

RECOVERY OPERATIONS STARTED.

A first-hand account of the recovery of the Gressford colliery after the explosion by Mr. Parry Davies

“As a Captain of one of the Rescue Teams which were employed directly after the explosion, and later in the recovery of parts of the mine which possibly could be worked, I have often been requested to put into writing my actual experiences during the time that work was being carried out.

Now the big day has arrived, all men are re-examined by the Doctors, and all have to pass a practical test with the apparatus, and to prove his knowledge and functions of the various parts. The airlock at the top of the shaft is completed and the trained men with the equipment are needed to take off the seal. It is realised that when this is done, the poisonous gases which have been put up in the pit by the sand stopping, will rise and soon fill the airlock just as soon as the seal was removed. There, no one could possibly live without the apparatus. On examination, it was found that the winding ropes, and the chains from the rope to the cage, after being stood 20 weeks, was not in a condition to think of riding men down the pit, and it was decided that the ropes must be re-capped, but how was this to be done?

Only men trained with the apparatus could enter the airlock, and none of them had experience of this kind of work! Then they must adapt themselves to a new profession and get down to being a temporary blacksmith. Take the chains off the cage and detach the rope from the chains, so that the rope could be newly capped. This was done successfully in a minimum of time, put back again, and the job is as sound as ever. All this work done by rescue men wearing the apparatus and breathing oxygen all the time, and this just goes to show how in cases of difficulty an inexperienced man may be taught to carry out other very important work to which he had never been accustomed. Still other difficulties make themselves apparent, How are the rescue men to be lowered down the pit and no means of signalling? Can we use a microphone? We try it, no use,

different ideas are discussed, but none are satisfactory, Everyone connected with pits know of the gong and hammer which the shafts man carries in the cage when he is inspecting the shaft. The sound will carry a long way, but what of the water that is pouring down the shaft from the water lodge? A stream at the rate of 25,000 gallons per minute is falling down the shaft and this would deafen the sound of the gong. Well then, we shall have to stop the water from going down the pit and turn it so it falls down the 'Dennis Pit' instead of the 'Martin Pit'. It only means going as far as the pump house in the shaft, a matter of only 200 yards down, and to go far the ordinary pitman's gong will do. Now the work of turning the water to the 'Dennis Pit' was a tricky piece of work, and the pump house a very difficult place, the entrance being not directly in front of the cage but at the side, with a distance of over half a yard to step from the cage to a foothold at the pump house entrance, and 500 yards of a drop if you missed your footing. That space looked more like two yards than half a yard. We were required to take measurement of the opening at the entrance so that shoring timbers could be sawn and taken to fix across the opening, and afterwards special clay in bricks could be put behind the timbers and so form a dam to a higher level than the opening in the side of the 'Dennis Pit', where the water naturally would go to the lower level. The noise of the falling water was terrific, each man holding on to his life by a mere thread, feet slipping and everything touched wet and 'slimy'. Every man giving half his attention on the job in hand and the other listening to the 'click, click' of the valves in his equipment. This was a very sever trial of nerve and endurance, every men wet through to the skin. Standing in a cage with an open top in the middle of the pit, and not knowing what may fall from above. Rust and slime everywhere above It was possible to make a thorough examination to say that everything was safe. However, the dam was completed by two teams on Monday March 1st. and the pit left to drain itself until March 7th. when the first descent was attempted. The weather was similar to that on that fateful morning of the explosion. The March air was nippy although not quite as much a rain falling.

THE FIRST DESCENT.

Now what is going to be the fate of the first team? Doom. Are they going to return alive? The reporters present called it the 'Death Trap', the 'Pit of Death' also many other titles were given to the pit. A Special Emergency Rescue Station had been erected at the Colliery where the equipment could be cleaned and refilled with oxygen, also testing and repairing of all equipment. As the

Captain of the team detailed to make the first descent I received a copy of typewritten instructions of which I give in detail.

GRESFORD COLLIERY INSTRUCTIONS TO CAPTAINS OF THE RESCUE TEAMS.

The Captain is responsible for his team, and all his members shall obey his instructions. The Captain and at least one other member of his team, must carry watches, and before going underground he must see that the watches are set at exactly the same time as the watches of Mr Abbott and Mr Fairhurst or Roberts or Joshua Jones, whichever is at the entrance to the airlock. The Captain shall ascertain the pressure of oxygen in the cylinders carried by himself and each member of the team at the start, and shall read the gauges every 20 minutes during the first hour, and every ten minutes afterwards, and the chart provided. He shall withdraw the whole of the team if any one of the gauges records only 35 atmospheres. The code of signals recorded on the back of the Pressure Gauge Chart must be observed) 'Distress' or 'Help wanted' -1 hoot b) 'Halt' -2 hoots c) 'Retire' -3 hoots d) 'Advance' -4 hoots e) 'To call attention' -5 hoots

The Captain shall obtain clear instructions, of what he and his team have to do before proceeding underground, and on no account shall he attempt to carry out any part of such instructions which in his judgement might cause risk of life to any member of his team.

The Captain must see that his team keeps together, and every member of the team must come out with the Captain when the work is completed, or the time limit is reached, or the oxygen supply is getting near 36 atmospheres, or for any other reason. The Captain must see that his team gets back to fresh air, that is outside the airlock, with not less than 30 atmospheres of oxygen, and under no circumstances, must the team be taken away from fresh air for more than 1 hour 40 minutes. The Captain must have with him the necessary small tools for the 'Proto' apparatus. He must carry one spare nose clip, he must be careful and warn the members of his team to be careful on entering and leaving the cage. Don't forget the frequent shaking of the breathing bags to keep the CO₂ absorbent free, this is particularly important with Soda Coke. Don't forget note book, pencil, chalk, 33ft tape measure and two foot rule. The Captain must make a written report of the work done, and to report any remarks made by members of his team concerning the apparatus, in the book provided.

FIRST PROCEDURE.

Cages to be run up and down the shaft several times to clear pipes, and engine cylinders of water, and to make sure that the winding gear and signals are in order. Engineer will enter airlock with two members of the team which are to remain to act as banksman and give signals. The engineer will examine the cages, bridle chains, detaching hooks and rope cappings. Also see that the gates on the cages are secure, hang shaft lamp on bridle chains, and when satisfied that everything in order he will leave the airlock and the first team must then be ready to descend.

HAVE READY

- 1). Hammer and Gong on the cage, these must remain there.
- 2). Hammer and gong to be hung at the bottom of the pit and remain there
- . 3). Tools comprising, picks, shovels, hammers, handsaws and axes.
- 4). Stretchers and ambulance requisites.
- 5). Oxygen reviving set and cylinder of Di-Carbox gas.
- 6). Spare cylinder of oxygen with fittings and shoulder straps.
- 7). Materials for stoppings -Scantlings, Boards, 4" and 6" wire nails, Brattice cloth and nails, also a quantity of wedges, hand hammers, wooden blocks, and bags of sand.
- 8). 1" pipes, 4 feet long, with tapered wooden plugs to be fixed through each stopping near the top so that samples of pent up gas can be taken.
- 9). 12 electric hand lamps.

SHAFT SIGNALS TO BE USED.

Men descending or ascending

To lower cage

To lower cage slowly

To raise the cage

To raise cage slowly

To stop the cage when in motion

-Signal 3

-Signal 2.

-Signal 5.

-Signal 1.

-Signal 4.

-Signal 1.

AFTER ASCENDING.

When the cage reaches the stopping place signal '1' and if materials are required from the surface signal '1' for the cage to be raised to the surface. Await the return of the cage, signal '1' to stop it where required. Take materials from the cage, then signal '4' to raise the bottom deck out of the sump. Signal '1' to stop it, and leave it there until required. Signal '2' to lower it when required, then the usual '3' and '1' to ascend. If materials are sent down on a tram or in tubs on the cage, be very careful to fasten the tram or tubs securely with wedges. Also when sending the empty tram or tub up on the cage. Messages to be placed in the leather bag hanging on the cage hand rail.

ON RETURNING TO THE SURFACE.

After leaving the airlock, take off nose clops, and mouthpieces, close main valves. On entering Rescue Room each member of the team to deposit his apparatus in the position marked for the same, and report to the Captain on the conditions. Each member of the team to carefully dismantle his own apparatus, empty and clean the breathing bag. Also wash out the mouthpieces and air cooler. When finished deposit the parts at the appointed place, except the breathing tubes which are to be hung up to drain. It was most important that the breathing bags should be washed out thoroughly before recharging and the gauges must also be cleaned. As instructions these were to be observed throughout the whole of the recovery operations, and every one of the team had to be thoroughly convergent with them. All of us realised that they had been carefully thought out, and arranged by practical men, and that the instructions were sound common sense, but there was still a lot to do before we could apply some of them. After the Engineer had made his inspection of the rope cappings,

chains, sec. my team was ready to descend with instructions to ascertain that the dam which had previously been put at the entrance of the Pump House, was holding good, and that there was no danger of it giving way, for it this was to happen after the cage was below this level the it was fairly obvious that whichever team was below would be drowned by the sudden inrush of 25,000 gallons of water per minute. Then we were to return to the surface and report to the Inspectors, Directors, and Mr. Abbott who was directing the recovery operations. After reporting we then had to descend again, and ride down to the 'meetings', that is where the ascending cage passes the descending cage in the shaft. The object being to satisfy ourselves, and the people responsible that the cages would pass without catching each other. We were then to again return to surface and report, leaving the remainder of the shaft to be examined by the next team.

These instructions were pretty clear and easily remembered, and after being examined still once more, this time by two Doctors, and all the apparatus fully tested and passed we are ready for the 'Death Trap' so freely spoken of. No persons were allowed in the Pit Yard except those holding permits, but it appeared to us that all the Pressmen, Photographers and B.B.C. representatives in the British Isles, had received these permits. Cameras were on the tops of cars, on legs and held in the hands and one could hardly get through the throng to reach the pit. Along the Chester-Wrexham Road outside the Colliery Yard were lines of cars and hundreds of people. Why were they all there? Curiosity? No, many of them praying to God, that we should return and that the roll would not be greater. Every precaution had been taken, and the arrangements made with the winding engineman regarding the signals etc. It was arranged that he should lower us down to the point where we had been on the Monday (the Pump House), and then every 20 yards below this point he was to stop without a signal, and then if he did not receive a signal to lower further, he must bring us back up. If he continued to receive a signal then all was well. If he did not receive a signal, probably the cause would be that the sound of the gong was not reaching the rescue man acting as Banksman, or probably another cause I need not mention. Sound and definite instructions had been given, we were to go so far, and no further, and prior to entering the airlock, watches were compared pipes coupled to the mouthpieces, and with all good wishes from the Coal Owners, Doctors, Engineers and Inspectors, we were once more inside and on the cage, each one of us absolutely confident that the apparatus we were

wearing would not fail us, and that the precautions that had been taken gave us an even chance of coming back up again.

"DOWN SO FAR SO GOOD".

What a time? What a thrill? What anxious moments for everyone concerned? Those on the surface seeing those wheels revolving so slowly. Every minute an eternity, every time the wheels stopped an anxiety. Are they all right? Is the dam holding? We could imagine all this from the responsible officials. These were the most anxious moments of the re-opening of the Gressford Colliery after being closed for 6 months. We are now down to the Pumping House entrance, and examining the dam. Thank God it is holding, and doing all that is needed. There is very little water coming through, but what was falling down the shaft was making a din as it dropped into the water 500 yards below. Anyway the dam is holding and our instructions are to return to the surface to report our findings to those eager anxious waiting people. Up to now this trip had been quite easy. What was in store for us on the second descent when we were to go 150 yards further down to the 'meetings'? Each member of the Team realised, that in going below the Pump House level, that he was dependent on his own examination of the dam having been of a minute character, and that if his judgement had been at fault then his life was the toll that would be taken, but we were thoroughly satisfied that the dam was doing its work and that given ordinary conditions it would continue to do so. Now we were passing the Pump House on the second descent, stopping as arranged every 20 yards. Signalling '2' to lower us further, the noise of the falling water into the bottom is now getting louder and as we are passing one of the garlands, (a cast iron recessed ring built in the shaft bricking in the water bearing strata) we find that a good deal of water is falling from this, but the noise below is far greater than the quantity. Lower and lower, still very slowly. Stopping as arranged, then going down and down till we see the chains of the ascending cage. Will it pass without catching out cage or will it catch and upset us, throwing us out of the cage into the water 350 yards below? Every inch it moved nearer, all eyes on the chain and ears listening to the valves in the apparatus. It is a real funny time which one can hardly describe. No fear, still anxiety. Seconds seemed ages. We moving down so slow, the ascending cage coming up to meet us just as slow. By now the anxiety is over. The up-going cage is passing well clear of ours, and as we watch it, it comes into line with us and we signal "stop" later signalling '7' to indicate to the winder the fact that the cages are dead level, so that he

could mark his indicator on the engines, the point of the 'meetings' in the shaft, It is then necessary that we should go just a little lower to be able to see the underside of the ascending cage and make certain that there was nothing loose hanging from it which was likely to fall down the shaft as the next team descending was to go below the point we had marked, After making the examination was signalled to be drawn back to the surface and reported our findings.

DOWN TO THE PIT BOTTOM. 1

After the next team for duty had passed through the same searching examination as we had been subjected to, they were given their instructions. The same method as before to be adopted, get down to the 'meetings' and then every 20 yards the engineman to stop and signal to be given from those on the cage to lower a further 20 yards. They were to proceed to the pit bottom and make an examination of the 'landing'. Would they be able to reach the landing? How about the water we had heard? They were descending on what was known as the 'Gressford Cage'. The nearest side to the Gressford Village. The one nearest Wrexham was called the 'Wrexham Cage and all went well with the descent until they reached the supposed 'landing'. The lower deck of the cage would not lower into the sump, below the landing. What a sensation when they could hear the chains on the cage slackening and banging on top of the cage and they not sure that their signal could be heard on the surface. Providence was once more kind to them. Their signal to be raised back to the surface was heard, and then answered, and soon they were on the surface reporting their eerie experience. Well if that cage will not lower into the sump then they must go down the Wrexham cage and down they went to see if that cage would lower sufficiently far enough to enable them to get off at the landing. It will be readily understood that nerves would be all shaken after their first experience, but without a murmur and no hesitation they were back and going down. There was no difficulty this time. The descending cage was lowered to the 'Landing Level' and as the bottom deck of the cage was being lowered in the sump one can imagine the feelings of those men. One yard of a mistake by either signals or winding engineman and they would be lowered into the water to be drowned like rats in a trap drain. After they had examined the condition of the landing they returned to the surface, reported on its condition and also the condition of the lower part of the shaft. The first part of our venture had been completed successfully.

CARRY ON.

The ovation that the second team received on their return to the surface will live long in my memory. They were met by crowds of people who could no longer be restrained. Their emotion and enthusiasm carried them into the Pit Yard to congratulate those brave lads on their achievement. The third team is now ready after passing the preliminaries. They are to go further again and explore and report on the road leading from the pit bottom. It is impossible to describe the havoc which met their gaze when they got off the cage many of the men in the third team were well acquainted with the pit bottom prior to the explosion in September and even they could not realise that this was the same place that they knew so well. The floor of the roadway was lifted up, rails and sleepers all torn up and strewn about the place in an indescribable manner, the brick walls in the pit bottom all broken down, heavy sections of girders bent and broken pointing in all directions, the 'landing' and 'scaffolding' all blown to pieces and need needing renewing. This team had a peep at the 'Pit Bottom Office' or 'Boss hole' for the first time since the explosion. Was it the same place they had known previously? They could not be sure, but it must be. It only appeared to be a small cavity in the brick wall but there were some books etc. and this must be the place they had known as the 'Boss hole'. The damage done to the place was appalling. What could they report on arrival back at the surface? It would take a lifetime to fire anything like an accurate description of the havoc below. However this completed the first days work of the exploration of the Gressford Colliery and I for one was feeling very pleased that all we had been asked to do had been done successfully and without further loss of life. One can imagine the grave looks and puckered expressions on the faces of those officials responsible for opening the pit after they had received the report of the third team down. What had caused those terrific later explosions? Was it the fire after the first 'Dennis' explosion that had ignited the gas after the sealing of the shafts? Theirs was a very grave responsibility. They were getting no rest either day or night, If so much damage had been done around the pit bottom, what was the damage likely to be nearer the seat of the explosion wherever it had occurred? What to do first and how to set about the job? All this needed a lot of discussion and a decision was not easily arrived at. One thing only was certain they had decided to reopen the pit, and the work must go on until something definite had been done. The analysis of the atmosphere assured the authorities that the fire which had been seen on 22nd. September had, through lack of oxygen supply, died out. Thus the seals on the pit had achieved. Well the rescue teams must continue

and we are again organised into shifts to carry on with the work of exploration and finding suitable places to erect stoppings in the 'Dennis Intake' and return airways thereby making doubly sure that we stop still longer the supply of oxygen to the seat of the first explosion. The work on the first day was as nothing compared with what was to follow and done by the Rescue Men in the further exploration the disastrous pit. No man ever dreamed of so much damage. No man had ever seen such a calamity in any mine in the whole world. There was nothing for hundreds of yards around the pit bottom that was not wrecked. Upheavals in the floor, falls of roof girders, tubs, rails, and timber everything and every kind of material was blown and twisted all shapes. Every move had to be done with the utmost care. Not only had we to face the poisonous gas, but we had the possibility of further falls to look out for. May be in crawling past some fall or twisted girders there was always the possibility that one might knock off the nose clip or catch the air pipes and pull them, off the equipment. The first 4 weeks of the reopening 5 teams were engaged on the work, and after this time it was decided to reduce the number to 4 teams. Three to be down the pit and one team in the airlock as banksman, and loading material required below. An attempt was made to get from the bottom of the 'Martin Pit' to the bottom of the 'Dennis Pit', but at first this attempt failed owing to the heaped up material which had been thrown together by the explosions. The teams had to go through water, waist deep to get to the roads, where the stoppings had to be put in. Really I don't know how we all stood the strain. Considering the heat and the water, it was perfectly wonderful, the spirit of endurance shown by every man. Personally, I did not credit myself that I could take such a gruelling. But even in all this, there was always some little humour. Particularly so when we had the Ministry of Mines Doctor in the Company. One thought so little of the work when listening to his jokes, but for all his jesting, I suppose he did it for a purpose and knew it was better than his medicine as a nerve smoother. He was quite a genuine chap was our Doc. Always ready with some good advice. many others were similar. One good lady of Gressford in particular was always waiting in the cabin at the surface, awaiting our return from below, and she always had a good big basket of food, chocolates and cigarettes and she was doing this daily for three months. Later she had to cut the food out of her benefactions, as the Colliery Company wished to make themselves responsible for this part. I will not comment on the change but thank the Company for their efforts. The good lady was not going to be put off like this and if she couldn't bring sandwiches along she came with other for more delectable delicacies and

the current newspapers. The Vicar of Gressford was also a daily visitor and he had to bring along his quota of chocolates and gigs. Everyone connected with the work seemed to be determined to keep our minds off the work we were doing the time we were 'standing by' in the cabin. The Press reporters had photos to show us, they had taken for their respective papers. I am sure that each of the Rescue Men had enough photos of himself to paper the living room with and at this juncture I would like to pay a compliment to the Gressford Teams of Rescue Men for their jovial and friendly ways and the way they acted to those from other collieries. Whenever we were in the need of anything wanted help to carry out our work they were always willing. It was a big help to a strange team to have knowledge of roadways and roof conditions prior to the explosion. Whatever we had occasion to ask for, that thing was immediately given to us. Doors and bridges also air crossings as marked on the plan no longer existed.

STOPPING 'F' IN THE 'DENNIS DIP'.

The first stopping to be built was the one so reported in the Press. Stopping 'F' to be built just in by of the 'slant' in the 'Dennis Deep'. It was a three block stopping, wood blocks 3ft long and 1ft square being used. Each block weighed about 25 lbs. and about 800 would be needed as the roadway at this point was 18 ft high and 13 ft wide and to get these blocks of wood meant that we had to carry them 300 yards. This would prove a very slow job and it was decided to clear a road, lay rails and transport the blocks on flat trolleys part of the way and an aerial rope was fixed up and the blocks slung on chains to this rope. This was indeed a considerable help. The Pressmen were reporting day after day "Rescue Men Build Stopping Off". it had many other names before it was finished. Each team had only two hours supply of oxygen, and they must do their work and get back to the surface before the time expired, and after going down, and receiving the trolley of blocks to take it along the aerial rope, unload and put each block on the aerial, put each block in position on the stopping and allow time to come back to the surface, we found that our two hours were up. If any team was a few seconds overdue the responsible people on the surface were in a bad way. They were wondering if something had happened and one does not wonder when it is considered that various species of insects and birds, in fact all manner of creatures that could walk, crawl or jump, had been tried in the airlock to see how long they would live in the atmosphere. I remember one Doctor who brought a rat into the airlock (he of course was wearing apparatus).

He was anxious to know how long the rat would exist, but before he could turn his wrist to look at his watch, the poor old rat had "gone west". One gentleman remarked that it was probably half dead when it was taken into the airlock, so it was decided to get a special sewer rat, one that was used to foul and poisonous gases. Give this one his due, he survived 10 seconds and he was 'gone'. A saucerful of all kinds of crawlers was next tried, but they were all dead before they had been on the job a second. Strange to relate the small 'ladybird' was the best of them all. She walked about for 6 hours before she gave up the ghost. Wood lice seemed to thrive in the atmosphere, but the Black beetle showed his legs instantly. Now if all these creatures were dying in such a short time what of the team who were working 11,00 yards from the airlock? If the least thing went wrong with the apparatus what chance had they? There was no back door here. No wonder the officials were anxious if a team was late getting back to the surface. To get to the stopping, every piece that was put on had to be 'solid' every joint 'crossed' and levelled up with sand. The work was so slow that it became notorious, and I am sure the public were tired of reading about the building of 'F' stopping. However, the thing that matters most is that the responsible people were satisfied that the job was being made a good one. Many days were spent before it completed, and many of us were most anxious to get on to other work, and other parts of the pit. The spark of curiosity was being kindled and although there was nothing but wreckage, we wanted to see how other parts were affected. Although going to the same place of work day after day, the authorities on the surface were most anxious and worried for our safety. Every hour, day, every minute was counted, and valued whilst we were down below. Our task and danger was exactly the same. No man of the team was likely to forget where he was, and everything was going along smoothly and successfully. Teams were working hand in hand. No spirit of competition. The work handed over to the next team. a true report of what was needed next, and how the job was left. All this helped the work on considerably. Good comradeship and fellowship is essential on this kind of work. However one might neglect this spirit in ordinary daily life. It was only the spirit, and that alone which enabled us to reopen the Gressford Colliery. I am proud to say that the same spirit prevailed until we finished. It was left in the hands of the teams to carry the work through. It was out of the question for this work to be delegated to others, so we needed harmony, and the true spirit of fellowship. Many and varied were the digressions when we were 'standing by'. On one occasion I asked a prominent Director of the Colliery Company if he could tell

us the winner of the Lincoln Handicap. He replied that if he knew the winner of the Lincoln Handicap we could have Gressford Colliery, but I pointed out to him that we as the Rescue Men thought that the Colliery already belonged to us as nobody else seemed to want to go down the pit. To this he smilingly agreed, but I don't think any of us would accept it as a gift. Indeed I know that I personally would not. There was always a good joke going and these repaid us for the continued monotony down below. So many different personalities visited us, listening to our experiences and the 'waiting period' simply flew on wings. It was time for the working team to come back almost before one thought they had gone down. Our turn next, and although the time seemed to be short, that 'waiting period' was always worse than the actual 'getting down' to it. Most of us were only colliers and it was an honour to be in the company of such eminent people. Medical Men, Research Doctors, University Professors, Chief Inspector of Mines, Senior and Junior Inspectors, Representatives of the Owners, Mining Engineers, Rescue Station Superintendent and also our own local celebrities, the Vicar of Gressford, and the lady of the land whom I mentioned previously. Mother of all indeed, the Ruth of old. We have never heard of such a lady and all round sport always a perfect Christian who lives up to her profession. Let us not forget the Pressmen, and a lot of chaps, but don't let them hear too much. All these people had something new to tell us each and every day, all were from different parts of the Country. All had different occupations and modes of living. It was highly educating to us to listen to some very interesting discussions, some of the becoming very heated at times. Each man upholding his own country, or defending his own profession. But when all their high standings and professions had been taken into consideration, they had to admit that we lowly Rescue Men, held the key of success on this particular occasion. We were supreme at this period and at this class of work, and they all had to bow to us, as we now have to do to them now we have returned back to normal life and occupation. This world is not to be a selfish world or a one man's property. It proves to us that each and every one is dependent on the other. It matters not what position a person may hold, he is at all times dependent on someone else. It is a great pity that people do not realise this, it would be better for all classes. All this of course is not building 'F' stopping. Day after day. Team after team. The same old work on the same old stopping. If other stoppings were to take so long, what were the chances of ever opening Gressford Colliery? But this was the main one, and the largest. It was down this road that the fire was actually seen, and we know that even now, by the samples

of air taken from behind the stopping, that there is still 'heating' and the importance making it as near airtight as possible. The work progressed well up to the last foot to be built, here all shapes of blocks were required, and wedges to tighten up. Every team knew that it was useless to attempt any 'scamped' work and that last foot took as long to complete as the whole remainder of the stopping had done. One good thing about the work, no one was hurrying the job on, and after completion and fresh air was put into the pit the Mining Engineers, Inspectors, and all concerned, had a word of praise on the way the work had been done. All were agreed, that the work could not have been done better even in daylight and fresh air if the stopping had been built on the surface and by men not encumbered by the apparatus.

I am not flattered or giving undue praise, when I say that those higher officials, Inspectors and Agents, who accompanied the teams did exceptionally well. Many of them were not accustomed to heavy manual labour, but they would take any position as allotted by the Captain on the Team. Haulage, carrying blocks or building made no difference to them and they worked side by side, and took their turn at the heavy work, like other members of the Team. We marvelled at their fitness and capabilities, I thought some of them had never caught hold of a hammer or shovel. They surprised us all. Each Team looked forward to these people coming down with us. It meant a man extra in the Team. As a rule there was an Inspector of Mines with each Team. These changed around to avoid being the last down the shaft. If ever such work is necessary again, I am sure Teams will ask the Mines Department for those same Inspectors. Occasionally after the fresh air had been put into the pit, we had other visitors accompanying us down. They were sightseers, some for experience which we hope they will ever need.

At this time Gressford must have been the Buxton Research Station. Every day eminent Professors were moving to and fro with the paraphernalia. During the opening period, I think every Country that was connected with Mining and Research work was represented and later Mr. Ernest Brown, the Minister of Mines came along to see for himself the work that had been done. Stopping 'F' was completed on the 28th April and we were pleased to be moving on to the next, stopping 'E' which was to be erected in the 'slant'. This was not considered to be near so important as the previous one, and it was decided that three thicknesses of brattice cloth across a framework would suffice, and this only took two shifts to complete. Next one, stopping 'H', was to be put in the

‘Dennis Return Airway’, but we had other tasks. Occasionally we would accompany the Research Doctor from Birmingham University who would want a few samples of the air in the pit from various places. It was a treat for any Team to accompany him, and if because he had the apparatus on, he could not speak his motions were equally as humorous and we were taught how to take and bottle the little samples of air and the direction of the ventilation. He was quite a hefty chap, about 16 stone in weight, so he could not overrun us, we were always ‘top dogs’ as he had so much more to carry, and many times he was glad of a halt in the journey. I remember that on one occasion we had to take down a hand pump with 100 yards of hose for delivering the water from the ‘sump’ into the low side. This was water which, in the first occasion down, had stopped the cage from entering the sump. As I said we took the pump and the suction pipes consisting of two large lengths coupled together with a clamp. We fitted the pump as near to the shaft side as the suction pipe would allow, and the Doctor thought to make himself generally useful, put his sample tackle on the side, and begins to couple the hose to the pump. Then throws the (as he thought) securely coupled lengths of suction hose into the water ready to start pumping. Every man worked in turn his hardest to get the water delivering. No good. Examine the valves of the pump. Still no water. Blame the engineers who have sent the pump down. Try again. No good. Hold on a minute. Why, there is no wonder we have not pumped any water, there is only two feet of suction pipe. Not near the water, and the remainder of the pipe is floating about in the sump uncoupled from the pump. One hour wasted. What is to be done? We must go to the surface and procure another length to couple up to the suction side, but we were careful to tell them on the surface, that the piece we had taken down was not long enough to reach the water. You can imagine the puzzled look on their faces. They probably thought we had put the pump where it was intended to deliver water. Our Doc, was never forgiven for throwing the suction pipe into the sump and the joke was always revived when we were sure no one directly connected was listening. Stopping ‘H’ was being built in a place easy of access, only 100 yards from the ‘Martin Pit Bottom’ along the ‘Main Martin Return’. This was to be built similar to ‘F’ stopping i.e. blocks of wood. by this time every man was so accustomed to his apparatus that everything was much easier. only listening the valves click watching the pressure gauges, making sure that every man had a sufficient supply of oxygen, and this stopping much smaller of course the ‘F’ was put up in three days, It had previously been decided that seven stoppings would be necessary, but after reconsidering, the

Mining Engineers were of the opinion that some would be unnecessary for the time being at last, and so we were put on to build 'D' stopping of sand bags. This proved to be very hard work. We had up until now only had to transport the material to the 'dip', but for 'D' we had to go to the other side of the pit, to the 'Rise', and the whole way we were travelling up to the knees in 'slurry' and grease. A trolley was being used to load the bags of sand, some pulling the trolley by means of a piece of rope, others pushing behind. 500 bags of sand were needed. How pleased we were when the last bag was put on. This completed all the stoppings around the pit bottom, and after a careful inspection by Agent, Inspectors and Rescue Teams of all other stoppings it was found that all were doing the work expected of them, and the second stage of the recovery could be considered with a practical possibility of success.

"SEAL TAKEN OFF DENNIS PIT".

By taking the seal off the Dennis Pit 'and dismantling the airlock at the top of the 'Martin Pit' natural ventilation would be set up and make it possible for those persons, not trained in the use of the apparatus to enter the pit. Those high officials who had waited day after day on surface listened to the reports of progress made, curbed their impatience week after week. These could now go and see for themselves the work that had to be done to make it possible for them to go down. Separating doors in the roads between the two pits in the pit bottom were opened wide, and men who had done no work for 7 months were busily digging the sand seal off the top of the 'Dennis' shaft. Removing boards, girders and other material. The foul air being liberated from the pit was like dense black smoke. It was found later that the latter explosion (after the seals had been put on) had dislodged two girders forming the seal, and these had fallen down the pit doing damage to the extent that no one knew at present, but all could conjecture. This was a very anxious time for all concerned. If the stoppings erected were not airtight some more oxygen would feed through on to what? If the fire was still smouldering, there was a possibility that the whole lot would be set away again, but, as has been proved those stoppings were good and held put the necessary oxygen. A task had been accomplished by the Mining Engineers, Inspectors, Research Doctors and Rescue Men. Something unique in the Mining World. The only pit ever opened after sealing by Rescue men working in an irrespirable atmosphere. Great credit was due to the manufacturers of the 'Proto' apparatus Messrs. Siebe Gorman of London. Their representative was present during the whole time seeing that all the apparatus

was kept up to standard and generally given sound advice on the care and use of their equipment. It was the 8th. April when after a most careful examination of all the stoppings, the men wearing 'Proto' apparatus returned to the surface, and the seal was taken off the 'Dennis Pit'. All the Heads of Departments, Chief and Divisional Inspectors, Superintendent of the Recovery Work, Mr Abbott, Mining Engineers and Directors of the Colliery all were able to go and look round the area up to the various stoppings. I am sure that a moment of consideration on that first trip round of theirs, would convince them that there had been no exaggeration in the reports by the captains of the Rescue Teams. To say the least they were amazed at the damage and far worse than they had expected. Not only the force of the latter explosions, but the fact that 25,000 gallons of water per minute had been pouring down the shaft for 7 months and everyone knows the effect of water in a pit. The floor is lifted up until the roadways are not even half the size that they were originally. Everyone knows equally the effect water had when put on lime. How the lime will crumble to a powder, and the water had a similar effect on the limestone that formed the strata. Destruction everywhere, played by two agents, 'Explosion' and 'Water'. It is difficult to imagine what were the thoughts of those gentlemen who were the Directors of the Colliery. Their thoughts must have run on these lines. Can any sort of order be restored out of this kind of chaos? Will ever we be able to get any more coal along these roadways? On one thing I feel sure, that the gentleman who had previously been asked for the winner of the 'Lincoln' and had replied that if he had known he would give us the Gressford Pit, I am sure that on looking round he must have wished that he had known the Lincoln winner, and so got rid of what seemed an impossible commercial proposition, a coal pit which looked and was a shambles. The reporters of the Press were allowed to accompany the Officials down the pit and many were the photographs which were taken, one I believe of which now hangs in the Ministry of Mines Offices. It is one of a place that was known as the 'Big Junction' where coal tubs had been piled one on top of the other in endless confusion and on one of the tubs was written in chalk:

"SAME WAY BACK

CAN'T GET THIS WAY

PARRY DAVIES -CAPT. 11.3.35."

- and on this message hangs a tale that I think I had better relate. It would appear that on his first visit down the pit after taking off the seals, the Chief Inspector of Mines, Sir Henry Walker had seen this message, and I was sent for to appear at the General Offices and told that they considered that I had accomplished an impossible feat in climbing up these tubs with the equipment on, as they themselves had tried and failed. "How on earth did you get the team there?" was their query. The thoughts running through my mind was that I was in for a 'slating', a real good 'telling off'. But no. After the explanation which after all was very simple, everything was all right. I explained, that with the Agent, Mr Charlton, accompanying, the Team had waded through water which came up to our waists. The Agent and myself intended going a few yards further to see if we could get measurements for another stopping. As Captain, and not being able to speak to the Team, this was the way I conveyed to them my intentions. That was, to return the same way, and they being fully trained men knew that I intended them to remain there until the Agent and myself got back to those piled tubs. The Chief Inspector made it pretty clear to me that had he have known that the Teams were taking these additional risks, he would not have let the Teams go down the mine. Each Team was doing the same. Taking risks. Indeed, what was the whole job, but one huge risk? Each team went down to find out exactly what was the position, so that an accurate report could be given. Who would have dreamed that photographers would be allowed down the pit and so be able to put on record out transgressions of 'Safety First'. No doubt the other teams committed similar acts, only they were either 'lucky' or 'unlucky' whichever way the question is looked at. Let me here record, that we all did a good deal 'off our own bat' some jobs that those in authority could not possibly have instructed us on. We also did one or two jobs on instructions and, dare I say it, regretted it afterwards, and were ready to throw the tools at each other afterwards. I remember on one of the occasions we were told to take two of the four cover plates off the top of the cage, so that the team following us could go down and do some repairs to the scaffolding in the shaft bottom. The cage we were to operate on was brought to the pit top and we took into the airlock sledge hammers, sets, cold chisels, etc. to break off the heads of the bolts holding these two plates in position. Now swinging a sledge is a man's job, even with 40 lbs. of equipment and in an atmosphere which is

irrespirable and we had worked like ‘niggers’ for the first hour and had ‘knocked off’ only 12 of the 40 bolt heads. Each member of the team was getting done up, and tired and progress seemed definitely slow. We were carrying out the instructions of the ‘heads’ which had been very particular, even to showing us how to hold the ‘set’ on the bolt head, and if progress is slow then they will have to put up with it. All the time we could be observed through a glass window in the airlock, and now and again, one or other of the authorities came to the window to see how we were going on. Slow? I should say we were, and not by any stretch of the imagination could we be expected to go faster as our two hours neared the end. Just then a stranger to us, beckoned of me to go outside the airlock. He told me, that the two plates were held by two clips and that if they were loosened, the plates could lift off the top of the cage. Back I went on to the job, and sure enough, there were two clips and in two minutes we had the plates off, and we had done the job that every man of the team had been hammering his brains out for more than an hour. Still we had been busy carrying the instructions and had never dreamed of doing any other, or that those two plates were fixed different from the other two. This never happened again, we always looked over the job ourselves after this, and the easiest was our way in the future. We found on several occasions, that if we had carried out our instructions of how to do the job, we would have worked hard and accomplished nothing. This is where a good Captain is important. It will be realised by that conversation is impossible and therefore, there is no ‘discussion’ down below, on the best way to do a job. The Captain will convey to the men what he wants them to do, by motions or writing, to tackle the job in the way he thinks, and he holds firm to that way. If he does not, then each individual member of the Team adopts his own methods, each one different, and the team finishes with the job partly done, and badly at that. I don’t suppose any Captain had trouble in this respect. All men knew that the captain was responsible, and the way, any particular job was done did not concern them. By this time there were 400 men employed clearing the debris and relaying the rails. These men were able to work without apparatus, as the air was quite fresh in all roads up to the stoppings after unsealing of the pits. These men were thoroughly skilled in the repair of the roadways, and the timbering of same, and let me add they were quite anxious to get back ‘into collar’ again after 7 months of

walking the streets. Not them for the 'Dole' any longer than they could help. The Rescue Men wearing their gear were to advance through stopping 'H' after a new airlock had been built. The airlock to be made of two doors properly bricked in the roadway directly in front of stopping 'H' and in fresh air. When a Team passed through the first door and closed it, the second could then be opened and the Team were again in the 'danger zone'. Rails had to be advanced and 'bars' set in the roof for support, and falls to clear. We advanced along the 'Martin Return Airway', 300 yards in this manner, and to a point where it was considered the second advance should be stopped and the ground 'won' consolidated. Framework erected and 'brattice cloth' covering, was sufficient for this and when completed the number of workmen could be increased to clear up the mess. Next stopping was one in advance of the big stopping 'F' on the 'Dennis Dip'. This was also to be of brattice cloth stopping. Of course only temporary as the first ones had not been taken down yet. Stoppings were also put up the 'slit' from the 'Martin Road' and the little 'slant' also on '20's Road', the last where we knew that one of the first rescue teams was still laying. However the stopping was erected 200 yards from where the body lay. On the little 'slant' a heavy sandbag stopped was built, and by means of these various stoppings and the airlock we have moved 300 yards down the 'Dennis Deep' and not had to alter or make a road through the big stopping 'F' and we can travel by way of the 'Martin Return' and out back on the 'Dennis Deep Road'. What of all that water which had gone down the pit? We could see no travel of water here. It had all been absorbed by dry strata. All of it seemed to have gone down by way of 'headings'. The conditions of the 'Dennis Deep' along the distance we had travelled was exactly in the same condition as when we left it on the 23rd September 1934. There was very little change, and it would appear that those later explosions had not touched the area where the first explosion had happened, and that the other districts in the pit were the ones to suffer in the later explosions. I have read and heard broadcasts on the wireless, that the bodies of the victims would be left submerged in the water that had gone down the pit during those seven months. It is a great mistake that such statements should be made. Nobody can say that this is the case for certain. If any man could find water for the 250 yards we advanced down the 'Dennis Deep', I would think it and that would surely put an end to me. Not only

is the statement conjecture, but what of the harm such a statement would make on the relatives? What would the poor relatives think? It is enough to know that their loved ones are still down that fateful pit, without the added horror that they are floating up and down the district. None are in the position to know as much as the Rescue Men and none of them believe that the water is near those bodies. In fact I will go as far as to say that emphatically I do not believe there is any water in that particular part. The theory of the man making the statement is wrong, and his calculations are a long way out, and to announce this as his opinion, is disastrous. We of the Rescue Teams claim to know all the facts that we have ascertained of the conditions down the Gressford Colliery. Some facts that are of no importance to others than in the mining world, and if revealed would only be added injury to those poor mothers' feelings. We have lodged those particular things in our own memories and need not divulge them to any person. If they were of any benefit, either to prevent similar explosions in the future, or to give a clue to the cause of this one, then of course they would have to be given. It is of no use to surmise that so and so happened, and I propose to leave to a later time this matter. By then probably other such silly ideas will have been broadcast.. On 2nd, May all stoppings were again completed and we were ready to advance a further 300 yards, All the original stoppings were to be taken down and those just erected were to do the same duty, that of holding the fresh air on one side and the gas on the other. Suddenly and without any warning a halt was called. All recovery work is suspended until the 'Dennis Shaft' which suffered in the later explosions, was made safe, so that in case of accident to the 'Martin Shaft' or winding engines, there would be a second means of egress out of the pit. The Authorities considered that the fact of only one pit had been taken too long, hence their decision to suspend operations. We were told that we should be wanted back there in a week's time to further advance the stoppings, to get to the bodies and if possible to find the cause of the original explosion. We were informed that on the Tuesday following the Jubilee celebrations we should be again going forward. None of us wanted it, but we had stood up to the work up to this time and it was up to us to go ahead to find the cause and if possible to get those bodies. What has happened we do not know. For some reason or other the Rescue Operations have been suspended and we do not start after the Jubilee celebrations. Was all hope of recovery of those bodies

abandoned? Why such a change of plan? Surely the least they could have done was to tell us that no further attempt was to be made to reach those bodies. We were told nothing and of course were constantly expecting the call to come to restart the recovery operations.

NIGHT VISIT TO THE DEAD RESCUE MAN.

I was still left wondering when the Rescue Operations would be restarted when on a certain evening at 6 p.m.. a call came to my house with the instructions to proceed to Gressford Colliery, and report at 9.30pm. The messenger did not know what for, and I was left to think what may be the reason. I accordingly went along and reported to the Agent. He informed me that the Inspectors intended to try to get to the body of the Rescue Man who had been left in the 'Return Airway' on September 22nd. 1934. I was to be Captain of the Team made up of two Inspectors and the Ministry of Mines Doctor. I had to look round the pit top to find any old clothes I could to change into, and then downed the old No.13 apparatus, seeing that every one's equipment was in order we proceeded to the 'Dennis Pit', taking stretcher, brattice cloth and other necessities. Everything had been kept a dead secret to avoid any crowd of sightseers or photographers. This was the first time I had gone down the 'Dennis Pit' since 23rd. September and I was astonished at the change which had taken place and the extent of the damage done. If anything it was worse than the 'Martin Pit'. In fact the water, after being turned to the Dennis Pit had done more damage. There was 4 feet of a 'dinting' being taken up from the cage in the pit bottom where the water lifted the floor. However, it is no use bothering the reader with these details. We had a job on hand, and as the only person in the Team who was aware of the position of the body, and it will be remembered I had seen the lamp shining down the road when on the 22nd. September we had fetched the other dead Rescue Man out. This apparently was the reason I had been sent for to accompany the Doctor and Inspectors. We proceeded to '20's Airway' and coupled up our apparatus in exactly the same place we had done the same thing on September 22nd. Our feelings were not the same on this occasion. We knew now that we were going in to fetch one who was past human aid, and we had no anxiety that there may be someone alive down there.

The roadway had stood wonderfully well. One or two small falls here and there and the floor lifted a little with the water running down. These made it difficult to get along. Measurements of the roadway were taken, loose stones pulled down and falls levelled as best we could. We reached the body and the Doctor

made an examination taking myself as a witness, In appearance the condition of the body was none the worse. Not a stone had fallen near it, He lay with his arm under his head and face downwards. Often the question is asked "What state would the bodies be in after three months down the pit?". I can truthfully say, that I would have been able to identify his body even if I had not known he was there. I had, as a boy, attended the same school, and later we worked together in the pit. His features, his hands were without a blemish and very little decomposition had taken place. We did not move the body It had taken us an hour to get there and make the examination, and it was too great a risk that we should bring him back now, in view of the short time at our disposal and the fact that there were those two small falls to level. This was the second time I had been compelled to leave a comrade where he had given his life in attempting to save others. Although I had to give the decision to leave him for the present. As Captain of that Team I am proud of that decision and I knew that the chances would be greater after the road had further been cleared. The Inspectors and the Doctor were good and fully trained in the use of the apparatus, but there was hard and heavy work to be done to get the body to the surface. Our time was limited and I could see that the supply of oxygen was not likely to last out. the road was rough and stony and my knees, through crawling along, were very sore, and I expect those of my team mates were in a worse plight as, of course, they were not accustomed to this kind of travelling. They were all agreed that it was better to have the road repaired and levelled at the earliest possible moment. It was the first time in my life that I had to work with Mines Inspectors or at least have them working for me, and the highest tribute that could be given I would give to them for that night's work. They worked under the Captaincy of their inferior in ordinary pit life and they gladly submitted to every instruction given to them. The Doctor, as I have said earlier was the life and soul of my party. First he would grouse, next he would praise, and finally he would groan. He kept this Special Team in good spirits on the homeward journey, till he felt his knees giving in to all the torture they had been subjected to, by his crawling over those sharp stones. The temperature in the return was 100oF, and all this, coupled with the size of the Doctor, gave him something to think about. The perspiration was pouring from him and I didn't think he could have a dry switch of clothing on him. I guess he was pleased to get back into fresh air. If we attempted to carry out that body on that occasion what would have become of the Doctor? He could have been no help with all the bruises and sore knees, and I could see we should require every little bit of

help possible. Hence my decision to leave the body on that occasion with the view of a nearly recovery. We returned to the surface somewhat disappointed, but on the whole, satisfied. We had seen the body, and knew that it was in a good state and that neither falls of roof or the water that had gone past him had decomposed the body. On the following Saturday, my original complete Team was summoned to the Colliery to go in and this time bring the body back. All other Rescue Teams 'standing by' in case of need. Again the whole operation was kept secret. at 9.30 p.m. after the usual examination of men and equipment we went down. A team of 5 accompanied by the Doctor and two Inspectors and the Agent of the Colliery. The apparatus was not needed on this occasion, as fresh air had been taken in the meantime forced down the airway. Some distance down, we took off the apparatus and proceeded to the body. Oh what a change. Something had happened. The Doctor again making an examination found that one arm and one leg was broken. A big stone had fallen since our previous visit to the body and had disturbed the remains. What a pity, I felt it more because I had seen the corpse perfect and felt guilty because I had decided to leave him here only the previous Thursday. It was unfortunate that had happened and there is no doubt that the fresh air, being turned down that airway, had caused the disturbance in the roof and the quick decomposition of the body. The Team was most anxious to get away from there before any further fall came, and the Doctor carefully wrapped the body in cloth after stones had been lifted from it and the Doctor removed the apparatus which was required to be tested. We carried the body out on a stretcher. After eight long months of waiting for an opportunity to get our fellow Rescue Man out of the bowels of the earth. The Team had felt it was an insult and a mark on the reputation of all Rescue Workers to have surrendered to any conditions, and leave a comrade buried in the unknown grave. We all felt that whatever state he is in, we must know that he is buried in a proper grave, so that we can go along and pay our deepest respects. He is now buried in Gwersyllt Cemetery and his funeral was one of the largest ever witnessed at that burial ground, All classes, all professions, the highest and the lowest in the district attended and paid a last tribute to our fellow comrade. What more could a man have done than to sacrifice his life in attempting to save others? He was the last of three rescue men who lost their lives to be recovered. All three had died heroes and their names will never be forgotten in the Mining World, we raise out hats to their memory. To their Captain, the same applies. He was the only man of that Team who went into the Airway and came out alive. He is living and working today.

By a mere thread was his life saved. He was helped from the pit in an exhausted condition. I saw him that morning, his eyes appearing to be coming out of his head and practically helpless. He had struggled with each one of these mates, trying to pull them back to fresh air and he exhausted himself. Only 20 more yards and he knows there is a chance of life but the struggle is too much and he has to leave them one by one, and he himself staggers back into fresh air. His unselfish attempt to save his mates whilst endangering his own life is worthy of the highest recognition.

BUNKUM AND BRAVADO.

In giving this story of the Rescue Operations at Gressford, I have given the truth which I challenge anyone to refute. There were several reports given to the Press which were sheer bravado and bunkum. One report given by one man, how he had burnt his shoes in the fire at '29's Junction' on Sunday 23rd. September. Well, he must have taken them off and thrown them into the fire. The rescue Teams were the furthest advanced and nearest the fire and none of us burnt our shoes, or even singed our clothes. Anyone who bunt themselves did it purposely. Later opinions are expounded that the victims died of starvation. A statement that is certainly without foundation. The same person gave it out publicly that his opinion was based on the fact that he believed they died of starvation because their lamps were lit. Is he not aware that lamps will burn in CO and that less than 1% of CO is fatal to life? Personally, I don't attach much importance to what was said by those men who were fortunate to escape. Their report of seeing 70 men following them out. How far? Isn't it too much to expect them to know much of those who are following behind, when their own life was in jeopardy? It had often been said that there are 70 men in the airway near the 'clutch'. I cannot at the moment contradict this, but I have my doubts. We were told that if the teams get down to '29's Junction' on Sunday 23rd. September that there will be 100 bodies there. We got there all right but no bodies were found and we will have to wait and see if the other report is correct of 70 men near the 'clutch' in that 'Return Airway'. There are lots of reports I could mention, but seeing that one cannot prove or deny, and that operations are indefinitely held up, why not let them stand over till, if ever, they are proved or disproved.

A PERSONAL TRIBUTE TO ALL MY MATES.

In conclusion, I feel that I must congratulate all the Rescue Men for their splendid work during the recovery operations. All Teams were one dependant and the other and all worked just as one unit. The majority of the Gressford Teams were new hands, and had been trained especially after the explosion. Each of them was equal to the best, even those who had 22 years of rescue work and training. Common sense is needed on this kind of work. 'Brain not Brawn'. This is not a job where one can rush in. A physically fit man with common sense and that necessary 'pit sense' and 'pit knowledge'. None of us are brave men, but we claim to have sufficient confidence in the apparatus and being accustomed to pit work, fear does not enter our minds. Of the Mines Inspectors, I never did care much for. They always seemed to know all and the Deputy or Workman nothing, but since my contact with them on this occasion I have entirely changed my opinion or should I say they changed it for me? They are a jolly good lot of chaps, particularly the two who constantly worked side by side with the Teams. One from Stoke and the other from Doncaster. Neither in nor out of the pit did they differ from us. They were mixing with us constantly, and if they enjoyed our company, so did we enjoy theirs. We look forward to our next meeting, not we hope under the same circumstances, and the same kind of work. The Chief Inspector, Sir Henry Walker, always had a word of encouragement for the Teams. It built and cemented that confidence in him. We knew that nothing could go wrong if we followed his advice. A word or two on the reports made at the time of the remuneration of the Rescue Men. The reports were varied and many of them that we were paid #10 per week. Let me tell my readers that the Rescue Men at the explosion were not paid at all. No man asked what the rate of pay was. The question of payment at a time like this does not enter the minds of men, but at Christmas 1934 the owners of Gressford gave a gratuity to all those volunteers who went down the pit on September 22nd. and 23rd. Each man received the same amount which was generous, at the same time pointing out that the services rendered could not be reckoned in money. The payment for the recovery work never reached anything like £10 per week. It was an agreed rate which taken on an average did not exceed £5 per week. I can safely leave it to my readers to judge the work and the pay. If every man engaged in the recovery was granted a pension of that sum per week for the remainder of his life, he would not be imposing or robbing the Exchequer if only one looks at the question from the saving of the unemployment pay. Nearly £600 per week is saved in this way since it was made possible to reopen the part of the pit and the figure will be increased to £1,000 as soon as they can re-

employ men. Nor is this the most important. If we had the opportunity to advance and find the cause of the explosion to possibly prevent a similar happening. What would then have been the value of our work? and what value is placed on our present experiences by the Research Committee? The whole of the Mining Industry has benefited by the unique experience of opening up Gressford. We are often asked for our opinion whether the bodies could be got out. We have all discussed the matter and personally I say that those that could be got out should. We have heard all the argument that is only sentiment, but the people who use this as an argument have no one belonging to them down the pit, and what is sentiment? Take sentiment from the human being and you place it with the animals. I say I should want mine out if I had one there and I should want the opportunity of visiting his last resting place. If there is nothing more than sentiment in having a proper funeral and a proper grave, why waste ground and go the expense of a coffin? Why not make a big hole and bury the dead in a heap?. Why take the Nobility to the Abbey? There is something more than sentiment. There is something in the inner man that appeals to all Christians and appeals to me. The authorities must have had a good reason for not going forward to get those bodies out of which I don't know, but I have always had that assurance that whatever could be done for the sake of the bereaved and for the safety of their future. They would always do. The Ministry of Mines in co-operation with all other officials in these I place my confidence and consider that they are in a position to know what is best.