

'The Norcroft Pit Disaster 1821' by David Hinchliffe

8th September 2021, by Zoom

David Hinchliffe told the story of this tragic and until recently, forgotten disaster, which he set against the background of the time, and with the added personal interest as his own great great uncle John Hinchliffe, was one of the children who died. Norcoft is south of Cawthorne existing still as Upper Norcroft Farm. In 1821 mining was a source of income for the two substantial landowners in the area, Walter Spencer Stanhope of Cannon Hall, and Samuel Thorp of Banks Hall. The Barnsley Canal, completed in 1802, enabled the coal to be transported to a wider market.

On the morning of 23rd May 1821 eleven colliers were ascending the shaft when the chain broke and they were hurled to the bottom of the shaft. Ten were killed including six boys, of whom three were brothers. The disaster was little recorded at the time, and no memorial to the disaster existed. John Hinchliffe was one of the three eight year old boys who died. A campaign was launched for a memorial to seven of those who had lost their lives and were buried in an unmarked grave in Cawthorne churchyard; this was erected in 2019. A commemoration of the bicentenary in May 2021 was held at Cawthorne Church.

An archaeological search has been conducted to find the exact site of the shaft in Flatlands field, but this has not been uncovered as yet. Money has been raised to erect an information board on the site, and a self-guided walk is planned.

David Hinchliffe's book about the disaster "Descent into Silence: Cawthorne's Forgotten Tragedy" is available through Amazon and other outlets.