

The Victorians

The Trapper - Danger in the mine

By Gordon Lamont

- JIMMY: My name is Jimmy Turton. I'm eleven years old and I'm a trapper. I work in the dark for twelve hours a day, opening and closing the doors to keep the mine safe. In winter we go down before the sun is up, and by the time we're back up, the sun's down again. But now, in summer, at least we can see the sun, but on a horrible wet day like this no one's looking up at the sky...
- WILLIAM: Well, Benjamin, and young Jimmy, is it wet enough for ye?
- JIMMY: 'Tis foul, William. I can't wait to get down.
- WILLIAM: Hold fast. Let her down, Jed.
- JIMMY: Jed put the steam engine in gear and the rickety cage we were standing in began its journey into darkness.
- BENJAMIN: Another day, another journey to hell.
- JIMMY: At least there int no rain down there...
- And this is me life down the mine, trapping. I sit in the pitch black. I open and close the doors to let the mine carts through. I listen out to hear them coming, the carts rattling on the tracks...
- WILLIAM: Hold it there a minute, Benjamin. Can Ivv have a breather? I can't seem to get my breath these days...





- BENJAMIN: Aye, we'll rest - just a minute. Is that you there, Jimmy?
- JIMMY: Benjamin - that you?
- BENJAMIN: Yes. You can close the door again, we won't be going through just yet.
- WILLIAM: So, how do you like life down pit, young Jimmy?
- JIMMY: Well I'm dry, and that's about all I can say. Hour after hour, day after day it's the same. Sit in the dark, hear the cart come, open the door, close the door, sit in the dark, hear the cart come, open the door...
- BENJAMIN: If you think you have it tough you should try hauling these carts along the tunnels.
- JIMMY: Just then, there was a deep rumbling - a sound I'd never heard down the pit before.
- What was that?
- BENJAMIN: Just the wind in the tunnels, or someone's opened a trap that's all. You're still a bit jumpy aren't you, Jimmy?
- JIMMY: It's the thought of a fire like the one killed our Dad.
- WILLIAM: That won't happen again, not if you do your job proper.
- BENJAMIN: Come on, William, we have to get moving. Open the trap, Jimmy.
- JIMMY: Right you are. What's that sound?





- WILLIAM: Bring your light down, Benjamin. I thought so, water. Look, there, water. There's water in the mine. Come on, lad, pull on that rope, we need to get out of here.
- JIMMY: It won't move, it's stuck.
- BENJAMIN: Look. The water's pushed some rocks and dirt up against the door. If we can just clear it...
- JIMMY: But where is it coming from?
- BENJAMIN: I don't know, but there's a lot of it. This int right. This is a dry mine.
- JAMES: What's it doing here?
- WILLIAM: Never mind that now. We have to get out and fast. Come on, clear the trap!
- JIMMY: It's over my boots. Come on, pull the trap rope.
- WILLIAM: All together. One, two, three. Pull.
- BENJAMIN: It's no good. The weight of water, it's too much, we're trapped...
- JIMMY: But we can't be. We have to get out!
- WILLIAM: We'll never get the door open and the water isn't stopping.
- BENJAMIN: We have to go back. We have to go the other way, find out where it's coming from. If the water's getting in, we can get out. Come on, this way.





- JIMMY: We struggled through the tunnel against the flow of the water. I thanked God that William and my brother knew the mine so well and could find a way up towards the surface...
- BENJAMIN: There's an old way in that they used before the shaft was sunk, I reckon that's where the water's getting in and I reckon that's our only way out.
- JIMMY: The water's getting higher.
- BENJAMIN: Watch your footing. If you trip you'll never get up again.
- WILLIAM: I'll have to stop – it's too much.
- BENJAMIN: You can't stop. None of us can stop.
- WILLIAM: I can't keep going. I just have to – ahh!
- JIMMY: William!
- BENJAMIN: No!
- JIMMY: It happened so fast. A sudden surge of water through the tunnel...and in an instant it seemed to lift William off his feet.
- BENJAMIN: He's gone, Jimmy, and so will we be if... Don't look back, he's gone. Come on.
- JIMMY: But the tunnel forks, which way?
- BENJAMIN: The left. It leads up, come on. Look Jimmy. There – there's a light. It must be the top.
- JIMMY: It's so steep here...I don't know if I can...





BENJAMIN:

You can. You have to. You don't want to end up like William do you? Come on, Jimmy, just a bit further, come on.

JIMMY:

I always feared fire down the mine. I never thought of flooding. When Benjamin and me staggered to the surface, we couldn't believe what we saw. There had been a sudden down-pour and the river had burst its banks, sending water flooding into the mine.

All around us were miners and their families who had rushed to the pit as soon as they heard of the flood. We found out later that thirteen miners, six of them children, drowned that day. We saw our mum and waved to show we were okay. Then I saw William's wife and I watched as Benjamin walked towards her. I saw him speak to her, slowly, shaking his head. She began to sob...and before I knew it, there were tears in my eyes too.

