

EXPLOSION AT A MIRFIELD COLLIERY. FOUR LIVES LOST.

An explosion of fire-damp, involving the loss of four lives, took place on Thursday night at Ravensthorpe, Mirfield, between eight and nine o'clock. The place is a colliery in Dark-lane, belonging to Messrs. Charles Wheatley, R. Barraclough, and John Nevin, the latter being the certified manager, and a son of the vicar of the parish. The parties carry on business as the Mirfield Coal Company, and have been so engaged about two and a half years, the greater part of which time has been occupied in sinking to the beds of coal under their estate. The immediate scene of the explosion is a shaft 13ft. in diameter, which has just been sunk to what is known as the Black Bed, a seam of coal about 220 yards from the surface. In this shaft, about 17 yards from the bottom, it had been decided to drive a tunnel on the west side, and four men, viz., James Balderstone, single; George Broomhall *alias* Rudd, single; Benj. Ellis, married a fortnight ago; and Edward Naylor, married and one child, were engaged. They descended to work at two o'clock in the afternoon, and in the ordinary course should have been relieved by the next relay of men at ten o'clock. They worked on a platform, and beneath them, at the depth of several yards, was a considerable quantity of water. The shaft was ventilated by means of a wooden pipe about 9in. diameter inside, air being forced down it by means of a revolving fan driven by a steam-engine. This pipe extended below the platform, and in the ordinary course should have driven off the foul air as fast as it issued from the crevices in the coal; but it would appear that a greater quantity than usual must have been generated, for it fired at the naked lights the men were working with, and an explosion of a very severe character occurred. It shifted the solid timber head-gearing about twenty inches, sent the boards attached into the air, and alarmed the neighbourhood, causing a great crowd to collect. In about half an hour, the fan having driven off most of the after-damp, a party of explorers, consisting of Mr. Nevin, Mr. Jas. Beevers, and Mr. Hadfield, the two latter being miners, descended, but were obliged to return. Beevers was in a fainting condition. At ten another unsuccessful attempt to recover the bodies was made, and it was not until twelve hours afterwards that the first corpse was brought to the pit bank. It was that of Balderstone, and was terribly burnt and bruised. About half-past three the body of Broomhall was recovered, and it too was in a shocking condition. Operations were continued for several hours with the view of recovering the corpses of the other two men. Last evening, Mr. Wardell, inspector of mines, arrived, and descended the shaft, along with Mr. Nevin, to make an investigation, the result of which will no doubt be laid before a coroner's jury. The bodies are lying at the Craven Heifer, a public-house not far from the colliery. About four o'clock the body of Ellis was found, and brought to the pit bank, and soon after half-past six that of Walton was discovered, and taken to his late home. The inquest is to take place at half-past two this afternoon.