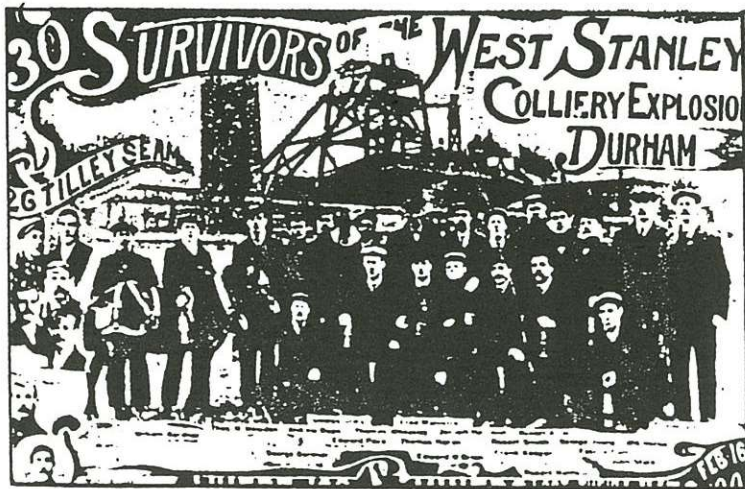


Stanley Colliery Disaster Lantern

J. Roger Mitchell

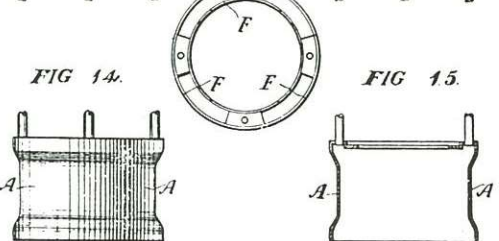
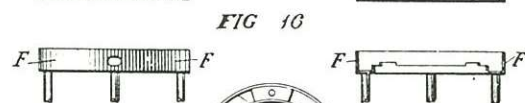
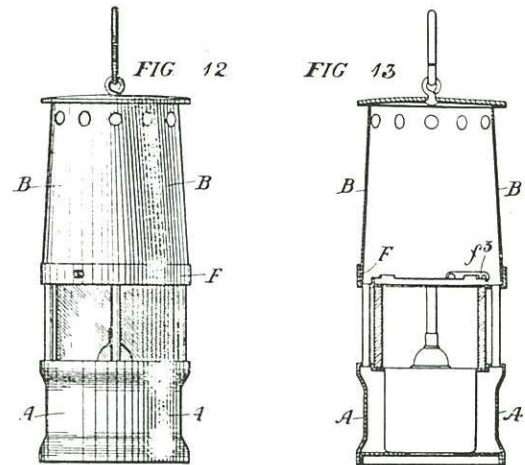
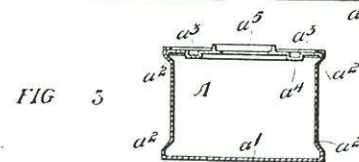
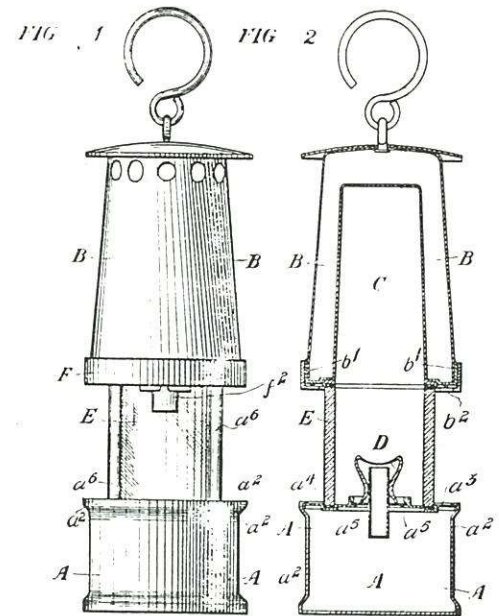
A short time ago I received as a gift a curious little safety lamp that I had seen in an antique shop in Ohio. It aroused my curiosity because it lacked many of the features of a real or working lamp. At the time I thought it was either a fake or a replica of a full scale safety lamp, until I spotted it in the No. 6 edition of the **Senior Conflow Calendar, 1987**.¹ The caption stated that it was a model safety lamp made to raise funds for the families of the victims of the Stanley disaster. Still not convinced it was a genuine mining artifact, I wrote to several collectors in England. The following is a brief history of the lamp, compiled with the help of collectors in England and the United States.

The lamp is known as the Stanley Colliery Disaster Lantern. It was sold to the public to raise money for the families of the victims of the Stanley disaster which occurred on February 16, 1909. Gas was the cause of the explosion at the Burns Pit in which 168 coal miners lost their lives. Only 26 miners survived. They had been saved by an air pocket within the mine. A postcard commemorating the "Survivors of the West Stanley Colliery Explosion Durham" was issued.

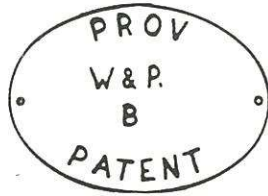
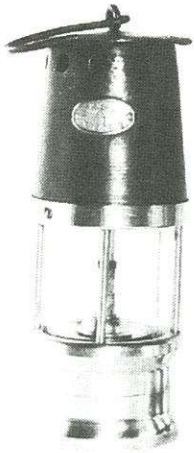


Postcard commemorating the Stanley Disaster

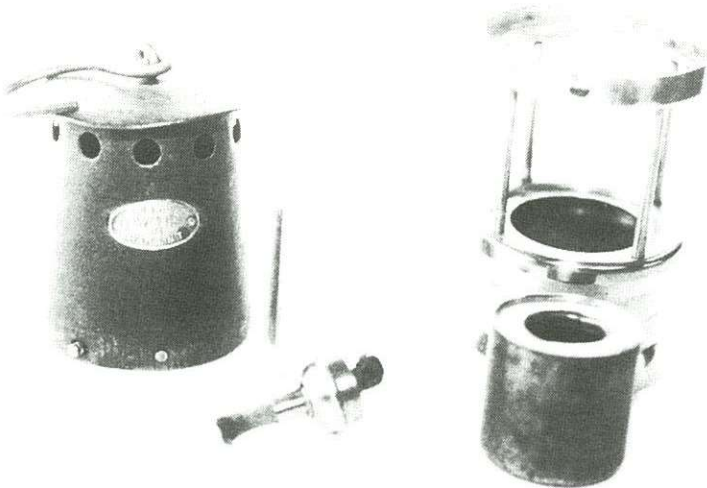
The colliery was located eight miles from New Castle, County Durham in northeastern England. Although the **Senior Conflow Calendar** states that the lamp was "made" to raise relief funds, it is the opinion of the author and others that the lamp was a failed prototype or model sold off as a job lot to help with the fund raising.^{2,3} It turns out that the lamp was indeed patented (No. 23,573) by three members of Burt Brothers who were coppersmiths in Edwards St. Parade, Birmingham, England.



Patent 23,573 October 15, 1909



An example of the Stanley lamp, with the early style brass nameplate. (Photos by R. Pearle)



Disassembled lamp, showing lack of safety features.

Though a brass tag on the lamps has the initials W & P. B, the patentees names were Southall, Wynn, and Harris. The lamp was a prototype for a full scale miners' safety lamp, the first to be made entirely from stamped or drawn parts. The lamp never saw full-scale production, but some were used in drift mines that were free of gases, because many lacked the protective gauzes inside the bonnet.⁴

Several varieties of the Stanley lamps exist, these being lamps with fixed and removable bases, removable wicks, and later models which had the patent date stamped on the base or on the brass nameplate. Both of the lamps pictured here are 6 inches high, and 2 1/4 inches diameter at the base.

Many questions remain. Since the lamp was produced after the disaster, were the Burt Brothers truly generous in producing the lamp to commemorate the event?³ This seems doubtful considering the time and expense. Or was the lamp a failed prototype sold off to purge their stock? And lastly, why would the manufacturer patent a limited run novelty item?



Late model Stanley lamp with tag indicating patent number 23,573 and date 1909 (Tony Moon).

References

1. Senior Conflow Calendar No. 6, September 1987, lamp no. 5 (Bob Batey collection).
2. Personal communication, John R. Bennett, West Yorks, England.
3. Personal communication, David S. Barrie, West Midlands, England.
4. Personal communication, Bob Batey, Newcastle upon Tyne, England.

Special thanks to Henry Pohs and Tony Moon.