

Daz Beattie was researching the events of the Huskar disaster when he came across the Coal Mining History & Resource Centre. Ian Winstanley's web site (and Picks Publishing) and he was able to obtain the following information.

Huskar. Moorend Colliery, Silkstone, Barnsley.

This is how the events unfolded on that day the 4th. July 1838.

The Huskar Colliery was joined to Moorend Colliery, for ventilation purposes it was owned by Mr. R.C. Clarke of Noblethorpe.

The day was hot and sunny but a violent thunderstorm raged from about 2 pm. to 4 pm. Hailstones and about two to two & half inches of rain fell.

The pit had a shaft which was used for pulling coal up to the surface by a steam engine. In a wood there was a drift which was used for ventilation. The rain put out the boiler fire and the engine could not be used to take the men to the surface. A message was sent down the pit for all the miners to make their way to the pit bottom.

The children, boys and girls, who worked in the mine, decided to wait until the engine was working again. They had then spent 9 hours underground. Forty of them decided to go out of the pit by way of the ventilation drift in Nabbs Wood. At the bottom of the drift, there was an air door and the children went through this. As they made their way up the drift, a stream, which had swollen into a rushing torrent by the downpour, overflowed down the drift.

The children were washed off their feet and down to the door through which they had just passed. The water rose against the door and twenty six children were drowned. Some of the older children managed to escape along a slit which lead to the Moorend Colliery.

James Garnett, the father of one of the children, was one who went in after the water had subsided and he found the body of his child. It could not be recovered until all the twenty six had been removed.

They were taken to Thostle Hall where George Teasdale and a man named Buckley washed their faces and they were taken home in carts.

The boys who died were:-



George Burkinshaw aged 10 years.
James Burkinshaw aged 7 years. (brothers).
Isaac Wright aged 12 years.
Abraham Wright aged 8 years. (brothers).
James Clarkson aged 16 years.
Francis Hoyland aged 13 years.
William Alick aged 12 years.
Samuel Horne aged 10 years.
Eli Hutchinson aged 9 years.
George Garnett aged 9 years.
John Simpson aged 9 years.
George Lamb aged 8 years.
William Womerfley aged 8 years.
James Turton aged 10 years.
John Gothard aged 8 years.

The girls who died were:-



Catherine Garnett aged 8 years.
Hannah Webster aged 13 years.
Elizabeth Carr aged 13 years.
Anne Moss aged 9 years.
Elizabeth Hollin aged 15 years.
Ellen Parker aged 15 years.
Hannah Taylor aged 17 years.
Mary Sellars aged 10 years.
Elizabeth Clarkson aged 11 years. Who was buried at the feet of her brother.
Sarah Jukes aged 8 years.
Sarah Newton aged 8 years.

Benjamin Mellow aged 46 years was examined by the Children's Employment Commission on the 18th. March, 1841.

He told the commission:-

" I am underground steward to four of Mr. Clarke's pits and I have superintendence above 90 colliers. We have had but one bad accident and that was the 4th. July, 1838. It had been raining hard during a thunder storm to such an extent that the water came into the sough of the engine house and the engineer gave the alarm to the banksman who shouted out incautiously to put the light out and come out of the pit. The children and people were frightened, not knowing what was the matter. A number of children, either from the fright or from a desire to get a holiday, ran from the shaft towards the pittrail which forms a second outlet and this, together with the water escaping from the old workings, rushed down the pittrail and met the children who had passed a trap door, against which they were driven by the water and being unable to open it, 26 were drowned, 11 girls and 15 boys. The water by the marks it left could not have been above six inches deep in its stream down to the pittrail but rose by the door and there they were drowned. Fourteen had got on before and they had passed sufficiently far to be safe. I am quite sure that the stream had never overflowed before. No man can prove it. The stream is very small and is dry nine months out of twelve. If the children had remained in the pit or at the shaft, they would have been quite safe, the water never rose anywhere except just where they were drowned".

The inquest into the disaster was held at the Red Lion Inn, Silkstone by Mr. Badger of Sheffield, Coroner. The bodies had been viewed at their homes and Joseph Huskar who lived in Huskar, told the court what happened on that fateful day.

"Eleven of us were together and they all drowned but me. The water swam me down the day hole and through a slit into another bord gate."

William Lamb said:-

"We did not know what we were going out for. We thought it was a fire. The water washed the children down the day hole against a door, through which we had just come, and they were all drowned. If we had stopped at the pitbottom we should have been saved."

Uriah Jubb stated that:-

"I was coming up the dayhole with Elizabeth Taylor and some other. We heard the water coming and me and Elizabeth Taylor got into a slot in the dayhole and we stopped there until we could get out. The water met the others as they were coming up and drove them against the door where they were drowned".

After hearing all the evidence and the accounts of the survivors, the jury returned a verdict of "Accidental Death".

Queen Victoria took an interest in the disaster and the loss of so many young lives in a pit was a factor in setting up the Royal Commission to enquire into women and children working in coal mines.

Inscriptions on the Monument in the churchyard of the Parish Church, Silkstone. reads:-

"Take heed watch and pray, for ye know not when the time is."

"This monument was erected to perpetuate the remembrance of an awful visitation of the Almighty, which took place in this Parish on the 4th. July 1838.

On that eventful day, the Lord sent forth his thunder, lightening, hail and rain, carrying devastation before them, and by a sudden eruption of water into the coal pits of R.C. Clarke Esq., twenty six beings whose names are recorded here were suddenly summoned to appear before their maker.

Reader remember:-

Every neglected call of God will appear against thee at the day of Judgement. Let this solemn warning then sink deep into thy heart and so prepare thee that the Lord when he cometh may find thee watching."

North side inscription:-

"Boast not thyself of tomorrow".

West side inscription:-

"There is but a step between us and death"

South side inscription:-

"Therefore be ye also ready".

Huskar Colliery, Wednesday July the 4th 1838

Information below sourced from: <http://www.priorycampus.co.uk/rlhg/roggins.php?p=huskar>

Moorend, Silkstone Common



Painting by Julie Tyler



"Girl Hurrier"

The dawn on this midsummer's morning was unusually warm, and the air was still, but full of bird song. In the stillness a mist lay over the woods, but it was starting to clear with the rising sun. Just before 6 am one hundred and twenty men women and children set out to walk from their homes to Moorend and the colliery that lay in the valley. Their thoughts were on the long hours they would have to endure before they emerged from their subterranean world into the long summer's evening and view this scene again. But unknown to them fate was to deliver an unexpected event, which would bring their lives into sharp focus, and in time bring the necessary changes to their working lives and the way they earned a living. For twenty-six young children this would be the last time they would do this walk and feel the sun on their faces. At 2 pm unknown to the workforce who had been toiling below ground for nine hours, a violent storm of thunder, lightning, hail and rain raged until late in the afternoon. In this area it started at Crane Moor and then extended to Silkstone and Stainborough. Similar storms were reported in other areas of Yorkshire and Lancashire. The large hailstones, described as large pieces of ice, covered the ground and did considerable damage to crops in the fields. Tyler, The correspondent for the Sheffield Mercury reported the damage done at Wentworth Castle and down the valley. With windows broken water poured into buildings and flooded the houses in Silkstone to a depth of four to five feet. The village was impassable on account of the trees uprooted by the flood of water and swollen streams. Mr. Clarke's shop and the pit yard at Sitkstone Cross was under water, and valuable timber was washed away. The engine and boiler yard at the Huskar Pit was inundated with the storm water. The fire in the furnace of the steam-raising boiler was extinguished. With the loss in steam pressure, the winding engine at the pit shaft, which was used to bring the coal and miners to the surface, was put out of action. A message was sent down the mine by the banksman who was in charge at the pit top, to instruct the miners and the children to put out all lights and wait at the pit bottom. Unaware of the



storm and the situation at the pit top, forty children made the fateful decision to make their way out of the workings by a day-hole or drift, which came to the surface in Nabs Wood.

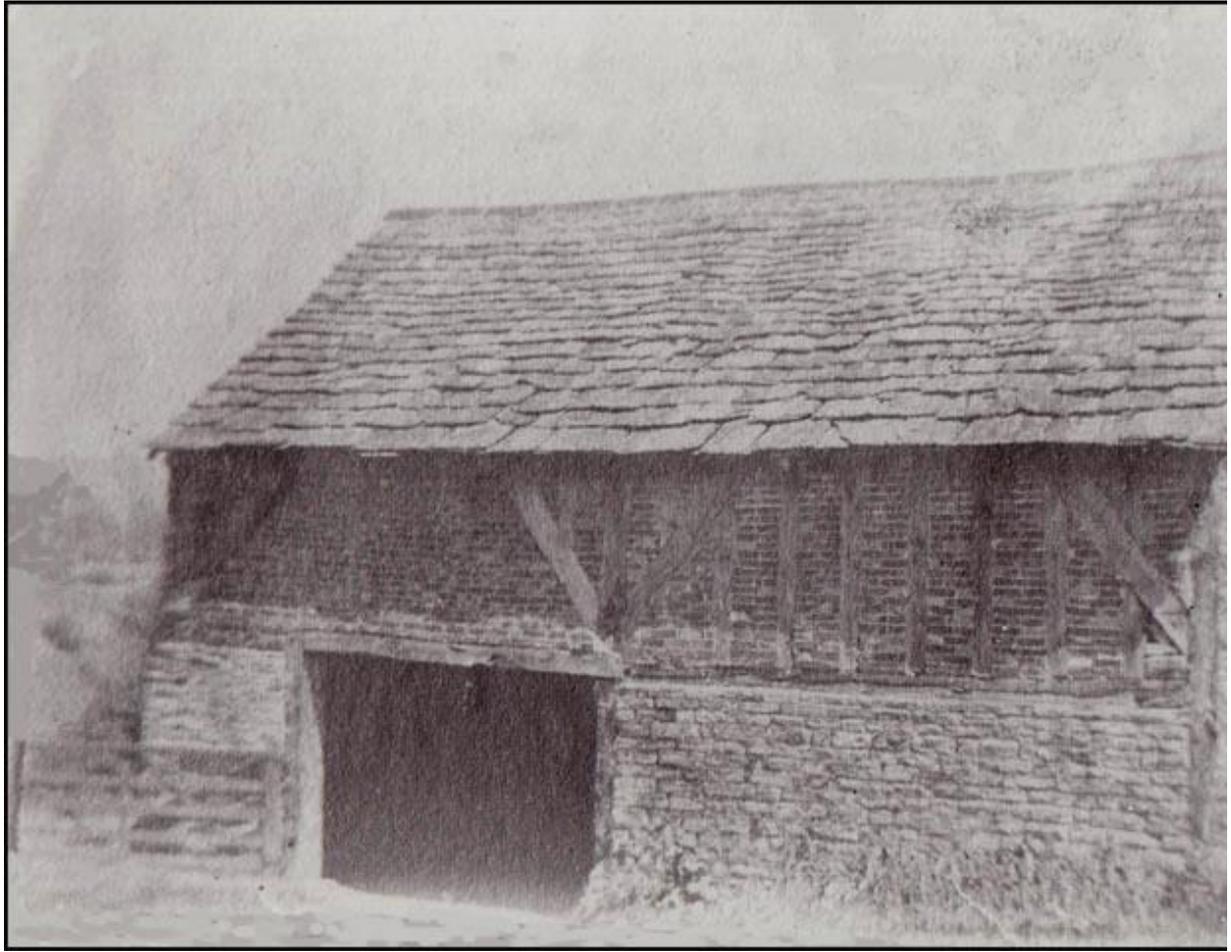
"Girl Hurrier"

At the bottom of the drift was one of the air doors, used to control the flow of air through the workings, which the children went through. They were not to know that a small stream near the entrance to the drift had swollen till it was a raging torrent. As the children made their way up the slope, the stream on the surface had already overflowed and had poured down the drift to the air door in front of them, where it was dammed up by the door and eventually, as they approached, burst through, sweeping them down to the door behind them, where they were trapped and drowned. News eventually came to the colliery from the shocked survivors who had reached the surface, and told of harrowing events in the dark sloping passages. Brother and sister cried out for one another and the youngest were swept off their feet, in a struggle to survive.

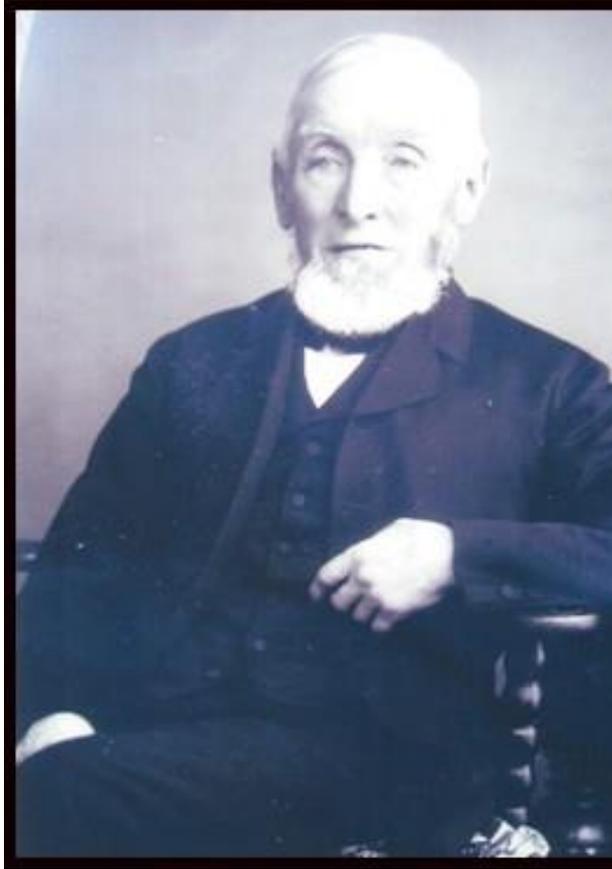


"Trapper Boy "

When the rescuers reached the door, among them fathers with missing children, they found the bodies altogether. One by one they were carried to the surface and through the wood to a barn at the side of the road. It is said that George Teasdale, employee of Mr. Clarke, and a man called Buckley washed their faces. Later that day the victims were taken by horse and cart to their homes. We can imagine the grief of the parents, some of whom had lost two children.



"Barn at Moorend"



Thomas Mann, who with his brother George was a survivor of the Huskar Disaster of 1838. The photograph (left) was taken in 1890 when Thomas was 72 years of age, in recognition of his 16 years service to the Silkstone Lodge of the Friends of Odd Fellows M.U. (Manchester Unity) No.217

It was presented by Friends of the Lodge to Thomas and is now in the possession of David Mann, great-great-grandson of Thomas.

"Thomas Mann"



"Red Lion Public House, High Street Silkstone where the inquest into the Huskar Colliery disaster was held by Mr Badger "