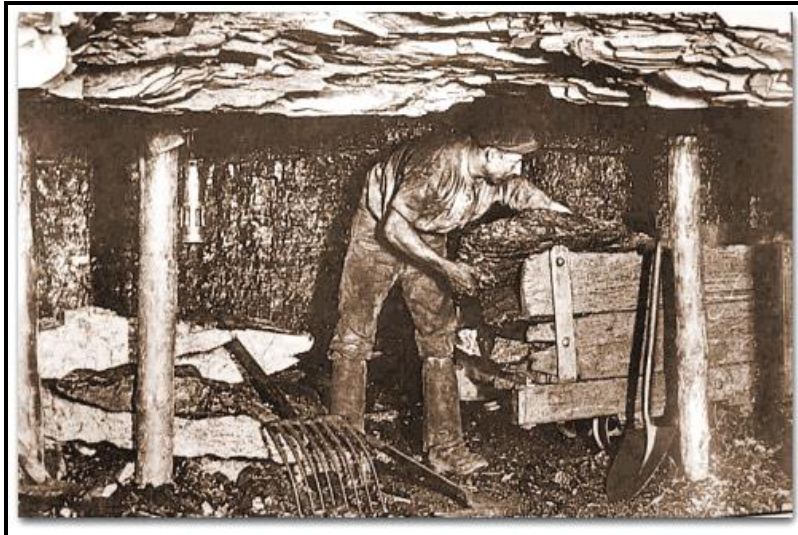


*THE CALIFAT COAL MINE TRAGEDY  
(Coleorton No. 2. pit)  
October 1863*



*By Samuel T Stewart - January 2021*

## PREFACE

This publication has been written by the author as a memorial to the three men who lost their lives by drowning in the inundation at the Coleorton No.2. Califat coal mine, and the brave men who tried to rescue them. They were - Jeremiah Rose of Belton, a carpenter, who left a wife and six children; Thomas Bird, foreman (known as the corporal) and in charge of the boys, &c., who left a wife and nine children; and Henry Clements, a pony driver, who was only a boy aged sixteen at the time, and resided at Limby Hall, Swannington.

Information has been researched and transcribed from various newspapers of the day that reported the incident in detail and earlier papers relating to issues at Pegg's Green Colliery which had an influence on the unfortunate outcome:-

Leicester Mercury – November 28<sup>th</sup> 1857

Leicester Chronicle – January 29<sup>th</sup> 1859

Leicestershire Mercury – October 10<sup>th</sup> 1863

Leicester Guardian – Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> October 1863

The Morning Post – October 21<sup>st</sup> 1863

*The information has been cross-checked against various other fragmented records and reports, so is hopefully an accurate reflection on events. The author recommends reference to the following technical report, however, it seems strange that no mention is made in it of the inundation at Califat:- "Califat Colliery, Swannington Common: Site History and Excavation Report by Peter Neaverson"*

**OTHER COMPLIMENTARY, FREE TO DOWN LOAD, COAL MINING RELATED PUBLICATIONS BY THE AUTHOR WHICH CAN BE FOUND ON THE GRIFFYDAM HISTORY GROUP WEBSITE**

**[griffydamhistory.com](http://griffydamhistory.com)**

**OR THE AUTHOR'S WEBSITE**

**<https://samuelstewart940.wixsite.com/mysite>**

- The Development of Coal Mining in the Local Area
- A Record of Fatalities in Local Coal Mines 1782-1957
- A History of Coleorton No. 3. Colliery (Bug & Wink) 1875 – 1933
- A History of Coal Mining and Brick & Sanitary Pipe Making, in the Vicinity of Newbold
- A History of Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century Coal Mining in the Manor of Pegg's Green
- Coal Mining in the Smoile
- The Loyal William Worswick Lodge of Oddfellows M.U. (No.5393) Established 1865 at the New Inn, Pegg's Green.
- The 1842 General Strike And Its Effect on NW Leicestershire Coal Miners

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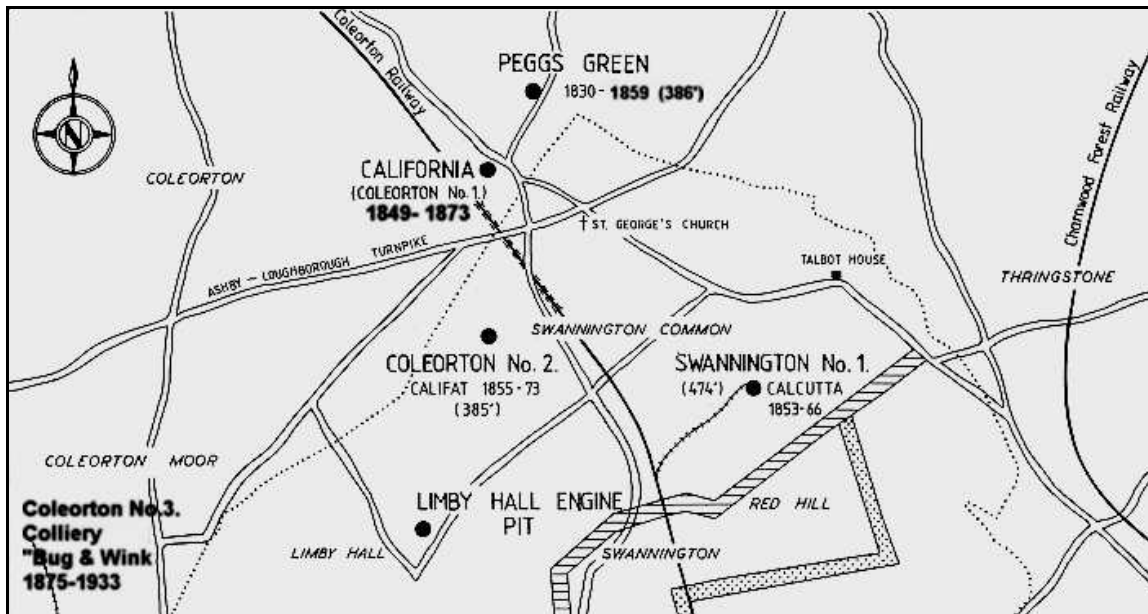
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## INTRODUCTION

### LIST OF COAL MINES REFERRED TO IN THE FOLLOWING TEXT

- A) Pegg's Green 1830 - 1859  
**Various partners over its lifetime**
- B) Coleorton No1. (Known as California Pit) 1849 - 1873  
**Benjamin Walker & William Worswick**
- C) Coleorton No.2. (Known as Califat but also as Alabama and Windmill pit) - Actually sited just within Swannington parish 1855 - 1873  
**Benjamin Walker & William Worswick**
- D) Swannington No.1. (known as Calcutta) 1853 - 1866  
**William Worswick**

### LOCATION OF THE ABOVE COAL MINES



Swannington Parish Boundary designated by.....

The story of the sad loss of life caused by the flooding of the Califat mine starts with Pegg's Green Colliery. This relatively large colliery was opened in 1830 and closed in 1859.

In 1849, Benjamin Walker & William Worswick as partners and proprietors had sunk shafts and opened the Coleorton No.1. (California) mine on land leased from Sir George Beaumont.

In 1852, William Worswick and Benjamin Walker had entered into an agreement with the partners in the Pegg's Green Colliery for the exchange of coal lying near to the California mine and Pegg's Green colliery to the benefit of both collieries and also for the joint pumping of water out of the California mine into the Pegg's Green mine where it would be pumped out by the Pegg's Green pumps.

Encouraged by the success at the California pit, Worswick turned towards Swannington where large quantities of the Main Seam coal plus other seams remained and in December 1852, he made an agreement with the land owners, the Trustees of Wyggeston Hospital to lease the Main Coal under 747 acres at £111 per acre for 35 years. Within 3 months he had started sinking shafts to the east side of Swannington Common (see map) for his Swannington No.1. Calcutta Colliery.

In 1855, shafts had been sunk for the new Coleorton No.2. Califat colliery to the west side of Swannington common. Although this was referred to as a Coleorton mine it was in fact just inside the Swannington parish boundary. This was a joint enterprise between Walker & Worswick.

Apparently little forethought was given to the provision of pumping the water out of these mines or to their ventilation except by making a water and airway through a portion of the Pegg's Green mine into the close by California mine and then turning the whole of the water pumped from the Calcutta, Califat and California mines into the Pegg's Green mine pumping facilities.

The working of the coal had become increasingly difficult at Pegg's Green, which persuaded the main shareholder at the time, the Cowlshaw and Breedon Everard family to sell 30 shares to Worswick and Walker, for which a contract was drawn up on the 14<sup>th</sup> October, 1856. This gave Walker and Worswick a controlling interest in the Pegg's Green colliery, but the ulterior motive was clearly to force the closure of the Pegg's Green mine and facilitate the pumping of water into it via interconnecting roadways from Calcutta, Califat and California.

A court injunction was obtained by other partners in the Pegg's Green Colliery in September 1857 to try and prevent Worswick and Walker interfering with the engine pumping the water at Pegg's Green which was subsequently overturned in the Vice-Chancellor's Court in the following November.

Other partners went to court after the horse had bolted in January 1859 to try and void the sale of the shares by Cowlshaw and Everard which had taken place in 1856 to Worswick and Walker, but this was thrown out in Vice-Chancellor Wood's Court. Two of the remaining partners Thomas Bostock and John Knight were accused of colluding with Walker and Worswick.

It was only 12 months later on December 3<sup>rd</sup> 1859 that Pegg's Green Colliery was dissolved by mutual agreement of the remaining shareholders Thomas Bostock, John Price, William Kidger, Benjamin Walker and William Worswick. So it seems to the author that Worswick and Walker had finally achieved their aim!

**London Gazette – January 10<sup>th</sup> 1860**

**PEGGS GREEN COLLIERY, LEICESTERSHIRE  
NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN**

That the partnership heretofore subsisting between us, the undersigned Thomas Bostock, John Price, William Kidger, John Knight, Benjamin Walker, and William Worswick, under the style or firm of "Bostock, Price and Co.," and sometimes called "The Peggs Green Colliery company", or under any other style or firm whatsoever, has been this day **DISSOLVED** by mutual consent

Dated the third day of December 1859

Within a week the Pegg's Green Colliery and its associated plant was put up for sale but the colliery and land lease was never purchased or worked by anyone else as far as the author can ascertain.

**Leicester Journal – December 9<sup>th</sup> 1859**

**Valuable Colliery and Plant, at Thringstone, in the Parish of Whitwick,  
Leicestershire**

**TO BE SOLD BY AUCTION**

**(Without Reserve)**

**By Mr. CHUBB**

**At the Queen's Head Inn, Ashby de la Zouch, on Wednesday, the 28<sup>th</sup> day of  
December, 1859, at Four o'clock in the Afternoon, subject to conditions of sale  
which will then be produced**

A VALUABLE COLLIERY called the Pegg's Green Colliery, situate at Thringstone, in the county of Leicester, and comprising about 40 acres of ungot Coal, and about 23 acres of LAND, and several MESSUAGES or DWELLING-HOUSES and COTTAGES; the reserved Rent of the Plant, Land, and Building being £125 per annum, and the minimum Rent for the Colliery £400 a year.

Also, a STEAM PUMPING ENGINE, of 55 horse power, 2 WINDING ENGINES of 30 and 14 horse power, and the valuable PLANT and MACHINERY on the premises.

The Colliery and Land (except the engine and machinery and other erections) are held under a Lease, which will expire on the 25<sup>th</sup> day of March, 1873.

Pegg's Green coal is of the first quality, and commands the best price in the market, and the demand has always exceeded supply. The colliery is situated on a branch railway connected with the Midland Railway between Burton-on-Trent and Leicester, and has direct access by Rail to Leicester, and other parts of the Kingdom ; and an extensive and lucrative Land Sale may be relied on.

Printed particulars with plans and conditions of Sale may be obtained after the 14<sup>th</sup> day of December at the principle Hotels in the neighbourhood, and of the Auctioneer, and the undermentioned solicitors, and in the meantime further information will be given on application to Messrs. Miles, Gregory, and Bouskell, Solicitors, Leicester ; or to MR. GEORGE F. BROWN, Solicitor, Ashby de la Zouch.

To view the premises, apply to Mr. William Kidger ; or, Mr. John Price, Pegg's Green Colliery, Ashby de la Zouch.

## **THE INUNDATION – THURSDAY OCTOBER 8th 1863 THREE MEN AND TWENTY NINE HORSES DROWNED**

On the morning of October 8th about half past eleven o'clock, an alarm was raised that water had broken into the Coleorton No.2. Califat pit, owned by Messrs Worswick and Walker. The men underground rushed to the pit's mouth, and as many as could be were drawn up the shaft. Unfortunately, the rapid deluge of the water prevented all the men from reaching the coveted spot, and three were drowned. Their names were Jeremiah Rose, Belton, a carpenter, who left a wife and six children; Thomas Bird, foreman (known as the corporal) and in charge of the boys, &c., who left a wife and nine children; and Henry Clements, a pony driver, who was only a boy aged sixteen at the time and lived at Limby Hall, Swannington.

Apparently, "stalls" in the pillar and stalls workings down the mine had been carried up to within 16 yards of the old Limby Hall Pit workings for some time, and the men who were engaged in stall number 8 had calculated that the heading could go another 80 yards before it had to be abandoned, but they unexpectedly breached the supporting pillar of coal into the 70 year old Limby Hall pit workings

In 1858, the mines inspector, John Hedley, advised Benjamin Walker (joint proprietor at that time with William Worswick) to drain the water from old workings in the direction of Limby Hall so as to be able to work Califat towards there. Walker took his advice, but in 1860 retired from the business, and the plans relating to the collieries were passed to William Bailey the new manager. Both he and his assistant George Lewis, were "apparently aware" that the heading was approaching old workings in the region of Limby Hall pit but should have noticed the presence of an old Engine Pit identified on the plan. Unfortunately, an old heading 37 yards from the engine pit was breached. Water suddenly appeared in a stall from a breach in the coal face, but apparently Bailey and Lewis were not particularly concerned, and arranged for the breached coal face to be plugged in some way.

One of the poor fellows who lost his life, Jeremiah Rose, a carpenter from Belton, was sent down to plug the holes through which the water was flowing, but about half-past 11 the seam wall in the stall gave way, and the water rushed in with overwhelming force; an alarm was raised, and all the men that could, made a rush for the bottom of the shaft. Fortunately there was a reservoir which filled up and held back a large quantity of the water before it overflowed to the area surrounding the bottom of the shaft, which gave the men time to ascend before it was upon them.

The inundation of the mine fortunately took place when only the day men were working below ground, meaning that only about 50 of the 200 total work force were at work.

It was about three o'clock in the morning when water was first perceived coming through the side of one of the stalls in the workings, and between six and seven o'clock it was increasing, so that several of the men refused to go down the pit to work.

Apparently the engine pumps at the Califat, California, Calcutta, and Pegg's Green collieries, all of which were inter-connected by underground roads continued working night and day and were capable of raising some 1500 to 1600 gallons per minute, however, the deluge of water that was rushing in from the old Limby Hall pit workings

was gaining momentum on the pumps, and by the Monday following, 15 inches of water had built up in the pit bottom.. There was a further misfortune in that a problem occurred with the pump at Califat and although speedily repaired, the water had gained another 6 inches in the pit bottom and was now 21 inches deep since the day of the accident.

News quickly reached the California pit, between which there was a communicating roadway, and the men and boys from there were immediately drawn up the shaft without any injuries or loss of life. There were large reservoirs between the pits, which checked for a time the progress of the water.

The flooding eventually prevented ventilation passing through the Califat mine and a build up of foul smelling sulphurous air together with “fire damp” (explosive gas) and “choke damp” (suffocating gas) increased in intensity.

Great exertions were made by the men on the day following the accident to ascertain the fate of those below, although it was considered impossible that any of them could be alive. The men who descended were unable to proceed far owing to the depth of water, then about six feet. After shouting and waving their lights, they were answered by F. Doman, who had managed to get up into a hole; he was immediately got out safe, as were also Thomas Bird, the younger (his father was drowned), and a fellow named Marsden, who had managed to get into a stable, thus making three men saved. The dead body of Henry Clements was unfortunately recovered. Owing to the foul state of the air and the lamps becoming speedily extinguished when a man had travelled far from the bottom of the shaft, no further attempt could be made but some more horses were also recovered.

Further attempts were made to get the horses out of the pit, and this was partially successful, but the water made such rapid progress, and when the last was drawn up, the water could evidently be seen down the shaft seething and foaming like a whirlpool.

There were many narrow escapes amongst those that survived. One poor bruised fellow told a newspaper correspondent that upon the alarm being given, he and his son ran for their lives; his lamp went out directly, and they were left in total darkness. They ran on striking their heads now and again against projecting coal, and hearing the rushing of the water behind them, which did not seem more than two yards off. They ran on, and were all but exhausted before they got to the shaft but he was pushed on by his son.

There were two shafts at Califat one being used for winding and the other for pumping. The winding shaft in the newspaper report is specifically referred to as a double shaft (two shafts inter – joined) and this is the shaft where the bratticing, took place to improve ventilation.

On Saturday the 24<sup>th</sup> October, air tubes were put down the shaft and the foul air abated somewhat enabling men to proceed a considerable distance up the workings towards the incline where the coal wall was breached, by which time the area was now reasonably dry. During that day, one horse was found alive about 400 yards from the bottom of the shaft towards where the breach was made, and another dead one was discovered in that direction also. 19 horses had been recovered by this time but eight more were still missing. Different reports exist for the total number of horses drowned but it was in the order of 29.

Mr. Worswick had been constantly in attendance with other senior men advising Mr. Hedley, of Derby, the Government inspector, on how they intended to recover the bodies of the two missing men. For the previous few days men had been engaged in converting the "double shaft" into upcast and downcast shafts in order to provide better ventilation in the mine. This was achieved by dividing the double 130 yard deep shaft with "brattice" wood work and then continuing along the roadway from the shaft bottom with tarred canvass sheets for about 100 yards up the workings. Jets of steam were also introduced into the shafts to disturb the air and give a better flow up and down the shafts. This work enabled the men to make good progress, and with diligence they were able to keep their lamps lit even though the air was still foul.

Even at this stage, water still rushed out of the Limby all workings but passed down the incline away from where the men were working higher up. It was hoped that in a few days the brattice work would be completed to a distance of about 600 yards from the bottom of the shaft where they expected to meet with a double roadway and more pure air. If successful, this should enable them to proceed up to the old workings in which direction they hoped to find the two missing men.....**no subsequent information has been found to continue the story further.**

Even though the colliery was re-opened, drainage and the threat of flooding from nearby workings continued to pose many problems in the Califat mine and as output rapidly declined the colliery was closed on March 1873 **shortly after the death of William Worswick.**

## THE INQUEST

The inquest relative to the circumstances connected with the inundation of the Califat, California and Pegg's Green pits by which three lives were lost, was opened on Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> October at the Railway Inn, Swannington before Mr. J. Gregory, coroner for Leicestershire and a jury. This was 6 days after the inundation.

It was said by Mr. Hedley, the Government Inspector that the water in the pits diminished, owing to the incessant and effective pumping which took place. Mr. George Lewis, the manager of the colliery stated that no examination of the breach into the Limby Hall workings had yet been made. William Wilton stated that a stream of water about the thickness of a man's leg was initially observed. The break was described as being "pricked" by the colliers about three o'clock in the morning, which widened and deluged the pits by half past nine following attempts to plug up the hole by sprags and wedges to support the coal and prevent a further breach. The water rapidly started to gain upon the men and it was quickly ascertained that the "Hollows" (a name given to some adjoining empty pits in the old Limby Hall workings) had been broken into, as the colour of the water changed from clear to ochre and red, which had a foul smell.

William Clements, the father of Henry Clements, the 16 year old pony driver who was drowned was amongst the first to discover the leakage of water, but although he was able to leave the pit himself, he was apparently confused, and did not think about warning his boy not to go down the pit, even though he had met him on the bank preparing to descend. He knew the men had hit "the hollows", and told them to knock off work.

William Clements complained of there being no boring rods, and said to Pickering, the ground bailiff, "I told you about a fortnight ago that rods ought to have been before us". Pickering in reply said "I told Mr. Lewis (the manager) a week since this morning that there should be some rods", and he replied "Pooh, pooh, there are 40 yards of good coal before us". In answer to a juryman, witness said they had not been in the habit of having boring rods to use. They had no books, or guide, or map, to show or warn them of the danger. The stalls in that direction he knew were surrounded by the "Hollows".

A witness named, named William Clamp, said, 18 men and a lot of boys wished to come out of the pit when they saw the water breaking in, and on going to the shaft bottom for that purpose were met by Mr. Lewis who said "Go back to your work; if there is any danger I will let you know". This was after the first alarm had been sounded.

They went back to their work, but on a boy called Gresley calling out a second alarm to them that the water was coming, they rushed to the shaft bottom, and got drawn up as soon as they could. The water was right up to the shaft then.

A witness described how he went down to try and rescue the men left in the pit, and found the water within 6 inches of the roof, forcing him to return, but later went down with a small party including Mr. Lewis. Four horses were sent up, but he saw a lot more up to their bellies in water in the stable. He swam from the cage to the stable, and made a search for the missing bodies of the men. The water subsided a little afterwards, and the exploring party was divided. His comrades fished up the dead body of 16 year old Henry

Clements and rescued three other men who were still alive. They were drawn up the cage to the bank. Jeremiah Rose and Thomas Bird had not been found at this time.

Another witness said that if Robert Lakin, a late manager, had been in charge, they would have had boring rods in use 30 yards before they came upon the breakage..

The inquest had to be adjourned because the bodies of the two missing men had to be found and the area of the breach inspected.....**The author has not found any records of the subsequent inquest.**

## **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION**

Following an enquiry, Bailey was prosecuted by the Inspector of Mines for negligence in failing to consult the old plans as described earlier.