

The 'Nine Men' of Madeley

At 5.40pm on Tuesday 27th September 1864 nine Madeley miners, most of them boys, began their ascent to the surface at the end of their shift in the Brick Kiln Leasowe Crawstone Pit. Iron ore was mined at the pit which was known locally as the Lane Pit. It was on the right hand side of the road from Madeley to Ironbridge about a quarter of a mile from Abraham Darby School. The pit mound created by spoil from the workings is still a prominent feature of the landscape although it is now partly built over.

The nine men were being raised by a crude apparatus known as 'the doubles' which was designed to carry a maximum of eight. It consisted of a central chain about 3m. long to which were attached four chain circles, one above the other, in such a way that each provided two 'seats' one on either side of the central chain. At the top of the main chain was a hook with a safety catch and between it and the topmost pair of 'seats' was an iron canopy known as the 'bonnet'. This was to protect the seated men from falling debris. The upper end of the central chain passed through the bonnet and its hook engaged with a ring attached to the end of the winding chain from the engine. Responsibility for ensuring a proper connexion between hook and ring lay with the 'banksman' on the surface for the descent and with the 'hooker-on' at the bottom of the shaft for the ascent. On this occasion the 'hooker-on' was Benjamin Davis – one of the victims.

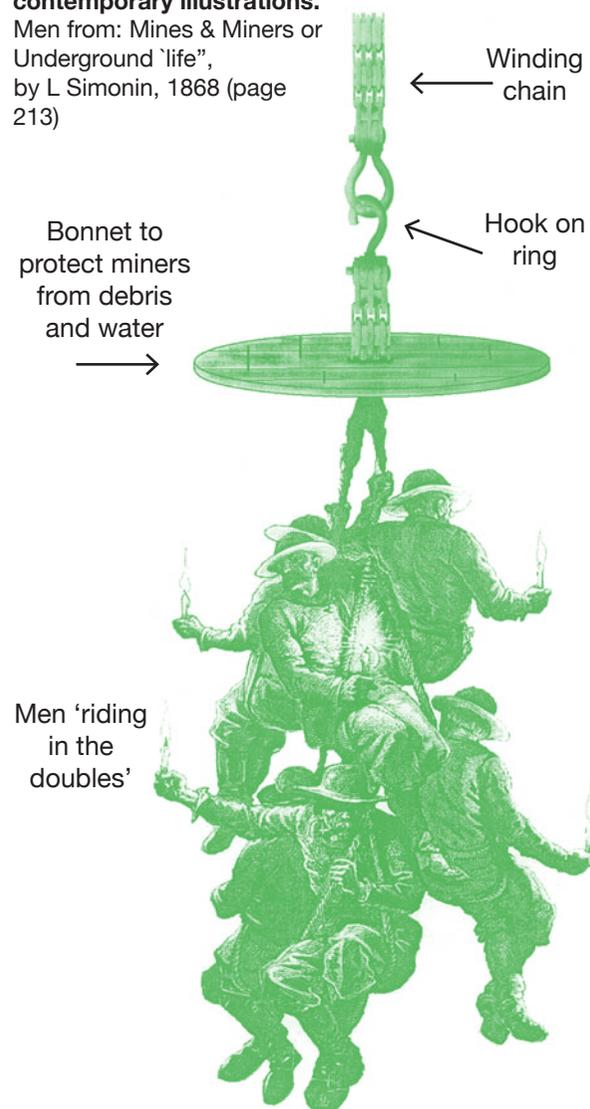
The shaft was over 200m. deep and, when the men were about half-way up, the engine-man – who was on the surface pulling them up – felt the winding chain slacken and realised immediately that they must have plunged

"Riding the Doubles"

(as used for example at the Brickkiln Leasows Pit at the time of the 1864 disaster)

Drawing based on contemporary illustrations.

Men from: Mines & Miners or Underground 'life', by L. Simonin, 1868 (page 213)



Courtesy of Shropshire Caving & Mining Club

to their deaths. He stopped the engine and hurried to the pithead although he knew there was no hope that anyone could survive. The painful task of recovering the bodies then had to be undertaken. The base of the shaft was covered by six-inch thick oak planks. Below these was the pit sump in which water collected. The planks had broken because of the force of the fall and the mutilated bodies had to be recovered by means of a drag from the 4m. of water which had accumulated in the sump.

The inquest began at the George and Dragon public house in Madeley Wood, the day after the disaster, but was postponed to allow the funeral to take place and eventually opened on Monday 3rd October at Waterloo Street Police Station in Ironbridge. It was soon clear that all of the equipment had been in good working order and it was concluded that the hook and ring had not been engaged properly. A verdict of Accidental Death was returned. It seems likely that human error on the part of the 'hooker-on', Benjamin Davis, played a part but he was dead. Was the fact that nine men, rather than the permitted maximum of eight, were being hauled up another factor? Edward Walleth and John Tranter who were responsible for management of the underground workings were also among the victims.

The funeral took place at St. Michael's Church, Madeley on Saturday 1st October. Over 400 miners, together with about 100 relatives and friends, made up the funeral procession. It was estimated that a further 2,000 attended the Church Service which was read by the Revd. George Edward Yate, Vicar of Madeley from 1859 until the early part of the 20th century.

The deceased were placed in individual coffins in a communal grave. Each coffin was provided with a cast-iron cover bearing the initials of the person buried beneath it. A stone memorial tablet recorded the names and ages of the victims and included two quotations from scripture.

The Madeley Wood Company, which owned the pit, covered all the funeral expenses and provided financial assistance to the dead miners' families.

The men's grave can be found in St. Michael's Churchyard, Madeley near the end of the path which runs down the side of the Church. In 2003 the grave was restored by Madeley Parish Council supported by a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. A plaque giving details of the tragedy has been set up next to the grave.

Shelagh Lewis
 Madeley Living History Project
 May 2004

The 'Nine Men' of Madeley

IN MEMORY OF

EDWARD WALLET	aged 52
FRANCIS COOKSON	aged 13
WILLIAM JARRATT	aged 18
JOHN FARR	aged 14
BENJAMIN DAVIS	aged 35
JOHN JONES	aged 14
JOSEPH MAIDEN	aged 18
WILLIAM ONIONS	aged 12
JOHN TRANTER	aged 37

Who were killed by the unhooking of the chains in which they were ascending the shaft of the Brick Kiln Leasow Crawstone Pit in this parish at the end of their day's labour on Tuesday the 27th September 1864.

*I went down to the bottom of the mountains;
 the Earth with her bars was about me for ever:
 yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption,
 O Lord my God.*

*When my soul fainted within me, I remembered
 the Lord: and my prayer came in unto thee, into
 thine holy temple. (Joshua 2:5)*

*Watch therefore, for ye know not what hour your
 Lord doth come. (Matthew 24:42)*

One of several memorial cards issued after the tragedy.



Courtesy of Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust

