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Ralphs Mine Disaster, Huntly New Zealand, 12th day of September 1914

/ Disaster History / By nzsurvivor

P On this day we remember the 43 miners that were killed in a shocking accident.

5th



Q At 7.20 a.m. an explosion at Ralph's mine on Raynor Rd rocked Huntly. Fortunately, it was a Saturday and only 60 men were at work instead of the weekday shift of 250.

The explosion was caused by a miner's naked acetylene cap-lamp igniting firedamp (methane gas given off by coal). The ensuing fire made the rescue mission incredibly difficult. Many of those who survived had suffered terrible burns. While some scrambled up the ventilation shaft, others escaped in one of the cages used to transport miners up and down the shaft.

It was not until the afternoon that rescuers reached the site of the explosion. Some bodies were retrieved but on Tuesday the mine had to be evacuated because of a dangerous build-up of gases. The recovery of those killed was a slow and dangerous task. A number of small fires had to be fought and the last body was not recovered until 27 September, 15 days after the explosion.

The mine was subsequently closed. The Huntly town hall was built on the pithead and officially opened on 21 June 1927. A marble plaque commemorating the disaster was set into one wall of the new building. The town hall was demolished in 1978, but when a branch of the Bank of New Zealand was opened on the site, the memorial plaque was transferred to the northern wall of the bank.

The victims had all been buried in the Huntly cemetery to the north of the town. In 2009 the Huntly Lions Club erected a miniature replica of a mine poppet head in the cemetery along with a memorial board showing the locations of the graves. This was unveiled by Mayor of Huntly Peter Harris on 19 April 2009. In 2013 the Lions Club also erected a larger model poppet head and a memorial stone to the victims near the original memorial plaque. These were unveiled on 13 September 2014, the day after the centennial of the disaster.

A commission of inquiry found that the coal dust in the mine was highly inflammable and ordered the immediate introduction of safety lamps. Five men had been killed in 1890 when Ralph's mine caved in and was flooded.

On this 12th day of September, we remember and honor the people that were killed and injured.

Our thoughts are with the families that would be forever affected by this terrible disaster.

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NZ Survivor Ltd.
Kapiti Road
Paraparaumu

Email info@nzsurvivor.co.nz

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