

Coal Mining at Fogg's pit, Darcy Lever.

Fogg's "colliery" was a coal mine located along the Bolton arm of the Manchester, Bolton and Bury Canal. The pit saw periods of excavation between the 1820s and 1913. It was originally sunk by Andrew Knowles & sons along with various other pits in the area including Agecroft, Clifton Hall, Clifton Moss and Farnworth bridge which were situated further along the canal. Owing to the large amount of 'coal pits' that existed in this area during this period, it's impossible to be certain which was Fogg's pit specifically, though it is likely and presumed to be the area at the east bank of the canal north from Hall Lane, marked 'Knowles pit' on the ordinance survey map of Darcy Lever 1844-48 which is available at Bolton archive. This is confirmed by the close proximity of Fogg's farm and cottages which are a short distance further along the canal (Nadim, 2006. et al.). A number of different seams or "mines" belonging to the West Manchester coal field were accessed at Fogg's for excavation, with some like the Arley mine being worked out as early as 1838. The original shaft at Fogg's extended 380 yards down to the Arley Mine (this is the deepest seam of the Middle Coal Measures in the West Manchester coal field.). However as said, this was worked out and all but exhausted leading to its abandonment in 1838. The "upcast shaft" where air left the mine was most likely located at the Victoria Pit north west of Darcy Lever Old Hall.

The conditions at Fogg's pit would have been consistent of collieries at the time and, as with others, accidents were not uncommon. Fogg's is infamous for two disasters that occurred at the site, one on the 7th of February 1877 and another 40 years later on October 4th 1907. At the time of the first accident in 1877 work was taking place to excavate the Doe mine at a depth of 320 yards into the shaft, 60 yards above the earlier exhausted Arley Mine. The Doe seam is made up of two sections of coal separated by dirt, the seam outcrops on either side of the River Irwell and was known to be liable to spontaneous combustion in some areas. At the time of the accident some 50 men and boys were employed at the pit and were working as far as 900 yards from the shaft in the more remote areas. Workers would use candles for light, as ventilation was good and gas was rarely reported at that particular site. Thirteen men were working in these remote areas on the day of Fogg's deadliest accident, a few hours into the working day at about 10 o'clock surface workers noticed a plume of thick black smoke rising from the upcast shaft at the Victoria pit. There was no bang which was the norm for colliery explosions, not long after though a signal to wind up the cage used to carry men in and out of

the mine was received from inside the shaft. It was later reported from men working at the most remote area of the mine; near James Edge's farm, that the cavity had filled with thick smoke leaving them with no option but to evacuate. This left them unable to warn others further into the mine. Immediately after the evacuation a roll-call was taken of all the men working in the pit that morning, it was found that 10 men were left behind.

Shortly after, a courageous attempt was made to get through the remaining smoke in search of the 10 remaining men; it was found that there had indeed been an explosion as the roof had collapsed in sections of the Doe mine. To the dismay of the would-be rescuers, it was discovered that the explosion had ignited exposed coal in the mine making it impossible for anyone to escape. All ten workers died that day. It is thought that a candle set fire to the brattice cloth used to regulate airflow around the mine, leading to a build-up of methane which then ignited. The victims of the Fogg's disaster made the news as far away as London; poems were even published characterising the air of sympathy felt towards miners and the

Colliery Accident I

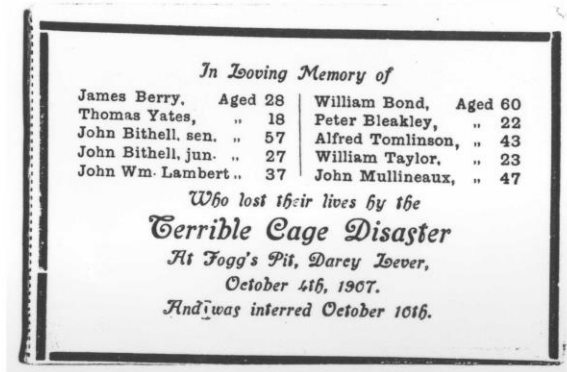
A shocking accident occurred at Fog's colliery, Darcy Lever, near Bolton, on Wednesday, February 7th, when 10 poor colliers were burnt and suffocated by fire-damp.

<p><i>Tune—Just before the Battle.</i></p> <p>Many a time a tale of sorrow, About poor Colliers we have to tell, Death must come in all its horrors, From beneath that gloomy well; They cause the death of many thousands, Whose families are left to mourn, Hundreds shed a tear of pity, When a collier to his grave is borne.</p> <p>At Darcy Lever ten poor colliers, Were burnt to death while underground, Heaven help their wives and children, Sorrow and trouble they have found.</p> <p>At a Colliery not far from Bolton, These poor men laboured in the mine; Colliers see but little comfort, Working where no sun can shine: The fire damp so fierce and scorching, Their helpless bodies did surround, None could help them, none assist them, Burnt to death while underground.</p> <p>It was upon the seventh of February, They met their sad and shocking death, All was dark and gloomy round them, When they gave up their last breath; Their bodies could not be recovered, Upon the fatal day they died, The poor men could not be discovered, Tho' many a volunteer had tried.</p>	<p>The others working in the coal mine, Did escape the fearful doom, They knew their comrades were in danger, But could not penetrate the gloom; They could not help their brother colliers, They knew the fatal fire was there, Scorching and burning the poor dead victims Far away from light and air.</p> <p>The village is a scene of mourning, Sorrowful faces testify, The loss of those who danger scorning, Only left home fit to die. A collier's heart is full of pity, His willing help is always shown, He knows the fate of these poor miners, To-morrow, perhaps, it may be his own.</p> <p>The widows and the little children, Are in the midst of trouble now, They feel the stroke from heaven greatly, Yet before it they must bow. God we know will not desert them, Friends for them are sure to rise, Until that day when angels call them, To join their lost ones in the skies,</p> <p>London:—H. P. Suck, Printer & Publisher, 177, Union Street, Bow.</p>
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harsh conditions they endured, these are available to view at Bolton's archive.

Following the explosion Fogg's remained in operation and for the twenty years before its close in 1913, an average of two hundred and fifty men were employed in subterranean work and about eighty at the surface during this period. It was at this time that Fogg's second major accident occurred on the 4th of October 1907, when an ascending cage collided with a descending cage in the downcast shaft, the ascending cage fell to the long since abandoned depths of the mine, those who may have survived the fall drowned in flood water. Nine men perished in all.

Figure 1 Example of poems relating to the disaster of 1877. Available to view at Bolton Archives Heritage Centre. Call No. 633.33 POE.



Black and white copy photograph of pit head at Fogg's Pit, Little Lever after the disaster of October 4th 1907. On reverse of print is copy of the memoriam card for the 10 men who lost their lives. (Local history collection, Bolton Museum)

This tragedy would mark the beginning of the end for Fogg's as a working colliery, it was abandoned on the on the 24th of November 1913 just before the beginning of the Great war. Not much remains on the surface at least, from Fogg's past. Today the area is made up of green open spaces, a place for leisure with little sign of the untiring excavation that took place there between the 1820s and 1913. Perhaps if people knew of Fogg's industrial past they would be able to even better appreciate the natural calm, and tranquil ease with which life now carries itself at the site in this post Industrial age.

Research carried out by volunteer Lewis Dawson for the Lancashire Wildlife Trust's Kingfisher Trail Project 2016/17

Key terms:

Coal field: A subterranean area that contains common deposits of coal distributed within “seams” which appear at different depths. (e.g. Fogg’s colliery falls in the west Manchester coal field a sub branch of the Lancashire coal field)

Coal measure: Is a term relating to rock layers for a coal-bearing part of the upper Carboniferous system (fossil based rock formations). Consisting of upper, middle, and lower coal measure formation.

Colliery: An area dedicated to coal excavation, often made up of a primary “downcast shaft” that may then lead to different “seams” or “mines” at varying depths. (e.g. Fogg’s colliery accessed, Avery, Doe and other mines)

Downcast shaft: The downcast is the shaft by which fresh air descends into the mine.

Mine: A coal mine refers to the seam at a certain point in the coal measure, different mines are present at different depths within the coal field. (e.g. Avery mine)

Upcast shaft: The shaft by which the spent air is expelled after ventilating the mine workings. It may be considered a type of chimney.

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