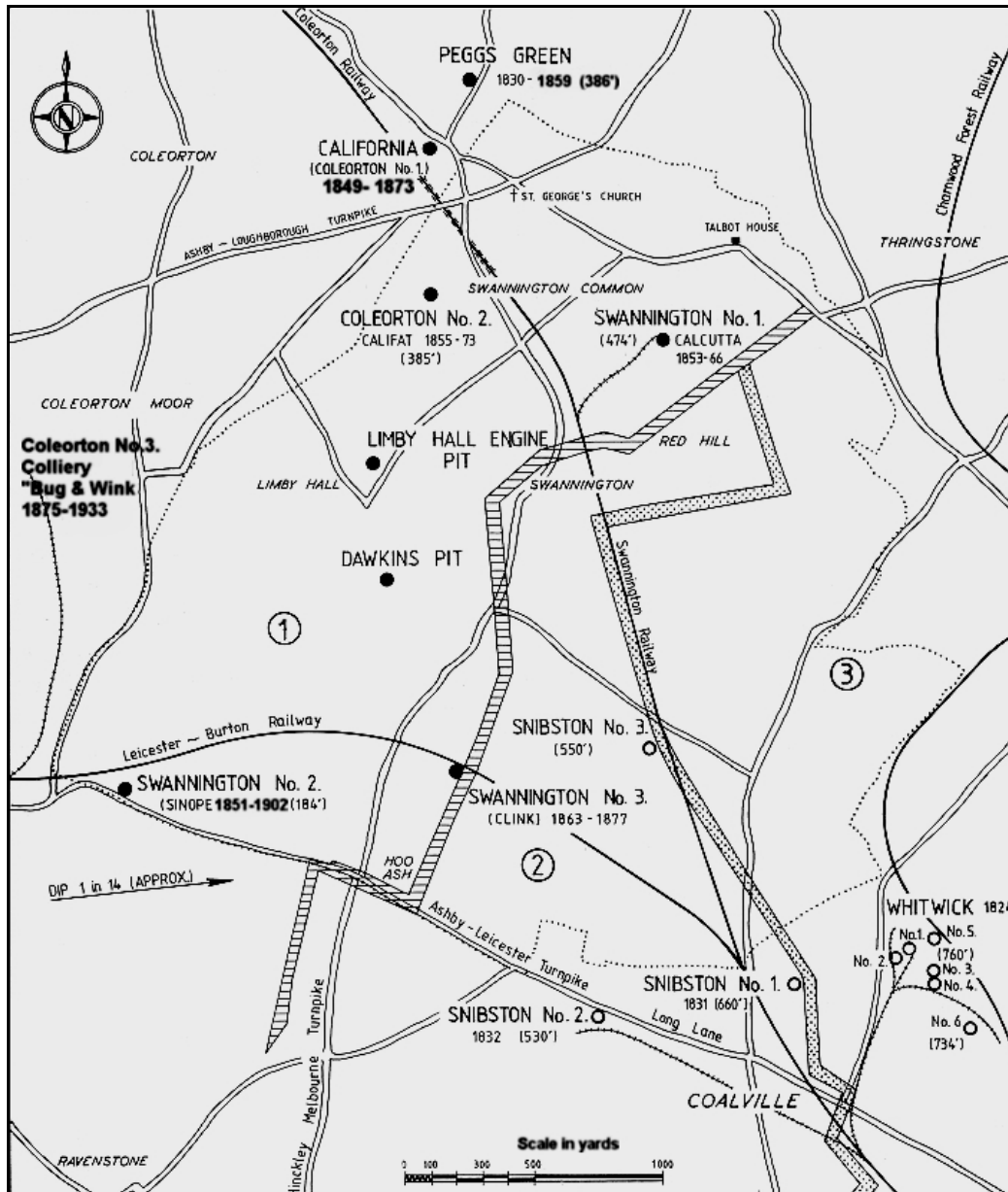
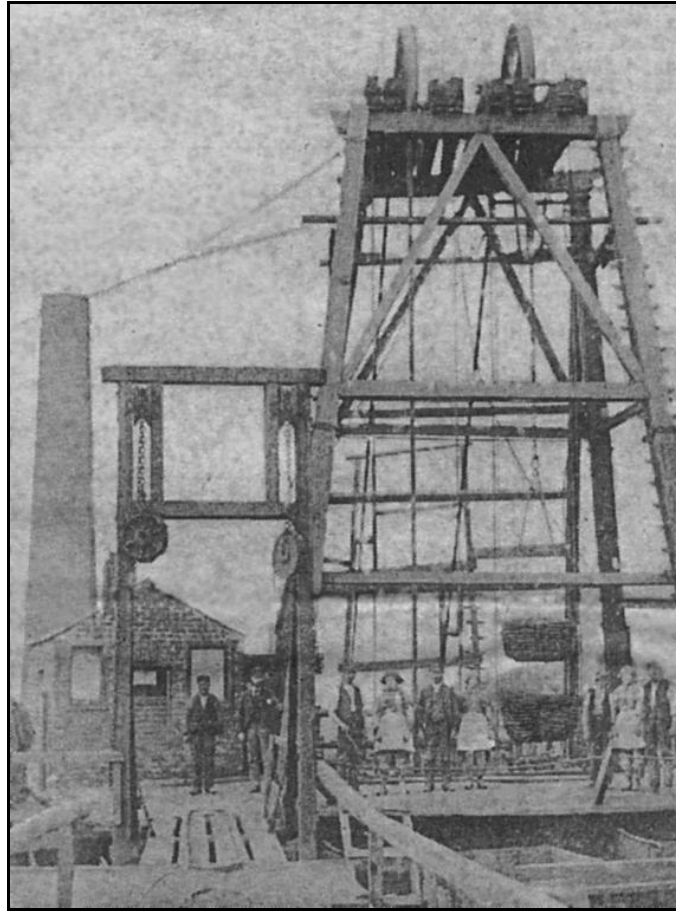


SHOCKING ACCIDENT AT COLEORTON NUMBER 2 COLLIERY (Also known as Califat / Alabama and Windmill pit)



Map showing location of local collieries including Coleorton No.2.

BY SAMUEL T STEWART - OCT 2026



Pit head winding gear c. 1880 with engine - house in background

The following is based on a report in the Loughborough Monitor dated Thursday 4th June 1863.

A very distressing and fatal accident occurred on Friday evening last, at the Coleorton No.2 Colliery, by which one man was killed on the spot, and another narrowly escaped a similar fate. Coleorton No.2 Colliery, at that time, was the property of Messrs. Worswick and Walker.

About half past five, on the above named day, some of the men in the pit, wishing to ascend, gave the usual bell signal. The engine man Wm. Walker, having just gone out to get a bucket from the pumping engine, Mr. R. Lakin, the foreman of the works was just going into the engine house at the time, and hearing the cage signal repeated, incautiously set the engine in motion, but sad to relate, when the cage arrived at the top, he was unable to stop it in time.

The consequence was that it ascended to the top of the pulley-wheel, where it was turned partially over, and broken to pieces, pitching one poor fellow, by the name of John Hutchinson (alias Dukey), headlong down the shaft that he had just ascended, and by which nearly every bone in his body was broken. The shaft was about 130 yards in depth, and it appears he fell down the

middle of the shaft without touching the sides ; and of course he was killed instantly. Luckily, there were only two men in the cage at the time, viz., the deceased, and W. Clements. They both clutched the iron bars of the cage :the one the deceased held, broke with the shock. Clements, fortunately, was able to catch hold of the cross-piece or beam on the top of the cage, under the pulley wheel, and from which he hung for a considerable time, until he was released from his perilous position ; with the yawning shaft beneath, and certain death if he once let go of his hold, his feelings may be better imagined than described. He was much bruised about the back, and although able to walk home, has since been confined to his bed, his nerves having received such a shock. It will be a long time, if ever, he fully recovers.

As for poor Lakin, he has all but lost his reason. It is said, that he has many times done the same thing, by assisting the engine man whilst he was looking over the works. He is a most respected and able man, and has been on the premises for a number of years.

On Monday, an inquest was held at the 'Fox Inn', Thringstone on the body of the deceased, John Hutchinson before - Mr. Gregory, Esq., Coroner. The first witness called was James Waring who said : I am a blacksmith, employed at the Coleorton Colliery. I was in my shop at the No.2. pit on Friday last about halfpast five. My shop is facing the draw pit or shaft. I heard a louder noise than usual by the cage catching against the guard. I looked up and saw two men in it up the frame, as high as the wheel where the rope runs. I saw both men had hold of the cross bars ; They were the deceased and W. Clements ; one had hold of one of the cross bars of the cage, and one the other. I saw the position they were in, and shouted to them to hold fast. The first thing the guard or fencing came in collision with was the bottom cross beam which caused the guard to break and the cage to swing round. The end of the guard that did not catch the beam caught against the under pale of the cage. At the same moment, the cross bars of the cage the men were holding by broke. Both men were thrown out. Clements was first thrown out, and caught the side of the conductor, and deceased was thrown over the side down the pit. Clements was dashed against the diagonal bar across the pit, by which he held, this sat on the cross piece of the frame or head gear. I went out directly onto the bank, and saw Robert Lakin and W. Walker coming out of the engine shed. Lakin is the overman and Walker the engine man of the pit. The engine was then stopped. I assisted in getting Clemence down. Lakin was in my shop five minutes before the accident.- By Mr. Hedley : have you seen Lakin at any time handle that engine? - No, never.

Levi Baker, on being sworn, said ; I am a stoker at No.2. pit. I was in the engine house on Friday afternoon last, the 29th inst.,. Robert Lakin came into the engine house about half- past five. I had been clearing the indicators. The engine-man had just gone out to the pumping engine, which is about 60 or 70 yards distant, for a bucket. The signal bell was then ringing. Lakin said ' Why don't you turn those men up'.The signal had not been answered from the top, which it should have been, before the engine started. I had charge of the pit top at the time. He said turn those men up. I told him I would have nothing to do with it. He went towards the engine handle, and I went out and left him.

There was no one else in at the time. Directly I got out, he started the engine. No signal was given. I was going to the pit to give the signal. I was at the pit mouth (shaft) and saw the cage come out with two men in it. When I saw it, I did not stop, I turned to get away, as it might fall on me. I fell down, and when I got up again, I saw a man on the cross beam over the shaft ; that was Clements. I never saw the other man. I could not recollect that more than one signal was given by the men below, there might have been more. Never saw Lakin turn men up before. Saw him turn a tub of coals up. The engine was in at the time. The engine was gone altogether in about 5 minutes. Witness was cross-examined by Mr. Lakin (who had been allowed to be in the room during the time the evidence was being given) and was questioned by the Jury, but he became so confused that he was unable to answer, or did not remember.

William Walker, engine driver, was next called, and in answer to the Coroner, said he had been the engine man about 10 years, and had been at No.2. pit about 8 years. Himself and brother John, were the engine-men, night and day. He further said, I was on duty Friday last, we turned half a day. Towards five-o'clock I left the driving engine. I went to the pumping engine to fetch a bucket, leaving Levi Baker in charge, and whilst speaking there to the man in charge, I stepped on one side and saw the ropes of my engine in motion. As soon as I saw that, I thought it was my brother come to relieve me (we not being particular to half an hour in relieving one another). His time would be six o'clock, but I hurried on and when I got in sight of the engine-house, I saw it was not my brother but R. Lakin and when I saw it was him, I made all the haste I could to reach it, and as I was passing the pit mouth (shaft), the first signal bell rang which is about 25 to 30 yards from the pit mouth, and when I got to the engine-house door, the second bell rang, which is immediately before the cage comes out of the top. Just as I stepped into the door, I heard the cage strike the cross piece. Lakin had hold of the handle and had stopped the engine himself before I got up. He said 'Oh dear' and use of some other expressions of sorrow, but I was so put about, I do not know what he said. He went away, and I assisted in getting Clements down and deceased up from the shaft. No one has any right to meddle with the engine unless the manager gives permission.

By Mr.Hedley : Have you seen Lakin touch the engine before? Yes, several times,he has drawn coals up during dinner time. I knew he could manage the engine before I came there. I never knew him draw men up. By the Coroner : the engine was in good working order at the time that this occurred.

W. Platts, a banksman, at No.2. pit was almost 30 yards from the mouth. He did not see the cage come out of the mouth of the pit, but saw it immediately after the accident. The cage was up against the pulley-wheel. Saw R. Lakin coming out of the engine-house. Have repeatedly seen Lakin working the engine. Did not know if he ever drew men up before.

W. Clements, a miner, employed at No.2. pit, said : On giving over work, we went to the bottom to go out. I was with Hutchinson. We gave the signal three times and then once. The engine did not go. In about another minute, we signalled again, and the engine started. We were both in the cage at the time

waiting. No signal was repeated from the top. The cage went alright up the shaft. Never perceived any difference in the motion of the cage. Did not remember anything but catching hold of the cage and then the cross-piece. Knew nothing more. Heard a great crash, and caught at anything he could. Never saw deceased after coming out of the shaft. In answer to Mr. Lakin, he said he was waiting about three minutes before the engine started. This witness was scarcely able to walk, and trembled in every limb, showing visibly the effect of the accident on him.

Thomas bird, deputy of the day shift, proved finding the body at the bottom of the shaft. Two boys told him a man had fallen down the shaft. He made haste and found it was the deceased. He was quite dead. The depth of the shaft being about 130 yards.

G.Lewis Esq., manager of the Coleorton Colliery, stated that he was, at the time of the accident, at No.1.pit (California) and went immediately to pit No.2. He met Lakin on the way, and asked him what was the matter - He said 'It's me'. I said,' you had better see about going down the other shaft and getting the man out'. When I got to No.2 pit, they were just bringing Clements down the ladder from the cross piece where he had been hanging. The broken cage was close up to the wheel, at the top of the pit frame. It was smashed all to pieces. I gave directions for it to be lowered and taken off, and a new one put on as quickly as possible. I examined the shaft and went down. Saw the deceased dead lying in a tub. I took a sheet down in which he was wrapped up, and sent up. I produced a copy of the rules of Coleorton Colliery ; every man is supplied with a copy. Special rule, clause 53, states that the engine-man shall not permit anyone but himself to interfere with the engine or machinery, without permission of the manager. By the Coroner : Have you ever given Lakin permission? - No. By Mr. Hedley :Were you aware that he had been in the habit of meddling with the engine? - I have since heard that when Mr. Walker was the manager he used to work it, and had done so in Mr. Walker's presence. He was permitted to do so by Mr. Walker. I do not know to what extent.

Mr. R. Lakin after being duly cautioned by the Coroner said, I worked the same engine in Mr. Walker's presence, and I thought myself completely master of it, and as these men wanted to come up, I considered myself capable of bringing them up. When I commenced turning them up and had got better than half way up, I saw Mr. Walker the engine-man coming. When I saw him running, my mind seemed fixed on him. I let the engine go and the cage appeared in sight. I took the steam off, and clapped the brake on, and stopped her instantly, but, with the crank coming over on a swing, it took the cage up higher.

This being the whole of the evidence, the Coroner commenced summing up, which we need not go through. In the course of his remarks, he said that a person undertaking to do a thing he had no business to do, or was incapable of doing, and death resulted through such inability or carelessness, the person causing such death was clearly guilty of manslaughter At the same time, if they come to any other conclusion, of a more favourable character he

should be happy to record it although he feared in the present case, they could not do so,&c.

The Jury after deliberating for upwards of two hours were unable to agree a verdict. The consequence was that an open verdict was returned **that the deceased died from injuries received through falling down the shaft of No.2 Pit.**