

# The Oaks Colliery Disaster 1866

## Fact sheet 1 – The Explosion

**1866 saw England's worst ever mining disaster at, The Oaks Colliery, Barnsley.**

**Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> December 1866.**

**About 1.15 pm** – The first explosion ripped through the underground workings of the Oaks Colliery. It could be heard 3 miles away! Dust and soot from the pit covered the ground at Cudworth 5 miles away. It was near the end of the day shift and the pit was full of men and boys. Absenteeism was very low as Christmas was near and Wednesday was making up day for pay.

**2.00 pm** – Three rescuers went down into the pit. They found 20 badly burned miners and sent them up to the surface. Only 6 of these miners recovered. Soon about 70 volunteer rescuers were underground. They found that the workings were full of *after-damp* (Carbon Dioxide CO<sub>2</sub>) which was caused by the explosion. They struggled to breathe in the confined tunnels underground. Eventually they went into the main part of the mine, the main underground tunnel (known as the 'Engine Plane'). They discovered it was full of miners collapsed on the floor. Fathers and sons were found embracing each other. Pony drivers with their horses were found together, all had been overcome with deadly *after-damp* gas.

By late afternoon, early evening volunteer rescuers had to be turned away as there were too many of them.

**At 10.00 pm** a prominent local mining engineer arrived called, Parkin Jeffcock, together with a man called Tewart, the under viewer, he supervised work underground all night. He wanted to get the air circulating around the mine again.

### **Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> December 1866.**

**8.30 am** – Most of the rescuers evacuated the pit for fear of another explosion. Jeffcock and his men carried on with their work.

**9.00 am** – The pit exploded again. It sent the cage into the headgear. 28 men including Jeffcock and Tewart were still underground.

**7.40 pm** – A third explosion saw flames roar up the shafts. The pit was on fire.

### **Friday 14<sup>th</sup> December 1866.**

**4.30 am** – The signal bell sounded on the surface indicating that someone was alive underground. A bottle of water and brandy was lowered into the mine and taken. A makeshift pulley was erected and two brave men named, Mammett and Embleton rode down in a large metal bucket. A man, Samuel Brown was found alive at the bottom. He had been knocked unconscious by the second explosion and had somehow survived. He was brought to the surface.

### **Saturday 15<sup>th</sup>, to Tuesday, 18<sup>th</sup> December 1866.**

There were another 14 explosions until the decision was made to abandon the rescue and fill in the shafts to smother the fire underground.

### **5<sup>th</sup> November 1867**

It was finally safe to start clearing the shafts.

In all it is estimated that 361 men and boys were killed. The exact cause of the explosion is not clear other than methane gas was ignited by an unknown source.