

**May 6, 1879**  
**Audenried Colliery, Audenried PA**  
**Fire**  
**6 Victims**

William Smith, David B. Morgan, John Davis, William Watkins, Sem. Lloyd and Richard Faull all practical miners, were fatally injured by being burned by gas, while in the act, part of them and all employed to assist in their endeavors to extinguish a fire in the Audenried shaft colliery, on the sixth day of May last, the details of which, to the best of the writer's knowledge, after a careful inquiry, are as follows:

Mr. Joseph Weir, the mine boss, and Joshua Davis, a fire boss, traveled a part of the colliery known to the workmen of said mine, as the North-west side, through the faces of the working places outward, and passed a point known as the head of the proving or test-hole, about eleven o'clock A. M. They stated, that knowing that there were strong feeders or jets of gas in the said test-hole, they extinguished their lamps, (that is their naked lights,) just as they were about to leave a cross-cut from the next place inside, into the said test-hole. There was some brattice of either cloth or boards at the same hole, about point. They then went forward on their trip by the light of their safety-lamps for some distance. In the course of an hour and a half, or two hours, they entered a point of the return air-way from the said part of the mine, when they at once found the scent of something burning, and immediately concluded that there was fire in the aforesaid proving hole, which was hundreds of yards away from them at this point.

They as a matter of course, repaired towards the proving hole by way of the tunnel, and there found a strong fire burning from the gas feeders, and what loose coal that was around there, some of which, no doubt, if not all, had already been loosened by the effect of the said fire. No one else than the said officers were known to have been through the said part of the working along that time, and much speculation has been had regarding the origin of the said fire. There were parties working near the lower end of said hole, a distance of about five hundred feet from the origin of the fire, and another party some six or eight chambers to the west of the same. These parties all knew the danger of taking a naked light to the said section. In fact, one of the workmen in the said chambers, had, on a previous occasion, been to the test-hole for lumber, and had ignited the gas feeders there, but his reporting the case immediately, the fire was extinguished.

but the miner was suspended for some two or three weeks, for having gone to the said place with naked light, &c. This being known to the miners and workmen at both ends of said proving-hole, it is hardly probable that they ventured there again with naked lights, and they all denied any knowledge of the same. Some persons placed the origin as the carelessness of some of the workmen, others went so far as to intimate it might have been done designedly, or in other words, an act of incendiaryism., while it is possible, but not probable, that either of the above theories might be correct, I rather believe that it occurred from sparks igniting some tinder, chips, or rags lying in the vicinity of the cross-cut, where the mine boss and fire boss extinguished their naked lamps on entering the proving-hole, and that this was fanned by the air-current into flames, which in time, ignited the brattice thereabouts, and from there the gas feeders, unless a small gas feeder should have been ignited to give it the start.

The lights from the naked lights being put out, and the officers having nothing but the dim light of the safety-lamp, its origin might easily have escaped their notice and they, no doubt moved away just as they extinguished their naked lamp-lights, as they had to light their safety lamps in advance, and, being in a current, it would not be a desirable place to stop. Another reason I have to think this reasoning to be the correct one is this. Mr. William Smyth, sometime before the men were burned, had made an inspection of the proving hole, from the south side up to near the said cross-cut, and saw that the brattice that was formerly there had been burned down, but that the fire then was all higher up on the apex or top of the anticlinal. Mr. Smyth said he thought from that that the fire must have started from that point. I agree with him in that of it's location, but I disagree as to how it originated. So much as to the origin of the said fire.

As soon as the fire was discovered a force of men were at once employed to combat it by carrying water from the shaft level gangway, at the tunnel end as they had no water-works at hand. Finally they connected the pipes used to carry compressed air to drive the rock tunnel to the pump column at the shaft, when the great pressure burst the receiver which again delayed them considerable but in time this difficulty was overcome and a stream carried to the fire. The feeders along the hole for hundreds of feet has taken fire by this time, but they were struck out very rapidly by the water, until they forced it to the top of the anticlinal or near the location of its origin. By this time considerable top coal had become loosened, and the same was burning fiercely, and every now and then the subdued flames would burst out afresh and ignite the gas feeders on either side of the hole, when the workmen would be forced to retreat down the said narrow passage in the direction of the gangway ad tunnel mouth, from which they got their, by that time scanty supply of fresh air, as the place was getting warmer each by and every moment.

About 11 o'clock p. m., Mr. F.B Parrish, assistant superintendent, called at my residence, when I was first informed of the fire, and I immediately repaired to the mine, and in a short time afterwards descended the shaft, in company with Messers ,Joseph Harris, mining engineer for the receivers of the Lehigh and Wilkes-Barre Coal Company; George H. Parrish. superintendent and F. B. Parrish, assistant superintendent and mining engineer for Charles Parrish & Co.; also, Mr. Dodge. While in the fireman's station, preparing lamps and examining the mine maps preparatory to going to the location of the fire, a messenger came running with the news that a large number of the workmen in the proving-hole had been burned seriously. The party at once started towards the scene of the accident. and met the injured men being assisted out by their more fortunate comrades, when we learned that the persons above named and two others, named John Richards and Levi Gibbons were dangerously burned. It would seem, from information obtained from parties who were in the proving hole, as it was called, that a short time prior to the men being burned, that they had been driven down from the anticlinal for hundreds of feet, by the ignition of the gas feeders along the sides.

It being about the time to change shift, new hands were on the spot to relieve those who had been there for many hours previous, but Messrs. Smith and Faull having proved themselves very good and brave in handling the hose and facing the dangers, they were asked to remain for another shift, which they agreed to do; and they took hold again, and applied the hose with renewed vigor, and, with the assistance of others to pull the hose, forced their way rapidly to the point from which they had been compelled to retreat a short time previously, quenching the gas feeders as they went along. At the critical moment, the feeders had all been put out that were in view, and no light perceptible, except that from a safety lamp or two. The air had become very warm, and some gas could be detected on the flame of the safety lamp, when William Howells, one of the fire bosses, informed the men Smith and Faull, that they better retreat, as the condition of the air was getting to be dangerous. They replied, "that he should take care of the lamp, that they were all right."

Howells then cautioned them again, receiving about the same reply, and he moved down the hole a short distance, when suddenly the flames burst out from under the heap of loose coals under the feet of Smith and Faull, and they immediately applied the power of the hose, and tried to check the flames, but it was no use, as they (the flames) then rushed over and on either side, igniting the strong feeders along the hole and down before them for hundreds of feet. This, as a matter of course, caused a retreat of all hands, and even caused the men to be panic-stricken. The men burned, with the exception of Smith and Faull, were not long in the mine, having changed shift after eleven, p.m. This, added to their misfortune, as they were all sitting down in the dark, on either side of the hole, ready to assist in moving the hose when required, or in turn relieve Smith and Faull. Then, when the gas burst out in flames just as a torpedo, or shell almost, the strange men ran wildly down the test-hole, through the fiery channel, until some of them fell when they were injured considerably from the roughness of the place they had to pass through, besides being burned, and in one case no less than three of the unfortunate beings were jammed between a prop, and the side having fallen on one another after the first got fast. The men all agree in their statements, that there was no concussion felt from the gas igniting, and that the burning was caused mostly by the feeders on both sides. There were several persons in the hole, a short distance below those at the hose who were not burnt at all. Amongst them were Howells, the fire boss, and Loyd, another fire boss, and Weir, the mine boss, with a few others. The officers stated that there were some eight thousand cubic feet of air passing through the tunnel and up through the said test-hole previous to and on the day of the occurrence of this terrible calamity. No doubt in my mind but that the cross-cuts on the anticlinal had by this time been partially closed by the heat and fire, thereby reducing the ventilation. Then again, it is plain that it was a grave mistake to let the men Smith and Faull force their way so rapidly to the top of the anticlinal, without first having taken ample time to cool the top and sides, as well as put out the flames as they went along.

In that way there would have been a less amount of gas given off, the place being so much cooler, which would also enable the men to stand more exertions, and the gas would not be so strong about the feeders. Then, again, when the officers observed that the current was being adulterated by the appearance of the flame of the safety lamp, and that it was liable become an explosion point, and that the flames were also liable to burst out from the coals underneath the workmen, thereby igniting the said charged current, then I say that the men should have been withdrawn. Mr. Weir, the mine boss, was in the hole at a point below, and this matter should have been attended to when or before Howells, his subordinate, called attention to the matter. In fact, it is only a wonder that matters did not happen even more severe than they did. I learned that some time before this burning of the poor men, Mr. Smyth, superintendent, and Joseph Edwards, had made examination of the north-east side, south of the anticlinal, and that they found the mine full of explosive gas on the west and inside of the said proving hole, when Mr. Smyth went out to report to the other officials and change his wet clothing and get something to eat, having been in the mines for many hours.

Then I say, what wonder would it have been had this great reservoir of explosive gas ignited and exploded, thereby killing instantly each and every living being within the mine. This condition of things proves pretty conclusively that the ventilation had been obstructed at the junction of the current from the west side, and that from the proving hole in the vicinity of tile cross-cuts, there being two of them in the pillar between it and the next place east, and the coal very thick, free and full of slips:

Had our party been down a few moments sooner, or had the gas not ignited for a few moments longer, no doubt the writer and some others of the party would have been in the said proving hole. What the result of our getting there would have been cannot well be guessed but it is possible, however, that the sad fate of the men might have been different, or it might be that we would have shared their terrible end.

As soon as the men injured were all taken out, the question of further operations was at once discussed. Mr. Smyth giving it as his opinion that the place was very dangerous to risk any further work. The condition of the place was described by the parties present, including a statement from Mr. Smyth, about the west side workings having been found full of gas before he went out, &c. The writer then suggested that further efforts to combat the fire with hose line at once abandoned, and that the mine be flooded; Messrs. Parrish and Smyth at once agreeing. When Mr. Harris suggested the matter of walling off, and cut off the supply of air, then the writer asked how could it be done, as it was too dangerous an operation, and that should such a thing be attempted the men at work on the same would be all blown to eternity before they could complete the walling, as suggested, in the tunnels or at any other points, and I protested against any such a thing. This view of the case was finally shared in and indorsed by those present, and the matter of flooding the mine was determined upon. In course of further discussion, it was next suggested by Mr. Harris that the fan be stopped, in order to decrease the force of the fire. The writer again suggested the almost certainty of the said plan in causing immediate and terrible explosions, and recommending, instead, that the fan speed be left unchanged so that the change be more gradual, being caused as the water would fill up in the mine, and that should there finally be an explosion, it would not be so severe, as the water would act as a cushion. This last view was also indorsed and carried out, and without any bad results. An explosion did, undoubtedly, take place on the west side, at some subsequent period, yet such was not felt by any person about the fan or shaft.

The mules were then taken out, the bottom of the shaft fenced off and loose boards, &c., fastened, after which the water from the Empire mine was turned into the mine, and in due time the creek was also used to help fill the burning mine. This is the end of the first scene in a series of awful, yet interesting incidents belonging to this mine, for the year 1879.

## Audrenried Colliery

May 6, 1879

Mine Fire

6 Victims

### Victims

William Smith

David R. Morgan

John Davis

William Watkins

Sam Lloyd

Richard Faull

AUDENRIED COLLIERY.—On the 6th day of May, about midnight, the fire that had been discovered there about noon of the same day, was considered to be too far gone to successfully subdue it, unless by the great risk of doing so when it was known that there were some fifteen or twenty chambers to the west of it, and immediately connecting with it, full of explosive gas, and subject to explode at any moment. Having been notified of the case about eleven, p. m., of this day, I immediately proceeded to the mine, and there met Messrs. F. B. and G. H. Parrish, superintendent and assistant superintendent for Charles Parrish & Co., Mr. J. Harris, engineer for the receivers, and others, at the shaft-head. We soon descended the shaft which is nearly nine hundred feet in depth, and we had just reached the fire-boss's station or room, and were preparing lamps, and looking over the mine tracing preparatory to going to the scene of the fire, when a messenger brought the sad news that a large party of workmen, at the fire, were very seriously burned while applying the water hose. The whole party started, accompanied by this time by Mr. Smith, mine foreman, and we soon met the unfortunate victims being conducted out by their comrades as best they could, eight of whom were seriously burned, so much so, that six of them succumbed to an untimely death after days and some of them weeks of excruciating and indescribable pain and suffering.

As soon as it was ascertained that all the victims of the disaster were brought out, a consultation was held, and all further efforts to put out the fire by the hose was at once abandoned, and the mine ordered to be flooded,

and in a short time the water from the Empire mine was turned into the Stanton colliery, and about the second day, the surface water or creek was also turned into it.

The next day I requested the outside foreman, Mr. Thomas Wagner, to close up every opening around the shaft-head, and it was so done, except the door into the room of the Bull pump engine, which had a lock on. I forbade him and Mr. F. B. Parrish to let any naked lights or fire go near the shaft-head, and Mr. Parrish assented. I also personally assisted in extinguishing the gas-burners used in the hoisting engine-room, and the night watchman was to have no lantern or other naked light around the shaft-head. On Sunday morning, May the 18th, about two-fifteen, A. M., the coal breaker of the Stanton or Audenried colliery was discovered to be on fire by the night fireman, the watchman being at the time in the engine-room at his supper. By five o'clock, A. M., the mammoth structure had been reduced to ashes, molten metals, and other debris. The flames were first observed breaking out in the northwest corner of the head-house, near the ground floor, having been ignited, apparently, from inside, by what means is not known. Various theories have been advanced to account for the origin of the burning of the breaker, such as ignition of the same by fire from the burning mine; then incendiaryism, which had its origin in the thoughtless and meaningless remarks of some of the bystanders during the burning of the great breaker. The idea of fire in the mine igniting the breaker, could only be entertained by those that knew little or nothing about the place, as there was about forty feet of water in the shaft when it occurred, hence the same could not have happened.

In my opinion, the most plausible theory is this: That the fire was caused by spontaneous ignition of inflammable materials in the said head-house, such as old waste used about machinery, or other old cotton goods, or parts of garments. On the night of the sad catastrophe, when the eight men were burnt, they were all brought into the pumping engine-room, and there were dressed with cotton waste, saturated with linseed oil, and whatever else could be had conveniently to tie them up with, before putting other garments on them, such as quilts, &c., when conveyed from there to their homes. Their old garments, partially burned, were taken off and left there, all of which, it was said, had been carefully put away. But we know that the whole floors were saturated with oil that night, unavoidably so, and it is hard to say positively, that some of the said oil, or other oiled garments in or around the said engine-room or one of the other two rooms, did not contribute to the origin of the great fire. Yet we have no positive proof of this, but I prefer this to any other theory advanced that I know of.

But to proceed with a history of this case, I would say that the water was supposed to have reached a height sufficient to have covered the locality of the fire by the first of July, and they had prepared a temporary head-house and sheaves, and got their engine, which had been considerably damaged by the fire, repaired, and ready to hoist water by two large water



tanks, each holding about eleven hundred gallons, and finally they began hoisting and started their pumps, and succeeded in reaching the bottom about the first of October. The mine was found to be in extraordinary bad and torn up condition, the water having caused the fire-clay underneath the seam to heave, and the roof in many places had caved in, and the timber so far as could be seen along the lower gangway and air-ways were generally destroyed. At the inner section of the northwest gangway, a terrible explosion must have taken place since the water had been first turned into the mine. The timbers were blown down, and mine cars were all destroyed, and scattered along the main gangway for a long distance, the cars so broken up that nothing but the fragments could be seen of many of them, and the timber being last put in place, being a new section of work, were blown down in every direction, but not broken. From the gangway up to the chambers the gas was full, preventing any further exploration. These explorations were made by the new mine-boss, Morgan R. Morgan, and his assistants.

The cleaning up of the mine along the main air-way and gangway was begun, and preparations to restore the ventilation as soon as possible was in progress, when, on the morning of October 17, the mine boss, and his fire boss, Richard Lloyd, discovered that the mine was still on fire, burning down to the level, at the extreme northern end of the new tunnel. This was rather a severe shock, as every person entering the shaft had been supplied with a locked safety-lamp, and no other light, matches, pipes, &c., were allowed to be in their possession, as it was well understood that the whole mine was full of explosive gas, and that all it required was the work of a single spark or flame that would ignite gas, to explode the whole magazine, with its horrible results, as there were some fifteen or twenty persons then at work in the mine. However, the men were quietly informed, that for that day, there would be no more work, and that those desiring might take with them their few working implements which they had there, and thus they were safely withdrawn, not knowing for what cause until they reached the surface, when their situation was made known to them, and the reader can better imagine, than the writer can describe, their feelings under such circumstances. Immediately the writer was sent for, out of the Empire or adjoining colliery, happening to be in the Hillman seam at the time, and intending to go into the Audenried colliery after dinner. Subsequently, the men from No. 5 slope, the next lift of Empire works adjoining, and connected to the Audenried workings were withdrawn in a quiet and careful manner, not informing them of the possible danger of an explosion in the Audenried colliery, for fear of their getting panic stricken, and injure one another in their fright.

In a very short time, less than seven hours, the water was turned into the Audenried shaft, and has been filling gradually ever since, except the surface water has been turned off. A new air-shaft has been commenced north-west of the present shaft, and about a thousand feet from the end



## REPORTS OF THE INSPECTORS OF MINES.

of the new tunnel. The said shaft is to be twenty-six feet by twelve feet, and will probably be seven hundred feet in depth. A large fan, of the Guibal pattern, is to be erected over or near it, of thirty-five or forty feet diameter, and no work, except taking out the water and what work will be necessary to make the connection, will be done in the old shaft workings until the said fan is erected and in operation; at least, that is what is now in contemplation. In the meantime, a bore hole is being put down to tap the condensed air from the air chamber, or dome, of the antielinal, which kept the water from reaching the fire when the water was in the mine the first time. This will insure perfect safety from any possibility of a fire being in there when they have taken out the water next time.

I would state that, up to the time of the mine fire, no permanent system of water supply to extinguish a fire had been arranged; but a temporary supply was secured when the mine took fire in May, in a few hours after it was discovered, by using the gas pipes employed by Mr. Robert Looney, to convey air to his receiver and machine rock-drills from the compressor on the surface, by connecting to the pump column. The pressure was so great that the receiver was exploded, and several other mishaps occurred, which helped to delay the getting of a supply of water. The balance of this subject will be treated under the head of the accident.

TABLE No. 11.—Fatal Colliery Accidents—Continued.

DATE.	Number of accident.	NAME OF COLLIERY.	NAME OF PERSON KILLED.	Age.	Widow.	Orphans.	CAUSE OF DEATH.	NUMBER OF PERSONS KILLED.							
								Explosions of gas.	Falls of roof and side.	In shafts.	By blasting powder.	By mine cars.	Miscellaneous.	On surface.	Total.
April 25	14	Audenreld, . . . . .	Frank Miller, . .	14	...	...	Killed by runaway car striking empty car, which caught and crushed him, . . . . .	...	...	...	...	1	...	...	...
May	6	Audenreld colliery, .	{ William Smith, . . D. B. Morgan, . . John Davis, . . . William Watkins, . Sem. Lloyd, . . . Richard Faull, . . L. Snyder, . . . .	...	1	8	{ Messrs. Smith, Morgan, Davis, Watkins, Lloyd, and Faull were fatally injured, and expired one after another in a short time, from the effects of burning with gas while trying to extinguish a mine fire, . . . . .	...	2	...	...	2	...	1	5
				35	1	2		1	...	...	...	...			
				40	1	4		1	...	...	...	...			
				35	1	4		1	...	...	...	...			
				25	1	...		1	...	...	...	...			
13	16	No. 4 slope, Nanticoke,	Richard Faull, . .	36	1	4	Killed by fall of top coal through his own reckless action, . . . . .	...	1	...	...	...	...	...	
	20	Henry colliery, . . .	John Schumaker, .	20	...	...	Fatally injured by gas running over him, . . . . .	...	...	...	1	...	...	...	
	28	Wyoming colliery, . .	Samuel Davis, . .	43	1	4	Fatally injured by gas explosion through the carelessness of Davis himself and his partner, T. J. Evans, . . . . .	1	...	...	...	...	...	...	
June	11	Empire colliery, . . . .	James Keeny, . . .	...	7	23	Fatally injured, as he expired some time after accident at city hospital, caused by being crushed between cars, . . . . .	7	1	...	...	1	...	...	9
				40	1	...		...	...	...	...	...			
				70	1	6		...	...	...	1	...	...		
				...	...	...		...	1	...	...	...			
				...	...	...		...	...	...	1	...	...		
				...	...	...		...	...	...	1	...	...		
	14	Sugar Notch colliery, .	B. McGrain, . . . .	70	1	6	Killed instantly by fall of top coal, an old and experienced miner, . . . . .	...	1	...	...	...	...	...	
	17	Laurel Run colliery, . .	West Everett, . . .	...	...	...	Injured fatally by culm car, by his own carelessness; died July 9, . . . . .	...	...	...	1	...	...	...	
	20	Enterprise colliery, . .	John Quinn, . . . .	41	...	...	Fatally injured while taking down piece of bad roof; laborer also injured, but only slightly, . . . . .	...	1	...	...	...	...	...	
	20	Mill Creek colliery, . .	Charles Rannard, .	...	...	...	Fatally injured by a thin piece of rock falling on him, breaking over props, . . . . .	...	1	...	...	...	...	...	
				...	2	6		...	3	...	...	2	...	...	5

## **Fort Wayne Sentinel May 7 1879**

### **Frightful Disaster in a Coal Mine at Wilkesbarre.**

#### **DISASTER,**

Wilkesbarre, Pa., May 7.—At 11 o'clock last night an explosion of gas in Stanton shaft Lehigh and Wilkesbarre Coal Company, severely burned Martin Kerrigan. At midnight while the men were employed in brushing out the accumulations of gas in the lower vein came in contact with a blower, causing a terrific explosion. A large force of men were sweeping the tunnel at the time, and eight of them were badly burned, a majority is thought fatally. The mine was set on fire, and soon 600 feet solid coal was burning furiously. To extinguish the flames the mine had to be flooded.

## **Chester Daily Times Chester, PA. Thursday, May 8, 1879**

On Tuesday night, a slight explosion of gas occurred in the Stanton Shaft of the Lehigh and Wilkesbarre Coal Company, at Wilkesbarre, severely burning Martin Kerrigan. An hour afterwards, while the men were "brushing out" accumulated gas in the lower vein, a terrific explosion occurred, seriously burning eight men, named William Smith, Levi Gibbons, Sam. Lloyd, John A. Davis, Richard Froull, John Richards, David Morgan, and William Watkins. Smith and Davis died of their injuries last evening, and most of the others were in a precarious condition. The mine caught fire from the explosion and 600 feet of solid coal burned furiously, compelling the flooding of the mine.