

## 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 in the vicinity of Kirkby but the closest, in the town itself, was known locally as [Summit](#).<sup>3</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>4</sup> Also, in January 1918, he recorded that "*Mr Hinds had both legs cut off at the Summit crossing & died at Mansfield Hospital*".<sup>5</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> Based on figures for deaths at the Summit colliery (see [Chapter 59](#)), this was the second commonest cause of miners being killed after the roof collapsing.

<sup>3</sup> 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) 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>4</sup> From FreeBMD, it seems that this was George Henry Martin and that he was 48 years old. He was listed in the 1911 census as a hewer. His wife was called Sarah (b1868) and they had three children William Henry (b1893) (who was also a hewer), Georgina Mary (b1896) (whose occupation was listed as tin mill) and Mary Alice (b1901).

<sup>5</sup> I have not found any details of a Mr Hinds dying in the area during this period. However, 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.

*Summit Colliery in 1930*



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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.

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](#). 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:

Willie 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:

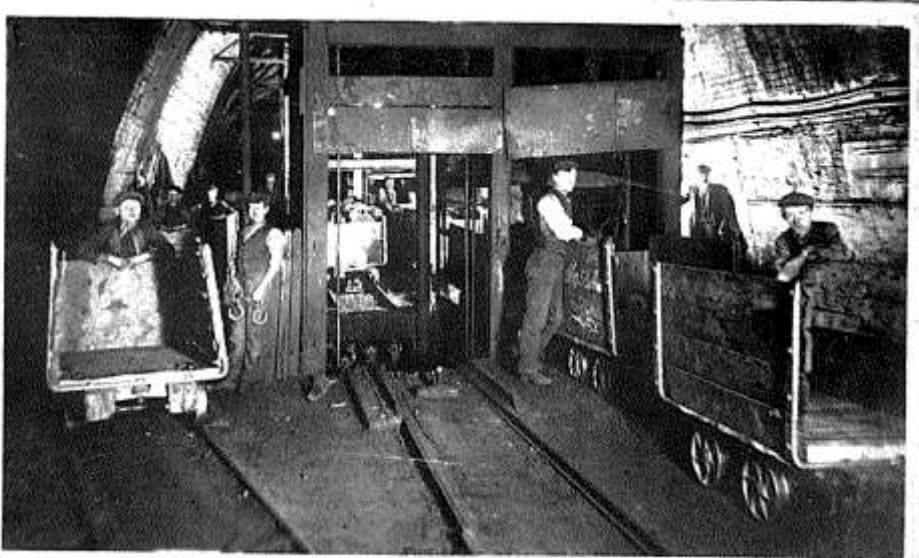
- W. Bacon aged 60 years who had a broken leg and head injuries
- C. Baron who was seriously injured and taken to hospital

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

Details from [Northern Mine Research Society](#)

Grandad recorded the incident in his diary "*Bentinck cages caught, 10<sup>6</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.



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

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.

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<sup>6</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.