

News 1893 – Terrible Boiler Explosion at Narborough

A YOUTH KILLED AND FIVE MEN INJURED

As reported in the Leicester Chronicle Saturday 28th October 1893

Early on Wednesday morning a terrible boiler explosion, resulting in the death of a youth named George Rippington of Littlethorpe, and more or less serious injury to five men, occurred at the Redhill stone quarry, near Narborough. The quarry which is situated about 200 yards out of Narborough, on the right hand side of the road leading to Huncote, is one of the smallest in the neighbourhood. It is worked at the present time by the Enderby and Stoney Stanton Granite Company, and employs about seventy men, but the quarry is well known, and has been worked for a long time past. Latterly, an engine, which was formerly in use at the Stanton quarries, was removed to Redhill for pumping purposes. It was last week fixed into position on top of the quarry and used for the first time here on Tuesday, when everything appeared to be in perfect order. The boiler, which was of 10-horse power, forced the steam through pipes to the bottom of the quarry, a distance of some 60 or 70 feet, where the machinery which pumped the water to the top was situated. It was therefore attached to no engine on the bank.



Almost before it was light on Wednesday morning work was about to be resumed. Fortunately there were not many men at the place, but five or six were close to the boiler, which was set in motion. Hardly, however, had it begun before there was a terrific explosion, the report of which startled the whole neighbourhood. A number of sett makers and others employed at the quarry at once went to enquire the cause of the alarm, when they found the boiler had disappeared, nothing being left of it but a few shattered fire bars, and five of the men engaged on the works lying on heaps of stone close by more or less seriously injured.

LIST OF INJURED

The injured men are;
William Pratt, aged 57, a quarrymen, of Enderby
John Measures (34), a quarrymen, also of Enderby
William Boulter (27), of Whetstone
Thomas Burbage (60), of Cosby
L. Sewell, of Narborough

The whole of the men, with the exception of Sewell, whose injuries were, happily, comparatively alight, were at once removed to the Leicester Infirmary in a couple of conveyances kindly placed at the disposal of the Workmen by Mr Cutter, wheelwright. They were accompanied by several of their fellow-workers, and arrived at the Infirmary about eight o'clock, and were at once attended by Dr. G. W. Roll, the house surgeon. It was found the most serious injuries were had been sustained by Boulter and Burbage. The former had a severe scalp wound, his right leg was found broken, his arm scalded, and his legs contused. Burbage had some ribs broken, and a small puncture on one of his knees. Pratt's injuries were chiefly scalds to the left arm, right thigh and face. Measures was scalded about the face and right arm, and his back was bruised. On arriving at the institution the injured men appeared to be suffering from the cold, but prompt measures were taken by the medical and nursing staff to alleviate their condition, and it is happily not anticipated that the injuries will be fatal in any case. The wives of the men followed by the next train to Leicester, and although not at first permitted to see their husbands, were assured that everything was being done for their comfort. One of the women showed our representative her husband's watch, which had stopped at ten minutes past seven.

THE FINDING OF THE BODY

It was for sometime hoped and believed that no lives were lost, and it was not until about ten o'clock, some three hours after the occurrence, that it was definitely ascertained that there had been a fatal result. A lad named George Rippington, aged 17, of Littlethorpe, an apprentice to the carpenter of the firm, had been missing for some time. Just before the explosion he was at work near the edge of the quarry, engaged in putting down stakes. In the confusion and excitement that naturally followed immediately on the alarm his absence passed unnoticed, and in addition to that the quarry itself, owing to the explosion, became filled

with steam. But after the injured men had been properly attended to and removed. Mr. T. Toone, the manager, began to enquire as to the whereabouts of the lad. A search was at once instituted, and it resulted in the body being found in the water which had accumulated at the bottom of the quarry. It was got out by the aid of a steam crane, which was close by the boiler, and found to be greatly disfigured, the head being much contused and bruised. Rippington was no doubt blown into the quarry by the force of the explosion, and the probability seems to be that his head came into contact with the steam pipes in the course of his terrible fall, so that his death would in all likelihood be immediate. The body was at once removed for the purposes of an inquest

The discovery of the body caused a great renewal of the excitement which had previously prevailed, and which by this time had begun to subside. Large numbers of the villagers, among them being many women, flocked to the scene, and the greatest consternation prevailed lest there should have been more lives sacrificed. The sad intelligence was also spread over the neighbourhood, and naturally excited a good deal of sympathy among the villagers, many of whom are engaged in quarry work. When it was found, however, that the full extent of the consequences of the explosion had been ascertained, the people gradually dispersed to their homes. Work was, of course, suspended at the quarry for the day.

THE MISSING BOILER

The boiler itself, to which not much attention had in the early morning been given, was found to have been hurled a distance of at least 100 yards or more over the road leading to Huncote. On the explosion it rose in the air, according to an eyewitness, like a balloon, passed over some elm trees in the hedge, and dropped in the field on the opposite side of the road, where it now lies half buried in the earth. It is rendered absolutely useless, being bulged and battered all over whilst portions of it were blown in opposite directions – some pieces being found 400 or 500 yards from the spot where the explosion occurred. The damaged boiler was throughout the morning an object of much curious interest on the part of those who visited the scene. As to the cause of the explosion, there is, of course, nothing at present known, but the opinion has been expressed that it was owing to the fire box giving way, some of the bars, as above mentioned, being left behind when the explosion occurred.

LATER PARTICULARS. NARROW ESCAPE OF THE MANAGER

A visit to the quarry shows at once the immense force there must have been in the explosion. The workings are about 100 yards from the highway, the stone-yard and sett-makers huts occupying the intervening space. The boiler which was the cause of the disaster was one of the vertical description. It was not fixed into the ground, but stood on a staging on the edge of the quarry, which is at least 100 feet deep. It was worked for a short time on Tuesday, and the few men who were on the premises at the time of the explosion were for most part engaged in connection with it. Burbage and Pratt were in charge of the boiler itself, and the deceased lad, Rippington, with the injured men, had been early on the ground moving the one boiler from the vicinity, under the direction of Mr. Toone. This they had accomplished before the explosion occurred, and Measures, Boulter, and Sewell had gone to their customary employment, a few yards from where the boiler stood. Mr Toone and the lad Rippington left the spot for few minutes to go to the manager's office some 50 yards away. Rippington's tools were kept here, and Mr. Toone handed them to him with instructions to return to the quarry edge and put a stake under one of the steam pipes attached to the boiler. Mr. Toone states that but for a very ordinary circumstance he would have returned with the lad, and there is too much reason to fear that he had done so he would have shared the same sad fate. But there were some goods at the office which had to be sent to Enderby, and the manager remained to see them safely loaded in a cart which had just arrived for the purpose. This delayed his return to the quarry edge for a few minutes, and in that time the fatal explosion had occurred. Rippington, it is presumed, had just reached the staging on which he was to work, and which overlooks the hold, when the boiler burst, and precipitated him to the bottom, where as above stated, his battered and bruised body was subsequently found.

The news of the explosion brought every man on the premises to the spot, and when they arrived there was no sign of the boiler having occupied the place except that the earth was slightly disturbed, and a few fire bars remained. The heaps of broken stone for yards around were blackened by the dust and steam, and a portion of a woollen jacket worn by one of the injured men lay at least thirty yards from the spot where the boiler had stood. It was close by here that the man himself was found. Another was near him on a heap of stones, and two others were in another direction, but they had been hurled so great a distance. By Dr. Cartwright's instruction the body of the unfortunate lad Rippington was removed to his home at Littlethorpe, where the inquest will be held.

The boiler itself is a curiosity, and the distance which it was thrown by the force of the explosion is a little less than 150 yards. It now lies – the major portion of it – in the field on the opposite side of the Huncote Road. In places it is simply flattened, and there are three large rents right across its side. The chimney seems to have maintained its position until the huge thing reached the ground, and now lies close by, whilst the remains of the firebox are disconnected, but also travelled the whole distance. The quarry was visited by numbers of people during the afternoon, and the distressing occurrence was the only subject

of discussion throughout the locality.

THE INQUEST

On the body of George Repenton, of Littlethorpe, was opened on Thursday afternoon at the Narborough Hotel, before Mr. G. E. Bouskell, the district coroner. Mr William Oram was foreman of the jury. The inquiry having been formally opened, the jury proceeded to view the body, which lay the the deceased home at Littlethorpe. Subsequently they visited the scene of the accident, and the circumstances of the sad affair were explained to them by some of the quarry officials. The father of the deceased George Repenton was called to give evidence of identification. He said he lived at Littlethorpe, and was a general labourer in the employ of Mr. Pochin, of Croft. Deceased was his son, and was 15 years old last August. He worked at the Enderby and Stoney Stanton quarries, and was apprenticed to the wagon building.

Charles Wright, of Narborough, a sett maker, employed at Redhill quarry, said he went to work at the quarry about twenty minutes to seven on Wednesday. As far as witness could say the explosion occurred at about five minutes to seven. At that time witness was in shed where he made the setts. He heard things falling on the roof of the shed, and after waiting until he thought it was safe he went out, and saw one of the men on the ground. Another one, who was scalded about the face, was walking down the yard towards the road. Witness went straight off for a doctor. When he returned he went to the scaffold and looked down the pit. He saw what he believed to be someone's clothes in the water, and on going down the ladder to the bottom of the quarry discovered the body of the deceased, partly covered with water. Witness obtained a rake and dragged the body out. The lad was quite dead. There was a plank wedged between his legs, having apparently fallen from the top of the quarry. When witness was in shed before the explosion deceased passed by as if he was going away from the quarry. He did not see a saw in his hand at that time. Witness heard the foreman say deceased had to fix a stay on the platform. The body was recovered between nine and ten o'clock.

Mr. Henry G. Cartwright, surgeon, Narborough was next called. He deposed that he was called to see the deceased just after half-past nine on Wednesday morning. The deceased was brought out of the pit while witness was there. He was quite dead, and witness ordered his removal home. Witness then examined body, and found that deceased had sustained a fracture of the skull, the face was scalded, and there was a cut across the nose. There were also several bruises about the body and legs. The cause of death was fracture to the skull. Death would, so far as he could tell, have been instantaneous.

The Coroner said he did not propose to carry the inquiry any further that day. He thought it would be convenient for everybody if the inquest was adjourned for a fortnight, in order that the Board of Trade might make an examination and inquiry. He had already communicated with them, and would resume the inquiry on November 9th at eleven o'clock.

EDITOR

The picture is from Bardon Quarry in the 1890's a steam crane can be seen in the background. We should have the inquiry information in the next week or so.

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Map

Satellite

Terrain