

BURRUM AND DISTRICT HERITAGE SOCIETY INC.

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New phone number: 4305 9620

Open: First Saturday of month 8am. – 12pm.

Tues, Wed, other Saturdays 9am. – 12pm

Open at other times by appointment



It was good to get Rusty our coal train running again at the February markets. This month's article is about the serious disaster that occurred at Top End Mine at Torbanlea. It was known that coal existed in this area since the 1860s and several exploratory shafts had been sunk and abandoned. Then James Robertson a Scottish mining engineer (who had been employed at a mine at Torbane Hill in West Lothian, south of Edinburgh) found a potentially profitable coal deposit. The Torbanlea Colliery Company was floated to mine it and by 1887 Torbanlea had developed into a thriving settlement with miner's cottages, community hall, school, hotel and a butcher shop. Mining progressed well in this mine which used the pillar and stall method of excavation, until 1pm on March 21st 1900. A rumbling sound was heard from within the mine. This was followed by a rush of air and sheet of flame as the flammable gases which had concentrated in the mine combusted. No shock or violence was reported by surviving miners, although a door was blown open by the explosion. The 5 men who had been working next to a pillar near the centre of the explosion were carried out alive but severely injured and taken to Maryborough by a specially requested train. However, sadly they all died in hospital. Their names are Amos Gambie, Frederick Griggs, Alexander Houston, his son John Houston and James Johnson and they are engraved on the Miner's Memorial in the museum's grounds. A statutory inquiry and Royal Commission were held to consider the disaster and made a number of recommendations. However, these were not acted upon until after the Mt, Mulligan disaster in 1921 when 75 miners were killed..

