

THE SHEFFIELD FLOOD

As far as national disasters are concerned most of us will have heard of the Tay Bridge disaster in 1879 when the central section of the bridge collapsed taking with it a train and the lives of 75 people. Most too will be all too familiar with the tragic deaths of 144 people, mostly children, when a land slide buried the school in Aberfan in 1966. Yet how many of us know about the Sheffield Flood? Sadly too few even though this is still the worst ever manmade disaster in our history.

A little before midnight on 11th March 1864, the embankment of the newly built Dale Dyke Reservoir near Bradfield, just a few miles from Sheffield, was breached unleashing 700 million gallons of water on the unsuspecting valley below. Officially 240 people drowned but, after analysing the compensation claims lodged against the Water Company, it is clear that many more people died in the weeks and months following of effects suffered as a direct result of being immersed in the foul waters of the flood.

Building work had begun on the dam on New Years Day in 1859 to supply the industries and people of Sheffield with desperately needed water but when disaster struck the reservoir was not yet in use. Word had spread among the locals in the upper part of the valley after the initial crack in the embankment has been spotted but lower down the valley it was a different story. No word of the impending danger was spread so many were in bed when a mighty wall of water as high as a three storey building began its fatal journey down the valley. Whole families died and at Malin Bridge around 100 people died in the space of just 20 minutes. Many clung to the rooftops desperately trying to escape the flood waters only to be swept to their deaths when the building was wrenched from its foundations. Others died in their sleep when the water filled their rooms beyond the height of the ceiling preventing any means of escape.

The inquest held afterwards declared that the workmanship was not befitting a structure of this magnitude although it has also been said that the positioning of the dam and the natural geology also played its part in the downfall of the dam, as it is thought a land slip underground may have forced one of the outlet pipes to collapse causing the ground above to slip, eventually bringing down the embankment.

When daylight broke next morning there was a scene of terrible carnage and devastation all the way into the center of Sheffield although the flood waters had even swelled the River Don as far afield as Doncaster.



View looking across the present Dale Dyke Reservoir

So how is it that outside the confines of Sheffield this terrible disaster has now been all but forgotten? Is it because those who died were northern working class people, many amongst the poorest in society? Yet this fact alone makes this tragedy even greater. At the time the disaster made national news and even Queen Victoria contributed to the relief fund that was set up to help those who had lost their homes and belongings.

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Nation of Ghouls?

The modern day practice of "rubber necking" when passing the scene of an accident may well be commonplace these days but it seems we have always been a nation of ghouls. The aftermath of the tragedy at Bradfield is certainly no exception. A report in the "Doncaster, Nottingham and Lincoln Gazette" printed on 18th March 1864 stated:

"On Monday last thousands inspected the ruins of Malin-bridge. From Hillsbro' to Bacon Island, the road had the appearance of a fair. The large number of persons congregated here was no doubt occasioned by the fine view which could be obtained of the desolation in that part of Neepsend lying round the Farfield Hotel. The weather was beautifully clear, scarcely a cloud flitted across the azure sky, and the country might be seen for a considerable distance. The terrible destruction inflicted by the flood was distinctly observable. The inhabitants of the houses about this district are busily engaged pumping the water out of their cellars ; and on lines in gardens at the back hang carpets, mattress-cases, and other things which have been saturated by the flood."

It went on to the report that on the following day, Sunday,

"The appearance of the streets this day was that of some of the busiest thoroughfares in the metropolis. Thousands of persons poured in from all parts of the country, and vehicles of every description, from a brougham to a mere donkey cart, were employed to convey the spectators to the moor. Omnibuses also ran from the town to Hillsbro', which bore large tickets with the words "To Hillsbro' and the ruins", and countless were the passengers who availed themselves of them. From Bridgehouse through the narrow lanes to Harvestland poured one continuous stream of all grades of society. "

A further edition printed on March 25th 1864 reported that spectators were still gathering en masse and that others were even profiteering from the crowds.

"The road presented the appearance of the turnpike road to Epsom on a "Derby day". Nor was there absent on this occasion a full complement of that class of individuals who are to be found on every occasion where excitement attracts large concourses of people - we mean the itinerant vendors of all kinds as of eatables - who undertake to cater for the wants of the hungry multitudes. From Owlerton to the dam were many carts and booths belonging to this class of persons who appeared to drive a roaring trade."

The edition printed on April 8th carried this incredible advert in the 'Notices' section:

Notices.

THE GREAT FLOOD AT SHEFFIELD
Produced on a scale of grandeur by the powerful
Oxy-Hydrogen Lime Light.
**VICTORIA ROOMS, HIGH-STREET,
DONCASTER.**
FOR SIX NIGHTS ONLY
Commencing on Monday, April 11, 1864.
TWO GRAND MID-DAY PERFORMANCES
On Wednesday and Friday, April the 13th and 15th,
at Two o'clock.

MR. E. J. F. JOURDAIN'S (of London) grand
MUSICAL and PICTORIAL ENTERTAIN-
MENT, being his second visit to Doncaster.
Numerous Views of Places of Interest, first-class
Music on the Pianoforte; and one of Alexandre's
magnificent Harmoniums. A change of Views each
Evening, combining the grandest and best Enter-
tainment in the world.
Doors open at Half-past Seven; to commence at
Eight.
Tickets and Programmes to be had at Mr. BROOKS'S,
Gazette-office; and at Mr. HARTLER'S, Chronicle-
office, High-street, Doncaster.
Reserved Seats, 2s.; Second, 1s.; Area, 6d. Schools
half-price to first and second seats.
SEE OPINIONS OF THE PRESS.

Perhaps we have always been a nation of ghouls?

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After the flood a relief fund was immediately set up and even Queen Victoria contributed £200 and over 7000 compensation claims were lodged against the Water Company. The Inundation Commissioners, engaged to arbitrate the claims, often deemed the lives of women and children as “worthless” so no award was made and many other claims were settled for a fraction of the amount claimed. At the end of the hearings there was a surplus of funds and it was suggested that the money be used to erect a suitable monument but incredibly the funds were returned to the subscribers.

Details of the compensation claims have since been made available online with the excellent project of digitisation headed by Dr Steven Earnshaw of Sheffield Hallam University. For more details have a look at: <http://extra.shu.ac.uk/sfca/>

Further details of the flood can also be found on Mick Armitage’s excellent website at: <http://www.mick-armitage.staff.shef.ac.uk/sheffield/flood.html>

For the past few years I have been researching the lives of those who died and I am currently in touch with well over 50 people from all across the world who are descended from those who died. I would love to hear from anyone whose ancestors died in the flood or from anyone wishing to find out if their ancestors were involved.

Please feel free to write to me by either snail mail or email and I will be happy to pass on any information I have about those who died.

This hobby will undoubtedly keep me entertained for many years to come and I hope that one day I can repay these poor people by helping to perpetuate their memory and to play my small part in helping to ensure history does not allow them to be forgotten.



One of 4 CLOB stones marking the
Centre Line of Old Bank
the original position of the embankment
that collapsed on 11th March 1864



Small memorial erected by the
Bradfield Historical Society to
commemorate the lives lost in
the Sheffield Flood

Karen Lightowler
29 Cherry Tree Drive
Dunscroft
Doncaster
South Yorkshire
DN7 4JY

Email: KarenL823@aol.com

THE SHEFFIELD FLOOD

Full List of Victims

ALBERT	Catherine, John, Mary Jane
APPLEBY	Mary, John Cowton, Mary
ARCULAS / ARCULUS	Christopher Bradbury
ARMITAGE	Eliza
ARMITAGE	William, Ann, Charles, Henry, Samuel, William, Maria
ARMITAGE	Greaves, Maria, Mary, Elizabeth
ATKINSON	Maurice, William
ATKINSON	James, Sarah
ATKINSON	William
ATKINSON	Robert
ATKINSON	George
BAGSHAW	James, Mary
BARKER	Joseph
BARROTT	George, Emma, William
BATES	Thomas, Harriet, George, Walter, Tom
BETHELL	William
BISBY	George, Sarah, Teresa, Eliza, Thomas, Ann, Hugh
BONSER	William
BOOTH	Walter
BOWER	John
BRADBURY	William
BRIGHT	Mary, Alfred, Mary, Eliza
BROUGHTON	Charles
BULLARD	Thomas, Sarah Ann
BURKINSHAW	Henry
CALTON / COLTON	Christopher, Mary
CHAPMAN	Dan, Ellen, Frederick, Samuel
CHAPMAN	William
CLAY	George
COGGIN	Alfred, Eliza, William
COOKE	Ann
CRAPPER	Joseph, Elizabeth, Joseph
CROOKES	William
CROSS	Edward
CROWNSHAW	Hannah Elizabeth
CRUMP	Mary, Samuel
DAMMS	Walter
DAWSON	Unnamed infant
DEAN	Joseph
DENTON	Joseph
DYSON	Joe, Mary, Sophia, Arthur, Priscilla, Lucy Ann, James
EATON	John, Keziah
ELSTON	Thomas, Elizabeth, Thomas
ETCHELLS	Ann
FAIRHURST	Thomas
FOLDS	Isobel Jane, John Aldred
FRITH	James
GANNON	John, Sarah, Henry, John, Peter, William, Sarah Ann, Margaret
GILL	Thomas
GILYATT	Susannah
GLOVER	John, Sarah Ann
GODDARD	Joseph, Sarah
GREEN	Elizabeth
GREGORY	Joe William Bradbury
HAGUE	Alathea
HALL	Henry
HASLEHURST	Richard
HILL	Hannah Marie
HUDSON	John, Eliza, Mary, George
HUKIN	Alfred, Mary
IBBOTSON	John Thomas and Stephen

THE SHEFFIELD FLOOD

JACKSON	Annice
JEPSON	George, Harriott, Isabella, Mary Ann
JOHNSON	Mary Charlotte
KAY	Thomas
KING	John
LONGLEY	William, Mary Ellen?, Jane Ann?, Sarah?
MAPPIN	Eliza
MARSHALL	Herbert Gravenor
MAYOR	John, Elizabeth, Sarah
McLAUGHLIN	Dennis
MERRYMAN	Thomas
MIDWOOD	John, Phoebe, Dawson, George, Fanny
MILLS	George, Hannah
MOUNT	Ann
NEEDHAM	John, Martha
OAKLEY	John
PARKES	Emma, Alfred, Emma
PEACOCK	JS or John Thornton
PEARSON	Ann
PETERS	Jane, Julia, Christopher
PETTY	Thomas, Margaret, Mary, Catherine, Thomas
PICKERING	William, Charlotte Ann, Elizabeth
PLATTS	Charles
PRICE	Charles, Elizabeth, Edward, Sarah, John Charles, unnamed infant
RADFORD	George, Elizabeth, John
RILEY	Edward
RIDER	Robert
SELLARS	William, Caroline
SENIOR	Samuel
SERVANTS	(unnamed) Man, Girl
SIMPSON	William
SNAPE	George, Mary
SNAPE	Richard
SPOONER	Thomas, Selina, William, Frederick, Mary Ann, Thomas, Betsy, Albert, Hugh
SPOONER	Hannah, Jonathan, Benjamin, Sarah Ann
TAYLOR	Charlotte
TINGLE	George
TRICKETT	James, Elizabeth, Jemima, James, George
TURNER	Isaac, Selina, Isaac, Sarah Ann and Jonathan
TURTON	John, Susan/Susannah
VARNEY	Sidney James
VAUGHAN	John, Elizabeth
WALLACE	Emma
WATERS	William
WATSON	Sarah Ann, Caroline Oakley, George Henry
WEBSTER	Peter, Sarah, Robert, Joseph Edward
WILLET[T]S/WILLITS	Priscilla
WINTER	Thomas
WOLSTENHOLME	William
WRIGHT	George, Rebecca
YEARLEY	Mary, Rosina, John

Sub total

240 people

The above list of 240 people includes Joseph CRAPPER who drowned but whose name did not appear in the official list but does not include Joseph CALTON/COLTON as I believe his death was registered in error.

Further people believed to have drowned but not included in the official list of victims

BENNETT	possibly Emma	(death mentioned in several accounts at the time of the flood)
DENTON	Thomas	(death registered in Loxley burial register)
DRABBLE	son of George	(death mentioned in flood claims)
JENKINSON	man [unnamed]	(death mentioned in several accounts at the time of the flood)
NORTH	William?	(body identified at the time of the flood according to a local newspaper)
SANDERSON	John	(body identified at the time of the flood according to a local newspaper)

Sub total

6 people

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People who died later of effects suffered during the flood

ASHFORTH	Millicent Jane
ASKHAM	Joseph
BARSON	William
BARTHORPE	William, Mary Hannah
BOYES	William
BRADBURY	son of William
BRAILSFORD	Elizabeth
BUCKLEY	Jeremiah
BULLOSS	Elizabeth, [step daughter of LAKE]
BUTTERY	Sarah Ann [or BUTHEY/BUTRAY]
CHAPMAN	Rosena
CLARKE	Frances, Ann
COOKE	Thomas
COOPER	Mark
CROOKES	Joseph
CROSS	James
DAVIES	child of Gardiner
DICKINSON	John
ELLIS	Mary
FLETCHER	John
GREAVES	Mr [unnamed]
GREGORY	William
HAGUE	Wife of George (unnamed), Deborah, Eliza, Farewell, Ellen
HEWITT	Charlotte, George?
HORSFIELD	Jonathan
HUDDLESTONE	Mary Anne
JACKSON	Sarah
JOHNSON	Julia
KENWORTHY	George
KIRTON	Mary Ann
LEE	Jonathan
MARRIOTT	John
MARSHALL	Harry Somerville
McCORMACK	Ellen
McDONALD	William
MOULSON	Thomas
MUSCROFT	Eliza
NEWTON	Richard
OLIVER	Robert, Sarah
PARKIN	Walter
PASHLEY	Harry
PEARS	Peter Pearce Ormrod
RILEY	Henry
SHAW	wife of Thomas
SHERWIN	Henry
SMALLEY	Thomas
SMITH	John
THORPE	Edwin
TRICKETT	Mary, Elizabeth
WALL	Henry
WALTHER	child of Herman
WILLIS	James

Sub Total

60 people

Final Total

306 people