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## FATAL EXPLOSIONS IN THE MINES OF ENGLAND AND WALES DURING THE LAST HALF CENTURY.

BY CAPT. J. L. MORRIS.

Since the commencement of Her Majesty's reign upwards of 11,000 lives have been lost in Great Britain, owing to the explosions of fire-damp.

The immediate causes of most of the sad catastrophies which have led to such loss of life were the use of gunpowder in blasting, naked lights, defective safety lamps, and laxity of discipline with no knowledge on the part of many of the officials of the dangerous nature of coal dust.

Fortunately, as the production of coal has gone on increasing, so has the system of working in mines been carried on by improved methods and on scientific principles.

Had this not been so, the deaths from explosions during the last twenty years would have been treble what they were; for they were as numerous, or more so, than when the quantity of coal raised was not much more than one-third what it is at the present time.

In 1837, when Her Majesty ascended the throne the production of coal was estimated at 38,000,000 tons, whilst in 1884, it was 160,757,779 tons, although during the past two years it was rather less.

Again it appears that the quantity of coal imported into London in 1837 was 2,626,997 tons; in 1845, when coal was first sent to the metropolis by rail, the imports by sea, canal and rail were 3,403,320 tons, whilst last year they were 11,800,507 tons.

Such has been the production and consumption of coal during the last half century.

As to the explosions during the same period, about 20 per cent. of the deaths from these took place in the West Riding, about the same in Durham and Northumberland.

But whilst during the last twenty years the explosions in those districts decreased in a marked degree, there was a great increase of them in South Wales, Lancashire, Scotland, Staffordshire and in a few other districts.

In the early explosions, the victims included women, girls and boys. At an explosion that took place at Porter's colliery, Barnsley, in 1842, three of the killed were young women, and

at the inquiry which took place in 1884, with respect to the Haswell colliery, in Durham, where 95 persons were killed by an explosion, it was given in evidence that lamps were given out to lads of 10 years of age. The fatality at Haswell, it may be also said, was about the first in which the government sent down experts to report upon the event and to assist the coroner in his investigation of the case. There were two gentlemen sent down, admittedly the most eminent of the time, being Prof. Forady and C. Lyall, Esq., (afterward Sir Charles Lyall).

Three years later, an explosion at the now historical Oaks Colliery, killed 73 persons and in the same locality at Dorley Main, 75 were killed in 1849 from a similar cause.

In 1857, however, the country was startled on hearing that an explosion had taken place at the Lund Hill Colliery, near Barnsley, by which 189 lives were lost, the largest number of deaths ever recorded as having been caused by one explosion.

During the next few years explosions became more frequent in other districts, including those in South Wales, but the climax was reached in December, 1866, when 361 lives were lost by the explosion at the Oaks colliery, and it was followed a few days afterward by a similar event at Talk-o'-th'-Hill colliery, Staffordshire, where the loss of life reached 100.

In 1863, in South Wales, 63 lives were lost at Morfa by an explosion, 14 at Maesteg, and 26 at Tredegar; and in 1867, 167 persons were killed at Ferndale. In 1768 the deaths from explosions throughout the kingdom was only 154, of which 22 took place at St. Helens, Lancashire, and 10 at Ruabon. In 1869 South Wales again took the lead, when out of the 251 killed, Ferndale again was credited with 60; Haydock Wigan, 58; Ince Wigan, 26; and Highbrook Wigan, 36.

In 1871 there was an explosion at Moss Side colliery, Wigan, which killed 70 men and boys, whilst from a similar catastrophe at two mines in South Wales, 57 had to be added to the number, and another at Seaham, in Durham, 30.

These explosions led to Parliamentary inquiries, which in 1872 resulted in the passing of the Mines Regulation Act, which has been in force since the commencement of 1873.

In the course of the first year of its operation, the deaths from explosions only numbered 100, the lowest recorded since 1859. But in the following year there was an increase of 66 in the number killed, of which 51 took place at Dukinfield, in Cheshire, 23 at Warren Vale, near Rotherham, and 17 at Big-nall Hill, Staffordshire.

With only two exceptions, the deaths from explosions in mines in 1876 was the lowest recorded during the previous 25

years, the most serious having been at Arbentillery, in South Wales, where 20 were killed out of a total of 96.

It was very different in 1875, when the lives lost by explosions were 345, and of these 213 took place at High Blantyre, near Glasgow.

In 1878, the killed by explosions reached 586, only exceeded in 1866 on the occasion of the Oaks explosion. The most serious one was at Abercarn, in South Wales, by which 265 lives were lost, Haydock (in Lancashire) adding 200 to the number. Another unfortunate year was 1880, when the killed from explosions numbered 499, of which 119 took place at Risca, South Wales, and 162 at Seaham in deaths, 40 of them occurring at the Abram colliery in Lancashire, and of the 250 killed in 1882, it appears that 30 took place at Clay Cross and 21 at Baxterly, in Warwickshire; of the 134 killed in 1883, we find that 68 occurred at Accrington, and 20 at Whamcliff Carlton, near Barnsley. The lowest number of deaths recorded in one year, from mining explosions, was 65, in 1884, and of these, 36 took place in South Wales. In the following year, however, the number increased to 341, of which 178 were killed at the Clifton Hall colliery, in Lancashire. The number of deaths from explosions in 1886 was 116, and of these 38 took place at Leigh, Lancashire; 22 at Altofts, near Leeds, and 28 at the Elmore colliery, Durham. Up to the 3d of July, 1887, the deaths from explosions have reached 129, of which 93 took place at Udston, near Glasgow, Scotland, and February, 1890, when that terrible explosion took place at Llanerch colliery, Abersychan, South Wales, where 176 lives were lost, when 70 wives were left widows and 240 children left orphans.

**THE CHAIR:** I am very glad that I did not miss Captain Morris' paper, because he has given us a very able, historical paper. Do you wish to discuss the paper before we proceed further.

**MR. EDE:** I move that a vote of thanks be tendered to Captain Morris for the able paper he has given us.

**MR. ROY:** We omitted to move a vote of thanks for the preceding paper, and I wish to amend Mr. Ede's motion to that effect.

**SECRETARY HASELTINE:** I wish to amend Mr. Ede's motion by still further thanking Captain Morris because of his pronunciation of all those jaw-breaking names which have staggered every person who has read the history of those explosions in England and South Wales.

THE CHAIR: It is a great question in my mind whether the Secretary really understands whether Captain Morris correctly pronounced them or not.

SECRETARY HASELTINE: Well, it is all right; he got them off, anyhow.

THE CHAIR: You have heard the motion that a vote of thanks be extended to Captain Morris and Mr. Hibbs for their very able papers.

Motion being seconded was unanimously adopted.

THE CHAIR: The next business in order is the election of officers for the ensuing year.

MR. ROY: Mr. President; I move that the present president and secretary be continued for another year.

SECRETARY HASELTINE: Mr. President, perhaps Mr. Roy does not remember, but it has been our custom to appoint a committee to nominate all the officers and make one job of it.

THE CHAIR: I don't know, indeed,—it is very flattering to me, but I don't think it is exactly right. I think one term is enough, I am rather democratic in my views and believe in rotation in office, and I think somebody else ought to take the chair this time; and if Mr. Roy will make a motion to appoint a committee, perhaps they can think of some one else to fill this position much better, probably, than it has been. I would rather have it that way. I don't think it is right to monopolize anything.

(Calls of "Question," "Question.")

THE CHAIR: What is the question?

MR. ROY: The motion is that the President and Secretary be continued in office for another year.

PROFESSOR LORD: I believe in the democratic principle that when you have a good thing, stick to it. I second the motion.

THE CHAIR: Even if it is a ripper. Gentlemen, are you ready for the question? The motion of Mr. Roy is, that the present President and Secretary be elected for the coming year.

(Calls for the question.)

The motion being put was unanimously adopted,

CAPTAIN MORRIS: Mr. President and members of the Institute, I have got a few lines here given me to read, and I will try my best to read it.

This is the 23rd of January,  
In the Capital of the State,  
We have met as friends and brothers  
To try and make a slate,  
With the names of honored members  
To serve for Ninety-one,  
And boom our precious Institute  
To A, and number one.

It is a fine Society  
Of gentlemen you see,  
That understand their business  
Whatever that may be.  
In planning, sinking, mining,  
And surveying now of late,  
And make a map for Haseltine  
As a record in the state.

There's names we can be proud of  
Among this gallant crew,  
That's always been of service,  
And their deeds are not so few.  
There is Andrew Roy of Jackson,  
And Watkins near by,  
And Hon. Daniel Harry,  
And Evans of Pomeroy.

There's Haughee from the Hocking,  
And Love from Leesville town,  
And others I could mention  
But their names are yet not down.  
There's Hon. Howells of Massillon,  
Our President who's our own,  
That worked so faithfully for us,  
Last summer in that town.

And Hon. R. M. Haseltine  
Who's Chief as you all know,  
And worked so very faithful  
To keep expenses low.  
And when we look things over,  
It makes me feel so proud,  
To be a common member  
Among such a faithful crowd.

I hope that we may live to see  
The work we try to plan,  
Accomplished by the Institute  
For the good of every man.

*(Great applause)*

CAPT. J. L. MORRIS.

MR. ROY: I move we establish a new office in our Institute to be filled by Captain Morris—the office of Poet Laureate.

THE CHAIR: Gentlemen; you have heard the motion that we institute a new office in our Institute called the "Poet Laureate of America."

MR. ROY: Of this Institute.

The motion being seconded was unanimously adopted.

PROFESSOR LORD: Mr. President, I move the appointment of a committee to nominate the other officers of the Institute and the executive committee.

Motion being seconded was carried.

PROFESSOR LORD: The Chair will appoint the committee.

THE CHAIR: The committee will consist of Professor Lord, Mr. Harry and Professor Sperr.

SECRETARY HASELTINE: I have here a resolution which was sent me to be presented to the Institute.

WHEREAS, Governor Campbell, in his annual message to the Legislature; commended the Ohio State University to their fostering care; and whereas, in pursuance of his recommendation as to the provision that should be made for the needs of the University, Hon. N. R. Hysell, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, has introduced a bill levying a tax of a fraction of a mill on the dollar for that purpose; and whereas, "A permanent and uniform income, large enough to stimulate healthy growth" of higher education, is necessary that Ohio may attain her proper rank in the sisterhood of states in that respect; and whereas, we especially recognize the advantage of the State University to the mining industries of the State; Therefore, be it resolved by the Ohio Institute of Mining Engineers that we heartily approve said bill and earnestly urge the Legislators from our respective districts to give it their support.

THE CHAIR: You have heard the communication and resolution attached to it. What shall we do with it?

A MEMBER: I move the adoption of the resolution.

(Motion being seconded was unanimously carried.)

MR. ROY: Mr. President, while you are on that question, on the question of resolutions, we might as well dispose of this one we had up in the morning.

SECRETARY HASELTINE: This is the resolution of the committee that was appointed last night. "Resolved: That it is the desire of the Ohio Institute of Mining Engineers that the Legislature shall pass a bill of the following effect:

*Resolved,* That it is the desire of Ohio Institute of Mining Engineers, that the Legislature should pass a bill of the following effect:

*First:* That all Mine Bosses should be required to hold a certificate of competence that can be gained by passing an examination before a Board of Examiners appointed for that purpose by the Governor. That all Bosses who are now and have been employed as such for a period of two years shall receive a qualified certificate to that effect that shall exempt him from further examination unless he desires a full and unqualified certificate, when he shall pass a regular examination required of a person who has not been so employed.

*Second:* That all candidates for the position of Mine Inspector shall be required to pass a suitable examination of competency and receive a certificate thereon. That the inspectors who are now or have formerly served, shall at once receive qualified certificates in a similar manner as indicated for the bosses. That all the requirements of examination shall give a great weight to practical knowledge and experience.

That the chair appoint a committee to present these resolutions to the suitable authorities and to confer with them as to the full details of the bill embodying the within resolution.

Signed by the Committee,

ANDREW ROY,  
R. M. HASELTINE,  
E. D. WILEMAN.

THE CHAIR: You have heard the resolution. What shall we do with it?

A MEMBER: Mr. President, I move the resolution be adopted.

(The motion being seconded, was adopted).

THE CHAIR: Now, I was going to say that the resolution is merely suggestive, and perhaps there ought to be some ex-



pression in this meeting of what qualifications would be necessary to give a certificate to a mining boss. I think some expression of that kind ought to be made. A bill might accidentally be passed by the legislature that would cut off almost all men from being mining bosses. My own idea would be that it would not be necessary for a mine boss to pass as rigid an examination as a mine inspector, that is, the educational part; in the practical parts he ought to. And I did not know but perhaps some expression ought to be made here.

MR. ROY: Mr. President, I think your suggestion is a very good one. We have here with us one of the members of the Board of Examiners in Pennsylvania, where that has been in operation for several years, and I move we call upon him for the result of the operations of that law as far as his experience and observation go.

MR. QUINN: I have been a member of the Board of Examiners for mine bosses. The law requires that the applicant shall have five years practical experience in the bituminous coal mines of Pennsylvania, without respect to the theory and practice he may have elsewhere. As to the other qualifications, I think the best thing I can do is to read you a set of questions to give you some knowledge of what is required of them.