TERRIFIC BOILER EXPLOSION NEAR WIGAN

On Monday afternoon a steam boiler at Mr Samuel STOCK’S pit, Blackleyhurst, Colliery, Billinge, nr Wigan exploded with the most disastrous effects. The pit is worked by three engines, one large one for winding and two smaller ones for pumping and other purposes, and the steam of these was supplied a fortnight ago by three long boilers about 30ft in length and 5ft in diameter. Just 14 days ago however, one of the three exploded, injuring six persons and blowing down a large chimney.

On Monday the engineer, Mr Richard MATHER, a young man 19yrs of age, ought to have been at his post at 1 o’clock, but for some time after that hour he was watching the erection of a new chimney to replace that that had just been destroyed. Half an hour after the time he ought to have been back at work he was seen to enter the boiler house quickly and turn on the tap, by which one of the two boilers was filled with water. A few seconds after a terrific report was heard, and the workmen were horrified by the sight of the body of the unfortunate engineer flying through the air, followed by the boiler on which he had been standing. The boiler was thrown 70-80yds over the engine-house and across the colliery railway into a field in which lay the remains of the one which exploded previously, near to which, and about 160yds from the pit was found the body of MATHER the engineer. The walls of the boiler and engine houses were completely destroyed, and many persons were bruised by the flying bricks are scalded by the water.

In a cabin a few yards off the spot sat William HITCHEN, a mechanic, getting his dinner. He says he heard the explosion and then lost his sensibility till he found himself behind some coke ovens, about a score of yards away, the cabin in which he was sitting having completely disappeared. He was hurt about the head and legs, and slightly scalded. J. HOPLEY, Labourer was injured about the spine, Daniel GREEN was hurt by the falling bricks on his side and legs, and his clothes were saturated with hot water, James SWIFT an old man of 79yrs was also scalded. Many others were hurt amongst them a number who had suffered from the previous explosion, and had just been able to resume work.

The damage to property was considerable. The two erections near the spot were completely levelled, and the second boiler was moved from its position. There were in the pit between 50 and 60 men and boys, and as the winding engine was rendered useless, arrangements had to be made for drawing the men up the shaft by a locomotive running on the railway. Little doubt exists as to the cause of the explosion, which is believed to be the neglect of the engineer to keep the boiler properly supplied with water. At the time of the accident he was doubtless turning the water on, as the handle of the tap was found near his body, and the inference that the boiler was nearly empty may be drawn from the fact that the bottom is torn from end to end.