

WALKING TOGETHER

An eerie wind whips through this site
Where metal men stand strong and proud
Shoulder to shoulder, walking together, as back in the day
To and from the draw of Markham.

These were buddies through and through
Down below, up above, all for one and one for all
Worked, laughed, lived, died together
And who now mark this memorial place for ever.

Markham like others was a dangerous place
Darkness, damp, dirt and dust
Depressingly long shifts, full of risks
For this family of men
Brave, trusting - yet full of fear.
Disaster strikes once.
Thursday 21st January, 1937
2.45pm - Day shift ending, afternoons starting
Slapped backs and jovial banter as men crossed paths.

Unbeknown in the Black Shale seam, a build up of gas.
A flame from a faulty covering plate on the coal cutting machine
Igniting coal dust. Almighty explosion.

Seven men lay at the scene, two others passing later.
Four casualties - seriously injured, never to work again.
A community bereft.
Disaster strikes twice.
May 1938, 10th, a Tuesday.
5.30am. Nightshift over, no different to any other
Snap tins and Dudleys long-relieved of contents
Attached to leather belts, clank in step of these weary men.

Tired limbs, eyes like pandas
Silent companionship, closeness
Sweaty grimy faces head for the cage
Where the Banksman patiently waits.

A tremendous draft, a terrific bang
Thick black coal dust and smoke filled the pit
A wall of fire swept through the seam
An explosion of gas at the coal face.

**Tubs carrying coal ran out of control
Smashing into an electric joint box causing sparks
Which ignited the coal dust.
79 men killed, 38 men injured.
A community destroyed.
Disaster strikes thrice.
Monday 30th July 1973
6.20am. 105 miners lowered into the pit to start day shift
A double-decker cage makes another descent
Fifteen men high, fourteen below.**

**Sparks!
From the brake cylinder
Engine winder hits the emergency stop button ...
... nothing happens.**

**The cage plunged 1,329 feet to the pit bottom
Ascending cage crashed through the winding house roof.
18 men died with another 11 men and one rescue worker very seriously injured.
A community devastated.**

**No more showering in a circle, washing dirt from the backs of mates
No domino games over breakfast butties in the Canteen
No afternoon or evenings supping pints of Tetley's at the Welfare
Chewing the fat, putting their world to rights.**

**No racing pigeons from lofts on the allotments where veg was grown
Holidays at Skeggie Miner's become a thing of the past
No more dancing, tug-of-war, knobbly knees
Just photographic memories for all those left behind.**

**These men ...
All equal
Respected in life and in death
Never forgotten
Comrades,
For ever
Walking Together.**