

We are sorry to understand that the colliers in William Pit (the principal coal-pit belonging to the Earl of Lonsdale) have been prevented from attending their work during the last fortnight, owing to an extraordinary accumulation of inflammable air.

13 OCT 1823

DREADFUL ACCIDENT.—On Monday last, this town was thrown into a state of extreme agitation, when it was generally known that the inflammable air in the colliery behind the North-wall, called William-pit, had suddenly caught fire, carrying death and destruction to every living creature, within the range of its explosion. It is not known how the accident occurred, as no one survived to tell the melancholy tale. Thirty two men, boys, and girls, (whose names we subjoin,) and seventeen horses, fell victims to the fury of the blast.—In our next we shall give some remarks of our scientific townsman, Mr. J. B. Longmire, on the Safety-lamp, and in the mean time refer our readers to the subjoined letter.

Joseph Usher, left widow and 4 children; John Murray, widow and 3 children; Jonathan Dixon, widow and 1 child; William Thompson, widow and 5 children; John Carmel, a young man; James M'Lennon, a young man; John M'Lennon, a boy; John Ellwood, a boy; Mary Froggat, aged 18; John M'Guire, widow and 5 children; John Blaylock, and Matthew Blaylock, boys, and brothers; Peter M'Allister, widow and 3 children; William Cragg, boy; Patrick Markie, single man; James Hinde, widow and one child; John Corkin boy; Thomas Irving, three orphans; Patrick Matthews, widow; Patrick M'Claughlin, widow and two children; Archibald M'Claughlin and son, 2 children; Thomas Fitzpatrick, a young man; John Tweedy, a young man; Christopher Pearson, a young man; Fergus Frail, a young man; Thomas Hughes, a widow and 3 children; William Sinclair, a boy; John Herring, a young man; Joseph Leathers, a young man; William M'Cullock, a boy; Richard Bainbridge, widow and 4 children; Ann Bainbridge, daughter to Richard Bainbridge.

Two sermons were preached yesterday at the Methodist chapel, Michael-street, by the Rev. Mr. Prescott, and one at the Independent chapel, Duke-street, by the Rev. A. Jack, in behalf of the relatives of the above-named unfortunate individuals: at the Methodist chapel the sum of £9. 5s. 4d. was collected, and at the Independent chapel the sum of £6. 7s.—In our next we shall give a more particular reference to the residences of the surviving relatives, in order to enable the benevolent to visit these "homes of affliction."

To the Editor of the Whitehaven Gazette.

Sir,—Your well known character for liberality, and the readiness with which you have ever devoted your columns to any thing which had for its object the good of the public and your fellow creatures, or the cause of humanity, induce me to trouble you with a few remarks, relative to the late shocking and melancholy accident at William Pit.

Amidst the general consternation and mourning, necessarily fixed on the mind of every rational being, by the awful destruction, at one instantaneous blow, of thirty two of our fellow creatures, the first questions that arise in every mind, are, how was this havoc occasioned? and was there no possibility of preventing it? These are questions which present themselves to every one. They are, indeed, questions of the greatest importance; and the one, I am persuaded, must answer the other.

These dreadful explosions, which so frequently occur in the Earl of Lonsdale's collieries, and which breathe such slaughter and destruction among the workmen, making, in one terrible moment, numbers of widows and orphans, are caused by the accumulation of foul or inflammable air, which, being ignited by some unknown accident, or carelessness, explodes on the instant, and deals out destruction to all that it meets in its progress. This, then, being the cause, we now come to inquire, is there no possibility of preventing it?

That explosions are more frequent, in the Earl of Lonsdale's collieries now, than they were formerly, is a fact which cannot be denied; for within a very few years, since Mr. Peile's accession to the stewardship, near ONE HUNDRED human beings have been cut off, by the frequent and awful occurrence of those dreadful and destructive accidents. Whether this sad increase of misery arises from a different manner of working the Pits, or from some other cause which cannot be prevented, is a question to the public, of general interest.—This inflammable air, so destructive in its explosion, is engendered through the total exclusion of atmospheric or pure air. The moment it meets the pure air it evaporates; and if pure air could be conveyed into the workings of the Pit, it would immediately destroy all noxious and dangerous vapours. Is there, then no possibility, of so conveying it?—I am decidedly of opinion, that it is possible to convey it.

The means which the miners employ to recover the dead bodies after an explosion is, to carry along with them a sufficient quantity of pure air to destroy the choke damp, which would otherwise prevent them entering at all. If, then, they can convey air into the workings, sufficient to destroy the dangerous vapour, AFTER an explosion, why not convey it in BEFORE SUCH AN EXPLOSION TAKES PLACE, and by that means prevent the possibility of its taking place?

This air is conveyed by means of Air Pipes, made of wood; and with this assistance they are enabled to penetrate the foulest part of the Pit. A few years ago, as I am informed, every man had an Air Pipe in his working, at the mouth of which he stuck up his candle, the Safety Lamp not being in use. If they could then so convey air, by means of pipes, as to enable the men to work with NAKED CANDLES, surely it must be possible to convey it by the same means now; and with the assistance of the Safety Lamp, might we not rationally expect those dreadful accidents to be less frequent now than before? Reason answers in the affirmative.

But I have heard it asserted by some colliers, that air cannot be conveyed, by this method, to the workings, except where there is close work, by which they mean where there is the solid bed to work upon; and, say they, William Pit has now nothing remaining but the PILLARS. How the air cannot be conveyed in pipes because the solid bed is cut up and nothing but the pillars remaining, cannot be easily conceived; and is not this contradicted by the fact of their carrying air along with them when seeking the dead bodies of the men that are destroyed? The Pit must, of necessity, be in the worst state immediately after an explosion, from the great quantity of choke damp consequently accumulated; and if, when the Pit is in that state, they can so convey air in as to be able to penetrate with safety, it appears difficult to find a reason why they cannot convey it in at any time.

As inflammable air is wholly engendered through the want of atmospheric air, so the conveying of atmospheric air into the Pits, must annihilate the inflammable air. This, therefore, appears to be the greatest requisite for safety. But, as it is necessary to be as cautious as possible, every man is provided with a Safety Lamp, and from the injudicious management of this, a great many, as I have reason to believe, of those deplorable accidents have happened. In the first place, too much reliance is placed upon them; and from the great confidence which they place in them, they are apt to neglect the other necessary precautions. If I recollect right, you, Sir, some time ago, recommended to the stewards of the colliery, to use more caution with respect to the lamps; but this does not appear to have been attended to. Owing to the long shifts which the men are obliged to work, it is necessary to trim the lamp during the time they are in the Pit; and for this purpose, there are certain stages where they go to perform it. Every person will imagine that the greatest care will be taken to have pure air at those stages; and yet the late dreadful explosion is supposed, by many of the colliers, to have originated at one of them! If such be the case, the stewards have certainly a dreadful account to answer for; for until they were perfectly certain that there was no danger, they ought not, by any means, to allow the men to remove the cylinder of the lamp. Why do they, indeed, compel the men to remain so long as to render it necessary to trim the lamp at all? Reason can suggest no answer.

I am also informed, on the best authority, that such was the state of the Pit, on the day on which the explosion took place, that the cylinders of the lamps by which the men were working in the forenoon, were actually red hot, from the continual burning of the inflammable air within them! And that for weeks previous to the misfortune, they daily expected it! Is it not fair to conclude, then, from the extreme thinness of the gauze of which the cylinders are made, that one of them might have been burned through, and thus ignited the destructive fluid?

But why were the men compelled to work in this Pit, the stewards knowing, as they must have known, that it was in such a state? Why did they not take the precaution of conveying air into the workings, if, by any means, it is possible so to do? The common cause of humanity calls aloud for satisfactory answers to these questions. I mean not to accuse the stewards of negligence; neither do I say that they could have prevented it; but I want an inquiry into the subject, in order that, if possible, a recurrence may be prevented.—Awful is the contemplation of such slaughters as these, but doubly awful if there is reason to believe there is any possibility of preventing them.

Every investigation should be made into the subject—no expense should be spared—every caution should be taken.—The lives of thirty two human beings I consider of more value than all the mines in the North. Hoping that some inquiry will be made,—I am, Sir, yours truly, X.

The following is a list of the subscriptions for the widows, and other relations of the sufferers in William Pit, on the late melancholy occasion:—

	£	s.	d.
The profit of one night at the theatre, the voluntary offer of the Manager	34	6	0
Donations from the Non-Commissioned officers, of the Royal Cumberland Militia	2	9	4
Other Donations	21	4	8
	£58	0	0

The above sum was distributed by the Magistrates, on Saturday, 25th inst., at the Public Office, and apportioned into 58 shares, including the widows and their children, the fathers and other connexions of the deceased.

27 OCT 1823

THE LATE ACCIDENT IN WILLIAM PIT.

The following is a more particular account of the residences and number of surviving relatives of the sufferers by the recent dreadful accident in William Pit, than we were enabled to give last week. It will assist those who wish to cheer the widow and fatherless to judge of the necessities of the various claimants, and to find out their humble dwellings with greater ease.

Name	Residence	Age	Relatives
Richard Bainbridge	Soapery Court, Lady Pit,	14	1 widow child
Ann Bainbridge	Daughter of the above	11	
John Blaylock	Front Row, parents living	16	
Matthew Blaylock	Front Row, parents living	14	
John Carmel	Bells Lane, parents living	15	
John Corkan	Last House, Back Row; mother left; had a brother killed formerly	16	
William Cragg	41, Castle Row, a helpless feeble mother. The father was killed by a former explosion, and an only surviving brother lamed by the same cause	15	
Jonathan Dixon	Harris Moor	1	1
John Ellwood	Front Row, parents living	17	
Fergus Frail	A single man		
Mary Froggat	17, Front Row, mother and step father	17	
Thomas Fitzpatrick	An entire stranger, only a few days in the pit on trial	16	
John Herring	Charles Street, parents living	14	
Thomas Hughes	Ribson Lane	1	3
James Hinde	New Houses, 1 child with his relations in Ireland, daughter 15 years of age in employment	1	1
Thomas Irving	Wife transported, the children are with his brother, in 33, Back Row	17	0 3
John Leathers	Queen-street, parents living	17	
Peter M'Allister	20, Castle Row	1	5
William M'Cullock	Parents living	16	
John M'Guire	4, Castle Row	1	5
Patrick M'Claughlin	17, Back Row	1	2
Archibald M'Claughlin	Son of the above	16	
James M'Lennon	Castle Row, parents living	18	
John M'Lennon	Castle Row, parents living	13	
Patrick Marke	A single man		1 0
Patrick Matthews	Davy Pit, Scilly Bank, only a few weeks married	1	3
John Murray	17-1, Back Row, mother and step father	17	
Christopher Pearson	Quay Street	16	
William Sinclair	Aik Bank, behind Lonsdale Place	1	5
William Thompson	A single man		
John Tweedie	Near Rose Hill gate	1	4
Joseph Usher			

Leaving in all 11 widows and 34 children.

