

Royal Cornwall Gazette – 21 September 1833

#### Diabolical Transaction

On Monday last the village of Ashford in the Water, near Bakewell, was the scene of excitement, in consequence of the perpetration of a most diabolical act, by which three of the workmen employed in the Red Soil Mine at Sheldon lost their lives, and several others were severely injured, It appears that the miners employed in the Magpie Mine, adjoining, had in the course of their operations arrived at the same point, and a communication had been made from the one mine to the other ; the consequence has been that the proprietors of the two mines have been in litigation for several years.

Further unsuccessful attempts have been made by the Jury to enter the Magpie Mine through the opening, and heavier penalties have been imposed. Matters were in this state when, on Saturday last, the workmen in the Red Soil Mine perceived smoke issuing from the Magpie Mine, which rendered it very difficult for them to continue long at work. On Monday morning last the Red Soil miners assembled at the top of the shaft, but, previous to descending, one of the men named Wildgoose, was sent down for the purpose of ascertaining whether there was as much smoke in the mine as might endanger their safety in working.

He proceeded about forty fathoms, and finding the annoyance had been discontinued he called out to the men that they might advance. Eleven men then descended, and Wildgoose returned to the top of the shaft. The way into the mine is down a perpendicular shaft for about forty yards (down which the miners clamber by the help of cogs driven into the sides) into a drift, gait, or level, which proceeds for some distance, and then down other shafts and along other drift gait to the waggon way, where the point of communication between the two mines is situated.

Four of the men had got into the waggon way when they experienced a most dreadful feeling of suffocation from what is supposed to have been the fumes of sulphur. &c, which came from the opening into the Magpie, and it was evident that some mixture had been wilfully ignited by some persons in that mine. Two of the men retreated up a shaft about fourteen yards into the drift gait, and gave the alarm to the other men who were descending. The other two (Joseph Knowles and Thomas Henstock) were so overpowered by the poisonous vapour as to be unable to get up the shaft ; they lay down on their faces, and by inhaling the air upon the earth saved their lives ; they were the last who were extricated. One of the men with great difficulty got so near the surface as to give the alarm to the persons on the mine hillock ; and after great exertions, and at much personal risk, eight of the men were rescued alive, but the other three men were not extricated until life was quite extinct. The dead bodies, on being brought out of the mine, presented a shocking spectacle, the countenances exhibiting the usual appearance of persons who had died from suffocation, in addition to which the heads and faces were much cut and braised, no doubt by their frantic attempts to escape from that miserable death. An incrustation (apparently of sulphur) of the thickness of half a crown, was taken from the lips of Taylor's corpse. The candles carried down by the miners were similarly incrustated. Five of the Magpie miners are in custody awaiting the result of the Coroner's inquest.— Derbyshire Courier