The following is extracted from “Thye Mauricewood Braves” one of Wilsons ‘Mining Lays, Tales and Folk-lore’ published 1916.

“The Mauricewood Pit, at Penicuik, near Edinburgh, took fire on September 5th, 1889, and sixtyeight men and boys lost their lives.

The principal product from the pit was ironstone, although coal in small quantities was also produced. The pit had a vertical shaft of 480 feet then a level roadway eastwards of 180 feet and this was followed by a one in eight dip decline of 960 feet (Deaths Incline). Halfway down the decline a steam engine had been erected and another steam engine did duty at the bottom. The steam pipes traversed this route, and it was at the 800 ft slant that the fire broke out among the support timbers. The wood was tinder and inflammable, and it was soon apparent that the conflagration would spread and become disastrous. There were no other outlets to or from the lower level, and unless the men below received a warning note to give them a chance of escape, they must inevitably perish.

Three trapper and pony boys – Robert Hook Tolmie, aged 14; Michael Hamilton, aged 15; and Thomas Foster, aged 17 years, volunteered to go round the mine and warn all the men below of their danger, but the only shiftman there, his mate was away in another district of the pit- pleaded with the boys not to go away and said that he would go himself to warn the other men of the fires danger, but the boys in unison shouted as they ran

“No, we’ll go” ….. And they went.

The brave boys never came back alive.

“They died to save”

The bodies of the boys were afterwards recovered (surrounded by over twenty other bodies) near a trapdoor that had got blocked up in the meantime cutting off the avenue of escape. The mine was subsequently flooded to quench the fire that was raging in the workings, and over a year elapsed before the last body was brought to the surface. The heroism and self-sacrifice of the three lads aroused sympathetic expressions and admiration throughout the mining world, and a monument marks their last resting place in the Penicuik Churchyard.”