course, when the state of things became known a great number of these came to the surface, not however to be idle lookers on, but as many as were needed from time to time were found ready to take their share in trying to induce operations being carried on with a view to extinguishing the fire.

It was calculated that there were some 200 men in the No.4 seam when the fire broke out. Of course all anxiety was concentrated on these. The consternation the news caused in the town and adjacent villages, where all the men reside can be imagined. In a few minutes the only highway through the valley was thronging with women, children and many men hurrying from all directions to the scene of the disaster, all in a terrible state or excitement. It was ascertained that a tremendous fire was raging in the interior of the workings in the Four-feet seam, about 500 yards below the surface, and that 177 men were in the interior of the workings, beyond where the fire had originated, and that not the slightest tidings as to their condition had been received from below, and it seemed too probable that all had perished.

What was known as the No.1or the Hetty Pit descended 365 yards to the Six-feet seam, passing through the Four-feet Seam which was about 40 yards from the bottom. From the Hetty Pit bottom a roadway then proceeded about 150 yards to the south, subsequently turning to the east for some 200 yards through a hard heading, or rock tunnel, driven upwards on an incline to meet the Four-feet seam. On entering the latter on the level, it proceeded for a short distance diagonally to the left, and then completed the angle, the main roadway thus formed being styled the East Main Dip. A few yards from where the main section commenced there was a hauling engine which drew the coal not only from the East Main Dip but also out of the "Four-feet" far end - a level that turned from the right shortly in front of the engine. The engine was erected in the roof above the roadway, so that workmen passing to and fro walked underneath it.

Meanwhile, the flame and smoke spread with extraordinary rapidity into the two levels described. Dealing with their progress through the East Main Dip, it may be explained that some 200 yards from the engine this again turns sharply to the right, and in the latter passage there were a large number of approaches to the workings, those on the right hand being known as the "Matthew Evans' Heading" and the "Ostler's Heading." Some 80 men were working in this, and the two passages were separated from each other by two brattice doors, which govern the airway. These, of course, were closed at the time of the accident.

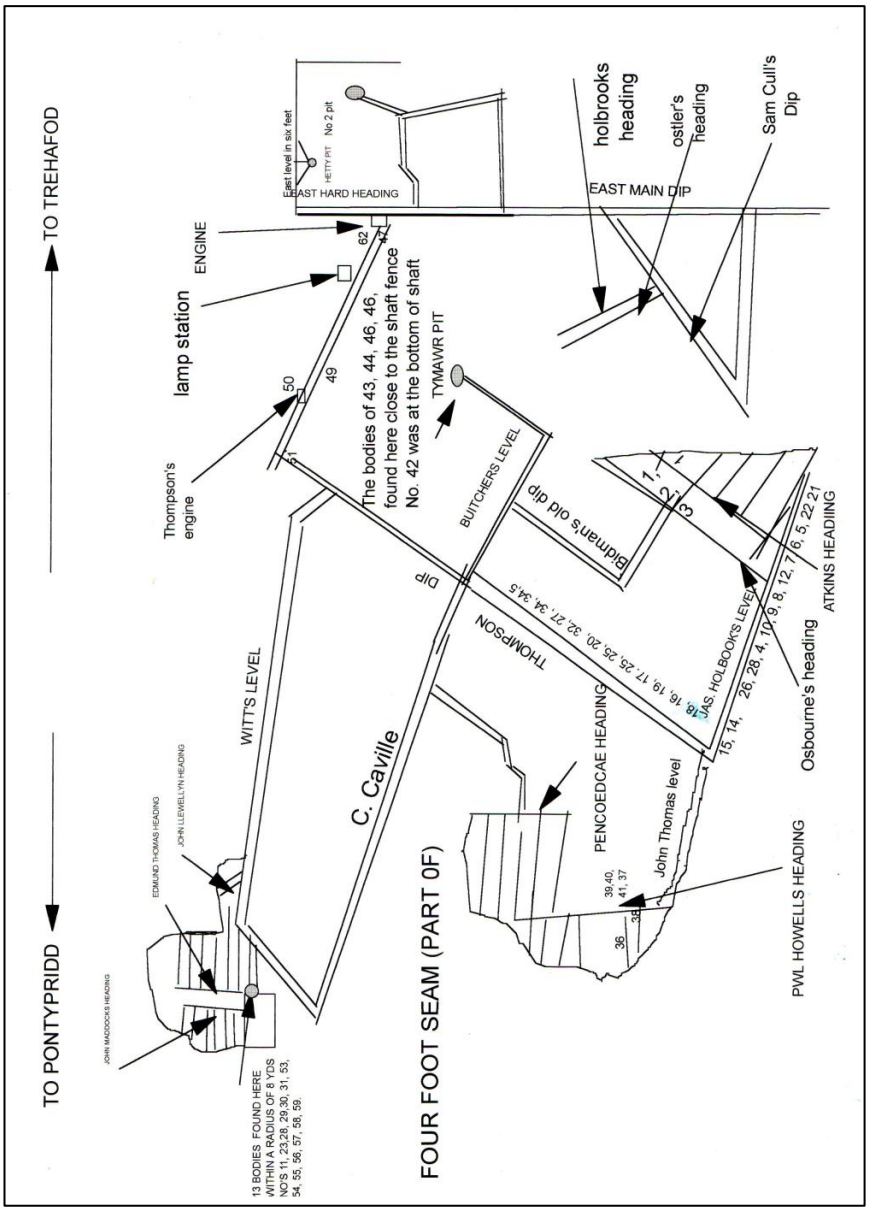
The initial cause of the fire was at an early stage unexplained but it was thought connected with the hauling engine. Various theories were afloat to account for this. Some experts contended that the brake of the engine took fire; others asserted that it was the woodwork on which it rested where the outbreak originated. However, the fire *had* started there and at once spread forward into the East Main Dip, catching the timbers and supports of the roof as it went on to the right hand into the Four-feet east far end. As in most disasters, the initial stages of this disaster are somewhat confused. But it was believed that a fire originating by this engine was discovered about 1.30 p.m. It was in theEast Main Dip on the Four-Feet east far end that the incidents of the disaster were principally confined.

The mine was very dry one naturally, and provision was made for damping the roadways and laying the dust by a system of spray-jets, fixed at intervals of about 40 yards in the principal intakes, the water for which was conveyed from the surface by a column of pipes, partly 2 inches but chiefly only 1¼ inches in diameter, down the shaft and continued along the different haulage roads. Altogether there were five miles of piping laid for this purpose.

The fire appeared to have been discovered by a boy named Edwin Matthews who had descended the Hetty Pit at about 1.30 p.m. to work with a collier on the afternoon shift in the Four-feet seam. In passing the East Hard Heading he noticed something on fire below the engine, and called to the engineman, and then ran back towards the Hetty Pit. A journey of trams was being hauled up the East Main Dip, and George James, the engineman, stopped the engine, and came down the roadway and saw one of the beams on fire. He, along with the rider of the journey, John H. Thomas, who had run out to the engine to see what was the matter, endeavoured to put out the fire by beating it, but failed.

They then tried to draw water from the tap above, but there was no water in the pipe. In a few minutes they were joined by some men who came in from the shaft, and directly afterwards by David Rees, under-manager, who happened to be near the Hetty Pit bottom when the alarm of fire was given. The pipe conveying water to the spray jets had by this time been broken by the engineman, but little water could be got from that source, and some of the men were carrying water in buckets from a cistern in the stables in the Six feet Level at the bottom of the East Hard Heading.

The first intimation of something having happened (at the other shaft) reached the Tymawr Pit a little before 2 p.m., when John Cannon, the hitcher in the Five-feet seam, heard someone crying from the Four-feet seam above: “Let’s have the carriage, quick.” He went up with the next cage, and sent up to the surface



Author's unofficial map of the four-foot seam

three cage loads of men, when he became affected by the smoke, and ascended himself with the fourth cage load. Three or more cage loads were raised from the Four-feet seam, the last one bringing up only one man, named William Fletcher. While these men were being raised one man, Jesse Titley, probably owing to his exhausted condition, or the difficulty of seeing the cage in the smoky atmosphere which then prevailed, fell down the shaft and was killed.

Four other men who had managed to reach the landing at the Tymawr Shaft were too exhausted to get over or through the wooden fence protecting the entrance to the shaft, and although several attempts were made, both by some of those who escaped and others, they could not, in the then state of atmosphere, be rescued alive. The fears of an excited crowd assembled on the surface became greatly intensified when about two hours after the breakout of the fire it became known that four men, named Charles Cavill, David Jones, both married, and two single men, Lewis Williams, and William Williams, a native of Upper Boat, but living in Wood Road, had been discovered in a dying condition near the fire and had breathed their last soon after they were brought to the pit bank.

It later emerged that William Williams had survived initial suffocation only to discover that his father was last seen in distress in the pit. He had plunged back into the smoky hell and his body was discovered later not far from his father.

The speed of the ventilating fan at the Tymawr Pit had, unfortunately, been increased soon after it became known at the surface that something was wrong. Probably, this was done in the excitement of the moment, and in the belief that an explosion had occurred.

The increase of speed from 51 or 52 revolutions, the normal speed of the engine, to 60 and then to 75, continued up to about 3 o'clock, and no doubt augmented the current of air passing up the East Hard Heading, and along the Four-feet East Level, thus fanning the flames to a greater degree and carrying the smoke more quickly through the Four-feet East workings.
Between two and three o'clock Mr. James, the manager, arrived at the scene of the fire, and soon decided that it would be a proper course to reduce the speed of the Tymawr fan to about half normal speed, and this was done. On being informed shortly after this of the state of matters in the Four-feet Landing in the Tymawr Pit, and thinking that probably the whole of the men in the East Level District had been able to reach that landing, he sanctioned the stoppage of the fan and the lifting of the covers at the top of the pit, with the object of turning that shaft into a downcast and thus getting fresh air at the landing, to affect the rescue of the men there. The fan was stopped between the hours of 3.15 and

4:00 p.m. and during this time the bodies of the four men who had died at the landing were brought up, but no more men came out alive by that road, nor could any sign of life be seen within the short distance (about 100 yards) inwards which Mr. Jones, surveyor, and others were able to penetrate. The fan was then run at half speed. The next step taken by the manager appeared to be an attempt to reach the East Main Dip workings by way of the return airway.

It was, however, found impossible to do so, the smoke being too thick in the return. About 4.15 p.m. Mr. Hugh Bramwell, Agent of the Great Western Colliery, arrived, descended the pit, and joined Mr. James, the manager. Soon after this steps were taken by them to increase the supply of water by laying another line of pipes from the shaft to the fire, but efforts had never been relaxed in using to the best advantage the available supply by the original pipes and by carrying water from the stables and the sump at the shaft. Fortunately the brick arch forming the air-crossing over the East Main Dip, fifteen yards beyond the engine, helped considerably to stop the spread of the fire down this road, and at about 6 p.m. the fire had subdued there sufficiently to allow an attempt to be made to reach the workings of the East Main Dip.

William Rosser, a firemen, and brother of the fireman in this district, got down as far as the first door, 210 yards distance, and opened it to help the smoke clear away from the dip, and keep it from going inwards to the working headings. His light went out, and he returned to the engine. Getting another lamp, and this time accompanied by Morgan Thomas, overman, and Lewis James, fireman, he again went down the dip, and passing the second door near the top of Sam Cull's Dip, and the third door beyond the first working heading, both of which doors were found open, reached men numbering around 78, including the fireman, Thomas Rosser, all gathered together and uninjured about 100 yards up Holbrook's Heading. They then all walked out by the intake, reaching the surface about 6.30 p.m. The men on emerging from the darkness unsurprisingly bore evidence of the intense suffering they had endured, and their eyes were bloodshot from the effects of the smoke that they had gone through.

The men had been under the leadership of Thomas Rosser, a man 23 years of age. All of them had been trapped by the flames and deadly fumes and had been unable to leave the shelter which young Rosser, with a rare presence of mind and resourcefulness had promptly provided for them. The rescued men all felt that they owed their lives to the courage and adroitness of young Thomas Rosser. He happened to be on the main heading from the engine house when he suddenly found himself in the midst of dense, stifling smoke, and instantly concluded that the smoke would kill all the men in that part of the colliery unless something was done to cope with it. He ran to two doors on the left, which

were there to direct air forward and prevented it from making a short cut back to the upcast of the Six-feet seam. He knocked down those two doors, the result being that the major portion of smoke and gases passed that way to the No.2 pit without going to him and the other 77 colliers. Having done this, he hurriedly called the men together, where one man told them to be prepared to meet their maker. However, Rosser persuaded them to try and make an escape to the engine house, near the No.2 pit, the only available outlet.

The bottom of the upcast shaft, into which Rosser, by his timely action had directed the smoke, was 100 yards deeper than the working in which the men were incarcerated, but they might as well have attempted to pass through a chimney as to attempt to escape that way. The smoke seemed to grow denser every minute and sparks of fire were borne towards them by the strong current of wind. Presently the sound of falling roof reached them, and then they became aware that the massive timber props supporting the roof of the roadway were on fire and that as each one was consumed, the roof fell in on the only outlet available for them.

There was thus the awful prospect before them of being entombed, but Tom Rosser "joshed" them into keeping their hopes alive and so panic had been averted and all made up their minds to try and rush through the smoke and the perils of the falling roof. They all took off their scarves, dipped them in the water tank which served as the pit horse's trough, and then placed the scarves over their mouths before attempting their escape. Eventually they met the small rescue party and the 78 trapped men quickly rushed through the holocaust of smoke and debris to joyous scenes of rejoicing. William Rosser, brother of Tom, was one of the rescue party, so the family reunion when the brothers met was indeed a happy one - even under the harassing conditions caused by the disaster.

Mr. Thomas Richards, manager of the Coedcae Collieries arrived on the scene with 24 colliers and descended the Tymawr Pit with them as a rescue party. It soon became evident that the appliances at hand would prove wholly insufficient to cope with the destructive element. The pressure of water was not sufficient to force the jet any great distance, and in the conflict between water and fire, the latter continued to get the best of it. The men engaged in this conflict had considerable difficulties. Falls kept on occurring along the line the fire was taking. The debris which had to be walked over emitted heat, steam and smoke, rendering the work of the men even more trying and exhausting, but inspired by the hope of saving more lives, the colliers were not daunted by difficulties or deterred by personal hardships or dangers. So they continued fighting with the fire, yet the enemy continued to gain upon them.

Hundreds of people gathered in the colliery yard as the dead bodies began to be brought up, and there was great excitement when it was announced that around 78 men and boys had been rescued after being trapped for four hours and being almost choked to death by smoke. About 6.30 p.m., as the men came out of each cage, they had strange and bewildered looks on their faces. To the immense enjoyment of the assembled above the grounds and the highway, the men, with young Rosser at their head, came to the light of day, being brought to bank in batches in the cages.

The onlookers at the top of the pit were looking for more news and yet dreading the arrival of such news. Fear was at once replaced by hope that as so many had been saved, could they not all have been saved? As time passed away bringing no tidings of any further rescues, the hope that had been cherished by many began to fade away, and deep gloom fell upon the multitude at the pit mouth. And yet from below no progress was reported. Inch by inch its course was followed by the intrepid workers, but gradually, though slowly, the fire, like a snake, glided from post to post along the dry timbers of the roof and sides, still leaving its pursuers many yards behind.

The furthermost point of the fire, which extended for a length of thirty yards had now reached a point fully one-hundred yards beyond the engine-house, where the conflagration had started but a few hours before. Its course had been followed for seventy yards, but unhappily it was now further beyond reach than it had been from the beginning. The probability was that many more hours would elapse before the conflagration could be extinguished. There were, however, very good grounds for hoping that the onward course could be very effectively checked in the course of Wednesday. The timber supports of the roof and sides, it was stated, extend for a further length of 30 yards into the heading. Beyond this 30 yards is good, solid roof of rock and it was here, it was hoped, the fire could be overtaken and finally quenched.

At 7 p.m. Mr. Henry Abraham, Hafod; Mr. Meredith, Wattstown; Mr. T. Griffiths, Cymmer; and others descended the shaft and directed operations below, the said operations consisting of fire extinguishing, putting up fresh timbers to prevent further falls, and pouring water on the roadway where the fire was still smouldering or giving off heat. When these gentlemen returned to the surface about nine o'clock, they reported that the fire was practically extinguished so far as could be seen, but there was still too great a heat to enable anybody to pass through the main roadway. Doctors Alfred Evans, Lewis, Howard Davies, W. Parry, J. P. Crawthorne and others remained all night to render what assistance they could.

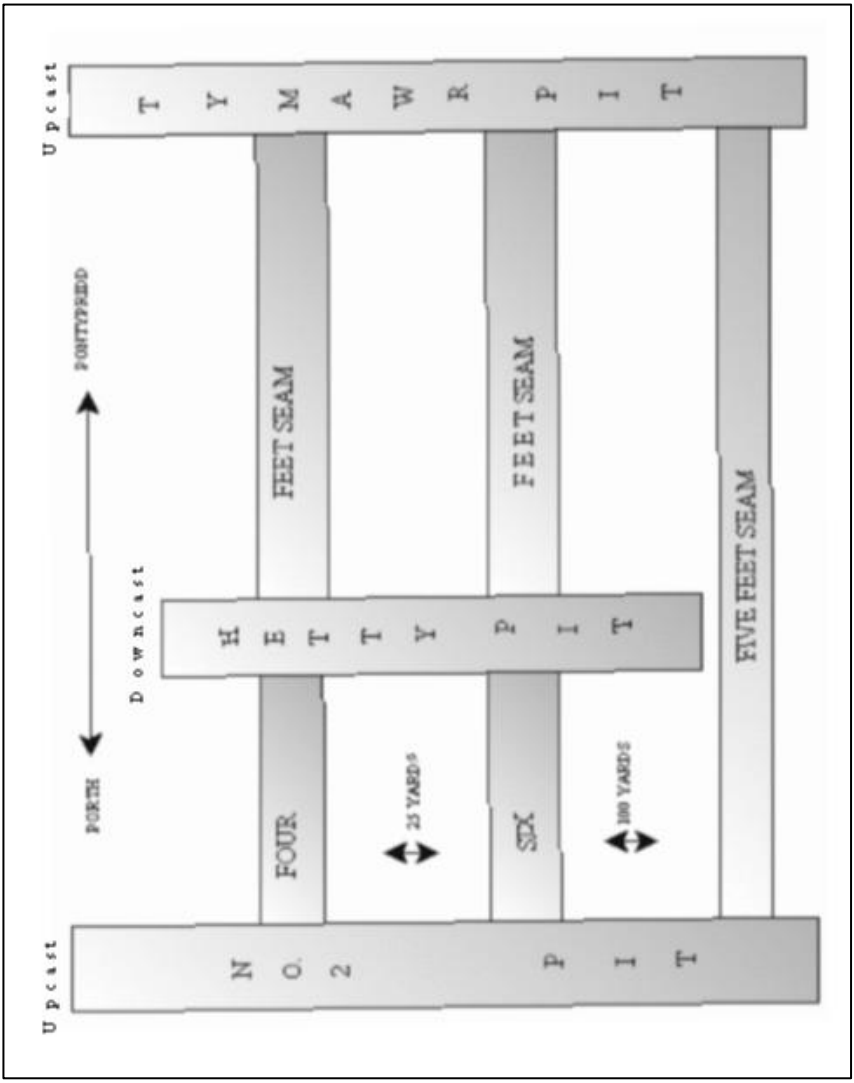
The terrible combat with the fire was carried out throughout the whole of Tuesday night, and the scene presented around the pit top was, indeed, a strange one. Men and women stood in small groups anxiously waiting for some news from below whether of the rescue of living men or the recovery of dead bodies. Some of these returned home during the night and were early upon scene again on Wednesday morning, waiting sometimes at the colliery offices, sometimes at the pit top, and occasionally paying visits to the men. As the members of the rescue party came to the surface occasionally it could be ascertained that the terrible fight below was being waged with unabated vigour, in the hope that life might yet be saved. The difficulties to be surmounted may, however, be imagined when it is understood that anxiety as to the best way to proceed was added to the work actually carried on.

The fan at the upcast had been reduced to half-speed in order to reduce the current of air, and although this helped to prevent the rapid spread of the creeping fire it increased the accumulation of gas down below and so rendered an explosion possible. The pressure of water (which by the way, was obtained from the work's pond)was still not sufficient to force the jet far ahead into the channel of fire, which kept gliding like a fiery snake in front of the workers. The falls of roof along the route already transverse were almost continuous and varied in depth from 2ft. to 5ft. and 7ft.

At about 3 o'clock in the morning it was found necessary to send to Pontypridd for 300ft. of hose-piping and this soon arrived in the charge of Mr. E. Rees, the secretary of the fire brigade, who, with other firemen, immediately prepared to descend the shaft and render what assistance they could. Still, when dawn was breaking there was but little sight of the fire being got under control, and battle as they could to keep up the hopes of the rescuers and others about the pit as the hours wore on they were reluctantly compelled to fear the worst so far as the safety of the entombed men was concerned.

Rescuer and survivor interviewed

A fitter named Norman, who was present almost from the beginning of the disaster on being interviewed said:"So far as I know the fire occurred about two o'clock, when they fetched me. I saw that the engine-house was on fire - the woodwork, beams, and part of the platform and such like. It is situated at the top of the East side hard heading, and is a pair of tens. We all set to put the fire out. We could obtain a good supply of water from the top of the pit through



Description of the shafts and seams at the time of the disaster

pipes. The pressure was fairly good about 530lbs., but the big fire was burning so fiercely that we could not get anywhere near it. The smoke also was suffocating, and for some time it was difficult to ascertain what was best to be done to prevent those at work in the mine being smothered. You see it was driving with the air in this direction, and there was nothing at all to stop it.

All the east side men, however, managed to get out safe; but up to now it was then about 7 o'clock and those in the East Side Level have not been heard of. There might be50or more there, probably more. They include all the men working at a right angle from the engine. To put out the fire we first cut off the water-pipes, and then put on the hose, whilst a number of the men set to work with buckets. The passage where the engine stands is about 15 ft. wide and about 13 ft. high, and was made especially to accommodate the engine." He could give no probable condition of the missing men. So far as he knew there had been no communication with them by those who had been engaged on the fire. It was impossible, he said, for anyone just then to get to them owing to the volume of smoke.

A man who was fortunate enough to be amongst the first batch of men brought out after the fire, though refusing to give his name, had no hesitation in giving his account to a Cardiff newspaper: "I was working on the East Side fitting up a door with the fireman's brother, a man named Tom Davies, when I suddenly smelt smoke. Immediately afterwards a haulier came running up to us, saying that there was something the matter. We saw lots of smoke issuing from the level towards us. We were then standing at the mouth of the return, and there was a lot more men nearby, and we could hear others shouting in the workings.

A lot of us at once started off through the return towards Tymawr. The smoke was driving after us, and we were however, for nearly a mile single file until we came to the landing at Tymawr, about 60 yards from the bottom of the Seven feet, when, having sung out, the carriage was sent up and we got out all right. There were eight or nine men. I saw in one place some who did not follow us out, though they might have done, but whether they are out now or not I can't say."

Chapter three
Wednesday, April 12th, 1893

The day following the disaster it was whispered around that the colliery officials had ordered a number of coffins to be got ready, and preparations were being made to receive the dead and the last ray of hope of relatives and friends still waiting was quenched when it was realised that those best able to judge no longer expected that any more of the entombed men would be got out alive. Forty coffins, which were well made and cost £3 each, were supplied by Messrs Stone Bros, Workington St; Cardiff. The others were made in Pontypridd by Griffiths & Co.; Gelliwasted Rd.

Startling news

The '*Western Mail*' reported: - Starling news came from below on Wednesday morning, that it was thought possible, if not probable, that a repetition of the famous rescue of the entombed men from the Park Slip Pit maybe here repeated. At 8 o'clock in the morning Mr. Bramwell, the Agent of the Great Western Colliery Co., Mr. William Stewart (Harris' Navigation Colliery) and Ivor John, a fireman, descended the shaft and continued their explorations trying to enter the Four-feet seam by way of Bidman's Old Dip and Osborne's Cross Heading, and James Holbrook's Level. Shortly before 10 o'clock news was brought to the colliery officials that the gallant little party who had been determinedly exploring for the entombed had almost succumbed to the deadly fumes.

Medical attendance was immediately sent, and about 10 o'clock the three gentlemen referred to alighted from the Tymawr upcast shaft, and were with difficulty assisted off the cage. When they had been attended to and had somewhat recovered Mr. Stewart was interviewed by a reporter, and although an experienced explorer and a man of exceptionally keen intelligence he appeared somewhat dazed. So startling was the information which he had to convey that there was no mistaking the result of the exploration. He stated that they travelled together for 400 or 500 yards underground from the Tymawr Pit, and found it exceedingly difficult to proceed owing to the terrible fumes, which nearly overcame them. All they came across was one dead body and three dead horses, but although they travelled in the direction to which the men were supposed to have escaped they found no dead bodies and no living soul of the 90 or 100 men now in the pit.
They found that the current of air had been diverted, and therefore there was a possibility, they said, that the men themselves, under the direction of the fireman, Mr. David Davies, had done this, and by so doing secured for

themselves in some remote corner of the colliery a quantity of pure air. It was quite possible, therefore, that all the men would be huddled together, and alive. "When we found," said Mr. Stewart, "that we could proceed no further we shouted loudly into the silence, but got no answer, and as we had found no bodies and saw no signs of any where we were, we think that the men may have got beyond the reach of our voices and may still be alive - I think there is reason for hope."

Mr. Stewart, proceeding, said that the danger which had been anticipated from the presence of gas in the Tymawr shaft had almost, if not entirely disappeared. He said that there was very little gas to be seen on the flames of the safety lamps, far less than was the case last night. After shouting in vain to try and arouse the attention of the entombed men, the rescuing party helped each other back to the bottom of the pit, and thus got up and brought these tidings, which certainly conveyed a ray of hope to the waiting crowds above. Mr. Stewart was much affected by the smoke, but recovered in a day or two.

A message from the Home Secretary

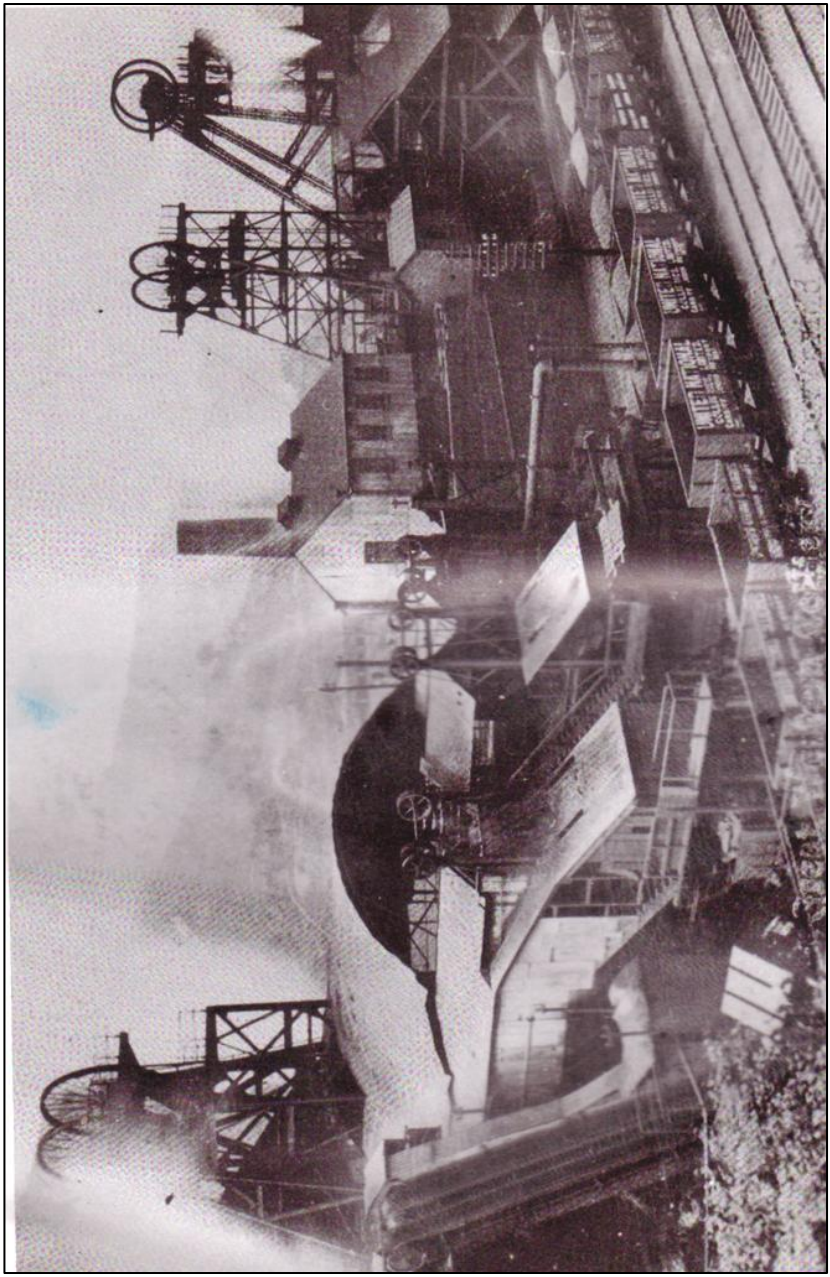
"The Secretary of State directs me to express deep regret at the news of the disaster at the Great Western Colliery, Rhondda, and his sympathy with the sufferers. You are requested to furnish particulars of the accident." - Under-Secretary of the Home Department.

The following reply was immediately wired by Mr. Robson, the mine's inspector: -

"Regret to say the underground fire at Great Western Colliery, Pontypridd, has not yet been sufficiently extinguished to permit exploration in the workings where about 100 men are shut in. I have just come up the pit, having found that everything possible is being done. There are good hopes that many of these men will be rescued alive. There were about 800 persons underground when the fire broke out at an engine-house. Regret to say that six at least have been lost."

Nearing the imprisoned men

At 1 p.m. on Wednesday the rescuing party had managed to get over the large fall and penetrated to a distance of about 200 yards beyond where they previously had, but were overcome by the noxious flames, and had to crawl back. Shortly afterwards news reached the surface that several of the water pipes, owing to the pressure put upon them, and the heat of the atmosphere, had burst, and the consequence was that the work of rescue was necessarily delayed for some time in order to put down fresh pipes.



The Great Western Colliery

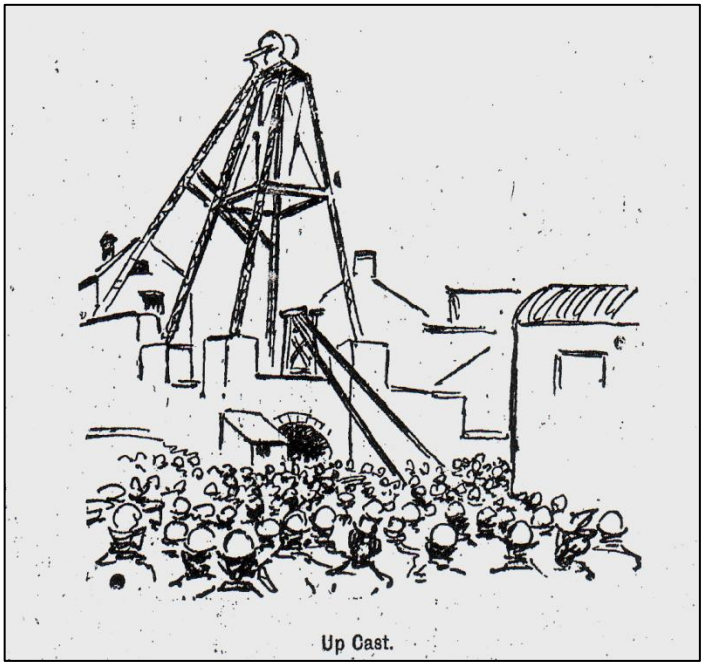
The fire was, as far as could be ascertained, still raging on the further side of the large fall, and it was feared that the flames were making headway into the workings where the unfortunate miners were imprisoned. The members of the various rescuing parties held out little hope of any of the entombed miners being alive. The work of rescue itself was attended with the greatest danger, as there was a possibility of the falls liberating accumulations of gas, which might become ignited by the burning embers, and cause a disastrous explosion. If an explosion did occur, the rescuers would beyond doubt be suffocated.

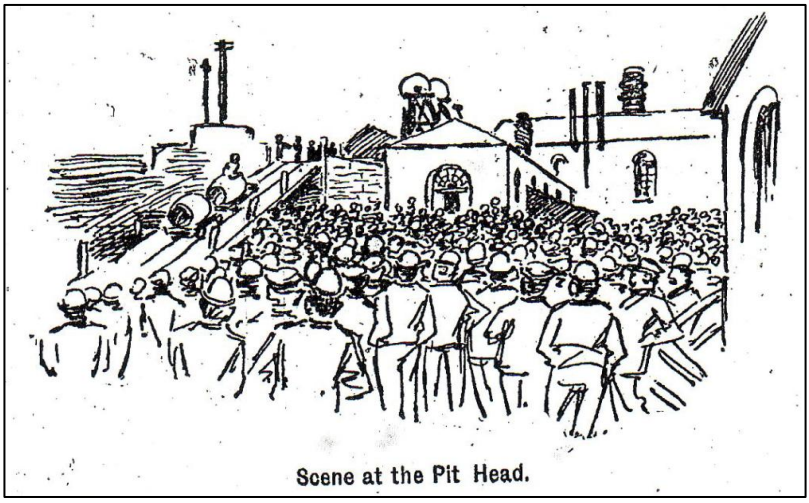
At two p. m. it was reported that the fire inside the workings of the East Far End was still burning, and, although the large fall had been passed by the rescuers, there was very little chance of getting it under control for some time, as the water pipes were leaking all along the roadway, and the extinguishing operations had to be carried on principally by means of buckets. The management were unable to give a list of the names of those miners who were engaged in the East Far End, as it is the practice for colliers at this colliery to take their lamps home. If the lamps of those who had been rescued were deposited in the lamp room there would have been very little difficulty in making out a list of the entombed miners.

A heroic party of explorers

About half-past three a party consisting of Mr. W. Meredith (National Colliery), Mr. Richard Lewis (Merthyr), Mr. Johnson (Plymouth collieries), and others, went down the Hetty Pit, and proceeded down the East Far End**,** about 100 yards beyond the point at which the fire originated. Mr. Meredith, who displayed courage which amounts to heroism, describes the experiences of the party in the following terms:

"We found that the fire had extended for almost 100 yards beyond the point where it all originated. There was still fire under the falls, and the heat was intense. It was just like an oven. Mr. Johnson and I, accompanied by some of the workmen, proceeded as far as an engine-house, where we found the body of a man, presumably the engine-driver. He had, probably, run towards the fire after smelling the smoke, and was compelled to return. He got as far as the engine-house, where he dropped down and was suffocated with the fumes. He was lying down by the handles of his engine. Mr. Richards and others were not able to come as far as this, but some of the workmen in the colliery came with me. We had the greatest difficulty in getting back, owing to the heat. I can tell you we were very glad to get to the fresh air. It was a hard struggle." Questioned by a reporter he gave the following replies:-





Two newspaper drawings of the 1893 disaster

"Did you see any signs of life or hear anything beyond?" "No, but we were between 500 and 600 yards from the spot where the men are supposed to be." "Would it be as hot in there as the place which you explored?" "It would be just as hot, and, besides, the men would have to contend against the impure gas. Still, they have a chance if they went to the face."

From interviews which the reporter had with others who were down in the pit at the time, it was clear that Mr. Meredith and those who were with him risked their lives in endeavouring to force their way to the place where the men are entombed.

A further supply of water

About 4 o'clock the rescue party with Mr. Meredith, of the National Colliery, Mr. Johnson, and two or three of the workmen succeed in making their way, despite the intense heat and the accumulation of debris, to the Far End engine. Here they found another fall. The covered wooden supports of the roof were found to be on fire. While engaged in putting out the flames John Rees, one of the night firemen, who had shown great courage and endurance in the struggle, ventured still further ahead, though the heat was scarcely endurable. To his horror after going some distance along he noticed the bodies of two men whom he could identify as John Nicholas, the driver of the far end engine, and a shackler named Cornelius Hayes, a lad of about 18 years of age.

In order that there should be no confusion, it is necessary to explain that between 300 and 400 yards from the engine which was the cause of the disaster there is another hauling engine, and it was close to this that the body of Nicholas was found. He was a single man belonging to Hopkinstown, and Hayes's people lived at Treforest. It was remarkable that neither Nicholas or Hayes, from the position in which they were found, had, so far as could be seen, made the slightest effort to escape; but they were both found at their regular working places, Nicholas being in a sitting position close by his engine, and Hayes being found lying at full length close by. At the time Rees made this discovery he was so overpowered by the intense heat that he was compelled to return to his party, to whom he communicated the sad intelligence, it being impossible at the time to make any attempt to remove the bodies.

It was learned from various batches of men who returned to the surface for fresh air and rest that the explorers had now penetrated considerably more than half way to the far end. The workings where the missing men were supposed to be, however, were yet a considerable distance further on from where the bodies of Nicholas and Hayes were found, but it was thought that with the special

precautions about to be taken to cool the mine the far end might be reached that night.

During the afternoon a scheme was used for sending more water into the pit. Between the Hetty and No. 2 Pit is a shaft, which is not used for raising coal. It was the pioneer pit of the Great Western Colliery, and was sunk very many years ago by Mr. John Calvert. In this pit was a large quantity of water, and a scheme was adopted by which the water might be pumped into compressed air pipes and sent down into the Hetty. The connections were quickly made, the men working with a knowledge that upon their promptitude might depend the lives of about a hundred men. As soon as this additional supply was put on the workers down below were enabled to entirely conquer the flames, which had extended about 100 yards into the East Far End, but underneath the falls there was still a good deal of fire. Several attempts were made by gallant hands of explorers to get through to the entombed miners, but the intense heat of the pit prevented even the most courageous of them proceeding more than about 300 yards beyond the point where the fire was checked.

The belief existed that once the smouldering remains of the fire were thoroughly flooded out, the passage would be cooled and the impure air easily cleared out. The findings of the additional bodies had created a feeling approaching absolute despair on the part of those who had all along crowded the entrance of the colliery in the hope of hearing news as to father, brothers, or sons who were missing.

It transpired that at the time the bodies of Nicholas and Hayes were discovered near the far end engine-house the corpse of a third man, who had apparently been suffocated, was also found. The latter had subsequently been identified as that of Tom Lambert, a married man, who resided on the tram-road, leading from Pontypridd to the colliery in the vicinity of the Greyhound Inn. Lambert, who went by the name of “Bungy” amongst his comrades, was well known in pugilistic circles as a capable exponent of the “noble art.”

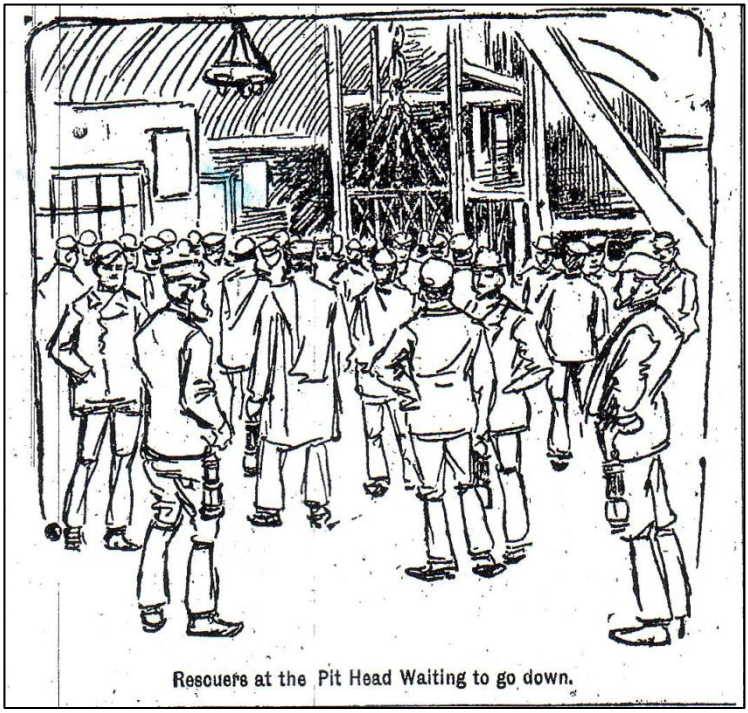
Consequent on the discovery of the bodies preparations were shortly afterwards undertaken with a view to their removal. To this end operations were directed to the Tymawr shaft, several parties of colliers going down at intervals during the afternoon to ascertain the best means of attaining the object in view. It was found, however, that the numerous falls in the vicinity of where the fire had been raging, in addition to the heat and foul air, still made these attempts futile for the time being, but in view of the plans for cooling the mine, arrangements were entered upon for carrying out the project later on.

Adjoining the engine-house stood an apparently disused house, most of the windows of which had been smashed in, and it was decided that this would be a convenient place for the reception of the bodies as they were brought up from the mine. A supply of sawdust was consequently obtained and spread over the whole of the rooms on the ground floor. These ominous preparations were carried out quietly and secretly as possible, in order, if possible, to avoid any demonstration or public curiosity, always to be anticipated on such occasions. A short gangway was constructed for the conveyance of bodies from the workings on the cage, and a number of ambulance stretchers procured.

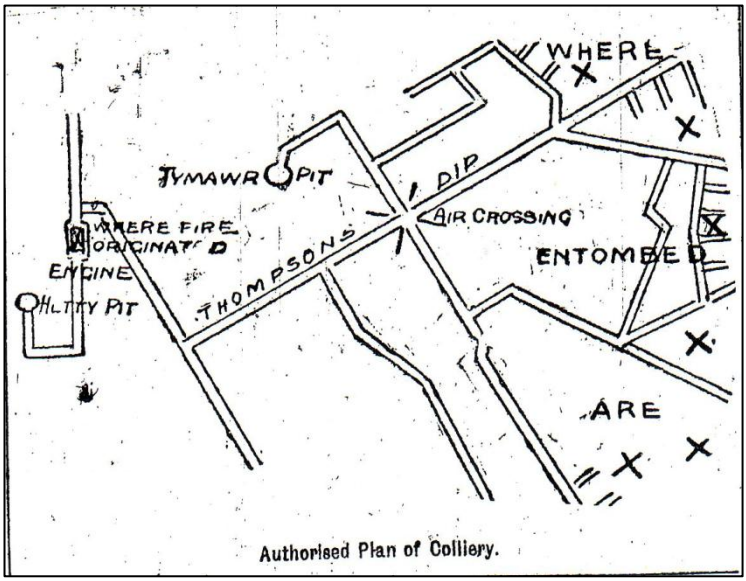
Another hopeful opinion

During the afternoon a reporter of the '*Western Mail*' was introduced to Mr. W. R. Beith, who was one of the foremost in the heroic band of brave men who liberated the entombed men in the Tynewydd Colliery just sixteen years ago, and, by the way, it is a singular coincidence that the fire which imprisoned the Great Western men occurred on the same day and almost at the same hour as the Tynewydd inundation. Mr. Beith, who is now sinking the Gelli Pit for Messrs.Cory Brothers& Co.; held out very strong hopes that the men would be rescued. If, he added, they had gone back towards the face of the workings, it was quite possible that they could divert the foul air, and so escape the noxious vapours. After ascending the pit later in the evening, Mr. Beith's hopes were not extinguished. He and those who were with him, found evidences of the proper steps having been taken by those entombed to preserve their lives. This was confirmed by Mr. Meredith, who stated that the doors were in exactly the position which he would have expected they would be in if an experienced man like the fireman (Mr. Davies) had been in charge. They were opened in such a manner as to divert the foul air, and thus secure a retreat for the men. Mr. Robson as late as six o'clock in the evening had not lost hope of some of the men, at least, being alive. The pit, he said, was cooling, and he hoped to have a thorough exploration in a very short time.

About 6 o'clock that night a consultation was held in which Mr. Robson, the officials of the colliery, and prominent mining experts took part. It was agreed that the pit would be soon sufficiently cool enough for explorers to make a thorough examination of the district in which the men were imprisoned. It was arranged that there should be three exploring parties, each composed of experienced colliery managers, a fireman, and an official who possessed an accurate knowledge of the particular headings to be examined. Each party was supplied with labels which, in the case of men being found dead, would be affixed to the arm.



Rescuers at the Pit Head Waiting to go down.



Authorised Plan of Colliery.

The object of this arrangement was that those that followed would understand that these bodies had been discovered and could be conveyed to the surface. Previous to the exploring parties going down, however, it was thought advisable by Mr. Robson that a preliminary examination should take place, and if all was right a telephone message be sent to the explorers to descend.

Mr. Robson was accompanied in this preliminary exploration by Mr. Hugh Bramwell (agent), Mr. W. W. Hood (Llwynypia), Mr. James (manager), and Mr. W. R. Beith. When these gentlemen went down, they found that the temperature had gone down considerably, but that their operations were impeded by another roof fall caused by the steam from the smouldering debris. The hose had been rendered useless by the fall and it was evident that some considerable time should elapse before the explorers could go down with any hope of accomplishing their investigation of the workings.

Mr. Robson's party discovered about 50 yards from the second engine house and on the side nearest the fire, the body of a boy wearing a blue jersey. It is presumed that the boy attended the engine, and that he was overcome by the fumes in the same way as the engine driver, whose body was discovered earlier in the day.

A miner's agent's experience

Mr. Morgan Weeks, agent to the Rhondda District of House Coal Miners, in answer to questions put to him said that he had gone down the shaft that afternoon, and proceeded to relate his experiences as follows:
"I met a lot of men all along the roadway, which was lit up by electric light. A lamp was supplied to me and I went along to the interior of the workings. There were plenty of willing hands there. They were lining the whole road.Up by the engine there were a lot of helpers standing in a row, and handing buckets full of water to each other all along the whole line, so that the water could be thrown on the fire. The narrowness of the roadway caused by the big fall there made it impossible for more than two to work at a time on the face. Everything was being done that could be done under the circumstances, and taking everything into consideration the work of the exploration and rescue was being most satisfactorily carried out. The heat where we were was very great, and it affected my eyes very much. I was in a bath of perspiration while I was down there**.** We went on to the place where the fire was and there was a big fall there, extending for scores of yards. Smoke was coming out from different parts of the rubbish. In some places it was quite cold, but there was a terrible heat just near the engine. They were working in relays, and the men were being changed every ten minutes."

Interview with another survivor

A reporter during Wednesday evening interviewed Thomas Israel, of Mount Pleasant, who was fortunate enough to escape with the batch of men raised through the Tymawr Pit. "I was in the next place to George Thorne," said Israel, "and my butties and myself were working when we smelt smoke. The smoke got worse, and immediately we knew there was something wrong. So we left our working places, about 40 of us and, half naked as we were, rushed along the main roadway to the bottom of the Tymawr Pit as fast as our legs would carry us. There was a good deal of excitement, as you might imagine. We did not think than an explosion had taken place, but we thought that something had got on fire."

The exploring parties enter the Pit

A batch of explorers who came to the surface at ten o'clock reported that, although progress was being made below, there was no hope of reaching the entombed miners until about midnight. The exploring parties were organised and descended into the pit at eleven o'clock. Mr. Robson, Mr. Bramwell, Dr. Ivor Lewis, Mr. W. Hood (Llwynypia), and Mr. W. M. Jones (surveyor) were appointed to superintend the explorations, and it was arranged that the following shift of explorers should report themselves to Mr. Robson:
Shift 1: Mr. W. James (manager), Mr. W. Bidman (fireman), Captain Morris, Mr. I. F. Adams and Mr. E. S. Richards.

Shift 2: Mr. D. Rees (under-manager), Mr. W. John (overman), Mr. Charles Morris (Cardiff), Mr. T. Griffiths, M. E. (Cymmer), and Mr. D. Hannah, M. E. (Ferndale).

Shift 3: Mr. Morgan Thomas (overman), Mr. Lemuel Jenkins (overman), Mr. White (Gelli), Mr. D. Davies (Cwmaman), and Mr. F. Horsford. Mr. Wetherhead (the chairman of the company) decided to stay at the colliery overnight.

Scene at the pit mouth

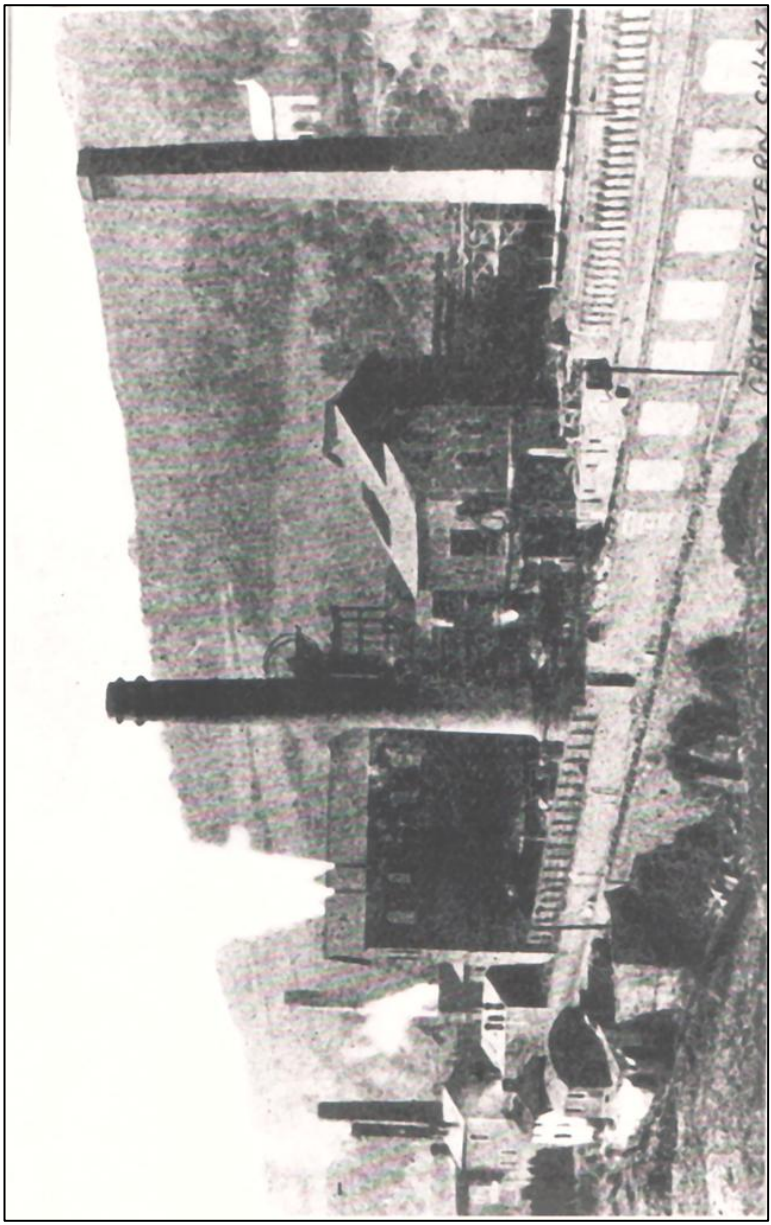
The centre of operations during the long day and into the night was the yard immediately surrounding the mouth of the Hetty Pit. It was here that the rescuing parties were gathered, grimy and resolute; it was here that they emerged, exhausted and reeking of the sulphurous fumes and bearing mottled stains of the terrible battle with the fire and the smoke below.

Around the pit's mouth, in silent anxious groups, were the heroes of the mine; the modest, careworn men who knew what it was to look death in the face without flinching, Meredith, James, Bramwell, Beith, Jones, Hood, White, Jenkins, and other leaders of forlorn hope, unselfish workers for the cause of humanity, stand about awaiting the call to the front. The dust-covered yard, enveloped in the mist created by the panting engines, holds many a brave soldier in the struggle not to kill, but to save, not to destroy, but sustain life. Their clothes bore testimony to their service where the fire rages and falls threaten; their dripping caps and dirt-laden clothes speak of dangers risked and labour expended where there is most need of it. Now and anon. the huge cage shoots up with a mighty clatter, empties one living freight, takes in another, and once more dives down from the light to darkness and the smoke. And meanwhile the elders in experience of coal winning, with its attendant perils, come and go, until one wonders how collieries elsewhere can get along without their men in authority.

Beyond the yard are the mass of people, ringed off from the sphere of action. More pathetic sight human eyes have not yet gazed upon than this line upon line of human faces, marked with the signs of the long-sustained tension and excitement. It is a silent, orderly crowd, languidly watched by the police. There are aching hearts in it, hearts sickened by the hope deferred. Such scrappy information as that which reaches the agitated, weary people keeps them in a constant ferment of expectation. They can only look on, mute and helpless, while abler hands than theirs make the effort which to some of them is fraught with the greatest consequences. And hours go slowly by, and hopes droop and revive, while gauged by periods of time, no appreciable progress is being made towards that end which all may pray may bring back the entombed to light and life, and all fear may only shatter the sanguine dream which has sustained them during the trying day and the long watches of the night. This is the story, hardly varied from dusk to dawn, of the vigil at the pit's mouth.

Latest particulars - Pontypridd midnight, Wednesday

Telegraphing his main office at midnight on Wednesday, a '*Western Mail*' reporter stated: - In view of the possibility of some of the entombed miners being rescued alive and requiring skilled attendance, the most complete medical arrangements have been made. Dr. H. Davies (Pontypridd), Dr. Leckie (Pontypridd) and Dr. Lewis (Cymmer) descended with the exploring party, and each accompanied a separate shift, while waiting at the mouth of the Hetty Pit



The Great Western Colliery in its prime

were Dr. Jenkins(Pontypridd) and Dr. Ben Lewis (Pontypridd). At themouth of the Tymawr Pit, Dr. Crawthorne, Dr. Bristowe, and Dr. James were in attendance. At half-past nine o'clock the fan of the Tymawr Pit was started as full speed, which indicated that the fire in the interior of the pit had been extinguished, and that no danger was anticipated from any accumulation of gas.

Special description by "Morien," - Wednesday night

This has been a day of intense anxiety and suspense for the district generally as respecting the fate of the poor fellows entombed in the workings of the Great Western Colliery. Truth to tell, no one knows how many men and boys are still in the workings. An invitation has been issued requesting the men who have escaped to report themselves to the colliery authorities with a view to enable them to know for certain who is and who is not still in the workings. But the officials of the colliery have no time to attend to any roll-call of the men, for they are straining every nerve to reach the entombed men, some of whom, it is still ardently hoped, maybe found in the inner workings, living upon a stock of fresh air imprisoned in the interior. It is difficult for anyone unfamiliar with colliery management to understand what the expression "imprisoned air," means. It will be understood that a colliery is ventilated by a continuous current of air passing down the downcast shaft, and, after traversing miles of workings, the current passes up through another shaft, called the upcast shaft. By the time the current passes out of the colliery it is in a very impure condition, for it is impregnated with the gases of the mine and carbon, or ashes of the oxygen consumed by men and beasts.

When a worker in mines happens to reach the verge of old age he is invariably subject to what is called colliers' asthma, and it has been found that the bronchial tubes, and even the lungs themselves, bear a greyish tint. When anything happens to arrest the continuous flow of the air current through the colliery what is there already becomes stationary, and as long as the oxygen remains in it unconsumed by organic bodies it will sustain life. Now, the smart act of Thomas Rosser on Tuesday in turning the air current, charged with dense smoke and sparks of fire, into the return air-way leading to the upcast, caused the fragment of the flow which had reached the 78 men under his care to breathe pure air, but slightly diluted with the smoke. They thus were in comparative safety until they came to the intake, whose current had been directed into another channel by young Rosser. It was when the men came to fight their way back towards the shaft through the tunnel, which had become a chimney full of dense smoke and fiery sparks and flaming timber props ranged along the sides supporting the roof, that their real danger (and it was a terrible one) commenced!

When one contemplates what young Rosser did - and a young Cymro only just out of his teens and holder of a manager's certificate, won by examination - one, feels that the Victoria Cross could never be bestowed on a worthier Briton! Your field marshals, generals, majors, colonels, and captains are decorated for efficiency in the art of destroying enemies, but these lowly heroes of the mines are but rarely rewarded for their valour in the task of saving lives of loyal subjects of Queen Victoria. "Peace," says Milton, "hath her victories not less renowned than war," but he ought to have added, though "renowned," they are but seldom recognised by any Government.

Now, at the time of writing there is just a glimmer of hope that a similar act as that which enabled Thomas Rosser to save the men on Tuesday was practised by David Davies, the fireman of the district in which are the entombed men. The explorers penetrating over falls along the intake observed two doors open on the right. They had not been opened by any explosive force, but by human hands. The effect of opening them was that the smoke was diverted from the ordinary intake and directed by another air-way to the return upcast shaft.

It is inferred that David Davies, the fireman, fought his way to those doors and had thrown them open, and then had retreated to the men in the interior, the remotest part of which is about a mile beyond the said two doors. If that be so - and all pray it may turn out to be the case - the entombed men are in the far interior, breathing the imprisoned pure air. But, on the other hand, then comes the question: "If they are alive in the interior, how is it that they do not attempt to come out as far as the diverted smoke current?" In reply to this it is said the scores of great timbers propping and bridging the roadways have been tremendously heated –that the heat has produced such expansion of the air and the roadways in the interior as to dislocate the timber there. Also, with the result of immense falls taking place and shutting in the men.

This afternoon the explorers passed over the falls, which are continuous for a distance of 600 yards from the engine where the fire originated, to another engine at the top of the dip leading into the East Far End, where the men are. The falls emitted dense smoke from the burning timber which had fallen underneath them.

The engine-house here was entered by Mr. William Meredith, manager of the National Colliery, and Mr. David Jones, manager of the AberRhondda. Lying dead they found J. Nicholas, the engine-driver. Mr. Hugh Bramwell, the agent of the colliery, and Mr. Stewart, of the Treharris Collieries, went down the Tymawr upcast shaft, and actually discovered that the smoke current had been diverted as the result of opening the two doors mentioned above.

But they saw no sign of any living being anywhere. They came upon the dead body of a haulier and three dead horses. They state that the heat in the district they traversed was intense. Relays of men are busily engaged in the task of opening the passage over the falls on the roadway from the first engine-house on the intake, and all afternoon men have been engaged in laying pipes to convey water at great pressure from the surface into the workings. While all hope for the best, the balance of probability is the very sad one that the poor men are beyond all earthly aid.

Great throngs of men and women have been assembled about the approaches to the colliery all day. Superintendent E. Jones and a strong body of police are here, but they have little to do, for the public are most solemn and orderly in appearance and behaviour. Captain Lindsay, chief-constable, was present during the day. Last night "Mabon," M. P; as soon as he heard of the disaster, travelled direct from the House of Commons. As usual when colliery disaster occur many local managers have assembled, among them being Mr. Williams Jenkins (Ocean) and Mr. Thomas Griffiths, (Cymmer).

The incidents in connection with a matter of this kind are fewer, so far, than is the case when an explosion happens, but the constant references to Mr. D. Davies, the fireman in charge of the affected district, show that he is held in the highest possible esteem throughout the neighbourhood for his intelligence, experience, and uprightness. The report brought up this morning by Mr. Stewart that he and his party had found the air diverted made many a workman and official nod his head and say "I expected it."

A familiar figure in Pontypridd and Hopkinstown was that of James Devereaux, the lamp-man, whose little cabin was situated only a short distance inside the engine at which the fire originated. As soon as the creeping fire had passed the lamp-station a search was made for Devereaux, but he was not found. The back part of the little cabin had fallen in, and there was a huge fall of debris just outside, so it was concluded that his body would be found somewhere beneath the heap of rubbish.

A young rider, who stood somewhere near the lamp-station when the fire broke out, made a gallant and successful dash for life by forcing his way through the flames, and the statements as to the poor fellows picked up by the first exploring parties and afterwards, of stern necessity, dropped and left to their fate is a sad one. The case of the Williams' is typical of the wholesale devastation caused by these colliery disasters. The two young men were dead when brought up, and their father and an elder married brother were left in the pit - possibly alive, of course. As to the abstentions from work owing to presentiment

(foreboding), cases which have now become quite frequent in accounts of these terrible events, the present occasion is not without its instances, but there seems to have been no tangible presentiment connected with the colliery itself. A man dreamt that a fatality had occurred to a member of the family, and he went to ascertain whether there was any foundation for the dream, and so did not go to work on Tuesday - strange to say, the very district in which the men were entombed.

An affecting circumstance is related with reference to David Davies, the fireman of the East Far End district, and Thomas Davies, the bratticemen, two of the men entombed. A brother who is in the ministry, and who holds the position of pastor of the Baptist Chapel, Drefach, Carmarthenshire, has been announced to preach a sermon at the Rhondda Chapel, Hopkinstown, on Sunday next. One can well imagine that the Rev. gentleman would look forward to the contemplated re-union with feelings of considerable pleasure, and one cannot help feeling sympathy with him now that the prospective happiness is turned into bitter woe.

On Wednesday night a barricade was put up around the Tymawr Pit, and some clever official of the company had the timbers covered with creosote. In the darkness scores of people spoiled their clothes by leaning against the barricade, and if the official in question had heard the remarks made about him his ears would have tingled.

Discovery of bodies

Pontypridd, Thursday 2.a.m.

Shortly before 2 o'clock on Thursday morning an exploring party returned to the pit bank at the Hetty shaft, and told that all was over with the poor fellows entombed and that no less than 53 dead bodies had been found. Down to the last moment, the disaster not having been caused by an explosion of gas, the families of the absent men were full of confident hope they were simply detained by the smoke in the workings between their working places and the bottom of the shafts.

"Morien" wrote: - This morning, long before daylight, I passed down the valley, now with its hill-sides green with the dyes of spring, and noticed cottages which were the late homes of the men now dead, and the good housewives were there behind the curtained windows waiting for the return of their husbands and sons from the neighbouring colliery.

I had just learned that all the men left in the colliery were dead, and that their late homes would be desolate, indeed, when the sun rose, and the last hope

that they would return again would vanish for ever from the minds of the Marys and the Janes, who were now, with refreshment prepared and with tea-kettles steaming on the hobs, watching anxiously for the sound of the old familiar footsteps in the darkness as the loved ones were approaching home. One repeated to himself the words of Job when witnessing the lights in the windows of the lost miners - “He shall return no more to his house, neither shall his place know him anymore!”

Chapter four
Thursday, April 13th 1893
TRAGIC ENDING TO HEROIC EFFORTS

The '*Western Mail*' newspaper of Thursday, April 13th reported: - The hope which has sustained the gallant band of men engaged in the rescue work at the Great Western Colliery, and the families of the unfortunate miners entombed therein disappeared at 1 o'clock this morning, when the three exploring parties, working on parallel lines to a common point, had the same ghastly tale to tell. Instead of the living beings whom they had hoped to greet, they came upon bodies from which the vital spark had long fled. Before 2 o'clock the heart rending news had reached the surface that no fewer than 53 bodies had been found and not a single living man. This was the message which the hundreds who had foregathered around the pit's mouth had dreaded to receive. It sounded the death knell to all hopes of a successful rescue; it being intimated that the only question left open to doubt was as to the actual number of victims which had fallen to a cause so trivial in its origin, so terribly destructive in its ultimate result. The death toll will probably contain more than one hundred names. We had hoped for more cheering news to give; this is the worst that could have been anticipated. We merely voice a sentiment which will be in all hearts in Wales today to express the deepest sympathy with those upon whom the hand of affliction has been so heavily laid.

A full report the following day read: - Shortly before 2 o'clock on Thursday morning the exploring parties, who had been long and anxiously expected, returned to the top of the Hetty shaft, and were immediately surrounded with anxious inquirers. They sadly remarked that all was over with the fellows entombed, causing a grave silence among the men assembled to await their return at the top of the shaft. Though this was the result almost universally expected, the actual truth uttered authoritably at last was sufficient to unnerve the strongest, and the party proceeded in silence down to the company's offices, and the representatives of the press were able to gather further particulars as to the horrible experiences of the explorers.

It was then announced that no less than 53 dead bodies had been found in the various workings at the East Far End, which, with the five bodies brought up from the mine on Tuesday, had brought the total deaths to 58; and it was feared that there was every possibility of more corpses being found when the numerous falls which were met with at every stage of the journey have been cleared away.

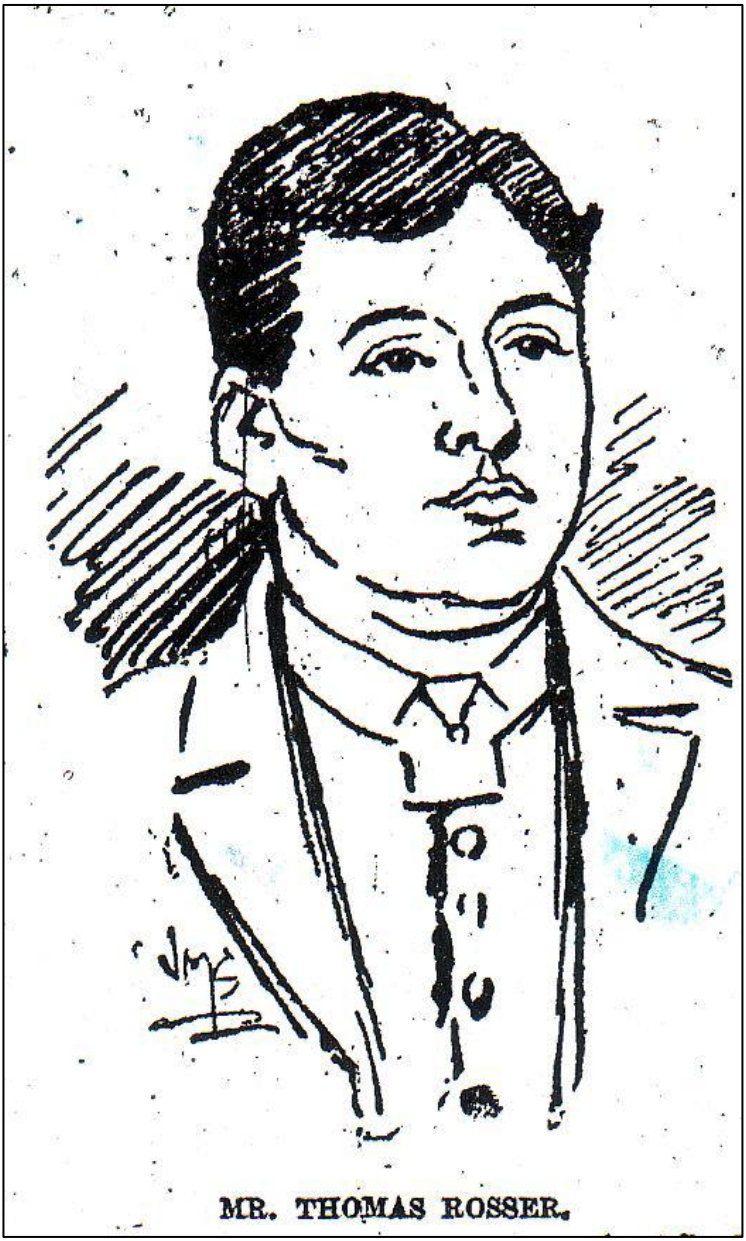
Mr. Robson, Her Majesties Inspector of Mines, who had accompanied the party, readily made a statement as to the precise position of affairs. His statement went as follows: “By 12 o'clock midnight it was found by Mr. Bramwell and some of the others with him that it was practicable to begin a thorough exploration of the extreme workings, which had not been explored before. Then three parties were organised and sent into each district of this particular portion.

At 11.15 a.m. on Wednesday night these three parties proceeded to the exploration of the workings, the arrangement being that they were to come back to a given point at the end of an hour. While this was being done, it was deemed expedient to stop pouring water on the still smouldering fire, but it was thought desirable to extend the exploration longer than an hour, because of the danger of the fire being again started by the stoppage of the water.

At the end of an hour two of the three parties returned to the place of meeting near the top of the main dip, and each of these parties reported that they had seen no living person apart from their own members in the pit. One party, headed by William James, the manager, and Capt. Morris, and which was known as the No.1 division of the gang, came back at midnight. They reported having found eleven bodies, seven of these were in a group at the bottom of the principal heading in that district, and there was another group of three on the main level, a little on the outside of the heading, and further out again there was a single body.

David Rees, who headed the No.2 gang came to the meeting point at 12.20 and reported having found six bodies. The No.3 party, headed by Morgan Thomas, reported when they reached the meeting place that they had seen twenty-eight bodies, some of them being on the main road leading to the spot where the explorers divided themselves into parties. The party divided at eighty yards from the top of the Main Deep, and that is where he awaited the return of each group.

It took No.3 party two hours to do their work, and we therefore had to wait an additional hour. They could not get in bythe main intake on account of the heavy fall, and they came back and went in by the return air way, and travelled by the return against the wind. They came back until they saw the same fall they were stopped by on the main drift, so it is only the fall itself that had not been explored in these three districts. Both intakes and returns and working headings had been explored. Captain Morris, the manager of Abergwynfi; Mr. William James, manager of the Pit, Mr. Bramwell, Mr. E. S. Richards, and Mr.



Thomas Pryce Prosser – Hero of the day

Connor, of the Gelli Pits, headed the exploring parties. Mr. Connor said the poor fellows were found lying down huddled together in groups in different parts of the pit. Only a few shewed any signs of being burnt or disfigured, all having apparently fallen victims to a painless death through suffocation.

Preparations were at once made for bringing the bodies to the bottom of the pit in order for them to be taken up. Later on the bringing up of the dead commenced. As they were brought up relatives identified them, and the bodies were conveyed to their once happy but now sorrowful homes. It was evident that attempts had been made by the poor fellows to escape, and that they had been overcome. Numbers were found huddled together in heaps by doorways and in other parts. It was needless to say that the terrible disaster had cast a feeling of deep gloom over the neighbourhood, and many a tear was shed at the sight of the sad processions passing in different directions, conveying the dead from the colliery. Three bodies were found within 25 yards of the engine where the fire originated. One of these, a lampman (No. 62 - see map page 17), had been buried beneath a heavy fall at his post in the lamp station, where he would most likely have been at the time of the outbreak; his not getting out from such a short distance appeared to show that the fire spread very rapidly in that direction, and that the smoke at once overpowered him.

The three other bodies (No. 47,48 and 63), may or may not have been at the places where their bodies were found. All these four bodies were much burned, the burning doubtless having taken place subsequent to death by suffocation. The body of John Nicholas (No. 50) found at his engine, was very slightly burned, but whether this was before or after death was impossible to say. It was however improbable that he had not moved far from his engine, if at all, after the smoke reached there, which it would have done in a minute from the outbreak. The position of which Dan Spooner (No. 49) and Thomas Price (No.52) were found indicated that these persons were endeavouring to escape by the intake; that of Frank Grainger, incline man (No.51), did not afford such indication, for he may have been at or near the place at the time in discharge of his duties.

It was a remarkable fact that many of those working in that portion of the district lying nearest to the Tymawr shaft were lost, while several who were in the two further portions escaped. Probably smoke would reach each division about the same time, as the distances from the intakes did not differ much. The distance from the working headings to the Tymawr shaft by the return varied considerably; that from the farthest east portion being 878 yards, that from the

east side of Thompson's Dip 560 yards, and from the west side only 442 yards. It was in the latter portion where the body of David Davies, the fireman (No. 60) of the district was found, near that of Mark Osborne (No. 61). Osborne had just resumed work after an accident to his leg, and from the statement of those who escaped from this part of the district it appears that Davies, the fireman, was delayed in assisting Osborne out, after having done his best to get the other men gathered together and sent out. How it came that so many of those who were lost in this part had attempted to go out by the intake instead of the return was a mystery, for most if not all of them would have been aware of their proximity to the Tymawr upcast.

Of the 134 men and boys in the East Level District at the time of the accident, 71 came out by the Tymawr upcast shaft alive and uninjured. The 134 persons were distributed as follows:

In the East Far End there were52, of whom 37 were saved and 15 lost. In the East Side of `Thompson's Dip there were 23, of whom 14 were saved and 9 lost. In the West Side of Thompson's Dip there were 48, of whom 19 were saved and 29 lost. On the roads in bye of the engine there were 11, of whom 1 was saved and 10 lost.

Interview with an explorer

Mr. Thomas Griffiths, agent and manager of the Cymmer Colliery, who was with one of the exploring parties on Wednesday night, in an interview with a '*Western Mail*' reporter, stated that the bodies of the men were in the headings. So far as headings were concerned, there was not one in his actual working clothes. There were eleven of them altogether in Thompson's Dip, some on their faces, some on their sides, and others on their backs. He noticed that a number of them had their legs cramped, and he gathered from Dr. Ivor Lewis (Cymmer) that it was due to suffocation. According to medical opinion the men soon became unconscious, and death was almost painless.

"What was the condition of the pit where the men were found?" "The faces of the workings were quite clear of gas when we went down, and there was no damage done. In some cases the workmen had collected their tools, and put them together, as if they were going to leave the pit in the ordinary way. In other cases men had left behind them their tea jacks and victual boxes, and some of their clothing. It is evident that those who had collected their tools had nor considered there was any serious danger, but others rushed away in panic."

"Were the bodies burnt or disfigured at all?"

"With the exception of two, they were not disfigured. These two were found close to where the fire originated. My opinion is this, that if the men, the moment they noticed the smoke in the workings, had travelled with the air they would have been able to get to the Tymawr Pit. They were in a dilemma. Some of them ran into the middle of the smoke and were suffocated. Agood many came out by the Tymawr Pit, and, as you will understand, the men can go a longer distance with the smoke than against it. If they had the presence of mind to go to the return they would have saved their lives."

"What condition is the pit generally?"
"There are heavy falls where the fire occurred, and also beyond, these latter falls being caused by the heat and fire which often brings down the roof. There are several big falls beyond where the fire took place, and it will take some days to remove them. There is a very heavy one in Thompson's Dip, off the main level; it is possible that there are several men under these falls, and tonight we start work in eight hours' shift to get them away, and at the same time to keep a good supply of water on the fire."
"Is there any fire in the pit now?"
"There is still fire there under the falls. We thought last night the fire had been extinguished, but that is not the case. The water cannot get at the fire in consequence of the rubbish intervening. It may take several days before we shall be able to reach the bodies which are now in the pit."

Mr. W. W. Hood, one of the proprietors of the Glamorgan Collieries, who had been down the pit with Mr. Wales and Mr. Robson, the Government inspectors of mines, to view the working and gather information from the men who were still engaged in exploring the mine, said that there was very little smoke hanging about when they arrived at the bottom. On the way leading to the headings they had passed four men lying asphyxiated on the roadside.

Mr. O'Connor, manager of the Gelli Colliery, and Mr. Meredith, manager of the National Colliery, who were with the party that had explored one of the districts, said they had seen numbers of dead men at the opening of the way running into the stalls. The poor fellows had unmistakably been suffocated. Their only chance of escaping had been by opening the two doors and letting in a current of air which would displace the smoke and drive it into the return airway. One of the poor fellows had, evidently, attempted to escape by that means, but before he could manage to open the first door the fumes overcame him. Had

the men only succeeded in opening the doors they would, in all probability, have been living now. The explorers found, at the opening of the workings and along the road, twenty men, all suffocated.
Mr. Wright, agent of the Pentre and Gelli Collieries, who had headed the party which had been investigating another of the districts, had found in all 28 bodies in three of the headings - three in one, eleven in another, and twelve in the last. Mr. Wright believes that if the men had not been confused they could have found an escape by the return leading into the Tymawr upcast. About 40 of the men working in that district had got out by that way before the smoke had reached them, and the others might have escaped in the same way.

By mid-afternoon on Thursday 14th April 1893, 59 bodies had reportedly been recovered and brought to bank. As the officials were unsure who was down the pit, and the poor condition of several of the bodies it was natural that confusion would arise, both in who was brought up and who was missing.

Amongst those who were present and who rendered valuable assistance were:- Mr. Miles, agent for the Wattstown Colliery, Ynyshir; Mr. Thomas Griffiths, Cymmer Colliery (Messrs. Insole & Co.); Mr. Philip Jones, (Manager) and Mr. W. Lewis, (Agent Cilfynydd Colliery); Mr. H. Abraham, Hafod (Lewis Merthyr - Navigation); Mr. W. Meredith, (Manager of Wattstown Colliery); Mr. H. T. Wales, (Mining engineer), Pontypridd (late agent for the Great Western Colliery); Mr. W. Richards, (Coedcae Coll.); Mr. D. Hannah, (Ferndale Coal Co); Mr. W. Jenkins, (Ocean Collieries); Mr. W. W. Hood, (Llwynypia); Mr. W. Stuart, (Treharris) and others. Medical gentlemen including: Dr. Leckie, (Medical officer of the colliery); Dr. B. M. Lewis, Dr. Howard Davies, Dr. Evans, Dr. Parry (Ferndale) who were all present and ready for any and every call.

Mr. W. Abraham (Mabon) M.P, expressed himself as satisfied that whatever men could do had been done to save the unfortunate fellows. They were a splendid lot of fellows working on the rescue and if the lives of the entombed were not saved it was not the fault of the workers. Throughout the whole of the sad proceedings Supt. Jones and the police had been in attendance and their valuable services deserved distinct and emphatic recognition. Inspectors Davies and Jones rendered valuable service. The Chief Constable was also present for a time.

It was too soon to ascertain that the pecuniary circumstances of those whose breadwinners had so suddenly been cut down. Mabon, however, lost no time in taking steps to provide for the needy, and to this end organised a public meeting

at the Town Hall at Pontypridd on Friday 17th at 8 o'clock to solicit help. It was also very pleasing to see Mr. Williams (Pontypridd), District Manager of the London, Edinburgh and Glasgow Assurance Company Ltd, present at the colliery from the first prepared to pay all claims, he having received the following telegraph from the head office:

London - April 12th 1893

"Newspapers report terrible colliery disaster at Pontypridd. Please proceed there at once and arrange for payments of claims on any of our policy holders who may have lost their lives. Send full particulars tonight of the extent of the lossof life and amount of cash required to meet claims" - Neill, (manager).

The Pearl Assurance Co; also showed great prominence in dealing with claims arising from this disaster and in each case the full face of policies being paid immediately, without the usual formalities, thus saving all trouble on the part of the bereaved.

Pitiful plight of devoted Mother

A Rhondda reporter on the '*Western Mail*' wrote of an incident on this Thursday morning: As I was walking along the street from one point to another about 6 o'clock this morning, an aged Irish woman, whose face was much wrinkled was standing on the doorstep anxiously waiting to hear some news about her son. Her moans and cries first attracted my attention, and upon approaching the threshold where she stood she enquired, in a most pitiful tone: "Have you heard anything about my son sir?" She repeated the question several times, stammering as she spoke. "Is your son down in the mine?" I asked. She then broke forth, "Oh, dear, yes," she answered, and as she uttered the words she clasped her hands and trembled as though she had been suddenly seized with palsy.

"What is his name?" I interrogated. She made no reply for a moment, but sobbed and dried the tears that trickled down her furrowed cheeks with the sleeve of her gown. "Tell me his name, my dear woman," I went on. "Sullivan," she answered, "and he was a dear boy! He was a good boy. Oh, my child, my child!" This moved me extremely. It struck me as I gazed upon the aged, weeping mother that she had sat up all night with a broken heart wailing after her dear son. "Was he married Mrs. Sullivan?" I pathetically asked, closing up the door to the poor old lady. "Oh, yes," she muttered, "she is in the house.

They have no children. She had also been sitting up all night. They were married four years ago. What shall I do now? I shall never see my child again." I tried to console that unfortunate mother. I walked away slowly, but turning around noticed the unhappy woman still standing, lifting her clasped hands to her face and crying bitterly. While a few yards away she exclaimed: "My dear husband was a banksman at the same pit, and he is dead, and now my poor child's wife and myself are alone."

I wended my way up to the Tymawr house, situated close by the upcast pit, out of which the dead were being raised at the time. It is a commodious house, and evidently had once been occupied by a retired gentleman. There are two large rooms on the lower storey, one on the left and the others on the right. The floor was covered with sawdust and the bodies were laid side by side in the room, each being wrapped in old oiled canvas. The mouths of several of the victims were covered with froth or foam, and this indicated to me that they had battled hard for life. The body of John Collins was conveyed through the town of Pontypridd to Berw Rd. this morning, and, was followed by a large number of miners. The number of bodies recovered is 57.

Though seven of the pit horses appear to have shared the fate of the unfortunate men, some ten or a dozen of them in the Tymawr Pit appear to have sustained no injury save the pangs of hunger. A supply of hay was taken to these animals during Wednesday afternoon, which was readily devoured.

Day of lamentation

Another reporter wrote: Thursday was a day of lamentation in Pontypridd as the Metropolis of the Rhondda has never before known. When the exploring parties returned to the surface about 2 o'clock in the morning they conveyed the sorrowful intelligence that not one of the entombed men could by any possibility have escaped the deadly fumes of the fire, and those who during the night had patiently waited at the pits conveyed the terrible tidings to the fathers and mothers, wives and children of the victims. It was, indeed, a mournful sight which met the eyes of a visitor to the scene of the disaster.

The drawn blinds on numerous cottages en route to the colliery, the black flags displayed at licensed houses where friendly societies meet, the processions at frequent intervals of men carrying the dead bodies of their comrades - some on stretchers and some in coffins - and the silent weeping of women waiting for the sad return of their loved ones, could not fail to impress even the most hardened

man of the world. Just above Pontypridd is a small district called Pwllgwaun or Newtown, from which nine hale and hearty men and boys proceeded on Tuesday morning to their work at the Great Western Colliery, to be brought back blacked corpses.

As early as 8 o'clock in the morning scores of relatives and friends of the deceased waited in the streets for the victims to be brought home, and the sincerest expressions of regret for the bereaved were heard on all sides. The most distressing case in this district is that of a family called Lloyd, who before Tuesday consisted of an invalid father, his wife, and a son named Ivor. The son, who was 21 years of age, was the chief support of his parents, and dutifully did he fulfill the duty cast upon him. Similar scenes were witnessed at several other parts of the district, notably at Hopkinstown and Gyfeillon, where several of the men lived.

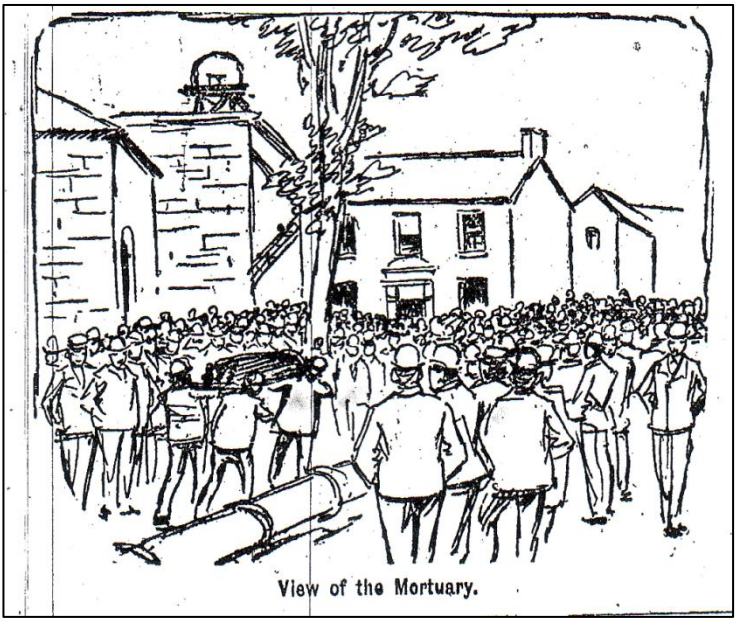
Bringing up the bodies

As soon as it became known that the explorers had completed their work gangs of men went down the Tymawr Pit for the purpose of bringing up the bodies. By this time the people, who had congregated around the Tymawr Pit, had gradually dispersed, until only a few remained to watch the bodies being brought to the surface. The gangs divided themselves into three parties and brought the bodies towards the shaft.

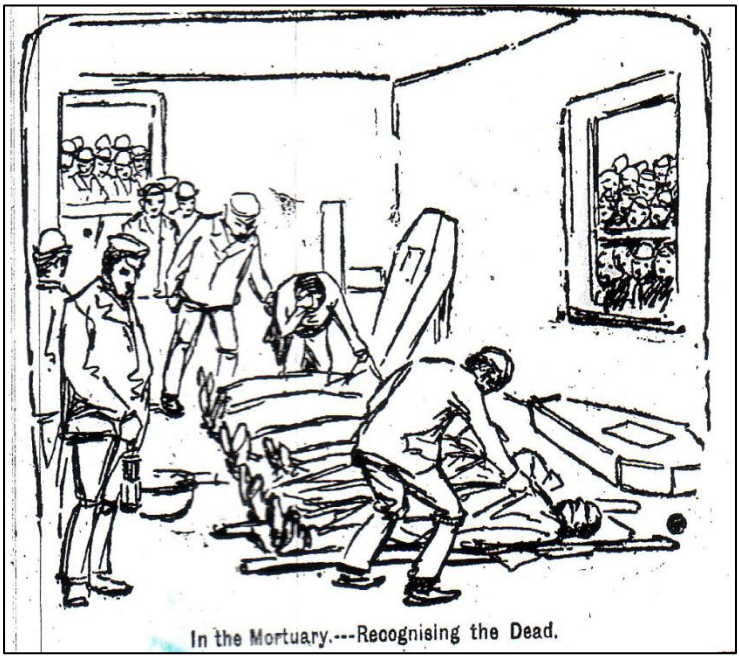
The bodies were wrapped in brattice cloth, and labels of identification were placed upon all of the poor victims whose names were known. In some cases the men were found to have been badly burned, but in the majority of instances death was clearly due to suffocation, and the features of the deceased bore no ugly disfigurement whatsoever.

The smell arising from the bodies was such as to call for the use of a liberal supply of disinfectants. It was a considerable time after the rescuers had gone down that any bodies were brought up, the first reaching the surface being those of Lewis Thomas and a man, name unknown.

Others were afterwards drawn out in quick succession, and they were all carried on stretchers to the improvised mortuary at Tymawr House, and laid side-by-side on the saw-dusted floors prepared for their reception, it being again here found necessary also that disinfectants should be used to guard against any evil effects from the noxious odours. As the bodies were identified they were removed to the respective homes of the unfortunate men.



View of the Mortuary.



In the Mortuary.---Recognising the Dead.

Pathetic scenes

The scenes witnessed at the identification of the bodies were often painful, but, apart from those badly burned, the process of identification has been less difficult than it usually is in connection with colliery disasters. Doctors state the death from asphyxia is painless, but the hunted look upon the faces of some of the dead in this temporary mortuary suggests a doubt as to the correctness of this, unless, indeed, that look was brought by the certain knowledge possessed by the individual that death was coming upon him. In some cases women fainted and the faces of other onlookers blanched when they saw some of the victims, but in other cases the dead were identified with business like rapidity and soon removed. “I would know him among a thousand,” said the father of the little boy Miller, of Pontypridd, when he saw the long-looked-for face of his son. But amid the excitement and the bustle there is in this instance an added feeling of the fearful responsibility of colliery operations when such an apparently simple and unusual cause as a spark from an engine brake has caused such a terrible catastrophe.

One particular mistake occurred at the temporary mortuary near the Tymawr Pit. The bodies were laid on the floor, and as they were identified the names were posted outside. In one instance, it is reported, a man in reading the list of identified noticed his own name there and pointed out the error, whereupon the body to whom the name was supposed to have been applied was declared to be unknown. The appearance of some of the bodies was suggestive of their having suffered terribly from the heat and lain down to die - the eyes fixedly staring at the roof and the lips parted as if gasping for breath.

Burnt to a cinder

The two first bodies brought out by the Hetty Pit presented a terrible, not to say sickening spectacle, and defied every attempt at identification. They were discovered near the spot where the fire originated, and were dreadfully burnt. In fact, they had scarcely a resemblance to human beings, but looked more like large cinders. Both are supposed to be the bodies of full grown men, but what remains of them did not fill a quarter of the ordinary sized coffins for adults. The lower extremities of each body were missing, and as the charred mass which remained defied identification it was allowed to remain in the mortuary the whole day. It is believed by some of the men that one of the poor fellows who were so horribly burnt is Devereaux, who was in charge of the lamp cabin near the engine-house, and who, being a cripple, would be unable to escape. The

body of one man was found seated on a lump of coal with the head resting on his hands. Others had their boxes and tea-jacks under their arms when they were discovered. A lamp No.927, found in the pit, has been identified as belonging to Thomas, better known in the district as "Bungy." The visitors to the colliery on Thursday afternoon were of a different class from those who were crowded around the pits on the two previous days. The shops at Pontypridd being closed for half-day, a large number of assistants and others were among the spectators, both at Tymawr and Hetty Pits.

RECOVERED THROUGH THE TYMAWR PIT

1. **Lewis Thomas,** 36, Tramroad-side, Treforest, 25, collier, single.
2. **William Thomas Cole,** 1 Williams-place, Berw Rd, Pontypridd, Collier, single.
3. **Richard Edmunds**, 39 Pwllgwaun Rd, 25, collier, single.
4. **George Potter**, 29 Gyfeillon Rd, 28, timberman, married.
5. **George Lewis**, 19 Rickard St, Pontypridd 16, single.
6. **William James Bond**, 61, Rickard St, Pontypridd.
7. **George Bartlett**, 5 Grover St, Pontypridd, 22, collier, single.
8. **William Howells**, Hopkinstown Rd, 17, collier, single.
9. **William Bowers**, 10 Rickard St, Pontypridd, 23, single.
10. **Ivor Lloyd**, 10 Barry St, Pwllgwaun, 21 collier, single.
11. **John Williams** (from Harlech), 11 Gyfeillon Rd, Pontypridd, 61 labourer, married.
12. **William Bolland**, Pantygraigwen Rd, 21, collier, married.
13. **John Thomas**, Ivor St, Havod, married.
14. **Dan Davies**, 6 Vaughan St, Pwllgwaun, collier, single.
15. **William Thomas**, 6 Vaughan St, Pwllgwaun, collier, single.
16. **John Roberts**, 7 Mount Pleasant, Zion St, Pontypridd, Pontypridd, 20, collier, single.
17. **Albert Pearce**, 39 Pwllgwaun Rd, 16, collier, single.
18. **David John** ("Mab-y-Brenin"), 3 Leyshon St, Graig, single.
19. **David Jenkins**, Llantrisant Rd, Pontypridd, about 28, single.
20. **Ernest Thomas Prosser**, 4 Pwllgwaun Rd, 18, collier, single.
21. **Thomas Henry Williams**, 54 Heol Gorllewin, Trallwn, 17, collier, single.
22. **Coleman Williams**, Hopkinstown, collier, widower.
23. **John Morgan Williams**, Wood Rd, ("Glanbad") about 60, no young children.
24. **John Williams**, Oddfellows Place, Treforest, married.
25. **Josh Thomas**, Foundry Rd, Hopkinstown, 37, collier, married and 3 children.

26.**Arthur Thorne,** 7 Morgan st, Pwllgwaun, collier.
27. **William Edmunds**, Pantygraigwen Rd, 50, roadman, married.
28. **William Lewis**, Treforest
29. **Amaziah Jones**, 37 Park St. Treforest**.**
30. **Arthur Davies**, 5 Lewis St, 33, collier, married with children.
31. **Job Miller**, 16 Mill St, Pontypridd, collier, single.
32. **Adolphus Dodge**, 1 Morgan St, Pwllgwaun, 14, doorboy.
33. **Daniel Shea,** 33 Hopkinstown Rd, 16, single.
34. **William Thomas**, Pwllgwaun, about 40, collier, single.
35. **James Holbrook**, 33 Hopkinstown Rd, single.
36. **Lewis Jacob**, 7 Gyfeillon Rd, collier, single.
37. **David Prosser**, 41 Wood Rd, Treforest, 18, collier, single.
38. **John Llewellyn**, 6 Jenkins St, Hopkinstown, 44, collier, single.
39. **Frederick William Nurse**, 96 Rickard St, Pontypridd, 17, collier, single.
40. **George Thorne**, 36 Cardiff Rd, Treforest, Collier, married with four children.
41. **William Wheeler**, 116 Wood Rd, Treforest, 17, collier, single.

RECOVERED THROUGH THE HETTY PIT

The bodies recovered by the Hetty Pit are as follows:
26.**Unknown**
27. **Unknown**, with lamp no. 927.
28. **D. Spooner**, 20, Graigwen, haulier, married, no children.
29. **J. Nicholas**, Hopkinstown, 28, Engine-driver, single.
30. **F. Grainger**, Phillip St, Graig, 28, married, one child.
31. **Thomas Price**, Tram Rd, Treforest, 15, doorboy.
32. **George Roderick**, Pantygraigwen, doorboy.
33. **D. J. Powell**, Rickard St, 15, collier.
34. **Charles Godfrey**, Foundry Rd, 25, collier, married with two children.
35. **W. Davies**, Pantygraigwen, 17, collier, single.
36. **Thomas Davies**, Pantygraigwen, 24, bratticeman, single.
37. **J. Maddocks**, Hopkinstown, 34, collier, married with several children.
38. **William Hughes**, Vaughan St, Pwllgwaun, 18, collier, single.

The names account for 54 of the victims, and to that must be added the five brought out of the Tymawr Pit on Tuesday, bringing the total bodies recovered up to 59. It is certain that there are more in the pit, and the officials of the colliery estimate that there are at least five more under the falls in the main level. Among them are possibly:

David Davies, Pantygraigwen, 28, fireman, married, no children.
Devereaux, Porthyglo, 44, lampman, bachelor.

Thomas Lambert, Tram Rd, Treforest, 34, rider, married.
Patsy Sullivan, Porthyglo, 26, married with two children.
Connie Hayes, Tram Rd, Treforest, 21, rope watcher, single.

Where, you may ask, did this list come from? The officials did not have time to compile it, nor the newspapers the knowledge, but a day later all was explained in the '*Western Mail*':

A remarkable feat of memory

The Great Western pits employ 1,200 men and boys. At the time the fire broke out about 800 men were at work. On Wednesday evening the reporters were at their wits' end for a list of the names of the men who were believed to be entombed. No official list could be got because, contrary to the practice in most other collieries those employed at the Great Western take their lamps home, so that no record is kept of the numbers when men leave work.

The flight from the colliery made a muster-roll impossible. The state of uncertainty may be gauged from the fact that responsible officials of the company on Wednesday night estimated that the number of men entombed exceeded 100. These facts will enable the reader to appreciate the merit of a feat which we are about to describe.

On the pit head a '*Western Mail*' reporter came across a working collier, a youth, who, upon being asked if he knew the names of some of the men entombed, replied: "Yes, I can give you some of the names," and then, relying entirely on his memory, the young man furnished our reporter with a list of the names, addresses, and particulars of family of no fewer than 53 men and boys. The list has such an official appearance about it that our contemporary promptly re-produced it in their evening paper on Thursday. Comparing this list with that of the bodies identified, we find that of the 53 persons whose name, address, and description were given, 46 were absolutely correct.

Six of the persons given by the young collier as being among entombed are not among those identified, but as it is believed that the pit has not yet given up all its dead, and, further, as in no single instance has information reached us that a person included in this list is among the living it is highly probable that further discoveries will bear still more striking testimony to the singularly comprehensive knowledge of his fellows possessed by him, and to his exception gift of memory. The shifting character of colliers in districts where collieries are numerous renders the feat all the more remarkable.

Singular linking of two incidents

The collapse of the stand at the Cardiff Arms Park on the occasion of the football match Cardiff v Swinton on Easter Monday, although not resulting in any serious accident at the time, has since, it is thought, proved the indirect cause of death of at any rate two men. On the stand at the time of the breakdown was Mark Osmond, a collier employed at the Great Western Colliery, and who injured his ankle so severely that it incapacitated him from work up till the day of the disaster.

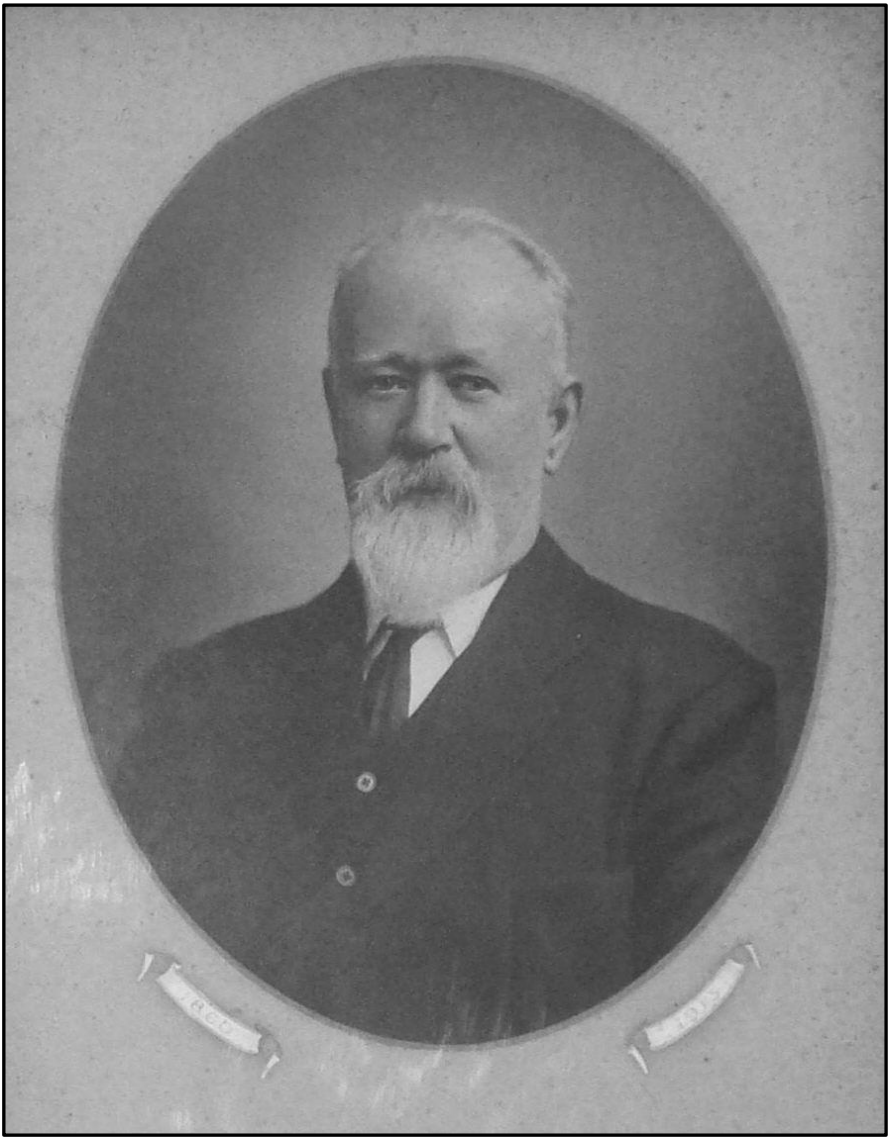
After the accident, when the exploring parties were searching they found Osmond's body some distance away from where he was working, linked arm in arm with another corpse. It is presumed that after the alarm was given Osmond was making his way to a place of safety when his ankle gave way, and he was unable to proceed further alone, and that the other man assisted him when they were both overcome by the deadly smoke and fumes, both ultimately losing their lives.

Generosity of the owners of the Pit

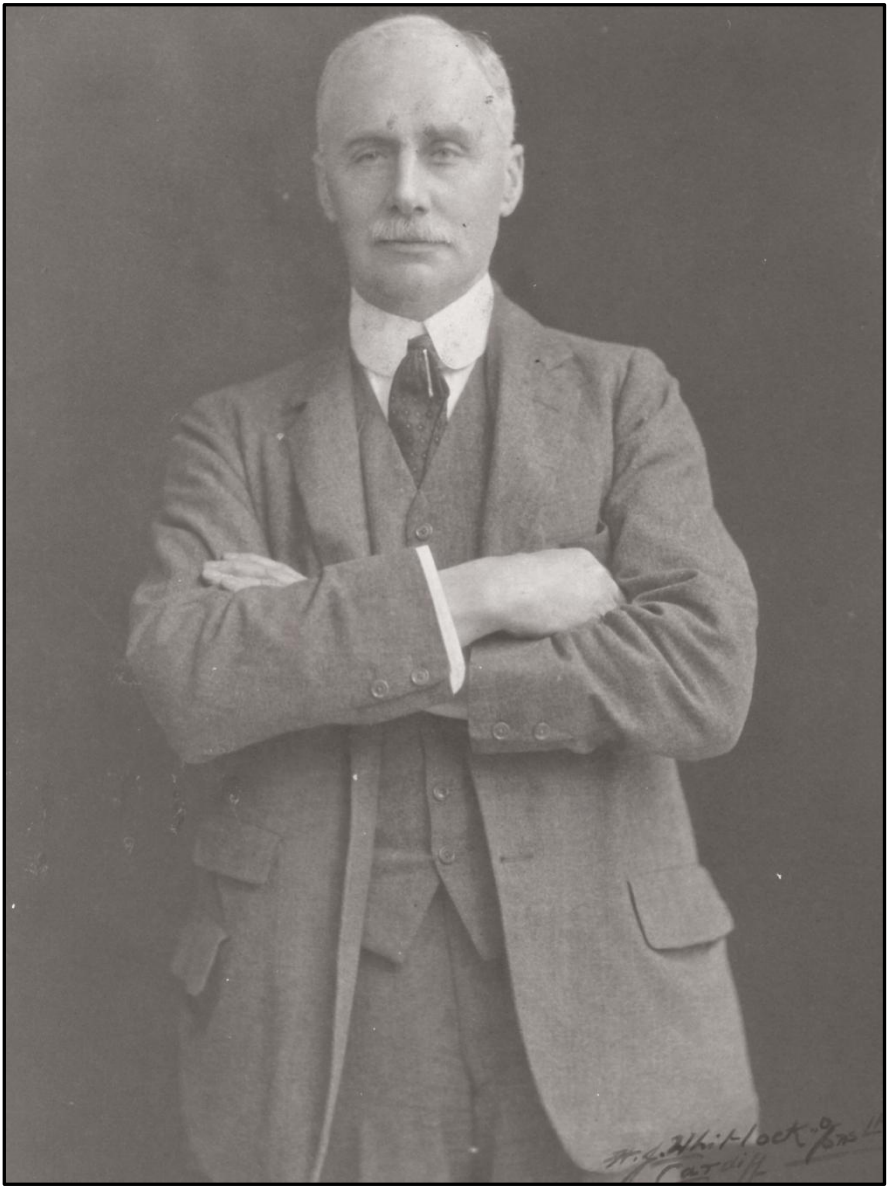
During Thursday, some of the directors of the Great Western Colliery met under the presidency of the chairman, Mr. Joseph Wethered, and formulated the following manifesto and letter of thanks, which was signed by the chairman and subsequently posted in the colliery offices:

The directors of the Great Western Colliery Company (Limited) desire to express their deep sorrow at the lamentable loss of life resulting from the recent accident at their works, and so tender their deep sympathy to the wives, children, and relatives of so many of their valued workmen. They are painfully aware that in many cases these lost men were the sole bread-winners of their families. To Thomas Rosser they wish to convey their admiration and thanks for the cool courage and prompt action by which he saved the lives of over 70 of his fellow-workmen.

To Her Majesty's inspectors and to the mining engineers and colliery managers of the district, who flocked to the pit and rendered assistance, and who taking their lives in their hands, led the exploration parties in their search for the missing men, the directors feel a gratitude they are unable to adequately express, and they ask the many medical gentlemen who were present, and anxious to render their skilled aid, to accept their sincere thanks.



William James, manager of the Great Western Colliery at the time of the disaster.



Hugh Bramwell, agent of the Great Western Colliery at the time of the disaster

To Mr. Bramwell and all the members of the colliery staff they are indebted for their resolute energy and the successful activity displayed by them during the whole of the two nights and days in endeavouring to rescue alive the entombed men under their charge. The directors feel also their indebtedness to the miners and workmen who volunteered their services in the dangerous effort to rescue. They ask all to accept this general acknowledgement, as it is impossible to take each individually.

Interview with the chairman

A '*Western Mail*' reporter had a brief interview with Mr. Weathered on Thursday afternoon. He had just left the scene of the disaster, having seen the fifty-ninth body brought to the bank, when the interview took place, the head of the company being then at the railway station on his way home, after spending 24 hours at the colliery. In the course of the few minutes' chat which ensued Mr. Wethered said it was feared that the death-toll of 59 would be increased by the discovery of more bodies under the falls - probably five or six more men would be found when the debris was cleared away.

The reporter incidentally mentioned the bravery and presence of mind displayed by Thomas Rosser, and after warmly commending the young man's conduct, Mr. Wethered remarked that there were many cases of heroism which had not become known to the public. "For instance," said he. "A brother of Thomas Rosser, who was at the head of the pit when the fire broke out, at once thought of the necessity of opening the doors in order to divert the smoke, and, in fact, he rushed to do this, but he was some distance away, and when he reached the place the task had been performed - but, nevertheless, the presence of mind and determination were displayed all the same."

A remark by the pressman that the disaster would have had far more appalling results had an explosion taken place after the outbreak of fire led Mr. Wethered to interject: "Yes, and the fact that no such explosion occurred shows how good the ventilation of the colliery is."

"How is your proposed subscription scheme going on?" asked the reporter. "Has anything further been done since you informed us this morning of the company's resolve to open a list?" "Yes, the directors met at the colliery this afternoon and confirmed that resolution. The company will head the relief list with a subscription of £500, and each individual director has put his name down for a contribution of £100, which will bring the amount up to £900." "Will anything further be done?" "I am hoping so, but at present I cannot say definitely. I myself am going to London tomorrow in connection with the question of relief, and I hope that I shall be able to obtain assistance."

Interview with Mr. Bramwell

On Thursday afternoon a representative of the '*Western Mail*' had an interesting interview with Mr. Hugh Bramwell in reference to the work of exploration and finding the bodies. Asked as to the position of the bodies in the pit, Mr. Bramwell said there were six in the main level, the same number in a group in Maddock's Heading and between 100 and 150 yards from their working places, two who were evidently going into the return when they were struck down. On the right hand side of the dip there were six or seven, and on the left hand side about twenty, the others being scattered over the workings.

"There were several congregations of men then?" observed the reporter.
"Yes," was the reply, "those who lived for any length of time after the fire broke out, collected in groups. Those on the main road were evidently killed almost instantaneously by the fumes. Several were only a few yards from their working places."

"Could the doctors form any opinion as to how long the men had been dead?" "No, they could not, the bodies had swollen from suffocation. The only men who escaped from this part of the pit were those who at the very outset made for the return, thus reaching the Tymawr Pit.

"In what positions were the bodies?" "Those I saw were stretched on the ground on their faces with the exception of one man who was on his side."

"Do you think they suffered much?" "No, I do not, the fumes must soon have produced insensibility, and then there was no pain. Myown opinion is that they were all dead in twenty minutes, or half an hour after the smoke reached them." "Then Davies, the fireman, whose skill and knowledge raised the hopes of many, would not have had a chance of doing much to keep back the foul air?" "He would not have had a chance to do anything. If the body supposed to be his, is his, it has been found on the main level. He opened the doors, and could do nothing more in that district."

"Is there any fire in the pit now?" "I don't think there is any actual fire, but we are still pouring water on the steaming rubbish which fell from the roof and sides. It is still very hot at the place where the fire occurred, but we shall start repairing and clearing away the falls at six o'clock tonight.""Do you think work will be resumed next week?" "That is very doubtful. We shall not resume until the pit has been thoroughly cooled, and it will be some time before work can be commenced in the No.4 level."

"At what do you estimate the damage done to the pit?" "It is very difficult to say yet what the damage is. There are about 500 yards of fallen roof, and it will cost about £3 a yard to remove that and repair the place. That will be £1,500 for labour alone.

Then, of course, we shall be losing money through one part of the pit being idle and the output being reduced. There are other expenses in connection with the accident, and I don't think the total cost to the company will be much under £10,000." One of the first things which will be done when the repairers set to work, will be to bury the seven horses which were killed by the fumes. Miss Carla Thomas, of Brecon, a lady who is ground landlord of a portion of the property worked by the colliery had telegraphed, expressing sympathy with the relatives of the victims, and it is probable that she will contribute towards the relief of the sufferers.

Latest Particulars

A telegram to the '*Western Mail*' on Thursday night at 11.25 stated that two bodies brought to the surface that night brings the total to 61. David Davies, fireman, married, without family was discovered in the cross-cut in the return at the East Far End, of Richard Edmund's stall. He was found by the party conducted by Lemuel Jenkins, and conveyed to the Tymawr mortuary. The other body was that of Mark Osborne, married with four children. The men were lying near each other. Both had been suffocated, and there were no signs of burning on either. Very few people were about. Cleaning is still actively carried on, but it is understood that no attempt will be made to get the bodies out tonight. Explorers are still engaged below, and other dead bodies may be found at any moment.

The aftermath

Many stories of heartbreak and sadness were heard in the days that followed. The first of the dead to be brought to the surface had done a noble act. As he and a number of others were rushing towards the landing in the Four-feet seam, he had called out to his comrades to let the boys and the old men go first. This behest he was the first to observe, with the result that, although he might have escaped, he, in the exercise of rare self-sacrifice, fell a victim to suffocation. The bodies that were extricated that week told their own story. One man was in an ace of safety when he was trapped under a fall, while an old lampman, whose job it was to light the lamps, was found dead in his cabin near the fire.

Two other men greatly distinguished themselves for their courage, experience and foresight in trying to prevent additions to the death-roll. They were David

Davies, the fireman, and David Williams. Davies had sent his men out and waited to save others, but ultimately perished himself. Although it was known from the first that Davies was in the pit at the time of the outbreak of the fire the fact was hidden from his wife, who was in ill-health.

Mrs. Davies, while there appeared a possibility of some of the imprisoned men being rescued alive, was made to believe that her husband was one of those who had escaped and that he was assisting in the work of exploration. She believed this and continued to send food down the pit's mouth day after day until she had to be told the sad and terrible truth.

One of the saddest cases of bereavement was of Mrs. Williams, of Wood Rd, Treforest, who has lost her husband and two sons. William, aged 21, had enlisted in the army some time ago, and only the previous January his mother had paid £21 to procure his discharge. Another son, David Williams had smelled the fire and gone out, trying first one way and then the other, urging some in vain to follow him to the upcast shaft, and at last succeeded in leading fifteen out of the mine. However, there were many cases of heroism probably never became known to the public. Mrs. Rees, Hopkinstown, whose husband was in the pit, upon hearing of the fire was so overcome that she fell down apparently lifeless, and remained unconscious for several hours. Her husband returned without having sustained any injuries. Nineteen-year-old Edward Morgan of Pwllgwaun was working at the colliery on that fateful day and must have been one of the first to realise that a tragedy had occurred. He was waiting sometime around 2.30 with a group of miners for coal to be brought to the top of the Hetty Pit. He noticed that his cousin, David Palmer and a friend had come up from the pit without their "Dai" caps, and in those days this meant that something serious must have been happening, and the pair told the worried onlookers that they had escaped from a fire by going through the Tymawr pit, and they believed that men were suffocating in smoke-filled "caverns" underground. Later it was found that more men had crawled to a "landing" in the Tymawr pit, but could not muster the strength to go any further and had died. Others were so overcome by the smoke that they could not get even that far. Mr. Morgan explained many years later: "There were many incidents of bravery on the landing, but they went unsung because the dead cannot talk."

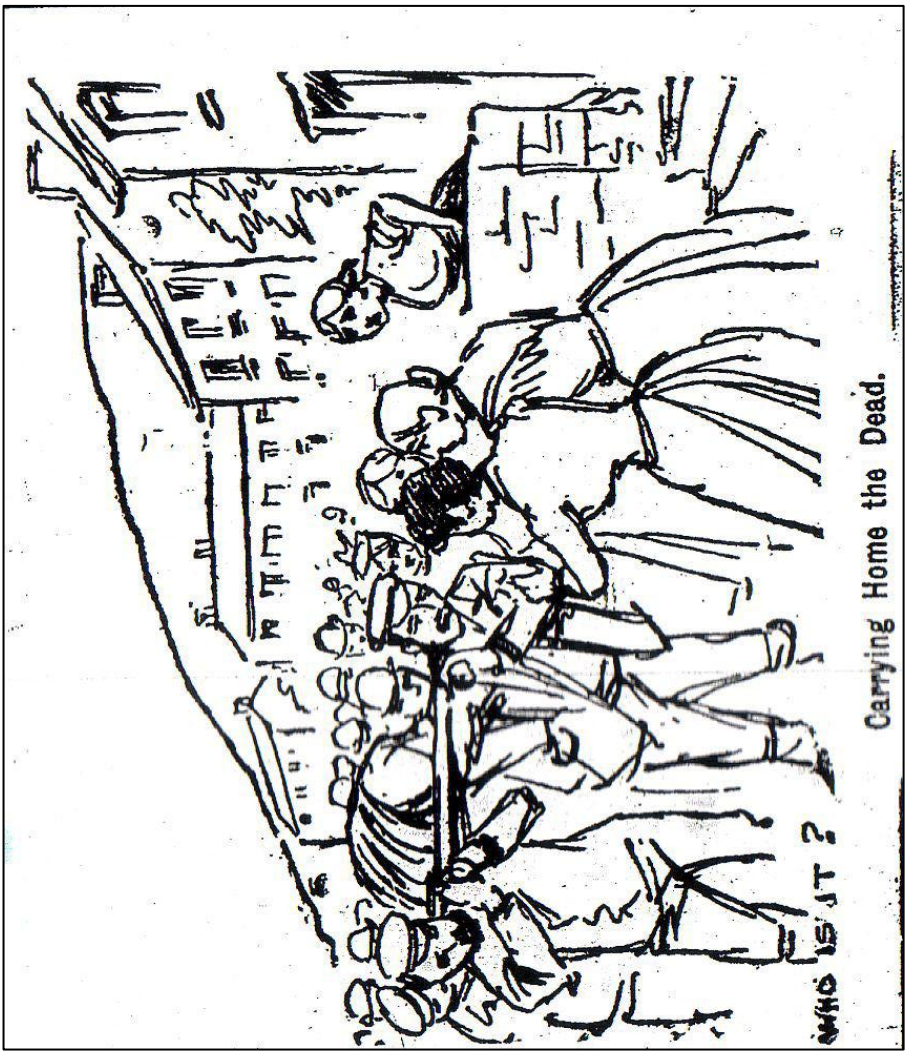
A contrast

The final word about Thursday was written by a correspondent that day, who wrote: In the long annals of our coal history there has been no greater contrast presented than in the history of this place, which, after a long immunity from disaster, has taken its part in the ever-lengthening list of fatal collieries. It began its career more auspiciously than any colliery in South Wales. Poor old John

Calvert, whom most of us remember him as he passed feebly from the scenes of former greatness, sunk the shaft in 1848, and, winning the coal in 1855, named the colliery Gyfeillion, and made the event memorable by a lavish display of hospitality. For the first time in the annals of the '*Illustrated London News*,' a special artist was sent into the wilds of Wales, as the Rhondda was regarded, and in a few houses in Pontypridd the faded paper is still preserved, giving descriptions of the colliery, the roasting of an ox, the grand procession of officials and Pontypridd tradesmen wearing rosettes, and the great coal owner carried in a chair by eight stalwart workmen, with bands and banners and thousands all around.

The place has little altered from that time. But what a contrast! We look down from the mountain upon the old colliery. When it started the wonder-stricken describers of that day ventured upon a bold imaginative future for it. It was to give employment to "between two and three hundred men," and, reckoning wives and children "this place would support eventually no less than one thousand souls!"

What would the writer have thought of the three hundred men being increased to a thousand, and that the small output, in the course of time, would touch 400,000 tons a year - more than a thousand tons every24 hours? An eventful history? Many a host of door-boys have grown up to become colliers, have aged, and passed away, and beyond an occasional solitary accident, the workings have been extended for miles and operations on a huge scale carried on without any of the sad events associated with Dinas, with Tynewydd, or with Pentre. Now its turn has come, and the contrast is appalling.



Carrying home the dead. A drawing from a south Wales newspaper covering the disaster

Chapter five
Friday, April 14th 1893

The '*Western Mail*' reported: The scenes at the top of the Great Western Colliery on Friday have been less exciting than on previous days, as the work being done is becoming more of a routine character. There are still large numbers of people about, but since the removal of the majority of the bodies has taken place the interest in the movements around the pit top has to a great extent abated.

At an early hour in the morning the pumps were stopped, and the task of clearing away the smaller falls and the large fall in the No.4 Far East End proceeds apace, but no bodies were found during the day. Notwithstanding the gossip constantly going on as to the large number of persons still left in the workings, it seems now to be tolerably certain that there are not more than from two to four undiscovered. When I visited the colliery in the afternoon I was kindly given the following statement by one of the officials: "The officials of the Great Western Colliery have just completed a house-to-house inspection, and the result is the following:

Seventy-one came out alive; the dead brought out numbered 61; four men are still missing; two men not at work at the time of the accident; total 138. Thus it has been ascertained that the number of men and boys who perished cannot exceed 65. The task of clearing the enormous falls in the colliery has been actively commenced this afternoon."
The four not accounted for:

1. **William Owens,** a boy who worked with Richard Edmunds(dead), and stated by relatives of the latter to have left Richard Edmunds' employment some days ago.
2. **David Watkins**, working with Charles Hill (alive). Further enquiries being made.
3. **Patrick Sullivan**
4. **James Devereaux**, the lampman.

Subsequently I was told that there was some doubt as to whether Owens was down, and the only two known to be down are Patrick Sullivan and James Devereaux. By way of illustrating the difficulty of ascertaining definitely how many men are missing, I give Mr. W. Davies, the cashier's version of the reckless statements made. He had given him on Friday a list of thirteen names of people said to be still in the pit. He made enquiries himself in the houses of eleven of the people, and found that they were all out of the pit and alive. Further than

that, three of them were not only alive, but were actually not working in the pit at all on the day of the accident. The dead horses in the fatal district have been interred underground.

In connection with the identification of Cornelius Hayes it should be explained how there was much difficulty in fixing the identity of the body. The remains were charred and mutilated beyond recognition. The arms were consumed up to the elbows, the legs were gone to the knees; the chest was smashed; the face had practically disappeared. The body had been found where it was quite possible James Devereaux might have been expected to be. It was at times thought it might be Devereaux, and at others thought to be Hayes. There were peculiarities about the two men when alive. Hayes had a wooden leg, but, then, both legs of his body were charred and gone.

Devereaux had an accident fifteen years ago, by being crushed on the cage, so that his spine was injured. The trunk remained, and Dr. Leckie, the medical officer of the works, examined the spine, in order to ascertain whether there were any indications of an injury. The spine was intact, and that settled the point that it could not be Devereaux. It was then regarded as certain to be Hayes, and accordingly a coffin was brought to the mortuary and the charred and mutilated remains of the unknown were placed in it and conveyed to Hayes' residence.

Now that the coroner's warrants for burial have been given, arrangements are being made to carry out the interment of the bodies. There are two cemeteries and several church and chapel burial grounds within a few miles of Pontypridd, and, as interments will take place at most of these different places, it is impossible to get an accurate list of the funerals, but it is understood that no fewer than fifteen bodies will be buried at Glyntaff Cemetery on Saturday.

Narrative of a survivor

Isaac Lewis, one of the survivors, said that he and Cavill were working together when they smelt smoke. He asked Cavill what it was. Cavill said: "It's a gauze burning." He (Lewis) said, "No, it is the brake of the engine on the hard heading." He then went out to see what was the matter, but was driven back by smoke. He then went back to the men, and said, "Run for your lives; there is a fire in the level." He and Cavill and Williams and others ran into the return. Lewis Williams, however, went back to find his fellow haulier. When they got to the bottom they nearly fainted, and one of the Williams' gave him some water, and this helped him to keep up. He, having a lamp, was able to see the carriage and come up. He believed that a lot more men would have been saved. He had,

he said, told nearly all of them to run, but they did not do so, and lost their lives, and it was really only through his lamp not going out like the others that he saved his life, this enabling him to see the carriage.

The Inquest

The inquest was opened at the New Inn Hotel, Pontypridd, on Friday, April 14th,1893, shortly after 11 o'clock, and a good deal of interest was excited by the presence in the centre of town of Pontypridd of so many of those who had taken a leading part in the work of the explorations, etc. It had been arranged that after the formal opening the jury would proceed to view the bodies, and the row of vehicles kept waiting outside the hotel for this purpose also attracted attention. The arrangements to hold a joint inquiry was adhered to and Mr. E. B. Reece, of Cardiff, and Mr. R. T. Rhys, of Aberdare, sat together. Mr. Bruce, one new partner of the firm of Messrs W. H. Morgan, Rhys and Bruce, attended to watch the interests of the workmen and the relatives of the deceased, Mr. William Evans, the Rhondda Steam Coal Miners' agent, instructing him. The Great Western Company were not represented by a solicitor at this preliminary stage of the inquiry (although they would be later on), and Mr. T. Williams of Gwaelodygarth, one of the directors, was present. Among those present were Mr. W. Bruce, the agent of the Miners' Federation; Mr. Ben Davies, sub-agent; Mr. H. T. Wales and others.

The following were the jury: Messrs. David Morris, chainworks, foreman; John Price, contractor, Berw Rd; Joseph Edwards, retired contractor, Ceridwen Terrace; William Jones, manager, Pontypridd waterworks; David Rowlands, contractor, the Grove; Rhys Morgan, schoolmaster, the Grove; Samuel Shipton, clerk to Llanwonno School Board, the Grove; John Snape, engineer, Gellywasted; William Norman, Half Moon Inn, Pontypridd; James Roberts, Taff Vale Inn, Treforest; J. Jones Bluebell Inn, Pontypridd; Horatio Rowlands, Holly Bush Inn, Hopkinstown; William Gay, collier, 30 Maritime St, Graig; James Williams, contractor, Typica; William Phillips, Vestry Hall, Pontypridd; and David Williams, Brynhyfryd, Graigwen.

Mr. Reece stated that the course which he and Mr. Rhys proposed to adopt was to swear in the jury, and after viewing the bodies to take evidence of identification, and adjourn the inquest to such a date as might be convenient. It was proposed to take three cases in each district. The jury was then sworn. The cases taken in Mr. E. B. Reece's district were those of Philip Jones, Trallwn Gardens, Pontypridd; Morgan Williams, Wood Rd, Pontypridd; and George Cavill, Zion St, Pontypridd. In Mr. J. Rhys's district the cases selected were those of

David Davies, Graigwen, Pontypridd; J. Williams, Gyfeillon Rd, Pontypridd; and Morris Potter, 29 Gyfeillon Rd, Pontypridd.

Mr. E. B. Reece said that before proceeding further, he wished to express the deep sympathy they all felt with the families and relations of the unfortunate men who were killed. This was one of the worst calamities that had ever happened in the district. Mr. Thomas Williams, oneof the directors, had assured him that every facility would be given by the company for this inquiry, and he (Mr. Reece) was sure they might expect a thorough investigation. The inquest would take a considerable unit of the time and demand the greatest attention of the jury, and he was sure it would receive the attention which its importance demanded**.**

Mr. Thomas Williams said that, on behalf of himself and brother directors of the Great Western Colliery he would like to say that they were very sorry indeed for this unfortunate accident, which had resulted in the loss of so many valuable lives. He desired to express his deep sympathy with the families, and more especially the widows and children of the victims, and to state that the directors would give every facility to make the inquest a thorough one.

Mr. Rhys endorsed what Mr. E. B. Reece and Mr. Williams had said and stated that it was impossible to hear of calamities such as this without a feeling of horror, and that feeling was only to a slight extent modified by the admiration one felt for the bravery shown by various people, who did their utmost to rescue those whom at one time they thought there was a reasonable chance of saving. The great presence of mind and pluck shown by many were in the pit and who had endeavoured not only to save their own lives, but the lives of others, had prevented the calamity being as overwhelming as it might have been. He hoped the floodgates of public sympathy would be opened, and that the widows and children who were deprived of their bread-winners would be enabled to live as comfortably and decently as before. The jury then proceeded to view the bodies.

On the jury re-assembling evidence of identification was taken, and, as this had to be done in the case of all the victims in order that a death certificate might be given, the process was a long and tedious one. The bodies of Morgan Williams, Wood Rd, and his three sons, named William, Lewis and John, were identified by another son named Lewis Williams, who is eighteen years of age, and the only male protector left for his mother and two sisters.

It was half-past-three before the list of the dead in the eastern (Mr. Reece's) district had been identified, and there was then left 25 in the northern district.

The body of Thomas Lambert, 17 Tramroad-side, one of those who was so dreadfully charred as to defy recognition on Thursday, had since been identified by the lamp which was found by his side. The lamp bore the number 927, and this the father of the deceased stated was the lamp which his son used. The other body which was so terribly burnt has not been, and is not likely to be identified. The inquest was adjourned to Thursday, the 20th inst.

Public meeting at Town Hall

The same evening, April 14th, a public meeting took place at the Town Hall, Pontypridd to appoint a Relief Committee to receive subscriptions in aid of the widows and orphans left destitute by the fatal catastrophe at the Great Western Colliery. Among those present: Mr. Alfred Thomas, M.P. (Chairman); William Abraham MP; Judge Gwilym Williams, Mr. Ignatious Williams, Stipendiary; Messrs G. Lenox, H. L. Grover, Thomas Williams (Gwaelodygarth), L. Grover, Thomas Williams, Henry Lewis (Greenmeadow), E. Owen (Secretary, Miners Providence Society), S. Shipton, E. Stanley, D. Leyshon, W. A. Mathias and the Rev. S. R. Jones. There was a very large attendance, the hall being crowded.

In opening the proceedings the chairman said that when he had received a telegram requesting him attend the meeting, that there was only one answer that he could give (hear, hear). He figured that the state should figure prominently in such matters as this, but at present it could not be done, and it was necessary, therefore, that they should through voluntary efforts, endeavour to relieve those who had been deprived of their breadwinner. The colliery was one of the best managed in south Wales, but the extent of the accident necessitated a searching investigation.

He afterwards forwarded the following resolution: *"That this meeting condoles with the widows and orphans of workmen who lost their lives in the Great Western Colliery and we offer them, through the press, our heartfelt sympathy with them in their grief and sorrowfulness."*

The resolution was seconded by Mr. Lenox, who stated that never before during his lifetime had such a catastrophe happened in Pontypridd than that which had been reported to the newspapers in the last few days. It was an extraordinary thing that the officials of the colliery were unable to say how many men were in the pit when the accident occurred. There should be some regulation made making it imperative that men who went down in every shift should be counted, so that if anything occurred it should be known at once who was in the pit (applause). He did not wish to say anything against the officials of the Great Western Colliery, but it seemed to him to be incomprehensible that a number of

human beings in the prime of life should be allowed to enter a pit without being able to say whether the number was 150, 100 or anything else. The men in every shift should be counted both when they went down and came out of the pit.

He thought to provide against such contingencies that there should be some kind of Relief Fund. A volunteer rate of 1p in the pound, on the rateable value of Cardiff, Merthyr and Pontypridd, for six years would give £1,300 and would provide a capital sum that would enable them to continue the £1,300 for ever. He hoped that all connected with the coal trade would subscribe to the fund which was to be raised for the relief for the sufferers of the accident (applause).
His Honour, Judge Gwilym Williams who evidently felt deeply the deplorable calamity from his long intimate association with colliery matters and his knowledge of workmen, eloquently appealed for liberal help. So far as the disaster was still casting its deep shadow upon them, and its terrible fatality was scarcely fully realised the powerful feeling that naturally ruled in them all was a natural sympathy for those overwhelmed by grief. But in a few days these would come to realise that they still had to live and face a hard world. Then they would need not our sympathy only or chiefly, but our practical help and such help he felt sure we would readily give. After urging the importance of prompt and generous giving, he said they would commend the widows and orphans to the care of him above who had sworn to be their protector.

Mr. Henry Lewis J P (Greenmeadow), said when asked to attend the meeting he could not for a moment hesitate. In driving through the valley it was sad to see the many windows with blinds down and to think of how many had suddenly been deprived of their breadwinners and plunged into deep distress. They all felt deep sympathy and as the occasion had arisen they felt it a duty to do what they could to alleviate the painful circumstances in which so many had been placed.
Mr. Ignatious Williams (Stipendiary) heartily supported the resolution. The resolution was carried in silence, all the audience standing with lowered heads.
"Mabon" then spoke at some length about the dangers of underground toil, and to which the collier is daily subjected. In fact every time a collier descends a pit, his life was carried in his hands. They were always literally surrounded by innumerable dangers. He said that in connection with the catastrophe at the Great Western Colliery they had an entirely new experience in the matter of Pit dangers. The usual afterdamp, he observed, was replaced by smut and smoke; the firedamp by a real fire a consuming fire, with all its deadly consequences. Fortunately the widows and orphans were fewer in the present instance than that was the case ordinarily, still, there were too many. If such a thing as a spark from an engine brake could start so terrible a fire as they had here, something must be done by our scientists to prevent it in the future.

After other remarks the chairman then moved that a Relief Committee of the following gentlemen be appointed with the power of adding to their number if they thought that necessary: Alfred Thomas M.P; Judge Gwilym Williams; W. Abraham (Mabon) M.P; Ignatious Williams; Mr. L. G. Lenox; Mr. D. Leyshon; Dr. Davies (Porth); Dr. Ivor Lewis; Dr. Leckie; Dr. Alfred Evans; T. W. Morgan; Mr. W. H. Mathias; Mr. Henry Lewis, Greenmeadow; Councillor William Spickett, Mr. Edward Williams.

Mr. William Lewis, Cilfynydd; Mr. D. Ellis, Cilfynydd; Mr. John Evans, Draper; Mr. Rogers, Pontypridd; Mr. J. Nape; Mr. J. Jones, Market St; Mr. Coombes; Mr. T. Forrest; Mr. W. Key; Mr. W. Williams, Mr. T. M. Williams; Mr. E. Treharne (Butchers Arms); Mr. Phillips (Colliers Arms); Mr. Cobb; Mr. W. Merchant. In addition to these gentlemen he proposed that clergy and ministers be asked as exofficio upon this committee. Also all colliery managers in the district. He also had the pleasure in announcing that Mr. Stanley Cobb and Mr. Shipton had been asked to act as treasurer and secretary, and both gentlemen had readily accepted. Mr. D. Leyshon seconded and the proposition was carried.

Mr. Thomas Williams stated that 61 bodies had been brought to bank, while two were supposed to be under falls and not accounted for, making a total of 63. The Chairman and Mr. Foster had proceeded by appointment to see the Lord Mayor of London and to endeavour to open a relief fund there, Mr. C. H. James and another director of the company had gone to Cardiff to see the mayor of that town with a similar object. He was therefore the only director who could attend the meeting.

Mr. Evan Owen, secretary of the Miners Permanent Fund, stated that assuming for the time being that there were 30 married men killed, it would require not less than £13,000 to give the same relief as was that given by the Miners Provident Fund. The average number of children for each widow was two, and two children were awarded the same relief as a widow.

The terms for which the Miner Provident Fund provided permanent relief was fourteen years. The amount therefore required to place the families in independent circumstances would be at least £13,000. The meeting was afterwards opened to receive voluntary subscriptions. A hearty vote of thanks was recorded to the Chairman for his readiness in travelling all the way from London expressly to preside at the meeting. The meeting terminated with singing the old Welsh funeral hymn “Bydd myrdd o rhyfeddodau.” (There will be a multitude of wonders).

No fresh developments

A reporter at the colliery at 10.30 p. m. reported: - I have just returned from a visit to the top of the pit, but found very few people about. There are no fresh developments, and the principal officials are down in the pit superintending the work of clearing the debris. It is thought possible that the remaining bodies may be recovered tonight, but, of course, there is no certainty. I hear the majority of the funerals are likely to be on Monday, as Sunday funerals are not permitted at the cemetery.

The same reporter at midnight stated that the remaining bodies had still not been recovered. He had heard of the pathetic finding of the bodies of the Williamses, the father and three sons being in the pit and all dead. Mr. John Thompson, of Pwllgwaun, tells me he was one of Mr. Richards' gang of explorers, and came across the body of Morgan Williams, the father, and one of his sons only a couple of yards from each other.

The son was on his knees in the attitude of prayer, and the father actually standing and leaning against timbers at the side, as if listening to the prayer from his son, when death came upon them both. John Williams, the eldest son, known as "Llew Taf," was a singer and frequent winner of eisteddfod prizes, as the little badges hung up in his residence in Treforest show. He had a part competing at the Llantwit Eisteddfod on Good Friday, and he was to have sung at a concert in Rhydfelen only last night, but that concert has now been postponed.

Rifle volunteers among the dead

By the accident the Pontypridd detachment of the 3rd Volunteer Battalion Welsh Regiment has lost three of its members. Frances Grainger, of Phillip St, Graig, had belonged to the detachment for six years, and will be buried with military honours Saturday afternoon at Glyntaff Cemetery. The band of the company, which has recently been reformed, will attend, and it is expected that a large number of volunteers will take part in the mournful ceremony.

The other members of the detachment who were among the victims of the disaster are William Williams, aged 20, Wood Rd, and Thomas Cole, 16, Wood Rd. In January last Williams was purchased out of the Royal Artillery by his relatives, and then joined the volunteers. Cole joined about the same time, and both young men were to have their uniform served out to them on Tuesday, the day of the accident. They did not reply to their names, and probably by that time they had answered a more solemn roll call.

A letter from a rescued man

A letter has been received from one of the rescued miners by his mother, who resides in Taunton. The escaped miner writes as follows:

"Dear Mother - Just a few lines to tell you that I am quite safe. I suppose you have heard about the accident in the pit yesterday, but I am glad to say we were taken out about 7 o'clock last night, after we had given ourselves up two or three times. We were in the smoke from 1 o'clock until we came out. We were nearly suffocated two or three times, and when we were coming out we had to run through fire. I came home and had some rum and went to bed, but this morning I could hardly open my eyes, and I have felt smoke in my insides all day.

We were all obliged to tie our scarves around our mouths all the time. They have brought out about twelve men dead now, and there are about 60 or 70 down, and they can't get at them. Dear mother, when I read your letter this morning, and you said that you hoped you would see me at Whitsuntide, I thought yesterday, dear mother, you would never see me again alive. I suppose you have been in a way about me. I shall try and get another job. If I can't I shall have to go down in the pit again, or else come home." Your affectionate son F. H. Burge

No further discoveries

"*Morien*" wrote on Friday night: The extent of the calamity at the Great Western Colliery on Tuesday afternoon has now been ascertained. Mr. Thomas Williams J. P; Gwaelodygarth, one of the directors of the company furnished me today with the following particulars - the result of a visit to all the homes of men employed in the division of the colliery which took fire. It has been discovered that on the morning 138 men belonged to the Four-feet seam. They are now accounted for as follows:

Seventy-one escaped and left the shaft uninjured on Tuesday afternoon, two men had stayed at home that day, sixty-two were brought out dead, and three have still to be discovered. It is conjectured that their remains are lying under falls in the workings. Now that the worst - and it is an awful worst! - is known, the thoughts of the men revert to the cause of the calamity, the only one of the kind that has occurred in the extensive south Wales coalfield, and, indeed, with the exception of one of the kind at Wigan some months ago, the only one that has taken place in Great Britain. Practical people point out that in future no engine should be allowed to be put up in any inner workings without being

placed in a position so as to be guarded by lengthy stone arches before and in front of it. Had that been done here, the fire would not have happened.

But it is easy enough to be wise after an event, and, no doubt, this terrible result of the engine setting fire to the timber at this colliery will have the effect of inducing the authorities of other collieries to take precautions with a view to prevent a like calamity. Another matter that is now engaging the earnest attention of thoughtful men is the extreme probability that the coal dust in which the hundreds of yards of timber supporting the roofs was swathed contributed immensely to the conflagration. That fine and dry coal dust must have been almost as inflammable as powder and fed the fire as it leaped with almost lightening speed from one brace of timbers to another. Mr. William Galloway long ago pointed out the terrible element of danger coal dust in the roadways of collieries was, but it is questionable whether, down to the present moment, the matter has received proper attention.

It is rumoured that miserable jealousy has hindered a proper attention being paid to Mr. Galloway's most important suggestion respecting the fiery nature of coal dust. If that be so, the Government of the country ought to take the matter in hand at once in the interest of thousands of industrious men who daily descend into the depths of the hills to earn their daily bread.

Awfully touching scenes have been witnessed since yesterday (Thursday) morning as the remains of the dead were conveyed to their late homes, each coffin - and, where no coffin was ready, the bier, with its ghastly burden enveloped in pit canvas - was accompanied to the late home of the departed by long processions of working men, who thus sought to express their regard for each friend who had passed away. Such a procession, at two o'clock this morning, accompanied the remains of the young Englishman, Mark Osborne, to his cottage on the side of the green hill above Glyntaff Church, Treforest. There was something inexpressibly moving as the silent throng marched, by the dim light of the stars, with the dead in the midst, down the Valley of the Taff. Sad indeed were the many processions in various directions conveying the corpses to their late homes, but much more distressing were the scenes of anguished within those homes as were carried in the lifeless remains of loved ones who on the Tuesday had gone to their work full of health and strength, little dreaming as they had trudged off to work and gave utterance to their accustomed salutation on quitting their residence that they were speaking a long, long farewell.

As to the spirit animating his late fellow-workmen, it may be mentioned that when the cart which had gone up to convey the coffin was seen in the colliery yard, at least a hundred Welshmen declared poor Mark Osborne should not be

conveyed to his late home on a cart, but on their shoulders, and that was done most reverently. At noon today a large procession carried home the remains of Lambert, who resided with his mother near the Cross Keys Inn, by the side of the Tram Road. Pontypridd. Poor Lambert, it seems, had led a rather wild life, but he nevertheless seemed to have a strong hold on the hearts of the hardy men among whom he toiled. Were it of any useful purpose many more touching scenes could be described, but it is now the duty of all to brace themselves up for the realities of the future, and, above all, to succour the poor widows and the weak little children of the fathers who are no more.

Let it be shown by a generous public that the little lambs of the dead miners will be protected, though the fathers have been struck down dead in the battle of honest toil! It appears that nearly all the men who lost their lives were insured for small sums in one of the following societies: The Wesleyan General Insurance; the Prudential Insurance; London, Edinburgh and Glasgow Insurance; and the Pearl Insurance. The sums the families will receive, however, will be hardly more than sufficient to cover the immediate expenses of the sad occasion. Many of the men were members, too, of the Ivorites and Oddfellows Benefit Societies, and their families will receive the usual allowance from them. It is deeply regretted on all hands that the Great Western workmen have not joined that splendid society, the Permanent Relief Fund, of which Mr. Evan Owen, Cardiff, is the secretary - a society which, at this moment, is the salvation of hundreds of families in South Wales and Monmouthshire.

The last gruesome chapter

The '*Western Mail*' that morning had reiterated the need that some families had of support from public donations to their fund for the victims of the disaster:

The last gruesome chapter of the tragic story has been unfolding itself to the gaze of the public since Tuesday last all but ended yesterday, when the bodies of the great majority of the victims of this most harrowing disaster were brought out of the pit and taken to their grief-stricken homes. A sorrier spectacle cannot be seen than that which periodically recurs to remind us how perilous is the winning of the coal which provides the motive power of the world's machinery and brings warmth to castle and cottage alike. Now only - when the hour for gallant deeds is gone and the noble frenzy has passed away, which while hope remained excluded all thoughts save those concerned with the rescue of the entombed, and when the heroic band of workers have dispersed to their homes in the coal valleys of Glamorgan - does it become possible to contemplate the simplicity and triviality of the occurrence in which the destructive fire had its origin.

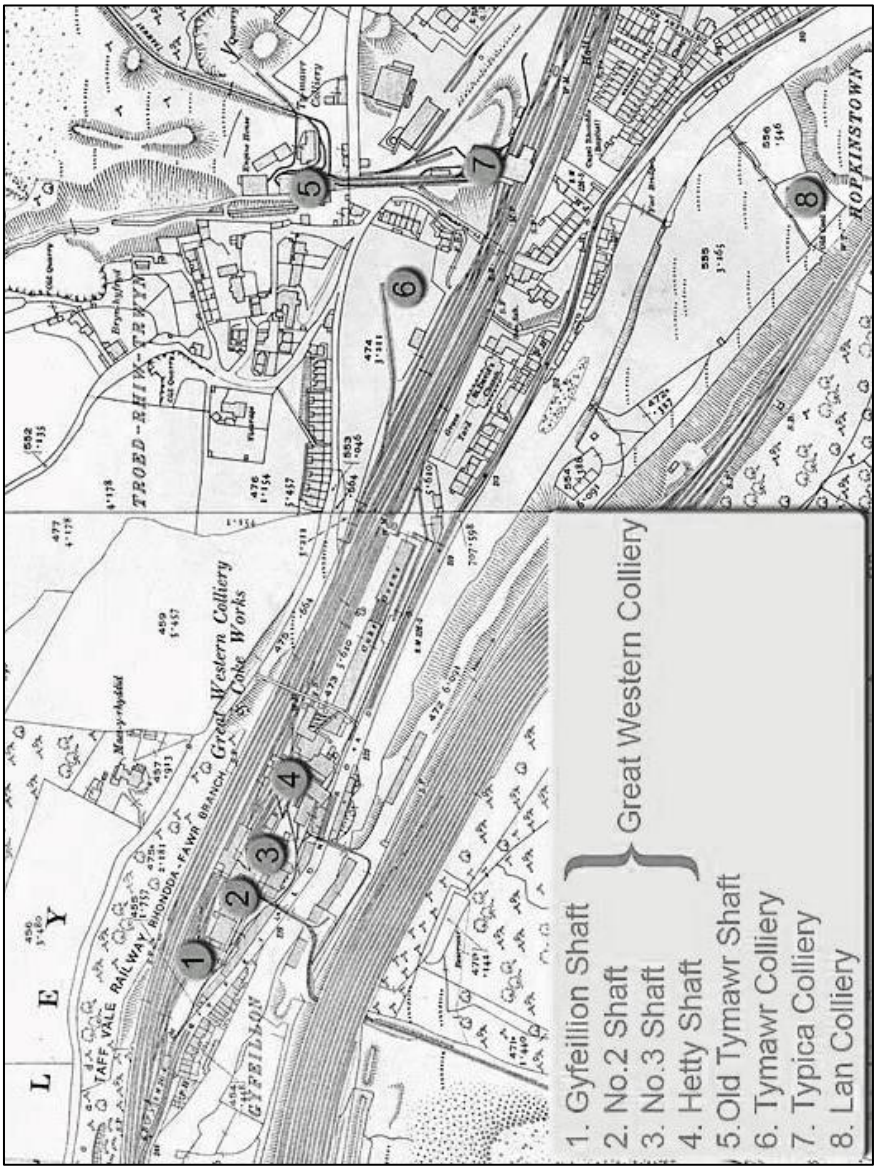
The precise cause will probably never be known. Those who might have described it have been cut off. But mining experts are virtually agreed in thinking that a spark produced by friction began the fire near the engine in the main artery of the of the colliery; that, unseen when small and feeble, it spread to the woodwork, with its inflammable packing supporting the roof, and quickly grew beyond the control of such ineffective apparatus as would be available underground to cope with it.

The idea is reasonable enough. At the critical moment no one seems to have been near to stretch out a hand and extinguish the tiny flame. Then came the discovery and the mad flight for safety; the escape of some, the cutting away of others, and afterwards the heroic struggle of the rescuing parties against time and the fire, while the hundreds held weary watch and ward above and the victims gasped away their last breath below in the torrid and poisonous atmosphere. None will know how that grim wrestle with death went on. Even those that have seen the slain as they fell can only venture to conjecture what preceded the final surrender to the inevitable. What mortal hands could do to save was done right worthily, but the task was, as the sequel proves, beyond man's might.

The manner of the doing is now, as ever in the sombre story of colliery disasters in Wales, the one feature which redeems its sullen mournfulness. The age of chivalry is not dead - cannot die while men are found capable, without no thought given to the consequences, of facing the horrors of a mine newly swept by the deadly blast or overrun with fire - when roofs are tottering and perils lurk invisible in the darkness of this silent and shaken tomb. It is at periods like these, when the shadow of a great trouble hangs over a whole community and pity wrings men's hearts, and there is a call for help which few only can render, that valour greater than that of the tested field and chivalry in its noblest form are manifest.

The Pontypridd disaster produced at once the need and the manifestation of these great qualities. No one who saw the heroism, silent and modest, unflinching and sustained, can easily forget it. A country which lavishes its medals and distinctions on the successful in war and yet professes to recognise that its greatness has been mainly gained in the paths of peace assuredly lacks the power of proper appreciation of merit, since it has hitherto made no appreciable effort to exalt the bravery which too frequently has to oppose death in our coal mines.

In paying willing tribute of praise to those who strove hard to break the full force of the calamity, we have to realise that the manly efforts have failed in their



Map shown the position of the different shaft of the Great Western Colliery

object. The men and boys entombed have been placed beyond the reach of human aid or sympathy. Their trial ended long ago their sufferings are over. The debt which society owed to them has been paid by the rescuing parties. But more remains to be done. Hitherto the burden imposed by duty has necessarily been borne by a few, equipped with special knowledge and experience.

Now comes the time when the general public - the classes and the masses - have to play their part in this tragedy. It happens partly because of local circumstances and the unreasonable prejudice fostered in respect of the Miners' Provident Association that the families of some of the deceased colliers have been left totally without the means of existence. The breadwinner has been suddenly withdrawn, and the pains of natural grief are being sharpened by the consciousness of prospective penury. This is not the moment to preach the disadvantages of improvidence not to improve the occasion with prudent admonitions to the living.

Enough for the present is the knowledge that the hearts of the afflicted are aching with inexpressible agonies, and that it is at once the duty and the privilege of the public to soften, as far as in them lies, the asperities of life which must needs be trying in any event. In the past, the response to these appeals have been singularly generous. Never was there a more imperative call for help, for the need of it was never more pressing.

Trade has been bad of late, and even the thrifty have been driven to eat into that little store set apart for the lean years. We sincerely trust that, notwithstanding the unfavourable circumstances and the drain upon the means of the charitable by comparatively recent calls of the same nature that the Pontypridd fund will be equal to the demands that will necessarily be made upon it.

Chapter six
Saturday, April 15th 1893

Saturday was the day of the funerals that was never to be forgotten by those attending or those who witnessed the sad processions passing slowly through the district towards the Glyntaff Cemetery and the last resting place of many of the victims. The *'South Wales Echo'* reported:

Pathetic scenes and incidents

If it is a difficult matter for the mind to readily conceive the full extent and horror of such a tragedy as that which has been enacted in the Great Western Pit. It is at least possible for the eye to comprehend it on the day of burial. So far, the poor colliers who met their fate on Tuesday have been counted in numbers, and have existed to the public eye only in calculation. On Saturday, for the first time, the grim reality was borne in upon the mind with terrible and startling emphasis.

The day was glorious in the sunshine. Nature seemed to have prepared herself as a setting for the scene. Pontypridd itself is not an impressive town, but it has the rare advantage of impressive surroundings. On such a day it seemed glorified. The gaunt hills which rise in rugged precipitations around, converging to the hollow amphitheatre in which the town stretches itself out, look noble and imposing when the sun rids them of the sombre monotony of their dark-grey hue and gives them life and colour. To those whose minds were full of the sad ceremony which was taking place, the hills added a touch of the solemn. Bare, bleak, or picked out here and there with a stunted growth or a dwarfed line of trees, they formed that strange and inspiring background to the last act in the terrible tragedy with which one has become familiar from past experience.

Ever since the bodies were recovered from the pit Pontypridd has been a place of mourning. The tragedy seems to have brooded over the town like a horrible thought, casting its shadow upon every street and reflecting itself in the tone and appearance of every individual. The Celtic mind is singularly in tune with the serious side of life. It is naturally melancholic, and yields itself up with peculiar readiness to the pathetic. Its music, its literature , its arts, are tinged with the same sombre hue. There is almost an eagerness to dwell upon each detail which excites the mind and makes the pathos of the moment more distinct.

It is not a morbid feeling; it is the expression of a natural impulse - one might almost alter the line of Milton and spea

k of “linked sadness long drawn out.” It was not merely in the funeral that the dead found sorrowful tributes of regret. In many cases the bodies of the poor men have been open on the previous day to a reverent inspection from all who chose to make it. In one instance strangers were invited in, and were asked to see the poor mangled frames of the victims, and volunteers were at hand to take them elsewhere and enabled to pay similar respect to others of the dead. It was not intended as an appeal to the curious. The sorrowing relatives believed it to be an act of homage, a respectable tribute to those who had gone. In many houses there was more than one victim, and almost universally the drawn blinds or the closed shutter gave evidence of that sympathy which is called forth by a catastrophe which appeals so strongly to all.

There were several reasons which tended to make Saturday’s funerals less imposing than usual. First of all, only a certain number of the dead were buried. Despite the generosity of the Great Western Company, who provided the polished coffins which were borne to the grave, it was impossible for the large demand on the energies of the carpenter to be complied with in a space of time so brief. And then Pontypridd is more of a metropolis than a town, and has suburbs stretching around it, each of which claimed its own part in the sad ceremonial. Sometimes a funeral of this magnitude is conducted on a lonely hillside station, and there is little choice, if any, in the resting place to which the victims are consigned. In such cases the last rites are imposing in their magnitude.

At Llanerch, for instance, a huge procession wound its way around the hill to the cemetery, where the small ground, ill-adapted for a demand so great, was honeycombed with 60 yawning graves. At Pontypridd the funeral was not one, but many. It was split up into separate atoms. Some of the dead were carried to the burial-grounds on the Porth side of the colliery; some were carried to the cemetery at Treforest; the poor Williams’, father and two sons, were borne by uncomplaining bearers as far a Llantwit Vardre to a pretty churchyard three miles distant from the house at Pontypridd. Nor was it possible for arrangements to be made for a general funeral.

The town has many chapels, and the survivors naturally chose each their own ministrants to perform the last sad rite. It was unavoidable, therefore, that the funerals should follow no organised plan, but went their own way according to the convenience of those whose duty it was to arrange them. There was little of the imposing; but there was an overpowering sense of the pathetic as the eye saw, diverging into different paths, moving at different intervals, what seemed a never-ending line of funeral parties, each taking to the grave the victim whom it mourned.

The spot mainly chosen was the cemetery at Treforest. It is situated on the sloping side of a hill, on which the sunlight lay pleasantly, picking out the white monuments and giving them a strong relief against the withered and barren side of the mountains. Just before it rises at a sudden angle to a somewhat stern and sombre ridge. It is a place that is carefully kept and almost beautiful to the eye, for the grass is kept well, and the graves are looked after with solicitous care.

To this favoured spot many a cortege filed its way from one o'clock until the close of the day. The processions were wonderfully alike, and each was marked by the earnest and reverent sympathy of the public. In the caravan came a big line of mourners; many who probably in many cases had slight knowledge of the dead but felt compelled to show respect. This must have been so, for the processions were in most cases from 200 to 800 strong. The coffin followed, borne by stalwart men, relieved at different points, and then a few coaches and wagonettes in which the mourners and women brought up the rear.

It was a striking feature at Pontypridd, this use of brakes and uncovered trap as a mourning carriage. It looked singular, but not unnatural, for the whole town had given itself up to mourning, and those who could not walk the two miles to the cemetery were not unwilling to take places in waggonettes and other vehicles of the sort usually associated with pleasure parties. In some cases a melancholy hymn was sung; but this was unusual. Generally speaking, it was sung as the coffin was borne from the house and resumed when the procession passed through a village; but the most conspicuous feature of the day's proceedings was the absence of this customary funeral sign.

Conspicuous amongst them all was the military aspect given to one of the funerals by the presence of volunteers. They were few in number, but the procession lost none of its dignity on that account. The red-tuniced men marched in the rear of the band, which played the majestic "Dead March" of Handel's, and behind them was carried the coffin on which the helmet of the dead comrade was placed. In the rear came the mourners, and many others whose sympathy had been excited. At the graves the scene was in every case pathetic beyond endurance. The solemn hush of that burial, broken only by the calm voice of the minister as he reads the touching service, in the open-air and amid scenery so impressive, is in itself tense with a deep emotion; but the presence of women, the near relatives, adds to the sorrow of the scene. Their unrestrained grief moved the little crowd. There were many who could not maintain their composure, and in some instances the spectacle was distressing in the extreme. Little was said, save in prayer; nor was the ceremony too long continued. Small space of time was needed for the due solemnity of the

occasion; small space could, indeed, be given. Each funeral was replaced by another; often two or three were threading the path to the grave while one was yet in progress.

A clear impression of the funeral is impossible to give. It needs that the reader should imagine the town sending out in each direction and along every road a ceaseless flow of funeral parties, at different times and to different spots, each with its own mourners and its body of sympathetic friends. For several hours the spectacle might be seen, unvarying in its appearance, until its constant character became too much of an excess of emotion and left the spectator exhausted. There are some events so stupendous in their tragedy as to dull the feelings and prevent the observer from adequately realising them. The power of pathos is best evoked where there are circumstances to relieve it. At Pontypridd there was nothing to perform this welcome part. The funerals of the dead were linked together with a melancholy so conspicuous that the mind lost the power of grasping its full significance. To attempt to depict in cold prose is still more difficult. A narrative can only be in the coarsest sense a bald recountal of bare facts.

The Funerals begin

The '*Western Mail*' newspaper of Monday, April 17th reported: A visitor visiting the town on Saturday, April 15th 1893, if he had not heard the tiding of what had occurred, would have wondered at the number of people in the street, all with an expression of sadness on their countenances, and most of them dressed in black.

The number of funeral biers carried through the streets, and the appearance of mourning coaches, would have forced upon him the conclusion that the angel of death must have been busy with his scythe, causing tears of waterfall in many a home. Death had overtaken its victims so suddenly, and in such a manner, that it was urgently desirable that as little delay as possible should occur in placing the dead in their last resting places.
From an early hour in the morning the streets of Pontypridd were thronged with people, very many of whom were in mourning attire. Shellibiers, mourning coaches, and vehicles of all kinds were requisitioned for funeral processions. Small groups of men were seen marching in different directions from precincts of chapels, churches and cemeteries carrying biers to the houses in which the bodies were lying. So great was the demand for biers that all could be obtained from places of worship whence funerals did not take place had to be secured, and yet enough could not be found. In one instance the coffin had to be carried without the bier, upon the shoulders of the bearers. Funerals of people not connected with the accident had to be postponed. With many funerals going in

different directions, there was some difficulty in getting a sufficient number of bearers. While huge crowds were waiting for the military funeral, there was a small procession toiling through the town in the heat and dust, but the bearers in this instance were reinforced between Pontypridd and Pentrebach by other funerals joining them, and the whole going along in one procession - coffins in biers, followed by another coffin in a shellibier.

The first of the mournful processions witnessed in Pontypridd was that conveying the bodies of David Davies, fireman, and his brother Thomas Davies, bratticeman, from Pantygraigwen to the station of the Taff Vale Railway, for whence they were conveyed by the 2 o'clock train to Pontyberem, near Llanelly, Carmarthenshire, for interment.
A large number of people had assembled in the vicinity of the station, and the scene that was witnessed was one of the most painful and heartrending that could possibly be been imagined. David Davies, who was 29 years of age, was a married man, but leaves no children. The other brother, Thomas, was 24 years of age, and had his life been spared, intended getting married on Saturday next. Their remains were conveyed from Llanelly to Pontyberem in a hearse, which was followed by a large number of conveyances occupied by friends and acquaintances of the dead.

After a short Welsh service at Caersalem Independent Chapel, at which the minister (Rev. W. E. Evans) officiated, the bodies were consigned to their last resting place in the graveyard adjoining Caersalem Chapel, of which both were members prior to their departure for Pontypridd. It is worthy to note that there was another brother working in the pit at the time of the accident, but fortunately he was one of the too few men rescued.

The most imposing procession, apart, perhaps, from the military funeral, was that of the Williams' - father and two sons - who were interred in the parish churchyard of Llantwit Vardre. The family lived in Wood Road, Pontypridd, and there at 2 o'clock on Saturday gathered large crowds of people, who had come to pay a last tribute of respect to the memory of persons who, when living, had made themselves an exceptionally large circle of friends, and who, in death, were surrounded by circumstances which compare with previous chapters in the sad annals of colliery disasters. A long line of vehicles had been arranged along the roadside, conveying, amongst others, several local public men, including Mr. William Spickett, the county councilor for the Graig district (on which the funeral took place), and by the time the three coffins had been brought out there were about 750 people on feet in the procession. Others fell into the ranks *en route,* and as the solemn cortege wended its way towards Treforest it could be seen that the blinds were drawn in every house. Little groups of sympathetic

mourners stood at the doors of houses where other victims of the disaster were lying, and, gazing across the valley, one could see on the opposite road a long procession conveying four other bodies to the cemetery.

At Treforest there was a large reinforcement, for just as the fore part of the funeral was passing the railway station, two shellibiers belonging to Mr. Walter Powis, came into sight on a side road, conveying to Llantrisant the mortal remains of Joseph Thomas and John Llewellyn, of Hopkinstown. Following these were breaks and other vehicles, and as all these joined at the rear of the first procession, the striking sight was witnessed of five coffins borne in one cortege, over 1,000 persons preceding the coffins and 21 vehicles, including mourning coaches, breaks, and private carriages following.

The road to Llantwit was a lonely thoroughfare, and, consequently there was no singing. At Pentonteg the funeral of the Williams's branched off towards the church, while that of Joseph Thomas and John Llewellyn continued on the way to Llantrisant. It should be mentioned that all these victims except Llewellyn were Ivorites, and that there were many members and officers of that Order present.

The quiet hamlet surrounding the old Parish Church at Llantwit was never so crowded as when these funerals arrived, and especially was the case when another funeral - that of Lewis Jacob, of Hafod, followed closely behind, and many hundreds of people most of them wearing the black sashes of a friendly society, trooped into the place. There was not room in the little church for a tithe of the people, and while the churchyard itself was well-nigh crowded, there were hundreds of folk on the road, and not only were the two public houses full, but seats, chairs and stools had to be placed on the pavement.

The four coffins were taken into the church, which was, of course, full of people, and as the vicar's voice, rising and falling in sympathetic cadences, came floating out through the open door, over the heads of those who were standing in the porch, the solemn service was endowed with an effective grandeur seldom witnessed. By-and-by there came a pause, and the hymn which was given with its note of victory echoed through the church.

Os gwelir fi, bechadur	If you'll see myself the sinner
Rhyw ddydd ar ben fy nhaith,	Some day at the end of my journey
Rhyfeddol fydd y canu,	Wonderful will be the singing
A newydd fydd yr iaith,	And new will be the language
Yn seinio 'buddugoliaeth,'	Resounding victor
Am iachawdwriaeth lawn,	For complete salvation
Heb ofni colli'r frwydr,	Without being afraid of losing the battle

Y bore na'r prydnawn The morning of the afternoon.

Subsequently, when the interments took place, the singing was renewed with still more thrilling effect. The Williams' were lowered into two graves - the two sons in one and the father into another - close to the church gates, and while the Rev. W. Colemen Williams, of Aberdare, officiated at these graves the vicar, the Rev. J. Jenkins, stood at the grave of Jacobs, on the other side of the church. The services at the church, and now the services at the graves were conducted simultaneously by the two clergymen, but presently there came a call for Mr. John Lewis, of Efail Isaf, a well-known choral conductor, and when the famous dirge "Bydd myrdd o ryfeddodau" was given out, the singing, led by Mr. Lewis, rose like a mighty sea of song, and the "repeat" at the close, with its rolling base voices, was taken up again and again until there were few faces not streaming with tears. Rather than give here the full words of the Welsh Hymn, it may be advisable to quote an English translation by Mr. D. Ellis, the secretary of the Albion Colliery:

"There'll be a myriad of wonders
When dawns the morning grey.
And resurrection's children
Awake to endless day;
All robed in snowy garments,
With new-born radiance shed,
Resembling their redeemer
When he came back from the dead."

The triumphant character of the singing was most fitting in this instance, for if ever there was a case in which it was appropriate it was that of the Williams's. As I stated in my latest message on Friday night, the eldest son, John Williams, the singer, was found dead on his knees in prayer; the father actually standing by his side, still in death, and with his head reverently bowed, as if he had been listening to the last prayer of his son, when the spirits of both father and son fled. But the more one inquires about this family the more wonderful the story. A younger son, on whose arm the mother leaned at the funeral, had actually been sent out of the pit by the father to say that he (the father) was "all right." The two sons, William and Lewis, who are now interred in the grave adjoining that of their father, actually reached the pit bottom and refused to come up, because they would go back to find their father. They died, by the way, and the father and the other son died in prayer. Surely this is a picture unparalleled in the history of colliery disasters, teeming as those usually are with exciting and touching incidents. John Williams ("Ioan Taf") was married, and lived at Park

Place, Treforest, and his funeral takes place on Monday, the interment to be at Glyntaff Cemetery, where he had buried a child some time ago.

Within sight of the pit where the sad catastrophe occurred four bodies were interred: namely, those of James Holbrook and Daniel Shea at the Rhondda Baptist Chapel, and Williams Edmunds at Siloam Welsh Methodist Chapel, Gyfeillon. The greatest respect was shown towards the dead and the deepest sympathy manifested with the relatives en route, where the streets were lined with people, who, as the long procession passed by, respectfully uncovered their heads, whilst all the houses had their window blinds drawn.

The burials at the Glyntaff Cemetery

On Saturday morning, April 15th, 31 graves were in readiness to receive their silent tenants in Glyntaff Cemetery (18 to be interred that day). The day was beautifully fine, and the cemetery, which was prettily situated on the hillside, looked quiet and peaceful in the shades of its numerous trees, but the mounds of newly-turned soil which were conspicuous in the Nonconformist portion of the grounds eloquently reminded the onlooker of the solemn and sorrowful rites to be performed later that afternoon.

The first orders for graves were received by the burial authorities on Thursday afternoon, and extra gravediggers were at once put on, and Mr. James E. Spickett, clerk to the burial board, and Mr. Morgan Rees, sexton at the cemetery, deserved great praise for the promptitude with which the arrangements were carried out.

The first of the funerals were timed to leave Pontypridd at 1.30 in the afternoon, and to arrive at the cemetery at 2.30 o'clock. Long prior to the first-mentioned hour crowds of people lined the thoroughfares of Pontypridd and the roadway leading from the Llanbradach Hotel to the cemetery. Blinds were drawn in nearly every house in Pontypridd, and the scenes as one funeral after another left the town for the cemetery were touching in the extreme. The rites arranged in connection with the Nonconformist burials were a short devotional service at the house of each of the deceased and a short prayer at the graveside.
At the entrance to the cemetery, Mr. J. E. Spickett (the clerk of the burial board) and Mr. Morgan Rees (sexton) awaited the arrival of the corteges. The first funeral to arrive at the Glyntaff cemetery was that of Adolphus Dodge, Pwllgwaun, which was met at the gate by the Rev. E. E. Probert, of Carmel, who spoke no words at the grave, and merely offered an extempore prayer of great feeling and intensity.

Thomas Coles, Berw Rd, 16 years of age, came next. The Rev. J. R. Jones, Tabernacle, read a few singularly-appropriate verses of Scripture and offered prayer. Then followed those of; Roberts, Zion St., the Rev. E. E. Probert officiating. The body of Phillip Jones, Feeder Row Trallwn; succeeded, the Rev. E. Gronow, Sion, Pontypridd, reading a portion of the scriptures and praying. Thomas Williams, Feeder Row, was buried by the Rev. W. Lewis, Penuel.

This was a very large funeral. Mr. Lewis, after reading a few appropriate verses of the scriptures in the vernacular, briefly addressed the audience, but stated that now was not the time to speak because the God above all had spoken on that occasion. The Rev. Gentlemen had but little to say of deceased except that he was good to his parents, and that was a high tribute. It was often the best that were taken away, but that was all the better for them.

After a short but impressive prayer those surrounding the open grave sang the ever-melodious Welsh hymn, "Bydd myrdd o ryfeddodua," with solemn effect, the music at times being almost entirely stopped by the sobs and tears of those present.

A little later on eleven coffins carried in a line one after the other, accompanied by a long line of mourners, passed through the town, the residents making their respectful sympathy by lowering their blinds. Albert J. Pearce, Richard Edmunds, J. Nicholas, Charles Godfrey, George Roderick, and Willie Davies, all of Pwllgwaun; George Bartlett, Grover St, Graig, Pontypridd; John Maddocks, Hopkinstown; Arthur Thorne, Pwllgwaun (a native of Somerset); William Hughes, Pwllgwaun; Jessie Titley, Pwllgwaun, were in one combined procession of nearly a mile long. The mourners were met at the gate by the following ministers, who officiated at the various graves: Revs. E. E. Probert, W. Lewis, T. Henry, W. Parry, Vicar Williams, Vicar Jones, J. Rees (curate), J. C. Evans (curate of Porth), and T. R. Williams (curate of Glyntaff).

The two lads Roderick and Davies, who were first cousins, resided in the same house, were regular attendants at the Penuel Sunday School, and a few weeks ago sat an examination in connection with the Calvinistic Methodists Sunday-schools. The result appeared in the *Tarian Y Gwcithiwr* of Tuesday last, both lads being successful. One of the last things they said before leaving the house on that fateful Tuesday morning was to ask the mother of one of them to be sure to buy a *Tarian,* which they might see when they came home.

As soon as the eleven bodies were buried the "Dead march" in Saul was heard and next, at 4.10, came the military funeral. George Grainger having been a member of the local volunteers was borne to the cemetery by his comrades-in-

arms. The coffin, draped with the union jack and surmounted by the helmet of the deceased, was preceded by the band playing the “Dead march” in Saul. The contingent was commanded by Capt. Hill-Male. The bearing party was marshalled by Armoured Sergeant Herdson, while Sergeant Samuel Thomas had charge of the firing party which consisted of Privates J. Thomas, T. Nouldson; M. Rowe, H. Turberville, Ivor Williams, E. Rolls, L. Llewellyn, S. Lawrence, A. Hughes, W. Beazer and W. Davies; and J. A. Thomas of the cyclist section. After the service conducted by the Rev Parry, late of Ynysybwl, three volleys were fired over the grave. The last funeral of the day was that of J. Thomas, Trehafod, who was interred by the Rev. D. Williams, Havod.

The coffins (which had been paid for by the Great Western Colliery Co.) were very neat and well-finished, being mounted with substantial brass ornaments and in many instances they were covered with beautiful wreaths of flowers and crosses. All the graves were labeled, so that the interments took place without the slightest confusion.

The scenes at the graves were most affecting. "The community of grief" gave no consolation to the mother who had lost her son, or the wife who had lost her husband, and loud cries of woe and lamentation rent the air as dust was returned to dust, and ashes to ashes. Thousands of people visited the cemetery during the day, but the last body of mourners had left the cemetery before six o'clock, and thus ended another chapter in the mournful history of the Great Western Colliery disaster.

Character of the coffins

A large proportion of the coffins had been constructed by the order of the directors by Mr. David Griffiths, contractor, Gelliwasted Road, Pontypridd. Mr. Griffiths, who is an old resident in the district, and acquainted with several of the unfortunate victims, personally supervised the execution of the order, with the result that the coffins issuing from the yard were finished in workmen-like manner, and were much admired.

They were constructed of elm, highly polished, and neatly lined with wadding. Cases are not unknown in connection with disasters of this kind - and indeed in the present instance - where the coffins supplied were of a most shoddy kind, and caused intense pain to the feelings of the mourning relatives many of whom absolutely refused to accept them. It is to the credit of the Great Western authorities and Mr. David Griffith to state that the coffins supplied by him were of a better quality that those for which the mourners themselves in a large number of cases could afford to buy.

The newspaper's view

The 'Glamorgan Free Press' (later renamed the 'Pontypridd Observer') had these comments to make: - The Rhondda has once more been visited by one of those calamities that are the dread of our colliery districts. Though not an explosion, the demon foul air has been spreading plague and wrecking the happiness of many homes by withdrawing from the hearth fathers, sons, both, and in some instances this was causing the dissolution of long-cherished friendships.

Entombment is even more awful in its contemplation than explosions. This form of fortune expresses the passage of death in its severest form of mental suffering. Explosion stakes its victim sharply out of its horror, but the solemnity of a living interment is the not less fearful to the entombed as the thought is shuddering to dear loved ones who mourn and lament in the security of the home.

Notwithstanding the advance of mining skill and management, and the efforts exercised by our mining authorities, the developments in colliery enterprise reveals new dangers which baffle the foresight of even the most vigilant supervision of our colliery managers, and equally well thought-out legislative regulations. Though it is our lot this day to deplore an apparent unforeseen catastrophe, appalling and fearful in its magnitude in destruction to life, still, when we take within the purview of our reflection the immensity of the coal industry, and the thousands of valuable lives engaged in it, we feel that relatively there is reason to feel thankful that these dire tragedies are not more frequently rehearsed amongst us. We shall have and should have a rigid investigation to the root of a product so terrible.

What was the cause of the fire? Only a spark - the emitting of violent friction from the brake. It is almost indescribable, and while under ordinary circumstances it is not conceivable. But think of the inflammable sympathies of the surroundings. The engine was situated in the main airway of the east workings of the Four-feet seam, and it was in these workings that all the lives were lost.

The framework of the engine was timber, and dry as chip coal dust, and the greasy drippings from frequent toiling of the engine. One and all materials of latent combustion. The roadways were arched with timber, and once the flames had a hold it pursued its course with defiant strides. The lesson points to greater utilization of stonework and iron girders for framework foundation. We admit that iron does not lend itself with the same responsiveness to the "squeezes," but stone would. Doubtless also, if the main intake for some distance from the

engine house was stone or brick arched the calamity would be less to record. There is one bright bit of colour in this dark picture.

Thomas Rosser's conduct and practical foresight are worth a record. For one so young in the official life of a collier to play so conspicuous a part is very gratifying. He saved his men by obeying the inspiration which prompted him to open the separation doors. Though it lessened the ventilation he diverted the smoke to the outcast and made an opening for the escape of the men. The opening of the door might have led to evil consequences, but with great judgment and coolness, once his men were released, he restored them to their ordinary state. In this he showed that his experience was on a par with his courage, and we trust that he will not be forgotten.

Another report in a newspaper of the same date gave this moving description of life in the district at this period: - It is very probable that many persons living at a distance from Pontypridd have no knowledge at all of the manifold dangers attendant on the cutting of coal. Daily they enjoy the fruits of the toil of the miners without thinking of those being exposed to any special hardships or perils, to whose labours they are indebted for the way in which they cook their food, for the gas that lights up their homes by night, and for the steam power that in so many ways administers to their comfort and convenience. In the winter evening, and when their families gather around a bright and cheerful hearth for warmth, they would be surprised and incredulous if it was suggested to them that the coal burning in their grates has been obtained by the cost of workmen maimed for life, or the terrible sacrifice of a husband and father suddenly cut down in the prime of his days, leaving a widow and family in a state of suffering and privation.

In the brief golden age of south Wales coal mining when workmen's wages attained their highest level, English newspapers contained vivid descriptions of banqueting and luxury as the style of living common among colliers. Their tables spread with the most costly dainties; champagne and other choice wines and spirits their everyday beverage; parties entertained by them with pricy sumptuousness and general revelry in the way of prodigal extravagance in dress and living, causing many a reader to exclaim, "Who not would be a collier?"

I wonder if these producers of fanciful pictures had with equal vividness presented the reverse side, if they had attempted to convey a true idea of the death-sweeping blast of an explosion, and its poisonous after-damp, with the consequent scenes at the pit's mouth as the dying and the dead are brought up; or of a fire stealing through a mine burning some workmen out of recognition, and suffocating dozens by its stifling heat and smoke; or had they simply

enumerated the many and various dangers to which miners are momentarily exposed while pursuing their employment, adding a list of a years record of miners injured or killed by colliery accidents, their readers would have changed their tone, and in terror asked, “Who would be a collier?”

We, who live in the heart of a large and important colliery district, know only too well that a miner’s occupation is arduous and hazardous. At a meeting of the Cambrian Miner's Association, held at Ton Pentre on Monday, 20th April 1893, one of the delegates, upon rising, said, “You see standing before you one who has been a collier for fifty-eight years. There is not many who can say that. I have known what colliery disasters are, for I have been in them.

When I was only a youth I was in a mine that was suddenly flooded, and as I made my way to escape I went through water up to my chin, and saw the corpses of workmen floating by me. I have been in an explosion underground, and in other mining accidents, so that I can deeply sympathise with those who have suffered from such causes.” His was an especially severe experience, but there are many in the district who could also speak of trying experiences and hair-breathed escapes, and who to their dying day would bear marks of injuries sustained while pursuing their lawful calling.

Some veteran miners possibly had been indulged in the belief that they had a perfect knowledge of every kind of peril to which underground workmen are liable. The sad event of last week however, adds to their list, for it was a danger before unknown in south Wales that a spark from an engine brake should be capable of producing such terrible results, affording a literal illustration of a saying in the old book, “Behold how great matter a little fire kindleth.” It is unnecessary to enter into details. A death-toll of upward of 60 names tells its own tale of suffering and bereavement.

Interesting incidents have marked the calamity, that of a son kneeling in the attitude of prayer with his father by his side bending forward as he listened to brief earnest supplications ejaculated by lips just about to be closed in death - a prayer in which we can well believe the poor mother at home was not forgotten - is beautifully touching. Of another lad - Thomas Price, aged 15, Cambrian Place, Treforest, son of Thomas Price, Pilotman, Talyllyn, Brecon, we learn that he had been chosen to take part in a cantatas at Dowlais, and had only recently come to the Great Western Colliery. His old singing friends had lost sight of him, and one of them from Merthyr Vale came to Pontypridd a few weeks ago searching for him to take part in a cantatas about to be performed at that place entitled “Freddy and his Fiddle.”

He was to have taken the principle part, "Freddy," and had been to the places several times to practice. His death has made a void which the Conductor said would be very difficult to fill. The poor lad was burnt beyond recognition, and was only identified by a little bottle he carried in his pocket, and by his boots.

The survivors so sadly and suddenly bereaved are in need of pecuniary help. If there is a ray of light flashing through the darkness it is the widespread benevolence which has been called into active operation. It was only right and fitting that Pontypridd had started first. We rejoiced that she acted up to her duty and was able at once to produce so generous a response.
The Albion Colliery workmen on Saturday night voted £100 to the Great Western Colliery relief fund. "Morien", the *'Western Mail'* reporter who had become famous after reporting on the Tynewydd Colliery disaster commented on the same day:

The disaster at the Great Western Colliery and its dire results are the first instances for the inhabitants of the town of Pontypridd and neighbourhood to be eye-witness as to what a great colliery calamity means! Most of the inhabitants of the district are, in some way or other, associated with the adjacent collieries, and almost the entire mining population know each other personally. In consequence of so many of them having the same surnames, it is the practice to add to the Christian name, by way of identification, some name of the nature of a *nom de plume*, instead of the ordinary surname.

Thus, poor Morgan Williams was named as "Dafydd 'Glanybad," and his three sons would have 'Glanybad,' being the Welsh name of Upper Boat, the native village of the parent. When Englishmen come and settle in a Welsh district they also will receive some fanciful surnames. Thus Lambert, who is one of the killed, was known as 'Bungi' and John Nicholas, the slain engineer, was called 'Jack the fiddler.' A miner inclined to be a bit smart and to sport a white collar otherwise than on Sunday, and was once seen wearing a paper collar long before the said useful articles became generally known, was dubbed for the rest of his life as 'Twm Colar pappar' (paper collar Tom). A miner, into whose fractured skull a silver plate had been inserted was ever after known as 'Dai Coppa Tin (Dai of the tin-head).

Frequently the nickname was of a highly humorous nature. Sometimes the receivers of nicknames resented the liberty taken thus with their names, but far more often the 'boys' themselves enjoy the new name given to distinguish them from others of the same name or surname.

The slang and humorous surnames are always given to erratic fellows by their boon companions, but the staid men, as a means to distinguish themselves from others each receives the name of his native village or the county of Wales he comes from. As a rule, the correct Baptismal names are used only by the Clerk to the works, to be used on the pay ticket and by strangers.

Mingling with the throngs of men, and conversing with them in the Welsh language, it is found that they feel the clerky name is too cold when referring to their lost companions of the stalls and headings underground. Think of a man always known as Dafydd being addressed as David! Dafydd would laugh in your face, and would ask you - "Since when have you been a Sais?" Many "Shone" would hardly believe you referred to him were you to address him a John; indeed, one name is a good as the other, except that in the Isle of Man "Shone" is the title of Old Nick.

Now, today (Saturday), many thousands of the old familiar friends who bore the above sketched relation to each other, turned out in their holiday attire to accompany their slaughtered companions to their long, long home, as regards to their mortal frames, in sacred earth.

The vast multitudes, all dressed in deep mourning, with white collars and black ties, and the women likewise in mourning garbs, presented an exceedingly respectable appearance. Anyone could see at a glance they were of the cream of the population, and belonged to the superior class who have dotted the valleys of all Wales with places of worship and with Welsh Sunday-schools. The proudest emperor or king would have regarded such subjects with joy.

Old men, with hair and beards as white as snow, and walking by the aid of sticks, were in the immense processions. In the funeral procession of Morgan Williams and his two sons, Lewis and William, who went from Wood Road to Llantwit Vardre Church were 483 stalwart miners, followed by vast numbers of wives and daughters.

Nineteen processions, each with a coffin bearing flowers in their midst, poured into Glyntaff Cemetery. There, as well as in the procession first mentioned, the faces of all wore an intensely solemn expression, like men on the verge of bursting into tears. Neither the "church" nor the "chapel" edifice in the cemetery ground was entered on this thrilling occasion. It seemed as if the magnitude of the calamity had induced the various religious parties to forget, for a moment, their petty squabbles about loaves and fishes, and be guided solely be the sentiment of freedom of religion which is defined thus by St James the Just - "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their infliction, And to keep himself unspotted."

There were many Nonconformist ministers officiating at graves, each open grave being surrounded by large throngs of men and women. About half-a-dozen clergymen in their white surplices, which contrasted very strikingly with the black worn by the thousands present, officiated at other graves. The sublimity of the church service for the dead never appeared more striking than on this occasion.

It did not require much imagination to enable one to regard the cemetery as the acres of God - the granary of Jehovah - and the robed clergy and unrobed Nonconformist ministers as the agents of the Divine husbandman. "God is light," and the clergy, wearing the holy robe, symbolising that light, walked to the entrance gate to receive each coffin, and each, as the mouthpiece of Divinity, said, now in Welsh, and the next time in English, "I am the Resurrection and the life!"

There are many things in the theology of the Middle Ages which we cannot understand, but we all believe the mysteries of life and the mysteries of death are in the system of divine intelligence, and that in the end everything will be found to be right. The sublime words of the burial service of the church - so full of hope - seemed on this occasion to scatter fragrance from Paradise among the sorrowing people. At the close of almost every service the well-known and extremely popular Welsh funeral hymn, "Bydd myrdd, o, ryfeddodau," &c; was sung most melodiously among the budding flowers and trees of the cemetery. After the last funeral, that of Volunteer Grainger, the vast throng then slowly dispersed.

Bodies of two bothers in one cottage

A most pitiful case was that of the family of Danny O'Shea, 16 years of age and a stepbrother of James Holbrook. The bodies of these two were discovered in the East far End. The cottage is situated a short distance from the colliery. O'Shea, the father, is a shoemaker, and works in a small low-roofed shed about 20 yards from the house, on the roadside leading to Porth or Pontypridd. The other son is about 18 years old, was also on the mine at the time. This is his story as interviewed by a newspaper reporter:

"We thought we smelt some smoke about half-past one o'clock in the afternoon. My butty and others said we had better make off for the return. The smoke came stronger, and we hurried away.

"What did you think was on fire?" "We thought one of the air doors in the level had caught fire, and we were therefore afraid an explosion would take place."

“An explosion?” “Yes,” he replied, “We were afraid the place would be blown up any minute.” “Did you all go together?” “Some of us started to go out against the smoke, but they soon returned and followed us into the return airway. One of those who went towards the smoke continued to go in the other direction and he was suffocated.” “Was the smoke very thick in the return just after you entered it?” “No, not very strong then, but it came thicker and thicker as we got to the end of the return or near the upcast and through which we were raised out of the mine.

It was just like a fog for a long distance, just as we got to the bottom of the pit our lamps were put out by the smoke. We could not be lifted out fast enough.” “Did the smoke travel faster than you?” “Sometimes it did and sometimes it didn’t.” “You ran all the way out through the return?” “Oh yes, as fast as we could.” “Tell me, did you argue the question at all when you first smelt smoke in the stalls, whether you should go out at once or not?” “No, not much. We did not know what was the matter. We stripped off and ran as hard as we could, and while we ran we ran for life, we every moment expected to be blown to bits.”

Another correspondent wrote: - “I entered on Friday evening the house of Mrs. Miller, Mill Street, Pontypridd. It is a very old-fashioned cottage, one of the oldest in the town. The body of her son, Job, 18 years of age, who was found among the dead in the East Far End workings, was in a coffin in the room adjacent to the kitchen. The grandmother of the deceased ‘boy’ was seated in the corner by the fire with her apron over her head. She was weeping bitterly and was very restless.”

“You must try and forget your boy now,” remarked a gentleman who accompanied him. “Oh, dear, dear,” she cried, “forget my child, forget my child! How can I live without him, how can I live without him? Oh, how wicked to allow the poor men to be killed like that.” “But you know,” rejoined my friend “it’s no use vexing now - you cannot bring your child’s life back, so you must try and keep up.” The old lady moved from chair to chair, covering her face up again, laid her head on the table, and again broke out weeping.

The mother of the boy was also in the kitchen and a couple of neighbours as well. She had six children to maintain, and, to use her own expression “Job was the only one who brought in a bit of money to live upon. She had a baby on the breast at that time. The deceased boy was employed in a stall. “He had not a stain on his character.” The mother repeated this quotation several times, and the poor aged grandmother emphasised the observation as she sobbed and wiped her eyes.

Sunday April 16th 1893

On Sunday, 16th April 1893, the funeral of Ernest Prosser, Pwllgwaun, took place at Pentyrch, the service being conducted by the Rev. E. Roberts. Young Rosser, who was aged but 18 was reared at Pentyrch, and when his funeral cortege, which left Pontypridd at 2 o'clock, arrived at Pentyrch, a distance of eight miles, it was received by a large body of mourners who accompanied the body to the Pentyrch Church. On entering the ancient edifice the solemnity of the occasion was intensified by the rendering of a touching selection from 'Y Gwasanaethau Dwyfol' (we cannot rest in heaven).

The immediate relations of the deceased sat in the chancel, and the nave was well filled with mourners, who at the close of the English service joined with splendid effect in the lines commencing 'Bydd myrdd o ryfeddodau. Ar doriad boreu wawr.' (There will be a multitude of wonders. At the dawning of the day) to the tune of "Hymnau Cyffredinol." Prosser was a constant attendant at the Carmel Sunday School (Pontypridd), and the scholars, numbering many scores, headed the mournful procession through the main thoroughfares of the town.

William John and his son David were buried at Llantrisant Parish Church. The Rev. Cule officiated at the house, around which a mournful crowd of several hundred had congregated. The service was short, but impressive, and the singing was joined in by large crowds. The coffins were carried on biers and the whole seven miles accompanied by a large number of persons, and so large was the number of volunteers anxious to be of service, that there was a sufficient number of bearers without any person having to act in the capacity more than once. In each case the mourners sang Welsh hymns.

Except on very exceptional circumstances, no interments take place at the Glyntaff Cemetery on a Sunday, but the members of the Glyntaff Burial Board had made arrangements in connection with this disaster to allow the burial of anybody on the production of a medical certificate stating that delay would not be desirable. As a matter of fact no interments took place that Sunday.

Operations at the colliery

A '*Western Mail*' reporter wrote: -When I visited the colliery on Sunday afternoon there were not many people about, but considerable numbers had visited the place during the day. Saturday's work was being continued. It will be best, perhaps, to state here that on Saturday the men at work found three lamps, damaged by the fall, and some caps and bundles of clothing, but no bodies. The falls near the scene of the fire are being, as far as possible, cleared,

and, so far as been seen, the fire has practically been extinguished. Steam, however, issues from the debris, and, lest there may be a chance of the flames re-kindling, water is being incessantly poured on the huge mass from two hose pipes.

To prevent the contingency referred to, the current of air also is kept down and the fan is only going at three-quarter speed. It will take another day to get at the fire, if any still exists, and to clear away all the falls will occupy, it is estimated, at least three weeks. Of the huge mass of rubbish brought down from roof and sides a portion has been brought to the surface and tipped, but the larger portion by far has been stowed away in convenient places underground. The bodies of Patrick Sullivan and James Devereaux have not yet been recovered, and the hopes of coming across them are gradually waning.

Church reports

This being a Sunday, of course, many people attended their local church, and throughout south Wales reference was often made to the Great Western Colliery disaster. Here are just a few:

St. Catherine's Church, Pontypridd**: -** On Sunday night, the vicar, the Rev. H. J. Williams referring to the disaster said:"I know of no class of men who should be more imbued with the thought of the uncertainty of life than the colliers. But, alas, it is only too patent that large numbers of them are utterly are utterly thoughtless and careless. Some of the incidents of this catastrophe which have come to light show distinctly that men who are most indifferent and careless can, when the opportunity comes to them, be capable of the most heroic and self-sacrificing deeds.

The fireman who was among the dead was found arm-in-arm with a poor lame man from Treforest, whom he had evidently been helping along. Many, it is said, might have saved themselves, making every effort to save the boys who worked with them, and when they were found they had a boy in their arms. Why, this is the loftiest heroism. Men who could act in this way deserve well of their fellows, and this self-sacrificing shows that such men are not to be despaired of. They have in them some of the spirit of that Christianity which they so much neglect in ordinary life."

Carmel Chapel, Pontypridd: - At the Carmel Baptist Church on Sunday, the pulpit was occupied by the Rev. E. E. Probert, pastor, appropriate references were made in both services to the dire catastrophe which had befallen the neighbourhood. As a solemn commentary upon life's uncertainty he referred to

the fact that on the previous day he had officiated at no less than eight funerals - the funerals of those who on the previous Sabbath were in life and health.

Speaking of life's brevity, it was incidentally noticed that a large proportion of those who had lost their lives in the recent disaster were young in years. "But," said the speaker, "there is a sense in which life is not to be measured by months and years, but by character and deeds. They live long who live well."

The services at Noddfa Baptist Chapel, which is situated near the colliery, were of a unique character. The Rev. W. Davies, brother of the dead fireman and brattice man, was to have preached here, and in his absence under these terribly sad circumstances, public prayer meets were held throughout the day, each prayer having special reference to the disaster.

A remarkable fact, however, is that only one member of this church is among the dead, the fireman and bratticeman referred to being members of the Congregational Church at Hafod. At the Gyfeillion Church, which was under the charge of the Rev. Llewellyn Davies, eleven of the members have been killed who leave widows.

The Rev. L. Hughes, curate in charge at Cymmer said: - "This awful death, awful in its suddenness and its silence, of so many of our fellow-mortals brings home to all of us the solemn thought of the uncertainty and frailty of human life. In spite of all the growth of knowledge and the increase of care for the life and comforts of man, how frail is mankind when at the mercy of the destructive powers around him. When we reflect upon human life and its conditions around us we are filled with a strange sadness.

The majority of those around us are obliged to gain their livelihood in conditions of peril and uncertainty unknown to our ancestors. Of all men the miner, carrying his life in his hand as he enters upon his daily task, ought to cultivate a strong feeling of dependence upon Almighty God and of gratitude for daily protection and guidance. The collier possesses manly courage in abundance, and many of the class show also filial reverence towards God, and very many show fearlessness and recklessness of mind. Such a calamity as the one now before us ought to sober and solemnise he most thoughtless and careless around us.

Chapter seven
Monday, April 17th 1893

On Monday, April 17th, six days after the disaster, a grim discovery was made lending additional horror to the horrible tragedy. The night shift of explorers in the mine below were relieved in the morning by a shift under the command of Morgan Thomas, overman, and David Rees, who at once proceeded to continue the work of clearing the falls in the Main East Level, while another section were engaged in pouring water on the smouldering debris some 500 yards beyond. It was known that the cabin of James Devereaux, the lampman, whose body was missing, was situated about 20 yards beyond the engine which started the fire, and as the explorers in clearing the fall approached this spot a close watch was kept for any indications of the lampman's fate. Eventually the cabin itself was reached, and a picture of horror was revealed.

Poor Devereaux had evidently perished in the cabin without having had the opportunity of making the slightest effort to save himself. The cabin in which he sat had been burned to the ground while he had been inside, and the poor fellow's remains were all but reduced to ashes and were found in a heap mixed up with the charred timber of the cabin below the fall. The remains themselves, principally consisted of whitened bones, and were, of course, beyond recognition; and had it not been for the fact that they were found where his cabin once stood, identification would have been impossible. A coffin was sent down into the mine soon after the discovery, and in this the charred remains were reverently placed, and eventually conveyed to his sister's house in Morgan Street. Forty-three-year-old Devereaux had been lodging at 32 Hopkinstown Road, Hopkinstown, with the family of James Edmunds, who also worked at the same colliery. He had been born in the Irish Republic.

How the seventy-two men were saved

The '*Western Mail*' newspaper of Monday, April 17th reported: It is only fair to mention that, amid the great credit accorded to the young fireman Rosser for his coolness and courage under such trying circumstances, there is some praise due to a man whose name has been, at his own request studiously withheld from the public.

That man is Mr. Henry Thomas, an experienced collier, who, according to Rosser's own version, advised him what to do in regard to those doors and other matters. Thomas had two sons in the colliery, and, fortunately, he and his sons came out alive and unhurt. He had been in several previous accidents in other places, and is a man who is singularly cool-headed and trustworthy. The mention of his name is contrary to his own wishes, and does not distract from

the credit due to Rosser for the courage he displayed in carrying out the suggestion made to him, for by doing so he undoubtedly risked his own life in order to save about seventy others. However, the above paragraph would prove to be controversial. Two days later the following letter appeared in the same newspaper:

Pontypridd April 18th 1893

Dear Sir - Great Western Colliery Disaster

We observe from a paragraph in your paper of the 17th int. that your information suggests that Mr. Henry Thomas advised Thomas Rosser what to do, and that a considerable amount of the credit for the action is due to Thomas. The true facts of the case are that the report of the fire was brought to Thomas Rosser by David Richards, a haulier, who came from the direction of the fire. Rosser was then near the double-parting. Rosser and those near him at that time could feel the oppressiveness of the smoke. Rosser at once sent to the men in the face to come out to the double parting, whilst he himself, accompanied by two men, forced his way with great difficulty through the smoke and opened the door.

This allowed the densest of the smoke to escape into the return. Henry Thomas at the time was in the face, and Rosser himself had opened the doors and returned to the double-parting fully ten minutes before Thomas came out of the face to the double parting after Rosser had returned. We, as men who were present, and know the facts and feel that our lives were saved by Rosser's judgement, coolness, courage and knowledge, feel it is our duty to let the true facts of the case be known, and will be obliged if you will give this publicity through your paper. ***Henry Morgan, 23 Union St, Pontypridd; David Morgan, 109 Hopkinstown Rd; David Evans, Hopkinstown; Henry Thomas, 5 Llewellyn St. Hopkinstown.***

The funerals continue

Large as had been the number of funerals during Saturday and Sunday, the sad work had to be continued throughout Monday, and night was fast spreading itself all over the town and district before the solemn ceremonies were over. The streets of Pontypridd thronged with people; indeed, so general was the turn-out of the population that one could not help but feeling that the townspeople, as well as the people of the district, had realised with terrible force the fact that the Angel of Death had come hovering over the town and stricken down the first-born in many a household. Work had been suspended in many of the most important collieries in the district, and the workmen flocked into the town, and, to their honour be it said, offered their services as bearers, in many instances

Gravestone of James Holbrook & Timothy O'shea at Capel Rhondda, Hopkinstown.

Gravestone of Coleman Williams at Capel Rhondda, Hopkinstown.

without even asking the question whose coffin they were carrying. It was sufficient for them that the body was that of a fellow collier killed by an accident in the mine.

A better illustration of the breadth of disposition to which the miner can raise himself, scarcely be found than this story told by a reporter on the '*Pontypridd and Rhondda Chronicle*': "I was walking along Mill Street, Pontypridd, on Monday, when a considerable number of men came marching together into the town. The foremost, a man of about 50, an experienced collier, and a most respectable man, from Porth, stepped up to me and asked if I knew where they would be most likely to find the smallest funerals, so that they might go in a body and assist the bearers. The incident certainly touched me, and promptly pointing to one and naming others, I noticed that they, quite as promptly, acted upon the suggestion, and carried out their laudable and sensible determination to go and help the weak. There was, however, no difficulty in finding bearers."

Twenty-two funerals took place viz; sixteen in Glyntaff Cemetery, five in Glyntaff Churchyard, and one at Pentyrch.

The first funeral to pass through the town was that of William Thomas of Pwllgwaun, who was interred at Bronllwyn, Pentyrch. The Rev. W. I. Morris, Pontypridd, officiated at the house, and the Sardis Choir attended in strong numbers, and sang the well-known hymn "Beth sydd I mi yn y byd" to the tune of "Aberystwyth." And afterwards a favourite hymn of the deceased's ending in the following line: "Ni gawn orphwys yn y nef," (we shall not be able to rest in heaven) the refrain sounding magnificently. The mournful procession started from the residence of his parents, at Vaughan St, Pwllgwaun, at 12.45, and wended its way through the town

The singing along the streets of Pontypridd when the funeral passed through was magnificent, and notable was this the case when the touching hymn -

Mae'n hyfyd meddwl ambell dro,	It's wonderful to think sometimes,
Wrth Deithio anial le,	When travelling a desolate place

was rendered to the tune of "Diadem" People came to their doors, and the pavements were lined with listeners from one end of Taff Street to the other, and the rousing repeats of "Ni gawn orphwys yn y nef" were taken up until the air thrilled with the melody. The members of the choir wore black and white rosettes, and on the coffin was placed an expensive and handsome wreath, subscribed by the choristers referred to. The deceased had been an active member of the Church at Sardis, and secretary of the choir and Band of Hope.

On the arrival of the funeral of William Thomas at Bronllwyn, Pentyrch, the Rev. W. I. Thomas (Pontypridd) and Rev. J. Davies (Tahirion), officiated. As an energetic worker in connection with the "Cymanfa ganu," the deceased had been somewhat prominently identified with the cause at Sardis, and it was not to be wondered at that the Rev. Morris should have been deeply effected when he attempted to put out the hymn

Mae' nghyfeillion adre'n yned,	My friends go home,
Draw o'm blaen o un I un,	Before myself one by one,
Gan fy ngadael yn amddifad,	Leaving me an orphan,
Fel pererin wrtho' hun	Like a pilgrim by himself.

So striking was the fitness of the words that the reverent gentleman utterly broke down in the task. Daniel Davies, a cousin of William Thomas, who was also a member of the same choir, presented a beautiful wreath.

Arthur Davies, of the Graig, Pontypridd, was buried at the Glyntaff cemetery, but on the way to his long rest the departed was taken to St. David's Chapel, where an impressive service was conducted by the pastor, the Rev. W. Henry. The local Rechabites Lodge, to which the deceased belonged, attended, and there was a large muster in the chapel. At the close of the service the hymn, "Lead kindly light amid the encircling gloom, lead thou me on," was given out and sung with a pathos peculiarly appropriate. The interment took place at the cemetery and the scene was heartrending when the poor little children cried piteously for their "Daddy," "Daddy," whose answering voice could not console them as it would have done only one short week before.

The fourth of the Williams family, John Williams ("Ioan Taf") of Park Terrace, Treforest, was on Monday afternoon buried at the cemetery at Glyntaff, and, as might naturally be expected, the choir and Band of Hope of Ebenezer Congregational Chapel, Rhydyfelen, attended and sang hymns especially selected for the occasion. In the same procession was carried the body of William Lewis, 44, of Bridge St, Treforest, who, like Williams was a member of Ebenezer. The Rev. D. G. Evans, of Rhydyfelen, and E. Gronow, Pontypridd, officiated. On the road and at the graveside the singing was magnificent, and, as was most appropriate for John Williams, who was found dead on his knees in prayer, the mourning choristers rendered with thrilling effect the hymn: -

Dacw'r delyn, dacw'r palmwydd,	That's the harp, that's the palms,
Dacw' ninas yn y ne';	That's the city in heaven;
Ffarwel bellach bob rhyw ofid,	Farewell further grief
Henffych wynfyd yn ei le!	Hail bliss!

Some time afterwards the cortege which conveyed the remains of Tom Lambert, the pugilist, came along, and an incident of a peculiar nature occurred here. The Rev. J. Llewellyn, curate of the Welsh Church, Pontypridd, officiated at the residence, and just as the funeral was about to 'ride' as Welsh people say, a lonely young woman stepped forward, took her place as chief mourner, following the coffin, and kept that place until the churchyard of Glyntaff was reached. It seems that Lambert and his wife - both of them young, had for some reason been separated, and, therefore, the family took no notice of the widow on the day of the interment. But the anger which had parted man and wife in life had now vanished in death, and the young widow, stricken with grief, went to the house, and, as I have stated, took her place as the nearest relative of her dead husband. The interment took place at Glyntaff Church, where the service was conducted by the vicar, the Rev. S. R. Jones, who also officiated at the interment of Charles Cavill, of Zion Street. The young lad, Job Miller, of Mill Street, who was a member of the St. Catherine's Church, was interred at Glyntaff Cemetery, the officiating clergyman being the Rev. D. Evans, and at the grave the vicar.

Fred Nurse and William James Bond, of Rickard Street, were also buried at Glyntaff Cemetery, the service being conducted by the Rev. W. H. Morgan, curate of St. Catherine's. About the same time arrived the procession which accompanied the mortal remains of David John Powell, aged 16, who had been a constant attendant at the Graig Mission Hall, Pontypridd. The members of the Band of Hope of that place mustered strongly, and sang "Beulah Land," a hymn which the deceased boy regarded as his favourite. Evangelist Thomas, Porth, officiated. With regard to Nurse it may be stated that, bowed down with grief, his mother attended St. Catherine's Church to be confirmed on Sunday, and was the person especially referred to in such touching terms by his lordship. The mangled and charred remains of poor Cornelius Hayes were then buried. Father Noonan, the priest in charge of Treforest, accompanied the cortege from the residence, Tramroad Side, to the cemetery, and officiated both at this funeral and that of Lewis Thomas of the same place, both of the deceased having during their lifetime been attendants at the Catholic Church.

An exceptionally large concourse of people escorted the body of Gwilym Howells from Hopkinstown to the cemetery. The deceased was held in high esteem in the neighbourhood, and the family was well known, the father, Mr. William Howells, having for many years been a prominent man in connection with friendly societies, and with all movements affecting the welfare of his fellow workmen. The service was conducted by the Rev. J. Lewis. Thomas Price, Cambrian Place, Treforest, was interred at the cemetery, and as the young man

was a member of the Baptist Church, at Libanus, Treforest, that church was well represented at the funeral. The Rev. Samson Jones, the pastor, officiated, and gave out at the graveside the hymn - "Bydd myrdd o ryfeddodau" (There will be a myriad of wonders) and sung amid such surroundings, theold hymn seemed tolift the people from the sight of open graves and white tombstones to the purer air of "ardal lonydd yr aur delynau" (still place of the gold harps).

Without entering into details concerning the other internment's here, there were altogether sixteen interments at the Glyntaff Cemetery, as the following list, supplied by Mr. Morgan Rees, the superintendent shows: Gwilym Howells, Hopkinstown; William Lewis, BridgeSt, Treforest; David John Powell, Rickard St, Pontypridd; John Williams, Park Terr. Treforest; William James Bond, Rickard St; Arthur Davies, Lewis St, Graig; Frederick William Nurse, Rickard St; Ivor H. Lloyd, Pwllgwaun; Job Miller, Mill St, Pontypridd; Mark Osborne, Glyntaff; Thomas Price, Cambrian Place; Lewis Thomas, Tram Rd, Treforest; Cornelius Hayes, Tram Rd, Treforest; David Prosser, Wood Rd, Treforest; Amaziah Jones, Park St, Treforest; and Morris Potter, Gyfeillion Rd.

At the Glyntaff Churchyard, where the vicar was assisted by the Rev. D. Evans (curate) there were five funerals. Lewis and Bowers, half brothers, were honoured with an especially large cortege, in which the Independent Order of God Templars figured in full regalia, as Bowers was a member of the local lodge.
Just at the time the funeral of William Thomas was starting there was an imposing procession conveying the body of his cousin Daniel Davies, to St Mary's Church, Cowbridge. The Rev. W. I. Morris held a brief service at the house, and the body was placed in a hearse, in which it was taken through the main streets of the town, a large number of vehicles following.

Coleman Williams, a widower of 23 years of age, with two children, of Foundry Road, Hopkinstown, was buried on Monday in the burial ground attached to the Rhondda Baptist Chapel, the Rev. J. R. Jones, Tabernacle, officiating. Williams, young as he was, had already mourned the loss of his wife, and his two children now were bereft of both parents. A melancholic fact in connection with his burial was that the gravedigger of the Rhondda Churchyard was his own father-in-law, but it is needless to add that on this occasion the old man was spared the trying ordeal of digging a grave for his dead daughter's husband.
Amongst the wreaths was a handsome one sent by the Pontypridd Cycle Club, of which the deceased was a prominent member. The day was far advanced ere the gruesome ceremonies were over. Almost all the victims had now been laid to rest, so that all that was visible of the disaster had passed from sight. The dire effects, however, time alone would heal. The remains of Danny O'Shea, 16 years of age and his step brother James Holbrook, who lived in one of the cottages

situated a short distance from the colliery, were also buried at the same churchyard. The funeral was a large and impressive one.

It need scarcely be said that some effecting scenes were witnessed at all the burial places, but the sight at the Glyntaff cemetery was most calculated to impress the eye witness with the appalling character of the disaster which had caused all this havoc, for there were gathered the largest number of mourners, and he who could stand at these open graves must have a heart of stone if he could listen or look on with unconcern. The moving processions seemed interminable, and, while the circumstances of the families, and their relationships to the dead whom they escorted, varied, their woe-begotten faces and forms bowed down with grief, appealed with overwhelming force to a community thrown into daily contact with them.

The singing now sad and low, now sweet as the balmy air of Beulah Land, now expressive of the apprehension felt on Jordan's stormy banks, then triumphant in the faith that tribulation's children will don their snowy garments on the Resurrection morn mingled, as this mingled, with the exhortations of the officiating ministers and the lamentations of the bereaved, was a strange one, even for a country in which colliery disasters are only too prevalent. "Swyn cenedl yw sain canu," (the charm of a nation is the sound of song) says the Welsh bard, and the truth of the saying is verified by the fact that a musical nation like ours can best express not only our joys but its grief in hymns of praise.

The '*Cardiff Weekly Mail*' reported the day thus: "The spot mainly chosen for burial was the Glyntaff Cemetery at Treforest. To this favoured spot many a cortege filed its way until the end of the day. The processions were wonderfully alike, and each was marked by the earnest and reverent sympathy of the public. In the van came a big line of mourners; men who probably in many cases had slight knowledge of the dead, but felt compelled to show respect. This must have been so, for the processions were in most case from 200 to 800 strong. The coffins followed, borne by the stalwart men, relieved at different points, and then a few coaches and wagonettes in which the mourners and the women brought up the rear. It was a striking feature at Pontypridd, this use of brakes and uncovered traps as a mourning carriage. It looked singular, but not unnatural for the whole town had given itself up to mourning, and those who could not walk the two miles to the cemetery were not unwilling to take places in wagonettes and other vehicles of the sort usually associated with pleasure parties.

In some cases a melancholy hymn was sung; but this was unusual. Generally speaking, it was sung as the coffin was borne from the house and resumed when

the procession passed through a village; but the most conspicuous feature of the day's proceedings was the absence of these customary funeral signs. Conspicuous amongst them all was the military aspect given to one of the funerals by the presence of Volunteers. They were few in number, but the procession lost none of its dignity on that account. The red-tuniced men marched in the rear of the band, which played a majestic "Dead March" of Handel's, and behind them were carried the coffin on which the helmet of the dead comrade was placed. In the rear came the mourners, and many others whose sympathies had been excited.

At the graves the scene was in every case pathetic beyond endurance. The solemn hush of that burial, broken only by the calm voice of the minister as he reads the touching service, in the open air and amid scenery so impressive, is in itself tense with deep emotion, but the presence of women, the near relatives, adds to the sorrow of the scene. Their unrestrained grief moved the little crowd. There were many who could not maintain their composure, and in some instances the spectacle was distressing in the extreme. Little was said, save in prayer; nor was the ceremony too long continued. Small space of time was needed for the due solemnity of the occasion; small space could, indeed be given. Each funeral was replaced by another; meanwhile two or three were then treading the path to a grave while one was in progress. A clear impression of the funeral is impossible to give.

It needs that the reader should imagine the town sending out in each direction and along every road a ceaseless flow of funeral parties, at different times and to different spots, each with its own mourners and its body of sympathetic friends. For several hours the spectacle might be seen, unvarying in its appearance, until its constant character became too much and an excess of emotion left the spectator exhausted. The dead are beyond our reach and for them nothing can be done, but their relatives are still with us, and while their grief calls for universal sympathy, their needs demand prompt and generous aid. Great credit was due to Mr. William Abraham MP; for allowing no time to be lost in soliciting such aid by holding a public meeting at Pontypridd." The funeral obsequies were as follows: -

SATURDAY'S INTERMENTS
April 15th

Carmarthenshire - William and Thomas Davies, brothers. Buried at Pontyberem, Carmarthenshire
North Wales - John Williams, Merioneth.
Machen - Daniel Spooner, at Machen Church.

Rhondda Baptist Church - James Holbrook & Daniel O'Shea
Siloam, Gyfeillon - William Edmunds
Glyntaff Cemetery - Adolphus Dodge, William Thomas Coles, John Roberts, Philip Jones, Thomas Henry Williams, Albert J. Pearce, Robert Edmunds, John Nicholas, Charles Godfrey, John Maddock, George Thorne, William Hughes, Jesse Titley, William Davies, George Roderick, George Bartlett, Frank Grainger and David Jones.
Llantrisant Church - Joseph Thomas & John Llewellyn.
Llantwit Church - Lewis Jacob, Morgan Williams and his two sons Lewis and William.

SUNDAY'S INTERMENTS

April 16th

Pentyrch - Ernest Thomas Prosser
Llantrisant - Llantrisant Parish Church, William & David John, father and son.

MONDAY'S INTERMENTS

April 17th

Pentyrch - Bronllwyn Congregational Chapel, William Thomas.
Cowbridge - St Mary's, Cowbridge, Daniel Davies (a cousin of the above)
Rhondda Baptist Chapel - Coleman Williams.
Glyntaff Church - William Bowers and his half-brother, George Lewis. Thomas Lambert, William Wheeler, Charles Cavill.
Glyntaff Cemetery - between 2 and 4 o'clock on Monday afternoon the following interments took place: Job Miller, David Prosser, David J. Powell, Fred Nurse, William J. Bond, Gwilym Howells, Morris Potter, Arthur Thorne, Ivor H. Lloyd, Mark Osborne, Amaziah Jones, William Lewis, Thomas Price, Cornelius Hayes, Lewis Thomas, Arthur Davies and John Williams (son of Morgan Williams whose two youngest sons were also killed).
Hafod - John Thomas.

TUESDAY MARCH 2nd

Glyntaff - Patrick Sullivan

Latest incidents

A representative of the '*Western Mail*' had an interview with Mr. Bramwell, the local chief agent of the Great Western Colliery Co., at the colliery offices on Monday, and was assured that everything that could possibly be resorted to was being done in order to remove the remaining falls in the colliery, and that, in

addition to having recovered the body of James Devereaux, the lampman, that morning, it was hoped that the remaining body, that of Patrick Sullivan, a journey rider (living with his wife at Porthyglo), would also be found.

Mr. Bramwell stated on Monday that the body of Devereaux, which was reduced to a skeleton by the heat of the fire, was recovered in the burnt-down lamp-room where the poor fellow met his death bravely at his post. The charred remains were brought to the surface, and having been placed in a coffin, which was ready for the purpose, they were carried on the shoulders of a number of willing comrades to the residence of Devereaux's sister, at Matthew's Court, Morgan St, Pontypridd. The body of James Devereaux was not buried locally and perhaps was returned to his family home in the Republic of Ireland.

In conversation with a reporter, Mr. Daniel Davies, Pantygraigwen, said, "One of my sons was killed there. He was a good boy, too. He was only seventeen years of age, but he was a most dutiful son. I had two sons in the pit at the time - one was taken and the other left! The other boy was in the 'dips,' and he was brought up alive in the first lot."

Support for the bereaved

At a meeting of the Cambrian Miners' Association on Monday, April 17th , Mr. David Brookes, Cwm Cynon, at the request of the meeting proposed a vote of condolence with the widows, orphans and relatives of the sufferers by the Great Western Colliery disaster. He described how in past times widows left by those killed in colliery accidents had no other help to look for but the workhouse, and he was thankful all that was changed now, owing as he believed to the efficiency of that Association. The vote was passed in silence.

Mr. William Abraham M.P; said that their valley had once more been visited by one of those fearful calamities that were the dread of every colliery district. The angel of death had passed over cutting down many whose death they greatly mourned. The visitation was a new experience. The chokedamp had been replaced by smoke and the firedamp by consuming fire. They were told it was caused by a spark through a friction of the brake falling upon the wood and oil canvass, and so setting fire to the timbers. It was almost incredible, almost inconceivable, that such a terrible accident had occurred. He considered that fixtures of engines underground and the arching around should be constructed of stone. There was one important matter connected with this disaster that would have to be cleared up. It was taken that the fire broke out in the colliery about 2.50 in the afternoon. If it was so, how was it that men toiling in the inner workings had not been immediately informed at the outbreak of fire, of the

danger, and be allowed to go out at once? If the fire was not discovered soon after the outbreak, how was it discovered? These were very important questions. Far was it for him to suggest that the management had been in any way negligent in the matter. The questions that he had raised would persistently rise themselves upon all practical men investigating the cause of the disaster.

Without the least desire to prejudice or prejudge the case of one of the best colliery companies and the most efficient and practically-managed colliery, it was evident the affair was so terrible that it demanded the most rigid and thorough investigation. He thought he could speak on behalf of the district that whatever could be done to find out the root of the evil and to find out a remedy, it must be done, and the Cambrian Association would not be backward in doing its duty. Further, in order to show their sympathy with relatives of the deceased in a practical manner, they considered that more than the passing this resolution of condolences should be done.

They were glad that one of the collieries - the Albion (Cilfynydd) - had already adopted a resolution contributing £100 towards alleviating the distress of the bereaved families. They had been told that they had no organisation in the district but believed that there were 20 collieries in the valleys that could afford to subscribe a similar sum to that contributed by the Albion Colliery. His object was to call the attention of the district to the necessity of affording immediate relief to the widows and orphans. In many instances parents had lost their sons, and the sufferings of those were worthy of serious considerations and sympathy of the Association, and sympathy in a practical way (hear, hear).

He suggested that the meeting should accept the responsibility of sending the bereaved relatives a substantial sum, and if the meeting thought proper, to forward a sum of money to relieve some of the most distressed cases. He was glad to find that the Great Western Colliery Co.'s workmen had a comparatively strong fund, out of which they had paid several outstanding contributions in accordance with the rules of the fund (hear, hear). The Association had contributed hundreds of pounds to the widows and orphans of the Tondu disaster, and as the victims in that explosion were outside the Rhondda district the Association should certainly not do less and should do more, or make a strenuous effort to render a substantial pecuniary support to the unfortunate families of the workmen who had been faithful members of the Cambrian Association up to the time of the dreadful calamity. The '*Glamorgan Free Press commented*': *"*If Pontypridd was first in the field, this town is not to have a monopoly of the privilege of contributing to the relief of the distressed. Funds are open or about to be opened in London, Cardiff, Aberdare, Merthyr and other

places. The Albion Colliery, Cilfynydd, won its spurs by being the first body of workmen to move in the cause. A contribution of £100 did them a great honour."

Mr. Edward Llewellin, secretary of the Pontypridd Football Club (Pontypridd RFC), was arranging a match with the Newport team next Saturday, in aid of the widows and orphans for the victims of the fire in the Great Western Colliery**.** The club had already voted £100 out of their funds to the same object. At a meeting on Monday night the Cardiff Football Club (Cardiff RFC) voted to donate £50 to the fund. The final words on this sad day at Pontypridd go to '*Morien*' in the '*Western Mail*' who wrote on Monday afternoon:

Touching incidents

This, I believe, has been the saddest day ever witnessed in this neighbourhood. Twenty-two funerals, accompanied by several thousands of both sexes dressed in mourning, passed here - seventeen through Cemetery Road to the neighbouring cemetery, and five into Glantav Churchyard. No black pall covered any of the coffins and biers, but the 'arks of the dead', as coffins are called in the Welsh language, were naked to the eyes, and the brass ornaments reflected the sunbeams as the arks were conveyed on the shoulders of earnest men, to be deposited most reverently each tenant in his narrow bed.

So attached were the people to the custom of having floral wreaths at funerals that hardly a single coffin was without them. Families of the dead who had no flowers of their own went, as I can personally testify, to beg laurels leaves and branches of lilac with flowers from those who possessed those articles. The masses often think deeper than is given them credit for. They understand the whisperings of Nature when they would feel bewildered among the fireworks of orators.

The attendances at these funerals were very large. In front of "Ioan Tav's" (John Williams) coffin walked his old choir. As they slowly walked along the road the choir and people sang the dirges of Wales, and the mountains seemed to echo them back. The effect of these dirges - and they were rendered by a people with hearts charged with grief-was beyond description touching. Inside the gates of the cemetery the bier on which was the coffin of the choir leader was lowered. The two choirs then formed on each side of the path, flanked by tall bushes of evergreen with the chapels, and sang the Welsh hymn, "Ar Ian Iorddonen ddofn," &c; by the young curate, the late "Ieuan Glan Geirionydd," the tune being "Moab."

The effect thrilled and almost overwhelmed all, the tears fell copiously over many a cheek. Then the journey to the open grave was resumed. After this came the coffin of William Lewis, and it seemed, by what one saw, that he had as much hold on the hearts of the throngs as the lamented one gone before had. The rites at both graves came to a close by all singing "Bydd myrdd o ryfeddodau."

The funeral of Arthur Davies was accompanied from Pontypridd by most of the leading tradesmen, as well as the general public, including all the members of St. David's, the young widow leaning on the arm of a friend, and four little children, the eldest not eight years old, following the mother two abreast, and each two with linked hands. Intense sympathy was manifested, and there was hardly a dry eye to be seen. It appears that the children in all number five, the youngest being a baby in arms. The young widow, when she saw the coffin lowered into the grave, cried out as from a heart ready to break, "O! Dadi! Dadi! Dadi!" She seemed to interpret the language of the little ones behind her, and to utter the familiar name used at home. The effect was supremely touching, and the scene which followed can never be forgotten. Everybody wept. Five members of St. David's Church are among the slain. As the coffins came, one after another, after a considerable interval between, the scene seemed to deepen in pathos with each new arrival.

Nine of the jury selected for the coming public inquiry into the cause of the calamity were at the Great Western Colliery on Tuesday, April 18th to become acquainted with the workings. It was evidence of the spirit of thoroughness and the determination to master every detail essential in arriving at a conscientious conclusion. There were gentlemen, several who had the command of a technical insight into mine preparations. The members of the jury who visited the colliery were:- Mr. James Roberts, Taff Vale House, Treforest, manager of the Treforest Steelworks; Mr. W. Jones Waterworks, Pontypridd; Mr. N. Shipton; Mr. S. Shipton, Llanwonno School Board, Gelliwastad, engineer; Mr. W. Norman, Half Moon Inn, Pontypridd; Mr. John Jones, Bluebell Inn, Pontypridd; Mr. James Williams, Tyfica Crescent, Pontypridd, building contractor; Mr. Walter Gay, Maritime St, Penrhiw Colliery; Mr. Horatio Rowland, Hollybush Inn, Hopkinstown; Mr. W. Phillips, Pontypridd, assistant overseer. The last three named gentlemen also visited the Four-feet landing of the Tymawr pit. Mr. W. Evans, sub-agent, accompanied the jurymen. Other members of the jury were Mr. D. Morris, mechanical engineer, chainworks, foreman; James Price, Berw Rd, retired colliery manager; J.Edwards, Ceridwen Terrace, Pontypridd, retired colliery manager; D. Rowlands, the Grove; R. Morgan, the Grove, schoolmaster; S. Shipton, the Grove, clerk to the board; J. Snape, Gelliwasted, engineer; and D. Williams, Graigwen Rd, Pontypridd, collier.

The '*Pontypridd and Rhondda Chronicle*' had one of their reporters with the jury that descended the mine, and gave this account: "On Tuesday afternoon I was accorded permission to accompany the jury on their visit to the scene of the disaster, descending the shaft so as to see for ourselves the site of the engine at which the terrible fire originated. The descent was made through the Hetty Pit, and the scene of the big fall continually referred to was visited. So far as this part of the mine and the entrance to the East Dip(through which over 70men escaped) a thorough examination was made, but over the temporary road the fall itself towards the East Far End, the party was not allowed to travel, as the top was "working" a little even then. It was observed that several of the visitors chipped off, as relics, pieces of the fatal brake which is supposed to have emitted the sparks which set the pit on fire. The party was conducted by Mr. Hugh Bramwell, the agent, and Mr. W. James, the underground manager, and, after remaining underground for some time and ascending the shaft, one or two went down the other shaft to see the spot whence two men fell through the pit during the excitement caused by the first news of the fire. When below, however, the party became a somewhat scattered one.

Mr. Bramwell and several of the jury went to the pit bottom, while Mr. William James remained with some others at the fall. I was accompanied by Mr. Watson, a "Graphic" artist, who wished to sketch scenes underground, and consequently we made some stoppages on our own account on the way out. By and by I heard the rumbling of a coming tram in the distance, and presently a voice of someone singing as he followed a horse. The tram stopped and we were hailed by the haulier, who had halted his horse in order to give us an opportunity to pass without difficulty. We passed on and Mr. W. Evans, miners' agent, who followed us, the artist sketched the group - tram, horse, haulier and agent with the effective foreground of a long row of electric lamps at the top, above the road. We started, and from the distance in this subterranean passage came once more the sound of the voice of the haulier, as he leaned on the side of his tram singing:

Myfi'r pechadur penna	I am the greatest sinner
Fel yr wyf, fel yr wyf,	As I am. As I am.
Wynehaf I calffaria	To calvary
El yr wyf.	As I am.

We stopped and listened to the weird music floating down the arched stone roof of the mine, and heard the same voice raised as if rendering the striking lines – especially striking after the awful accident in this colliery:

Nid oes o fewn yr hollfyd	There isn't within the whole wild world
Ond hwn I gadw bywyd;	But this to keep life

Yng nghanol mor o adfyd,	In the middle of a sea of adversity
Fel yr wyf,	As I am
Mi ganaf gan f'Anwylyd,	I'll sing
Fel yr wyf,	As I am.

At the monthly delegate meeting of the Cambrian Miners' Association, held on Monday, April 17th 1893 at the Windsor Hotel, Ton, Ystrad, Mr. J. Brooks presiding, the question of offering relief to the relatives of the sufferers of the Great Western Pit came up for consideration, and was moved by the delegate from Cwmcynon, and seconded by the delegate of the Albion Colliery, that the heartiest sympathy be extended to the widows and orphans (hear, hear).

Mr. W. Abraham, M. P. (Mabon); in supporting the motion, said they ought to consider how to avoid such accidents. The timber in the framework should be replaced by stone or iron (cheers). The heading should be arched with brick or stone, and cast iron brakes should be used instead of wrought iron, for they were told that sparks emitted from the first named would not even, if it fell upon the most combustible stuff, cause a fire (hear, hear).

Strong jets of water should also be thrown upon the brakes whilst at work. They were told that the fire ignited by this engine was discovered at 2.30 p.m. If that was so, why were the men not informed immediately of the danger and ordered to come out at once, and if the fire was not discovered at once, why not?

Proceeding, the hon. member said that something more than the passing of a resolution of condolence was necessary at this juncture, and he was glad to find, that one of the largest collieries in the district, had already contributed £100 towards the relief fund, yet people said they had no organization. We suggest that the organization should now send a sum of money to alleviate the immediate suffering as they had done when the Park Slip incident occurred (110 killed on August 26th 1892), and decide later on what to do in the way of putting levies on the collieries to further relieve the distress. (applause). The resolution was then put to the meeting and carried by the delegates all standing.

On the motion of the Llwynypia delegate, seconded by the Ynyshir delegate, in was then unanimously resolved that £100 should immediately be sent, and put in the charge of the officials of the Association to relieve the most distressing cases. The delegate from the Great Western Colliery having heartily thanked the meeting, a unanimous vote of thanks to the outside public for their support was

passed, and it was ordered that each colliery should raise a levy for further augmenting the fund.

Charity rugby games

Amidst all the public fund-raising the Pontypridd Football (rugby) Club were doing their bit to help the bereaved. The secretary of the Pontypridd club, Mr. Edward Llewellin, and the Athletic committee, with commendable promptitude acted upon the urgency of the case with a view to increasing the funds. In connection with others, Mr. Llewellin had been busily engaged in promoting the affair. The Newport team were asked to go on the matter, and, with characteristic generosity fell in with the proposal and agreed to play a match wherein their principal players should take part. The event had been the topic of conversation amongst local football enthusiasts prior to the game, and the committee had worked assiduously and with untiring energy in pushing forward the sales of tickets, with the result that numerous quantities had been sold. In the selection of players, Newport had secured as good a team as possible considering the lateness of the season. Pontypridd in this respect availed themselves of the best talent that could be obtained.

That evening, Tuesday, April 18th 1893, after five o'clock, the roads leading to Taff Vale Park were crowded with persons wending their way to the field of battle. The four-thirty trains had brought down quite an exodus of strangers from Newport, Cardiff and the Rhondda. The town itself presented a lively appearance, crowds assembling outside the Victoria Hotel, the headquarters of the Pontypridd club, and outside the New Inn Hotel, where the visitors put up. At about five fifteen, almost every available space on the Taff Vale Park was occupied, and every point of vantage taken up. The enclosure, grandstand, etc., were lined with crowds of eager spectators discussing the probabilities of the match. As the players entered the arena they were greeted with loud and continuous cheering. The Pontypridd team were the first to make their appearance, followed soon by the noted wearers of the Black and Amber. On the spin of a coin, fortune favoured the genial home captain, Ack Llewellin, who decided to kick-off from the town end. An exciting match, in which the result did not really matter, ended in a victory for Newport by 1 Goal (a converted try) and 1 try, to Pontypridd's two tries. On Tuesday, April 25th 1893 the second charity match was played on the Taff Vale ground. This time a game against a Swansea XV was not so well attended. It was seen that Swansea was not well represented, there being only three of their first team in the party. A good game was witnessed and several Morriston men took the other positions. Pontypridd emerged victors from this game by one goal and one try to nil. A total of £50 raised over the two games was handed to the Great Western Disaster Fund.

Later in the year, especially during the summer of 1893, many events were organised in south Wales to raise funds for the dependants of the disaster, and annual events were also contributing. In the first week of July there was a charity rugby match between the higher and lower Rhondda Valley which was contested at the Ystradfechan Field, Treorky, before a large concourse of spectators**.** There was also a sports meeting held at the Partridge& Pontrhondda ground when there was a large crowd and 10 guineas was contributed to the orphans of the victims and at the conclusion of the sports the majority of competitors subscribed towards the same fund.

Operations at the colliery

The '*Western Mail*' of Wednesday, April 19th reported: The excitement over the sad disaster at the Great Western Colliery has practically subsided, but frequent enquiries are being made as to the operations going on at the colliery. The question and answer is almost a stereotyped one. Clearing is still being carried on, now from both ends of the fall.

There was, however, a little episode on Monday night which gave a fresh impetus to gossip. It appears that the workers below ground came across a little fire in a lodge used by the roadman, and it was, of course, promptly extinguished. The huge fall will take some time to clear, and all possible effort is being concentrated on the work.

No coal has yet been raised, and the workmen who are not direct sufferers by the accident will, consequently, feel the pinch of poverty in some instances, for a week has elapsed since they have been allowed to work, and there is no need to remind anyone of the slackness of trade which has prevailed for some time here, as elsewhere.

The latest information is that 63 lives were lost, and that there were dependants of 21 widows; 39 children under 13 years of age; 2 mothers dependant on their sons; and one sister depending on earnings of brother.

Meeting of the workmen

A return to work

On Wednesday, April 19th 1893, a general meeting of the colliers took place at the Workmen's Hall, Hopkinstown under the presidency of Mr. Morgan Jenkins, chairman of the Workmen's Committee, where there was a good attendance. It was reported that an examination as to the state of the colliery had been made, and had proved so satisfactory that workmen might be able to resume work without fear or danger on the

following Monday the 24th inst. in the Seven-feet and Four-feet seams, but not in the East Far End, so much referred to in the disaster for some time. Arrangements were made for delegates to visit the bereaved relatives for the purpose of distributing the £100 donated by the Cambrian Miners Association, to which body a hearty vote of thanks for their generosity was passed. The following resolution was passed:

"That we, the workmen of the Great Western Colliery desire to express our gratitude to Mr. Abraham, M. P; our Agent, for the very prompt manner in which he has convened public meetings, both at Cardiff and Pontypridd, to alleviate the sufferings and the distress of the widows and fatherless children of our dead comrades who met their death in this terrible disaster at the above named colliery."

It was stated that Mr. Daniel Thomas, colliery proprietor, Pwllgwaun, had personally called upon each of the widows and had presented them all with substantial gratuities. The announcement was hailed with applause and thanks to Mr. Thomas for his timely munificence was unanimously accorded. Mention was also made of the £100 voted by the Albion Colliery workmen; £20 voted by the executive of the Miners Federation of Great Britain towards the Central Relief Fund, and they were cordially thanked, as also were all the subscribers to the fund. Mrs. Olive Talbot, placed £40 at the disposal of the Vicar of Llanwonno for the immediate relief of distress for sufferers in that parish.

Relief fund grows in Pontypridd

In the town all the various societies, clubs and establishments had all began to raise money for the Great Western Disaster Fund. Later in the month the Glamorgan Free Press carried this report:

Great Western Colliery Accident

WIDOWS & ORPHANS FUND - PONTYPRIDD

President; A. Thomas, Esq. MP; Vice President: W. Abraham, Esq.; (Mabon) MP Treasurer: A. S. Cobb Esq; London & Provincial Bank, Hon. Sec. Samuel Shipton.

Sir or Madam

At a meeting of the Central Committee held at the Town Hall, Pontypridd on April 26th 1893, it was decided to issue a collecting box to the various Colliery Proprietors, Land Owners and Ministers of Religion in the district, for the purpose of raising subscriptions towards the 26 widows and 45 children who had been left destitute by the accident by fire at the Great Western Colliery. You are earnestly invited to contribute towards the fund and also to bring this appeal to the notice of your friends.

Great Western Colliery, £500; Directors of the company, £400; Lord Tredegar, £500; The Marquis of Bute, £100 ; Mrs. Hester Jenkins (owner of the Tymawr Estate) £100; Messrs. Cory Bros., £105. Welsh Union Football, £105. Taff Vale Railway Co.£105; Mr. T. H. Williams JP, £100; London Provincial Bank, £105; Albion Colliery workmen, £100; Lord Windsor; Messrs. Dr. L. W. & T. W. W. Morgan (Havod), £100; Mr. Alfred Thomas MP, £50; Messrs. George Insole; £100; Capt W. Evans, London; National Provincial Bank, £100; Mr. Godfrey Clarke,£25; Lord Windsor, £50; Mrs. Godfrey Clarke, £25; Mrs. Llewellyn, (Raglan Hall) £50; Mr. Clifford Cory, £25; Mr. H. Llewellyn Grover, £25; Mr. Edward Currie,£50; Sir William Thomas Lewis, £20; Mrs. Miles (New Inn), £25; Judge Williams, £20;

Messrs. Morgan Rees and Brace (Solicitors), £20; Mrs. Arlton Fothergill, £25; Mr. H. Lewis JP; £20; Dr. Lecky, £20; Mr. Blandy Jenkins JP £25; Mr. Ignatius Williams JP, £20; His Honour Judge Williams, £25; Mr. Henry Lewis (Greenmeadow) £20; Sir W. T. Lewis, £20; Mr. Walter H. Morgan Rees & Bruce £20; Mr. George Griffiths JP £20; Dr. H. Naunton Davies £10; Rhondda Valley Brewery Co, £20; Mrs. P. Gowan £10; Captain Williams, Pontypridd £20; Mr. H. T. Wales £10; Capt. Morgan Lindsay £15; Mr. David Leyshon, £10; Mr. G. Lenox JP £10; Mr. W. H. Mathias, £10; Mr. H. M Daniels JP, £10; Mr. C. E Whitting £10; Mr. Daniel Thomas (Pwllgwaun Colliery), £10; Mr. H. N. Gregory (Ynysangharad), £10; Mr. Hardy(Patent Pick Co.) £10; Mr. H. Rowland (Hollybush Inn), £10; Mr. Samuel Shipton, £5-5s; Mr. Hopkin Smith, £5; Mr. D. H. Evans (London) £5-5s; Mr. Edward Phillips (Pontypridd), £10; Mr. J. Evans & Co. Drapers, Pontypridd £10-10s; South Wales Tobacco Co, £10-10s; Messrs. Richards & Ross, (Drapers) £10-10s; Messrs.Williams & Co, £10-10; Messrs. Crompton & Co. (Pontypridd) £10-10s; The Rev. W. Bruce, £10; Dr.'s Lewis and Lyttle, Pontypridd, £10-10s; Mr. F. W. Scott £10; Mr. Graeme Ogilvile, London £10; Messrs. Curtis & Harvey £10; Church wardens of Glyntaff Church, £5-10-4d; and many others totaling £2325-10-6d

Tradesmen within Pontypridd also made special appeals to their suppliers etc. to make donations to the disaster and Mr. Protheroe, a local grocer was one of the first to start collecting for the disaster fund. The local newspaper also carried this report: With the laudable desire to utilise every means for utilising the fund now being raised on behalf of the sufferers for the late fateful terrible accident, a local businessman, Mr. Prothero (grocer), had applied to many of his business friends at a distance, and he was to be heartily congratulated on his success. All the letters accompanying the subscriptions were so promptly and liberally

worthy of publication, asserting to show the sympathy of the writers with the sufferers. An example of which goes as follows:

Anglo-Swiss Condensed Milk Co.
10 Mark Lane London April 20th 1893

Mr. Prothero Taff St. Pontypridd

Dear Sir

We are in receipt of yours of the 18th, re: the terrible disaster at the colliery in your town. We have been informed of the same by our representative, and had also gathered particulars from the newspaper reports. We can quite understand, however, that even with this information, that a very slight idea of the terribleness of the catastrophe can be realised by those of us at a distance. We, however, know that needs of widows and orphans suddenly plunged into such grief would add considerably to their grief. To meet the former in some way, we have pleasure in handing you our cheque for £10-10s-0d, which please accept, with the company's sympathy for the sufferers. We are, Sir, ***Yours very truly. J. M. Bilson (manager).***

Plea for a mortuary

The people of the town were left to reflect on the nature of death in the community and this was also seen in the local newspaper, the '*Glamorgan Free Press*,' who wrote in its '*Local & general notes*' column:

"Pontypridd has of late years progressed in an exceptional degree, and naturally the various selected bodies have been sorely taxed in endeavouring to cope with the special difficulties which have arisen from the sudden increase in the population and the general development of the district. We venture, however, to suggest that there is one matter which urgently needs consideration and adoption, viz; the provision of a public mortuary. Unfortunately, fatal accidents have occurred in the vicinity necessitating the removal of the bodies to the workhouse mortuary, to await an inquest.

Whether the Master acts within the strict letter of the law, in admitting to the building the body of a person who is not in forma pauperise we cannot say, but we can certainly appreciate that he exercises commendable discretion, by erring - if at all - on the charitable side. At the same time it is easily conceivable that there is a very strong element of danger in removing amongst the precincts of an institute of this kind, the bodies of persons who may have been suffering from

diseases of an infectious nature. In the best interests of the inmates, as well as the officials, we plea for remedial measures."

Lessons of the Disaster - the danger of old mines

The '*Western Mail*' of Friday, April 21st wrote: - Operations are being carried out day to day with the object of clearing the falls, and coal-cutting is likely to resume today (Friday) in the Seven-feet seam, and in the remaining portions of the colliery (except the East Far End) on Monday. Sullivan's body has not yet been found.

A correspondent wrote: - The fact that the jurymen have personally examined the colliery is an earnest sign of the rigid investigation which may be expected to take place into the case of the colliery calamity. The great lesson of colliery accidents is prevalent for the future, and looking back through the long list, it is evident enough that many a valuable fact has been gleaned and made thereafter to figure greatly in local or imperial regulations. Colliery authorities, while discussing these things, point significantly to the fact that we have not yet come to the critical period in the life of a steam colliery, its closing years - for the time when the greatest depth comparable with workings has been sunk and the widest ramifications afforded by its area has been reached.

In many of our great collieries in the Rhondda and in other districts, which have been working for over 30 or 40 years, the point necessitating the exercise of great care has now been, or will soon be, reached, and it behoves the adoption of the fullest appliance in the way of prevention. A list of the oldest may be useful, thus, the first accident at Dinas happened in 1844; Risca, 1846; Morfa, 1849; Middle Duffryn, 1852; Cymmer, 1856; Dinas 1849; Duffryn 1858, Ferndale1867; Pentre, 1871; and Abercarn 1878.

It would be very gratifying to many colliers to see the adoption of Mr. Kirkhouse's "harbour of refuge" in every pit, but, so far, only one has been put up, and that is kept in good working order at Tylorstown. Then, every deep sinking should certainly be provided with the 'Fleuss' apparatus, or some invention of the kind for extinguishing fires; and it would figure in the list of preventions and at a certain pit, by the underground winding-engine, there should be protecting brick or stone work and roofing of steel instead of timber.

The following day, April 22nd a follow up report stated: - The recent calamity has naturally turned the attention of the public and professional minds to the advisability of devising some means of averting, if possible, the terrible loss of life which unfortunately occurs. It is, we think, a suitable opportunity of calling

public attention to an idea which has been patented for several years in France, Belgium, and United States and England.

We refer to the 'harbour of refuge' scheme of Mr. Herbert Kirkhouse, managing director of the Tylorstown collieries. Mr. Kirkhouse is a colliery expert of acknowledged repute, and the scheme formulated by one with such a varied experience will command the respectful attention of those engaged in the mining world. The following outlines of the scheme in vogue at the Tylorstown and other collieries may, therefore be interesting. The construction of these refuges present no current difficulty. They should be built of boiler plates with a cushion of nonconducting substances, so that in case of an underground fire the men could seek shelter in them. The great question of a continuous supply of fresh air would be solved by pipes conducted from the surface. The refuges should always be provided with food, and the present system of preserves would lend every assistance to such a demand. There can, however, be scarcely any difficulty in the provision of arrangements for the inmates of the refuges. The invention reflects the kindest charity of the inventor. We heartily wish it every attention from those interested in colliery affairs, as we feel sure that any scheme for averting the fatal results of these disasters will have their warmest sympathy.

Interview with survivor

One of the correspondents of the '*Glamorgan Free Press*' later had an interview with one of the workmen who escaped - a young man named William John, living in Wood Road, Treforest, whose life for a time was in peril, and whose narrative still further showed that much was due to the coolness and self-possession of Thomas Rosser. William John's father worked on the day of the accident at the Great Western Colliery at a parting about a mile from the scene of the fire. Strange to say, he left his work on the Tuesday at half-past-four, and did not even know of the fire in the adjacent pit until he got to the end of the Rhondda Road, where he met his wife, who acquainted him with the rumour in the town. Together they returned to the pit only to hear the sad news that their son was entombed in the raging fire. William John said that about quarter-to-two he was working with seventeen others in the Ostler's Heading, East Main Dip. "When at work a young man named George Fletcher, a roadman, came to us, and in an excited manner informed us that there was something seriously the matter. He told us to come as far as the double parting. The sight of the smoke confirmed the hitcher's contention that something was the matter which needed all of us to head for the parting." "We had gone but fifteen yards before the smoke became almost stifling," he continued. "There were 150 yards to go before we could arrive at the parting. After great difficulty we got out there and found that there were a large number of colliers there before us who had

gleaned from the smoke that something was the matter. The foreman, Thomas Rosser, was there. Rosser got us together and told us to wet our cravats and put them around our mouths. There were about 72 of us together now at the parting and we followed Rosser's suggestion. Rosser next told us to lie down at the double-parting. We were in this position in our wet cravats from quarter-to-two until three o'clock or half-past-three. Rosser told us that if he could manage to open another return door they could possibly prevent smoke from coming in their direction. Most of the men were now becoming excited. Questions were asked whether or not they could make their escape out some other way." Rosser said "If you listen to me, we will stop here."

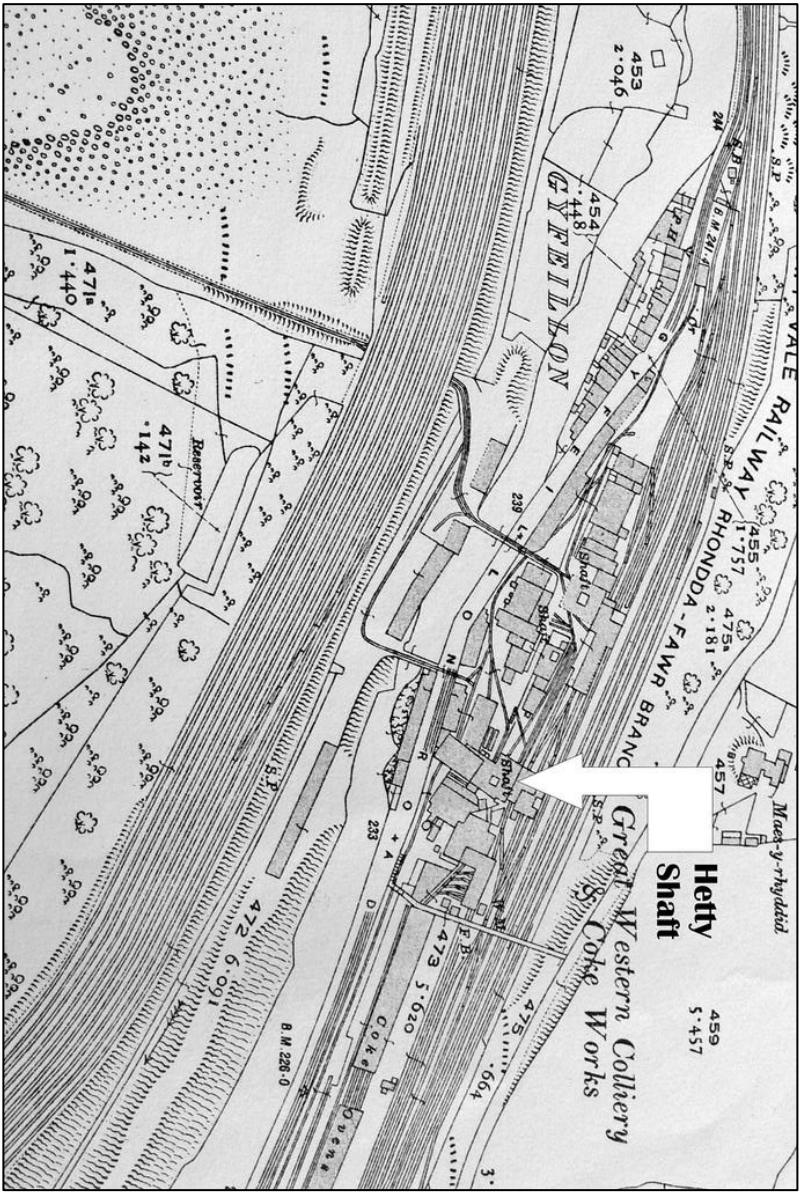
"In the meantime," said John, "Rosser went exploring. It was not half-past-three. Shortly afterwards he came back and removed us to another return door 100 yards further up, and he put a brattice door up. The smoke was proceeding so rapidly that this was a welcome change. By means of the brattice door the smoke was diverted to the old workings return. We were here from about 4 or 6 or half-past until we heard someone approaching. All this time we were in a bath of perspiration, and when we heard the shouts our hearts bounded with joy. In the darkness it could not be discerned for some time who was coming. Some of us asked Rosser what he thought about the Far End men, the men who had now been proved as suffocated. Rosser said he thought that they stood a better chance than we did as they had the Tymawr pit to run to. We had only one road to escape by and that was along the main road where the fire was raging. This outlook was anything but comforting. He asked again if we would follow his instructions and we answered in the affirmative. He told us that when we were making our way through the smoke and fire the boys should be first so that the older men could pick them up if they fell exhausted. There was one old man who kept up bravely. He next told us to put out all lights with the exception of twenty."

John, continuing his account of the accident said, "It was about half-past-six o'clock when William Rosser (brother of our leader), Lewis James, two foremen of the east side and Morgan Thomas, overman of the pit, came up to where we were. They, it appears, had fought their way through the fire and smoke to us. The first question William Rosser put was as to his brother Tom. Was he alive? Was he safe? He asked these questions tearfully. Tom Rosser, who was some yards away from us circumventing the works as to the presence of gas, was called and he came up, and a sight that I shall never forget to my dying day was when they met. Both brothers embraced and wept affectionately like two children, offering up prayers to the almighty that they were not separated in death.

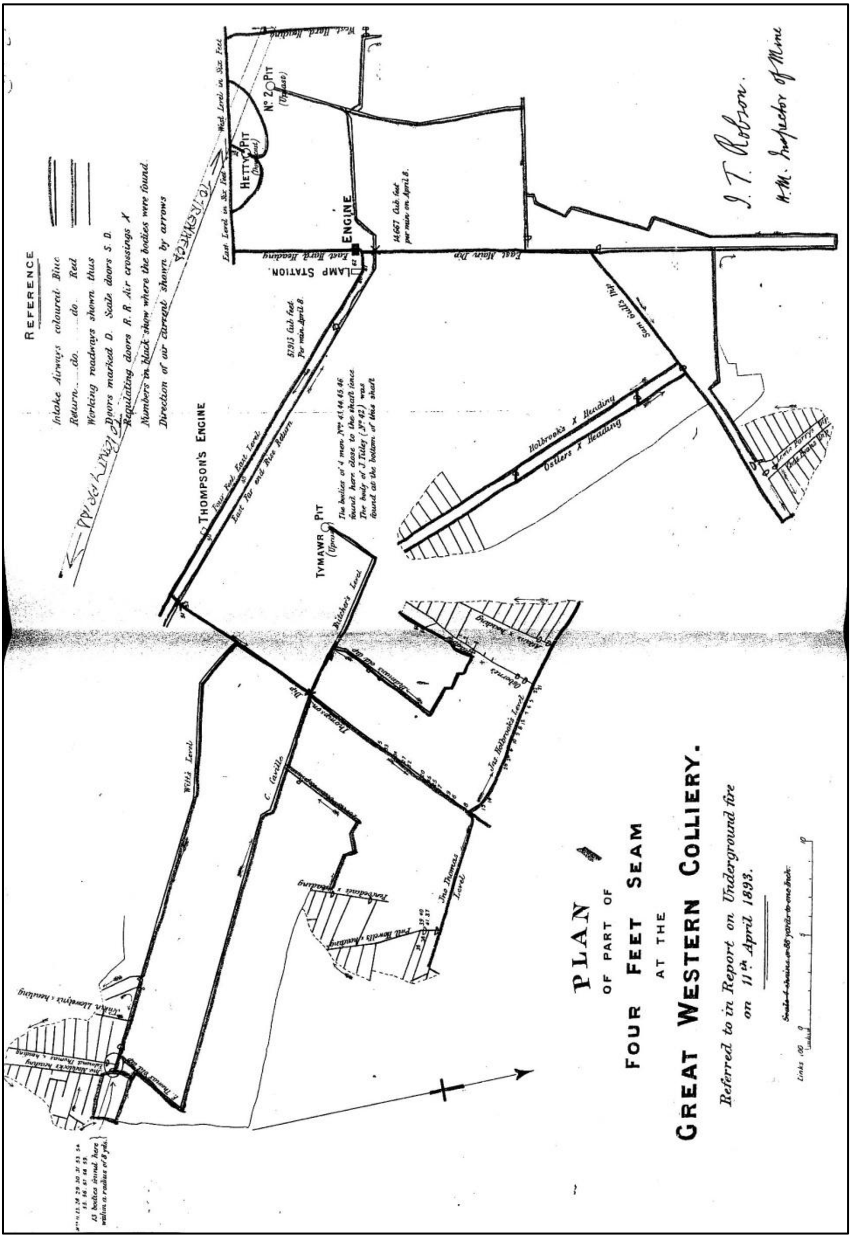
Lewis James and Morgan Thomas, the foremen, shared in the expressions of joy as they afterwards said that they had been told by the men on the top that they did not expect to see any of the East Main Dip men get out alive. After the congratulations Rosser told the boys to go ahead and for us to dip our hats in the cold 'bosh' used by the horses for drinking purposes and tie them to our mouths."

"Then commenced a struggle that would ever be remembered by our party. Travelling under great difficulties, some of us crawling along on our hands and knees owing to the falls, it took us from fifteen to twenty minutes to reach near where the engine was burning. Here the heat and smoke were almost unbearable and some of our party fell exhausted. We fought our way over obstacles and were rewarded soon afterwards in coming to fresh air. It was universally admitted that had we had twenty yards more to traverse we would have succumbed to sheer exhaustion. As it was, some of our men, there being a large amount of sulphur in the air, had eyelashes burnt, and we were unable to stand in the upright position in consequence of having been in cramped conditions for such a time. As we passed the engine-house we could see the timbers and beams burning which gave out a tremendous heat. My senses seemed to have left me when we got to the shaft. I have a dim recollection of someone addressing me and telling me to go to the office to give in my name. By the time we had arrived at the shaft it was seven o'clock. I shall never forget the torture and suspense endured as long as I live, and I have to thank the almighty for his goodness. I cannot tell with what joy that my mother and father welcomed me home, a sentiment that was echoed by the old lady, who sat near crying as if it would break her heart to lose her son," concluded John.

The '*Pontypridd District Herald*' April 29th 1893 reported: - A general meeting of the men employed at the Great Western Colliery, Gyfeillon, took placeat the Workmen's Hall, Hopkinstown, on Thursday evening April 20th. Mr. Morgan Jenkins, chairman of the Workmen's Committee presided, and there was a good attendance. The workmen's committee reported that the colliery had been examined, and that the men could venture, without the fear of danger, to resume work in the Seven feet and Four feet seams on Monday 24th inst. It was understood that operations could not be resumed in the East Far End, (where the accident occurred)for some time yet to come. The district was divided into twelve sections, and delegates were appointed to visit each section on the following day, Friday, April 21st, todistributethe£100 which had been given towards the relatives by the Cambrian Miner's Association, to which body a hearty vote of thanks for their generosity was passed.



Great Western Colliery map 1915



Map of the Great Western Colliery four-foot seam

Chapter eight
Thursday, April 20th 1893

The inquest

Nine days after the Great Western Colliery disaster the public inquest into the 62 men was about to resume. Mr. E. B. Preece sat for a considerable time on Thursday, April 20th 1893, at the New Inn Hotel, Pontypridd, to further investigate the circumstances of the disaster at the Great Western Colliery.

Messrs E. B. Preece and R. H. Rhys acted as Coroners, and were assisted by Messrs J. T. Robson and A. H. Sims, Inspectors ofMines. Mr. S. T. Evans, M.P; represented the Home Office. Mr. Inskip (Bristol), the Great Western Colliery Co; Mr. W. H. Morgan (Messrs Morgan, Rhys and Bruce), the Cambrian Miners Association; Mr. M. Roberts-Jones, the Miners Federation of Great Britain. There was also present Mr. Foster Brown, Director of the company; Mr. W. Evans, Cambrian Association of Miners; Mr. Ben Davies, sub-agent of the Miners' Federation; and Mr. Brace, Miners Federation.

Mr. M. R. Jones stated that he appeared for the workmen of the colliery by virtue of a resolution passed at a mass meeting on the previous evening. Mr. W. H. Morgan remarked that he represented the Cambrian Miners' Association, of which 58 of the deceased were members. He knew nothing of the mass meeting. He had been instructed by M. W. Abraham M. P.

The jury was the same as before. The witnesses were as follows: Messrs M. Jones, surveyor; R. Molyneux, D. Rees, L. Jenkins, E. Matthews, George James, J. H. Thomas, G. Brinn, H. Templeman, S. Cull, Hugh Bramwell, William James, Thomas Rosser, W. M. Jones and W. Rees.

Bridget Devereaux, sister of James Devereaux, the lampman, identified the remains of her brother. The body was brought to her house on Monday week. Deceased was 39 years of age.

Evidence of the colliery surveyor

Mr. W. M. Jones, Surveyor of the colliery, was the first witness examined. Some considerable time was taken up in the proving of the plans, showing the different positions of the colliery workings; situation of the engine; where the fire originated; and ventilation of the colliery, etc. He stated: -

The Hetty Pit went down to one Six-feet seam and the two others, the Tymawr and the No.2, to the Five-feet, the lowest. They all passed the Four-feet seam. Ventilation was conducted through the Hetty Pit and near the bottom on the shaft, the current was split one portion going into the west and the other to the east in the Six-feet. Going eastwards the current was carried along the Six-feet levels, up the East Hard Heading, which rose to the Four-feet seam. The distance between the two seams was about 25 yards vertically. The heading was about 150 yards long, rising 1 in 6. From the top of the East Hard Heading the current was again split, a portion of it going down the East Main Dip, and the other portion of it going along the Four-feet East far end level

Speaking of the quantity of air sent through the colliery, he said that the record showed that on the 8th of April 14,667 cubic feet of air per minute was the quantity in the East Main Dip. In the east far end level it was 57,913. The quantity passing the engine-house, therefore, would be the two quantities put together.

The accident happened on April 11th. He was in the colliery at the time, in the Five-feet seam. He heard first of all that a man had fallen down the Tymawr Pit. This was about 2.30 p.m. He went back to the bottom of the Four-feet seam at the Tymawr Pit, and saw a man stretched out on the floor dead, Jesse Titley. Mr. Morgan Thomas, overman, and Mr. John Rees Charles, fireman, were there at the time and were about to take up the body of Titley, when he (witness) suggested nothing could be done for him, but that he and the two men named should proceed to the Four-feet landing in the Tymawr Pit to see what was the matter.

They went up and stopped one cage opposite the opening into the Four-feet seam. Witness saw smoke coming out from that seam. They listened and heard groaning from the Four-feet seam. Mr. Morgan Thomas and witness stepped from the cage out into the landing, and Mr. Thomas's lamp went out. Witness went in about 4ft. from the edge of the pit to some railings, which stood there for protection, when his lamp also went out. But before his lamp went out he noticed there were several men inside or beyond the railings. They (witness and his companions) dared not go inside the railings for fear of suffocation. Then, proceeding, he said they stretched their arms over and tried to pull the men. He (witness) failed to move his man, and so he went to Mr. Thomas's assistance. They both pulled until they were exhausted, but could not get the man out. Then they stepped back into the cage, and signalled to ascend to the surface. As the cage reached the top of the archway opening into one pit J. R. Charles's light also went out at once. Witness felt affected by the air. It was more a sense of unconsciousness. He sat down on the cage, and just before reaching the top he

recovered. When they got to the top they consulted together, and thought it best to reduce the fan to half speed, and that was done. This was about a quarter to three. By the coroner - He thought the fan was then going at the rate of 76 revolutions per minute. The usual speed of the fan was over 52 revolutions, and the order he gave was to reduce the speed to half the usual speed. He (witness) left Thomas at the Tymawr Pit, and went himself to the Hetty Pit and there descended the shaft immediately and made inquiries for Mr. W. James, the manager. He saw him at the fire. He called the manager back to him from the fire, and told him what he had seen and done in the Tymawr Pit.

He then gave witness orders to stop the Tymawr fan temporarily, and witness in accordance with that order ascended the Hetty and went to the Tymawr shaft, stopped the fan, and lifted the cover. That was about 3.15 p.m. He descended the Tymawr Pit quietly, passing through very thick smoke. Whilst in the cage he heard rapping on the surface - the rapping coming from the Four-feet seam, and then they ascended to the surface again, so that those in the Five-feet seam should come up. Then the cage that was down below brought two men up from the Five-feet. They were slightly affected by smoke. He inquired where they felt it most, and they replied that it was strong in the Five-feet seam.

Witness again went down the Tymawr Pit to the Four-feet landing, went out into the opening, and saw the bodies of four men there. They were Lewis Cavill, Philip Jones, Lewis Williams, and another, stated to be William Williams. Witness proceeded into the return as far as the smoke would permit; found no more men there; got up again to the surface. The distance he had gone into the return was 100 yards. He put down the covers and restarted the fan at half speed, and again went down the Hetty Pit to report to Mr. James, the manager. They both then went to the East Main Dip return, and made an attempt to reach the East Main Dip that way, but the smoke was too strong. They then returned to the fan, where he saw Mr. Bramwell superintending the operations.

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By Mr. Robson - Did not know at the time of the finding of Titley's body that anything had happened. Did not know that men had been drawn up from the Four-feet seam. Morgan Thomas, the overman, was at the bottom, but did not say that any had gone up. Did not know whether anyone had been sent by Morgan Thomas to the Four-feet landing to assist the men who arrived there. Was told that the speed of the fan had been increased to 72. Did not hear that any message had been sent up from the pit to increase it. Saw the manager by the engine-house at three o'clock. He could explain how the smoke came to the Five-feet seam. The smoke entered from the Four-feet east far end down the Tymawr Pit, as the Tymawr had been turned into a downcast temporarily in order to relieve the men down at that end. He had given instructions at the top of No.2 Pit to have the men sent out.

Even if Morgan Thomas had not gone down nor the order given toget the men up the No.2 Pit, he would have done the same, because the No.5 was simply a column of smoke in the pit. Restarting of the fan at half speed was done about four o'clock, so that the Tymawr shaft had been turned into a downcast for something like half an hour or less. The effect of increasing the revolution would mean increasing the volume of air, and so feed the fire and drive the smoke in. Roughly, it would take a quarter of an hour for the smoke to travel from the engine into the workings when the fan went at its usual rate.

The average sectional area of the road way in the east level was about 48 square feet, or it might be fifty. This was a fiery mine, worked by means of safety lamps, and it was naturally dry and fairly dusty. The lamp station in the east heading was about 22 yards from the engine. According to the data given the smoke would reach the top of Thompson's in less than a minute. When he got within a few yards of the engine he did not see the fire - he had gone mainly to see the manager. There were trams in the way and men in the way.

By Mr. W. H. Morgan - The usual speed of the fan was 52. He saw Titley at 2.30. He could not tell below whether the speed had been increased to76. He heard afterwards it was increased owing to this accident. He reduced the speed to one half as soon as he came up - that would be about a quarter of an hour. Then it was stopped for about half an hour, and then put on at half speed. Three plans were thus adopted. Asked which of these methods was the best he said it was best to reduce it to half speed, and then stop it all together. The increasing of the speed of the fan would not commend itself to his judgment, because it tended to increase the fire. Morgan Thomas went down the No.5, and he gave witness the order to get the men out of the No.2 as soon as he could get there. If

their turn had been larger the men could not have travelled through it without getting to the top of Thompson's Dip. They failed to get there. This return of the east far end was disused, but was stowed in such a way as to allow a little air to pass through. The railings referred to at the entrance to the Four-feet seam of the Tymawr Pit were placed there to prevent men in advertently falling. There were water pipes near this engine, but they were not under his charge.

Mr. Moses R. Jones (Miner's Federation) - "Was not the stoppage of the fan a violation of the first general rule?" Witness: "The conditions were extraordinary." "Was there anyone sent to warn the men in the Four-feet seam before the fan was stopped?" Witness: "Not that I know of." "If there were any who wished to escape would they not be confused by the changing of the current?" Witness: "I don't think so."

Asked if he knew of the circular issued by the Government inspectors after the Park Slip disaster, suggesting that men should become acquainted with the return, he said that was a strong argument for what he had done. He understood there was enormous pressure on the brake when the trams were travelling.

Mr. Robert Jones asked whether or not the surveyor had ever heard of sparks being emitted from an engine brake. He replied that he had, but had never seen them. He did not think the spragging of the trams would relieve the drums of the engine, and thereby prevent the friction said to have caused the spark.

Mr. Inskip, on behalf of the Great Western Colliery, elicited from the witness that he had been surveyor to the company for seven years. Every expense had been incurred and every precaution taken for safety. He had been working underground in pursuance of his profession, and had no cause to complain. The east far end rise had been abandoned, and starting from the top of Thompson's Dip the return would be in the Tymawr Pit. He believed most of the men would be there, and his object in stopping the fan was to give those men relief. He was adopting a remedy under an emergency, and still adhered to the opinion that what he had done was right. Under ordinary circumstances the men would not come from the Four-feet seam to the Tymawr Pit. The last two men came up from the Four feet seam just as he (witness) went down. The speed of the fan was increased after the second man had come up so he had been told.

The mechanical engineer

Robert Nelaka Molyneux, mechanical engineer at the Great Western, had occupied his position four and a half years. He said there was at the entrance to

the east far end a hauling engine 10in in diameter, 12in stroke, working on two loose drums, geared in the proportion of four to one. The drums were 3ft 8in. In diameter, and the engine was worked by compressed air at the pressure of 55lbs to the square inch. The engine was placed on a stage. There were three cross beams 12in. square, and there were two more lying across, 16in.x 8in. The wrought iron framework of the engine rested on those beams. There was a stage for the attendant, of 1½ planks, forming a floor about 10ft. x 4ft. The engine was driven on the date of the fire by George James, whose work began at 7 a.m. Speaking of the appliances for checking, he said there was a brake fitted to each drum worked by means of a lever on the engineman's platform. The strip outside called the brake strap was wrought iron, and elm wood bolted on formed the body of the brake. It was a wooden block curved something live a railway engine, but in this case it reached around one half of the drum.

In the cylinders they used glycerine and cylinder oil for lubricating, and they were applied through a grease cup with a double tap in it. The other portions - the bearings were lubricated with olive oil, applied with an ordinary oil-can. There was no other lubrication used to his knowledge. The drums were constructed of steel plates with the exception of the "boss" in the centre, which was of cast iron. There was no wood used in its construction. The timber on which the engine stood was more or less greasy. That arose from leakage. The flooring might have been renewed since. The flooring might have been renewed since the engine had been erected, but the beams had not.

The engineman would be supplied with small quantities of cotton waste. He had never seen any actual sparks emitted from the brake but had found it warm. He knew they got very hot sometimes. He had seen sparks emitted from the surface engines where the brakes were frequently used. Here there would be about 45 journeys a day. He never had the least idea that the brake would smoulder and therefore never took any precautions for cooling it. He had never cautioned the engine driver to keep his place tidy and not allow cotton waste lying about, because he had not seen much there - only small pieces in use. The machinery underground was daily inspected by one of his (witnesses) assistants. The engine was not damaged by the fire but the beams were burned. The engine held its position. The bank of the main drum was partially destroyed by the fire.

By Mr. Robson - This engine worked the east hard heading also. So far as he knew that was the heaviest gradient. The tail drum worked the east hard heading. He had about twice in his time heard of difficulty in working the engine from the freezing of the exhaust. The covers were taken off and the ice taken out, but he did not know of anything being done to prevent that happening - it happened so seldom. It did not altogether depend upon the weather. He did not

know of anything like a lamp being used to keep up the heat at the exhaust. He knew it had been done in other places. He had heard of oil being spilled on it and lighted, but not anywhere in south Wales. The beams were more burnt at the bottom and the inside leading to the workings than the top. He could not see whether the fire originated above or below the beams. About a quarter of the brake block had been destroyed by fire.

By Mr. S. T. Evans - Norman was a fitter, and had regularly inspected the machinery below. Witness and Caddy took the engines above ground. A portion of the machinery underground had been examined on the day of the accident but not on the east end. It appeared from the report that it had not been reached before the accident. Witness had never considered that there was any danger before this accident. The brattice put up near the engine was put up at the discretion of the engineman. In future there would be no brattice used there but galvanised iron sheeting instead. He did not think there was any petroleum in the pit. There was some in the stores above ground for lighting purposes. The engineman would have a safety lamp. But he could not say whether it was locked or not, as the engineman was outside the lamp station. There was electric light above the engine, and the safety lamp would only be needed to come and go in or from his work in case of any accident to the electric light. He had heard that sparks had been emitted from that brake some months ago. He was not sure whether it was Alfred Noble, his foreman, who told him. He said they were about changing the spur brake as it was sparking a little. He had never heard that there was a fire of any extent there before the accident, or any ignition there.

By Mr. Jones - The regular driver was ill on that day. His name was William Palmer.

George James, who was in charge, had experience of hauling engines. He had had thirteen years experience as a mechanical engineer, and put many engines up. They were now making everything as fireproof as possible. It was now the intention of the company to do away with the wooden beams to support the ironwork of the machinery, and place ironwork. In future they were going to substitute iron sheeting for brattice cloth. No wood would be used whatever. In his opinion the fire was caused by sparks falling on cloth and then igniting it. There were no water pipes placed down there for the express purpose of providing for any emergency. There was a pipe used for spraying purposes and the laying of dust. In future no engine will be fixed unless under an arched roof, brick or stone, and not less than ten yards from ventilation. There was an archway in the East Main Dip before the accident. There was not a man killed in this particular heading. In the other headings where timber was used men were

killed.

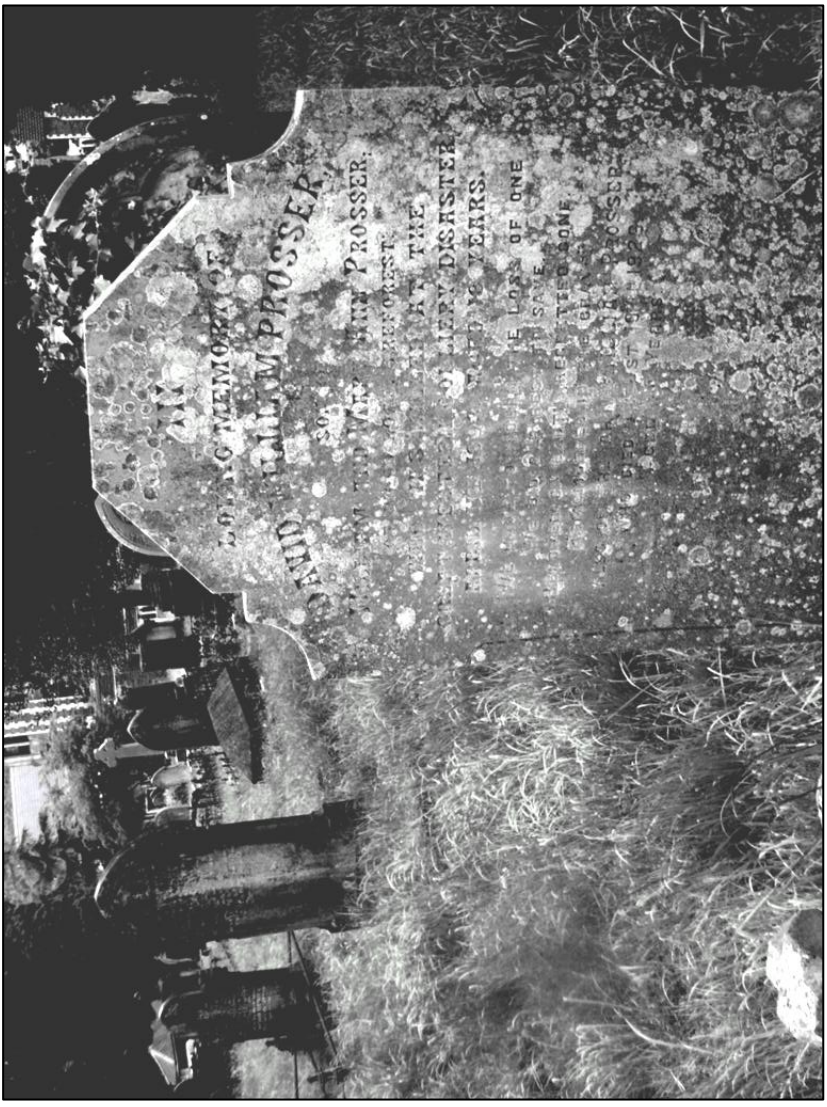
Mr. Phillips (a juryman): - “Have all the engines that you have erected been built on timber?” Witness: “We were making preparations to put a very large engine on a stone foundation previous to this accident.” At this juncture the inquiry was adjourned for lunch.

Evidence of the engine driver

The court resumed a little after 2 o’clock, and the start of the fire was revealed when George James, the engine-driver who lived at Trallwn, Pontypridd, was examined by the Coroners. Mr. James was deposed to being in charge of the engine on the day of the accident. William Palmer was the proper driver, but on this day was home ill. He had worked three days in the place of Palmer. The first intimation of anything being wrong was that given by Edwin Matthews, who came up from the hard heading about 1 o’clock. He told the witness that there was fire. Witness was on his platform. This time he was pulling up a load from the East Main Dip. Witness made an inspection and found one of the beams beneath the engine on fire.

He did not then see the brattice on fire, but it caught fire immediately afterwards. There was nothing the matter then with the brake. Witness tried the water pipe but found there was no water in it. He went down below and knocked the pipe to try and get water and then went up to see if any water came, but none came. He shouted for help. The fire spread very quickly inwards to the Four feet East Level. He could not say whether the timbers then took fire. He went down to the hard heading for a bucket, and had to go as far as the stable for water. Other men had arrived on the scene before then, and when he got back he threw the water on the fire, but it was not of sufficient quantity to do any good. It was, he thought, an hour before the manager arrived.

There was then no water to be had except the water in the stable. If the pipe had contained water he believed he could have put out the fire and so prevented the accident. The pipe had been laid so as to provide water for laying the dust on the flooring. It rose to the height of about 2ft. higher than the flooring. He watered the flooring the day before the accident, but the water he then used was from a bucket standing by, and he did not know if there was any water in the pipe for three days previous. He had been at the engine three weeks previously but did not then use the pipe either. He remembered using it about six weeks ago. Did not see any sparks emitted from the brake, and did not believe they could without his seeing them.



Gravestone of William David Prosser at Glyntaff Cemetery

The years take their toll on the gravestone of Thomas Price at Glyntaff Cemetery

He smelled it heated all day and every day. He had never noticed sparks from the brake of that engine. He had a safety lamp with him, but it had gone out because he did not look after it. It had been out about two hours. He did not need the lamp for light as there was an electric light above the engine. He had known the exhaust to freeze in the winter, but it did not freeze on the day of the accident. They used glycerine to prevent it freezing, but had never put a lamp to it to prevent it freezing. He had only a small bit of cotton waste lying about the floor. He did not know what there would be to set the beam on fire except the brake. The beam was on a level with the brake.

From where he stood on the platform he could not see the whole of the brake - the lower part of it would be out of his sight, and he could not say whether sparks were emitted from that or not. In lowering the "journey" down the East Main Dip no heavy braking had been required – only the weight of his arm on the brake. The braking was heavier on the other incline. Noticed slight smoke from the brake in letting the journey down the hard heading. That was about twelve minutes before he stopped the engine.

There was no smoke to be seen when a journey of six trams was being let down, only when there was a journey of twelve trams. He had not noticed sparks from the wire supplying the electric light. It was about four minutes after the discovery of the fire before he got away from the fire, but in that time he beat it with his coat. John Thomas the rider, was the first one to the fire after the boy Matthews and himself being there. The under manager, Mr. D. Rees, was the first official on the scene.

By Mr. W. H. Morgan: The bucket was not there in order to provide water for throwing on the brake when it got heated, so far as he knew. When he returned from the stable there were four men at the fire and the under-manager all engaged in trying to put the fire out. They could not give the alarm to the men in the workings, as they could not get past the fire. Had the alarm been given before he went to the stables, some of the men could have been brought out. The time would not have been too short. If the brake took fire it must have been in letting the journey down the East Dip, in which case it must have been burning ten or twelve minutes before it was discovered.

Evidence of collier boy

Edward Matthews, the collier boy, was the next witness. He said that he was seventeen years of age. He said that he was going to work on the two o'clock shift in the East Main Dip on the day of the accident and noticed the fire first. The fire was under the engine. This he could see as he approached the engine.

He gave notice to the engine-driver and ran back to the hard heading to tell them that the engine was on fire. John Morgan and John Thomas ran up to the engine, and witness ran to the bottom of the pit. Mr. D. Morris (a juryman): "Was the fire raging so badly that you could not go near it? Witness: "I was much too afraid."

Evidence of rider

John Henry Thomas, a rider employed at the colliery, said that he rode on the East Main Dip at the East Level. When the fire broke out he was about 150 yards on the East Hard Heading. He had passed on a journey ten minutes before but had noticed nothing. He was told by the boy that was with the others that there was a fire and that he saw the engine-driver trying to extinguish the flames with his coat. Witness went up to the engine-house and tried to put out the fire. Even if there was water in the pipe at the time the fire had got too much of a hold to be got under control. He had never noticed any sparks emitted from the engine. He noticed the fire on the crossbeam nearest the engine. There was an old man named Devereaux in the lamp room near bye. Witness did not think him of being there in the excitement of the moment. "I disconnected the main pipe and found very little water in it. There was no water in the spray pipe. There was a deficiency of pressure," said Thomas.

Evidence of regular driver

William Palmer, regular engine-driver, who lived in Hopkinstown, deposed to have been driving the engine for four years. During this time the engine had not been altered. He gave evidence as to the water pipe near the engine. The upright pipe, he said, was used for cooling the brake. There was a flexible hose there, but sometimes a bucket was used. The bucket was kept there for the purpose of cooling the brake with water. He had known sparks to come off the brake often. He had considered that there was no danger in using the brake even if sparks and smoke were emitted, where water was liberally used. Whenever he noticed the brake getting very hot or smoking very much he applied water. With the exception of accidents, there was a regular supply of water there.

The Thursday before, Good Friday, 30th March, was the last time that he had worked the engine. The timbers upon which the engine rested were very oily and greasy. If there was no water in the pipe he wouldn't have considered it safe to go on with the engine, and he usually saw that his bucket was filled up and handy. He could only recollect three or four times having to send someone for a bucket of water. He did not consider that sparks from the brake were

dangerous. He had on occasions seen the waste smoulder from sparks, and put them out with water. It was of such a very common occurrence that he did not think it worth reporting to the manager of the colliery, or any other official. He did not appreciate the full danger, and he always knew that there was water handy. He had since left the employment of the colliery.

By Mr. Robson: Kept a safety lamp to go about with. All disused cotton waste was thrown on to the road and that partly used was placed near the 'drum' of the engine. Examined by Mr. S. D. Evans, the witness said he assured himself that there was water in the bucket if only for his own comfort as when the brake had a hot and nasty smell and smoke arose. Mr. Evans: "You have heard the evidence. Are you prepared to issue a theory as to the fire." Mr. Palmer: "No."

By Mr. W. H. Morgan: It was a well known fact that the brakes of a hauling engine were more likely to get hotter than winding engines. When he saw that the brakes were heated he felt it his duty to put water on them understanding that it might catch fire. He had known brakes to take fire even in water. If the brake was working when portions of the woodwork were smouldering, sparks would be likely to be thrown off. By the Coroner: - He had been advised not to go to his old post in the colliery as he had a bad throat.

By Mr. Inskip: He had been driving hauling engines at the colliery for upwards of nine years. He did not remember anyone seeing him use the water to cool the brakes. Norman D. Rhys and W. James, manager, had been on the engine. There was no water in the pipes and he gave them verbal notice. He had been three or four times without water during the four years that he had been at the engine. He believed that the mine representative did visit the colliery to inspect the safety of the workings. In his opinion he did not think there was any omission on the part of the company. Mr. W. Jones (one of the jurymen): "It has been said that the brake becomes more heated when there is more work from the Four-feet level, and the difficulty more than otherwise. Does George James, the Deputy Engineer understand this? I should like him to be asked this." George James was recalled, and replied that he understood that the pressure was greater.

Mr. Shipton (another juryman): "Did Palmer anticipate any danger of not having water at hand, or was it simply his own uneasiness as to the smoke, etc.?" Mr. Palmer: "I did not anticipate any danger to myself or to the colliery, or that anything would catch fire. I was afraid that the brake would not hold the journey, and it would slip."

Mr. W. Phillips (a juryman): "When was the last time that you drew water from

the pipe during the last two months?" Palmer: "I cannot say during that time whether or not there was any water in the pipes as I had no occasion to ascertain water always being in the bucket. As far as I know no official has ever visited me and investigated whether there was water at hand." The inquest was then adjourned till Friday morning 9 a.m.

Friday, April 21st 1893

Mr. R.H. Rhys's hands were covered with a beautiful coating of coal dust on Friday on examining some firemen's report books which were handed over for inspection, and then he wanted to know why the books had not been wiped before being put in. A number of the witnesses gave their evidence in Welsh, and Sgt. Evans, Cilfynydd, made an excellent interpreter. One of the coroners, Mr. Rhys, blunt of speech, but endowed with a strong intellectual gift, more that once questioning them in their native tongue.

Shortly after the inquest was commenced, the coroners, jurors, barristers, colliery officials, pressmen, and others in the room were annoyed by the noise that came from below, where the carpenters engaged on the new wing which was being added to the New Inn Hotel were hammering away to their hearts content. Mr. Rhys at once told one of the officers present to request the noise to be stopped, and no sooner than he had popped his head through the window, and hurled the order at the peace-breakers, than dead silence reigned. Some fine new additions were being made to the New Inn, and later, when a new flue was being tried a cloud of smoke leapt through the crevices of the wall at the back of the jurymen and made them cough desperately. For a time the question was debated whether the hotel was on fire, but an abrupt adjournment of the inquest was obviated by a reassuring explanation. It was decided that an inspection of the mine should be made by Her Majesty's Inspectors for a certain purpose. A juryman suggested that the inspections should be made that day, but the inspectors were not disposed to assent to the suggestion in the absence of any promise on the part of jurymen to provide them with new suits of clothing after their inspection of the colliery workings.

Medical evidence

Dr. Leckie, Pontypridd, the colliery surgeon, said he saw about 40 of the bodies, and amongst others he saw the body of Jesse Titley, who had fractures of the limbs, and the skull was fractured. Death resulted from a fall. The majority of the others, if not all, died from suffocation by, he thought, smoke, but some of the bodies were burnt after death.

Evidence of under-manager

David Rees, the under-manager, had never seen water used for damping brakes. He knew that Palmer had water with him in the engine-house, but did not know what for. They found that the water pipes had choked at the top of the pit. There was plenty of water in the top reservoir. The possibility of such a fire had never occurred to him. Hugh Bramwell, agent of the colliery only since Dec. 24th 1892, said that when he had arrived at the disaster water was spraying on the fire, but not with much pressure. Two Queen Fire Extinguishers (QFE) and hand grenades were also in use. He had never heard of the brake engine getting overheated. He entirely approved with what the surveyor did. They knew of no better substance for the brake than wood. He produced a set of rules issued since the accident for the regulation of engine-houses. Henry Thomas Wales, M. E; late agent, said that he had never put pipes to dampen brakes; never had any idea of any danger of fire from the brake. If the brake had been cooled in time the accident may not have happened. After other evidence the inquiry was adjourned until Saturday.

Evidence of the colliery agent

Mr. Hugh Bramwell said that he was not at the colliery at the time the fire broke out. He got there at 4.15. He immediately went down the Hetty Pit. The worst fire was in the East Level. There was considerable fire burning in the East Dip. There were heavy falls in the Four-feet east, but there was fire raging beneath the falls. The water pipes had been disconnected and extended near the fire. The pressure was disappointing to him, but he had reason to believe now that this was normal. Two Queen Fire Extinguishers and hand grenades were also in use. The pipes were very small - 1¼ inch - and there were laid five or six miles. They were intended for dampening air in the mine by means of hose sprays. The quantity of water for that was very small, but it had to be at a high pressure. He made a calculation as to the quantity of water which could pass through, and found it would be 40 gallons per minute if there was good enough pressure on and no leakage, but in practice they did not get more than 20 gallons per minute.

He had never heard that the brake at times became over heated. He had been in the engine house three or four times since he first came to the colliery. He could not tell who gave the orders for accelerating the speed of the fan. The 70 men who came up alive were very excited, and speaking of the danger of the four men left behind, urged that this should be done, and the speed of the fan was increased without any definite instructions. There was a great clamour for the speed of the fan to be increased. It had never entered his mind that the heating

of the brake block was a source of danger. He had fourteen years experience. It was a very rare occurrence in his experience for hauling engine brakes to emit sparks. They were not going to alter the brake. They knew of no better substance than wood. He believed leather would char if used and get untrustworthy. He had never tried leather or heard it suggested before yesterday. From their experience now he thought it would be advisable to have water at hand.

The ex-Agent

Mr. H. T. Wales said he was agent of the Great Western Colliery for ten years up to December last when he was succeeded by Mr. Bramwell. He had been down the mine since the accident, and he believed the accident had occurred from the firing of the brake, and consequently, if it had been discovered in time and plenty of water had been available it could have been put out.

The Manager's evidence

Mr. William James, manager of the Great Western Colliery, said he had occupied his present position for two years, and was previously under-manager for eight years and a half. When the accident happened he was on the return of the East Main Dip in the Four-feet seam. He found men trying to extinguish the fire. The water from the pipes was flowing fairly well then, but there was a very poor chance to put it out then with any supply. He sent his assistant Richards to the Tymawr Pit to get the carriage down to the Four-feet landing, but the men had got up before he reached them.

He frequently passed the engine at which the fire originated, and if he could not go up to the engine house he would normally shout out from the road to the engine driver to know if everything was all right. He never had any statement made to him as to the brake giving out sparks, and it never occurred to him that any danger could arise from sparks in connection with this engine. He had not noticed sparks from roadway brakes, because he was not very much above ground to notice it. Hose pipe had been attached to the stand pipe in order to cope with any fire that might arise from the paraffin lamps in use before the electric light. He never knew that the engineman used that water from damping the brakes. He did not know at whose instructions his brother, George James, went to drive this particular engine, but he believed it was it was Morgan Thomas. He (the brother) had been driving the engine in the Nine-feet previously, and had never told witness about sparks or the least danger.

Evidence of Alfred Norman

Alfred Norman, of No.2 Middle Street, Trallwn, Pontypridd, said he was employed as a fitter underground, and was the assistant to Mr. Molyneux, the mechanical engineer. It was his duty to look after the water pipes, sprays, and hauling engines. The last time he examined this engine before the accident was the day before. It was then in good working order. He did not examine the tap of the water pipe that morning because he saw the bucket was full of water. The driver told him some time before that there was a little smoke from the brake, and he used the water in the bucket to keep down the smoke as much as he could. He (witness) did not mention this to Mr. Molyneux, as he did not attach any importance to it. The sprays were in good working order that morning.

The evidence of George Groves

George Groves, banksman of the Tymawr Pit, said he was on duty when the fire broke out. He remembered having the signal from the Five-feet seam about 2 o'clock to raise the carriage to the Four-feet landing. The signal was six knocks. He signalled to the engineman by means of a bell. The cage was raised as desired, and then came three knocks, to raise it to the top. Witness did not notice smoke come up the Tymawr Pit, but could smell it a little whenever the cage came up. Four loads of men came up by ten minutes past two. The last load only brought one man up - Fletcher - and he (Fletcher) did not say there was any more men down the pit. He fancied Fletcher was too ill to speak. At this point the proceedings were adjourned till Saturday.

Saturday, April 30th 1893

The evidence taken on Saturday was that of John Cannon, hitcher, Tymawr Pit; Williams Andrews, Pantygraigwen, the fan engineman at the Tymawr Pit; Moses Roderick, timekeeper; and William Fletcher (the last man who was rescued), all of whom only bore out the statements given by the others.

The first witness called in the reconvened inquiry on Saturday, was John Cannon, hitcher at the Tymawr pit. He gave evidence to the effect that when in the Five-feet seam a voice from the Four-feet seam called out, "Let's have the carriage quick." He went up in it and then four cages full were sent to the top. Every possible effort was made to save the men who were still left in the seam. He saw Titley fall.

William Andrews, a fan-engine man, said that the fan was making 51 revolutions.

At the pitman's request, he increased the speed to60. It was afterwards put on to 75. At about 3 o'clock, he, by order, reduced the speed to half. Half an hour later, by the surveyor's orders, it was stopped altogether. Afterwards, by the manager's orders it was put at half speed.

William Fletcher, the man brought out alive from the Four-feet Landing said he worked in Maddock's Heading in the East Far end. He made his escape by means of the Four-feet landing. There was no cage at the landing when he got there. There were several men there who had come out with him from the workings. No one had gone up at all. At the landing his light went out. The smoke was but very thick there then. Several loads full of men went up before he got on. He had lost his lamp, but when the cage came down there was a lamp on it, and by the help of the light of that lamp he got into it. When he got into the cage there were four other men at the landing, viz; Philip Jones, Charles Caville, William Williams and Lewis Williams. They were in a worse state of exhaustion than he was. They were on the other side of the railings, and he did his best to get them over or through the fence, but failed. They told him at least to try and save himself. Those were the last words they told him. When he got to the top he was pulled out unconscious. He saw Titley go over the railings. He held fast to them for fear he would also fall down the pit. He heard Titley fall. It was as soon as he got into the carriage; Titley had got exhausted before he fell. He gave a drink out of his jack to Lewis Williams and rose him upon his knees.

Thomas Rosser, Pantygraigwen, the hero of the day, giving evidence stated that he was the Fireman of the East Main Dip. He did not know when the fire broke out, but the first smoke he saw was when he was on the double parting in Sam Cull's Dip, by Holbrook's Heading. That was about quarter-to-two. He went up and met David Richards, a master collier, who said that there was a lot of smoke coming down behind him. The witness sent four men into the working to get the colliers out, while he took two men up the dip to see how much smoke was there. He could only go halfway as the smoke was so dense, and they could hardly see their lights. They saw they could never live there, for men were getting giddy already. "We then," continued witness, "tried to reach the upper-crossing door. Failing to reach that door we hurried back and opened the west door, which we could reach. That was the door in the straight in the entrance to Sam Cull's Dip. We opened that door to allow the smoke to go straight to the return."

His intention was to keep the air already in the workings, and to prevent the air unfit to breathe from reaching the workings. Richards became exhausted so they turned into Sam Cull's Heading, and then returned to the double parting where the colliers had already assembled. He told the colliers to stop there on

the double-parting, and they stayed there for an hour. The colliers who had not seen how dense the smoke was, wanted to go out, but he persuaded them to remain where they were.

The air that came to them on the double-parting brought sufficient smoke to make men sick, and they vomited. He moved the men 50 yards away up into the heading and opened another door. After a time that place became unfit to breathe in, and he, the witness, moved the men further inwards, beyond the first crossing. They opened the first crossing door and put up good brattice's across Holbrook's Heading to stop more smoke from getting to them at all. It was then about half-past-four. They remained there until his brother William Rosser, Morgan Thomas and another man came down and rescued them. By that time the fire had been partly extinguished, the smoke was not so dense, and they eventually got out past the fire and up the Hetty Pit. Mr. E. B. Reece said: "You showed great presence of mind and judgement in saving the men." Mr. S. D. Evans said "He could not possibly, I should think, have adopted a better plan" Mr. E. B. Reece said that he quite agreed.

A colliery manager's opinion

Mr. William Stewart, general manager of the Treharris collieries, said that he had fifteen years experience of colliery management. He had been down the Great Western Colliery, and in his opinion the hauling engine had been fixed in the most suitable and safest place for doing its work. Judging from the evidence, he thought that 19 or 20 hours after the accident, no one could have lived longer than 10 or 15 minutes in the smoke.

The Inspector of Mines evidence

Mr. J. P. Robson, Government Inspector of Mines (examined by Mr. R. J. Rhys), said that he reached the scene of the disaster about a quarter to eleven on Wednesday morning. After examining the place, he was satisfied that everything possible had been done under the peculiar circumstances to rescue the men who might be alive. The hauling engine was in a very common position, and as a compressed air engine he would never have thought of taking exception to its situation. He would not have taken any exception to it being supported on wooden beams. Now, of course, after the accident he would have taken exception to the fact that the double-timbers of the roof reached very near the engine. Any recommendations he would now make with reference to arching would be based on experience gained at this accident.

With reference to the signalling at the Tymawr Pit, he was not prepared to say that the absence of a signal at the Four-feet landing was a breach of the Mine's Act. It was a fine point. Had he known of the absence of a signal there he would have called the attention of the management to it, though he did not think he would have considered he would have warranted in recommending a prosecution. There would be advantages and disadvantages connected with having a signal there, but on the whole he thought he should have felt inclined to say it would have been better to have had a signal there.

He had always considered these compressed air engines the safest of all engines, though he had not anticipated danger from brakes firing combustible materials. He had seen this engine before the accident, but he could not say when. The damping of brakes was such a detail of management that it would not come before an inspector, but but he had seen brakes damped so long ago as twenty years.

As a practical man he knew that brakes were liable to fire. When he reached a mine there were very many things he would have to look after such as ventilation and gas, and frequently also be inquired about the engines. It was a prudent thing for a man to provide water at the engine, but not specially laid for the brakes. He would never anticipate cotton waste being so near the brake as to be fired by a spark from the brake. The chief danger, he would have thought, would have been from spontaneous combustion of an accumulation of the waste. He knew of much heavier braking than was the custom at this engine. He would not examine the brake of the hauling engine unless his attention was specially directed to it, and he quite approved of them.

Summing up

Mr. E. B. Reece, in summing up, said that it was very clear that none of the officials apprehended the danger at the engine. Mr. Stewart, under-manager and Mr. Robson, Inspector of Mines, had also spoken to the same effect. It was for the jury to consider whether or not the officials of the colliery had exercised due and all responsible care that careful men could exercise by having the engine working in the condition that it was. To his mind, the brattice at the engine-house, saturated as it would be with oil, was a source of danger, and yet they added that brattice screens of this kind were hitherto commonly used in action with these engines. He hoped that they would not be used again, for he could not help thinking from the evidence before them that the brattice fired up and produced this disaster.

This was certainly the impression on his mind. The only other point was what happened after the fire took place. Was everything done that could possibly be done to save the men? From the evidence before them it seemed to him that everything had been done. Mr. Robson, in reply to Mr. Rhys, said that he was also satisfied that all that could be had been done. They had heard what the inspector had said about the absence of a signal at the Four feet landing.

Now, as the larger number of men were saved from the west side, there was, he thought, the greatest credit due was to young Thomas Rosser for the great presence of mind and pluck and judgement which he displayed in keeping the men back, and in employing the various means he did to preserve their safety. Then with regard to the efforts made to rescue these poor men who had fallen helplessly behind the screen or fencing at the Four-feet landing, the witness Miles, and Thomas who was with him, appeared to have shown great courage indeed in venturing twice down the shaft, full of smoke as it was, to try and rescue them.

Mr. Inskip here interrupted and stated: "And Fletcher, too, sir, deserves mention." Mr. E. B. Reece said: "Thank you; yes, Fletcher deserves great praise for his efforts. He was there at the landing and tried his utmost to get these four men out of danger. All the poor men with the exception of Titley, seemed to have lost their lives from suffocation. But in the case of Titley their verdict must be different, for there was no doubt at all that he lost his life by falling from the landing into the bottom of the Tymawr Pit." Mr. R. J. Rhys said he would not add any remarks, but let the case go as it stood to the jury.

The verdict

The room was at noon cleared, so that the jury might deliberate. At two o'clock they returned the following verdict in writing: - *"We find that the accident at the Great Western Colliery, on April 11th 1893, was caused by a spark or sparks emitting from the brake of a hauling engine at the top of the East Hard Heading, which came into contact with some inflammable substance in its neighbourhood, and we do not attribute any negligence to any of the officials either before or after the accident and that the sixty-two men who lost their lives by suffocation by smoke arising from the fire and that Jesse Titley lost his life by falling from the Four-feet landing at the bottom of the seam at the Tymawr shaft."* They also recommended that: -

(1). The code of regulations drawn up by Mr. Hugh Bramwell be sent to the Home Secretary with the object that those and similar ones should be adopted in other collieries.

(2). That sufficient width or surface for brake power be provided at all hauling engines, so as to prevent any friction.

(3). That every care should be exercised in letting down full journeys on the East Hard Heading in the Great Western Colliery at a uniform rate of speed. The enquiry was then brought to a close.

● A full report of the inquiry appears in the rear of this book .

Chapter nine

Following the verdict of the jury at the inquest the '*Pontypridd District Herald*' commented:

"The inquest into the fatal accident at the Great Western Colliery was brought to an end last Saturday. As was already expected, the result shows that no-one is culpably blameable for the sacrifice of the 62 lives. What seems remarkable about the incident is the unexpected. No experience, however great, considering the accident of the kind within the region of the probable, and consequently no provision was made to meet a contingency. It affords more proof of the fact that something is to be learned every day, in colliery management in particular. The poor fellows who lost their lives will not have died in vain, if their deaths will add one more element to safety for underground workers who follow them. A life of a man is frivolous at the best. When he disappears in the mouth of a pit he is never certain of beholding again the blessed sight of God's sun. It is therefore the duty of everyone responsible to see the dangers of his calling are reduced to a minimum. The new rules and new arrangements adopted by the colliery syndicate, it is hoped, afford ample security that all that can be done will be done, to secure for the colliers greater immunity from possible and unlooked for dangers than they have hitherto enjoyed."

Mr J. T. Robson, Inspector of Mines for the South Wales District in his official report on the disaster concluded: "The verdict was the only one which, according to the evidence, could reasonably have been returned, and I entirely concur in it. It is a lamentable fact that the cause of this terrible loss of life was in the first instance the smouldering or burning of a piece of greasy brattice cloth or a portion of a wooden beam, and probably of such an insignificant nature that a single bucketful of water thrown on it at once would have effectually put it out. But, this not being done at once, in a very few minutes the fire became so intensified that nothing short of a copious supply of water could have stopped its progress. Such a copious supply of water was not available, and hence the magnitude of the fire, and the difficulty of stamping it out under the extraordinary conditions prevailing. Indeed, at the time of writing, more than a month after the occurrence, there is still fire smouldering in the gob 12 or 15 yards from the side of the East Level near the lamp station." He continued: "Reference was also made to the fact that for ventilating purpose the Tymawr Shaft is the upcast for the whole of the East Level workings. It was the only available means of egress from these workings after the intake from the downcast shaft was cut off by the fire, because the original return marked on the plan was partly stowed between the shaft and the air crossing over the East

Main Dip. Whether the Tymawr shaft was the outlet under the 16th section of the Mines Act or not is a moot point, for the Hetty and No.2 Pits being connected with the Four-feet seam, with a communication between them, the No.2 Pit may be held as the second outlet for the Hetty Pit. The clause in the Act makes it clear that such second outlet must be provided for each *district of a seam.* It is certainly necessary that every district should have a second outlet available for use, and such was the case here. The loss of life by this simple accident was very great, but great as it was, if the Tymawr upcast shaft had not been a winding pit, in all probability the loss of life would have been much greater."

The final victim recovered

On 4 o'clock on Sunday morning, April 30th 1893, the day after the inquest was finished, the remains of Patrick Sullivan (25), the 63rd and last of the victims of the Great Western Colliery disaster was found beneath the debris of the great fall, which was gradually being cleared. He had been badly burned, and was placed in a coffin taken down the pit for the purpose and afterwards returned home. He was buried at the Glyntaff Cemetery the following Tuesday (March 2nd). There was a very large procession of comrades and friends.

An unfortunate dispute soon arose at the Great Western Colliery, resulting in the cessation of work on the part of all workmen employed in the mine. After the explosion the workmen, after consultation with the management, arranged to work in shifts of four hours clearing falls etc.; and in all shifts of six hours in places in the mine where the air was good. The manager, Mr. Phillip Jones, had now made a request that the men should return to the old system of ten hour shifts, and on Monday the workmen held a general meeting to consider the matter. Mr. Thomas Kemp, presiding, being supported by Mr. W. H. Gronow, check-weigher; Mr. Evan Jones, secretary; Mr. Morgan Thomas, agent of the Hauliers Association, and others, after a long deliberation, unanimously resolved to adhere for the present to the four and six hour shifts, and a deputation communicated the result to Mr. Phillip Jones. Upon returning, the deputation reported that they had failed to come to any agreement with management, and consequently the men resolved not to return to work pending the settlement of the dispute.

The first ever May Day March in Pontypridd at the end of April 1893 saw a the gathering assemble at the People's Park before marching through the town led by the Penrhiw and Ynysybwl brass bands. One of the features of the day was a

Tymawr pit top c. 1910

procession of gaily-decked horses, and spruced, cleaned, painted or polished carriages, cabs, cars, traps and carts. It being Mabon's Day (in honour of the famous miner's leader), there was a general holiday and in addition to the strong colliery element in the town, the various trades turned out in great force, with their banners and devices. As the parade went through the main streets of the town on either side of the procession were scouts with boxes willing to accept any contribution for the benefit of the widows and orphans of the men killed in the recent accident. What seemed to appeal to the sympathies of the public all along the line was a tram occupied by colliers, who were gathered around a frame work black and begrimed with coal dust, intended to represent the Hetty Pit of the Great Western Colliery. It was recorded that over £15 was handed to the Relief Fund as the result of the united efforts of the collectors and the sympathetic public.

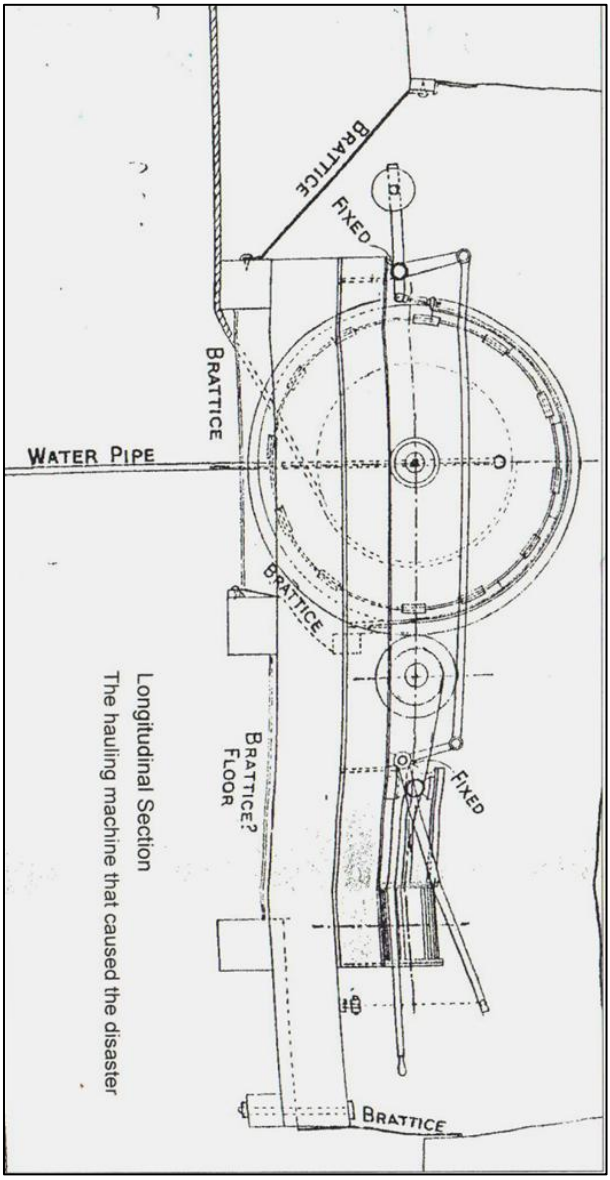
More deaths within weeks

With the miners returning to work, you would imagine that everyone would be very wary of accidents in the mine, but this appears not to have been so. At about half-past-one on Friday afternoon May 19th 1893, about five weeks after the disaster, another fatal accident occurred when David Llewellyn, aged 19, an assistant hitcher employed at the No.2 Pit met with a horrible death. Llewellyn, it appeared, attempted to cross the bottom of the pit while the cage descended with terrific force upon his head, killing him instantly. The deceased was a native of Llantrisant, and lodged at Distillery Row, Hopkinstown. Another sad accident occurred at the Great Western Colliery on Monday, May 29th, when William Harries, a collier, aged 44, received fatal injuries.

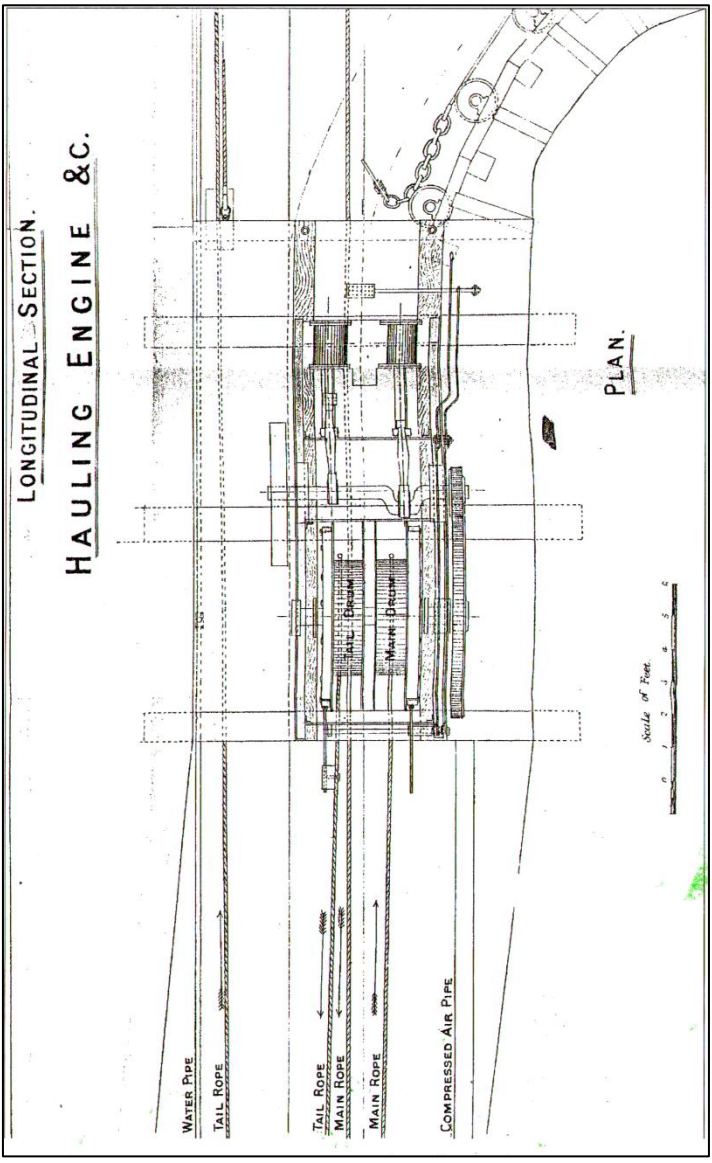
It appears that Harries, residing at 8 Western Street, Hafod, was following his vocation in the Four-feet seam when a fall suddenly smote him to the ground, and before long the poor man expired from the injuries received. An inquest was held and a verdict according with the testimony of eyewitnesses of the accident was recorded. Meanwhile, in the second week of May two concerts were held by the Eisteddfod Choir at the Colston Hall, Bristol. All proceeds going towards the Great Western Disaster Fund.

Glyntaff Burial Board meeting

The '*Pontypridd Chronicle*' of May12th 1893 reported: Extra labour and trouble had been associated at the cemetery at the time when the burials took place of the victims who had lost their lives of the Great Western disaster, and that a bill



Plan of the hauling engine that caught fire and caused the disaster



Plan of the hauling engine that caught fire and caused the disaster

had been submitted for £11-18s-8d for extra labour. Mr. Roberts thought the

Board ought to congratulate themselves on the fact that funerals were very well conducted and the greatest decorum was shown in the cemetery.

There was no crush whatever although the crowd at the cemetery was very great, and he felt very much pleased that all had been carried out in such a systematic way during these memorable and black days in the history of the town. Rev. S. Jones said he was there in his official capacity during the whole of the two days, and he believed they were greatly indebted to the sexton for the very excellent arrangements which he had made, and particularly for the way in which he had marked out the destination of each funeral, otherwise it would have been quite impossible to have them buried in the right graves.

The Chairman: "Most of us attended the funerals, and we can testify to the same thing. We ought also to thank our clerk for what he did that day for he assisted the sexton in many ways and gave him all the help he could, and it is only fair that we should thank him for the great trouble which he took, and for the way in which every detail was carried out. I propose that a vote of thanks be accorded both to the clerk and the Sexton."

Mr. W. Jones: "In seconding that proposition I wish we would show our practical appreciation of the efforts made by our sexton. If anything had gone wrong it would be a serious reflection upon the Board. I think we should give eighty-shillings in consideration of the extra work which he did on that day, for he has well merited that, and under such circumstances he was obliged to work very late." This was carried unanimously. The same newspaper reported: -

Special Sermon by the Rev. J. R. Jones

It having being announced that collections towards the Great Western Relief Fund would be made at the Tabernacle Chapel, Pontypridd, and on Sunday morning and evening, a special service was also arranged for Sunday evening when a large number of the visitors including a number of the relatives of the victims of the disaster attended. The Rev. J. R. Jones, pastor, having read at the opening of the service the 12th chapter of Luke, the choir and congregation sang

"Myfi'r Pechadur penaf'
Fel yr wyf," &c;

To the well known tune of "Tyrgwyn." very effectively the hymn which a haulier

in the Great Western Colliery sang underground when the jury visited the pit a few days after the accident: -

Mr. Jones then took for his text 1 Thessalonians, v chapter, 2nd and 3rd verses: "You yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night, for when they shall say 'Peace and safety,' then sudden destruction cometh upon them, and they shall not escape." Among the lessons taught by this text might be found an indication of the case with which God could, if he wished, destroy. Here at the Great Western Pit it was not an explosion that happened, although at one time people dreaded that as a consequence of what actually did happen. The Lord did not create thunder, or flashed the lightening, but what caused the terrible disaster which took so many lives were sparks, only sparks, and those sparks from the engine brake ignited a fire which filled the mine with smoke, innocent as it might seem - only smoke - appeared to be the destructive agent which sent so many to eternity. There was, fortunately, cause for rejoicing over the fact that the saved were more numerous than the lost. The dead might have been reckoned by the hundreds but the devastating element was prevented from striking down more than 64 or 65.

Still, the scenes in Pontypridd during the few days subsequent to the disaster were mournful and terribly striking to the onlooker. Body after body might have been seen carried upon the shoulders of the deceased's comrades, themselves rescued out of the 'jaws of death.' Vehicles conveyed others who on the previous Tuesday went to work full of life and energy, but who had been stricken down when they were full of the hopes of life. Mercy and justice seemed to have been striving together regarding thefateof70 more, and the strife lasted till half past six, but mercy was triumphant, and the 70 came out of the pit alive. The third lesson which he gathered from the text was the importance of being ready at all times to meet the Son of Man. They should be on the Lord's work and in the spirit of the work with their candles burning as became people who were prepared to meet their Master. They should be ready so that if they heard the sound of his footsteps in the fire, or saw his shadow coming in the smoke, they need not get excited or hurried.

There should be no necessity then for trimming the light or brightening the flame, but the light should be kept burning ready to welcome the Master. Did they not have a splendid example of living religion - of the candle kept burning awaiting the Lord's coming in the case of John Williams, one of the victims of the Great Western Disaster, who was found dead on his knees in prayer, while at his side stood, still in death, but apparently in a listening attitude when he died, his father Morgan Williams? It was stated that artists from the '*Graphic*' and

'*Illustrated London News*' had descended the Great Western Pit to portray the sad havoc which had been wrought on the mine, but he asked, was there not in this wonderful incident an illustration of a living faith worthy of being portrayed by one of the angels of heaven, and placed upon the walls of an heavenly Jerusalem for admiration?

Here was the son upon his knees by the side of his aged father, evidently leading him in prayer at the very moment when the soul of both father and son fled, the son dying while engaged in prayer, and the father dying while listening to that prayer. The best which they in the Tabernacle Chapel had seen of John Williams was when, a few weeks prior to this terrible disaster, he occupied in front of the gallery and led a children's choir in singing 'Yr Iesu Ydy testun caniadeau pur y Nef.' (Jesus is the subject of heaven's pure songs). The Rev. Gentleman proceeded to reiterate the importance of being ready for the coming of the Lord, and said that Christians of the present day were prone to sleep throughout the day of grace, but it should be borne in mind that such apathy in this life would only lead to their being awake throughout the long night of eternity.

There was consolation to the bereaved in these disasters from the knowledge that Jesus Christ reigned and held the keys of the grave and the world to come; that in such a catastrophe as this no one could pass from one world to another without Jesus Christ opening the door for him. He(the preacher) had expected that as a consequence of the terrible lessons of this sad disaster they would have heard in the churches of Pontypridd and the district the sound of many people seeking for admission and embracing religion, but such had not been the case, and he regretted to say that the scenes witnessed on the streets of Pontypridd on Saturday evening only proved that the heart of man was very hard.

The choir, under the leadership of Mr. John, sang with thrilling effect the hymn, "Beth yw'r utgorn glwai'n seinio?" the first and third lines in each verse, forming questions being sang as a solo part by Miss Jones. At the close the famous dirge "Bydd myrdd o ryfeddodau" was sung by the congregation, the last four lines being repeated again and again.

Funds to pay out

On Wednesday May 17th a conference of the representatives o fthe various funds being raised at Pontypridd, Cardiff, Bristol and other places for the relief of the widows and orphans of the 63 men killed at the colliery disaster was held at the Parish Rooms, Pontypridd, and agreed to amalgamate all the funds and draw out a trust deed. During the meeting the chairman gave particulars of the instances in which sons had been killed leaving widows by the sad event. There

were 39 orphan children, while, in addition to this, three of the widows would soon again become mothers. There were also three children under the age of thirteen whose brothers had lost their lives, leaving widowed mothers, so that the orphans might be taken at 45. The number of men leaving no dependant claims, beyond what might be allowed to the relative for the loss of life was 33. Mr. Godfrey Clarke then said that taking the Permanent Relief Fund as a basis for payment, the following sum would be required for relief, omitting interest that would accrue on an investment of funds:

Thirty-three single men lives at £20 each payable to next of kin. £660
Four single men leaving dependants, including Mrs Roberts, whose husband was in an asylum, say extra allowance of £10 per life in these cases, which would be £30 per life. £120
Twenty-two married men's lives at £5 each, leaving dependant Four single men lives at £20 each, payable to next of kin. £110
Four sons leaving widowed mothers at £5 per life £20

Twenty-six widows at 5s per week equals £6-10s per week; this multiplied by 52 = £338 per annum, and that sum placed at a 12 years purchase. £4,056

Forty-five orphans at 2s-6d per week, would be £5-12s-6d per week, or £292-1s-0d per annum, and placed at a 8 years purchase would equals £2,340

Total sum required £7,306

To meet this they had now paid into the bank and promised to several funds the sum of £7,629. Immediate payments and investments, including £910 death claims to the next of kin, and £650-10s first year payments to widows and orphans on current account - would swallow £1,540-10s, leaving a balance of £6,000 that could be invested at 3%, in the bank or elsewhere. At the end of the 12th year, taking the permanent scale as a basis, they would have £1,453 in hand, and the calls on the fund would practically cease at the end of 12 years. These plans were approved. Mr. Gordon Lenox, J.P; proposed that the Pontypridd committee be authorised to grant immediate relief in cases of necessity upon the basis proposed. This was also agreed to, and a resolution was passed to the effect that the executive committee should have power to apply what surplus might remain to any local or national fund established for the relief of workmen.

The controllers of the disaster fund meanwhile were still collecting donations: A meeting of the executive committee of the Great Western Colliery Fund, was

held at the Cardiff Town Hall on July 15th 1893, G. L. Clarke, Pontypridd, being in the chair. The other members present were Messrs. T. Johns (Mayor of Newport); Evan Owen and George Padfield, Cardiff; D. Leyshon, Williams Evans and W. Morgan, Pontypridd; and Briggs and Weatherall, Bristol. A number of objections to claims were considered and dealt with. The sums handed in from the various districts were as follows: Pontypridd, £3,900, of which £140 had been paid in relief to widows and orphans in that district. Newport, £379-11s-11d; Merthyr, £373-5s-2d; Aberdare, £280-17s-7d; Bristol, £2,500, which included £477-5s-6d the amount of the Mansion House Fund.

Mr. Evan Jones stated that the Cardiff Fund would have been handed in on that day had it not been for a few outstanding subscriptions that had not been paid. Mr. Padfield estimated that the proper total of the Cardiff Fund would be about £900. It was roughly estimated that the total amount would be £8,833. The meeting was adjourned until the 27th, when the Secretary, Mr. Shipton, gave a statement of accounts. A sum of £9,085 was reported, this included a sum of £950 from the Mayor of Cardiff's Fund; but a communication was received from the mayor stating that he had also received a cheque for £80 from the Secretary of the Cyclist's Festival held in Cardiff on the 10th of June in aid of the Cardiff Fund, being the proceeds of that meeting. Thus the Cardiff Fund now amounted to over £1,000.

It was suggested by the secretary that £7,000 should be invested in the Newport Corporation at 3¼%; which would yield £350 per year. It was estimated that without deducting orphans that would come of age or allowing for widows getting married, the annual sum required would be £520. Further, it was calculated by Mr. Shipton that the balance in hand at the end of 20 years would be £1,580-7s-9d. It was resolved, on the motion of Mr. Owen, to invest £7,000 in the Newport Corporation. An extra £5 was awarded to a widow, 19 years of age, who had lost her husband in the disaster, and who had given birth to a posthumous child, which had since died.

There were several other deaths in the Great Western Colliery that year and the Western Mail' Fund was distributed to the widows on a Friday afternoon just before Xmas 1893, at the Parish Rooms, Pontypridd. The money that had been conventionally wrapped up in small envelopes, was then distributed to the poor widows as follows:

Elizabeth Ballen, 1 child £7; Elizabeth Cavill, two children, £9; Mary Ann Davies, £5; Mary Davies (Lewis St), five children, £15; Mary Edmunds (Pantygraigwen), £5; Robert Edmunds (father-in-law of the previous, 84 years of age), £5; Elizabeth Godfrey, two Children, £9; Alice Grainger, one child, £7; Elizabeth

Jones, three children, £11; Alice John, two children, £9; Mary Lewis, one child, £7; Mary Maddock, three children £11; Hannah Osborne, three children £11; Matilda Potter, 2 children, £9; Jane Spooner, one child, £7; Catherine Sullivan, £5; Barbara Thomas, three children, £11; Annie Thorne, four children, £13; Margaret Thomas, two children, £9; Margaret Williams, three children, £11; Margaret Williams, mother-in-law of the previous, £5. This money having been distributed, after some discussion it was resolved to send a cheque for £5 to Mrs. Williams, a widow, who resided at Harlech, north Wales; to give to Gertrude Williams and her father of Hopkinstown whose father had been killed at the accident and whose mother is also dead, a sum of £2 each. These orphan children were now cared for by John Williams. £2 was also sent to the children of Steven Bond and to Mrs. Roberts, Trallwn £3. At the close a vote of thanks to the '*Western Mail*' was carried.

The Home Office report

Mr. S. D. Evans MP, representing the Home Office, in his official report, dated May 26th 1893, to The Right Honourable H. H. Asquith, M.P; The Secretary of State for the Home Department, reported on the enquiry and causes of the disaster and forwarded some recommendations that would perhaps prevent such an accident occurring again: -

"The jury unanimously found that the fir originated at the engine referred to, and of this the evidence left no doubt. They also found that the fire had been ignited by sparks emitted from the brake, and caused by the friction on the application of the brake to one of the drums, probably the tail drum, of the engine. The drums were made of steel plates, and the brakes consisted of a strip of wrought iron called the brake-strap, bolted on to elm blocks, which went halfway round the drum. The pressure on the brake on the tail drum was as 45 to 1, and on the main drum as 15 to 1. Underneath the engine, brattice had been fixed in order to protect the engine driver from the draught and coal dust resulting from the great current of air. This brattice in the course of time became more or less saturated with oil and grease which fell from the engine, and was thereby rendered more combustible. The beams and wooden flooring would also intercept some oil and grease, and would also in turn become more amenable to the flames. Some of the brattice was within 18 inches of the brake.

I think there can be no doubt that the sparks emitted from the brake ignited the brattice, and that the flames were communicated from the brattice to the beams and timber. Close to the engine on both sides of the roadways there

were posts and timbers, both in the heading, level and main dip. Immediately the fire seized the beams the strong current of air carried it along the timbers at a terrible rate. It chiefly spread into the Four-feet east level. The smoke would be carried with great velocity into the workings, and it suffocated some of the men in or near their working places, and others as they attempted to make their way into the Tymawr upcast shaft. A considerable number of men, from 70 to 80, fortunately reached the Four-feet landing of the Tymawr Pit, and were raised in cages to the surface. Four men who had reached the landing were too exhausted to go across the fencing into the cage, and they succumbed to the gases, in spite of the brave efforts of Fletcher and others to assist them into the cage. Numbers of other men were kept by the admirable discretion and presence of mind of a young firemen, Thomas Rosser, in Holbrook's Heading for hours, and afterwards were able togo up by the East Main Dip. The chief points to which I directed my inquiry and upon which I have to report were: -

(1) Whether there was any negligence or default in the construction or working of the engine, which caused or contributed to the disaster;

(2) Whether, after the fire originated, everything was done which was reasonably possible to check it, and to preserve the safety of the workmen;

(3) Whether any prosecutions should be instituted against any person or persons under the Coal Mines Regulation Act, or otherwise; and,

(4) Whether any and what steps or precautions could or ought to be taken in similar collieries in the future, to prevent the recurrence of such painful calamities.

In the first place, I must state that it appears that hauling engines like the one in this case are in general use at this and at other large collieries of the Rhondda Valley, similarly erected, and with similar drums, brakes, supports and surroundings. This particular engine had been erected over five years. The evidence showed that it was not unusual for sparks to be generated by the brakes at this engine, and that on some occasions these sparks had ignited cotton waste which happened to lie about, and which was being, or had been, used by the engine driver for cleaning purposes. The regular engine driver, William Palmer, who was away from work through illness, had frequently seen sparks emitted from the brake, and had even seen pieces of cotton-waste

smoulder and ignite on many occasions. These he would put out by means of water which he kept in a bucket at hand for the purpose of cooling the brake when it became very heated. George James, acting as the engine driver on the day of the incident, plus one David Palmer, who was with him practising as a spare hand at engine-driving, used the buckets.

It never occurred to Mr. Molyneux, the mechanical engineer, who had twice heard about these sparks; the manager or under manager, or indeed any of the colliery officials, that any danger might arise from sparks emitted in this way; and consequently it was admitted that no precautions were taken in the supplying of water, or the removal of timber, or in any other way, against the possible danger of which had never occurred in their minds. William Palmer said, however, that he always kept a bucket full of water near him to apply to the brakes when they became heated and "smoked." This water he generally got from a stand-up waterpipe, which was carried to the floor of the engine from a water pipe 1¼ inches in diameter which was laid along the roadway, and which conveyed water to the underground workings from reservoirs on the surface. These water-pipes were laid down by a previous manager (Mr. Wales) some years ago, and were not intended in any way to be a precaution against fire, but were laid for the purpose of having fine sprays of water to allay the coal dust. They extended about five miles into the workings. It was not very clearly shown why the stand-pipe had been erected, but some evidence was given to show that it was intended to provide water for contingencies which might happen to paraffin lamps which were formally used in the engine-house.

For some years, however, paraffin lamps had been discontinued in the engine room, electric light having been substituted in its stead. Attached to the stand-pipe was a tap and hose, and William Palmer said he never considered it safe to go on working the engine without having a bucket full of water to cool the brake. According to evidence, the use made of the water out of the stand-pipe at the engine was not known to the officials, except to Norman, the assistant mechanical engineer.

George James, who worked the engine on the day of the disaster, said he never saw sparks from the engine, though he "smelt" the brake getting heated, and saw it "smoke." This happened particularly when a large load of twelve full trams were let down the East Hard Heading, which was the sharpest gradient in the colliery (1 in 6), and along which the full load went down, necessitating

of course, the powerful application of the brake on the tail drum. It appears that such a load was let down this steep heading about 10 or 12 minutes before the fire was actually observed on the 11th of April, and there can be little or no doubt but that the ignition took place at this time. The whole of the brake was not in view of the engine driver as he stood on his platform; and the fire had caught in the brattice, and had also seized the cross-beams underneath, before his first attention was called to it.

The flames were first seen by a lad named Edwin Matthews, who was walking along the East Hard Heading at 1.30 p.m; intending to proceed to his work for the shift commencing at 2 p.m. He shouted to the engine-driver, and the latter came down and saw the fire. He had only half a bucket of water, so he tried the water-pipe, but there was no water in the pipe. He broke the stand-up pipe, but he could get no water; the main pipe in the roadway was afterwards broken 8 or 9 yards away, but there was no pressure of water in the pipe; in fact, there was so little water in it that "it would take a long time to fill a bucket." At this time all the water that could be got was from a tank in the stable at the bottom of the heading 150 yards off.

It is sad to think that if water had been found at the usual pressure on the pipe near the engine the fire could have been extinguished when it was first discovered; but four or five minutes was sufficient for the flames to get firm hold, and to be beyond prevention. No satisfactory explanation was given for the failure of water in the pipes on this day. The pipes had not been examined during the day; the person responsible for examining the pipes and machinery underground was A. Norman. He had not reached the East Workings on this day before the accident. In fact, the examination of these pipes, and of the engine, did not seem to be very regularly carried out; but, as before stated, the pipes were not intended to convey water to put out fires, and were admitted to be inadequate for such a purpose. Soon after the fire was discovered by Matthews, other persons arrived, and the under-manager was on the scene in about a quarter of an hour, and the manager in about half an hour afterwards. The first thing now to be done was to try and save the men in the Four-feet seam, and to get the men out from other parts of the colliery.

At first the fan at the Tymawr Pit was increased in speed from about 52 revolutions, to about 76 revolutions per minute. It is not certain who advised this. It was done in the excitement. and was well-intended; but in my opinion, it was a mistake, because it increased the current of air going down the Hetty

Pit and passing the engine, and lent more force to the flames, and gave increased velocity to the smoke. But no-one can be blamed, and it cannot be said with any certainty that it caused any further loss of life. Soon afterwards the surveyor reduced the fan to half the usual speed, and in a little time stopped it altogether, thus converting the Tymawr Pit from an upcast into a downcast shaft, and so conveying fresh air to those who might be in the Four-feet seam return-ways. This was the prudent course. After some time when nothing more could be done, the fan was restarted at half speed, and was continued at that speed for some days.

Seventy or eighty men were taken up the Tymawr Pit from the Four-feet landing, and they were taken up quickly and without delay. But I have to make one observation as to the state of things at this Four-feet landing. There was no signalling apparatus there to communicate with the engine-driver. The method adopted by the men who reached the landing on this day to signal was to shout down to the bottom, viz; to the Five-feet seam, which was 100 yards below. The hitcher there stationed thereupon signalled up. The company said they did not feel it necessary to have signalling apparatus at the landing, because the Tymawr Pit was not used for raising men, and because the Four-feet landing was not for the time being used for loading or raising minerals, although minerals were raised from the Five-feet seam. Evidence was given, however, that officials sometimes used this Four-feet landing to ascend the pit. Moreover, the very object of the upcast shaft is to afford a separate second means of ingress and regress (section 16 (1) of the Coal Mines Regulation Act 1887). In my opinion there should be a signalling apparatus there, in order to comply with rule 25 of the said act; and the manager undertook that in future it should be provided. I think, however, that no delay, and no loss of life was shown to have been caused by want of a signal at the landing of the Four-feet seam; and having regard to this, and to the evidence given on this head by Mr. Robson, Her Majesty's Inspector, as follows: -

"I would not think it was a breach of the Act. I mean to say that I could not satisfy myself as to recommending proceedings. Of course I do not decide as to a breach of the Act, that is for higher authority; but so far as I could judge I would not have thought it desirable on my part to interfere, and recommend the case be tested, although I should have drawn the manager's attention to it, and I think I have done so in some other place very similarly situated, and I think that as a rule it has been done. But I am quite aware there are objections and disadvantages to a signal in such a place; it would lead to confusion with

the other signalling, and might induce men to come out and use that shaft when they ought not to use it, and so fall down the pit.

I cannot advise that any proceedings should now be instituted. On the whole, having regard to the evidence of the officials, and to that of Mr. Robson, I do not feel justified in saying that the company were negligent in the construction of the engine, or in not supplying water at the engine as a precaution against such a fire as this, as the possibility of such a catastrophe as this never presented itself to their minds; but at the same time it was clear that a fair supply of water might have extinguished the fire in time to have prevented any loss of life. I also think that all that could have been reasonably done, after the fire occurred, was done in bringing out the men and saving life. With regard to the future, the terrible calamity at this colliery has opened the eyes of managers and others to this possible source of danger; and I am pleased to be able to report that additional precautions have already been taken, not only at this colliery, but at others in the district, to prevent as far as possible any recurrence of such a disaster from similar cases. As to what has been done at this colliery, reference may be made to the new regulations drawn out by the manager, which are as follows: -

They are divided into temporary precautions and permanent ones. The temporary ones are intended to apply at once to the engines we have in use, and the permanent ones to the engines we subsequently put up.

26. Every engine-house shall be carefully cleaned up. All oil, old waste, and inflammable material other than the supports for the engine to be removed.

27. All brattice cloth, now used for sheltering engine-men from draught, to be totally removed, as well as all unnecessary wood about the engine-house.

28. Galvanized-iron sheets to be erected for shelter in the future.

29. Each engine-man to be provided with a tin-box with a handle, into which all old waste must be thrown and brought out of the pit. No engine-man will be supplied with clean waste by the storekeeper unless he produces the old dirty waste at the surface.

30. Each engine to be carefully examined to see that no moving part of it is rubbing against any framing used for its support.

31. Two buckets for water to be kept in each engine-house.
Then the permanent precautions are:

1. In future no engine is to be erected on wooden supporting beams. All such supports to be of iron or steel girders.

2. Flooring of all engine-houses where flooring is required to be of iron or metal plates and not of wood.

3. No engine to be erected except in arched engine-house.

4. The roadways to and from every engine-house to be arched with stone or brick for a distance of not less than 30 feet in each direction.

5. Each engine-house to be provided with a hydrant or cock, not less than 1¼ inches in diameter, connected with the water-pipes, and fitted with not less than 15 feet of India-rubber hose pipe. The hydrant cock to be always at the intake side of the engine house. Such hydrant to be tried daily by the engine-man.

It is also a matter well worthy of consideration whether some practical means might not be found to communicate by signals, *e.g.;* electric bells, to all the working places, in order to warn or call out workmen in case of any accident in any part of a mine which might render their remaining in unsafe, or any delay in coming out dangerous. The accident illustrates also, how important it is to keep the return air-ways and the upcast shaft in good order and condition, and ready for emergencies.

I am, & etc. (Signed) ***S. T. Evans***

● A full account of this report appears at the rear of this book.

Meanwhile, relatives of the people killed in the disaster, started legal proceedings, claiming that the Great Western Colliery Co. through negligence had caused the death of the 62 men and boys. The '*Pontypridd District Herald*' of Saturday Aug 26th 1893 reported: -

Action against the company - Claim under the Employer's Liability Act
A verdict for the plaintiff

On behalf of the nearest relatives of the 62 men who lost their lives at the Great Western Colliery disaster, the Miner's Federation of Great Britain entered several actions against the colliery proprietors under the Employer's Liability Act. The last case was that of Barbara Thomas, who claimed £230 damages against the Great Western Colliery Co. for causing the death of her husband, Joseph Thomas, a collier, by negligence. This came on for hearing at the Pontypridd County Court on Thursday, before his Honour, Judge Gwilym Williams. Mr. M. Jones, barrister, (Coroner for north Monmouthshire), instructed by Messrs. Meyrick & Davies, Cardiff, appeared for the plaintiff, and the defendant company was represented by Mr. Abel Thomas, Q. C; and Mr. S. T. Evans, Q. C; instructed by Messrs. Preece and Inskip, Bristol. Mr. W. Brace, Miner's Agent, was also in attendance.

Mr. Jones in opening, remarked that it was a test case. It is one of several cases against the company for compensation. He added that Joseph Thomas, of Hopkinstown, who was killed at the colliery on April 11th left a widow and three children, and it was alleged that the accident happened through negligence in management of the machinery, that being referred to being the hauling engine of the East Hard Heading. Mr. Jones quoted cases in which it was laid down that it was the defence to prove that every precaution was taken.

Barbara Thomas, the plaintiff, gave evidence of the loss of her husband by the accident. He was a collier and earned about 30 shillings a week. Mr. Thomas, for the defendant company, contended that his friend had not shown that the accident arose through any defect in connection with ways, works, and any machinery or plant connected with or used in the business of the employers. The only defect the strongest imagination could discover was there was a piece of brattice cloth that was within two feet of the brake, and not one of the witnesses with the exception of Mr. Robson, anticipated that there was the slightest danger for this which could now be called a defect.

It was also necessary to prove that the defect was known, and had not been remedied through negligence of the employer or some person in his service entrusted with the duty of seeing that the machinery was in proper condition. There was but one person who knew of the sparks - the engine driver himself - and he stated he never mentioned them to anybody else. They also had it from one witness that though he walked under the engine 27 or 30 times a day he never saw a spark, and the man who had charge of the engine never saw sparks for two months, and the regular driver said he only saw sparks occasionally. Mr. Robson was one of those happy gentlemen who got into the witness box saying there was no danger from sparks, and left it seeing considerable danger. But they had the evidence of several experts that there was no reason to anticipate

danger, and therefore he asked His Honour to say that the case was not proved. No ordinary person, with ordinary care and skill would have seen the danger, and therefore it could not be said that there was a defect in the engine, and if it had been made out that there was a defect, negligence had not been proved against the employers.

Mr. Jones said that they had complained of the danger that existed from the sparks falling on the brattice cloth, and that it had not been discovered through the negligence of the employers or their officials. His Honour said he should give judgement for the plaintiff. He found that there was a defect in the machinery, and based that finding upon the position occupied by that piece of brattice cloth. Those in authority ought to have known as reasonable men that brattice cloth placed in that position gave rise to considerable danger. Mr. Thomas had talked about reasonable men and so forth. He quite accepted the definition of a manager as a reasonable man, whose common sense ought to have led him to the conclusion that the putting of pieces of inflammable brattice cloth in that position was negligence. To say if they devoted the necessary time to the performance of their duties, that they did not discover sparks were emitted from the brake was to him something like trying to insult ones understanding. It was their business to find out that their machinery worked smoothly and well, and he had no doubt they knew it.

It was not because the engineer did not tell them that they did not know the fact. To say that they passed the place several times a day and did not find these sparks emitted was to his mind not true. He found therefore that there was a defect in the machinery in having this piece of brattice cloth in such proximity to the brake.

With regard to the water, he had no doubt that it was known to the management that the water was used for the purpose of cooling down the brake, and used very often when the brake emitted sparks. Therefore it was negligent not to have a continuous supply of water in that particular tap. He believed the evidence of witnesses that had there been a regular supply of water that the fire would have been prevented. Therefore he found a defect in that respect also and he gave judgement to the plaintiff the amount to be computed under the Act of 30 shilling per week for three years, with costs. Mr. Thomas applied that the execution should be stayed for fourteen days on the amount being paid into court, and to this his Honour agreed.

Two men killed and two injured

So the relatives had won, but the company would have fourteen days toappeal,

which the did, meanwhile back at the colliery on September 27th 1893 Herbert Thomas, 33, and on November 18th Hugh Hughes, 22, were both killed in roof falls. As the year of 1893 drew to a close the Colliery's appeal against the decision awarded for the relatives a few week before came to court. The '*Pontypridd District Herald*' of Dec. 16th reported: -

The claim for compensation against Great Western Colliery Co;
The appeal - The Judgement

In the court of the Queen's Bench on Monday, Justices Wills and Wright gave judgement in the case of Barbara Thomas v The Great Western Colliery Co. It was an action brought by the widow of a man who was killed in the G. W. Colliery in April, 1893, when 62 other persons lost their lives. The widow sought to establish the case that the accident happened owing to the negligence of a colliery official in not seeing that the brake block connected with a machine emitted sparks close to some inflammable widths of cloths, and the igniting of which was said to have caused the accident. Further, it was said that there had been negligence on the part of the colliery officials in not seeing that the water was not in a certain pipe close to where the fire occurred, and the absence of which prevented it being extinguished. The County Court judge found for the plaintiff, but the colliery company had appealed.

Mr. Justice Wills, in giving judgement, said in this case he and his learned brother had the difficult and embarrassing task of saying whether there was any evidence to go to the jury that the accident which happened at the colliery could be attributed to the negligence of someone in the employ of the company, and for which the owners were responsible. The case for the plaintiff was put upon two grounds. One, a brake-block, and the other to the absence of water for the water pipes. It was said that the juxtaposition of the brattice cloth and the brake-block was in itself a defect in the plant. He supposed now that the event had happened, which did happen, no-one could doubt that it was a defect in the plant or that it had turned out a lamentable object lesson. But that was not sufficient under the Act unless the failure to discover that plant was in that respect defective was due to some negligence on the part of the persons entrusted with the duty of looking after the plant and seeing that it was in proper order.

Therefore the question resolved itself into this - ought the man who had the duty of looking after the engine to have discovered that the juxtaposition of the brattice cloth to the brake-block was a source of danger? One thing was perfectly evident, and that was that before this accident happened it never occurred to a any human being to have supposed that the emission of sparks

either in this place, or any machinery of the kind was a source of danger, or likely to cause such an accident as had occurred.

The evidence of the Inspector of Mines seemed to be of the strongest possible character on this point. He said that before the accident it would not have struck him that there was any immediate danger in working the engine as erected. Of course, he added as an Inspector of Mines he always anticipated some amount of danger where there was machinery. But he further added that he saw nothing in this case which could have warranted in suggesting any alterations in the brake-block. The question was not whether it was actually in itself a source of danger, but whether it was that which any reasonable man would anticipate to be a source of danger prior to the accident. Nothing would be stronger than this evidence.

But afterwards, when the inspector was recalled, he modified his former statements, and he gave evidence on which the County Court judge appeared to have relied. He said that if he had been told that the brake was in the habit of emitting sparks, he should have thought it dangerous. It was quite clear that in this piece of evidence he had treated the brake as being of an exceptional character, but he (the learned judge) could not understand on what he had based such a supposition.

There appeared to him (Mr. Justice Wills) to be no trace of evidence that this was so. It appeared to have been an ordinary common brake, subject to exactly the same ordinary contingencies which attended such an arrangement, and he could not but help thinking that the Government Inspector's expression really came to this - than now, having asserted that the danger actually existed, he took a different view with respect to that which happened afterwards, and thought the brake-block was an exceptional character.

That was not evidence on which anybody ought to set. It might be scintilla (slightly) but no more, and seeing that other testimony was clear that this brake-block behaved just as other brake-blocks in similar circumstances, he thought this was hardly any tangible evidence upon which any tribunal ought to act, and saying that the superintendent of this department of the mine was guilty of negligence was distorting this undiscovered and unsuspected source of danger.

Then the next point was the man whose duty it was to examine the pipes bringing a supply of water to the mine had failed to examine them on the Monday, that the accident happened on the Tuesday, and that the accident was due to this negligence. In his view there was a total failure in the evidence to show that this system of water pipes was ever intended to have anything to do in putting out a fire of this kind.

It was absolutely necessary to connect negligence with the accident in order to make the colliery company liable, and he thought that there was no evidence of such negligence, that being so he thought the learned County Court Judge, on deciding for the plaintiff, was wrong and that judgement should be entered for the defendant company. Mr. Justice Wright concurred. The appeal, therefore, was allowed and the judgement entered for the defendant with costs.

So the families were unable to pursue the matter any further. It had been decided that the company were NOT negligent.

On Friday, December 22nd 1893 Morien distributed nearly £200 amongst the widows and orphans of those poor fellows who lost their lives at the Great Western Colliery disaster. This was part of the money collected on their behalf by Mr. H. Laselles Carr, the editor of the '*Western Mail*' newspaper soon after the accident. There was still nearly £100 in hand, and this would be distributed amongst the most deserving, and those which local funds could not relieve.

The '*Pontypridd Chronicle*' of July 13th 1894, just over two weeks after reported:

Action against the Great Western Colliery.

At the Glamorgan Assizes at Swansea last week, before Mr. Justice Vaughan Williams, sitting with a special jury, Mary Davies, widow of the late Arthur Davies, collier, brought an action against the Great Western Colliery Co. Under the Employment Liability Act, for compensation by reason of her husband having been killed in the Great Western Colliery accident of April the 11th 1893.

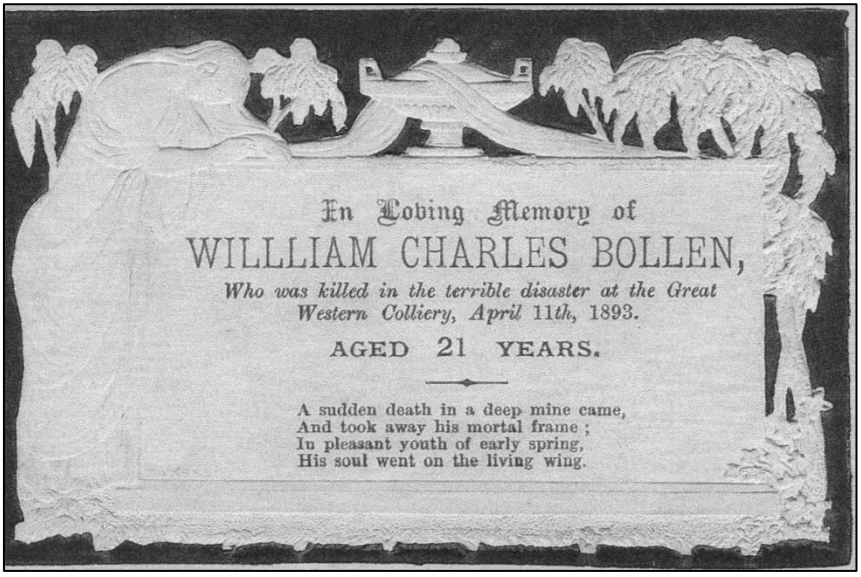
The plaintiff claimed that death was due to the negligence of the defendant company. The allegation was denied by the company, which also repudiated all Liability for any negligence. Mr. Atherley Jones, M.P; and Mr. Robert Jones, appeared for the plaintiff, and Sir Richard Webster, Q. C; M.P; Mr. Abel Thomas, Q. C; M. P; and Mr. G. T. Evans, M. P; represented the defendant company

Case for the plaintiff

Mr. Atherley Jones, in opening the case, said that several actions had been brought against the defendants upon similar grounds. One had already been tried, and was now the subject of litigation in the courts of appeal. Sixty-three or sixty-four persons had been killed in the accident. Their deaths had resulted from a fire, which consumed the platform upon which stood the engine of the main intake of the colliery. In this case it was alleged that such defects existed in the works and plans of the collieries as to make the employers responsible. Around the drum had been placed a brattice clothe for the purpose of,

apparently, protecting the engine from dust and the engine-man from the draught. The brake had been seen often to smoke and emit sparks. The learned Counsel thought that it would not be denied that the brattice cloth was set on fire by the sparks from the brake.

The plaintiff attributed negligence to three persons, Mr. Bramwell, the manager of the colliery, Mr. Molyneux, the chief mechanic; and Arthur Norman, assistant to Mr. Molyneux, who he affirmed, knew of the dangerous condition of things, and did not remedy it. There was a further charge of negligence by the non-provision of water on the day of the fire. The learned counsel asked the jury, and not only on behalf of his client, but on behalf of the thousands of persons employed in the mines of the country, to support the legislature in the endeavour to ensure the greatest skill and care in operations below ground, and to give a verdict for the plaintiff in this case. After a very lengthy hearing a verdict was given for the defendants, the jury being of the opinion that there was no negligence at the time of the accident.



Mourning card for William Charles Bollen

Chapter ten

The disaster remembered

With workmen desperate for pay, as we have seen, the colliery had soon been reopened after the disaster, and many must have been filled with foreboding before descending for their first shift. There was no trouble in finding people to replace the dead colliers down the mine. For the next of kin though, getting over the death of a loved one would be a slow, slow process. For those who were trapped or within the mine when the disaster took place the memories of that day would live in their minds forever and as the years passed the horrors subsided and perhaps those left alive had a stirring story to tell their grandchildren and even the occasional newspaper reporter. Over the years, these accounts of that day in April 1893 appeared in local newspapers:

Pontypridd Observer April 5th 1947

Friday next, April 11th will be the 54th anniversary of the fire at the Great Western Colliery, Pontypridd, in which 63 miners lost their lives. These men were at work in the East Level of the Hetty Pit on April 11th 1893 when the haulage engine burst into flames and caused the disaster. About 790 miners were saved after being trapped in the Main Deep for 4½ hours and being almost suffocated by the terrific volumes of smoke.

Four of the known survivors alive today are Mr. Daniel Matthew Evans, Swansea; John Evans, Treforest; Jones of Hopkinstown and W. J. Young of Tynant. Recalling his grim experience that day Mr. Young writes; "I recall the kindly advice and heroic courage in that great ordeal of that grand old man John (Wesleyan) Evans. When eventually he told us to be prepared to meet our maker, all went silent. Then I think of the two brothers, Tommy and Billy Rosser, they were firemen in that district, Tommy by day and Billy by night.

Tommy carried out his duties and saved us from panicking. Then when hopes of rescue were being given up the answer to our praying came through. Billy Rosser had broken through the cordon of men drawn up around where the fire had originated. The flames had spread a few hundred yards by this time, but Billy was determined to get through to us, and his brother, Tom, who was among those trapped.

Billy successfully forced his way through the raging fire and it was a joy to see the two brothers meet. They trailed their arms around one another, and kissed each other. Billy gave us instructions on how best to get to safety and led us out through the smoke and under the fire. There was many of us then, but I believe

we are only four now. As years have passed, they have not forgotten those words: "Prepare to meet thy maker." No-one will forget Billy Rosser or his brother.

More recollections of Great Western pit fire

The '*Pontypridd Observer*' of April 19th 1947 carried these two reports: -Mr. Edward Evans, 15 Rosser St, Maesycoed, Pontypridd, is yet another survivor of the fire which caused the death of 63 miners at the Hetty Pit of the Great Western Colliery, 54 years ago last Friday. Mr Evans said: "I have a vivid recollection of the sad disaster. At this time I was a spare-hand engine driver, and on that day was working instead of Dan Jenkins, who was ill, at the engine on the West side. It was called the Middle Parting Range feeding the "Eight Hours District." "What struck me the most was the hurry and fluster the men got into. We tried to persuade them to keep cool, as the air current was all right.

There was no smoke or fumes coming into the West Side, as the ventilation was separate from the East Side. But run they would. The traffic men and rider asked me to bring two journeys of men out from the Eight Hours District, which we did with care. Then we made our way to the pit bottom and came to the surface. It reflects credit on the management that no gas explosion occurred. I can remember the two brothers, Tom and Billy Rosser. The men failed to keep Billy back when he went to the aid of Tom. Between them, they got many men out safely. The next few days were busy, but sad. Several colliery managers and students came to the pit, and the way in which the fire was eventually overcome was by running water into the compressed air pipes."

Graphic story

Another account of the disaster is supplied by Mr. Arthur Williams, of 51 Llantrisant Rd, Pontypridd. He says that as one of the survivors, it effected two districts where Tom Rosser was fireman. Sixty-three were saved, also the horses, due to Tom Rosser when he asked for two volunteers to go through the full force of smoke and fumes to open the doors, so that it eased the men inside. I was working as a collier boy on the Far End Bottom Bogey Dip. This is the area in which 63 men lost their lives.

The men saved went through the return air-way into Tymawr Four-feet landing, as the fire burned in for a mile on the far end level and Tymawr was our only escape. All overcome by the smoke lost their lives. Many lost their lives by trying to get out the way they came in, but it was impossible, and a number died

on the landing as it was slow progress getting to the cage. There was no signal-knocker on the landing and we had to shout up to the hitcher on the Tymawr pit bottom, which was thirty yards below, to make our position known. Nothing could live on the far end when the smoke and the fumes overtook them. The fire was started by sparks coming off the wooden blocks fixed on the steel band of the brake on the hauling engine when letting down usually about

Arthur Williams

twenty trams of coal down the steep hard-heading which always produced sparks by the strain to hold the journey, and the brattice cloth sheets which were around the engine caught fire. On this particular day the usual engine driver was absent and he always kept a bucket of water at hand, but the substitute driver did not, and when the fire started he ran down to the stables at the bottom of the hard heading, but during the time he was away, the fire got a firm hold. Rescuers fought, as you mentioned, for four and a half hours and saved the Main-Deep, but the fire went on for about a mile from the far end. I know about six or seven survivors in Pontypridd today, all of whom escaped from the far end through the Tymawr. My brother with whom I worked, is alive now getting on 80 years of age. So I will now conclude and I think all the survivors that I know will agree to my version of the terrible disaster. - Arthur Williams. Other survivors still residing in the district included: - Mr. William Mazey, 8 Willow St. Rhydyfelen; Mr. William Atkins, Queen St, Treforest. Mr. Alfred Felin, 96 Berw Rd, Pontypridd.

Rhondda Leader account

In the '*Rhondda Leader*' of 1955, 76 year old Edward Morgan, of Glen View, Pwllgwaun, Pontypridd had just completed a short history of the fire of the Great Western Colliery. Mr. Morgan was working at the colliery at the day of the accident. Then a boy, he was waiting with a group of miners for coal to be brought up to the top of the Hetty Pit on the afternoon the fire broke out underground. His cousin, Mr. David Palmer, and a friend came up from the pit not wearing their caps. For the Welsh miner to be without his "Dai" cap in those days meant that something really serious must be happening, and the pair told the worried onlookers that they had escaped from a fire by going through the Tymawr Pit, and they believed that men were suffocating in smoke filled caverns underground. Later it was found that men who had crawled to the Four Feet landing in the Tymawr Pit, had not the strength to go any further and had died. Others were so overcome by the smoke that they could not even get that far. Explained Mr. Morgan: - "There were many instances of bravery on the landing, but they went unsung because the dead cannot talk."

Another of Mr. Morgan's cousins, Mr. William Williams, survived suffocation only to discover that his father was last seen in distress in the doomed pit. He plunged back in the smoky hell and his body was discovered later not far from that of his father. Hundreds of people gathered in the colliery yard as the dead bodies were brought up, and there was great excitement when it was announced that many men and boys had been rescued after being trapped for four hours and almost being choked to death by smoke. As the men came out of the cage, they had strange and bewildered looks on their faces. Their faces were

black, but their lips were white, stressed Mr. Morgan. Mr. Morgan who lectures to local organisations on the musical history of Pontypridd as well as that eccentric and colourful Welshman, Dr. William Price of Llantrisant, rightly feels that the price paid by past generations of the area's miners in the quest for coal is one that should never ever be forgotten.

A footnote to the Arthur Williams account of the disaster appeared in the Pontypridd Observer of April 14th 1962: - Eighty-year-old Mr. Arthur Williams is probably the last survivor of the Great Western Colliery fire. At that time Mr. Williams was 15 years of age and employed as a collier's helpmate. "I did not think when we were racing for our lives through the mine airways that I would have to write about it seventy years later," he commented. Mr. Williams sent a plan showing his escape route to this newspaper. "My memory of that terrible morning is as clear as if the disaster had only occurred yesterday," he added. Through the years he kept in touch with other survivors of the fire, but now time has claimed them all and attempts to trace anyone who escaped have failed. Mr. Williams is convinced that he is the last survivor of the disaster.

What became of Thomas Pryce Rosser?

Thomas Rosser was considered the 'hero' of the Great Western Colliery disaster, guiding many of the men underground to safety. But it was not a lot later that he left the village. This is his story as told in the 'Glamorgan Free Press' of January 19th 1895 when he was about to leave to work in the South African gold mines: -

Honouring a local hero

Presentation to Mr. Thomas Rosser at Pontypridd

On Thursday evening a public meeting was held at the Workmen's Hall, Hopkinstown, for the purpose of presenting Mr. Tom Rosser, fireman, Great Western Colliery, who had recently taken unto himself a wife, and left "yr hen wlau" for South Africa on Friday - with a token of the high esteem in which he is held by his fellow workmen and many friends in the district.

There was a large and enthusiastic attendance, amongst those present being Councillors William Seaton, Watkin Williams, P. Gowan, and T. Taylor, Messrs R. M. Evans, J. Spragg, and J. F. M'Clune. There were also a goodly proportion of ladies present. It will be remembered that Mr. Rosser, by his presence of mind, and indomitable courage, and at great personal risk, was the means of saving the lives over 70 of the men who were underground on the occasion of the terrible explosion at the Great Western Colliery in April 1893. In the absence of Councillor Hugh Bramwell the chair was ably filled by Mr. J. Vaillant, surveyor. The proceedings started with a performance by several talented musicians.

The chairman, in the course of a happy speech, expressed the opinion that this meeting was the most popular ever held at Hopkinstown. (Hear, hear). And its object was the presenting to Mr. Rosser of something which would to some degree indicate their appreciation of his stirring work. He was glad to find so many young people present, and hoped that they would realise that it was in childhood was formed the character of the man.

Such was the case with their friend Rosser, who, for his perseverance and energy, had won for himself the respect and esteem which that meeting showed him. (Applause.) Miss Gowan, daughter of Councillor Gowan, then handed Mr. Rosser a handsome and valuable gold watch and chain bearing a suitable inscription. Mr. Rosser assured his hearers that it afforded him the greatest pleasure to receive their valuable gift, especially as it showed the love and respect which they brought towards him. He did not think he was particularly worthy of such regards more than many others, but for some reason it had been manifested towards him that evening.

He would always look upon their present as one of the most precious treasures and would not part with it until he parted with all his earthly belongings. That evening, one of the last he would spend in Great Britain for some time, had been a most enjoyable one to him, and he could now renew his sincere thanks for their sincere kindness. Mr. William Jones, manager, Maritime Colliery, said he felt sure their feelings as were his own, were mingled feelings of joy and sorrow. He was glad to find that they had honoured Mr. Rosser in the manner they had done that evening.

On the other hand it was a matter of regret to find their friend was about to leave the district for South Africa. It was their best wish that prosperity would follow in his footsteps; that he would succeed in life, that he would be the means of doing much good to himself and to his fellow men. (Applause.) He, the speaker, had known Mr. Rosser for many years; knew him as a lad before he commenced working, and knew him for the last seven or eight years at the colliery, during which time he had watched him closely.

It was not often that one met men such as Rosser and his brother – alike – whose careers he had watched attentively and thus had ample opportunities of knowing their abilities. He had one winter the honour of teaching Mr. Tom Rosser the science of mining, and he would say that intellectually his friend could hold his own with most people. It was not often the occasion arose for testing men's abilities, but an occasion did once occur when Tom Rosser's abilities were put to the test in a practical way. (Cheers.) And possibly many in

that room had to thank him for their lives. (Renewed cheering.) It was a peculiar statement to make, but he thought he was right in making it, that were it not for Rosser's presence at a certain important juncture, many at that meeting would not have been able to attend.

Proceeding, the speaker very graphically described the circumstances in which the men were in when the catastrophe occurred, and their terrible experiences. How Rosser failed to open one pair of air-way doors, but, fortunately, knowing of another set, rushed for the latter, where he was successful, and was able to keep over seventy men together in one spot, where they found refuge until discovered by the exploring party.

Continuing, the speaker said Rosser deserved all honour, if only for that one act of bravery. In the course of some further remarks Mr. Jones most pathetically referred to the many brave men who had willingly sacrificed their own lives in order to save others. The speaker wished Mr. Rosser long life, happiness, and success in his new sphere. Councillor Watkin Williams expressed the great pleasure he felt in finding that such a testimonial was being made. People were ever ever-ready to find the brute in each other's character, but rarely recognized the divine. That was something more that the brute – something divine - in the character of their young friend had evidenced most clearly, and it only required occasions and opportunities to bring forth his many good qualities.

Wales was proud of such a hero, and it was to be hoped that young men would emulate his noble example, that they would study deeply and assimilate all the information that he could obtain with reference to their particular work, and should occasion require it, that they would have the courage to make use of their knowledge to save the lives of others. He had no doubt that the almighty would prosper Mr. Rosser wherever he would go. Mr. J. F. M'Clune said that he felt proud to be at that assembly, and trusted that the good example of Mr. Rosser would make an impression on the young men of the district.

He hoped they would make use of their educational facilities, and prepare to meet emergencies as Mr. Rosser had done. It was undoubtedly, a great loss to the district to lose a man like Rosser, but it was to be hoped that he, in his new sphere of labour, would make a name for himself as a Britisher and a Welshman, and that he would return to the old country with the honours thick upon him that the colony would undoubtedly showered upon him. He wished Rosser every prosperity and a safe return to the old country. Mr. Gimblette next sang "Gogon iant i Gymru." After the usual vote of thanks the meeting terminated with the singing of "Hen wlad fynhadu."

Thomas Pryce Rosser did emigrate to South Africa and later became a shift-boss at Wolhuter Deep gold mine, in Natal. He also fought on the British side as a colonial volunteer in the Anglo Boer War of 1899-1902 as a Lieutenant. On returning to the mines he contracted phthisis (a wasting disease or Pulmonary tuberculosis) and died. His brother, William Pryce Rosser was also killed underground in the same country.

What became of the colliery

The Great Western Colliery continued producing coal for many years after the disaster, and the deaths still continued. The Hetty shaft was closed in 1926, but this remained as an upcast shaft for the Tymawr Colliery. The No.2 and No.3 shafts, and the old Tymawr shaft were closed the same year and a new Tymawr Pit was opened up. In 1928 the colliery came under the ownership of the Powell Dyffryn Coal Co, and remained so until the mines were nationalised in 1947.

In 1958 the Lewis Merthyr Colliery, a mile or two North-west of the former Great Western Collieries, was amalgamated with the latter and joined underground, at which time coal winding stopped at the former and materials ceased going down at Tymawr. In 1969 the combined collieries were officially named the Tymawr and Lewis Merthyr Colliery.

The last dram of coal raised at the Tymawr colliery was on June 21st 1983 and the colliery was demolished soon after. Today only the head frame and winding engine house and steam winding engine of the Hetty Pit survive. It was originally intended to be incorporated into the Rhondda Heritage Museum, but its future is now unclear. The Hetty winding house and engine are now being renovated by volunteers under the supervision of Mr. Brian Davies of the Pontypridd Museum.

List of the 63 killed at the Great Western Colliery disaster				
No.	**Name**	**Address**	**Job**	**Age**
1.	Lewis Thomas	86 Tramroad-side single	Haulier	25
2.	Lewis Cole	1 Williams St; Berw Rd.	Collier	16
3.	Richard Edmunds	39 Pwllgwaun Rd, single	"	25
4.	Morris Potter	29 Gyfeillon Rd, married	"	28
5.	George C. Lewis	19 Rickard St, Graig, single	"	16
6.	William J. Bond	61 Pwllgwaun Rd, single	"	16
7.	George Bartlett	5 Grover St, Graig, single	"	22
8.	William Bowers	19 Rickard St. Graig, single	"	23
9.	Ivor Lloyd	4 Barry st. Newtown, single	"	21
10.	Gwilym Howells	44 Hopkinstown Rd	"	17
11.	John Williams	11 Gyfeillon Rd, single	Labourer	61
12.	William Bollin*	Pantygraigwen Rd	Collier	21
13.	John Thomas	Ivor St. Hafod	"	27
14.	Daniel Davies	Panygraigwen Rd, single	"	17
15.	William Thomas	Vaughan St, Newtown, Single	"	18
16.	John Roberts	& Mount Pleasant, single	"	20
17.	Albert Pearce	30 Pwllgwaun Rd, single	"	16
18.	William John	3 Leyshon St. Garig	"	42
19.	David Jones	19 Llantrisant Rd, single	"	31
20.	Ernest T. Prosser	4 Pwllgwaun Rd	"	18
21.	Thomas Williams	Feeder Rd, Treforest	"	17
22.	Coleman Williams	Foundry Rd, Hopkinstown	Haulier	22
23.	Morgan Williams	144 Wood Rd. Married	Collier	57
24.	John Williams	Oddfellows Place, Treforest	Labourer	31
25.	Joseph Thomas	Foundry Rd, Married	Collier	37
26.	Arthur Thorne	7 Morgan St. Newtown	"	17
27.	William Edmunds	27 Pantygraigwen Rd, married	Roadman	52
28.	William Lewis	Park Terr, Tr. Marr & 5 children	Collier	50
29.	Amazia Jones	37 Park St, Treforest, single	"	15
30.	Arthur Davies	5 Lewis Terr, Graig. M & 5 child.	"	33
31.	Job Miller	16 Mill St, Pontypridd, single.	"	18
32.	Daniel O'Shea	33 Hopkinstown Rd, single	"	16
33.	Adolphus Dodge	1 Morgan St. Pwllgwaun, single	Doorboy	14
34.	James Holbrook	33 Hopkinstown Rd, single	Collier	33
35.	David John	3 Leyshon St. Graig, single	"	17
36.	Lewis Jacob	7 Gyfellion Rd, Havod, single	Collier	21
37.	David W. Prosser	$ Wood Rd. Treforest, single	"	18
38.	John Llewellyn	6 Jenkins St, Hopkinstown, single	"	44
39.	Frederick Nurse	96 Rickards St, Graig, single	"	17

40.	George Thorne	Cardiff Rd, Rhydf. Married 4 child.	"	38
41.	William Wheeler	116 Wood Rd, Tref, married	"	17
42.	Jesse Titley	Pwllgwaun	"	19
43.	Lewis Williams	144 Wood Rd, single	"	26
44.	William Williams	" " "	"	21
45.	George Cavill	71 Zion St, Pontypridd, married	"	50
46.	Phillip Jones	Feeder Rd, Trallwn	"	42
47.	Cornelius Hayes	Tramroad, Pontypridd	Oiler	18
48.	Thomas Lambert	Davies Court, Tramroad	Rider	27
49.	Daniel Spooner	Pantygraigwen Rd, married.	Haulier	28
50.	John Nicholls	Hopkinstown Rd, single	Engineman	26
51.	Frank Grainger	Phillip St, Graig, married	Roadman	28
52.	Thomas price	Tramroad side, Trefo, single	Doorboy	15
53	George Roderick	Pantygraigwen Rd, single	"	14
54.	David J. Powell	Rickard St, Graig	Collier	13
55.	Charles Godfrey	Foundry Rd, Hopkinstown	"	23
56.	William Davies	6 Vaughan St, Newtown	"	17
57.	John Maddox	Hopkinstown Rd, Married	"	34
58.	William Hughes	10 Vaughan St, single	"	18
59.	Thomas Davies	Panygraigwen Rd, single	Fireman	29
60.	David Davies	" " "	Collier	29
61.	Mark Osborne	Glyntaff, married 3 children	"	26
62.	James Devereaux	32 Hopkinstown Rd, single	Lampman	39
63.	Patrick Sullivan	No address known, Married, taken to sisters house in Morgan Street, Pontypridd.	Rider	25

The above list cannot be considered really accurate. William Charles Balling (No.12) for instance, in all lists is spelt incorrrectly. In fact the surname is Bollen, not Balling. He had only been married a year. His widow, Elizabeth, gave birth to his child a few weeks after his death. Sadly, the baby, also named William Charles Bollen, died on 18th July 1893. The widow, 15 months later married William James, the manager of the Great Western Colliery, who himself had been widowed in December 1893. They lived out their lives together, eventually retiring to Weston-Super-Mare around 1923, six years after James had completed nearly 50 years service at the colliery, having started underground at ten years of age. William Charles Bollen was buried at Llanwonno Church and the body of his baby was interred with him a few weeks later. Elizabeth and William James were buried at St. David's Church, Hopkinstown.

GREAT WESTERN COLLIERY (RHONDDA VALLEY) DISASTER

REPORTS

ON A

DISASTER IN THE GREAT WESTERN
COLLIERY RHONDDA VALLEY

ON 11TH APRIL 1893

Mr. S. T. Evans, MP, (represented the Home Office.)
6 Pump Court, Middle Temple, May 13th 1893

Sir,

A disaster took place at the Great Western Colliery, near Pontypridd, in the Rhondda Valley, South Wales, in the afternoon of Tuesday, the 11th April 1893. A formal inquest, which was adjourned to the 27th April last. I now beg to submit to you my Report upon the inquiry, and upon the circumstances connected with or relating to the disaster, which were brought to light by the evidence which was given.

The inquiry was full and exhaustive. In all 25 witnesses were examined, including all the officials of the colliery who could give any information touching the cause and result of the accident, as well as the general management of the colliery. The inquest was held before two coroners, Mr. E. B. Reece and Mr. R. J. Rhys, because their districts are contiguous near the place where the colliery was situated, and some of the deceased workmen lived within the jurisdiction of the one, and others within that of the other. The inquest was also attended by Mr. J. T. Robson, the chief Mines' Inspector of the South Wales District; by Mr. Walter H. Morgan, solicitor for relatives of most of the deceased men; by Mr. M. Roberts Jones, council for relatives of most of the other deceased men; and Mr. James Inskip, solicitor for the Colliery Company.

At the time of the adjourned inquest, 62 of the bodies had been recovered. Of

these 61 died from suffocation, and the other Jesse (Titley) died from injuries sustained in a fall from the Four Feet Seem to the Five-feet seam in the Tymawr Pit hereinafter referred to, whilst he was in the act, probably, of trying to get on to the cage of the Four Feet Landing in order to ascend the pit. The body of the sixty-third victim, viz; Patsy Sullivan, had not been found when the inquest was held; but it was recovered, I understand, on the day after the inquest was concluded. It was found under a large fall.

The cause of the disaster was clearly traced to a fire which originated about 1.30 p.m. on the 11th April 1893 at or near an underground hauling engine, the position of which will be herein-after described. The verdict of the jury, and their recommendations, were as follows:

"We find that the accident at the Great Western Colliery, on April 11th 1893, was caused by a spark or sparks emitting from the brake of a hauling engine at the top of the East Hard Heading, which came in contact with some inflammable substance in its neighbourhood, and we do not attribute any negligence to any of the officials either before of after the accident and that the sixty-one men who lost their lives by suffocation by smoke arising from the fire. With regard to Jesse Titley we find that he lost his life by accidentally falling from the Four-feet landing at the bottom of the seam at the Tymawr shaft. We beg to make the following recommendations:

(*1.) That a copy of the new "Regulations" drawn up by Mr. Hugh Bramwell for adoption at the Great Western Colliery be sent to the Home Office with the object that these, or similar ones, be adopted in other collieries.*

(2.) That sufficient width or surface for brake power be provided upon all hauling engines so as to prevent undue friction.

(3.) That we recommend that every care should be exercised in letting the full journeys down the East Hard Heading at the Great Western Colliery at a uniform rate of speed.

The colliery is a steam coal colliery employing a very large number of men. There were from 930 to 950 men working in various parts of the colliery on the day of the accident; and it is a matter for congratulations that over 850 men, at any rate,

escaped unhurt. There are three pits in the colliery:

(1.) The Hetty Pit, which is the downcast shaft; and

(2.) The Tymawr Pit

(3.) The No.2 Pit, both of which are upcast shafts.

The seams of coal which the workings reach are three in number:

(a.) The Four-feet seam;

(b.) The Six-feet seam; and

(c.) The Five-feet seam;

taking them in order from the highest to the lowest. The Six-feet seam is about 25 yards below the Four-feet seam, and the Five feet seam about 100 yards below the Six-feet seam. The Hetty Pit is sunk down to the Six Feet Seam, through the Four Feet Seam. The other two pits go down through the Four-feet seam, and the Six-feet seam into the Five-feet seam, which is the lowest. The three pits are marked on the plan which is annexed to this report.

From the bottom of the Hetty Pit (which, as stated, is in the Six-feet seam) a heading called the East Hard Heading is driven into the Four-feet Seam. This hard heading is marked on the plan. It is about 150 yards in length, and rises 1 in 6. It was at the upper end of this heading in the Four-feet seam that the engine referred to was erected. It was a double cylinder hauling engine, working two loose drums by means of spur gearing. The drums were 3 feet 6 inches in diameter, and the engine was worked by compressed air at a pressure of about 55 lbs. to the square inch. The engine is more fully described in the evidence of Mr. Molyeux, the mechanical engineer, at pp. 79-82 at the first day's shorthand notes. A plan and section of the engine are also appended to this report. The engine was erected in the roof above the roadway, so that workmen passing to and fro walked underneath it. It was fixed on three cross wooden beams, and two longitudinal ones; and the engine driver stood on a small wooden platform laid upon these beams. The engine was situated in the main air-way of the east workings of the Four-feet seam. These are the

workings shown on the plan, and it was in these workings that all the lives were lost. All the men in the west workings and in the other seams escaped without injury.

The current of air passing the engine for the purpose of ventilation of the workings was very large; it was estimated at72,580 cubic feet per minute. Of this, about 57,913 cubic feet per minute passed along the Four Feet East Level to the East Far End Workings, and 14,667 cubic feet per minute went down the East Main Dip.

It is fair to state here, that the ventilation of the colliery was excellent; and although the mine was a fiery one, and the fire made great extensions into the Four Feet East Level, there seems to have been no trace of any explosion from gas. The course of the ventilation is shown by the arrows on the plan; the arrows along the blue line indicate the intake, and the arrows along the red line the return air-ways. The figures on the plan show where the bodies were found.

The jury unanimously found that the fire originated at the engine referred to, and of this the evidence left no doubt. They also found that the fire had been ignited by the sparks emitted from the brake, and caused by the friction on the application of the brake to one of the drums, probably the tail drum, of the engine. The drums were made of steel plates, and the brakes consisted of a strip of wrought iron called the brake-strap, bolted on to elm blocks, which went halfway round the drum. The pressure of the brake on the tail drum was 45 to 1, and on the main drum at 15 to 1.

Underneath the engine, brattice had been fixed in order to protect the engine driver from the draught and coal dust resulting from the great current of air. The brattice is marked on the engine plan. The brattice in course of time became more or less saturated with oil and grease which fell from the engine, and was thereby rendered more combustible. The beams and wooden flooring would also intercept some oil and grease, and would also in turn become more amenable to the flames. Some of the brattice was within 18 inches of the brake.

I think there can be no doubt that the sparks emitted from the brake ignited the brattice, and that the flames were communicated from the brattice to the beams and timber. Close up on the engine on both sides of the roadways there

were posts and timber, both in the heading, level, and main dip. Immediately the fire seized the beams the strong current of air carried it along the timbers at a terrible rate. It chiefly spread into the Four-Feet East Level. The smoke would be carried with great velocity into the workings, and it suffocated some of the men in or near their working places, and others as they attempted to make their way into the Tymawr upcast pit. A considerable number of men, from 70 to 80, fortunately reached the four-feet landing of the Tymawr Pit, and were raised in the cages to the surface. Four poor men who had reached the landing were too exhausted to go across the fencing into the cage, and they succumbed to the gases, in spite of the brave efforts of Fletcher and others to assist them into the cage. Numbers of other men were kept by the admirable discretion of presence of mind of a young firemen Thomas Rosser, in Holbrook's Heading for hours, and afterwards were able to go up by the East Main Dip.

The chief points to which I directed my inquiry and upon which I have to report were, (1) whether there was any negligence or default in the construction or working of the engine, which caused or contributed to the disaster; (2) whether, after the fire originated, everything was done which was reasonably possible to check it, and to preserve the safety of the workmen; (3) whether any prosecutions should be instituted against any person or persons under the Coal Mines Regulation Act, or otherwise; and (4) whether any and what steps or precautions could or ought to be taken in similar collieries in the future, to prevent the recurrence of such painful calamities.

In the first place, I must state that it appears that hauling engines like the one in this case are in general use at this and at the other large collieries of the Rhondda Valley, similarly erected, and with similar drums, brakes, supports, and surroundings. The particular engine had been erected over five years. The evidence showed that it was not unusual for sparks to be generated by the brakes at this engine, and that on some occasions these sparks had ignited cotton waste which happened to lie about, and which was being, or had been, used by the engine driver for cleaning purposes.

The regular engine-driver was William Palmer; but he had been away from work through illness since the 30th March 1893. George James acted as the engine driver since that date, and on the day of the accident. One David Palmer had been with James at the engine on the day in question from about 10 a.m. till within a quarter of an hour of the fire, practising so as to qualify

himself as a spare hand at engine-driving. The regular engine driver had frequently seen sparks given off from the brake, and had even seen pieces of cotton-waste smoulder and ignite on many occasions. These he would put out by means of water which he kept in a bucket at hand for the purpose of cooling the brake when it became very heated. It did not seem to be known to the colliery officials that sparks were thus emitted from the engine, and no complaints seem to have been made to any of them about these sparks by any workman. Only one of them, Mr. Molyneux, the mechanical engineer, admitted that he had heard at least twice (although he had never seen) that sparks had been caused by the friction of the brake, once about Christmas last, and another time a few weeks before that. It never occurred to him, or to the manager or under manager, or indeed to any of the colliery officials, that any danger might arise from sparks emitted in this way; and consequently it was admitted that no precautions were taken by the supplying of water, or the removal of timber, or in any other way, against a danger the possibility of which had never occurred in their minds.

William Palmer, the engine-driver, said however that he always kept a bucket full of water near him to apply to the brakes when they became heated and "smoked." This water he generally got from a stand-up water-pipe 1¼ inches in diameter which was laid along the roadway, and which conveyed water to the underground workings from reservoirs on the surface. These water-pipes were laid down by the previous manager (Mr. Wales) some years ago, and were not intended in any way to be a precaution against fire, but were laid for the purpose of having fine sprays of water to allay the coal dust. They extended for about 5 miles into the workings.

It was not very clearly shown why the stand-pipe had been erected, but some evidence was given to show that it was intended to provide water for contingencies which might happen to paraffin lamps which were formerly used in the engine-house. For some years, however, paraffin lamps had been discontinued in the engine-room, electric light having been substituted in their stead. Attached to the stand-pipe was a tap and hose, and William Palmer said he never considered it safe to go on working the engine without having the bucket full of water in order to cool the brake. According to the evidence, the use made of the water out of the stand-pipe at the engine was not known to the officials, except to Norman, the assistant mechanical engineer.

George James, who worked the engine on the day of the disaster, said he never saw sparks from the engine, though he "smelt" the brake getting heated, and saw it "smoke." This happened particularly when a large load of 12 full trams were let down the East Hard Heading, which was the sharpest gradient in the colliery (1 in 6), and along which the full load went down, necessitating of course, the powerful application of the brake on the tail drum. It appears that such a load was let down this steep heading about 10 or 12 minutes before the fire was actually observed on the 11th of April, and there can be little or no doubt but that the ignition took place at this time.

The whole of the brake was not in view of the engine driver as he stood on his platform; and the fire had caught in the brattice, and had also seized the crossbeams underneath, before his first attention was called to it. The flames were first seen by a lad named Edwin Matthews, who was walking along the East Hard Heading at 1.30 p.m; intending to proceed to his work for the shift commencing at 2 p.m. He shouted to the engine-driver, and the latter came down and saw the fire. He had only half a bucket of water, so he tried the water-pipe, but there was no water in the pipe. He broke the stand-up pipe, but he could get no water; the main pipe in the roadway was afterwards broken 8 or 9 yards away, but there was no pressure of water in the pipe; in fact, there was so little water in it that "it would take a long time to fill a bucket." At this time all the water that could be got was from a tank in the stable at the bottom of the heading 150 yards off.

It is sad to think that if water had been found at the usual pressure on the pipe near the engine the fire could have been extinguished when it was first discovered; but four of five minutes was sufficient for the flames to get firm hold, and to be beyond prevention. No satisfactory explanation was given for the failure of water in the pipes on this day. The pipes had not been examined during the day; the person responsible for examining the pipes and machinery underground was A. Norman. He had not reached the East Workings on this day before the accident. In fact, the examination of these pipes, and of the engine, did not seem to be very regularly carried out; but, as before stated, the pipes were not intended to convey water to put out fires, and were admitted to be inadequate for such a purpose. Soon after the fire was discovered by Matthews, other persons arrived, and the under-manager was on the scene in about a quarter of an hour, and the manager in about half an hour afterwards. The first thing now to be done was to try and save the men in the Four-feet seam, and to get the men out from other parts of the colliery.

At first the fan at the Tymawr Pit was increased in speed from about 52 revolutions, to about 76 revolutions per minute. It is not certain who advised this. It was done in the excitement. and was well-intended; but in my opinion, it was a mistake, because it increased the current of air going down the Hetty Pit and passing the engine, and lent more force to the flames, and gave increased velocity to the smoke. But no-one can be blamed, and it cannot be said with any certainty that is caused any further loss of life. Soon afterwards the surveyor reduced the fan to half the usual speed, and in a little time stopped it altogether, thus converting the Tymawr Pit from an upcast into a downcast shaft, and so conveying fresh air to those who might be in the Four-feet seam return-ways. This was the prudent course. After some time when nothing more could be done, the fan was restarted at half speed, and was continued at that speed for some days. Seventy or eighty men were taken up the Tymawr Pit from the Four-feet landing, and they were taken up quickly and without delay.

But I have to make one observation as to the state of things at this Four-feet landing. There was no signalling apparatus there to communicate with the engine-driver. The method adopted by the men who reached the landing on this day to signal was to shout down to the bottom, viz; to the Five-Feet seam, which was 100 yards below. The hitcher there stationed thereupon signalled up. The company said they did not feel it necessary to have signalling apparatus at the landing, because the Tymawr Pit was not used for raising men, and because the Four-feet landing was not for the time being used for loading or raising minerals, although minerals were raised from the Five-feet seam.

Evidence was given, however, that officials sometimes used this Four-feet landing to ascend the pit. Moreover, the very object of the upcast shaft is to afford a separate second means of ingress and regress (section 16 (1) of the Coal Mines Regulation Act 1887). In my opinion there should be a signalling apparatus there, in order to comply with rule 25 of the said act; and the manager undertook that in future it should be provided. I think, however, that no delay, and no loss of life was shown to have been caused by want of a signal at the landing of the Four-feet seam; and having regard to this, and to the evidence given on this head by Mr. Robson, Her Majesty's Inspector, as follows: -

"I would not think it was a breach of the Act. I mean to say that I could not satisfy myself as to recommending proceedings. Of course I do not decide as to a breach of the Act, that is for higher authority; but so far as I could judge I would not have thought it desirable on my part to interfere, and recommend the case be tested, although I should have drawn the manager's attention to it, and I think I have done so in some other place very similarly situated, and I think that as a rule it has been done. But I am quite aware there are objections and disadvantages to a signal in such a place; it would lead to confusion with the other signalling, and might induce men to come out and use that shaft when they ought not to use it, and so fall down the pit."

I cannot advise that any proceedings should now be instituted. On the whole, having regard to the evidence of the officials, and to that of Mr. Robson, I do not feel justified in saying that the company were negligent in the construction of the engine, or in not supplying water at the engine as a precaution against such a fire as this, as the possibility of such a catastrophe as this never presented itself to their minds; but at the same time it was clear that a fair supply of water might have extinguished the fire in time to have prevented any loss of life. I also think that all that could reasonably have been done, after the fire occurred, was done in bringing out the men and saving life. With regard to the future, the terrible calamity at this colliery has opened the eyes of managers and others to this possible source of danger; and I am pleased to be able to report that additional precautions have already been taken, not only at this colliery, but at others in the district, to prevent as faras possible any recurrence of such a disaster from similar causes. As to what has been done at this colliery, reference may be made to the new regulations drawn out by the manager, which are as follows:

They are divided into temporary precautions and permanent ones. The temporary ones are intended to apply at once to the engines we have in use, and the permanent ones to the engines we subsequently put up.

(1.) Every engine-house shall be carefully cleaned up. All oil, old waste, and inflammable material other than the supports for the engine to be removed.

(2.) All brattice cloth, now used for sheltering engine-men from draught, to be totally removed, as well as all unnecessary wood about the engine-house.

(3.) Galvanized-iron sheets to be erected for shelter in the future.

(4.) Each engine-man to be provided with a tin-box with a handle, into which all old waste must be thrown and brought out of the pit. No engine-man will be supplied with clean waste by the storekeeper unless he produces the old dirty waste at the surface.

(5.) Each engine to be carefully examined to see that no moving part of it is rubbing against any framing used for its support.

(6.) Two buckets for water to be kept in each engine-house.

Then the permanent precautions are:

(1.) In future no engine is to be erected on wooden supporting beams. All such supports to be of iron or steel girders.

(2.) Flooring of all engine-houses where flooring is required to be of iron or metal plates and not of wood.

(3.) No engine to be erected except in arched engine-house.

(4.) The roadways to and from every engine-house to be arched with stone or brick for a distance of not less than 30 feet in each direction.

(5.) Each engine-house to be provided with a hydrant or cock, not less than 1¼ inches in diameter, connected with the water-pipes, and fitted with not less than 15 feet of India-rubber hose pipe. The hydrant cock to be always at the intake side of the engine house. Such hydrant to be tried daily by the engine-man.

Whenever engines of this kind are used underground, I should recommend that the following matters should be particularly attended to: -

(1.) Such engines should be arched over with stone or brick, or be covered by a stone roof, and should be erected on iron girders instead of on wooden beams.

(2.) There should be no brattice near the engines; iron sheeting, or some such incombustible substance, should be used instead of brattice for the protection of the engine driver.

(3.) For reasonable distances from the engine all roadways should be arched with stone or brick, and not timbered.

(4.) Brakes should be used of such a size and quality as to minimise as far as possible the risk of sparks.

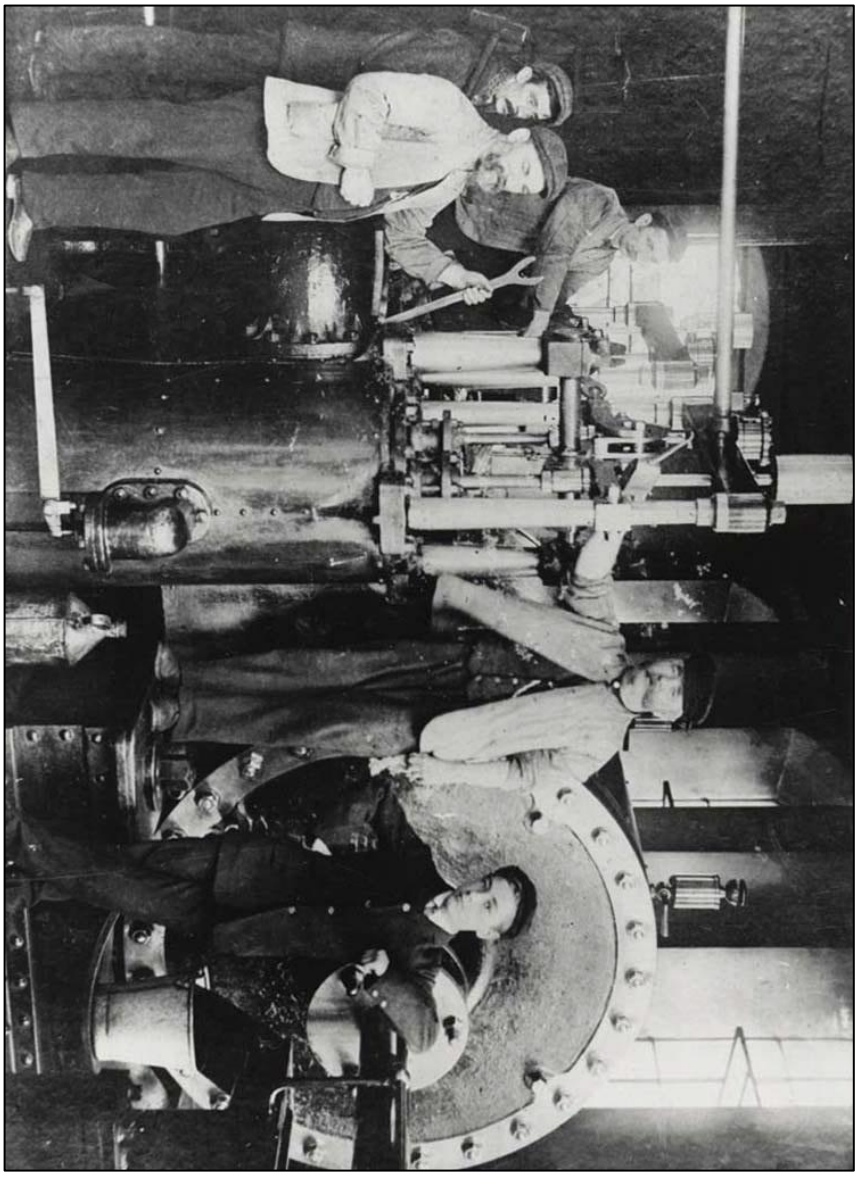
(5.) Care should be taken in the removal of inflammable material such as oil, cotton waste, &c.

(6.) A supply of water should be always afforded at each engine house for the purpose of cooling heated brakes, and as a precaution against possible ignition.

(7.) Engines, and water supply to them, should be examined carefully by the responsible official every 24 hours at least.

It is also a matter well worthy of consideration whether some practical means might not be found to communicate by signals, *e.g.;* electric bells, to all the working places, in order to warn or call out workmen in case of any accident in any part of a mine which might render their remaining in unsafe, or any delay in coming out dangerous. The accident illustrates also, how important it is to keep the return air-ways and the upcast shaft in good order and condition, and ready for emergencies.

I am, & etc. (Signed) S. T. Evans.



Tymawr Engine house C. 1900

Report by J. J. Robson (H.M. Inspector of Mines)

Sir,

About 1.45 p.m. on Tuesday, April 11th 1893, a fire occurred at the Four-feet seam at the Great Western Colliery, which resulted in the loss of 63 lives. The Great Western Colliery is situated at Gyfeillon, in the Rhondda Valley, about two miles above Pontypridd, in the heart of the South Wales Steam Coal Field. It is one of the largest collieries in the district, and is owned by the Great Western Colliery Company, Limited, whose registered address is "The Exchange, Bristol." Messrs. Forster Brown, and Rees, mining engineers, of Cardiff, are the consulting engineers for the company.

The managing staff consists of - Mr. Hugh Bramwell, agent; Mr. William James, certified manager; Mr. David Rees, certified under-manager; Mr. Evan S. Richards, holder of a first-class certificate, acting as assistant manager. Mr. W. M. Jones is the surveyor and Mr. R. L. Molyneux is the mechanical engineer. There are 3 overmen and 17 firemen. Mr. Bramwell, the agent who is a mining engineer and certified manager, succeeded Mr. H. T. Wales on 1st January of the present year.

There are three shafts, viz; the Hetty Pit (downcast), which is sunk to the Six-feet seam, and is 398 yards deep; the No.2 Pit (upcast) sunk to the Five-feet seam, a depth of 473⅓ yards; the Tymawr Pit (upcast) also sunk to the Five-feet seam, and depth of 472⅓ yards. Coal is raised at each of the three shafts. At the Hetty Pit, the Four-Feet and the Six-feet Seams are worked. The Four-feet seam, lying about 25 yards above the Six Feet, is passed through in the shaft, but, for greater safety and convenience in winding, all the coal is raised from the Six-feet seam, the lowest landing in the shaft. At No.2 Pit only the Five-feet seam is worked at present, the coal being raised from the landing at this seam. At the Tymawr Pit, the Five-feet seam is also being worked and raised from the Five-feet landing.

The ventilation of the colliery is produced by two Schiele fans, each 15' 3" diameter, one of which is placed near the top of the No.2 Pit, which is elliptical in section, the diameters being 14' 4" and 10' 9" respectively; the other fan is fixed near the top of Tymawr Pit, also an elliptical shaft, measuring 16' x 10'. The downcast or Hetty Pit is circular and 16' in diameter. About 270,000 cubic feet of air per minute is circulated through the workings,

which are amongst the most fiery in the South Wales District.

The whole colliery is well equipped with modern machinery and appliances for producing a large output of steam coal, and both the Hetty and No.2 Pits have been safely and successfully worked since the year 1877, when these shafts were first sunk to the steam coal measures. Prior to this house coals had been worked.

The Tymawr Pit had only recently been acquired by the Company, and sunk by them to the lower steam coal seams. Previous to this the east workings in the Four Feet from the Hetty Pit had been extended beyond the Tymawr Pit, and since the latter was an upcast shaft, it became more convenient to connect these workings to it for the purpose of ventilation; so that now one large district of Four-feet seam at the Hetty Pit has a direct communication with the Tymawr upcast in that seam. On the accompanying plan, reduced to scale of4 chains (88 yards) to the inch, are shown the position of each shaft, all the workings in the Four-feet seam lying to the east of the Hetty pit, which are the parts effected by the accident in question, and their connections with the landing in the Six-feet seam in this pit.

It may be stated that the total number of persons employed in the three pits was about 1,460, of whom about 950 were at work on the day shift on the day of the accident. Of this number 212 were in the east workings of the Four-feet seam, and were all placed in jeopardy by the fire. Of the 212 persons 78 were in the East Main Dip, and 134 in the East Main Level. Those in other portions of the mine, although never in danger in consequence of the fire, were all speedily withdrawn and sent to the surface.

Haulage by machinery is largely adopted and, in common with many of the larger collieries, compressed air is used for the transmission of power from the compressing plant on the surface to work the underground machinery. There are no less than 15 hauling engines in the whole of the seams in connection with the colliery, and it was at one of these engines the disastrous fire originated. The position of this engine is shown in red and marked “Engine” on the plan annexed. Before dealing more particularly with the engine it may be convenient to shortly describe the haulage roads and the workings in the parts effected.

On the east level in the Six-feet seam, about 120 yards from the Hetty Pit, a

main road marked "East Hard Heading" branches off at right angles, and this road, rising 1 in 6, cuts the Four Feet at a distance of 156 yards. It is here where the engine in question is situated. From this point the road marked "East Main Dip" is continued in a straight line for a distance of 270 yards, and then turns to the right, here called Sam Cull's Dip, and continued a further distance of400 yards. At a point 176 yards down Sam Cull's Dip a pair of headings branch off at right angles to the right, and extend 396 yards to the rise, and those to the left 114 yards to the dip. These headings and the 29 stalls at work in them formed one ventilating district, which may be termed as the East Main Dip, and it will be seen from the plan that it was ventilated to the No.2 upcast.

From the top of the East Hard Heading referred to, just inside the engine, another main road, marked "Four Feet East Level" on the plan, branches off to the right for a distance of 463 yards to the top of "Thompson's Dip." Following Thompson's Dip 103 yards, "Witt's level;" is reached branching off to the right, and this extends 548 yards to the working headings which are to the rise. Returning to Thompson's Dip it will be seen that it is continued in a straight line to the bottom, a further distance of 363 yards. On the east side is a level extending 143 yards to the working heading, and on the west side another level, reaching the last three headings at a distance of 288 yards. These three divisions form one large district ventilated to the Tymawr upcast. The roadways above mentioned are the haulage roads and also form the intake airways. They are all of a minimum section of 50 square feet.

From the Hetty Pit to the top of the East Hard Heading, a distance of 280 yards, the roadway is arched throughout. Inside of this point, with the exception of a short length forming an air-crossing 15 yards farther in on the East Main Dip, the roadways are all double-timbered, most of the timbers being lagged. There are about 72,000 cubic feet of air per minute passing up the East Hard Heading and beyond the engine for a few yards, where it was split; about 57,000 going into the East Level and 15,000 to the East Main Dip. The velocity of the current at the engine would be about 20 feet per second.

The mine being a very dry one naturally, provision is made for damping the roadways and laying the dust by a system of spray-jets, fixed at intervals of about 40 yards in the principal intakes, the water for which is conveyed from the surface by a column of pipes, partly 2 inches but chiefly only 1¼ inches in diameter, down the shaft, and continued along the different haulage road.

Altogether there are 5 miles of piping laid for this purpose.

The engine was fixed immediately over the roadway upon pitch pine beams resting on side walls of masonry. It consists of two 10-inch cylinders with 12-inch stroke, diameter, each of which has a brake fitted to it consisting of an iron strap, to which are bolted elm curb blocks, the brake extending half the circumference of the drum, with a bearing 4 inches wide. The brake leverage of one drum, working the main rope, is 15 to 1; that of the other working the tail-rope is 45 to 1. This engine works the haulage on the East Hard Heading, the East Main Dip, and the East Level as far as the top of Thompson's Dip.

Six trams at a time are hauled up the East Main Dip by the main-rope drum, and lowered down the East Hard Heading by the tail-rope drum. Twelve trams at a time are hauled along the East level by the main-rope drum and lowered down the East Hard Heading by the tail-rope drum, and while a "journey" is being hauled out from the east Level the tail-rope is attached behind and drawn out, so that the next empty journey may be hauled in by this rope, which passed round a sheave at the inner end of the East Level. When a journey of 12 trams, having a gross weight of 19.2 tons was being lowered by the tail-rope drum down the Hard Heading there would be a strain of 3.2 tons on this drum, and the breaking would consequently be severe.

The woodwork in connection with this engine consisted of two wooden crossbeams 12 inches square, 13 feet long; one cross beam 12 inches by 10 inches; 13 feet long, one cross-beam 8 inches square, 10½ feet long; two longitudinal beams 14½ inches by 8 inches, 16 feet long; a platform of 1½-inch deal 10 feet by 4 feet; and the elm blocks forming the brakes.

The situation of the engine being on a main intake airway, the enginemen had placed canvas brattice cloth at the end and below the drums to afford shelter from the strong current and the dust blown off the loaded trams in passing. With the exception of a small quantity of cylinder oil, olive oil from the bearings, and some cotton waste for cleaning the engine, there was no inflammable material about it other than the woodwork and canvas mentioned. Doubtless there would be a considerable amount of oily and greasy matter adhering to the woodwork below the drums. The lighting was by an electric incandescent lamp, this lamp being the last of a series fixed at intervals from the shaft inwards in this direction. Fire had never been anticipated here, and no special provision had been made to deal with a fire.

There was, however, un upright pipe, branching off the pipe supplying water to the spray-jets, with a few feet of hose attached, the upright pipe being provided with a tap, so that water could be drawn if necessary. One bucket was kept at the engine. It may be mentioned that the engineman who usually worked this engine had been absent for some days owing to ill-health; and although this man appears to have been in the habit of keeping the bucket filled with water, and occasionally using the water to cool the brake of the tail-rope drum, the engineman on duty at the time of the accident had not provided himself with water.

On the day of the accident I was engaged at a colliery near Merthyr and did not reach home till after 9 p.m; too late to proceed that night to Pontypridd in response to the telegram which had been sent to me at Swansea. Mr. J. Mancel Sims, Assistant Inspector at Cardiff, had heard of the occurrence and proceeded at once to the colliery, reaching there at 8.45. Mr. J. D. Lewis, Assistant Inspector, residing at Swansea, was apprised of the telegram reporting the fire on his return home about 6 o'clock that day, and he also went to the colliery, reaching it about 12 p.m. Both Mr. Sims and Mr. Lewis went underground and remained at the colliery until my arrival at 10.45 a.m. on the following day. After being informed by them and the officials of all the circumstances that were then known, and consulting with them and with some mining engineers and managers from other collieries, I made an examination of the scene of the fire, and saw that steps were being taken to extinguish it and reach the workings beyond. It will be convenient at this juncture to describe shortly what had taken place so far as was then known.

The fire appeared to have been discovered by a boy named Edwin Matthews who had descended the Hetty Pit about 1.30 p.m. to work with a collier on the afternoon shift in the Four-feet seam. In passing up the East Hard Heading he noticed something on fire below the engine, called to the engineman, and then ran back towards the Hetty Pit. A "journey" of trams was then being hauled up the East Main Dip, and George James, the engineman, stopped the engine, came down to the roadway and saw one of the beams on fire. He along with the rider of the journey, John H. Thomas, who had run out to the engine to see what was the matter endeavoured to put out the fire by beating it, but failed. They then tried to draw water from the tap above, but there was no water in the pipe. Then in a few minutes they were joined by some men who came in from the shaft, and directly afterwards by David Rees, under-manager, who happened to be near the Hetty Pit bottom when the alarm of

fire was given. The pipe conveying water to the spray jets had by this time been broken by the engineman, but little water could be got from this source, and some of the men were then carrying water in buckets from a cistern in the stables in the Six Feet Level at the bottom of the East Hard Heading. The fire was now beginning to spread inwards, and it caught the timbers supporting the roadway at the top of the East Main Dip and the entrance to the Four Feet East Level.

The first intimation of something having happened reached the Tymawr Pit a little before 2 p.m; when John Cannon, the hitcher in the Five-feet seam, heard someone crying from the Four-feet seam above "Let's have the carriage, quick." He went up with the next cage, and sent up to the surface three cage loads of men, when he became affected by smoke, and ascended himself with the fourth cage load. Three or more cage loads were raised from the Four Feet, the last one bringing up only one man, named William Fletcher. While these men were being raised one man, Jesse Titley, probably owing to his exhausted condition, or the difficulty of seeing the cage in the smokey atmosphere which then prevailed, fell down the shaft and was killed. Four other men who had managed to reach the landing at Tymawr shaft were too exhausted to get over or through the wooden fence protecting the entrance to the shaft, and although several attempts were made both by some of those who had escaped and others, they could not, in the then state of the atmosphere, be rescued alive.

The speed of the ventilating fan at Tymawr Pit had, unfortunately, been increased soon after it had became known at the surface that something was wrong. Probably, this was done in the excitement of the moment, and in the belief that an explosion had occurred. The increase of speed from 51 or 52 revolutions, the normal speed of the engine, to 60, and then to 75, continued up to about 3 o'clock, and no doubt augmented the current of air passing up the East Hard Heading, and along the Four Feet East Level, thus fanning the flames in a greater degree and carrying the smoke more quickly through the Four-Feet East workings.

Between 2 and 3 o'clock Mr. James, the manager, had arrived at the scene of the fire, and soon decided that it would be a proper course to reduce the speed of the Tymawr fan to about half the normal speed, and this was done. On being informed and thinking that probably the whole of the men in the East Level District had been able to reach that landing, he sanctioned the stoppage

of the fan there, and the lifting of the covers at the top of the pit, with the object of turning that shaft into a down-cast and thus getting fresh air at the landing, to effect the rescue of the men there. The fan was stopped between the hours of 3.15 and 4 p.m; and during this time the bodies off our men who had died on the landing were brought up, but no more men came out alive by that road, nor could any sign of life be seen within the short distance (about 100 yards) inwards, which Mr. Jones, surveyor, and others were able to penetrate. The fan was then run at half speed.

The next step taken by the manager appears to have been an attempt to reach the East Main Dip workings by the way of the return airway. It was, however, found impossible to do so, the smoke being too thick in the return.

About 4.15p.m. Mr. Bramwell arrived, descended the pit, and joined Mr. James, the manager. Soon after this steps were taken by them to increase the supply of water by laying another line of pipes from the shaft to the fire,but efforts had never been relaxed in using to the best advantage the available supply by the original pipes and by carrying it from the stables and the sump at the shaft.

Fortunately the brick arch forming the air-crossing over the East Main Dip, 15 yards beyond the engine, helped considerably to stop the spread of the fire down this road, and about 6 p.m. the fire had been subdued here sufficiently to admit of an attempt being made to reach the workings of East Main Dip. William Rosser, a fireman, and brother of the fireman of this district, got down as far as the first door, 210 yards distant, and opened it to help the smoke to clear away from the dip, and keep it from going inwards to the working headings. His light went out, and he returned to the engine.

Getting another lamp, and this time accompanied by Morgan Thomas, overman, and Lewis James, fireman, he again went down the Dip, and passing the second door near the top of Sam Cull's Dip, and the third door beyond the first working heading, both of which doors were found open, reached the men, numbering 78, including the fireman, Thomas Rosser, all gathered together and uninjured about 100 yards up the Holbrook's Heading. They then all walked out by the intake, reaching the surface about 6.30 p.m.

Great credit is due to Thomas Rosser, the fireman of this district, for his coolness and prompt action on discovering the smoke was entering the

working by the intake. It appears that he first felt smoke about 1.45 p.m. while standing near the double parting on Holbrooks' Heading, and at once went up the dip, meeting David Richards, master haulier, who told him that there was a lot of smoke coming down the dip behind him. Thomas Rosser immediately sent some men into the working places with instructions to withdraw all men and boys and bring them to the double-parting. Rosser, Richards, and another man, William Devereaux, went up the dip, through the smoke, and realising the gravity of the situation, made an effort to reach the outermost of the two doors with the intention of opening it and thus short circuiting the air current.

They, however, failed in this, and returning, opened the second door near the top of Sam Cull's Dip, and then reached the double parting again where the men were beginning to gather. Although most of the men wanted to make an attempt to get out by the main intake, Rosser was able to dissuade them from this course. By and by the atmosphere, notwithstanding the opening of the above mentioned, became by diffusion so impregnated with smoke that he had to move the men further up the heading. He then opened a door between Holbrook's and Ostler's Headings, and afterwards another on the first crossing 73 yards up these headings, finally erecting a brattice across the Holbrook's Heading inside of this crossing and retreating with the men to the inbye side of it. They waited here, about 280 yards from the face of Holbrook's Heading. Gas had by this time accumulated in the headings and stalls, and before they left Rosser had ascertained that it showed in the lamp about 120 yards from the face.

Some more unsuccessful attempts had in the meantime been made by those on the surface to enter the Four-feet seam by the Tymawr return, but it was not until about 8 a.m. on Wednesday, when Mr. Bramwell, Mr. William Stewart of Harris' Navigation, and Ivor John, a fireman, made the attempt, that this was accomplished. They reached by way of Bidman's Old Dip and Osborne's Cross Heading, James Holbrook's level, where they found the dead body of a haulier and two horses, but the air was too heavily charged with smoke to remain many minutes in it and they returned to the surface. Mr. Stewart was much affected by the smoke but recovered in a day or two.

Efforts to overcome the fire in the Four feet east level were continued during the night and the following day, but the work of getting the water to the front became more and more difficult owing to the falling in of the roof and the

smoke and steam from the burning mass behind, buried more or less by the falls. By mid-day on Wednesday it was possible to reach the engine situated 70 yards outside of Thompson's Dip, and the dead body of the engineman was seen in the engine house.

The condition of the air in this level, however, was such that no one could remain long in it, and it was deemed unwise to make any more attempts until the fire had been reduced in dimensions and the roadway cooled down to some extent. The utilisation of the closed air pipes had been considered by the management, and Mr. Treherne Rees, one of the consulting engineers, at an early period, but dismissed on the ground that, as these pipes were only standing a pressure of 55 lbs. per square inch, it would be too risky to put a strain of 520 lbs. on them, that being about the pressure due to a column of water the height of the shaft. Upon further consideration it was decided to try this means, with the precaution of tapping the column at about 70 yards above the bottom of the shaft in order to relieve the pressure on the column. The plan was carried out with success, and by 11 p.m. on Wednesday the extra supply of water delivered by these pipes at the engine, and conveyed from there by lines of hose pipes, enabled the falls to be sufficiently cooled to warrant a thorough exploration of the east district and Thompson's Dip. This work was completed by organised parties between 1 and 2 o'clock on Thursday morning, but no sign of life was discovered.

The figures on the plan annexed show the position where the bodies of the unfortunate men and boys were found. It will be seen that three were found within 25 yards of the engine where the fire originated. One of these, No. 62, (see official map near front of book - author), the lampman, had been buried beneath a heavy fall at his post in the lamp station, where he would most likely be at the time of the outbreak; his not getting out from such a short distance appears to show that the fire spread very rapidly in that direction, and that the smoke at once overpowered him. The three others, Nos.47, 48 and 62, may or may not have been at the places where their bodies were found. All these four bodies were much burned, the burning doubtless having taken place subsequent to death by suffocation. The body of John Nicholas, No. 50, found at his engine, was very slightly burned, but whether this was before or after death is impossible to say. It is however improbable that he moved far from his engine, if at all, after the smoke reached there, which it would do in a minute from the outbreak.

The position where the bodies of Dan. Spooner (No.49) and Thomas Price (No.52) was found indicates that these persons were both endeavouring to escape by the intake; that of Frank Grainger, inclineman (No.51), does not afford such indication, for he may have been at or near the place at the time in the discharge of his duties. It is a remarkable fact that many of those working in that portion of the district lying nearest to the Tymawr shaft were lost, while several who were in the two further portions escaped. Probably smoke would reach each division about the same time, as the distances by the intakes do not differ much.

The distance from the working headings to the Tymawr shaft by the return varies considerably; that from the farthest east portion being 878 yards, that from the east side of Thompson's Dip 560 yards, and from the west side only 442 yards. It was in the latter portion where the body of David Davies, the fireman (No.60) of the district was found, near that of Mark Osborne, a collier. Osborne had just resumed work after an accident to his leg, and from the statement of those who escaped from this part of the district it appears that Davies, the fireman, was delayed in assisting Osborne out, after having done his best to get the other men gathered together and sent out. How it came that so many of those who were lost in this part had attempted to go out by the intake instead of the return is a mystery, for most if not all of them would be aware of their proximity to the Tymawr upcast. Of the 134 men and boys in the East Level District at the time of the accident, 71 came out by the Tymawr upcast shaft alive and uninjured. The 134 persons were distributed as follows: - In the East far end there were 52, of whom 37 were saved and 15 lost; In the East side of Thompson's Dip there were 23, of whom 14 were saved and 9 lost. In the West side of Thompson's Dip there were 48, of whom 19 were saved and 29 lost. On the road inbye of the engine there were11, of whom one was saved and 10 lost.

The Inquiry

I attended the adjourned inquest which was held before Mr. E. B. Reece, coroner, of Cardiff, and Mr. R. H. Rhys, coroner, of Aberdare, and a jury at the New Inn, Pontypridd, on the 27th, 28th and 29th April.
Mr S.T. Evans, M. P; barrister, attended and watched the proceedings in concert with myself on your behalf. Mr. W. H. Morgan, solicitor, Pontypridd, appeared for the Cambrian Miners Association, and Mr. M. Roberts Jones,

barrister, appeared for the local branch of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain. Mr. I. Inskip, solicitor, of Bristol, watched the proceedings on behalf of the Great Western Colliery Company. Mr. Foster Brown was present on the 27th, and Mr. Treharne Rees, his partner, on the following days. Mr. William Evans, agent for the Cambrian Miners' Association and Messrs Ben Davies and W. Brace, agents for the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, also attended each day.

The condition and working of the colliery and the circumstances attending the sad occurrence were most carefully and exhaustively inquired into, so as to arrive at the cause of the disaster and the large loss of life occasioned thereby. At the conclusion of the inquiry the jury returned the following verdict: -

"We find that the accident at the Great Western Colliery on April 11th, 1893, was caused by a spark or sparks emitted from the brake of a hauling engine at the top of the hard heading, which came in contact with some inflammable substance in its neighbourhood; and we do not attribute any negligence to any of the officials either before or after the accident, and that the 61 men lost their lives by suffocation by smoke arising from the fire, and that Jesse Titley lost his life by falling from the Four-feet landing to the bottom of the seam at Tymawr Shaft."

They also recommended:

(1.) That the code of regulations drawn up by Mr. Hugh Bramwellbesent to the Home Secretary with the object that those or similar ones should be adopted in other collieries.

(2.) That sufficient width or surface from break power be provided at all hauling engines, so as to prevent undue friction.

(3.) That every care should be exercised in letting down full journeys upon the East Hard Heading in the Great Western Colliery at a uniform rate of speed.

The verdict was the only one which, according to the evidence, could reasonably have been returned, and I entirely concur with it. It will be noticed that 62 is the number mentioned in the verdict as having been lost, and this is accounted for by the fact that the body of Pat Sullivan (No.63 on

the list) had not at that time been recovered from beneath a very large fall just inside the lamp station. The code of regulations for the future working of the engines referred to in the first recommendation of the jury is given in an appendix to this report. These regulations appear to be necessary and proper as precautions to be taken to prevent, as far as possible, a similar catastrophe.

It is a lamentable fact that the cause of this terrible loss of life was in the first instance the smouldering or burning of a piece of greasy brattice cloth or a portion of a wooden beam, and probably of so insignificant a nature that a single bucket full of water thrown on it at once would have effectually put it out. But, this not being done at once, in a very few minutes the fire became so intensified that nothing short of a copious supply of water could have stopped its progress and at this stage even that might have failed. Such copious supply of water was not available, and hence the conditions prevailing. Indeed, at the time of writing, more than a month after the occurrence, there is still fire smouldering in the gob 12 of 15 yards from the side of the east level near the lamp station.

Reference has already been made to the fact that for ventilating purposes the Tymawr Shaft is the upcast for the whole of the east level workings. It was also the only available means of egress from these workings after the intake from the downcast shaft was cut off by the fire, because the original return marked on the plan was partly stowed between the shaft and the air crossing over the East Main Dip. Whether the Tymawr Shaft was the outlet under the 16th section of the Mines Act or not is a moot point, for the Hetty and No.2 Pits being connected with the Four-feet seam, with a communication between them, the No.2 Pit may be held to be the second outlet for the Hetty Pit. The clause in the Act makes it clear that there must be a second outlet for each *seam*, but it is not clear that such second outlet must be provided for each *district of a seam*. It is certainly necessary that every district should have a second outlet available for use, and such was the case here.

Following upon this matter there arises the question as to signaling apparatus at the Four Feet Landing in the Tymawr shaft. There was not a separate signal provided here, but this landing was neither used for the ascent and the descent of persons except on rare occasions, nor for the raising of minerals, anditmay be that there was no statutory obligation to provide a separate signal. There are objections to having a signal at such places, for this may induce persons to make use of the landing when no necessity arises, and it may also prove a

source of danger through misunderstanding as to signals. Moreover, where no person is stationed in charge of the signals, and to superintend the getting in and out of the cage and attend to the fencing at the opening, it is still more objectionable. Still I think it would have been better to have a separate and distinct signal at the landing in question, but I do not consider that the want of a separate signal here caused any delay, or led to any loss of life, for there seems no reason to doubt that the cage was sent up as quickly as it could have been had such separate signal be provided. The loss of life by this simple accident was very great, but great as it was, if the Tymawr upcast shaft had not been a winding pit, in all probability the loss of life would have been much greater. - **J. T. Robson (Signed) Swansea Dated 26th May 1893**

Hopkinstown Post Office 1884

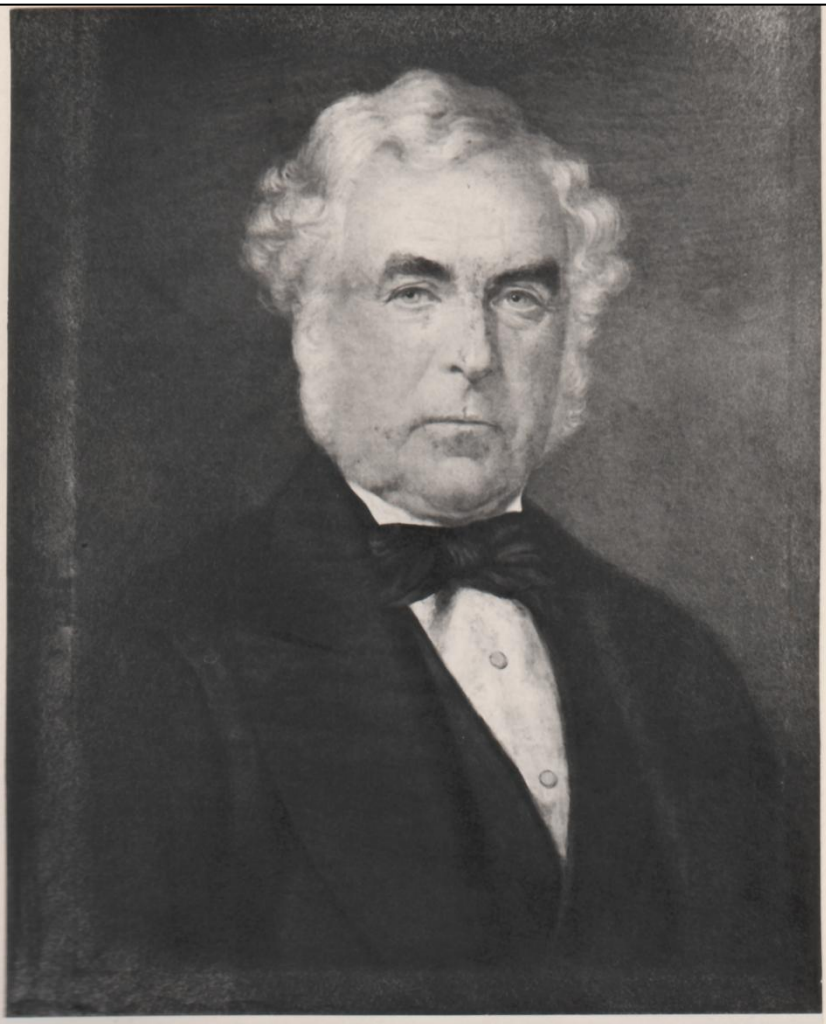
JOHN CALVERT

Yorkshire Pioneer of Pontypridd and Rhondda Coal Mining

The remote and beautiful recesses of Upper Wharfdale in the Yorkshire Pennines are dominated by the towering flanks of Great Whernside, at 2,310 feet above sea-level one of the major heights of the Pennines. At the point where the Little Cam Beck joins the Wharf in the village of Kettlewell. Large by Dales standards, Kettlewell occupies both banks of the Cam Beck, and supposedly takes its name from "Ketel," an Irishhorse chief. By the time of the Domesday survey it had already become a place of some importance, and in due course it came into the possession of the monasteries. The well-known Fountains and Bolton Abbeys had minor interests, but it was the lesser-known Coverham which had the major holding. During this period Kettlewell became celebrated for its fairs. Trust Lords, elected from the free-holders, eventually governed the Manor of Kettlewell. Today the village is justly popular as a walking centre, not only to the summit of Great Whernside itself, but also to Buckden Pike, to Coverdale and over Old Cote Moor to Hawkswick in Littondale. The attractive and much favoured Bluebell Hotel in the village dates from 1680. In this rural setting in the early years of the 19th. Century George Calvert was the land and mineral agent to Mr. James Dearden, Lord of the Manor at Rochdale over the border in Lancashire. In this household, on July 12th 1812, his son John Calvert was born who was destined to become the industrial pioneer of Pontypridd.

As a young man John Calvert was employed as a time-keeper in the construction of the Birmingham Railway. One of the contractors, thinking he had taken on the contract at too cheap a price, gave up the work. Thereupon, the engineer, Mr. Stephenson, induced his young timekeeper to carry it on. It proved a great success for John Calvert and he made a handsome profit. Years later the failings of another contractor were to turn into success for John Calvert as an exact parallel, and this time at Llancaiach in Glamorgan (the Cilfynydd branch of the Taff Vale Railway). So satisfied were the Stevensons (father and son) that they soon afterwards sent for John Calvert to London and persuaded him totender for another venture, a certain 'crooked line down in Wales' so disparagingly, did the Stephensons describe the future of the Taff Vale Railway. Calvert was awarded the contract for the greater part of it, from Llandaff to Merthyr Tydfil.

This he completed, but the "Hungry Forties" (For the 1840's brought suffering to many) were not so kind to another railway contractor, Thomas Strom by name, who was adjudged bankrupt. Again John Calvert stepped in, secured the



— John Calvert Esq. —

Sunk Gyfeillon Pits to Nº 3 Rhondda seam 1851
Original proprietor of the Great Western Colliery who sold the Colliery to the Great Western Railway Cº in 1854. afterwards buying the Colliery back in 1864 and finally sold to the Great Western Colliery Company Ltd in 1866.

contract for the Llancaiach branch, and completed the work. His railway contracts thus completed, John Calvert decided to remain in Glamorgan rather than return to his native Wharfdale, and to turn his Yorkshire energy in mineral prospecting. He acquired the lease of a property in the little Gelliwion Valley that joined the Rhondda only a matter of a couple of hundred yards from the junction of the Rhondda river with the Taff at Newbridge (Pontypridd). The agreement was signed in march 1844 with the Rev. George Thomas and his brother to work the "John Edmunds Vein" (the No.3 Rhondda Seam) under 283 acres of Gelliwion and Llandraw farms for a term of twenty years and a cash payment of £400 per annum.

Here in the first year he sank the first of his two pits, which became known as "Calvert's Pit" or the "Newbridge Rhondda Colliery." John Calvert was to remain a prominent figure in Pontypridd for 46 years. With as much Yorkshire luck as geological knowledge John Calvert, the 32 year-old contractor turned prospector, was fortunate enough to sink his shaft into one of the wings of the great anticlinal fault. At no greater depth than 54 yards he struck the "John Edmunds Vein," the rich No.3 Rhondda Seam. The mineral wealth of this tiny valley had first been commercially tapped only a few years earlier in 1841 when John Edmunds of Whitecross sank the Gelliwion Colliery to strike coal at a depth of fifty yards. John Calvert's pit was a little downstream of this first venture. The site of this first of John Calvert's collieries is not easy to pinpoint today, - it lies on the left of the road running through the Maritime Industrial Estate, some little distance in from the entrance to the estate off Factory Lane beyond the Morning Star Inn, Graig. For many years Calvert's Pit was worked successfully, employing many colliers and bringing into being much of the Graig district as it became known later.

A second Colliery

Across the lowest extremity of the Rhondda Valley hereabouts was the Hafod estate, the lease for whose minerals was held by the representatives of Dr. Richard Griffiths of Gellifendigaid in Llanwonno who died in 1826 (his sister Catherine married Evan Morgan of Hafod Fawr). Here John Calvert decided to extend his mining activities and sink again for the fabulous No.3 Rhondda Seam. Success was to come, but not so readily here, however, for it was only after three years of unremitting toil that the seam was won - at a depth of 149 yards, almost three times the depth of his first pit. Here, however, Calvert could sell his coal as being "identified with R. Coffin's celebrated coking coal." This pit commenced in 1851 and was known as the Gyfeillon Colliery and brought to Calvet not only fame but also the beginnings of his eventual financial downfall.

He and his wife Charlotte (six years his junior) and their son George took up residence in Gelliwastad House, then one of the principal residences of the locality. To celebrate the winning of the seam he organised the event reported at the beginning of this book, first of many extravagances that to were lead to his penury. In 1851 Calvert attended a demonstration at Gelli Colliery of the "William Brunton Exhausting Ventilator." This was a horizontal fan 22feetin diameter attached to a vertical spindle over the top of the upcast shaft. This fan, revolving as 95 times a minute, produced 18,000 cubic feet of air. John Calvert was so satisfied with the utility of this machine, having been underground during its operation, that he gave Mr. Brunton an order for one to be fixed at his colliery immediately. And this mechanical ventilator was duly installed at the Gyfeillon Colliery.

Around this pit-head Calvert spared no cost. The buildings around the shaft-mouth were built of dressed stone in preference to cheaper brickwork. The colliery, and the coke-ovens that followed, were a great success for Calvert, but everything he did henceforth was to be on a lavish scale. Apart from many other eccentricities he would order special trains on the Taff Vale Railway he had done so much to construct, merely to convey himself - quite alone- up from Cardiff. In this manner his fortune could not keep ace with his extravagance and generosity, and Gelliwastad House had to be vacated.

Moreover, the capital expenditure, apart from any personal extravagance began to prove too great a strain for one man and in 1854 - in the face of a large over-draught Calvert was compelled to agree that the Great Western RailwayCo; which had carried so much of his output should take over the working of the colliery, initially for three months on trial. Ten years later, in 1864 it was sold to the same railway company for £31,000 and was to become known as the Great Western Colliery. Calvert, however, managed to obtain an interest in one of the lower seams of the colliery, and for this he received from the company which superseded him a settlement of £3,000.

John Calvert & Morien

Keeping company with John Calvert in Pontypridd at this period was that well known correspondent and member of "Clic-y-Bont" who met at the Butcher's Arms, Owen Morgan or "Morien" as he was better known. The reporter wrote that Calvert was "a man of great energy, but hardly any education. His chief characteristic was his strong-handedness. Once having made up his mind to do anything, he would go at it with his eyes shut and head down. Among the mining population he was long supreme at Pontypridd. He came by degrees a man of affluence and everybody 'capped' to him. But the shrewd natives could not be

blind to his rougher side, and among themselves when they were sure he was not near them, related laughingly of incidents in his daily life. He was generous to a fault, and thought that members of the established church were the aristocracy of the saints."

Morien goes on to talk of the inevitable financial crash and Calvert's exit from Gelliwastad House. "During many years after that he was in indigent circumstances, and he was 'capped' to no longer. Then Morien explains how he had retained a latent interest in a lower seam of the colliery and of his receipt of the sum of £3,000. There follows an amusing anecdote of Morien's meeting with Calvert at this point in his chequered career. Meeting him one day Morien reports that he spoke to Calvert thus: "You have had the experience of the patriarch Job. You were in prosperity and the public paid you homage. Then you lost all; then you found there was no one so poor as to do you reverence. Now, since you have received the £3,000 I notice people 'cap' to you again."

"Calvert," Morien continued, "stared at him for a moment and then with a swift movement caught Morien's hand tightly. Then he retreated a step, leaving two bright half-crowns in Morien's hand, and with a gesture said: "You take care you do not give them back to me, for if you do I'll knock your head off. I want you to drink to my good health. You are the only man who has told me the naked truth." Alas for his future, John Calvert had not learned the lessons of his former mismanagement. With the£3,000heproceeded to erect himself a fine residence, with little thought having been given to living costs and maintenance. With these calculations absent, his money vanished on the residence which later came on to the market for half the building costs. His only son George, found employment by manual labour about the yard of the Great Western Colliery which had been his father's prosperity.

On his 78th birthday on June 12th 1890 John Calvert passed from the Pontypridd scene, dying in comparative poverty in a Llantwit Fardre cottage. He was buried at the Glyntaff churchyard sharing his last resting place with Thomas Calvert (1822-1844), a brother who had died many years before. In five short years after her husband's death John Calvert's widow, Charlotte, was to share the same grave.

Right up to the early years of World War Two the shaft of John Calvert's Newbridge Rhondda Colliery in the little Gelliwion valley at Graig was fulfilling a useful role it had been used for the ventilation of the nearby Maritime Colliery, and equipped with a fan. It was only with the establishment of the present Maritime Industrial Estate that the shaft of John Calvert's pit was filled in - but

even now there is a lasting reminder of this pioneer for all to see. This is the beam engine, which, erected on John Calvert's pit around 1844, now stands in the grounds of the University of Glamorgan at Treforest - in front of the former Forest House, which was the nucleus of the old Treforest School of Mines.

The superb sighting of the industrial relic around the university campus is one of the happiest applications of industrial archaeology in Wales, with its original components (made by the Varteg Iron Company of Monmouthshire) still intact, and its renewed cylinder from the local workshops of Messrs Brown & Lenox in 1861, this old beam-engine has been a familiar landmark since 1920. A year earlier, still on its original site on the Newbridge Rhondda Colliery pithead, it was in working order and was dismantled when the Maritime Coke Works was being prepared. The beam-engine was then presented to the Treforest School of Mines and re-erected in its present position under the supervision of Mr. J. W. Davidson, who was then chief engineer of the Great Western Colliery, by whom it was presented.

Constructed as a winding machine and not - as we so often associate these old beam engines - as a pumping engine, it has passed many years of retirement on its commanding site. It is when we recall John Calvert, industrial pioneer - with all his human frailties - in conjunction with this survival of his first colliery, that the full value of its preservation becomes more significant locally.

The grave of Thomas Calvert at St. Mary's Church, Glyntaff

Glossary of Mining Terms
(Courtesy of the Cynon Valley Historical Society)

Air-bridge – Also called 'air-crossing.' Where intake and return airways cross, they are kept separate by taking one, usually the intake, over the other.

Afterdamp – The deadly mixture of gases following an explosion in a colliery. Mainly composed of carbon monoxide. It often killed more miners than the explosion itself.

Agent – See management of mines.

Auger - Tool used for drilling hole into arms or collars to place explosives.

Balance pit – An early method of powering the cages in a shaft. Each cage (or bucket) was fitted with a tank which could be filled with water when it was at the pit top. A rope or chain from the top of one cage was taken over a large pulley (or sheave) and then similarly connected to the other cage, the rope being of such a length that when one cage was at the top of the pit the other was at the bottom, and visa versa. The pulley was usually fitted with a brake. When it was necessary to raise a tram of coal to the surface it was placed in the cage / bucket at the bottom and the tank of the topmost cage was filled until it was heavy enough to counter-balance the weight of the loaded tram at the pit bottom, and raise it to the pit top. The water in the descending cage was let out at the pit bottom and had to be pumped back to the surface unless it could drain from the pit by gravity.

Bank - The surface of a shaft, and at a level from which the pit cages are loaded or unloaded.

Banksman - The man in charge of the 'Bank' area at pit-top and of the cage upon raising, or lowering, at pit-top. He operates the signals to the winding engine-man and to pit-bottom, from the surface.

Bashing - A sealed off portion of the mine that had been worked out, but not stowed properly leaving a gap behind a wall and which was therefore a very dangerous and illegal practice that could allow an accumulation of gas and hence an explosion.

Bastard Rock - A strong mudstone, but not sandy enough to be called rock.

Blocklayer - All the underground rail systems especially forming junctions and double partings was done by the blocklayer and his mate.

Blower - An outburst of gas, usually methane, which issues from a crack in the floor, sides or roof, likely near a fault plane.

Brattice cloth – A kind of plastic sheet for covering ventilation doors; also for directing air-flow into places of working. Formerly made of tarred hessian.

Cage - The pit carriage for descending or ascending of a shaft.

Cap (or gas cap) – The blue flame found above the lowered wick of an oil-lamp. The height of this blue flame indicates the percentage of fire-damp in the area.

Check-weigher - A man appointed to check weight of coal in a tram, and to record the tonnage for the collier who cuts that coal. He would also assess the weight of small coal, and possibly crop the collier; i.e. Deduct a sum from his wages.

Chock - Also known as a **cog. -** A roof support constructed of interlaced horizontal wooden pieces, laid from floor to roof.

Collar - A wooden roof support consisting of two arms, joined at the top by another piece of wood, know as a the collar.

Comet - A naked light used to illuminate main roadways below ground.

Cog – See chock.

Cross-cut – A link-up roadway connecting two other paralleled drivages, usually for ventilation or supply purposes.

Cross-walls - They were packs put on between buttress packs i. e. parallel to the face, creating a break line plus help maintain ventilation at the face. Think of a dry stonewall backfilled with muck(debris) which is built up to the roof and adds additional support where the coal has been removed. When the coal is removed you usually have a space around 8 yards long either side of roadway. If the roadway is 5 feet 7 inches high and the coal is 2 feet 6 high then you have 3 feet 1 of rock(muck, debris) to clear before you have required road height of 5 feet 7. The coal is taken 8 yards both sides. You fire(explode) the rock down and then use that rock to build your pack (dry stonewall).

The pack would then be constructed in the 2 feet 6 void where the coal once was.
Not easy work if you are doing it properly but often as not muck was just shovelled down into the void and only cursory walls built.

Davy - Safety lamp invented by Sir Humphrey Davy in 1815.

Dead work – Work that is non productive, e. g. repairing weak roof, cutting bottom 'squeeze', laying of tramways etc. A collier would receive extra payment for such work.

Dip - Working a seam to the 'Dip' means working down-hill, as opposed to working the 'rise', uphill.

District - The area in a colliery that is legally under the supervision of a mine deputy.

Double-parting - A roadway containing one tramway entering a section of wider roadway containing two set of tramways. It is a transfer area where a full 'journey' of coal is deposited and another 'journey' of empty trams is ready to be taken to the coal face.

Drivage - An advancing heading (tunnel) in a mine. It could be exploratory of for development.

Downcast - A ventilation shaft, where fresh air is drawn (or forced) into the workings.

Dumb drift - A dumb drift was a short length of airway that by-passed the ventilating furnace near the bottom of the shaft allowing the return air to be drawn up the shaft without contacting the furnace - explosive! An alternative was to place the furnace itself in the drift drawing in intake air and expelling it into the shaft thus drawing the return air up from shaft bottom - again, isolating the furnace from direct contact with gas laden air.

Engine plane – Usually a sloping roadway with an engine towards the top hauling up trams.

Face - The part of the mine where coal is actually mined from.

Fire-clay - A band of clay normally found adjacent to a coal seam and sometimes worked in addition to the coal, It becomes the main constituent pf brick making, also used for the 'stemming' of shot-holes in mines.

Fire-damp – Chemically known as carburetted hydrogen or methane, has a specific gravity compared with air of ·559 and is therefore found near the roof. When fire-damp explodes, after-damp is formed, and consequently, nearly every death caused by colliery explosion may be attributed to gas poisoning.

Fireman - Local name for a deputy. Sometimes the man who looked after the ventilation was also known as a fireman.

Flueman – The man appointed to maintain a fire in the flue.

Furnace ventilation – A method of ventilation in which a fire is kept burning near the bottom of the upcast shaft, to draw air into the mine workings. Also called 'flue.'

Gas - A term normally used for firedamp, but could be any gas found in a mine

Gas drift - In order to prevent an accumulation of gas in the mines, which is the principle cause of colliery explosions, an escape drift should be driven from the upcast into the summit of the goaf, providing the overlying measures are bound by a strong post girdle, which can resist the draw of the goaf to the surface. By this means the gas would escape to the upcast as fast as it was given off, but where the upper measures consists of loose shale matter, and each fall in the broken section or goaf reach the surface, an escape drift would be of no benefit whatever in this respect, but the gas in this case would find its way into the return airway under certain atmospheric changes, and would in connection with the return current, ascend the upcast. The gas would be drawn up the upcast shaft through the 'gas drift' and bypass the furnace at the bottom of the shaft.

Goaf - The worked out ground of a coal mine

Goit – Drainage ditch (north of England term)
Hard heading - A drivage through rock and coal at an angle to contact a seam for future production.

Haulage engine – A steam, compressed air fixed engine, on surface or below ground. Used for taking into the district trams filled with supplies and returning with a full journey of coal.

Haulage plane – The actual 'run' of a journey into a particular district, its gradients, turns, etc., details that are familiar to the haulage-engine driver.

Heading - A drivage in advance of any coal-face, driven to determine mining conditions ahead.

Haulier - A miner who drives a horse to the coal-face or stall with an empty tram and returns to the 'double parting' with a full tram of coal. He is in sole charge of his horse.

Haulage engine - A steam, compressed air, or electrical type of fixed engine, on surface of below ground. Used underground for taking in a district supplies for the face and returning with a full journey of coal.

Hitcher - A man at pit-bottom who operates the shaft signals which are heard by the winder and banksman.

Inbye - A word to describe the relative position of anyone in a mine e.g. "He has gone in-bye' means he has gone towards the coal-face.

Incline - Any inclined tram road underground, usually provided with a haulage engine taking men, stores etc; inbye and coal or rubbish outbye.

Intake - The route taken by fresh air from the downcast shaft to the workings.

Journey - A number of trams linked together.

Knocker - A signal box connected to a pair of signal wires, hung for the whole length of a haulage road and into the engine-house. A "rider" would signal to the engine-man to move or stop a journey of trams, on these low-current wire**s.**

Lagging - Timber 'slats' erected above and around sides of wooden 'Pairs of timbers' to ensure no stones could fall on a man passing by.

Lamp station - Place where a lamp could be re-lit.

Level – A level is a drivage tunnel which follows the seam of coal from the surface. Other factors, such as water and roof conditions, would decide the accrual pitch of the lecel's initial gradient.

Longwall - A method of mining coal with all the colliers of that district manning one lengthy coal-face. No pillars were left behind in a longwall face and the roof was allowed to 'cave in' behind the line of supports.

Management of mines – 'Official' was the generic term for all levels of management, from agent down to shot-firer. Formerly, in large coal companies one or more 'Agent' would have been in charge of a group of mines. Each mine would have a manager (viewer) who was required in the 1870's to be properly qualified and answerable (but not legally) to the Inspector of Mines. The under-manager (or under-viewer) was generally responsible for the immediate supervision of operations in his district. Overmen were responsible for the provision supplies when needed, including timber for support of the roof. The overmen of the 19th century also had the responsibility for calculating the wages due to each collier.

Master-haulier - An official who organises the tasks of hauliers and checks the shifts of horses in his care.

Manhole - Refuge holes made in a roadway for the shelter of a person from shot firing, or safety from a passing journey.

Ostler – A horse attendant, working in underground stables.

Outbye - Towards the shaft or to the mouth of a level.

Overman – See Management of mines

Packs (see cross-walls) - In long-wall faces, a wall of loose, available stones would be erected, and then packed tightly with loose debris. This would support roadways at the ends of the face and also direct ventilation efficiently.

Pair of timbers - Wooden roof supports consisting of two arms and a collar.

Pillar and stall – A system of mining a seam, by mining the coal in parallel 'stalls' advancing onwards. The stalls would be about 22 yards apart, depending on the roof conditions and height of seam. 'Cross-cuts' would be driven at right-angles every 25 yards to link up all stalls, this leaving 'pillars' of coal to support the roof of the district. Each stall would be manned by two workmen.

Regulator - Similar to an air door bit with a smaller sliding door on it. You slide the door across to change the area of the opening thus regulating the air flow.

Repairer - A workman employed on out-bye work, repairing and replacing damaged roof supports, and generally ensuring a good state of airways, etc.

Return - A ventilation term. The area of a mine through which travels the foul air and gases from the workings and coal faces, on the way to the upcast shaft.

Rider - A thinner piece of coal above the main seam (sometimes too thin to work). It is often of inferior quality. The tender clod probably means the muck between the main seam and the rider which is of a soft quality so that it often falls when the coal is removed.

Rubbish - A general term for any sort of debris, stone, dirt, etc, to be disposed of.

Safety lamp - see 'Davy.'

Seam - One of a number of beds of coal, normally found throughout a coalfield.

Shaft - The veridical sinking of a colliery to a required seam. Most shafts are circular in section, and designed to hold one or two cages.

Shotsman - A qualified official who fires shot-holes in a district.

Sinker - A specialist miner, employed for the sinking of a pit-shaft.

Stall – See pillar and stall.

Sprag - A piece of wood tapered at each end and inserted between the spokes of a tram wheel to stop the tram or to prevent it running away when on an incline. Also refers to a temporary prop, erected to support a ripping lip until a permanent prop is stood.

Squeeze - The increasing pressure of a weak roof in mine workings, detected by the crushing of timber supports - sometimes accompanied by audible cracking of roof strata.

Stall - A working place at the coalface where the coal was extracted; in a coalface 100 yards long there would be as many as 20 of 30 stalls, each separated by a pillar of coal left to support the roof.

Stemming - Clay or other inert material, used to pack behind the explosives in a shot-hole.

Strata - One of several parallel lays of rock etc., arranged one on top of each other.

Sump - An extension downwards at the bottom of a pit-shaft to contain the water that seeps down the shaft. It would then be pumped to the surface.

Tamping - The pressing of rubble or horse manure onto the explosive substance inside the bored hole of an arm or collar to stop any flames reaching out and causing an explosion.

Thurling - The point where one heading breaks into another.

Timberman - A workman who would 'notch' and prepare wooden posts for the securing of the roof. A man employed for the re-timbering of the supports of an old roadway.

Top - Commonly used in mines to describe the roof of a seam, e. g. "The top needs extra supports."

Under-manager - The qualified person in charge of the mine in the absence of the manager.

Upcast shaft - A secondary shaft that returns stale air to the surface. It normally contained a furnace fire at shaft bottom.

Viewer – Colliery manager during the 19th century.

Water balance – See balance pit.

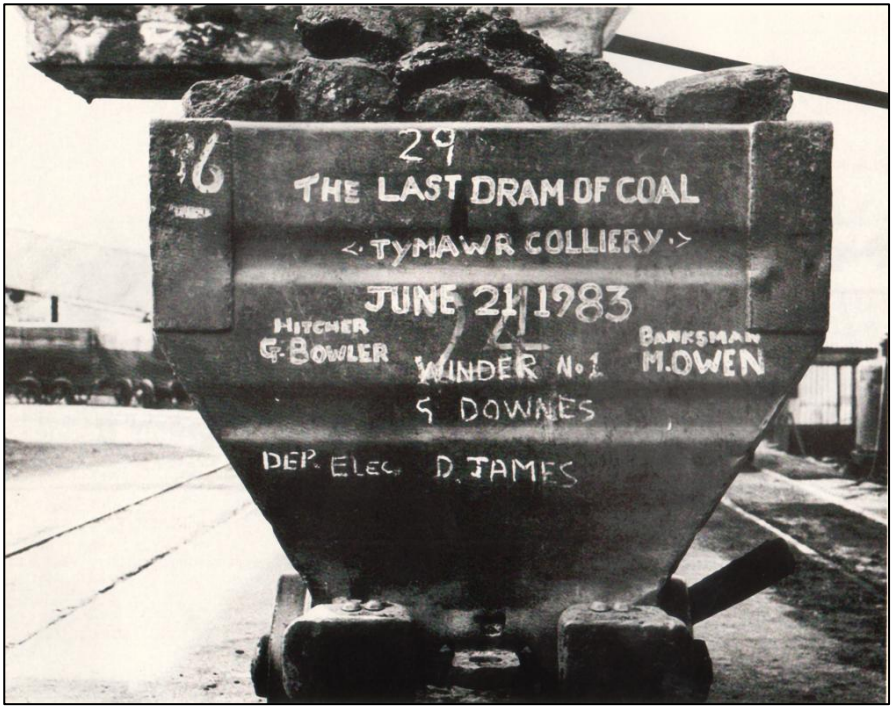
Water Gauge – Instrument used to determine the pressure difference between either the two shaft bottoms, or the main intake and return roadways, thus find out the ventilating pressure. Still used to this day only more up to date magnetic gauges rather than a glass U tube with water in.

William James
The Great Western Colliery Manager

April 11th 2015 marked the 120th anniversary of the Great Western Colliery Disaster in which 63 men and boys were killed. Local historian Gareth Harris has written a book about the event, but despite all inquiries he was unable to discover a photo of the much-loved underground colliery manager at the time, William James. However, a copy of the book eventually reached the grand-daughter of William James, who has recently supplied Gareth with a copy of the attached photograph.

When he retired nearly £80 was collected, chiefly amongst the men. Which was a huge amount in those days. The presentation would have been made at an earlier date were it not for the incident which created such a sensation in the district. The articles, including an 'illuminated address' were being exhibited in the parlour window of the Hollybush Inn, but to the consternation of the genial host and hostess, Mr. and Mrs. Horatio Rowlands, the gold watch had one morning mysteriously disappeared. Of course the news spread like wildfire, and hopes were general that the culprit would be brought to justice. Such proved to be the case, and when those that had assembled at the Rhondda Chapel on a Saturday presentation night were wishing their felicity and prosperity to Mr. And Mrs. James, the unfortunate culprit was undergoing "durance vile" at one of the beloved Queen's 'palaces.'

Starting as a doorboy in the early days of the colliery, after fifty years service as manager of the Great Western Colliery, William James retired at Christmas 1922 and removed to Weston-Super-Mare where he died on Monday, September 1st 1930 at the age of 76. His remains were brought by road to Gyfeillon Church, of which he was a sideman for many years, for internment, and there met by a large concourse of people, amongst whom were several who had served in an official capacity under the deceased for nearly half a century. Mr. James had married a widow of one of the victims of the disaster.



The last tram of coal raised from the Great Western Colliery complex when the Tymawr Colliery closed in 1983.

The Hetty winding house, the sole remains of the Great Western Colliery today.

Acknowledgments

In the making of this book I would like to thank the following people. The staff at the Pontypridd Museum and Historical Centre, notably Brian Davies, for his introduction; Ann Cleary, for listening to my problems; and in particular David Gwyer for checking and checking again my manuscript. Thanks also to Hywel Matthews at the Pontypridd Library and the R.C.T. Library Service; the Cardiff Central Library, the late John Cornwell, for the use of his brilliant photographs. And lastly my son Carl for lending me £5 to buy the ink to print this manuscript!

TY MAWR COLLIERY, NEWBRIDGE,

GLAMORGANSHIRE.

TO BE LET, upon a minimum rent of £150 per annum, or sixpence per ton gale age, and immediate possession given, TY MAWR COLLIERY, on the Rhondda Branch of the Taff Vale Railway, having a Siding with Tips and Screens within 150 yards of the Pit's Mouth. There are Two Veins of Coal already opened, viz., to the Gelly Whion and Cymmar Veins, and the pit sunk 70 yards below these, to within a short distance of the Dinas Vein, celebrated for its very superior gas and coking qualities, and which may now be reached by a very moderate further outlay. The Plant, which is of the most substantial description, and nearly new, to be taken at a valuation, consists of a first-rate horizontal 18-inch cylinder Engine, 45-feet cylindrical Boiler, 8-inch Force-pump, and six-inch Lift-pump, with T bobs and gearing, flat Winding-chains, Pit-framing, 70 Tram-wagons, 30 Trolleys, Tram-plates, 40 sets of Colliers' Tools, Smiths' and Carpenters' Tools, &c.

To view the Property apply to Mr. Aaron Crosfield, Ty-mawr-house; and for further particulars apply to Mr. R. M. Toogood, Auctioneer and Appraiser, 100, Stow-hill, Newport, Monmouthshire; E. M. Miller, Esq., Official Assignee, St. Augustine's place, Bristol; Messrs. James, Solicitors, Merthyr-Tydfil; or Mr. W. Bevan, Solicitor, Bristol.

ANNUAL

The sale of the Ty Mawr Colliery in 1851, which predated the Gyfeillon (Great Western) Colliery.

MOST OF THE COLLIERY DISASTERS IN SOUTH WALES HAVE BEEN COVERED IN PREVIOUS BOOKS, BUT THE ONE AT THE GREAT WESTERN COLLIERY DISASTER IN HOPKINSTOWN ON APRIL 1893 SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN MISSED OUT, THE ALBION COLLIERY DISASTER THE FOLLOWING YEAR CASTING AN EVEN BIGGER SHADOW OVER THE PONTYPRIDD DISTRICT.

THIS PUBLICATION SETS TO PUT THIS RIGHT AND TELLS THROUGH THE NEWSPAPERS OF THE TIME OF THE DEATH OF 63 MEN AND BOYS AND THE DAY TODAY ACCOUNT OF THE BRAVE BUT FUTILE RESCUE ATTEMPTS THAT FOLLOWED IN TRYING TO REACH MEN WHO MIGHT OR MIGHT NOT BE STILL ALIVE.

IT TELLS OF THOMAS ROSSER, A BRAVE MAN WHOSE CALMNESS IN A CRISIS SAW THE SURVIVAL OF MANY MEN WHO MIGHT OTHERWISE HAVE PERISHED. IT ALSO TELLS OF THE DISTRESS CAUSED TO THE FAMILIES OF THE VICTIMS AND THE MASSFUNERALS THAT FOLLOWED IN THE NEARBY TOWN OF PONTYPRIDD.

THE ERA OF THE COAL INDUSTRY IN SOUTH WALES IS NOW A DISTANT MEMORY, BUT THIS BOOK PAYS TRIBUTE TO ALL THE MEN WHO WORKED IN THE GREAT WESTERN AND TYMAWR COLLIERIES THROUGHOUT THE YEARS UNTIL ITS CLOSURE IN 1983.

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