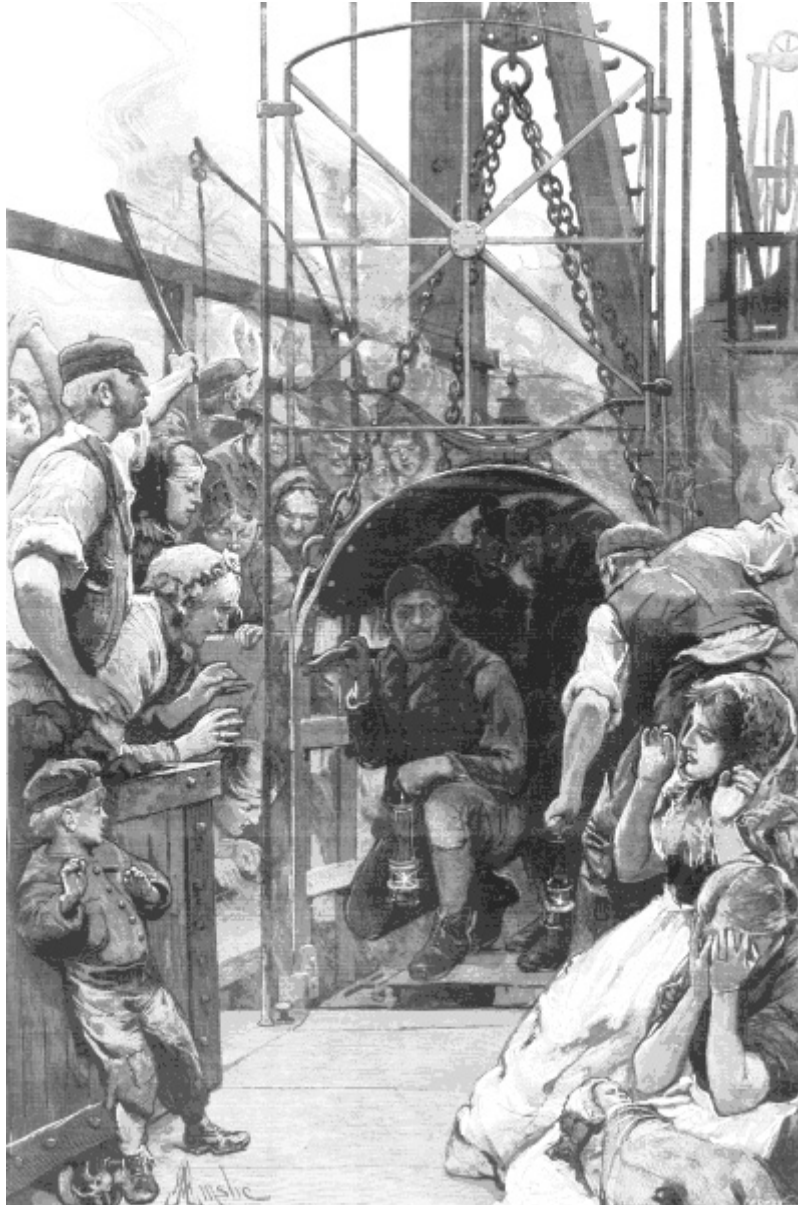




The National Archives

Education Service



# Mining Explosion

## The Trimdon Grange mining accident

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## Introduction

In 1882, 74 men and boys lost their lives in an explosion at a coal mine. Almost everyone in the small town of Trimdon Grange near Durham lost a father, brother, husband, or grandfather.

Source 1 comes from a popular magazine called the Illustrated London News (1882). Source 2 was written by Tommy Armstrong, who was from the region. All the people and events mentioned in the song are real.

## Tasks

Look at Source 1

1. Look at the picture and answer the questions below:
  - a) Describe what you can see in the picture.
  - b) What do you think has happened?
  - c) How could you work when this picture was set if you did not know the date?
  - d) Choose a person in the picture. Describe events from **their** point of view. How are they **feeling** and **why**? What can they hear and see around them?
  - e) Choose another person in the picture. What questions would you ask them about the events that have taken place?

Look at Source 2

2. This song was written by a local man, Tommy Armstrong, at the time of the disaster.
  - a) Read 'Trimdon Grange Explosion'. What do you think is happening in the song?
  - b) Discuss with your partner, and make a simple storyboard or flowchart of events.
  - c) The song mostly uses literal language (says exactly what it means). What effect does this have on the reader?
  - d) Working in groups, choose one verse of the song, and freeze-frame the different events in that verse.
  - e) Watch your friends' performances, and evaluate their work. Think about what they have done really well and why, and what they could do to improve their performance.

## Background

Tommy Armstrong was born at Shotley Bridge on 15th August, 1848 and was often known as the 'Pitman Poet'. At the age of nine he started working at East Tanfield Colliery where he had problems with his legs, and therefore only ever grew to be five feet tall.

He was a miner who wrote songs and poems that tell of life in the Durham area at the turn of the century. He wrote to keep himself in beer money as well as to support his fourteen children! He had his songs printed and sold around local public houses for a penny each.

Although he had never been to school, Tommy's songs were seen as an important record of Durham's mining communities. Writing during a period of extreme change in the mining industry Armstrong chronicled some of the worst strikes and accidents in the region's history.

Mining disasters and colliery explosions were a regular occurrence in Tommy's time, and the Trimdon Grange Colliery Explosion, which is featured in this lesson, is one of his most famous songs because he recorded it to raise money in aid of the widows and orphans.

Tommy Armstrong lived in Tanfield for most of his life and died aged 71 around 1919.

## Teachers Notes

This lesson can be used with pupils at key stage 2 to support the teaching of Literacy in Year 5. It focuses on a song and picture of a mining explosion at Trimdon Grange in 1882, and supports the following text level objectives from the National Literacy Strategy:

### **1998 Framework objectives covered:**

Year 5, Term 2: T4 and T5 read a range of narrative poems, perform poems in a variety of ways; T6 understand terms which describe different kinds of poems and identify typical features; T10 understand the differences between literal and figurative language.

For the purpose of this exercise, 'Explosion at Trimdon Grange' has been referred to as a narrative poem. However, it is worth noting, that it was originally a song written by Tommy Armstrong, the 'Pitman Poet', who was from the region.

The picture could be shown before the poem, so that pupils focus on analysing the events in the picture with no prior knowledge of what has happened. The poem could then be introduced as an additional task.

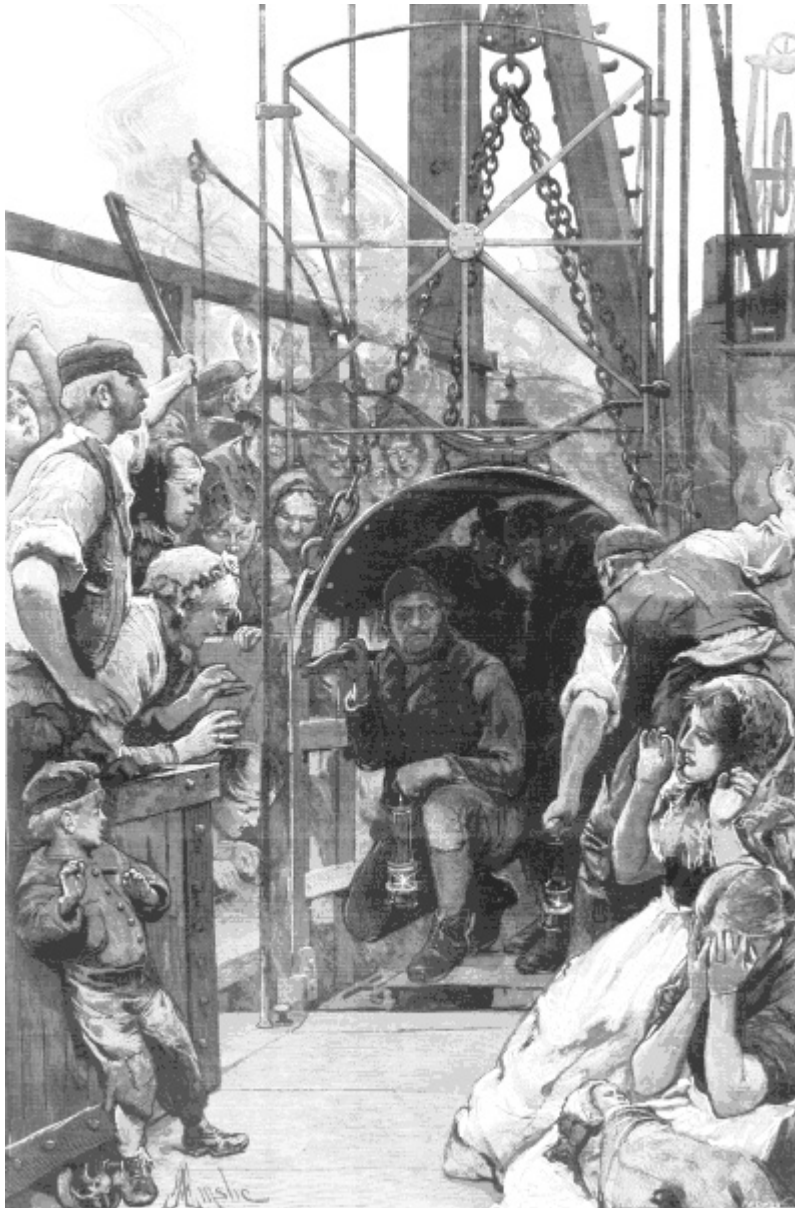
### **More activities**

- Pupils could work in pairs, and choose people from the picture to 'hotseat'.
- Pupils could use the picture to write their own piece of narrative poetry
- Pupils could take the character of Mrs. Burnett from the poem, and write a short piece of poetry about her experience of the Trimdon Grange Explosion
- The class could perform their version of 'Trimdon Grange Explosion' during a school assembly

### **Sources**

Source 1 - ZPER34/80

## Source 1 : A Colliery Explosion: Volunteers to the Rescue 1882 (ZPER 34/80)



## Source 2 : Trimdon Grange Explosion

Let us not think of to-morrow,  
Lest we disappointed be;  
All our joys may turn to sorrow,  
As we all may daily see.  
To-day we may be strong and healthy,  
But how soon there comes a change,  
As we may learn from the explosion,  
That has been at Trimdon Grange.

Men and boys left home that morning,  
For to earn their daily bread,  
Little thought before that evening  
That they'd be numbered with the dead;  
Let us think of Mrs. Burnett,  
Once had sons but now has none,  
By the Trimdon Grange explosion,  
Joseph, George and James are gone.

February left behind it  
What will never be forgot;  
Weeping widows, helpless children,  
May be found in many a cot,  
Homes that once were blest with comfort,  
Guided by a father's care,  
Now are solemn, sad and gloomy,  
Since the father is not there.

Little children, kind and loving,  
From their homes each day would run  
For to meet their father's coming,  
As each hard day's work was done.  
Now they ask if father's left them,  
Then the mother hangs her head;  
With a weeping widow's feelings,  
Tells the child that 'father's dead'.

God protect the lonely widow,  
Help to raise each drooping head;  
Be a Father to the orphans,  
Never let them cry for bread.  
Death will pay us all a visit,  
They have only gone before;  
We may meet the Trimdon victims  
Where explosions are no more.