

JOHN BENSON

COLLIERY DISASTER FUNDS, 1860-1897*

It is well known that in England the last four decades of the nineteenth century witnessed both the growing importance of the coal-mining industry and the continuation of widespread voluntary charity. But the absence of detailed local studies has made it easy to assume that, as colliery districts did not enjoy the same benevolent institutions as other areas, these were distinct, indeed almost separate, developments. Relegated to a footnote by the historian of English philanthropy, "the imposing sums collected to meet disasters"¹ have been in this respect almost completely ignored.

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate that between 1860 and the passing of the Workmen's Compensation Act in 1897² industrial and charitable activity were linked in all English coalfields by the establishment, after serious mining accidents,³ of publicly subscribed, *ad hoc*, colliery disaster funds. An examination of these funds will reveal their significance both in relation to serious mining disasters and to the total number of fatal accidents which occurred in the coal-mining industry. It will be argued that despite the quantitative importance of colliery disaster funds during this period, they proved inadequate to meet the needs of the bereaved for whose benefit they were founded.⁴

I

The table shows that between 1860 and 1897 25,101 miners lost their lives in and about English coal-mines. Probably 55% of those killed

* I wish to thank J. B. Bennett for allowing me access to the records of the West Riding of Yorkshire Miners' Permanent Relief Society (hereafter referred to as WR) before their transfer to Barnsley Public Library.

¹ D. Owen, *English Philanthropy 1660-1960* (London, 1965), p. 479.

² 60 & 61 Vict., c. 37.

³ Defined as accidents claiming 5 or more lives.

⁴ Owen, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

The number of miners killed and the number of dead miners whose dependants were relieved by colliery disaster funds in the English coal-mining industry, 1860-1897

| Years | North (Northumb., Durham, Cumb., West., North Riding) | | Lancashire | | Yorkshire (East and West Ridings) | | Midlands (Derbys., Notts., Leics., Warwicks.) | | West Midlands (Staffs., Cheshire, Salop. Worcs.) | | South-West (Glos., Somerset) | | Total | | | | | | | | |
|--------|---|-----|------------|------|-----------------------------------|-----|---|-----|--|------|------------------------------|-----|-------|-----|-----|-----|----|------|-------|------|------|
| | All | CDF | All | CDF | All | CDF | All | CDF | All | CDF | All | CDF | All | CDF | | | | | | | |
| | accs | | accs | | accs | | accs | | accs | | accs | | accs | | | | | | | | |
| 1860-4 | 1143 | 361 | 318 | 674 | 40 | - | 325 | 84 | 59 | 280 | 23 | 894 | 62 | 6 | 116 | - | - | 3432 | 560 | 416 | |
| 1865-9 | 866 | 44 | 24 | 1063 | 302 | 260 | 719 | 366 | 361 | 342 | 8 | 937 | 129 | 129 | 108 | 11 | 11 | 4035 | 860 | 785 | |
| 1870-4 | 825 | 31 | 26 | 901 | 177 | 170 | 534 | 57 | 57 | 355 | 35 | 825 | 128 | 39 | 99 | 7 | - | 3539 | 428 | 318 | |
| 1875-9 | 629 | - | - | 1014 | 325 | 232 | 640 | 195 | 164 | 302 | 13 | 7 | 629 | 101 | 43 | 78 | - | - | 3292 | 634 | 446 |
| 1880-4 | 988 | 288 | 238 | 755 | 122 | 116 | 482 | 27 | - | 390 | 77 | 77 | 546 | 108 | 95 | 65 | - | - | 3226 | 622 | 526 |
| 1885-9 | 783 | 127 | 100 | 846 | 221 | 178 | 521 | 32 | 22 | 329 | - | - | 498 | 104 | 87 | 97 | 10 | 10 | 3074 | 494 | 397 |
| 1890-4 | 730 | - | - | 614 | 16 | - | 602 | 144 | 139 | 312 | - | - | 417 | 10 | 10 | 75 | 10 | 10 | 2750 | 180 | 159 |
| 1895-9 | 530 | 30 | - | 368 | 13 | - | 334 | 63 | 23 | 180 | 7 | - | 303 | 77 | 77 | 38 | 7 | 7 | 1753 | 197 | 107 |
| | 6494 | 881 | 706 | 6235 | 1216 | 956 | 4157 | 968 | 825 | 2490 | 163 | 133 | 5049 | 719 | 486 | 676 | 38 | 38 | 25101 | 3975 | 3144 |

Lives Lost

All accs: Lives lost in all accidents.
 5+ : Lives lost in accidents entailing the loss of five or more lives.
 CDF: Dead miners whose dependants were relieved by colliery disaster funds.

Source: Reports of H. M. Inspectors of Mines and Quarries, 1860-1897. These statistics may slightly underestimate the total number of deaths and therefore exaggerate the significance of accident claiming more than four lives. See R. Mitchell in British Miner and General Newsmen, 13 December 1862; T. W. Bunning in The Wigan Observer, 22 March 1884; F. G. P. Neison, Report on the West Riding of Yorkshire Miners' Permanent Relief Fund (Barnsley, 1883), pp. 3-4; and a List of Members whose deaths were unrecorded by the Inspector of Mines March 16th 1877 to December 31th 1882, WK.

were married¹ and each dead miner left, on average, 1.2 dependent children.² Thus from 1860 to 1897 over 13,000 widows lost their husbands, and over 30,000 dependent children their fathers, by accidents in the English coal-mining industry. The great majority – over 84% – of these deaths did not result from serious accidents causing more than four fatalities. But it was to help the 2,200 widows and the 4,800 children of the 3,975 miners killed in accidents claiming five or more lives that the 50 colliery disaster funds listed in the Appendix were established. As may be seen from the table they helped the dependants of only 3,144 (12.5%) of those killed during this period. In the Midlands and in the South-Western coalfields, where large mining accidents were rare, the funds were of little importance. Even in Yorkshire, where they proved of greatest assistance, public subscriptions aided no more than 20% of the bereaved. Considered then as a method of compensating the dependants of those killed by accidents in the coal-mining industry between 1860 and 1897 colliery disaster funds were of strictly limited significance.

But the funds did provide an effective method of directing relief to the dependants of the 3,975 casualties of large disasters. Every widow and child bereaved by an accident claiming more than four lives in the South-Western coalfield, for example, was helped by a colliery disaster fund. In no district, indeed, did these appeals do less

¹ The 6 largest disasters in this period killed 1,413 miners, 49% of whom left widows. See Northumberland County Record Office, *New Hartley Colliery Accident Relief Fund Papers*, 488/A/14; WR, *Colliery Explosions Fund*, Mansion House London (hereafter referred to as CEF), pp. 68-69; G. E. Swithinbank, *Report and General Statement of the Oaks Colliery Explosion Fund*, to 31st December, 1871, With Classified List of Subscribers and Sketch of the Explosion (Barnsley, 1872), p. 18; *The Durham County Advertiser*, 17 September 1880; *The Provident*, 15 December 1882 and 15 December 1886. The miners' permanent relief societies found that 60% were married. T. Y. Strachan's Report bound with the 35th Annual Report of the Northumberland and Durham Miners' Permanent Relief Fund, p. 4; T. Y. Strachan and R. Todhunter, *Actuarial Report on the Northumberland and Durham Miners' Permanent Relief Fund*, as on 31st December, 1901 (Newcastle-on-Tyne, 1902), p. 8. For Yorkshire see F. G. P. Neison, *Report upon the West Riding of Yorkshire Miners' Permanent Relief Fund* (Barnsley, 1897), p. 4, and for Lancashire see F. G. P. Neison and J. H. Schooling's Report printed as Appendix B of 19th Annual Report of the Lancashire and Cheshire Miners' Permanent Relief Society, pp. 31 and 38, and Neison's Report printed as Appendix B of the 24th Annual Report, p. 49.

² The miners killed in the 6 disasters analysed above each left 1.17 dependent children while for every member of the Lancashire and Yorkshire permanent societies killed before 1897 1.25 children were left. Neison and Schooling, *op cit.*, p. 33; 24th Annual Report Lancashire Miners' Permanent Relief Society, Appendix B, p. 49; and Neison's Report on the Yorkshire Fund (1897), p. 4.

than in the West Midlands where 68.3% of the families of those killed by serious accidents were assisted. Although colliery disaster funds did nothing to assist 87.5% of those bereaved by colliery accidents between 1860 and 1897, they were of major significance in relation to serious mining disasters. The dependants of over 79% of those killed by major accidents received charitable assistance from the public subscriptions which were raised.

II

Despite the fact that appeals were begun to help so many dependants of the victims of disasters, the subscription funds very often proved unable to offer adequate relief. The primary explanation of this failure is that success in attracting subscriptions did not necessarily bear a close relationship to the amount of distress with which the organisers of a fund were confronted. An appeal was likely to gain support if, as at Hartley in 1862, there was prolonged public suspense, during which time the bereaved conducted themselves in a manly, Christian manner.¹

Geographical factors, too, could exert considerable influence upon the success of an appeal. If the disaster occurred at a colliery situated "in a sequestered district thinly inhabited"² or in an area where few of the middle class resided³ it might be difficult to raise subscriptions and "the leading inhabitants [. . .] if they have themselves done their duty" could then "appeal to strangers for assistance".⁴ When the area in which the accident took place had been comparatively free from similar catastrophes it was possible that a shocked public would contribute generously to the fund which was founded.⁵ As the secretary of the Central Association For Dealing With Distress Caused By Mining Accidents concluded in 1896, "There can be no doubt that the public heart fails to respond to oft repeated applications",⁶ particularly

¹ G. L. Campbell, "Great Colliery Disasters Relief Funds, From 1862", in: Central Association for Dealing With Distress caused by Mining Accidents (Wigan, 1890), p. 71; id., *Miners' Thrift and Employers' Liability; A Remarkable Experience* (Wigan, 1891), p. 7.

² Colliery Guardian (hereafter referred to as CG), 12 October 1861. See also *The Accrington Times*, 10 November 1883.

³ E. J. Shoemack in CG, 12 October 1861.

⁴ CG, 12 October 1861; see *ibid.*, 17 November 1882.

⁵ CG, 23 March 1888; *The Derbyshire Times*, 28 January 1871.

⁶ G. L. Campbell, *Public Subscriptions and Permanent Funds* (Wigan, 1896), p. 12; W. Watson, *To The Miners of South Yorkshire. Provide for the Widows and Orphans. Provide for yourselves in Case of Accident. Provide for yourselves in Old Age. A Letter to the workmen employed in and about the coal mines of South Yorkshire* (Barnsley, 1877), p. 10; G. L. Campbell, *Miners' Insurance Funds: Their Origin and Extent* (London, 1880), p. 10; *The Provident*, August 1881 and 15 December 1882.

when previous disaster funds in the area had been widely criticized.¹

Subscriptions might also be diminished by competition from other appeals. Thus after the death of 361 men at the Oaks Colliery in 1866 the South Yorkshire Miners' Association forbade its members to contribute to any relief fund except that organised by itself.² On occasion, though, the rival might be absorbed by the colliery disaster fund; in 1893 the money collected for the local Royal Wedding Presents Fund went to the Thornhill Colliery Explosion (1893) Relief Fund.³

Another problem could be the confusion in the public mind between colliery disaster funds and the trade union movement, hostility towards the latter militating against the success of the former.⁴ Potential subscribers might also be discouraged by the belief that the committee had overestimated its requirements,⁵ that contributions received or promised would prove sufficient,⁶ that the surpluses of previous funds should be acquired,⁷ or that alternative sources of compensation made the fund's very existence unnecessary.⁸

The support of the royal family⁹ or of the owner of the colliery at which the disaster occurred was felt to be of particular significance.¹⁰ After the explosion in December 1875 at the Swaithe Main Colliery, Yorkshire it was felt that the county's owners, who had been making large profits, should set an example by subscribing generously.¹¹ Indeed in a circular addressed to colliery proprietors, the committee of the Swaithe Main Colliery Fund argued that the general public would not contribute unless the owners were seen to lead the way.¹²

The success of the appeal necessary before a fund could begin to operate was thus not solely a function of the amount of distress to be relieved. Disaster funds were not always an efficient method of

¹ J. Pollard in *The Yorkshire Post*, 12 February 1893, and W. Watson in *The Barnsley Chronicle*, 18 September 1880.

² National Union of Miners, Barnsley, South Yorkshire Miners' Association, Minutes of Special Meeting, 15 December 1866.

³ *The Labour Tribune*, 8 July 1893.

⁴ *Yorkshire Post*, 8 January 1867.

⁵ CG, 6 June 1873.

⁶ S. Child to T. Gabriel, 2 January 1867, CEF, p. 24; *Yorkshire Post*, 28 December 1866 and 16 February 1867; W. A. Scott in *Durham County Advertiser*, 22 December 1871; and CG, 6 June 1873.

⁷ CG, 6 June 1873 and 18 February 1876.

⁸ O. Sagar, E. Baste and T. R. Clark in *Durham County Advertiser*, 17 March 1882; *Capital and Labour*, 9 October 1878, quoting *Manchester Courier*.

⁹ *Yorkshire Post*, 17 December 1866; CG, 30 November 1883; Owen, *op. cit.*, pp. 165-166.

¹⁰ CG, 10 January 1863; *Wigan Observer*, 2 June 1876.

¹¹ *Barnsley Chronicle*, 11 and 25 March 1876.

¹² Circular to Colliery Proprietors, 28 March 1876, WR, Bundle on Swaithe Main Explosion Fund.

channelling assistance to those most in need after serious accidents in the coal-mining industry.

III

The failure to provide speedy relief was a further weakness. Although the funds established after the most serious disasters did offer immediate aid,¹ such payments remained exceptional. In Yorkshire, for example, the committees of both the Oaks and of the Swaithe Main funds were criticised for their delay in relieving distress.² It took time both to establish the new institution and to ensure that payments from other sources, in addition to the allowances from the disaster fund, would not make the recipients' total income unacceptably high.³

The management of the charity was also important. Working class representation, on a limited scale, might be secured upon the committees managing colliery disaster funds.⁴ But demands for trade union membership were likely to be roundly rejected⁵ and overwhelmingly the funds were run by the clergy and other leading local residents,⁶ some of whom might simultaneously be serving as guardians of the poor. When the general purposes committee of the West Lancashire Fund was appointed in 1869, 4 of its 24 members (16.7%) were also

¹ For Burradon see Newcastle Chronicle, 31 March 1860; for Hartley CG, 12 April 1862; for Clifton Hall The Provident, 15 December 1886; for Altham Accrington Times, 17 November 1883; for Edmund's Main Barnsley Chronicle, 10 January 1863; for the Oaks W. H. Peacock to T. Gabriel, 2 January 1867, CEF, pp. 20-21; for Swaithe Main Swaithe Main Colliery Explosion Relief Fund Minute Book, Barnsley Public Library, Committee Meeting, 6 March 1876; and for Thornhill Dewsbury Public Library, Minutes, Central Relief Committee, 20 July 1893.

² W. Taylor to R. C. L. Bevan, 27 December 1866, CEF, pp. 15-16; J. Normansell in Yorkshire Post, 27 December 1866; and Barnsley Chronicle, 4 March 1876. The relief committee of the Edmund's Main fund in fact withheld relief so that the bereaved might go destitute to the guardians. W. Banham in The Times, 27 January 1863. ³ See below, pp. 79f.

⁴ Newcastle Chronicle, 10 March 1860 (on Burradon); Seaham Colliery Explosion Relief Fund (1880), Durham County Record Office, D/Lo F 698(1), Minutes, 20 September 1880; Thornhill, Minutes, 7 September 1893, and Hyde, Minutes, Committee Meeting, 22 January 1889. For access to these minutes I wish to thank the Borough Treasurer, Hyde.

⁵ Leeds Intelligencer, 31 January 1863, and Barnsley Chronicle, 5 January 1867.

⁶ Hyde, Minutes, Meeting of Relief Committee, 19 January 1889; Swithinbank, op. cit., pp. 6-7; J. H. Dyson, Thornhill Colliery Disaster, 4th July, 1893. An Account Of The Disaster and Subscribers To The Relief Fund, With Particulars As To Its Administration (Dewsbury, n.d.), p. 8; R. Fynes, The Miners of Northumberland and Durham (Sunderland, 1873), p. 173; The Provident, May 1881 and 15 December 1886; CG, 17 August 1861, 27 December 1862 and 6 June 1873. Also see Owen, op. cit., p. 165.

members of the Wigan Board of Guardians.¹ The Oaks Colliery Explosion Fund enjoyed the active support of the clerk and two guardians from the Barnsley Union, one of whom became treasurer to the appeal.² Of the 27 members appointed to the permanent committee of the Swaithe Main Colliery Fund in 1875, 3 (11%) were also poor law guardians in Barnsley.³

It is perhaps not surprising that when those responsible for establishing colliery disaster funds directed their attention to the rate at which permanent allowances should be paid, neither past practice nor any other consideration deflected them from the conviction that relief should be strictly limited. Even when vast sums of money were subscribed by the charitable, payments to the bereaved were not increased. Twenty years after the Oaks explosion of 1866 a surplus of over twenty-nine thousand pounds remained to provide 31 dependants with "weekly sums of six shillings and less".⁴ Indeed as early as 1863 the executive committee of the Hartley Colliery Relief Fund discovered that over twenty thousand pounds of the eighty-five thousand pounds subscribed would not be needed to pay the widows 7/- and the children from 2/5 to 3/6 a week.⁵

Thus it is not actuarial difficulties which explain the rate at which benefits were provided by disaster funds. Alarming cases had even been discovered in which the payments from colliery funds helped make the bereaved "better off than ever they were before".⁶ The level of payment, then, is rather accounted for by the determination that the relief granted by the charity should do no more than maintain the recipient in his station in life. Those entitled to assistance from other sources were therefore discriminated against. After the Bunker's Hill

¹ Lancashire County Record Office, PUW/1/10, Wigan Union, Guardians' Minutes, p. 436, 24 April 1868; Colliery Accidents in The Wigan District. Report of Relief Committee to the Subscribers To The Fund Formed In Aid Of The Sufferers (Wigan, 1871), p. 12.

² Barnsley Public Library, Guardians' Minutes, 1865-1868, pp. 125-126, 17 April 1868, and Swithinbank, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-7.

³ Swaithe Main, Minutes, Provisional Committee, 28 February 1876, and Guardians' Minutes, 1873-1876, pp. 227-228, 20 April 1875.

⁴ G. E. Swithinbank, Innes & Co., Report and General Statements of the Oaks Colliery Explosion Fund, from 1st January, 1881, to 31st December, 1886 (Barnsley, 1887), pp. 7 and 11.

⁵ CG, 5 April 1862, and the paper by G. L. Campbell in Central Association for Dealing With Distress caused by Mining Accidents, 1890 (Wigan, n.d.), pp. 61-63. By 1903 a further thirteen thousand pounds was available. The Central Association Of Miners' Permanent Relief Societies, 1930, Colliery Explosion Public Relief Funds, p. 13.

⁶ "Sympathy" in Barnsley Chronicle, 14 December 1867, and "By Order of the Miners' Committee" in Wigan Observer, 6 October 1871.

explosion it was at first planned not to give equal aid to “the Widows and children of the men who had been members of the ‘Colliers Permanent Relief Association’”,¹ and the Seaham Colliery (1871) Fund would, but for the opposition of the Northumberland and Durham Miners’ Permanent Relief Fund, have refused relief to those receiving assistance from that society.² The Oaks committee reduced allowances to those granted compensation by the Widows’ and Orphans’ Fund of the South Yorkshire Miners’ Association³ while the Clifton Hall Colliery Explosion Fund increased the payments to its widows from 3/- to 8/- a week and began to relieve dependent children only when the club attached to the pit ceased payment.⁴

Introducing the proposed permanent scale of payments to the committee of the Hartley fund, Hugh Taylor articulated this fear of the unwelcome consequences of a too liberal rate of relief. Although arguing that the allowances were generous and that, as men were the great spenders, most families were as well off financially as they had ever been, he believed

“they had received information to show that if persons of this class had too liberal allowance it led to idleness and neglect of their families rather than to taking advantage of matters for improving their circumstances”.⁵

The founders of colliery disaster funds were determined to restrict the level of relief to that which they considered adequate to maintain, but not to improve, the position of the bereaved.

But often the estimates of the income sufficient to satisfy even this limited requirement proved remarkably low. The allowance which every fund paid to its widows ranged from a minimum of 2/9 to a maximum of 8/- a week. The relief granted to the mothers of bereaved children either varied between 1/6 and 3/6 per child per week or was calculated upon a graduated scale from 3/6 per week for the first child to 14/6 for six children.⁶ The widows created by large disasters might, as members of bereaved families, receive additional relief. The Thorn-

¹ S. Child to I. R. S. Vine, n.d., CEF, pp. 52-53.

² 10th Annual Report of the Northumberland and Durham Miners’ Permanent Relief Fund, p. 15; W. A. Scott in Durham County Advertiser, 22 December 1871.

³ W. P. Pattison, Report & Valuation (Barnsley, 1867), p. 6; South Yorkshire Miners’ Association, Minutes, Council Meeting, 30 September 1867.

⁴ The Provident, 15 December 1886 and November 1887.

⁵ CG, 12 April 1862.

⁶ Swaithe Main, Committee Meeting, 16 March 1876; W. Watson to G. L. Campbell, 8 July 1890, WR, clip, 1890 Conference, No 65; S. Child to T. Gabriel, 2 January 1867, CEF, p. 24; Hyde, Minutes, Meeting of Subscribers, 17 December 1889; J. Jackson to Poor Law Board, 28 December 1866, Public Record

hill fund paid the relatives of boys killed by the explosion¹ while at Burradon ten pounds compensation was allowed for each son lost and one pound paid on the posthumous birth or death of a child.² Grants to compensate for the loss of a colliery house³ or to help sick children of the deceased might also be paid.⁴

Some committees concerned themselves with the health of the bereaved. Confinement expenses and other medical treatment were paid for;⁵ the Mayor of Hyde's Colliery Explosion Fund, indeed, not only met the reasonable costs of medicine and medical attendance for every widow not receiving benefit from a club, but paid for extra food, drink, clothing and journeys needed for health reasons.⁶ But with the exception of payments for educational purposes it was unusual for widows to receive more than simple, weekly, cash allowances. School fees, though, were often met⁷ and "It [. . .] became a matter for the serious consideration [of committee members] how far they could provide for the future well being of the children of whom they were now the guardians." The solution adopted by the Oaks Colliery Explosion Relief Fund was typical; boys were encouraged to acquire "the knowledge of some trade [to] enable them to take worthy places in one or other of the various branches of skilled industry". The girls were to receive "such industrial training as would thoroughly qualify them for domestic service".⁸

In the policies they adopted towards the widows and children for whom they were responsible the managing committees of colliery Office, MH 12/2972/52561/66; Durham County Record Office, D/Lo F 698(1), T. Y. Strachan, Seaham Collieries Explosion Fund. Actuarial Investigation And Report, As On December 31, 1888 (Seaham Harbour), p. 1; Colliery Accidents in the Wigan District, p. 5; Swithinbank, op. cit., p. 16; Dyson, op. cit., p. 10; Campbell, Disasters Funds, p. 73; 10th Annual Report Northumberland and Durham Miners' Permanent Relief Fund, p. 13; CG, 13 July 1861, 21 December 1861, 5 April 1862 and 6 June 1873; Barnsley Chronicle, 10 March 1888; The Provident, 15 December 1882 and 15 December 1886; Wigan Observer, 20 April 1866; Nuneaton Chronicle, 16 June 1882; Derbyshire Courier, 3 February 1883.

¹ Dyson, op. cit., p. 11. ² CG, 13 July 1861. ³ Strachan, op. cit., p. 1.

⁴ Ibid.; Hyde, Minutes, 17 December 1889, and Swaithe Main, Minutes, 30 March, 20 April, 4 and 31 August 1876.

⁵ Durham County Record Office, D/Lo F 698(1), Minutes, 13 June 1881; Strachan, op. cit., p. 1; Dyson, op. cit., p. 11; Swithinbank, op. cit., p. 19.

⁶ Hyde, Minutes, 17 December 1889 and *passim*.

⁷ S. Child to T. Gabriel, 26 December 1866, CEF, p. 12; Strachan, op. cit., p. 1; Durham County Advertiser, 21 December 1866; J. W. Innes and Co., Report and General Statement of the Oaks Colliery Explosion Fund, From 1st January, 1892, to 31st December, 1896 (Barnsley, 1897), p. 10.

⁸ G. E. Swithinbank, Report and General Statement of the Oaks Colliery Explosion Fund, from 1st January, 1872, to 31st December, 1875 (Barnsley, 1876), pp. 10-11.

disaster funds proved consistent. But a suitable scale of relief was not always decided upon. Payments were often inadequate to meet even the minimum "purpose of placing the sufferers [. . .] above want."¹ In 1887, for example, it was convincingly argued that the weekly allowance of six shillings from the Oaks fund was too low for the "respectable maintenance" of "Those widows living in cottages [who] will have to pay at least 4s.6d. a week for rent, coals, and light, leaving but 1s. 6s. [sic] for food, clothing, and other necessaries, or less than 2½d. per day".²

IV

Dependants other than widows and children received even less favourable treatment. After large disasters, it is true, relief was granted to parents and to other relatives of those who had been killed.³ But even on these occasions adequate assistance was not always offered.⁴ Those injured in the disaster were sometimes helped; the Talke fund of 1866, for example, provided wines, spirits and nurses,⁵ although it is not easy to assess the value of such treatment.⁶ The committees of most colliery disaster funds were compelled, or were content, to offer systematic relief only to the widows and to the children of dead miners.

Not only did the benefits granted often prove inadequate but in practice they could be still further restricted. The regulations governing some funds did not make it easy for the bereaved to collect their allowances. After the Burradon explosion of March 1860 relief was distributed not to the bereaved but to the representatives of the colliery,⁷ so that on at least one occasion the widows did not receive

¹ "A Subscriber" in *Barnsley Chronicle*, 10 December 1887; *Durham County Advertiser*, 11 February 1881.

² E. A. Rymer in *Barnsley Chronicle*, 3 December 1887. Also "A Subscriber", *ibid.*, 10 December 1887; for criticism of the allowances paid by the Hartley fund see CG, 15 and 22 March 1862.

³ CG, 13 July 1861 and 3 January 1867; *The Provident*, 15 December 1886; Dyson, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11; *Swithinbank*, *op. cit.*, p. 19; *Strachan*, *op. cit.*, p. 1. The 361 men killed by the Oaks explosion left 144 such dependants (*Swithinbank*, *op. cit.*, p. 18) and the 178 miners killed at Clifton Hall left 69 dependants (*The Provident*, 15 December 1886).

⁴ *Durham County Record Office*, D/Lo L 702, letter "On behalf of the friends of the lost ones"; Tynemouth Board of Guardians quoted by *British Miner*, 13 September 1862; and *Barnsley Chronicle*, 24 November 1888. For criticism of the Haydock Colliery Explosion Fund see *Wigan Observer*, 31 May 1879; "A Subscriber", *ibid.*, 12 July 1879, and "Subscriber No. 2", *ibid.*, 19 July 1879.

⁵ S. Child to T. Gabriel, 2 January 1867, CEF, p. 24; *Nuneaton Chronicle*, 16 June 1882.

⁶ "A Subscriber" in *The Accrington Times*, 29 December 1883.

⁷ T. Messer quoted in *Newcastle Chronicle*, 31 March 1860.

their allowances.¹ It was the rule of the Pelsall Hall Colliery Inundation Relief Fund that no family was to be paid more than one pound a week² and most funds terminated widows' payments in "cases of grave misconduct".³

Even if lump sum payments are regarded as advantageous to the recipient,⁴ commutation did not invariably benefit the bereaved. In January 1878 the committee of the Swaithe Main Colliery Fund decided that although its funds were insufficient to meet all its liabilities, it would be "inexpedient" to reduce payments to children or to their mothers. In order to save money it was therefore decided that all able-bodied widows, under forty, without dependant children, should receive a final payment of ten pounds.⁵ Dowries were granted, as a final settlement, upon the remarriage of widows. At Burradon payment was not made unless the committee was satisfied that the husband-to-be was of good character⁶ while the Hyde fund's grant of ten pounds would have been paid by less than six months' regular benefits.⁷ Only at Hartley in 1862 and at Clay Cross twenty years later was the sum granted as a dowry equivalent to the allowances which a widow would have received from the disaster fund in the course of a year.⁸

V

Coal-mining accidents were an important example of those "Emergencies and disasters [which] could always be depended upon to arouse the public-spirited to action".⁹ In all English mining districts between 1860 and 1897 colliery disaster funds served to join the dependants of those killed in the expanding coal-mining industry with a wide charitable public. It was a fruitful combination; in the Midlands, for example, over seventeen thousand pounds was raised to relieve

¹ "Borraddon [sic] Colliery", *ibid.*, 21 April 1860.

² CG, 6 June 1873.

³ Durham County Record Office, D/Lo F 698(1), Cash Account, 1 February 1883; Swaithe Main, Minutes, 10 May 1878; Swithinbank, *op. cit.*, p. 19; G. L. Campbell, Public Subscriptions, p. 15, L. T. Shrewsbury to G. L. Campbell, 19 July 1896; Durham County Advertiser, 21 December 1866 and The Provident, 15 December 1882 and 15 December 1886.

⁴ A. Wilson and H. Levy, *Workmen's Compensation* (Oxford, 1939), II, pp. 133-134, 139, 148-149; "Northumberland Miner" in Labour Tribune, 9 November 1889.

⁵ Swaithe Main, Minutes, 4 January 1878; CG, 13 July, 1861, 12 April 1862 and 6 June 1873.

⁶ CG, 13 July 1861.

⁷ Hyde, Minutes, Meeting of Subscribers, 17 December 1889.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 5 April 1862; Derbyshire Courier, 3 February 1883; Swaithe Main, Minutes, 4 August 1876; Swithinbank, *op. cit.*, p. 19; Durham County Advertiser, 10 September 1880.

⁹ Owen, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

the families of 133 men killed in colliery accidents¹ and in the Yorkshire coalfield more than one hundred and twenty thousand pounds was subscribed to provide for the dependants of 825 miners killed by industrial accidents.²

It has been seen, though, that colliery disaster funds were not so successful in directing assistance to those most in need as a mere catalogue of the sums they raised would suggest. They were able to deal with the families of no more than one eighth of all the men killed in the coal-mining industry and did nothing for one fifth of the families of those killed by serious accidents claiming more than four lives. The subscriptions raised after a disaster did not necessarily bear any direct relationship to the amount of distress which the charity was attempting to relieve. The benefits provided were often too low to prevent destitution and many funds failed to systematically assist dependants who were not the wives and children of the deceased. But the failure of colliery disaster funds to relieve all the distress with which they were confronted in no way invalidates their claim to the historian's attention. Subscription charities exerted a powerful, if temporary, contemporary appeal and an examination of colliery disaster funds reveals much about the nature of late nineteenth century English philanthropy.

APPENDIX

COLLIERY DISASTER FUNDS, 1860-1897

| | Year | Colliery | Lives Lost |
|-------|------|----------------|------------|
| North | 1860 | Burradon | 76 |
| | 1860 | Minor Pit | 22 |
| | 1862 | Hartley | 204 |
| | 1862 | Walker | 16 |
| | 1866 | Pelton | 24 |
| | 1871 | Seaham | 26 |
| | 1880 | Seaham | 164 |
| | 1882 | Trimdon Grange | 74 |
| | 1885 | Usworth | 42 |
| | 1886 | Elemore | 28 |
| | 1888 | St Helens | 30 |

¹ Derbyshire Times, 28 December 1861 and 28 January 1871; CG, 6 and 20 July 1877, and 13 April 1883; Nuneaton Chronicle, 16 June 1882.

² Barnsley Chronicle, 27 January 1877; G. Barker, *ibid.*, 25 December 1875; CG, 9 October 1896; Yorkshire Post, 28 November 1874; Wakefield Express, 16 October 1886; Dyson, *op. cit.*, p. 4; Swithinbank, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

| | Year | Colliery | Lives Lost |
|---------------|---------|--------------------------------|------------|
| Lancashire | 1866 | Park Lane | 30 |
| | 1866 | Bank | 8 |
| | 1868-70 | West Lancashire (10 accidents) | 317 |
| | 1878 | Unity Brook | 43 |
| | 1878 | Haydock | 189 |
| | 1881 | Abram | 48 |
| | 1883 | Altham | 68 |
| | 1885 | Clifton Hall | 178 |
| Yorkshire | 1862 | Edmund's Main | 59 |
| | 1866 | Oaks | 361 |
| | 1872 | Morley Main | 34 |
| | 1874 | Rawmarsh | 23 |
| | 1875 | Swaithe Main | 143 |
| | 1879 | Victoria | 21 |
| | 1886 | Silkstone | 22 |
| | 1893 | Thornhill | 139 |
| | 1896 | Micklefield | 23 |
| Midlands | 1861 | Clay Cross | 23 |
| | 1871 | Renishaw Park | 26 |
| | 1877 | Annesley | 7 |
| | 1882 | Baddesley | 32 |
| | 1882 | Clay Cross | 45 |
| West Midlands | 1861 | Brownhills | 6 |
| | 1866 | Dukinfield | 38 |
| | 1866 | Talke | 91 |
| | 1872 | Pelsall Hall | 22 |
| | 1874 | Bignall Hill | 17 |
| | 1875 | Bunker's Hill | 43 |
| | 1880 | Leycett | 62 |
| | 1881 | Whitfield | 25 |
| | 1881 | Lillydale | 8 |
| | 1889 | Hyde | 23 |
| | 1889 | Mossfields | 64 |
| | 1891 | Apedale | 10 |
| | 1895 | Audley | 77 |
| South-West | 1869 | Newbury | 11 |
| | 1886 | Dean Lane | 10 |
| | 1891 | Malago | 10 |
| | 1895 | Tinsbury | 7 |