

Kangaroo Flat Cemetery



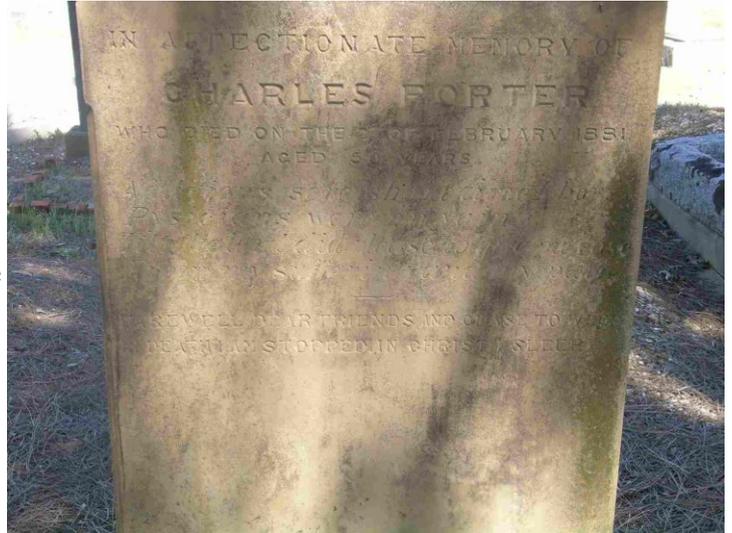
The grave of Charles PORTER

A fearful explosion occurred at the New Chum mine on Friday morning on 21st
Jan 1881.

Seven men were injured, two seriously with Charles Porter dying from his
injuries on 2nd Feb.

Images:
Porter_002_KF_2656.JPG
to
Porter_002_KF_2656A.JPG

In affectionate memory of
CHARLES PORTER
who died 2 February 1881
Aged 50 years
"Afflictions sore short time I bore
Physicians were in vain
Till the Lord did please to given me ease
From my suffering and my pain
Farewell dear friends and cease to weep
In death I am stepped in Christ I sleep."



*

Charles PORTER

Bendigo Advertiser (Vic. : 1855 - 1918) Sat 22 Jan 1881 Page 3

TERRIFIC EXPLOSION AT NEW CHUM.

SEVEN MEN INJURED AND PROPERTY DESTROYED.

The old proverb "it never rains but it pours" seems unfortunately to apply to the occurrence of mining accidents in our midst, for it is a strange circumstance that one serious casualty seldom occurs without being soon afterwards followed by another. On Thursday the sad news spread throughout the city, that two men were in a few short minutes hurled into eternity, through an accident at the Great Southern claim, and before the excitement, consequent. On that intelligence had subsided, another appalling casualty occurred, and which is fraught with circumstances of a most exciting and sad character, resulting in injury to no less than seven men, three of whom are in a most precarious condition, whilst the others with the exception of two men are very seriously injured. The occurrence was one of the most extraordinary, and at the same time most frightful, that has ever taken place in this district, being an explosion of dynamite in the claim of the New Chum Consolidated Company, New Chum. The explosion was a terrific one, and was worse in its effects than any other yet recorded in Sandhurst, and it played such havoc as astounded all who witnessed its results, which were of a most astonishing character.

THE NARRATIVE.

At about half-past seven o'clock yesterday morning a fearful explosion was heard throughout nearly the whole of the city, and in the neighbourhood of the occurrence, viz, New Chum and Golden Square, a severe shock was felt; in some places somewhat resembling the shock of an earthquake, whilst the report was of a most appalling character, being described by many to a simultaneous discharge of numerous cannons. The greatest consternation was occasioned in the vicinity, and in the more distant portions of the city wonderment at the strange report. Many of those in the immediate neighbourhood rushed to the spot from whence the sound proceeded, when it was found, to their horror, that a dreadful accident had occurred at the engine of the New Chum Consolidated Company. The scene which presented itself to the view of those who first arrived on the scene was of a most appalling and heartrending character. The engine house was a total wreck, and presented a most extraordinary spectacle of dilapidation and ruin. No less than seven of those connected with the mine were found to be injured, all with two exceptions seriously, being thrown about close to the engine house, where they had been just prior to the explosion, some of them being then totally unconscious, and presenting a ghastly spectacle, as they were covered in blood from their many wounds, whilst their clothes were nearly all torn to ribbons.

The following are the men injured:- T Sheppard, the mining manager of the claim; Charles Porter, engine driver; George Dobridge, lander; Peter Summers, miner; James Whitford, miner; Richard Hoskins, miner; and Jacob Grigg.

Hoskins and Grigg, though very severely shaken, were, notwithstanding their injuries, enabled to get up again, but the others were so seriously injured that they were nearly all in a semi-conscious state, and unable to move. Plenty of assistance was forthcoming, and no time was lost in having them removed from the ground. Mr Sheppard and the young man Summers were conveyed to their homes, the first named residing in Booth Street, several hundred yards from the claim; whilst Summers lives with his parents in a street off Booth Street, and within a very short distance of the scene of the accident. Porter, Whitford, and Dobridge were conveyed to the Bendigo Hospital, the first-named on a stretcher carried by some of his mates and friends, and the latter two in conveyances. They were all terribly knocked about and bruised, their flesh, being pierced with innumerable splinters of various sizes, whilst the limbs of some were seriously injured. It was a matter yesterday of exceeding difficulty to obtain anything like an accurate account of the sad affair, as all who were on the spot at the time were injured, and most of them so severely that it was forbidden by the doctors that they should be interfered with, and they could not consequently be interviewed. The accounts given by those who were able to speak, though graphic, and of a most sensational character, were of the briefest nature; in fact, they could be nothing else owing to the dreadfully sudden and unexpected manner in which the accident occurred.

The facts, as gleaned, are as follow: Shortly after seven o'clock in the morning the seven men mentioned were in and about the engine-house. Porter, the engine driver, and was shortly to be relieved by an engine-driver named R. Mitchell, Mr. Sheppard was about the engine house, superintending matters, George Dobridge, the braceman, was working near the top of the shaft mixing up clay, whilst near to him were Richard Hoskins, and James Whitford, mates, who had been working at the 390 feet plat, and who had come to the surface after finishing their shift, being relieved by John Lethlean and W Glasson. A young man named Peter Summers was connected with the relieving shift, but did not descend with Lethlean and Glasson, as he was required on the surface to assist in sending down timber, the men below being engaged in timbering up the shaft. There was also a miner named Jacob Grigg present, Hoskins and Whitford had just changed their clothes, and left the changing room, which is situated in the engine house and over the boiler.

The men were conversing with the braceman at the mouth of the shaft, when Porter, the driver, who was in the engine house gnyo the alarm of fire. Smoke was then seen issuing from the north-eastern corner of the engine house, which was of weatherboard. The hose at the time was fixed on to the tap, being in use, and was directed by Porter on the fire. Whilst he was doing so, and the men all close at hand, a fearful explosion took place. Some dynamite, which had been placed in the engine-house for convenience, having been ignited by the fire. The force of the explosion was something astonishing, and its results truly dreadful. As if by a stroke of magic the building was completely stripped of its weatherboard covering, and corrugated galvanised iron roof. Great beams of wood forming the basement and supports of the floor were shattered into splinters, whilst others were torn and twisted in an extraordinary fashion. Masses of the debris were hurled high into the air, and quantities thrown for hundreds of yards. The houses in the immediate proximity were also considerably damaged. The most serious phase of the occurrence was, however, its sad effects upon the men named, all of whom received a terrible shock, five of them being dreadfully injured.

The mining manager, Whitford, Summers, Dobridge, and Porter, were found lying on the ground in an insensible state, and greatly mangled; their appearance, covered as they were with blood, with their clothes torn to pieces, being a sickening spectacle. Assistance being quickly at hand, they were all removed from the ground as previously stated, it being found that they were very seriously injured. Hoskins and Grigg had most miraculous escapes and, strange to say, escaped with but trivial injuries as compared with the others, though of course the shock they received may tell on them for some time to come. The cause of Gripps' escape was that on the occurrence of the explosion he was thrown down, Sheppard and Porter falling on him, and thus actually forming a shield which protected him from flying splinters and other pieces of the ruins. Hoskins' escape is still more strange. The force of the explosion threw him over an embankment into an excavation that used once to be an old dam. The result of his fall into this was that

he was placed below the line of the flying timbers, etc., but he had great difficulty at times in avoiding quantities of falling debris.

THE CAUSE OF THE ACCIDENT.

As regards the cause of the accident, as in all such cases, various surmises were freely entered into, but no really definite clue could be obtained. The company have a magazine on the ground, in the shaft known as Menzies, where dynamite was kept, but it appears that, for convenience sake, some of the miners engaged at the shaft at which the accident occurred (formerly known as the South Old Chum) placed (it is said) a small quantity of dynamite in the engine-house. It was placed in a small box, and it is stated to have consisted of two packets, weighing five pounds each. In the same box, however, were also placed the caps, which act is regarded by many as having been an incautious one. By placing the dynamite there considerable trouble would be avoided, but it has since been stated that it was kept in the engine-house outside of the mining manager's knowledge. The box containing it was placed at the eastern end of the engine-house and furthest from the boiler, two engines being between buildings. This supposition is strengthened by the fact that the first appearance of smoke was discovered in the portion of the engine-house where the brake was.

INJURIES TO THE MEN.

The three most severe sufferers by the accident were the unfortunate men Porter, Whitford, and Dobridge. They were as stated conveyed to the Bendigo Hospital, where they were attended to by Dr. Welchman, and placed in the casualty ward. It was found on examination that their injuries were as follows:-

Porter sustained no less than seven or eight severe jagged scalp wounds, a cut on the forehead, and five or six cuts on the right side of his body. His right thigh was a mass of cuts and bruises. His left arm was broken right up near his shoulder, and his right side has evidently received a very severe blow, and it is believed that some of his ribs are broken, but his condition was so low that he could not be examined with a view of properly ascertaining that. His face is also singed.

Dobridge has sustained a compound fracture of the left leg, and is dreadfully shaken. Both are in rather a critical condition, but Dobridge's chances of recovery are the best.

Whitford was in the most precarious state, and but little hopes were entertained of his recovery. His face was shockingly bruised and cut, and a flying missile had struck him with such force on the throat as to lacerate the larynx right through, and to prevent him from swallowing. One of the blood vessels of his neck was ruptured, and he was all day spitting blood. He was perfectly unconscious.

Porter appeared in great agony, and was continually moaning and crying out. Too much praise cannot be bestowed on Dr Welchman for the untiring attention he bestowed on these men, the responsibility of whose care devolved wholly on his shoulders, as Dr Colquhoun was so ill as to be confined to his residence. Each of

the sufferers are men pretty well up in years. Porter is stated to be 52 years old, Dobridge 50 years, and Whitford 42. Mr Sheppard received very severe injuries, but, fortunately, recovered consciousness soon after he was conveyed to his residence, where he was most carefully attended to by Dr Penfold. He was injured in the left eye, which is supposed to have been penetrated by a splinter, and the sight of which it is expected he will lose. A number of splinters entered his face, and his legs were much cut and torn by flying splinters of wood.

An idea may be formed of the force of the explosion from the fact that a new pair of printed moleskin trousers which he had on were torn from his legs. Young Summers was, for some time after removal to his parents' residence, in a semi-conscious state, but improved during the day under the treatment of Dr Eadie. He received a long gash over the left eye, cuts and bruises on his left leg, and his left arm was lacerated from the wrist to the elbow, and in it were found numerous splinters of wood. The shock he received to his system told heavily on him. Griggs and Hoskins received but slight injuries, the former a cut on one of his legs, and Hoskins a cut on his nose.

THE DAMAGE DONE.

The amount of damage done was very considerable, and many were of opinion that such a quantity of dynamite as was stated to have been placed in the engine-house could never have caused the havoc made. The engine-house was a compact weatherboard building, being apparently about 20 feet by 30 feet in dimensions. It covered the boiler (over which was the changing house) and two engines, viz., a vertical engine, working one of Ford's vertical forked air compressors, also a horizontal engine working the winding plant. The explosion took place on the eastern side of the flywheel of the winding engine, and it was of such surprising force that it shattered the building almost completely, stripping it of every weatherboard, driving out even the window casings, and leaving nothing but the uprights on three sides, and about two-thirds of the rafters of the roof. The floor was ripped up, and most of the floor boards knocked into matchwood. The galvanised corrugated iron roof was sent flying in all directions and part of the lightning conducting rod, affixed to the chimney stack, torn off, whilst the steam funnel of the engine was stove in on one side.

The massive timbers connected with the foundation of the winding engine were greatly shattered and broken, and the foundation of the engine shaken a good deal, but not displaced. Strange to say the machinery all escaped injury. It was shortly after the accident examined on behalf of the company by Mr A Harkness, who found that it was all right. The fire was drawn soon after the explosion, but in the afternoon steam was again got up, and the engine driving the air compressor was set at work as usual so that the general operations below were not interfered with. The damage done was not confined to the engine-house alone. Situated close to it is a weatherboard building, consisting of two rooms. It belongs to the company,

and was at one time used as an office and blacksmith's shop, but was set apart for the accommodation of a miner employed on the claim, named Benjamin C. James, and his family, James acting in the capacity of caretaker of the claim on Sundays. It is situated many yards from the engine-house, but the explosion had such force that many of the weatherboards were shaken off the front of the building, and all the windows smashed, whilst some of the crockery of the house was broken. Dobridge's house is also near to the claim, and the concussion of the explosion broke three large panes of glass in the front windows of the house. The appearance of the engine-house and its surroundings, after the accident, was one of the greatest confusion and ruin, and great quantities of debris were to be seen strewn about in all directions far and wide, some portions of the ruin being hurled for a great distance away.

GENERAL EFFECTS OF THE EXPLOSION.

The report of the explosion was heard within a radius of about six miles round Sandhurst. It is described by those who heard it near at hand as being something tremendous. The houses in the immediate neighbourhood were greatly shaken, and the sudden vibration added to the noise of the explosion filled many persons with the greatest fear and concern, and numbers thought that an earthquake had visited us.

Crockery and other ware was broken in many houses, pictures shaken down off their hangings, and in fact the effects generally were exactly those which really would follow a slight shock of earthquake. People at the White Hills, Epsom, Quarry Hill, Ironbark, Long Gully, Golden Square, Kangaroo Flat, Myers' Flat, and many other outlying portions of the district, distinctly aver that they heard the report of the explosion, and were filled with wonderment as to what it could be. The excitement throughout the city was very great, and crowds of citizens visited the scene of the occurrence. The report made by the bursting of the boiler of the New Chum United which occurred some time ago, and which, was in the same locality, did not create anything like the noise of the dynamite, nor was such a shock felt.

STATEMENTS.

The statements made by those, who were able yesterday to throw any light on the matter of the general circumstances appertaining thereto, were to the following effect:- Richard Hoskins stated that he and James Whitford had been on the night shift, working at the 300 feet plat, putting in timber. Their other mate, R Griffiths, had not gone down with them, but remained on the surface for the purpose of sending down timber. He (Hoskins) and Whitford came to the surface at about a quarter to seven o'clock. They were relieved by John Lethlean, W Glasson, and Peter Summers. The two former went below, but Summers remained above to do the same class of work that Griffiths, their mate, had been doing.

He (Hoskins) and Whitford after changing in the changing house went outside near to the mouth of the shaft where Dobridge, the braceman, was working. Porter was in charge of the engine, having been on the night shift, his relief being R. Mitchell, who was to come on about that time. The mining manager, Thomas Sheppard, was at the engine-house. Dobridge was beating up clay, and Mr Sheppard asked him if he thought he had clay enough. Dobridge replied that he had. Just then Porter called out that the engine-house had caught fire somewhere. Hoskins looked round and saw smoke emanating from the north east corner of the building. Porter asked for the hose, which was attached to the watertap and which Dobridge had been using. The hose was handed to Porter, and he directed it to where the smoke was seen.

Some one then drew attention to the fact that some dynamite was on the floor of the house. Immediately afterwards a tremendous explosion took place, which knocked Hoskins into an old but dry dam, situated close to the poppet heads, where he was standing. The fact of his fall from the dam saved him from being struck by debris when flying away, but a great quantity of wood and iron descended all around him, and he had the greatest difficulty in avoiding some of the pieces. Finding that he was not severely hurt, he got up when he saw the men being removed. He then proceeded to his home in Booth Street.

Jacob Griggs' statement is to the effect that he was at the engine-house in the morning as stated, as were also the other men named. Porter said at about half-past seven o'clock that he smelt something burning, and asked if any thing was on fire, and one of those present replied that he did not know. Porter then went from the upper story, where the air-compressor engine was, down to the ground floor, under which he saw flames. He then called for the hose, which was given to him, and at his request he (Griggs) turned the water on, when the explosion took place. Griggs was knocked down, and was struck by pieces of wood, when he became evidently in great pain, as indicated by his cries, being covered in blood. On being asked if he had suffered any injury, he (Griggs) replied in the negative, but immediately after he found that he had received a rather extensive wound on one of his legs, besides certain bruises. He was then taken to his home. His clothes were greatly torn.

Mr Sheppard was too weak to be interviewed, but his son states that his father said subsequent to the accident that he was not aware that dynamite was kept in the engine-house, and that it is believed that it was placed there by miners, who obtained it from the magazine in the usual manner, but that finding it would not be required, as only timbering was being done in the shaft, that they for purposes of convenience placed in the engine-house. What he has said about the occurrence coincides with the general account given by the others. Peter Summers was also in such a state that he could not be interviewed, but from what he has uttered to his friends, it appears that when the outbreak of the fire was first discovered, he knew

the danger that existed owing to the presence of the dynamite, and attempted to escape, but seeing the others manfully trying to extinguish the flames he turned back determined to assist them, when the explosion took place.

H Jeffreys, engine-driver at the other shaft of the company, states that after he heard the explosion, he at once proceeded to the scene of the accident. He found the place in a wreck, as already described, and the various sufferers lying about. The air compressor engine was going as if nothing had occurred, and he stopped it. The fires were afterwards drawn out, and steam allowed to go down.

Thomas Porter, who is a brother of Charles Porter, the injured man, states that he and his son witnessed the explosion. They were at the time working at the windlass at the Red, White, and Blue Extended claim, about a mile and a half distant, He states that the explosion made a fearfully loud report, and the debris rose to a great height, for the most part going in a north easterly direction, and in its flight taking the form of a rainbow.

OPERATIONS AT THE-MINE.

The accident, though of such a destructive character, probably has not interfered with the operations of the mine, to any appreciable extent. Soon after the occurrence, a number of men were busily employed repairing the floor of the engine-house, and as it was ascertained that the machinery was not injured, the engine driving the air compressor, was again set to work, under the care of R Mitchell, but not the winding engine as the bed was somewhat shaken.

The operations are now being carried on under the supervision of the underground boss, Mr R Whitford, who is by the way no relation to the injured man.

THE STORAGE OF EXPLOSIVES.

With regard to the storage of explosives it may be mentioned that paragraph A, of rule 2, section 6, of the Regulation of Mines Statute of 1877 (Act 583) bears on the matter, and provides that explosives should not be stored on the surface of or adjacent to the mine, unless in such magazine, and in such quantities as may in writing be approved of by the Minister of Mines.

PROTECTION OP THE PROPERTY.

Very shortly after the accident a proper force of police were stationed on the ground, and remained there during the day, for the purpose of protecting the property of the company, and credit is especially due to Constable Hoare, of Golden Square, for the promptness with which he proceeded to the spot.

LATEST PARTICULARS.

Up to late last night no change of importance had taken place in the condition of either Sheppard or Summers.

3.15 a.m.

On inquiry at the hospital it was ascertained that no change had taken place as regards the condition of the men there.

*

Bendigo Advertiser (Vic. : 1855 - 1918) Tue 1 Feb 1881 Page 2

THE NEW CHUM EXPLOSION.

The man Porter continues in an extremely low state. The present appears to be a very critical time for his wounds, and it is greatly feared the unfortunate man will not be able to pull through. We mentioned in yesterday's issue that a statement had been made to the effect that the men employed at the mine at which the explosion took place would render no assistance in the removal of Porter to the hospital. The statement was so greatly at variance with sympathetic kindness almost invariably exhibited by miners to others who have met with an accident that we were quite confident mistake must have been made, and we now learn that no difficulty or delay what ever occurred in the removal of any of the injured men. All the men belonging to the claim were more or less injured by the explosion, but immediately afterwards plenty of willing assistance was at hand, everyone present being most anxious to do whatever was be at for the sufferers.

*

Bendigo Advertiser (Vic. : 1855 - 1918) Wed 2 Feb 1881 Page 2

THE NEW CHUM EXPLOSION.

One of the unfortunate sufferers by the late explosion at the New Chum Consolidated Company's mine has succumbed to the injuries he received, the engine-driver, Charles Porter, having died at the hospital about one o'clock this morning. From the time he was first admitted Porter's case was regarded as very serious indeed, and though the poor fellow's condition alternated almost daily between improvement and relapse, there was never at any time any really strong hope entertained that he would recover. His injuries were very serious, his head and whole body being covered with severe wounds and bruises, besides which he had sustained a fracture of one of his arms. The hospital surgeons were most assiduous in their attention to the injured men who were taken to the institution, but the trying weather which has lately been experienced operated very prejudicially against Porter, and he died as stated. The other sufferers continue to make good progress towards recovery.



Compiled by Olwen Fenton & Ian Belmont
in August 2021
for the Bendigo Cemetery Obituaries & Notes