

*The "Star" 5th June 1963*

## Coal Avalanche Kills Man at City Hospital

FIREMEN burrowed with their bare hands in a vain attempt to save a lorry driver buried beneath eight tons of coal in an underground bunker behind a Sheffield hospital today.

The man had plunged 10 feet down a coal chute after being swept off his feet by an avalanche of wet coal from the eight wheeled lorry.

The dead man is believed to be Mr. Jack Croft, aged about 35, of Joseph Street, Grimethorpe near Barnsley.

He was working for the Barnsley coal and coke distributors J. H. Freeman and Co Ltd., and on contract from Peter Slater Ltd., transport contractors, of Morley, Leeds.

Two dramatic rescue attempts were made by maintenance men at Jessop Hospital, who scrambled down a second connecting chute by ladder.

### Desperate

They found no trace of the man, buried beneath the load in the gloom of the bunker.

Then a team of firemen with portable arc lamps, ropes and shovels began a desperate fight to find the man.

As time ran out, firemen discarded their shovels and began tearing away at the coal with their bare hands, before uncovering the man's head.

When his body was hauled to the surface by coal-blackened firemen, last-minute attempts were made to save his life by ambulancemen and a doctor from the hospital.

A "minute man" respirator was clamped over his mouth as he lay on a stretcher at the side of the coal chute. It is understood that he was not breathing at this point.

### Oxygen

After 10 minutes he was transferred to a waiting ambulance. He was given oxygen on the half-mile dash to Sheffield Royal Infirmary.

Then a hospital official announced: "The man is dead" The only eye-witness was boilerman Mr. William Taylor, aged 58, of Langsett Road, Sheffield. He watched helplessly as the man disappeared down the chute followed by tons of coal.

He shouted to his mates before dashing to dial 999. He told The Star: "I saw the driver go to the back of the lorry, which was then in the half-tipped position. He knocked the securing pins out of position, but stumbled on some coal.

## Swept Down

"He was not quick enough to escape the torrent of coal and I saw him swept down into the bunker."

At the scene a chief fire officer told The Star: "We were looking for him for about ten minutes."

"His head was uncovered first, then my men dragged him from the heap of clinging coal by ropes".

The drama was watched by nurses and staff from the windows of the hospital.

Access to the deep bunker is by way of three chutes. The lorry was unloading on a routine delivery in a small yard outside the giant boiler house at the hospital's Gell Street entrance

Mr. Taylor said had it not been for the holidays the bunker would have been half-full and he would not have fallen



Fireman who toiled in shirt sleeves to reach the buried man



Police and Fire officers examine the lorry tailboard which the dead man was opening before being swept down the coal chute