

## Chapter 5: A Mining Community



Commemorative plates relating to mining in Nottinghamshire. They show just how many mines there were in the area. Summit colliery in Kirkby is highlighted.

As with many towns and villages in the area at that time, Kirkby in Ashfield was a mining community. So, as with all families there, the life of my grandad's family took place against a backdrop of coal mining. His brother-in-law, John (Smith), Olive's husband, worked as a miner.<sup>1</sup> In February 1914, grandad noted that he had gone up to see Olive but she was not there as "*she had gone to the pit to take John's strap*". John had a number of accidents as a miner and grandad noted these. In one case he trapped his thumb and, in another, he was crushed between some tubs.<sup>2</sup> Fortunately, he did not experience serious injury but he had some close shaves. In July 1914, grandad noted that "*John had a narrow escape from the chair killing him*".

There were many collieries<sup>3</sup> in the vicinity of Kirkby but the closest, in the town itself, was known locally as Summit.<sup>4</sup> Not all the injuries which occurred there were minor. In June 1914, grandad noted that "*Mr Martin got hurt at Summit Col*" and that, on the 15th, his mother and Mrs Annie Bowmar "*went to see Mrs Martin*", presumably because of the injury to her husband. Grandad did not say how severe Mr Martin's injuries were but it seems they were serious as, in November 1914, he notes "*Buried Mr Martin*".<sup>5</sup> Also, in January 1918, he recorded that "*Mr Hinds had both legs cut off at the Summit crossing & died at Mansfield Hospital*".<sup>6</sup>

The Colliery in Kirkby was known as "Summit" because it was at the highest point on the railway between Pinxton and Mansfield. The colliery was sunk by the Butterley Company in 1888 to 1890 with a third shaft, to the Blackshale seam, being sunk in 1912.

Although there had been plans for Summit to become a "*Super Pit*" with an annual output of 1.5 million tons of coal, it was controversially closed in July 1968 when it began to experience geological problems and a planning application for a new pit tip and slurry pond extension was turned down. At the time of closure, the pit employed 2,258 men.

<sup>1</sup> At least for some time. In the 1911 census, his job was listed as a colliery onsetter below ground, i.e. he was responsible for the loading and unloading of cages. However, in the 1939 register, he was listed as a motor haulage contractor, bus proprietor.

<sup>2</sup> This was the second commonest cause of miners being killed after the roof collapsing, see [Chapter 59](#).

<sup>3</sup> These are briefly described in Bill Clay-Dove's book "*Kirkby-in-Ashfield: An Interesting Township*" (from p45). Much more detail is available in the book by A R Griffin "*Mining in the East Midlands 1550-1947*". Mark Ashfield provides interesting insights in his chapter "*When Miners Came Home Black*" in his book "*Christmas Pigs and a Summer Donkey*" pp51-57).

<sup>4</sup> According to Jonathan Evans' book "*The Mystery of Ernie Taylor's Abdomen*" (p7), "*the town was dominated by the Summit Colliery whose enormous black pit glowered over everything*". There are various places with good examples of photos of Summit Colliery, for example, in David Ottewell's book "*Kirkby-in-Ashfield and Annesley on Old Picture Postcards*" (#27), in Bill Clay-Dove's book "*Kirkby-in-Ashfield in Old Picture Postcards*" (#32 and #63) and in the book "*Kirkby & District: A Second Selection*" by Frank Ashley, Sylvia Sinfield and Gerald Lee (pp43-44 and p98 – this last photo also appears in Gerald Lee's "*Kirkby-in-Ashfield: Yesterday Remembered*" (p40)).

<sup>5</sup> Based on a list on Kirkby Living Memory Facebook Group, he was William James Martin, aged 36. He died as a result of a roof collapse and kidney disease. His wife was Ann Mary and they had six children. Based on a report on the Durham Mining Museum website, he was a stallman. On 11 June 1914, he was "*cutting down some clod to make room for a bar to support a slip to which he had just set a catch prop. He liberated the slip which allowed 2 cwt. of coal to fall upon his back causing injuries from which he died on 20th November, 1914*". A report of his inquest was included in a news report in the Mansfield Reporter and Sutton Times of 27 November 1914.

<sup>6</sup> I could not find any details of a Mr Hinds dying in the area during this period. A Mr Samuel Hind did die in the first quarter of 1918 in Mansfield. Based on the 1911 census, he lived in Edward Street and was a coal miner hewer. I confirmed that it was indeed him from an article in the Nottingham Journal the next day. This confirmed the details grandad had recorded and also noted that he was 70 years old. He was knocked down by a light engine while walking over the Summit rail crossing. He was found by two men who bandaged his injuries. He was transferred to Mansfield General Hospital where he died shortly after admission.

Summit Colliery in 1930



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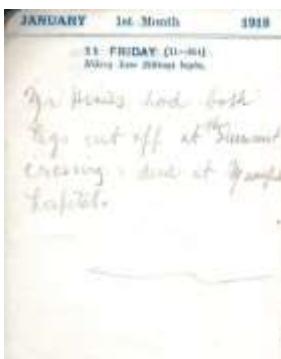
Postcard showing Summit Colliery in Kirkby with replica miner's lamp inset left and token inset right.

Paul Madin noted that these white tokens (motties) were used to claim weekly pay packets. He explained that "you went to one side of corridor to pick white motty up then went to other side to hand motty in to get corresponding number on wage packet"



Kirkby Colliery also called Summit/Leamore pit. 1887-1909			
Name	Age	Date of death	Cause of accident
Frederick Haist	20	24 March 1895	Fell out of the cage 23 March 1895.
Horatio Small	21	8 January 1905	Fell of roof
Arthur Smith	21	17 January 1905	Fell of roof
George Henry Gilman	22	27 January 1905	Fell of roof
James Williamson	23	7 August 1903	Ran over by lode
Charles Bacon	23	27 January 1905	Ran over by lode
James Frederick Mantell	26	20 September 1902	Ran over by lode 3 February 1902 Totanus
Horatio Small	26	8 January 1904	Fell of roof
John Edward Mantell	26	21 October 1904	Fell of roof
Henry Hill	26	25 October 1904	Fell of roof
Robert Chambers	26	30 October 1904	Ran over by a tub
John Edward Mantell	26	12 November 1904	Ran over by a tub
William White	26	12 January 1905	Fell of roof
John Edward Mantell	26	8 July 1905	Fell of roof
John Matthews	26	21 October 1905	Fell of roof
William Henry Small	26	1 July 1905	Crushed by the cage
John Edward Mantell	26	22 October 1905	Fell on a tub 2 August 1905 deceased Holley
James George Southam	26	26 October 1905	Ran over by lode
Charles Barber	26	23 November 1902	Fell of roof
Frank Palmer	26	27 January 1905	Ran over by lode
George William Cuthedge	26	27 January 1905	Ran over by a wagon on the surface
John Edward Mantell	26	16 December 1903	Fell of roof
James Barnes Martin	26	1 May 1904	Ran over by a wagon on the surface
George Dossing	26	1 December 1904	Ingested Mung tub 24 November 1904 Septicemia
Joseph Green	26	20 February 1905	Crushed by the tubs 30 January 1905
John Edward Mantell	26	25 February 1905	Ran over by lode 14 January 1905
James George Southam	26	26 October 1905	Fell of roof
Thomas Henry Ebsley	26	26 October 1905	Ran over by lode
John Hesley	26	27 August 1905	Fell of roof
George Awding	26	27 August 1905	Fell of roof
John Hesley	26	27 August 1905	Fell of roof
Frank Taylor	26	1 November 1905	Fell of roof
Tom Lovell	26	18 May 1906	Struck by a watch handle
John Edward Mantell	26	4 January 1906	Ran over by a wagon on the surface
William Jones	26	12 January 1905	Ran over by a wagon on the surface
John Edward Mantell	26	12 January 1905	Ran over by a wagon on the surface
Robert Cawley	26	19 September 1905	Ran over by a watch handle
Thomas Granville Mann	26	21 October 1905	Ingested 4 October 1905 Septicemia
John Edward Mantell	26	23 October 1905	Ran over by a wagon on the surface
William Hall	26	23 October 1905	Ran over by a wagon on the surface
John Edward Mantell	26	6 June 1906	Crushed by the cage 27 May 1905
John Edward Mantell	26	18 June 1906	Crushed by the cage falling down the shaft
Abraham Freeman	26	21 October 1905	Ran over by a wagon on the surface
Montague Abbott	26	3 April 1902	Crushed by a tub
William Hough	26	24 April 1902	Fell of roof

CRUSHED BY A "SLIP."	
KIRKBY MINER'S DEATH AT NOTTINGHAM	
HAM.	
A fall of roof at the Summit Colliery, East Kirkby, on June 11th last, was suffered as an impromptu punishment against Horatio Mantell on Tuesday to have contributed to the death of William James Martin, 36, a woker, of Milnes-street, East Kirkby. The inquiry was held by the City Coroner and attended by Mr. E. H. Smith, of the Mayor's Bench, Mr. W. Carter, of the Mansfield Association, and Messrs. J. Bremmick and J. Ellis Ferree for the Butterley Colliery Company.	
The evidence given by various witnesses went to show that on the day of his accident deceased was working in a stall where there was a "slip" or a small opening. That had been pointed out to him by a deputy, who had advised the setting of a catch prop, but evidently while the man was cutting down some coal, the "slip" fell, and the unfortunate miner was pranged to the ground underneath a heavy stone. The iron prop, which had not had been partially supported by a catch prop, and this was pushed out of position when the fall occurred.	
After the occurrence deceased was taken home, and the following day removed to the Nottingham Hospital, where he was found to be suffering from a ruptured bladder and a fractured pelvis. The iron prop had broken off, however, and on July 2nd the patient was discharged, only to be readmitted on October 26th, when there were symptoms of kidney disease. From that date until he died on Friday last he had remained an in-patient, and a post-mortem examination of his body showed extensive kidney affection, consequent upon the injury to the bladder. Death was due to that cause.	
The jury fixed a verdict of "Accidental death."	



## KILLED BY LIGHT ENGINE.

Early yesterday morning, Samuel Hind, aged 70, of Edward-street, East Kirkby, was knocked down by a light engine whilst walking over the Summit level crossing. He was found by two men, who bandaged up his injuries, and he was afterwards conveyed to the Mansfield Hospital, where he died soon after admission. Deceased was severely injured about the legs.

Top – examples of mine tokens from Nottinghamshire collieries. These tokens (also called checks or tallies) were used to provide information as to who was at work. Essentially, a miner used these to get a lamp at the start of a shift and got the token back at the end when they handed the lamp in

Middle – top left – grandad's diary entry for 11 June 1914 noting that Mr Martin was hurt at Summit Colliery; above left – grandad's diary entry for 25 November 1914 which notes that Mr Martin was buried; above centre – list of miners killed at Summit Colliery between 1895 and 1922. Mr Martin's death highlighted. List from [Kirkby Living Memory Facebook Group](#); above right – news article from the Mansfield Reporter and Sutton Times of 27 November 1914 concerning the death of William James Martin. The cutting was obtained by paid subscription to [Find My Past](#)

Above – left – grandad's diary entry for 11 January 1914 concerning a fatal injury to Mr "Hinds" at the Summit Crossing; right – news cutting from Nottingham Journal of 12 January 1914 obtained through paid subscription to [Find My Past](#)

On 30 June 1915, at the neighbouring Bentinck colliery, two cages, that were taking men up and down the 1,500 ft mine shaft, collided. There are very extensive details of this tragedy on the [Northern Mine Research Society's website](#).<sup>7</sup> There were 14 men in the descending cage and two in the one that was ascending. Seven men, who had been in the descending cage were knocked out of it and were killed. In the descending cage, two of the men were dead and the remaining five were injured. They were suspended in a cage that had lost its flooring. The two men in the ascending cage were injured but not seriously. The rescue of the men from the cage took several hours and longer to recover the bodies of those who had died. There is a very striking eye witness story by Charles Simpson, one of the surviving men, on the Northern Mine Research Society's website.

Those who were killed in the accident were:

- Willlie Sysan aged 18 years
- William Bacon aged 40 years who left a widow and seven children
- Harold Brown aged 14 years
- Ferdinand Wright aged 45 years who left six children
- Percy Staton aged 32 years who left a widow and four children
- Amos Allen aged 32 years who left a widow and a child
- George Simpson
- Willis King aged 25 years
- John C. Fletcher aged 39 years

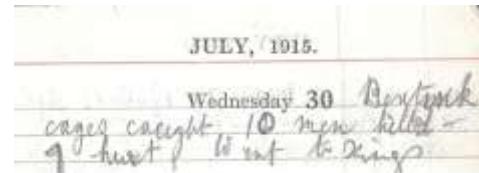
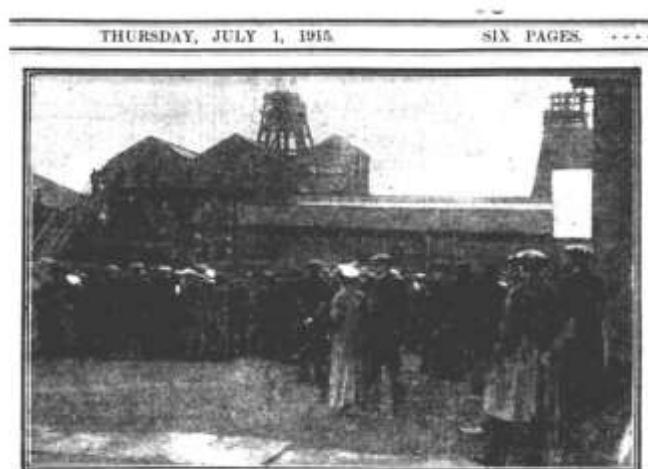
Those who were seriously injured were:

- W. Bacon aged 60 years who had a broken leg and head injuries
- C. Baron who was seriously injured and taken to hospital

Others less seriously injured were:

- James Smith
- E. Ainger aged 32 years
- Robert Walker aged 24 years
- Harold Shelton aged 28 years
- Charles Simpson aged 37 years

Grandad recorded the incident in his diary "*Bentinck cages caught, 10<sup>8</sup> men killed, 9 hurt*". He also noted that, within three months of the disaster, his friend Willie Clover had started to work at Bentinck colliery on nights.



Left – this image was posted by Nottinghamshire Mining Museum on [Kirkby Living Memory Facebook Group](#) with thanks to the British Library Board who have the copyright on this photograph  
Above – extract from grandad's diary for 30 July 1915

<sup>7</sup> In addition, there has been discussion of this on the [Kirkby Living Memory Facebook Group](#) including a photo from the newspaper on 1 July.

<sup>8</sup> Initially, it was thought that the death toll had been higher with the local newspaper reporting that 12 miners had been killed. As more accurate information became available, the death toll was revised down.

# BENTINCK PIT DISASTER

On Wednesday June 30th 1915 there was an horrific accident at Kirkby Bentinck Colliery. Nine men lost their lives and 7 were injured in this accident.

Mid shaft the two cages collided at a combined speed of more than 80 mph. 7 men were instantly flung out or fell from the bottom. 2 more men died inside from the impact.

One man, Robert Walker from nearby Sutton-in-Ashfield described how a miracle had saved his life. His trousers caught on the bottom rail and he was suspended with his head hanging downwards, swinging like that for 20 minutes unconscious. His hand touched the rail on the bottom of the cage, he caught hold and pulled himself up to stand on the rail. This was above a 660 foot drop to a certain death.

The survivors, some being severely injured had a 2 hour wait before being brought to safety.

6 doctors had gone to the bottom of the shaft but there was nothing they could do for the men there.



8 hours after the accident the bodies were eventually brought up. There was a huge crowd waiting in the pit yard and relatives were called for identification. Several women fainted and had to be revived by the Red Cross nurses.

The youngest victim of this awful disaster was 14-year-

old Harold Brown of Sutton who was described as a lovely youth.



## The fatalities were:

Ferdinand Wright (45), Amos Allen (32), George Simpson (54), Willis King (25), John Fletcher (39) all from Kirkby, William Syson (18), Harold Brown (14), of Sutton, Percy Staton (23) of Ripley, William Bacon (40) of Selston.

The injured men were Ernest Ainger, James Smith and Charles Simpson of Kirkby, Robert Walker and Harold Shelton of Sutton, W. Bacon (60) and C. Bacon of Selston.

The disaster numbed the local mining community as well as the surrounding communities.

There was a local inquiry into the disaster which was held on Thursday July 22, 1915 at the Limeburners Inn (now called The Countryman).

The official verdict was the deceased were accidentally killed by reason of two cages coming into violent contact.

There were sadly many accidents in the local pits and many young people were amongst the victims.

There is a detailed report of this accident and the inquiry into it at Kirkby Heritage Centre.



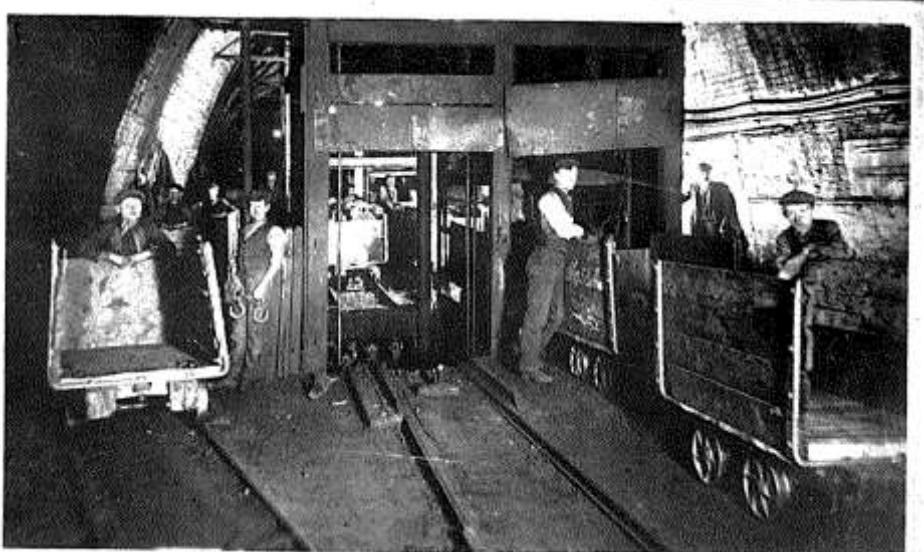
Want to find out more about Kirkby and the surrounding area's history?

Pop into the Heritage Centre on Kingsway for a brew and a warm welcome from the Centre volunteers.

Open most days 10am-12noon or take a look at the Facebook page.  
Kirkby Heritage Centre, 13 Kingsway, Kirkby-in-Ashfield NG17 7BB

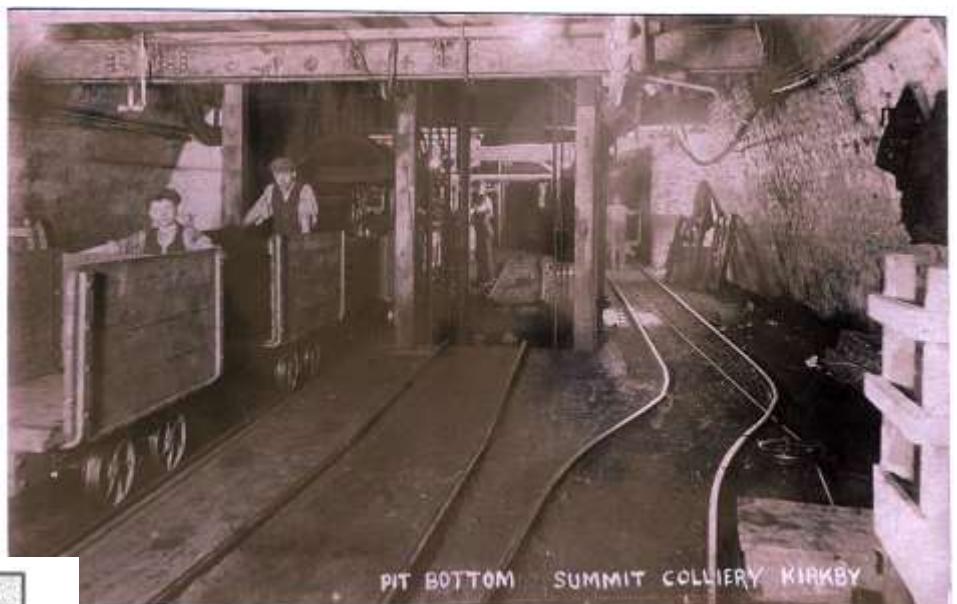
Tel: 01623 720111

*Report of the Bentinck Pit Disaster from Kirkby Heritage Centre and obtained from [Annesley OC Heritage Extra Facebook page](#)*



Postcards showing the pit bottom of Summit Colliery – the photograph on the left also appears in the book "Kirkby & District in Old Photographs" by Frank Ashley, Sylvia Sinfield and Gerald Lee, p51

PIT BOTTOM, SUMMIT COLLIERY, KIRKBY.



PIT BOTTOM SUMMIT COLLIERY KIRKBY

## Summit Colliery By Chris Kidger



Front cover of "Summit Colliery" by Chris Kidger

Many of the books relating to Kirkby that I have consulted reflect the mining environment which dominated the town for many years. For example, in her book(let) "*I Remember*" (p52), Edith Searson recalled as "*a notable event*" the installation of a pithead bath at Bentinck Colliery in 1935 as this meant miners could wash before returning home after a shift. Chris Kidger of Kirkby Heritage Centre has produced a book(let) about Summit Colliery which captures experiences of people who worked there.