COLLIERY DISASTER.

EXPLOSION AT THE DUDLEY MINE.

HEAVY LOSS OF LIFE.

FIFTEEN MEN ENTOMBED.

NO HOPE OF RESCUE ENTERTAINED.

HEARTRENDING SCENES AT THE PIT MOUTH.

THE PIT-HEAD SHATTERED.

THE REPORT HEARD FIVE MILES DISTANT.

DEBRIS STREWN IN ALL DIRECTIONS.

PRESENCE OF CARBONATED HYDROGEN.

DESPATCH OF EXPLORING PARTIES.

LIST OF THE MISSING.

NEWCASTLE, Monday.

A profound sensation was caused throughout the Newcastle district to-day when it became known that a serious explosion of gas had taken place at the Dudley Colliery, and that 15 men had been entombed. The report of the explosion was distinctly heard for a distance of five miles, and hundreds of miners and other citizens from the adjoining mining villages rushed to the scene in the hope of ascertaining the fate of the men, and to render any assistance which might be required. The first intimation of the disaster was received in the city by telephone from the pit, and the news rapidly spread throughout the Northern district. From what can be gleaned it appears that the fan was set in motion about 6 a.m., and a party of 15 men descended the pit at 7 a.m. for the purpose of making the necessary arrangements preparatory to the resumption of work to-morrow. The explosion occurred at 9.10 a.m., completely shattering the winding-gear, and carrying the timber roofing and debris away a quarter of a mile. Simultaneously an explosion occurred at the air shaft, situated a quarter of a mile distant in an easterly direction from the main shaft. The roofing and brickwork of the air shaft were lifted bodily and thrown in all directions, but fortunately the machinery was not damaged in any way.

LIST OF THE MISSING.

The following is a complete list of the missing men :—

George Hindmarsh, overman, married, three children, residing at Dudley.

William Humphries, deputy, married, grown-up family, residing at Wallsend, father of colliery manager.

Thomas Young, deputy, married, five children, resided at Dudley.

Thomas Hetherington, J.P., a deputy and ex-Mayor of Adamstown, and returning officer for Kahibah electorate, widower, with very large family.

Thomas Haddon, a deputy, married, four children, resided at Dudley.

Thomas Green, waggon weighman, single, resided at Lambton.

Thomas Dorrity, in charge of the wheelers, single, resided at Charlestown.

Cyrus Price, an onsetter, married, two children, resided at Adamstown.

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James M'Dougall, a flatter, single, resided at Burwood Extended.

George Cook, an onsetter, married, nine children, resided at Dudley.

A. Durham, an onsetter, single, resided at Charlestown.

Archibald Mowbray, a flatter, single, resided at Charlestown.

William Rudge, a waterbailer, single, resided at Dudley.

Thomas Jones, a waterbailer, single, resided at Dudley.

Not the slightest hope of rescuing any of the missing men is now entertained. Even presuming they had escaped from the effects of explosion, it is considered certain that they would have succumbed to the after-damp, which must have permeated the whole of the workings.

THE SCENE OF THE CATASTROPHE.

The mining township of Dudley, situated about 10 miles by road from Newcastle, was originally known as South Burwood, but owing to the complications inseparable from a similarity of names it was deemed wise to change it to its present title. Like many other townships around Newcastle, it owes its rise to the colliery from which it derives its name. The site chosen is good and commands a view of the Nobbys to the north, the entrance to Lake Macquarie to the south, and an unbroken stretch of ocean to the east. The township has all the appearance of an important mining centre. There are several stores, two hotels, a large Public school, churches, and a post-office. The Dudley Colliery was commenced some eight years ago. The main shaft is 630ft. deep, being at present the deepest working one in this district, nearly the whole of the works having been carried out under the supervision of Mr. H. Humphreys, the present manager. The mine is connected with the Government railways by a private line four and a half miles long, and is distant from the cranes eight miles by rail. The coal is an exceptionally good sample, and is very free from impurities, and the seam is 6ft. 3in. of clean coal.

THE FIRST NEWS.

The terrible catastrophe happened without the slightest warning of any description. The Dudley Colliery has been generally returned as one of the most gaseous pits in the district, but at the same time it was one of the best ventilated and equipped mines in the colony. The miners never apprehended any serious danger. In fact, the mine was in full swing on Friday last, and operations were to have been resumed to-morrow. The deputies and others who are constantly descending the pit did not notice any extraordinary smell of gas, and the mine was considered perfectly safe. The colliery manager, Mr. Hugh Humphries, was sitting in his office when the disaster occurred. He describes the report as ten times louder than a volley of cannon. His first impression was that the boiler had burst; but rushing to the door of his office, he at once realised what had happened. The atmosphere was thick with small coaldust, vast volumes of debris were being hurled from the shaft's mouth, whilst timber and other materials were flying in all directions. The explosion was almost immediately followed by a smell of gas, which was detected for a distance of over two miles from the colliery. According to statements made the report was heard distinctly at Lambton, the Glebe, and Adamstown. The news spread like wildfire, and ere an hour had elapsed over 100 willing hands had gathered round the pit's mouth. The Dudley miners were anxious to be of some assistance to their comrades, but the damage caused to the winding gear was so extensive that a considerable time elapsed before any attempt could be made to descend the pit. The gas fumes also poured forth for some time after the explosion, and precluded any effort to afford assistance to those below. Streams of vehicles from the city continued to arrive during the whole of the afternoon and evening.

THE FIRST EXPLORING PARTY.

When repairs to the cage and the guides had been effected an exploring party of four, Mr. John Dixon, Senior Inspector of Collieries, Mr. T. Croudace, general manager of the Scottish Australian Com-

elected an exploring party of four, Mr. John Dixon, Senior Inspector of Collieries, Mr. T. Croudace, general manager of the Scottish Australian Company, Mr. Hugh Humphries, manager of the Dudley Company, and Mr. Duncan M'Geachie, manager of the Waratah Company, was formed to ascertain, if possible, the fate of those below, and the extent of the damage done under the surface. Every precaution was taken, but still the managers carried their lives in their hands. A very steady descent was made, and when 200ft. from the surface the foul air or after damp was encountered, necessitating an immediate return to the surface. A quantity of brattices was then erected around the main shaft, and a fan worked at full speed. This had the desired effect of improving the ventilation. With a view of testing the condition of the atmosphere below, a naked light was lowered in a cage, and upon the cage returning to the top without the light having been extinguished, those in charge arrived at the conclusion that the mine was practically safe.

THE SECOND PARTY.

A second descent was made about 1 o'clock, and the party, which this time consisted of Inspector Dixon, and Messrs. Croudace and M'Geachie, reached the bottom in safety. A hurried examination of the workings showed that access along the main tunnel, especially on the east side, was unobtainable. The party remained below for over an hour. Messrs. Croudace and M'Geachie were interviewed by the representative of the "Sydney Morning Herald" immediately they reached the surface. They stated they had felt round the pit bottom on their hands and knees but could feel nothing of the missing men. There was plenty of ventilation for a naked light, and there was no immediate danger. The fumes had moderated to a great extent, enabling them to reach a short distance beyond the flat. The entrance on the eastern side of the workings was completely blocked by debris, but the entrance on the west side was comparatively clear. The wreckage prevented the cage from reaching the bottom by about 2ft., and the members of the exploring party lowered themselves from the cage by means of the ropes. The body of the man who was in charge of the pumps at the bottom of the shaft was searched for, but no trace of it could be found.

THE EXTENT OF THE DAMAGE.

Some conception of the terrific force of the explosion may be gathered from the fact that the iron roofing of the sheds round the main shaft, a height of 50ft. from the surface, was burnt, torn, and shattered into atoms, and carried hundreds of yards away. The cage, weighing between 30cwt. and two tons, which was suspended at surface, was lifted bodily on 25ft., several of the guide lines were torn away, and the timber surrounding the top of the pit was blown to splinters. Tons of coal dust were hoisted to a height of over 100ft. and distributed a considerable distance around the estate.

Those who witnessed the immediate effects of the disaster describe it as resembling a volcanic eruption on a small scale.

The damage below has also been considerable, and some days must necessarily elapse before the extent of it is definitely known. The Hugh pumping machinery at the bottom of the shaft, weighing many scores of tons, was completely wrenched from its bearings and capsized. Several skips full of coal were carried for a considerable distance into the workings, and twisted into a variety of shapes. Large masses of timber 12in. in diameter, used as foundations at the pit's bottom, were completely splintered and knotted as though they had been wire. A cage suspended at the bottom of the pit was overturned and greatly damaged, whilst four of the thick guide lines were torn away and twisted into a network of wire, impeding to a great extent the efforts of the exploring party. Some scores of tons of debris were also carried by the violence of the explosion towards the main shaft, blocking up the entrance to the drives.

A WORKING PARTY FORMED.

Acting on the recommendation of members of the second exploring party, a working party of 12 was formed for the purpose of clearing away the debris at the bottom of the shaft, in order to enable the explorers to enter the main workings. No sooner was the request made than scores of volunteers [illegible] and it was determined to appoint several working parties, to relieve each other at frequent intervals. The first working party consisted of Messrs. Alfred Mason, Thomas Durham, S. Rundle, R. C. Dryden (secretary of the Dudley Miners' Lodge), R. Parker (in charge of cage), W. Ward, T. Parker, T. Smith, Evan Jones, Charles Nicholson, W. Patrick, and Crittingdale. This party accomplished excellent work within a very short space of time, and was under the supervision of Mr. T. Robson, engineer of the Dudley Colliery, and Mr. W. Short, engineer of the Lambton Colliery. Operations were commenced at 3 o'clock, and a considerable quantity of debris was sent to the surface. Relieving parties will continue the work throughout the night.

THE RESCUE PARTY.

As soon as an entrance to the main workings was cleared a rescue party of volunteers descended the mine. Faint hopes were entertained of the safety of any of the men, still it was thought possible that one or two who were known to be engaged in distant portions of the workings might have escaped the shock, and even survived the foul air. This party consisted of Mr. T. Croudace, manager of the Scottish Australian Mining Company, Mr. Ross, manager of the Wallsend Colliery, Mr. Mathieson, manager of the Hetton Colliery, and Mr. John Dixon, sen., inspector of collieries. A descent was made at 3.30 p.m., the party remaining below for over two hours. On reaching the bottom they divided into two parties to explore in different directions, with a view to recovering the bodies, or saving those who might still be alive. Messrs. Croudace and Dixon went 900 yards along the main heading, where they encountered extinctive gases or after-damp, and were driven back.

No trace of any of the men could be found, although a very diligent search was conducted. It was found that the stoppings used for directing the current of air from the ventilating shaft had been carried away by the explosion, thus interfering seriously with the ventilation of the workings. The overcast was also found to have been destroyed. When this state of affairs was found to exist below, all hopes of finding any of the men alive were abandoned. Owing to the destruction of the stopping the air produced by the fan passed out without circulating through the mine. The members of the party, upon reaching the surface, announced their determination to again descend during the evening, and to erect brattices as they proceeded, thus carrying the current of air along with them into the end of the workings.

SUPPOSED POSITION OF THE VICTIMS.

The exact whereabouts of the victims of the visitation are not known. This fact adds considerably to the difficulty experienced by the exploring and rescue parties. The 15 deputies and men were, it is presumed, distributed in various portions of the colliery. Three or four, it is believed, were in the second left crosscut, 400 yards from the pit bottom, in an east-north-easterly direction from the main shaft, and would be engaged in relaying a road preparatory to resuming operations on the following day. Others were more than probably employed in the work of removing stone pillars in that portion of the pit technically known as the second right return. The remainder of the 15 men would be located in the pump headings, or round the faces. The men in charge of the pumps would have been standing in charge of the pumping machinery immediately at the bottom of the main shaft. The explosion, it is presumed, originated at some spot between the air and main shafts. The work of exploring will be carried on continuously during the night, and several relieving shifts have been formed. It is, of course, intended in the first instance to devote attention to those portions of the workings just indicated, and should the search prove unsuccessful, the other portions of the mine will be thoroughly examined.

A LIFE-SAVING APPARATUS.

Dr. Leetrange Eames, instructor of the Government Miners' Ambulance Corps, recently formed at various centres in this district, was early on the scene, and brought with him two of the pneumatophors, or life-saving apparatus, imported by the Government a few weeks ago for use in gaseous

phors, or life-saving apparatus, imported by the Government a few weeks ago for use in gaseous mines. Owing, however, to the fact that the instruments had not been thoroughly tested, none of the colliery managers or men would undertake the risk of descending the mine with one of the machines. Experiments were, it will be remembered, recently made in Newcastle, but the construction and working of the apparatus are not sufficiently well known to warrant their adoption by mine managers. The pneumatophones are more particularly intended for use in workings, and were kept in readiness throughout the day and evening in case they were required. Medical men present were unanimously of opinion that had the Fieuss apparatus and telephonette system been obtainable, the mine could have been entered two hours earlier than was the case. It is understood that one of these apparatus is now on its way to Australia to the order of the New South Wales Government. The telephonette, which forms a portion of the apparatus, enables exploring parties to communicate with the surface from a distance of 1000 yards.

ACTION OF COLLIERY MANAGERS.

Signal service was rendered by the colliery managers of the district, and especial credit is due to Mr. Thomas Croudace, general manager of the Scottish-Australian Mining Company, who displayed indomitable courage in forcing his way against foul air and obstructions. Among others who assembled to render any assistance that might be required were Mr. James Fletcher, colliery manager of the Wickham and Bullock Island pit; Mr. Duncan M'Gechie, colliery manager of the Waratah pit; Mr. Joseph Croft, manager of the Newcastle Company's collieries; Mr. H. Mathieson, manager of the Hetton colliery; Mr. A. Ross, manager of the Wallsend colliery; Mr. W. Turnbull, manager of the A.A. Company's colliery; Mr. R. Thomas, manager of the Minmi collieries; Mr. J. Barr, manager of the Co-operative pit; Mr. G. Fletcher, under-manager of the Wickham and Bullock Island. Mr. Hugh Humphries, manager of the Dudley Colliery, also rendered excellent service, notwithstanding the mental agony he was undergoing. Not only were the lives of the whole of his trusted officials sacrificed, but among the missing men was his father, who held the position of one of the deputies.

Among other prominent residents who gathered around the pithead were noticed Mr. Alexander Brown, M.L.A., manager of the Newcastle branch of Messrs. Dalgety and Co., the shipping agent for Dudley Coal Company, Messrs. A. Edden and Watkins, M.L.A., and Mr. James Curley (the miners' secretary).

THE SCENE AT THE PIT'S MOUTH.

The gathering around the main shaft continued to swell throughout the afternoon and evening, and between 600 and 700 persons, all more or less interested in the fate of the entombed miners, remained throughout the day. There were many heartrending scenes, but the women bore the trial bravely. The increasing agony caused by the awful suspense was depicted on the countenances of quite 50 near relatives of those who it was almost certain had been hurled into eternity. About a score of women, wives and mothers, accompanied by their grief-stricken children, congregated around the head of the pit, and as the guide lines of the cage were noticed to move they clustered closer and closer around the entrance to ascertain the fate of those below, but no news was forthcoming. As the evening approached, camp fires were lighted in the vicinity, and a large number of people remained throughout the night. The officials of the colliery did everything in their power to allay the grief of those women who were mourning the loss of their breadwinners. The cries of the little children as they clung to their mothers were extremely pitiable. The recovery of the bodies was anxiously awaited, and the scene at the pit during the night was one of the most mournful ever witnessed in this district.

RECOVERY OF J. DORRITY'S BODY.

The search parties continued their explorations unceasingly, and at about 10 o'clock to-night the body of a young man named Dorrity was discovered about 200 yards from the bottom of the pit. The remains were very much charred and mutilated, but on close examination the features were recognisable. It is surmised that deceased was in the vicinity of the explosion, and must have been carried for a con-

examination the features were recognisable. It is surmised that deceased was in the vicinity of the explosion, and must have been carried for a considerable distance along the workings by the violence of the outbreak. The bones of the body were badly broken, and the clothes burned. The body was placed on a stretcher and temporarily deposited in the office on the estate. Information was eagerly sought, and all hopes of finding any of the other miners alive have now been abandoned. Deceased was a single man, and was in charge of the wheelers. He was very popular among his comrades, and until recently was a delegate of the Dudley Miners' Lodge on the Colliery Employees' Federation. An inquest on the body will be opened by the City Coroner at Russell's Hotel, Dudley, to-morrow morning.

AN ACT OF PROVIDENCE.

Had the disaster occurred 24 hours later, or a few days earlier, there can be no doubt but that between 250 and 300 lives would have been sacrificed. The colliery was in full swing as late as Friday last and operations would have been actively resumed to-morrow morning. It is merely a coincidence that the outbreak occurred when the pit was idle, and the explosion was in no way due to the fact that work had been temporarily suspended. Had the catastrophe taken place one day later, every home in the little village of Dudley would have been rendered desolate. The miners as a body consider they have had a narrow escape from certain death, and naturally feel very keenly the loss of so many of their fellow-employees. Work at the Dudley Colliery has not been very brisk of late, and as a consequence many of the families which have been bereaved are on the verge of destitution. Their immediate wants will, however, be attended to by prominent residents, and a relief fund will be inaugurated at an early date.

THE CAUSE OF THE EXPLOSION.

The gas which caused the explosion was carbonated hydrogen, commonly known as explosive gas or fire-damp. The origin of the disaster, however, cannot even be surmised, as everything was in its natural state when the last reports were received from below. The accumulation of foul gas must have been very rapid, and was due to some unknown cause. The mine was known to be a fiery one, but no danger was at any time anticipated, as may be judged by the fact that it has been the custom since the opening of the pit, eight years ago, to carry naked lights. The colliery managers of the district are at a loss to account for the mishap, and no theory has yet been put forward. It is, however, the prevailing impression that the volume of gas was ignited by coming in contact with one of the miners' lamps. Efforts to locate the exact spot, or even the place where the explosion originated, have not, so far, been attended with success. It is supposed, however, from the fact that the eastern entrances are blocked with debris, that the explosion took place in some portion of the workings in an easterly direction from the main shaft, and the different exploring parties report that no fire has been met with, but that it is not improbable that gob fires exist somewhere in the workings. The disaster is in no way similar to that which occurred at Stockton in December, 1896. The poisonous gas in that instance was carbon monoxide. It was pointed out, however, by several colliery managers that if gob fires exist in any of the workings there will be a danger of meeting the carbonic monoxide gas. Gob fires usually occur in abandoned workings, and the poisonous gas thrown off is due to incomplete combustion.

THE ACTION OF THE POLICE.

Immediately upon the receipt of the distressing news, Inspector Lynch left for the scene with a detachment of police. He remained at the colliery during the whole day and night, and his officers rendered material assistance to the colliery officials.

ARRIVAL OF THE CHIEF INSPECTOR.

Mr. A. A. Atkinson, Chief Inspector of Collieries, arrived from Sydney by train to-night. He alighted at Adamstown, and was driven to the colliery. After a hurried consultation with the other inspectors and colliery managers, he descended the workings for the purpose of conducting an investigation. His opinion as to the probable cause of the catastrophe is being anxiously awaited, and whatever advice he

pose of conducting an investigation. The opinion as to the probable cause of the catastrophe is being anxiously awaited, and whatever advice he tenders will be followed by the search parties. It is understood that the Minister for Mines (the Hon. Sydney Smith, M.L.A.) will arrive by special train.

LATEST NEWS FROM THE SCENE.

The latest news received from the Dudley Colliery is to the effect that up to midnight only one body, that of Dorrity, had been recovered. Several search parties are still in the pit, and operations will be continuously carried on throughout the night.