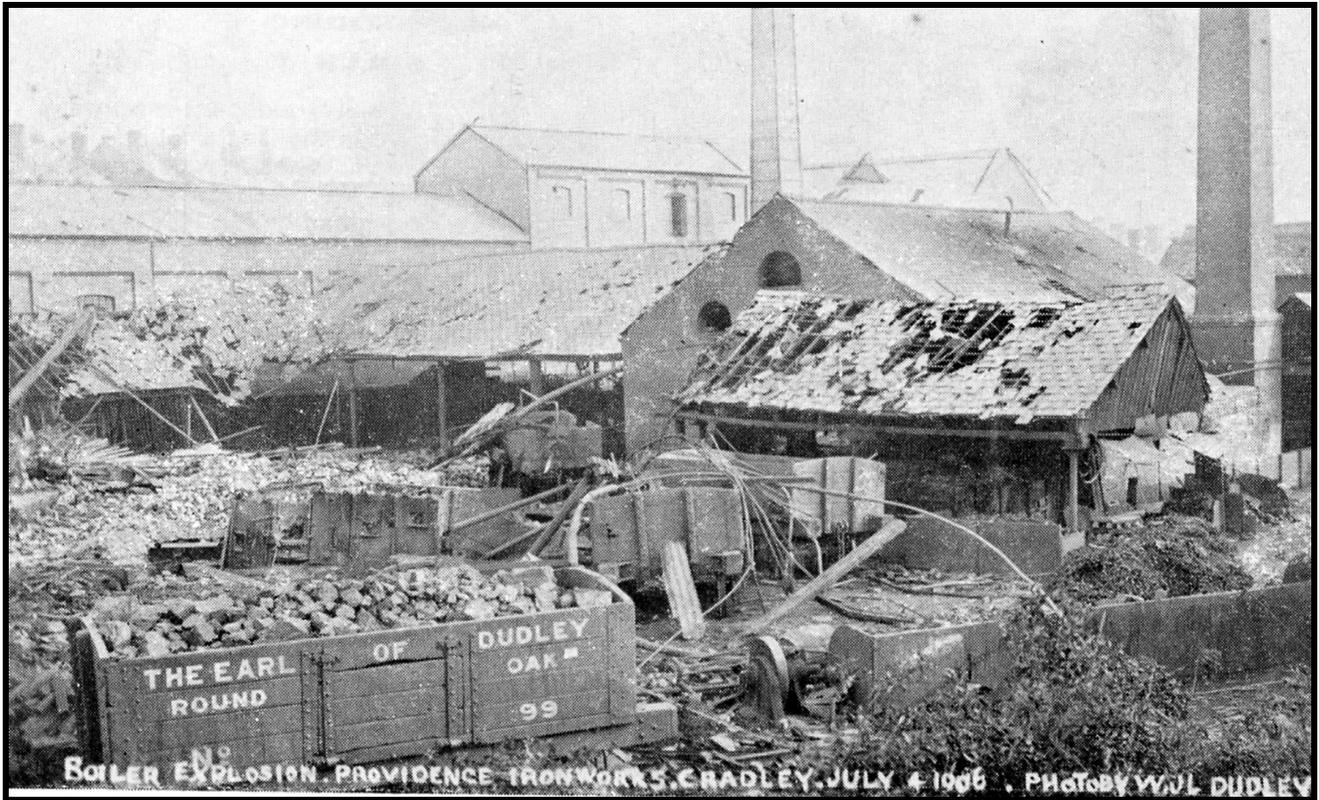


HISTORIC STEAM BOILER EXPLOSIONS

PENN BROTHER'S PROVIDENCE IRONWORKS, CRADLEY HEATH, STAFFORDSHIRE

Wednesday 4th July 1906 - 2 KILLED



This interesting photograph clearly depicts the massive amount of damage caused to the roofs of the Ironwork's structures and buildings, with masses of roofslates having been ripped off, and significant volumes of brick debris scattered amongst the railway waggons in the yard.

By Courtesy of Ned Williams

Events Leading Up To The Boiler Explosion

The early morning of Wednesday 4th of July 1906 was hot and sultry and without the slightest breeze. Hanging above the many Iron-Working Forges scattered about the town was a murky yellowish dense fog, the product of the scores of coal and coke furnaces operated by the town's Forges and Ironworks.

Penn Brother's, Providence Ironworks was established in 1839 and had become one of the most prominent ironworking factories in Cradley Heath. The firm was a major employer of the town's work force and was built on a small piece of rough land, ram-jam packed tight between the heavily polluted, yet attractively-named, Mousesweet Brook and Providence Street, just by Foxoak Street and Newtown Lane. In the tight space between the Ironworks and the

Mousesweet Brook was the Earl of Dudley's mineral railway that joined to Round Oak Steel Works in Brierley Hill, via the Cradley Heath branch of the Pensnett Railway. All heavily industrialised parts of the town.

Since six o'clock the men had been working in roasting-hot conditions at their Forges, and Puddling Furnaces and at eight-thirty the shop foreman rang a hand bell informing the workforce it was breakfast time. Being extremely hot inside the Works, the vast majority of the men, either went home for their break, or, moved outside to the far end of the Works Yard where they ate their bread and cheese sat upon large slabs of iron or on planks of wood.

PENN BROTHERS PROVIDENCE IRONWORKS



Two men stand to the right of the utter devastation of collapsed buildings, timber rafters, iron pulley wheels and masses of brick rubble.

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The Boiler Explosion

Within perhaps a couple of minutes of the men sitting down, the air was rent open by the cacophony of a phenomenal explosion. The explosion was the result of a twenty-two feet long by five feet diameter, wrought-iron Egg-Ended boiler, fired by waste heat from a Puddling Furnace suddenly bursting. The force of the explosion violently lifted the ancient boiler from its brick setting, and whilst ripping the shell into two large sections, hurled one section weighing around 5 tons, high into the air to eventually land in the garden of a house belonging to Messrs Gould and Hammersley almost a quarter of a mile away. Another portion was blown into the works belonging to Messrs. Woodhouse. Many more pieces were scattered all over Providence Ironworks. There was massive destruction throughout the Ironworks and adjoining railway premises. Miraculously, there were only two deaths. Had the weather been cooler, then a goodly number of the men would have breakfasted within the Works, which would have resulted undoubtedly in scores of men killed and maimed.

The Cradley Heath local newspaper, the Express & Star dramatically reported:

“The explosion was so great as to hurl a brick as far as New Town, Dudley Wood, a

distance of half-a-mile away, where it crashed through a window of a cottage and struck on the head a child named Gwendoline Pearson. The child was being nursed on its mother’s knee at the time the skull is fractured it is very doubtful whether the child will recover.”

The Dead And Injured

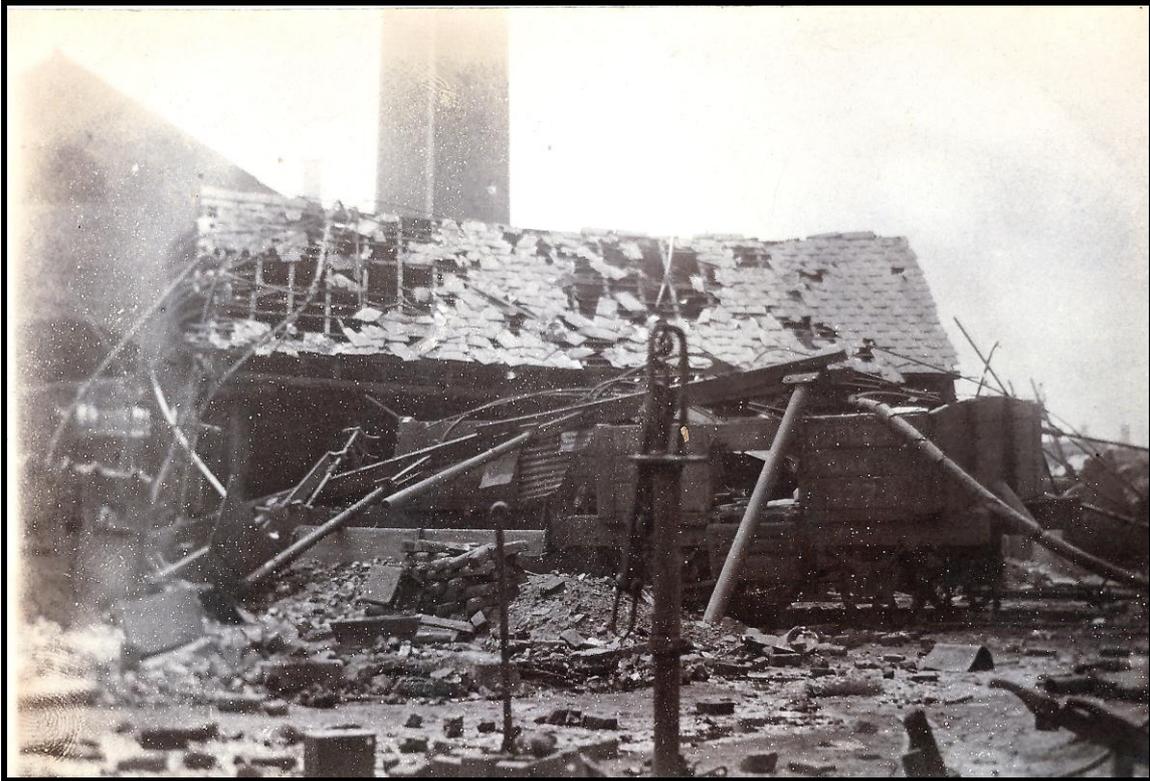
Unfortunately, two men who had decided to remain within the Ironworks and close to the boiler were killed.

John Penn - Puddler aged 55 (not related to the owners of the Ironworks).

John Beddard - Furnaceman.

The Express & Star reported: ***“John Penn, Puddler, was blown over a hundred yards; he was decapitated and his legs severed from his body. Fellow workman, Jack Beddard was terribly scalded and injured from falling bricks That the loss of life is not greater is marvellous.”*** The newspaper mentions also the sad plight of an injured young girl: ***“A little girl, who had come to the Works to bring her father his breakfast, was terribly injured by scalding.”***

HISTORIC STEAM BOILER EXPLOSIONS



Total ruination of more buildings and equipment.

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CRAPLEY BOILER EXPLOSION JULY 4 1906
SECTION OF BOILER IN M^r GOULD & HAMMERSLEY'S YARD 500 YARDS AWAY

The five ton section of the Egg-Ended boiler that landed in Messrs. Gould and Hammersley's Yard. The roughly improvised section and plate brackets riveted onto the boiler shell are the mounting brackets that would have sat on the brick walls of the flues.

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PENN BROTHERS PROVIDENCE IRONWORKS



Surrounded on all sides by the wreckage created by the boiler explosion a group of firemen and workmen stand, whilst at the front a bowler-hatted gentleman and a flat-capped individual, possibly a Foreman, stand discussing the awesome sight. Nearest the camera a tweedy-capped onlooker surveys the scene.

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A fascinated group of men and boys pose for the camera around the five ton section of the boiler.

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