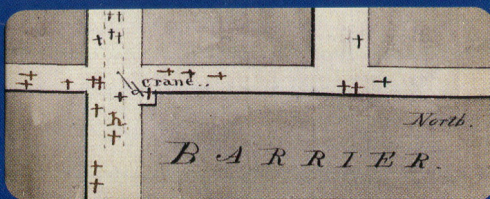


The Price of Coal

Coal was mined on Tyneside before records began. It was extracted first on the banks of the river and at the coast where the coal was easily accessible. Later on, as the demand for coal grew and techniques for digging coal from increasingly deeper seams were developed, mining became more widespread across the area. Small hamlets, villages, towns, entire communities sprang up around mines, including many settlements now inside the boundaries of the City of Newcastle such as Scotswood, Coxlodge and Newburn.

Coal mining was once the biggest employer in the North East. It was at its height either side of the first world war. In 1923 there were 432 working coal mines in the Great North Coalfield which stretched across Tyneside, south east Northumberland and Durham, producing 54.6 million tons of coal. These mines employed 250,000 men and about the same number may have worked shipping coal on the railways and ports. Although 1923 saw no major disasters, 205 men were killed, 786 men seriously injured, and 42,376 men were off work for at least seven days because of injury. A miner died for every 279,000 tons of coal produced this year.

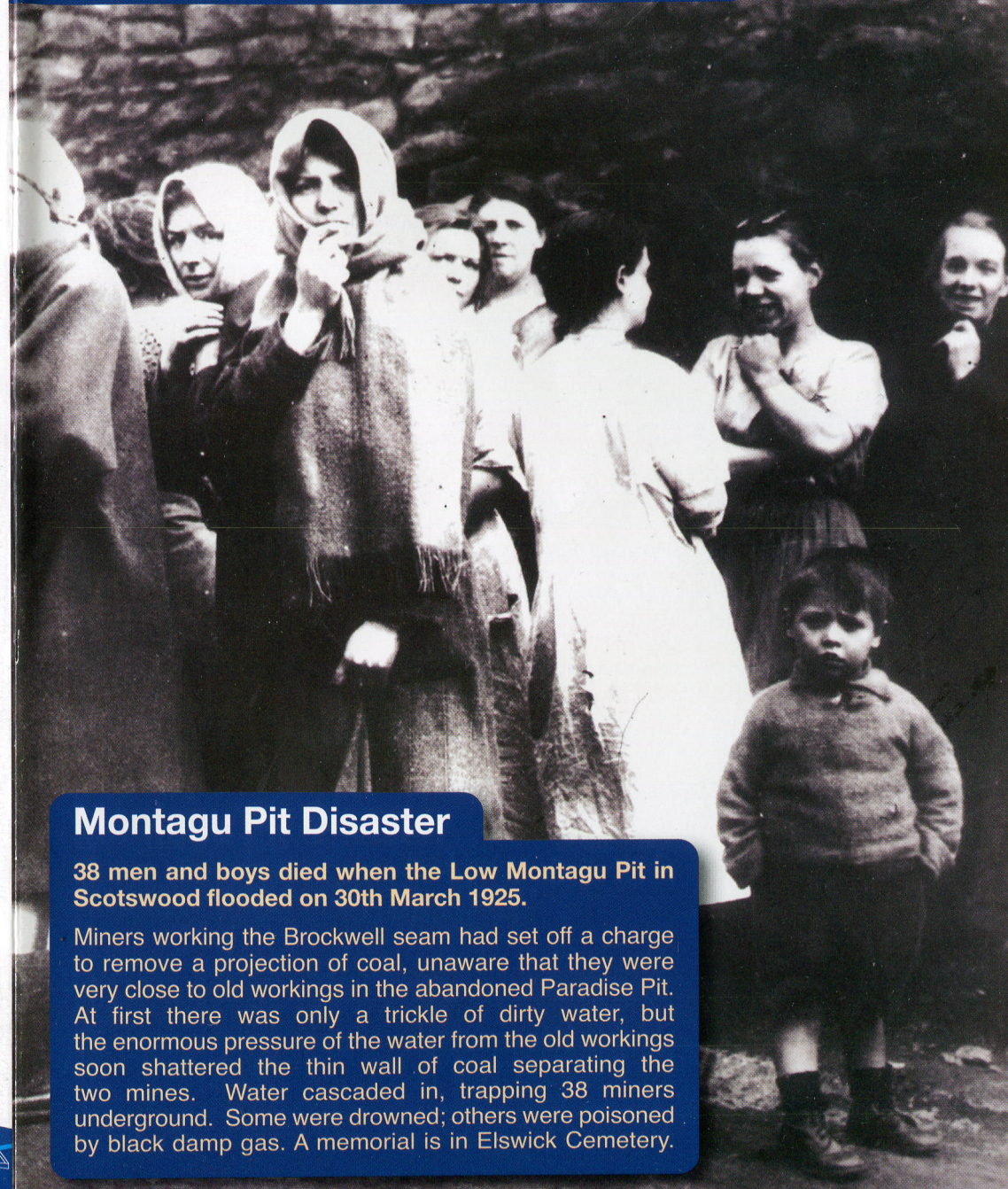
Mining was a dangerous occupation. Small incidents such as roof falls, gas pockets, foul air, falling down the shaft and being struck by



equipment were regular occurrences resulting in injury and death. Less common but more shocking were the major accidents principally caused by the explosion of methane gas or by flooding. This leaflet describes nine of the worst mining disasters in the Tyneside area in the 19th and early 20th centuries. During this period the effects of such accidents were made much worse since medical care was primitive, there was little compensation and families lost their houses and living as well as their men-folk. Rescue efforts were often strenuous and brave, but equipment was minimal. Pit disasters were usually seen as "accidents" rather than preventable occurrences. It took many deaths before the need for strict legislation on mine safety was accepted and compensation was paid for deaths and injuries. Disasters prompted many changes in the law as a result of public sympathy with the miners' conditions.

2012 is a particularly important year to remember the number of miners who died in pit accidents, as two of the worst disasters - New Hartley (150 years ago) and Felling (200 years ago) - are commemorated this year.

"Waiting at the Pit Head" Coal Mining Disasters on Tyneside



Montagu Pit Disaster

38 men and boys died when the Low Montagu Pit in Scotswood flooded on 30th March 1925.

Miners working the Brockwell seam had set off a charge to remove a projection of coal, unaware that they were very close to old workings in the abandoned Paradise Pit. At first there was only a trickle of dirty water, but the enormous pressure of the water from the old workings soon shattered the thin wall of coal separating the two mines. Water cascaded in, trapping 38 miners underground. Some were drowned; others were poisoned by black damp gas. A memorial is in Elswick Cemetery.

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Images: Montagu Pit: photograph courtesy West Newcastle Picture History Collection. Heaton: "Inundation of a Mine", Simonin, L., Underground Life or Mines and Miners, Paris, 1869. Courtesy NEIMME. Wallsend, The Church Pit Wallsend, Coxlodge: The Jubilee Pit Coxlodge Colliery; and Hebburn: The C Pit Hebburn Colliery, all from "Sketches of the coalmines in Northumberland and Durham" T. H. Hair. Courtesy NEIMME. New Hartley: The Fatal Accident at New Hartley, Removal of the Coffins containing the Bodies. ©Illustrated London News (NEIMME ref ZD-44-1-(17). Burradon (NEIMME ref Tr59 352a & Tr59 352b); Felling (Bell-15-597); Jarrow (Bell 17-461), all Courtesy NEIMME, ©2012



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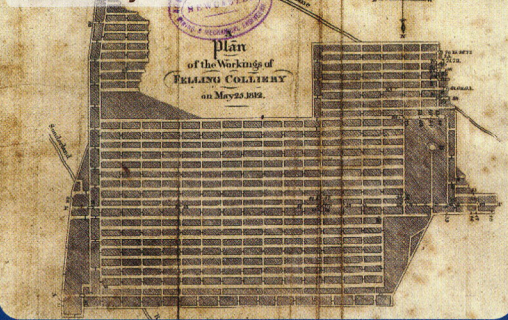


Local People: Local Heroes



Felling Pit Disaster

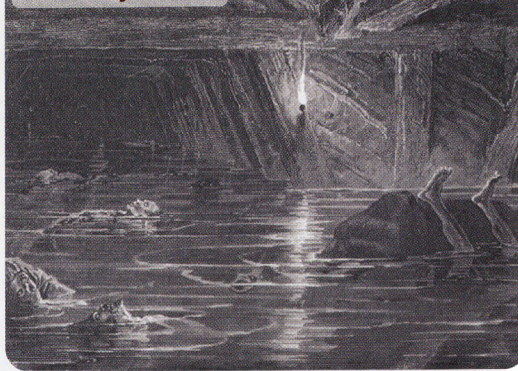
25th May 1812



At this time, miners used candles or a steel mill to provide light underground. Because of the dangers of flammable gas, men known as "monks" used to go down the pit wrapped in wet rags and use candles on long poles to set off small explosions to get rid of pockets of gas before the miners went down to work. Despite this, disastrous explosions still happened. The explosion at Felling travelled right through the mine and erupted from both John and William Pit shafts, killing 92 men. This disaster led to the invention of the miners' safety lamp in 1815.

Heaton Colliery Disaster

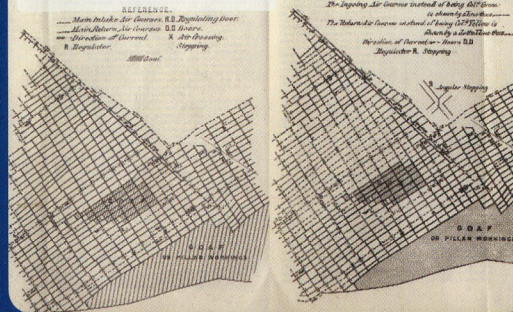
3rd May 1815



The Heaton disaster was caused when water burst through from older coal workings nearby. Millions of gallons of filthy water flooded the entire mine in about 15 minutes. Some miners drowned then, but many others survived only to die a lingering death over the following days. It took almost nine months for rescuers to reach all the trapped men, by which time they had all died of suffocation or other causes. A total of 75 men and boys died, the youngest aged 8.

Burradon Pit Disaster

2nd March 1860



76 miners were killed when firedamp caused two explosions at Burradon. Some men survived the actual explosions only to be killed by after damp gases produced by the explosion. The miners had complained about gas and poor ventilation, but no action had been taken. Despite the evidence, the inquest did not blame the management. This meant that the families of the victims did not receive any compensation. It also allowed the manager Charles Carr to remain as manager at New Hartley where two years later an even worse disaster was to occur.

Wallsend Colliery

23rd October 1821 and 18th June 1835



Wallsend Colliery was a complex of mine shafts sunk between 1778 and 1863. For over a century, Wallsend Best was regarded as the best house coal in the world. There were several explosions over the years, claiming well over 200 lives. In 1821, 53 miners died when a huge explosion ripped through the Bensham Seam with a noise that was heard many miles away. The worst disaster happened on Newcastle Race Day in 1835 when 102 lives were lost as a result of another explosion. John Buddle was in charge of the colliery at this period.

Coxlodge Pit

6th March 1863



An explosion at Coxlodge in 1863 killed 26 miners, most of them young men and boys. Not all were killed outright by the explosion. Fifteen miners were asphyxiated by after damp gas near the shaft bottom within yards of safety. Yet others escaped from the pit but died afterwards as a result of their injuries. The mine was known for its poor standard of ventilation and there had been several fatal accidents in previous years, with three explosions in 1844 alone causing three deaths and more than ten injuries.

New Hartley Pit

26th January 1862



In the worst pit disaster in our area's history, 204 miners died after a massive cast iron beam broke and fell down the single pit shaft. Men who were being wound up in a cage at the time were killed. The broken beam smashed the shaft's timber lining and shattered pumping equipment. The debris blocked the shaft completely, trapping men in the mine where they died of asphyxiation or poisoning before rescuers could reach them. In a huge funeral procession five miles long, most of the victims were buried together at Earsdon.

Jarrow Colliery

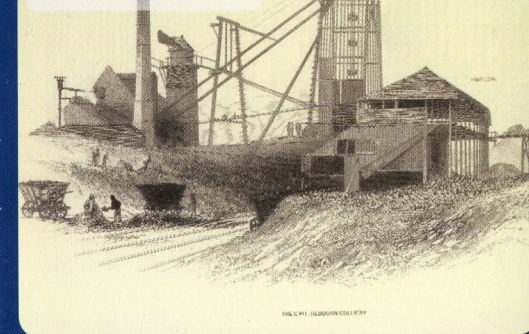
"The Slaughterhouse"



Jarrow Colliery became notorious in the first half of the 19th century because of the number of men killed there, acquiring the name "the slaughterhouse" in the 1840s. The pit was managed by John Buddle for much of this period. The Bensham Seam in particular was liable to explosions caused by gas. There were seven serious explosions during the first half of the 19th century, killing at least 150 men in total. The worst disasters happened in 1830, when 42 miners died, and in 1845, when 39 died.

Hebburn Colliery

5th June 1849



Explosions were common at Hebburn Colliery during the 19th century. In 1849, an especially violent explosion killed 33 men and caused terrible injuries to many others. The force of this explosion was blamed on the fact that a quantity of gunpowder stored in the mine was ignited by a gas explosion. Gunpowder was used in shot-blasting in order to loosen the coal. Such disasters eventually led to new safety regulations, including outlawing the storage of large amounts of explosives in coal mines.

PLAN
OF PART OF THE COUNTIES OF
DURHAM AND NORTHUMBERLAND,
SHEWING THE
COAL FIELD.

IN THOSE COUNTIES
BY
THO^S YOUNG HALL
NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE
IN CONNECTION WITH HIS TREATISE ON THE
DURATION OF THE SAID
COAL FIELD.

1854.

Lineographed in Colors, by Andrew Reid, Newcastle.



Major North East Mining Disasters 1708-1951

| | |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1708 Fatfield 69 deaths | 1845 Jarrow 39 deaths |
| 1710 Bensham 80 deaths | 1849 Hebburn 33 deaths |
| 1763 Fatfield 39 deaths | 1852 Seaton Colliery 6 deaths |
| 1767 Fatfield 39 deaths | 1860 Burradon 76 deaths |
| 1778 Chartershaugh 24 deaths | 1862 New Hartley 204 deaths |
| 1794 Picktree 30 deaths | 1866 Pelton 24 deaths |
| 1795 Paradise Colliery 11 deaths | 1871 Seaham 26 deaths |
| 1805 Oxclose, Washington 38 deaths | 1880 Seaham 164 deaths |
| 1805 Hebburn 35 deaths | 1882 Trimdon Grange 74 deaths |
| 1812 Felling 92 deaths | 1882 Tudhoe 37 deaths |
| 1815 Newbottle, Fencehouses 57 deaths | 1885 Usworth 42 deaths |
| 1815 Heaton 75 deaths | 1886 Elmore 28 deaths |
| 1817 Harraton, Washington 38 deaths | 1896 Brancepeth 20 deaths |
| 1819 Sheriff Hill 35 deaths | 1899 Brandon 6 deaths |
| 1821 Wallsend 52 deaths | 1906 Wingate 26 deaths |
| 1823 Plain Pit, Rainton 55 deaths | 1908 Washington Glebe 14 deaths |
| 1825 Fatfield Hall 11 deaths | 1909 West Stanley 168 deaths |
| 1826 Jarrow 34 deaths | 1916 Woodhorn Colliery 13 deaths |
| 1833 Springwell Colliery 47 deaths | 1925 Low Montagu 38 deaths |
| 1835 Wallsend 102 deaths | 1942 Murton 13 deaths |
| 1837 Springwell Colliery 27 deaths | 1947 Louisa Colliery 22 deaths |
| 1841 Willington Bigge Pit 32 deaths | 1951 Easington 83 deaths |
| 1844 Haswell 95 deaths | |

