**Essays on Mount Crosby - James Acton Dies at Holts Hill**

James Acton was born in Ireland and the travels of his life brought him to Mount Crosby in April 1916. There isn't much recorded about James’s life, except that at the end he was fifty-two and slaving in a labourer’s job far from home, he was still single, and he was living rough (in other words, he wasn't a lot different to any number of other itinerant workers at the time). It seems to me that he was an unlucky sort of bloke. It is also true that when he saw death he behaved in the way we all hope we will.

James started work at Holts Hill building the first slow sand filters associated with the Mount Crosby Water Supply Scheme. The task was straight forward enough; make enough flat but elevated land for the filters by removing the top Holts Hill. By the time James got there, a team of men and a pair of steam shovels had been at it for nearly 12 months blasting the rock, scooping it into wagons, and drawing the waste rock to the edge of the hill for tipping.

On 3 October 1916, James was working as brakeman for a set of four tipping rail wagons, called tumbling tommies. The men had blasted the hill and the tommies were loaded with large rocks lifted by the steam shovel. It was James’s job to control the speed of the wagons with a brake lever as the horse teams drew them to the edge. As often as not, when the men attempted to tilt the wagon and empty the spoil, the wagon itself would start to lift off the rails towards the edge. James was used to this and helped out by leaning on his brake lever while his friends, Quince and Evans, tipped the hood to empty the wagon.

In the afternoon, there was a huge stone in the wagon and as the tommie was tipped it hung in the hood instead of tipping out. This unbalanced the wagon and it brought it sharply off its rails. James was leaning on the lever and had no chance to let go as the whole wagon lunged towards the edge. James was flung from the wagon and over the edge of the decapitated hill, down onto the spray of loose rock that was steep and hard to climb.

It took him some moments to recover himself as he staggered, winded, among the rocks on the hillside. Quince and Evans looked down, James eventually looked up, and they all saw something terrible. The huge stone now rolled down the hillside towards him and he was unable to get out of its way. It knocked him down and rolled over him, leaving him in awful shape with a deep cut to his arm and multiple other injuries. His friends went down to him and tried to straighten him up. Like all mates, they wanted him to be all right and they tried to lift him and put him on his feet, but James knew what it had come to. He merely said to them “I am done, let me lie down”.

A boy ran to call the ambulance and as it hurried to Mount Crosby the workers put James on a stretcher and carried him to the shade of Mr Oliver’s garden where they all waited impatiently for its sound. James never heard it. He died just twenty minutes before the ambulance reached him.

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