

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 2 (Shield #132)

Post-incident statement to Grosvenor

No initial statement provided.

Interview with the Coal Mines Inspectorate

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 2: It was our last shift obviously, so it was kind of, you know, it was good, the feeling was good because we were going home and you know. Yeah and we were, I'm pretty sure we were pumping or had been pumping. I remember carrying stuff down. It wasn't my turn to be a chock man or anything like that, but I filled in for the lunch break and, but all that morning and that I pretty much just was running supplies down the face and, yeah.

I can't really remember too much more than that to be honest, but then, yeah I remember going down for lunch, when they went to go for lunch and I think ... INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1 was driving the shearer and INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 4 was chocking and I went down with INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3 to, I was chocking and INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3 was driving. And I remember INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1 cutting the tailgate and the power going out. And I'm pretty sure he cut the whole tailgate out and I was waiting, when the power went out I had, it was at the stage where I had to go in and move the chocks, chocks in and, because the tailgate chocks hardly ever went in auto, they did sometimes, but most of the time we had to bring them in manually.

And I remember it was just pretty casual. I think we were just, I was sitting there talking and that with Jackson I think or INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3, one of them two, I can't remember. I don't actually remember walking into the tailgate, but I have had flash, flashbacks of me doing it and, but I do remember ventilation change, like a, the ear pressure and I remember hearing....A...couple of months ago I...got woken up by the sprinklers outside, the garden sprinklers starting and that reminded me of the noise, so that's, I kind of heard that kind of noise, like sprinklers. Obviously it wasn't sprinklers, but yeah...

...and then I just remember being on fire and the fire going out and I sort of fell down unconscious obviously...then I remember waking up and...just walking out of there.

...

Mr Tolhurst: So when the incidents occurred have you felt, you mentioned the sprinklers and the change in the ventilation...did you feel anything else?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 2: I did hear a goaf fall to be honest, yeah I did, yeah...
Mr

Tolhurst: And can you explain what that sounded like?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 2: It's like, yeah like a, the roof, like the roof falling down, you know like a, it wasn't, it wasn't huge, but it was bigger than just a little one, you know...

Mr Tolhurst: So in your experience working longwalls since 2011, have you experienced goaf falls?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 2: Oh yeah, yeah.

Mr Tolhurst: So how would you rate this goaf fall?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 2: Oh, it was, when it happened I didn't really think anything of it because, yeah, I remember it happening and then I didn't think anything of it, I just thought, oh, yeah it was a bit of a, yeah, a bit of a fall. But, you know.

Mr Tolhurst: Okay, and the location of the fall?

...

Mr Tolhurst: You know behind the chocks or...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 2: Yeah, yeah, it would have been in the main, in the tailgate roadway or...behind the tailgate chocks, yeah I'd say.

Mr Tolhurst: So it was towards the tailgate end?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 2: Yeah, yeah, it was more inbye than what I, where I was.

Mr Tolhurst: And with hearing that goaf fall, did you hear or feel anything else at that time?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 2: After it I'm pretty sure I heard those sprinkler kind of, yeah like a, I don't know if it was a, yeah, I can't, that's the only way I can explain that noise, yeah.

Mr Tolhurst: Okay and the change of ventilation, apart from the noise can you recall...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 2: Just the pressure in my ears. I remember it being quite, quite large, yeah...

And I can't say when that happened, but I know, like I've had a flashback and I can remember, you know, I can actually remember that change of pressure, yeah. And it wasn't normal for where we were and what we were doing.

Mr Tolhurst: And with regards to the change in pressure, did you only feel it once or...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 2: Yeah, just once.

Mr Dobson: Do you recall, INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 2, when that pressure change occurred, do you recall whether the ventilation changed at all?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 2: Yeah.

Mr Dobson: The air velocity.

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 2: I think so, yeah, like of course it did, you know it was quite large, yeah, yeah.

Mr Dobson: You don't recall how long that was for?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 2: No, I'm a bit lost with the...I can remember certain bits, but I can't remember...in what order, you know.

Mr Tolhurst: With regards to I guess the ventilation change and the goaf fall, do you recall which way you were facing or...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 2: I was facing towards the panline sort of, but sort of facing a little bit towards the tailgate.

...

Mr Tolhurst: And with regards to I guess the goaf fall and the change of ventilation or pressure, did that, were you affected by that?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 2: No it didn't knock me over, not from what I can remember, no.

...

I don't even remember like a, like a push or anything like that. I don't, I remember just being on fire. I'm not sure if, if there was a push when that happened or not, but yeah.

...

Mr Tolhurst: What do you recall about the flame?

...do you recall if it came from maingate, tailgate...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 2: No...

Mr Tolhurst:... above?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 2: ...I don't.

...

I don't remember seeing it come towards me so, so yeah it obviously came from behind the chocks or...

Mr Tolhurst: Or from maingate if you were facing, did you say you were facing towards tailgate?

...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 2: Yeah, you know, I definitely didn't see it come towards me, so yeah.

Mr Tolhurst: And do you recall how long the flame was in existence?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 2: ...it wasn't very long.

...

Mr Tolhurst: If we can just go back to the, I guess the incident, the time leading up to it. Do you recall what equipment, if any, was operating at the time?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 2: The face power was off, as far as I can remember there was nothing, yeah. The power had gone out, that's why we were sitting there talking and, yeah.

Mr Tolhurst: Okay so the power's gone out, is that after the initial goaf fall?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 2: No.

...

I remember the power being out and hearing the goaf fall, yeah.

Mr Tolhurst: Okay, so power went first?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 2: Yeah, yeah.

...

Mr Tolhurst: Okay and sorry for missing that, missing this at the start, but from the moment I guess you've lost power to the goaf fall to the flame, you were talking matters of seconds or minutes or...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 2: It would have been minutes. I remember talking for quite, a little bit, yeah.

...

Mr Tolhurst: I may have asked it, but when you felt that ventilation change come through did you feel a second ventilation change or...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 2: No.

Mr Tolhurst: ...any pressure?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 2: No I didn't, no. I was unconscious at one stage, I do remember that, so if it happened during that time...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1 (Shield #133)

Post-incident statement to Grosvenor

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INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: ...Anyway and then our crib relief guys, the two guys had come down to relieve us for crib and yeah INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3 come down. I was just about to do a quick handover with him so we could go for lunch and then we had a, a goaf fall behind us and it reversed the ventilation, it blew a couple of boys over. I had managed to, I was in between the chocks sort of thing so I managed to keep myself upright and at that point it dropped the power and the face went, went dead and I remember saying to INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3 they're not going to like this, this is another HPI. Then there was another bigger goaf fall and the last thing just before the ignition happened there was a pop and then it was just, yeah, it was just flames.

Mr Dobson: Where were you stood at the time then...when that first wave hit and knocked you over?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: Well it didn't knock me over, I managed to stay upright. But I was beside the shearer and sort of in between where the mimics are on the chocks to operate the roof supports, in that gap, between the chock beside it and where the mimic is, I had sort of been in there. I was sort of there because I was about to start just checking on the mimics, what was going on.

Mr Dobson: Were the mimic on the, on the front walkway or on the rear walkway?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: Front walkway.

...

Mr Dobson: So you were actually on the pontoon in...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: On the feet of the pontoon, on the front of the chock, yes. ...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: Beside the shearer, yeah the shearer was behind me and I was facing into the chocks.

...

Mr Dobson: When you say it were a goaf fall, the first one, did you hear that break of strata or...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: Yeah, no...

Mr Dobson: ...were it just a...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: ...it was just a, yeah just a, the ventilat-, it just pushed us, a big, you know burst of wind going the opposite direction to the ventilation and that stopped the ventilation, it went still.

Mr Dobson: You know when, I'm talking from my own experience, you know when you're at tailgate [unintelligible – "(ui)"] fall, when you're first goafing...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: Yeah.

Mr Dobson: ...and you get that break of strata where you'll hear, it will come down and you'll hear the strata break behind you. Did you hear any of that or did you just...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: I think no, it was just...

Mr Dobson: Just a pressure wave?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: ...a pressure wave come through, yes.

Mr Dobson: And did you say the first one knocked, it knocked some of the guys over?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: It was, yeah, it was pretty intense the first one and yeah, and that one dropped the power, so yeah and, yeah but that's, yeah if you haven't got your feet right and that, especially if you don't know it's coming it will knock you over, yeah if you're not careful.

Mr Dobson: So did the other guys beside you, did they get knocked over?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: I can only recall INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3.

...

Mr Dobson: And then do you recall what the time lag was between that and the second pressure wave?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: Not very long.

Mr Tolhurst: Are you talking...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: I couldn't tell you...

Mr Tolhurst: ...seconds?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: ...actual time. Seconds yeah.

Mr Dobson: And was that as intense or was that...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: The second one?

Mr Dobson: Yeah.

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: Was yeah, it was just as intense, yes.

Mr Dobson: And that were the same, it were a pressure wave, but there were no...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: Yes.

Mr Dobson: ...you didn't hear any breaks of strata or falling strata?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: Just a pop, like a pop.

Mr Dobson: A pop and then a pressure wave?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: Yeah and then there, yeah I don't know what happened, but it was, yeah from there it wasn't very pleasant.

Mr Dobson: Did you, when you say a pop...did you hear where it came from?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: No.

Mr Dobson: Did it come from the left or your right, deep in the goaf or...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: It was tailgate end, but I couldn't tell you if it was behind or where, it was just a pop.

Mr Dobson: What sort of, I know it's hard to say, but you know is it like a pop of a cork out of a bottle or a louder...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: Like a rock hitting, dropping a big rock down onto something else, yeah, yeah

Mr Dobson: Okay.

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: So like two rocks hitting, you know that sort of a clonk, pop, yeah.

Mr Dobson: And after that what were the time from the pop to the flames occurring?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: Not, yeah, just probably, sort of nearly at the same time sort of thing.

Mr Dobson: More or less instantaneous?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: Yeah.

Mr Dobson: Okay and where you were stood, did you see where the flames came from?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: No, hell no.

...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: Yeah it just, wasn't expecting something like that to happen, it was just, yeah a goaf fall, so you, yeah you've just reset yourself and, but then, yeah the ignition was just out of the blue, it was just, yeah.

Mr Dobson: And what, do you recall what position you were facing when you, were you...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: I was...

Mr Dobson: ...facing the mimic towards the goaf?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: Yes, yes I was still facing that way and yeah then all of a sudden it was just, I recall just for a second a blue flame and then that's it, I just, yeah covered up as best I could, yeah.

Mr Dobson: And do you recall how long the flame lasted?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: Well to me it seemed to last an eternity. I have no idea to be honest...

Mr Dobson: And with the, with the ignition of the flame, you said there were a very short, more or less instantaneous occurrence of that. Was the ventilation still stalled at that time?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: Yes, yes the ventilation hadn't pushed back at that stage.

Mr Dobson: So in the instance from the first roof fall through to the ignition, the ventilation was stalled throughout that time?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: Yes

...

Mr Dobson: Do you recall if you'd had any similar type pressure events, roof falls that...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: No not like that, no.

Mr Dobson: No?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: No.

Mr Dobson: Some of a lesser magnitude?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: At the start of the wall, yeah, because you always get that period where that roof will (ui) up at the face, it takes a little while, but other than that, before that, prior to that, no I don't recall any, you know pressure waves or goaf falls like that, yeah.

Mr Dobson: Do you recall any on the previous blocks, on...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: Yeah there was a couple on the previous blocks, yeah, nothing like that though, yeah it was just a, the (ui).

...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: And it didn't reverse, the ventilation as, you know, it stalled it for a second, but then it cleared through pretty quick.

...

Mr Dobson: ...When they, when you had that first pressure wave as well...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: Yes.

Mr Dobson: ...were there any, did you feel any suck back towards the goaf? Were there any draw back?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: No.

Mr Dobson: No. So it were just a pressure wave...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: Yes.

Mr Dobson: ...a stall of ventilation...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: Yes.

Mr Dobson: ...a second pressure wave...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: Second pressure wave.

Mr Dobson: ...and then the flame...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: And the ignition, yes.

...

Mr Tolhurst: I just want to talk about the flame. Do you recall, like was it up in the canopy or...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: I don't, have no idea.

...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: And I was just standing there and then all of a sudden I just see, I just, there was blue flame and that's, I just went sort of standing feel (?) position with my eyes, yeah just, just covered up, just, and yeah."

...

Mr Tolhurst:... I just want to revisit I guess your description at the start where you said you heard a pop.

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: Yes.

...

Mr Tolhurst: Can you describe that to us again, you know?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: Like I said it sounded like if you dropped a big rock on another one, a solid rock and that pop like when they hit, it was like that.

Mr Tolhurst: Okay. It was quite loud or distinct?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: It was distinct, yeah.

Mr Tolhurst: Okay and again you can't recall what direction, if it was behind the...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: I, no idea where it come from.

...

Mr Dobson: I'm just trying to get me head around the sound me self. Is it like when you've had a roof cavity and you've got rocks on face side and one drops out of the cavity and smacks onto another rock?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: Yes, similar to that, yes.

Mr Dobson: Okay.

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: Not, it didn't sound like rock hitting the canopy, it just sounded like a...

Mr Dobson: A crack or...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: ...a clap, you know just, yeah.

...

Mr Dobson: I know you, did that, where you were stood in the shields, right...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: Yes.

Mr Dobson: ...facing the goaf, you don't recall if it were in front of you or were the clap, did it sound like it were all around?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: No, no. I just heard it, I don't know where it come from. It didn't sound like it was all around me, it was just like a...

Mr Dobson: And then the flame followed that?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: It was, yeah.

...

Mr Tolhurst: And from your location did it sound, and again sorry to harp on...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: No you're right, you're right.

Mr Tolhurst: ...did it sound close, far away? I know it's hard to judge, but...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: Yeah I just, I just heard it. I don't know where it come from, because if there was a bit more time between probably yeah I could, but it was like...

...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: The first fall had tripped the power out.

...

Mr Tolhurst: So obviously there's nothing running at the time you heard that pop?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1: Nothing moving, nothing running, it was, yeah the lights had gone out, the shearer had dropped off, yeah everything was down.

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3 (Shield #131)

Post-incident statement to Grosvenor

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Interview with the Coal Mines Inspectorate

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3: And about then heard a little, like a little pop and he turned to me and said that didn't sound good and I sort of took it as it's just, you know the roof was going to fall in again, you know there's going to be a rock fall and just straight after that the rock fall and that, when it come down, you know just knocked, the air and that forced, knocked us completely over...

...But yeah the wind just completely knocked us, you know knocked us all over and then I remember on the, because I was standing on the, the relay bar, me mate was standing on the pontoons, I just remember picking me, looking for me light on the ground and scrambling in the dirt and I saw me light, because all the lights had gone off, it was dark and the dust, so I found me, saw me light. So I sort of picked it up to try and get some light, see on the matter (?) and I, I mean I couldn't tell you then how long it was until we got the heat and the blast and yeah that, they did say on the camera on the shearer, the timer on that was about 13 seconds between the, like the first blast and then the fire. But I couldn't tell you that at the time.

So I we, I was scrambling just to get up and next minute just the heat and just got us. Me and INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1 were still pretty close and you know, I mean we were screaming out, you know because we were in pain and then within a few seconds, like the pain had gone, it was, you know it was bigger than Ben Hur by then. Yeah we were trying to gather ourselves, I couldn't even...

...

Mr Tolhurst: Okay. Do you, I know you said you don't recall where you were standing, but at the time, so within that exact location on the face, but do you recall how or which way you were facing? Were you facing, when the first blast came through.

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3: I think I turned me back just by defence, you know because, yeah I think, because I landed virtually on me hands and me knees, on me, on me hands, on me, facing away from it.

Mr Tolhurst: Facing the AFC?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3: Yeah, facing towards the maingate.

Mr Tolhurst: Towards the maingate, okay.

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3: Yeah. So I...

Mr Tolhurst: Okay.

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3: ...yeah, just I don't know...

Mr Tolhurst: At the face, yeah.

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3: Yeah I don't know if I got blown that way or just defensive mechanism, you just, turn me back on the dust or whatever, I don't know.

Mr Tolhurst: And how would you describe the intensity of that blast?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3: Of the first one, of the air?

Mr Tolhurst: Yeah.

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3: Yeah just took, yeah just took me by surprise. Yeah I just, next minute, next second I just knew I was on me, on me hands and me knees and me, knees and me hands. I know I hit me, hit me knee on the way down, it was probably on one of the relay bars, but yeah I just, just didn't know what was happening, it just happened so quick. I'd never been in a big enough fall to, you know to have, knock people over, you know I was just [unintelligible – "(ui)"].

Mr Dobson: In your experience before...have you been on the face when you've had goaf falls before where you've had a blast of air?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3: Nothing like that.

Mr Dobson: No. Have you had similar, have you had, have you been on when you've set off from the face start line and then you get first goafing? Have you been on the...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3: Yes.

Mr Dobson:...face when it falls? How did it compare, compare to that?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3: Unbelievably, yeah lot, a lot. Yeah I mean I've had, you know I've had those small falls with the fall and you feel, just feel a gust of wind, you know, just there and back, but this was just, yeah just knocked us completely over and like, and like, and when we heard later it even knocked the blokes in the maingate, then, I mean you don't realise how big.

Mr Dobson: In terms of intensity would it be, you know two or four or six times what you'd normally experience with a normal goaf fall?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3: Oh yeah, four or six times, yeah, it was just, yeah it was huge, yeah.

Mr Dobson: Okay.

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3: At least, yeah, it might be more, but yeah I've never anything like that. I've been, you know a little bit of wind, you feel it and turn, but this was just, yeah completely off me feet and...

Mr Dobson: So you talked about a pop sound. Now did the pop occur then, the first pressure wave?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3: Yes.

Mr Tolhurst: Okay. Almost...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3: Most, straight after, yeah heard the pop and then simultaneously it was like, yeah it was like then, I heard the pop and then just the fall, we heard the fall and just the wind, yeah.

Mr Tolhurst: Can you describe the pop?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3: No it's just, yeah like something just popping away. That's why I thought it was just, you know it's going to be a goaf fall, it's like, yeah like, you know the rock when it sometimes just pops, the layers like pop off, like you just broke...

Mr Dobson: Yeah.

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3: ...that sort of pop.

Mr Tolhurst: Did it sound like it was behind in the goaf, behind the shields, above or...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3: No like above and towards the, in the, right in the tailgate and above us in the tailgate.

Mr Tolhurst: Okay.

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3: It was, yeah towards more the tailgate, but in, like where we were in the face sort of just about.

Mr Tolhurst: So it would have been between where the shearer was located in the tailgate.

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3: Yes.

Mr Tolhurst: Okay.

Mr Dobson: So what would you say like, like when it sounds like a strata layer breaking, is that similar to like when you've advanced a shield and you hear that crack of ground that drops behind you? Like if you get tailgate shields and then it's been hanging up.

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER: I've never sort of really heard that sound (?) that clear like a pop before, so it was different, yes. Yeah, yeah it was definitely, yeah that's, I mean it was, yeah just, and that's why I went, we, and like I said I was talking to INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 1 and it, yeah it definitely, you know it sounded different, you know, it was, yeah like, so that's why it sounded like it was going to be bad, you know because I never heard that and it was like a pop and then yeah.

...

Mr Dobson: And you said the lights went out. Did they go out on that first pressure wave?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3: Yeah, that's what, yeah.

Mr Dobson: Okay. When you, I know I'm labouring down on this crack sound, this pop sound, but what sort of loudness would you put with that pop?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3: It wasn't really loud, it was like just something you could just virtually hear, but it was, yeah definitely like a popping sound, it wasn't, you know like, like a, yeah probably different, like cracking was just a pop.

Mr Dobson: And the pressure wave came more or less simultaneously after it did you say?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3: Yes, yeah.

Mr Tolhurst: And then that's knocked you to the ground.

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3: Yep.

Mr Tolhurst: Had you gotten up prior to the second event?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3: I'm not sure if I was trying to get up. I think I, I think I might have, but yeah I must have, must have just got up, because I think I was standing up when I got, yeah, so I must have just got up and then, and virtually I know, I know, I can't even remember if I actually saw it coming towards us, but yeah then it, yeah I think I must have just got up and then yeah, because we were standing up when we were on the fire, on fire.

Mr Tolhurst: We talk about on the second event, was that when the flame was...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3: Yes.

Mr Tolhurst: Okay. Do you recall what colour the flame was?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3: No.

Mr Tolhurst: Okay.

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3: No.

Mr Tolhurst: Do you recall which way the flame came towards you and where you were standing?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3: Felt like more from the tailgate, tailgate direction. Felt like it come from that way.

Mr Tolhurst: Okay.

Mr Dobson: Were you facing the tailgate at that time or were you facing the goaf?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3: No, no I was probably just about probably facing, probably might have been facing the goaf. But I think when the flame, I think, remember sort of definitely probably turning to defend myself against the heat and that's why me back, I think, assuming the reason why me back was the worst and me arms were the worst hit. I mean me stomach wasn't and me chest wasn't affected by the heat. Yeah I know, because I turned away from the tailgate, yeah just felt like that's where it's coming from, so (ui) I turned.

...

Mr Dobson: And with regards to the pressure waves, did you feel any suck back between the pressure waves at all? Do you recall any...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3: No I didn't notice any.

Mr Dobson: No.

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3: No, I didn't notice it.

Mr Tolhurst: ... You talked about two incidents, so two pressure events. There was the first pressure event that knocked you over...

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3: Yeah.

Mr Tolhurst: ...you've stood up, then there's been the second event of which was the ignition or the flame as well. Was there a third, do you recall a third pressure event?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3: No I don't.

Mr Dobson: With the pressure wave...do you recall whether it changed the visibility? Were there dust blown up, were there anything different in the environment with the pressure wave, with the first one?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3: There's a lot of dust in the air, once we're getting up, yeah could hardly see. I mean obviously it was dark as well, but yeah you could tell there was a lot of dust, there was a lot of dust in the air.

Mr Dobson: Yeah and when you say knocked you over, so it came from the goaf to the face, the direction of the wave?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3: Probably more from the tailgate, the tailgate than the, yeah than directly from the goaf.

Mr Dobson: Okay.

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3: But you know probably, probably behind, behind the tailgate chocks, I would imagine that's what it felt, and that, you know sort of the tailgate direction for us was, yeah.

Mr Dobson: You don't recall any smells or anything with that at that time or anything different?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 3: No I didn't.

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 4 (Shield #120)

Post-incident statement to Grosvenor

No post incident statement taken

Statement provided to the Board of Inquiry

Suddenly the direction of the ventilation changed to head toward the maingate. The gas extraction mechanism is designed for the ventilation to travel the other way toward the tailgate. The force of the wind was strong. INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 4 was immediately uneasy as he knew that this was not normal and unexpected. Within seconds, INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 4 was engulfed in a fireball. Everything seemed to be on fire – equipment, his PPE, his fingers, his face. The fire was everywhere as was the dust. His lungs were filled with smoke and he was choking. He couldn't see anything. The first wave of fire ceased when the ventilation changed direction. He attempted to get to a hose on the closest chock – but the hose did not work. There was then another change of direction of the ventilation and there was a second wave of fire. The second wave was just as intense as the first.

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 5 (Shield #100)

Post-incident statement made in hospital and provided to Grosvenor

I was walking along the face from the maingate to the tailgate to relieve the guys for crib. I was at about 70 – 80 chock when I felt a burst of air, like a pressure burst, from the tailgate. The burst of pressure knocked me over to the ground, and I felt a second burst of pressure from the tailgate. There was a yellow flame. I was on the ground when the yellow flame happened.

Interview with the Coal Mines Inspectorate

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 5: Just after 3:00ish there was a thick heavy surge of air pressure that travelled from the tailgate to the maingate. It made a whistling noise and it was dusty. I turned to start to walk to the direction of the tailgate to go and help them and then the second pressure surge blew towards me. I saw a wave of ash of some sort for a split second and then the right side of my face, the back of my head, my neck and my upper arms started to burn. I was doing all these movements to try and put it out, then I remember screaming.

Mr Tolhurst: Do you want to have a break?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 5: No. I dropped to the ground. I tried to put my self-contained rescuer on. I couldn't see because my hat had blown off...

Further written questions from John Tolhurst, Coal Mines Inspectorate

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 5: If my PPD (personal proximity detector) showed that I was standing at 100 shield, I am happy to accept that's the case. In any event, I recall that I was standing near the faulted area on the face at the time.

...

From where I was standing, I could see down to the last advanced shield. My best guess is that this would have been a distance of about 50 meters from where I was standing. I only saw the flame for a split second and it was only about one chock away from me when I saw it.

...

No, I can only recall the two pressure waves.

...

To the best of my recollection, the face power switched off at the time of the first pressure wave and the chain then stopped.

...

I was watching the position of the shearer from the Mimic on the front of the shield that I was standing on.

Q6: Would you classify the first pressure wind blast event as something that is normal or unusual for longwall operations at Grosvenor mine whilst already having retreated as far away from the installation face?

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 5: I have never experienced a windblast with that amount of pressure in my life before this event. It would therefore be classed as a very unusual occurrence.

Statement to George Cowan, Rees R & Sydney Jones (1 March 2021)

INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 5:

Around about 3pm, there was a thick and heavy air pressure surge which travelled from the direction of the tailgate towards the maingate. This air surge made a whistling noise associated with a lot of stone dust in the air.

I turned to start walking in the direction of the tailgate to go and help the boys when a second pressure surge blew towards me.

I heard a cracking/popping sound and then I saw an orange wave. Interview with the Mines Inspectorate:

On 18 May, 2020 I participated in a telephone interview with John Tolhurst of the Mines Inspectorate.

During this interview, I was advised by John Tolhurst that at the time of the event, my PPD (Personal Proximity Detector) showed that I was standing at #100 shield on LW104. I am happy to accept that may well have been the case. In any event, I recall that I was standing near the faulted area of the face at the time.

From where I was standing at the time of the explosion, I could see down the face to the last advanced shield. My best guess is that this would have been a distance of about 50 meters from where I was standing. I only saw the flame for a split second and it was only about one chock away from me when I first saw it.

Following my interview with John Tolhurst of the Mines Inspectorate, I was asked if there was a 3rd pressure event. I can only recall the 2 pressure waves before I saw the flames heading towards me.

...

At the time of the incident, I was watching the position of the shearer from the mimic on the front of the shield that I was standing on.

I have never experienced a wind blast with that amount pressure in my life before this event. I would therefore class it as a very unusual occurrence in the course of my coal mining career.

AARON CHRISTENSEN (Shield #5)

Post-incident statement to Grosvenor

Small bump. Felt big bump. Dusted out.

ADAM MAGGS (Maingate DCB)

Post-incident statement to Grosvenor

Magsy left to go to MG to let Cadbury know face conditions and that we didn't have to pump. Hung up phone and felt percussion. At this stage thought we had lost 36 c/t. 15 sec after first percussion felt 2nd percussion.

Video Statement to Grosvenor Debrief Officer

Mr Maggs: After that, I made my way to the maingate, got up on to the DCB, tried Cadbury. There was no answer there. As I hung up from Cadbury, there was just a huge percussion or a wave that hit me in the chest on the DCB, followed by a big dust. It reversed the ventilation and came back over the top of us. There was three boys with me – Jackson, Beau, and actually there was another one, there was Johnny Badke on the – on the maingate there.

I then hopped up and said, Something happened there. We've either had a fall – I thought the cut-through that we'd just gone past may have fallen in, so 36 cut-through had fallen in on the maingate side. As I went to go down the stairs, another big percussion had hit us.

Interview with the Coal Mines Inspectorate

Mr Maggs:...I went to the DCB then, so the maingate DCB area then, hopped up on top there and I used the maingate phone there. I wanted to have a look at the pressures, as well, of the chocks around that area, if 149 and that had got any. I made that phone call to Cadbury. He didn't answer. As soon as I hung that phone up, that's when the first...

Mr Tolhurst: Wave?

Mr Maggs: Wave, yes.

...

Mr Tolhurst: Adam, you said you were obviously at the DCB, you tried to contact Mick Burgess up on top, when you felt that first pressure wave?

Mr Maggs: Mmm.

Mr Tolhurst: So can you explain what you felt, what you heard at that point?

Mr Maggs: Yes. So, yes, the first one – I'd only just hung up the phone, just hung it up and it was a pressure bump and a big pressure bump. Like, it was an event. It was a huge event. It was something I'd never felt before.

Mr Stook: You've been there for, what, two years; right?

Mr Maggs: In the wall.

Mr Stook: In the wall?

Mr Maggs: Yes.

Mr Stook: And you've been on the start of 104, start-up of 104 as well?

Mr Maggs: Yes, yes.

Mr Stook: So compare to coming away from install face and getting past the square, this event was unique?

Mr Maggs: Yes, definitely.

Mr Stook: Never felt anything like it?

Mr Maggs: Never felt anything like it, no. The thump of it and the reversing ventilation – so the ventilation reversed straight away. I looked straight down a 1, 2, 3, 4 chock and that maingate bag, and it just billowed over the top of that, the dust and the ventilation, and that bag was just fluttering, the dust that come over the top of that area and reversed from there, it was – it was a goaf event.

I actually thought, to start with, and this is what I said to the boys on the face "We've just lost 36 cut-through". I thought the 36 cut-through, the one we were in line with there – I thought it had come in and we've lost that area. I thought we'd had a fall around that area, and I said that to the boys. I had my MX6 in my hand. So the face had reversed. Like I just said then, over the top of that 1, 2, 3 was just something I'd never seen, and it twists my guts now thinking about, you know, the –

Mr Stook: Yes, yes, and that's why you thought it might have been 36, because it was closer by. It's pretty hard to imagine something happening on the face reversing ventilation?

Mr Maggs: That's right, that's right. And just what I seen come over the top around that 1, 2, 3 chock, you know, that's what made me think that it was around that initial area and goaf area, with that maingate bag flapping so hard, it was really flapping and that. I said to the boys, I said to Johnny Badke there, Beau, and I said to Jackson, I said, "We've just lost 36 cut-through. I think that's fallen in around them".

Visibility was zero because of the reverse ventilation. I grabbed my MX6 out. I've got to be honest with you now, I thought it was quite strange, for something like that – and this is another reason I thought it was around that area, was I didn't have nothing on it. There was no gas or anything at that time. You know, it didn't – it wasn't registering too much.

I then asked Beau. Beau's a trainee deputy as well. He had an ALTAIR with him as well, so I actually grabbed his ALTAIR as well, to correlate between two gas detectors, and they were pretty similar. I was getting down the DCB stairs – ladder then, at the time. So I was halfway down that ladder, it was probably 10 to 15 seconds later. As I said to you, visibility was zero. I could hardly see there. And the second one, it was just a lot more violent, a lot bigger. We're talking six, seven times, eight times, a lot of pressure and shock.

I was getting down that DCB ladder, and it braced me, if you know what I mean. Like, the force of it braced me up against the ladder. A couple of boys on the DCB, they hit the deck. Still again, you know, I still felt that it was a goaf – a goaf event. The force and that of around that 1, 4 and maingate area, and that maingate bag sort of fluttered. There was a bit that flapped past and that, and I still had feelings that it was definitely around the goaf or roadway or something like that. I still wasn't thinking of the tailgate.

But we'd lost power on that second one. The gas detectors were going off their heads. I had around 13 to 14 per cent O₂, quick, but you know, spike. CO was going off. I'll be honest, I can't remember what – I didn't even see what it was up to. I was getting down the ladder then, and visibility was zero. I was bumping up against the rib, the DCB, trying to get down to that – peek through that maingate bag.

Mr Stook: Would you expect that amount of force, say for example, for the first one, to have been a consequence of that tailgate roadway finally coming in, for however long it was standing up for?

Mr Maggs: The tailgate?

Mr Stook: Yes. It doesn't seem like it could be.

Mr Maggs: No I'm a long way from that tailgate roadway.

Mr Stook: Yes.

Mr Maggs: I think it's something bigger, myself. I really think it's a – you know, if – my initial thinkings of it now, and knowing of it, I really think we've had a huge goaf fall, you know or that whole roadway's come in, anything from that tailgate right the way – if we've got a ring

main effect or something of that.

Mr Stook: Yes, yes.

Mr Maggs: Because I poked my head through – once I got to that maingate area, that one chock and that, you know, we were right in line with that 36 cut-through, visibility was still zero. I couldn't see there, but I could see two bits of tape of the cans that were in the 36 cut-through. At that stage I knew 36 cut-through hadn't come in.

But in correlating that, at the same time, that's when I heard the boys on the DAC. I heard INJURED COAL MINE WORKER 5 on the DAC at that time...

BEAU LACY (Maingate)

Post-incident statement to Grosvenor

Sitting at MG felt ears funny vent reverse and went then sucked in, another pressure wave. Bump into Jackson Hayes. Everything went black...

Interview with the Coal Mines Inspectorate

No interview conducted.

Statement to the Board of Inquiry

I felt a progressive pressure differential to the point of causing ear pain. I recall looking over to Jackson Hayes observing that he was bending over holding his earmuffs.

I recall standing up and looking at the Maingate brattice wing and seeing that it was still intact and erect. I recall observing that the main gate was a lot dustier than normal and thinking that a big goaf fall had occurred as we had just passed 36CT intersection. Another CMW [coal mine worker] present on the Maingate had commented "that was a big one"... I also had the same thought.

Within a matter of seconds there was a sudden complete loss of power to the longwall and Maingate which left the only available lighting to be that of individual miner's cap lamps.

While standing up and looking back towards the Maingate corner I recall hearing an extremely loud rush of howling air and feeling of very strong air flow coming in from Outbye which I can only describe as being like standing in a strong wind tunnel.

To the best of my recollection the air blast which was a terrifying experience lasted for around 3 to 5 seconds.

The air blast was immediately followed by a massive pressure wave. I was still facing the Maingate corner and recall being hit with a wave of force and dust although I can't recall a sound. Its force blew me off my feet onto the floor of the main gate platform and over the top of Jackson Hayes. Visibility was basically nil due to the thickness of dust. My Altair 5X gas detector was alarming. I grabbed it from my hip and observed that it was reading 12% oxygen and approximately 0.25 to 0.5% carbon dioxide and shortly after it started to alarm with methane also but I cannot recall the value. I recall having difficulty breathing and quickly realised that ventilation had reversed and gas from the goaf was now in the workings.

I got to my feet and grabbed Jackson Hayes and pushed him towards the ladder of the main gate platform to get down and walk Outbye to get into fresh air.

We walked approximately 15 metres towards the boot end of the Maingate when I noticed the ventilation had started to reverse again and push fresh air back towards the longwall.

JACKSON HAYES (Maingate DCB)

Post-incident statement to Grosvenor

Little, bigger, bang (3 x pressure waves).

Interview with the Coal Mines Inspectorate

Mr Tolhurst: Where were you located on the longwall at the time of the incident?

Mr Hayes: At the time of the incident, I was standing on the maingate at the - sorry, the DCB section of the maingate.

Mr Tolhurst: What do you recall, what did you hear or feel or see at the time of the incident?

Mr Hayes: ... So I'd gone up to the maingate, just got up there, got the information, and then there was the first pressure bump. And then we sort of were, like, that's unusual. Everyone's like, you know, sort of like, taking notice. And then the next wave came over us, all the wind. Myself and Beau were standing next to each other, and I grabbed on to the CME because I was getting blown over.

Mr Tolhurst: That was the second one?

Mr Hayes: Yes.

Mr Tolhurst: So let's talk about the first event.

Mr Hayes: Yes.

Mr Tolhurst: How would you describe it?

Mr Hayes: A pressure bump, you know, like when you get a goaf fall. Like, most people who've been underground would have felt one at some point.

Mr Tolhurst: So you've experienced a goaf fall previously?

Mr Hayes: Yes. Yes, like, yes, I've experienced them, and it's just sort of like your ears equalising through your whole body is the best way I could explain it.

Mr Tolhurst: And so the first pressure wave you'd describe as just what you've felt previously, or would it be more?

Mr Hayes: It was, yes, just a heavy, like a big, you know, pressure bump. You know, like, it's a weird feeling that you get through your body.

Mr Tolhurst: So you felt the pressure?

Mr Hayes: Felt the pressure, power was still on, and then –

Mr Tolhurst: Did you see anything? Was there a lot of dust or anything around?

Mr Hayes: I can't remember seeing anything at that stage. Like, it just sort of had happened, and then the next one came and it was just like a - it just - it felt originally like another one, I think, and then it just built and built, and then the dust came. Power dropped at some point in that sequence, the power had dropped, and then - yes, and then I sort of grabbed onto that CME, and it just was white for, I don't know, enough time for me to get down the outbye stairs, and then the ventilation recirculated and we heard the boys call out over the DAC.

...

Mr Tolhurst: Between the first wave, pressure wave, and the second pressure wave, how much time do you believe?

Mr Hayes: Well, I know how long it was because I've been part of the investigation, so it was 13 seconds.

JOHN BADKE (Maingate DCB)

Post-incident statement to Grosvenor

I was located at MG DCB platform. Last DAC call I heard was double chocking at TG. Severe wind blast experienced at MG roadway. Loss of power and methane warning heard over DAC.

THOMAS BARRY (Maingate Carport Area)

Post-incident statement to Grosvenor

2 x vent reversed. Dust. 2nd larger than first.

MICHAEL (MICK) SMITH (36 cut-through)

Post-incident statement to Grosvenor

Heard flexi stopping flex with pressure outwards and then breath/suck back – pushing back out with more force than the 1st and then suck back and push out a 3rd time with a smaller force.

Interview with the Coal Mines Inspectorate

Mr Smith: Yeah so we were, done the flexi and we were jack picking the inbye rib so we had the OMCO(?) sort of on a 45 degree angle across the cut through with, we were up in the man basket, Simon, Todd and myself, Sean was driving the OMCO and we were jack picking the top of the keyway out and I heard what was, I believe was just a roof fall in the goaf and then the flexi's hopping, it sort of just sucked back in more than I ever thought they could and then she went bang again and that's when I said to the boys we're getting the hell out of here and we ran out to B heading which is the travel road and the phone was, one at outbye so I've just run up and rang the deputy and I got to the deputy and the boys followed me and I got to the phone and the deputy met me there because he thought our cut through had fallen in.

...

Mr Lydon: Going back to when you said you heard a goaf fall.

Mr Smith: Which I presumed yeah...

Mr Lydon: Yeah that's alright.

Mr Smith: ...having no clue.

Mr Lydon: And then you had another...

Mr Smith: Yeah.

Mr Lydon: ...event?

Mr Smith: Yeah. So I believe there was three...

Mr Lydon: Do you remember what sort of ball park time between the two, ball park?

Mr Smith: ...yeah say 10 to 20 seconds if, if that. It wasn't long.

Mr Lydon: Yeah that's alright, yeah.

Mr Smith: Yeah.

Mr Lydon: And you were going to say three or?

Mr Smith: Yeah definitely had three. Like there was, what I presumed was a roof fall and then a massive bang and then just like a small, like a, (boof-sound made) yeah.

Mr Lydon: Alright.

Mr Smith: The way I presume it was like a thousand machine doors getting slammed shut, sorry a hundred machine doors getting shut and then a thousand and then like 10.

Mr Lydon: Alright.

Mr Smith: ...like for noise if you know what I mean yeah.

Mr Tolhurst: All within 15, 20 seconds?

Mr Smith: Yeah yeah.

Mr Tolhurst: Yeah, it wasn't like minutes, it was fairly...

Mr Smith: No no she was yeah...

Mr Tolhurst: ...continuous?

Mr Smith: ...yeah. Enough time to scare you and get out of there.

Mr Lydon: Yeah, that's good.

Mr Smith: Yeah.

Mr Smith: I didn't rate the flexi stoppings before that but I've got a bit of faith in them at the minute. To see how far it flexed, held out.

...

Mr Tolhurst: Mick, if I can take you back to when the incident's occurred and describe that flexi seal sucking in.

Mr Smith: Yeah.

Mr Tolhurst: So you heard the first...

Mr Smith: Yeah.

Mr Tolhurst: ...like pressure wave or...

Mr Smith: Yeah.

Mr Tolhurst: ...bang or...

Mr Smith: First event yeah.

Mr Tolhurst: ...first event.

Mr Smith: Yeah.

Mr Tolhurst: Did the flexi seal then suck in?

Mr Smith: Yeah, so it could have blown out beforehand, we don't know because we were just, but yeah we heard the bang and we sort of pulled up, that was a good roof fall, that's what we thought. And we looked and the flexi stopped and yeah she just started sucking in and that's when I said to the boys we're getting the hell out of here and then before I even finished saying it she'd popped back out at a great rate of knots.

Mr Tolhurst: Yeah.

Mr Smith: And that's when that bit of plaster and that fell off in the photos yeah.

Mr Tolhurst: And then you heard the third?

Mr Smith: Yeah as we were leaving it was just a small, like a, like you are putting a flame out, you know when you suffocate something that's what it sounded like to me.

Mr Tolhurst: Yeah, okay.

Mr Smith: Yeah I had no idea obviously.

Mr Tolhurst: Yeah, okay. There wasn't a noise that was associated with the flexi shield moving or?

Mr Smith: No.

Mr Tolhurst: No, okay.

Mr Smith: Yeah, no, definitely not.

Mr Tolhurst: So you mentioned it sounded like a goaf fall?

Mr Smith: Yeah the first one did yeah.

Mr Tolhurst: Yeah, are goaf falls regular?

Mr Smith: When you are first taking off they are yeah, like that's what, that's what's got to happen when you cut coal so yeah.

Mr Tolhurst: And so that initial goaf fall or what you believe may have been a goaf fall it would have been like a standard level of other goaf falls that you've heard in the...

Mr Smith: Yeah it didn't bother me.

Mr Tolhurst: ...yeah.

Mr Smith: It was only that I looked at the flexi and seen it heading back in and I'm like might not have been a goaf fall, we better do.

Mr Tolhurst: Okay.

Mr Smith: Yeah.

Mr Lydon: When you say the first one, so you say the first one sounded like a goaf fall yeah?

Mr Smith: Yeah.

Mr Lydon: What did the second one, did it?

Mr Smith: I don't really know what it sounded, it was just a, a massive bang you know maybe like yeah. Didn't really sound like an explosion but it didn't sound like a goaf fall either.

Mr Tolhurst: Yeah.

Mr Erwin: Is that what you said sounded like the machine door closing yeah...

Mr Smith: Like a thousand doors getting slammed shut at once.

Mr Erwin: ...slammed shut.

Mr Smith: It was...

Mr Lydon: So there was a difference between the...

Mr Smith: Oh yeah the, one was loud and one was excruciat-, excruciatingly loud and one was just a little puff at the end.

Mr Tolhurst: So apart from, apart from the, on the second event, apart from the flexi seal starting to suck in, so when you talk about your sensors, you know what you see, hear, feel, smell, taste, so you've seen the flexi seal suck in...

Mr Smith: Yeah.

Mr Tolhurst: ...but hearing wise there's been a very loud...

Mr Smith: Oh yeah, massive, massive...

Mr Tolhurst: ...bang?

Mr Smith: ...yeah.

Mr Tolhurst: Yeah. Okay. And you've never heard...

Mr Smith: Not that sort of...

Mr Tolhurst: ...anything like that in your 13 years?

Mr Smith: ...no not that second one no.

Mr Tolhurst: Okay.

Mr Smith: Yeah then we just left, put the man basket on the ground and we jumped out, turned the loader off, left all our gear, jumped over the loader, climbed out, yeah we headed up to the phone, just left everything there.

TODD BELL (36 cut-through)

Post-incident statement to Grosvenor

Heard and felt pressure push flexi and it pushed out and sucked back in and pushed back out with a lot more force than the first then sucked back in and pushed back out with less force than the first.

Interview with the Coal Mines Inspectorate

No interview conducted.

Statement to the Board of Inquiry

At the time of the incident myself, Mick and Simon were in the Man basket while Sean was in the loader. We were doing a seal prep in bye of the last open and were jack picking and chain sawing the in-bye rib for the seal when we heard and felt a roof fall.

At that time Simon shit himself, and myself and Mick had a laugh about it then we see the flexi seal suck in and there was a massive bang and the pressure pushed the flexi back towards us. The pressure was that much it moved us that we then said to each other its time to get out of here so we jumped out of the man basket, Sean jumped out of the loader and myself, Mick, Simon and Sean ran down to the next open...

SEAN FARQUHAR (36 cut-through)

Post-incident statement to Grosvenor

No initial statement provided.

Interview with the Coal Mines Inspectorate

Mr Farquhar: And as we were prepping that seal for installation keying out the ribs and jack picking we felt what we thought was a roof fall, it felt like a really big one and which in my experience I've felt a lot and I yelled out to the boys and said that one was a bit big, what do you reckon? And, and as discussion between the guys in the basket was happening to what, deciding what to do I just lowered the man basket and within that time the second, we call it a pressure bump according to what the, some of the people I've spoken to describe it.

Mr Tolhurst: Second event?

Mr Farquhar: Yeah the second event. That sort of rocked the place a bit more and that was enough to encourage me to turn the machine off to get further clarity that maybe we should because it actually felt like the cut through was caving in and once the machine was turned off the third one come through and there was no hesitation whatsoever because the timeframe between the second one and the third one was a lot closer and it absolutely just rocked the place and I was like yeah that wasn't a roof fall boys, let's get, yeah let's get out of here.

Mr Lydon: The time ball park...so from the first event, roof fall possibly...

Mr Farquhar: Yeah.

Mr Lydon: ...to the second event what sort of ball park time...

Mr Farquhar: ...I can't, all, I can't really give you a ball park time or...

Mr Lydon: Say...

Mr Farquhar: ...all I can tell you that the dist-, the timeframe between the first and the second one was longer than the second and third one. So those ones were closer together and but there was enough time for us to have a conversation of.

Mr Lydon: In the first one to the second?

Mr Farquhar: Yeah.

Mr Tolhurst: We're talking seconds not minutes?

Mr Lydon: Seconds?

Mr Farquhar: Yeah, oh yeah seconds yeah, like yeah probably 10 to 15 seconds you know like yeah, nothing, no, yeah not, not minutes, it was yeah.

Mr Lydon: And the timeframe between, ball park once again, the second event and the third event?

Mr Farquhar: Prob-...

Mr Lydon: A lot closer?

Mr Farquhar: ...yeah felt like maybe four to five seconds, a lot closer. Yeah it was definitely half the, half the time between the first and the second one.

Mr Tolhurst: Yeah.

Mr Farquhar: Yeah because that was, that was enough to absolutely you know scare the bejesus out of us and like yeah that's not right, let's get the hell out of here.

...

Mr Tolhurst: Okay, let's talk about the three pressure events or three events that occurred that you've stated. So the first event, how would you describe that?

Mr Farquhar: It felt like a really really big roof fall. Hence why you know behind the seal when you're building those seals there's always roof movement, you know like it's, it's a common thing for that to happen and at that seal, the flexi seal there's cog timbers and cans and then there's the brattice seal right at the very end. Normally those sorts of falls when that happened because you're a fair way away from it, you feel them but it's not very very prominent, you know like it compared to when I built seals a long time ago we were maybe 10 metres from the cut, from the open cut through whereas in Grosvenor their cut throughs are 90 metres wide and they put the seal I think 30 metres from centre, so you're at 70 metres away from what is the old long wall slash goaf so any sort of fall doesn't really shake you too much. But that fall felt like it hadn't, I think it was falling where the cans were but we couldn't see anything because the flexi seal was there. And yeah it was, it was heavy enough to, you know to, to spark an interest that this, that's, that's not right, yeah it's not normal.

Mr Tolhurst: So, so okay...

Mr Farquhar: Yeah.

Mr Tolhurst: ...so what you're saying and what I'm understanding is it may not have been possibly a goaf fall but a fall in that cut through on the other side? It felt closer?

Mr Farquhar: It felt, whatever, whatever the pressure change was that, that the noise, because the noise was it sounded like a fall, the noise sounded like a fall.

Mr Tolhurst: A standard goaf fall?

Mr Farquhar: Yes, yeah just a big bang of rocks hitting the ground but the, but yeah the, the vibration or the pressure you feel through the ground itself was a little bit bigger than, than what's normal.

Mr Tolhurst: As in, why is that, because it was clo-, it would be closer or?

Mr Farquhar: No because we were w-, because we were further, because it was bigger as in like maybe the...

Mr Tolhurst: Quantity?

Mr Farquhar: ...the quantity yeah.

Mr Tolhurst: Yeah.

Mr Farquhar: Yeah, yeah it was, because yeah when you're, I've, I've been inbye, not inbye but I've been in the vicinity of a wall when it first starts and that first fall of, of the long wall and you know you've got that large volume of rock, when it does fall you know the amount of pressure that goes through the long wall area, you feel it and it, yeah it's a, it's, it's pretty unnerving sometimes and that's, that's what it felt, it felt like a large fall.

Mr Tolhurst: Okay.

Mr Farquhar: Yeah.

Mr Tolhurst: So it would be in your words consistent with maybe that first initial fall of a goaf?

Mr Farquhar: Yeah I'd say it yeah.

Mr Tolhurst: Yeah.

Mr Farquhar: But being that...

Mr Tolhurst: As in, as in what you felt, I'm not saying it was...

Mr Farquhar: ...yeah.

Mr Tolhurst: ...but I just, as?

Mr Farquhar: No no because it, it wa-, it would have been, yeah because the amount of pressure that come through and the amount of vibration we felt through the ground was quite, quite large, larger than just a normal say, just a long wall just dribbling off.

Mr Tolhurst: Yeah, so you talk about, again we're talking about the first instance, the first event, you talk about the vibration through the ground, now I can understand if you're standing on the roadway or standing on the ground through the cut through that you'd feel that vibration but you're sitting in the loader, the loader's running, you still felt the vibration through the loader?

Mr Farquhar: Yeah.

...

Mr Lydon: Do you hear rock falling, do you hear rock falling generally, hear rock fall?

Mr Farquhar: Yeah you, normally you'll hear, you'll hear the dribble and then the big bang but yeah like I said we're 70 metres away from, from the open cut through, you don't, you don't hear a dribble.

Mr Lydon: Was the roof working?

Mr Farquhar: Not, not in that cut through no, it was...

Mr Lydon: No, was the roof working? Did you get any indication of the roof working?

Mr Tolhurst: Banging, crashing?

Mr Lydon: Do they...

Mr Farquhar: No there was, there was no, no lead up and there was no little dribbles or anything like that coming through at the time, it was just a big bang and yeah it was, yeah it was enough to stop us and ask the question you know like that felt pretty close as in like it felt like it had fallen in where the cans were.

Mr Lydon: Yeah.

Mr Farquhar: Yeah.

Mr Tolhurst: So the first one you've felt the vibration and you've heard a bang, did the first one cause any movement in the flexi seal? I'm talking about the first event?

Mr Farquhar: Oh yeah she, she fle-, she come out.

Mr Tolhurst: Yeah?

Mr Farquhar: Yeah like she flexed. The boys in the basket would have seen it a lot better but I know that the second one it broke the plaster and, and it went to the boys in the basket, but the first one from what I was told and when what I saw the first one didn't do that. And you, I'm sure Mick and Simon would be able to confirm or correct me on that.

Mr Tolhurst: Okay. So let's talk about the second one then. How would you describe the second event?

Mr Farquhar: I felt the second event was softer than the third one...

...

Mr Farquhar: Yeah, yeah. But yeah from, from what I thought I told in the original statement was the second one felt soft and third one was the one that rocked the place and really put the hairs up on the back of my neck and thought what the fuck's going on.

Mr Tolhurst: So that's, whether it's, or it's the second or the third one let's talk about the largest event I guess, how would you describe that?

Mr Farquhar: I'm pretty sure, how do you explain it?

Mr Erwin: What did it sound like?

Mr Farquhar: You can, you can, you can put it in a class of a shot fire.

Mr Tolhurst: Yeah.

Mr Farquhar: Yeah like the, they all, I honestly think they all sounded the same because I believe it was the, the flexi seal, just like a drum, so as the pressure's hitting that you know it's, there's no, not much difference but that third one it, it was like a big thud, it just, you could feel it through, through everything. Like you just, it, like I don't know how you fully explain it.

Mr Tolhurst: Well let's, you talked about vibration at the start, so you feel vibrations?

Mr Farquhar: Well the, when you, when you feel a roof fall you feel that thud and the, like the shockwave comes through, you know you feel the shockwave whereas that, the third one it just, it felt like it just immersed, it just come in, it wasn't just a single thud, it just felt like it picked you up and just dropped you like, it didn't pick you up but that's what I mean like it was a lot bigger.

Mr Tolhurst: It was intense.

Mr Farquhar: And, yeah and it just, nothing like I'd felt before. Like I'd, yeah.

Mr Lydon: So did you, do you think it felt different from a goaf fall?

Mr Farquhar: Definitely, like I've been underground for shot fires and you feel that, the shockwave and the thud hit you, like it was dif-, even different to that.

Mr Lydon: Yeah.

Mr Farquhar: Like it yeah just felt like it, I don't know if it, you know if it bounced back, come forward, bounced back, come forward, you know like the whole, the whole experience was in like, within like thud, actually that's probably a better way to explain it, the thud just wasn't an instant thud, like it felt like it hit you and it stayed with you for a couple of seconds. You know like it just, like it just kept going, yeah it was, it was not a fun exercise.

Mr Tolhurst: At the time of the third one or the biggest one were you still in the loader? Was the loader turned on? I think you mentioned earlier you'd dropped the basket?

Mr Farquhar: Yeah yeah after the first one I was talking to the boys and, and I just started lowering the basket and then I think the second one come through and I switched it off. And, and then we were having the discussion about should we go and see the deputy and the third one come through and that was it, there was no more words exchanged, it was everyone out yeah.

...

Mr Lydon: Between, and mate this is a ball park again, so between the second and third was it a lot shorter timeframe than the first and the second?

Mr Farquhar: Yeah yeah way, way shorter. We had, you know the first one come through and we were like, we, you know you could see the discussion, you know like what's going on, like that was, that was pretty big, what do we do and then, and then yeah, and like started dropping the basket down and then so by the time everyone had sort of acknowledged maybe what you know we, should we go and see the deputy, you know do we, do you want to make a big deal of this or maybe it's just something small and then the second one come through and it was, yeah it was a no brainer, it was, it was time to get out of the cut through yeah. And then the third one come through and I've never seen that big fellow move so fast.

Mr Tolhurst: Are you talking about Mick?

Mr Farquhar: And Simon.

JAMIE DOWD (34 cut-through)

Post-incident statement to Grosvenor

34C/T – 1 loud 'pop', a little pop...stopping nearly fell over on the third 'pop'.

Interview with the Coal Mines Inspectorate

Mr Smith: Okay and what is your role?

Mr Dowd: My role is a shearer driver on bull gang, F crew.

...

Mr Smith: Okay. So on the day, on the 6th of May, can you just take me through what your day consisted of?

Mr Dowd: So we got underground about, maybe quarter to 7:00. We did our toolbox talks underground. Did an A comm (?) board in the crib room and then Sam basically told us what, what our jobs were for the day, where we were going to cut. He mentioned that we're going to do FY checks around about the 2:30, 3:30 mark. The reason why we were going to do that was for the diurnal (?) load, if you see a, you know just for the gas levels in the afternoon.

So at that stage Aaron Charchalis and me self, Aaron was my chocky on the day, so we walked down the face, we met Ben Trezise (?) or Leon Trezise and had a bit of a chat and Leon was a shearer driver on that shift, on that, on the night shift, so we had a bit of a chat about tailgate conditions. He basically informed me that the tips were down on chock 146, 147. The next time we go into the tailgate we're going to have issues getting the drums under. He told me they started cutting around about, I think it was nine past 3:00 in the morning. He had a look at the drums, the picks, picks looked good, the sprays looked good and he said, yeah, basically when we get a chance to do it, we can do [unintelligible – "(ui)"].

So Leon and Robin left the face then. So Rambo and me self, sorry, Aaron Charchalis and me self we took over cutting from about, I think it was 92, 93 chock I'd say. We were heading towards the, the maingate. So, yeah so we, Aaron and me self had a bit of a chat about what we were going to do. So I told Aaron that we're cutting, we'll do our maingate pushes, head back towards the tailgate, we'll slow down where that fault was. I think the fault was roughly around about the 120 to about the 120-, sorry, 110 to about 125 chock mark. Once we got there we'll slow the shearer down and then go through and support as we can.

...

Yeah okay. So we started cutting, we went to the maingate. We did our main, we did our first maingate shuffle. As we, as I drove back into the snake we pushed over. At that stage we must have broke a tailgate side rack bar pin on chock 10, because as I drove back in I couldn't get the shearer past the ten pin (?). So I pulled back, put the flippers out, got the fitters to come and put a new tailgate side rack bar pin in. That took about ten to 15 minutes. After that we did the second run into the maingate, we then come back out and drove back towards the tailgate. So when we got to where the fault was, I slowed the shearer down to about four metres a minute, as we had done since we've been cutting that fault. We got through there with no major issues. It was actually a pretty good day because we were cutting some, cut some tonnes (?) for a change. We got down through, I think it was around about 135 chock. I then stopped the shearer. Aaron and me self walked in the tailgate to have a look. We noticed that the chocks were double chocked and they were tip down. So I marked, I can't remember which chock it was, but I marked the chock so by marking the chock it allowed the shearer to stop as a, as a, as a flipper was out. So yeah, we continued cutting. We got to that holding back (??).

Mr Stook: Where did the double chocking start mate?

Mr Dowd: I think it started about 140.

Mr Stook: 140, yeah.

Mr Dowd: I think. So there was a couple of chocks there and then there was a couple back. So yeah we cut into there and when we got to the double chocks area, Aaron and me self hopped in the back walkway, we went and hopped in the tailgate side, the maingate side of the tailgate drum and then I started cutting in while he was manually advancing the chocks. When we got to about, I think it was 144 chock, we then stopped the shearer. Yeah we, Aaron and me self had a bit of a chat. At that stage Sam Priest and Mick Burgess was there. Mick Burgess is a longwall coordinator and Sam Priest was an ERZ controller.

So we had a bit of a chat about what, how we're going to tackle the fact that 146 and 147 tip was down. We, so by, by getting the tips back up we moved the flipper from 145 chock. So basically we emptied the hole, lifted the chock up, I advanced the shearer one more chocks worth and then we tried to do the same with 146. 146 had a hell of a lot of stone on the top (?). As we were moving the, as we were moving the flipper with the chain running and the shearer running, so big rocks come down and then I, we put the flipper back out, I had to

start the lump breaker at that stage. I drive without the lump breaker on. So I started the lump breaker, we cut up a few rocks, moved the flipper a bit more and a few more rocks come down, at that stage it sheared the lump breaker shear shaft.

...

Mr Stook: ...what you saw, and heard and did?

Mr Dowd: Rightio. So basically we were standing cans at 34 cut-through. At that stage we run out of cans, so myself, Aaron Charchalis, Rowan Sweeny and Anthony Ellen, we were standing there having a, having a talk about just a movie we saw on the weekend and, then I, me personally, I had a massive pain in the jaw, like someone stabbed me with a needle and then me ears, it felt, same thing, felt like someone stuck something in me ears, maybe three, four seconds later, the same thing happened again. At that stage the brattice bag that was separating the cut-through from the belt road flapped and blew.

...

Mr Stook: Was the second event, was the feeling that you had in the first event, did that reoccur in the second event?

Mr Dowd: It did, yes. But it was...

Mr Stook: Was it worse?

Mr Dowd: It was worse on the second event.

Ms Stook: Worse on the second event? So when you say worse...

Mr Dowd: Like the pain in my ear was, yeah to the point where you, you know when you, you flinch?

Mr Stook: Yep.

Mr Dowd: Yep and then obviously the ventilation pushed the bag and then we heard a massive big loud bang.

Mr Stook: So there was a bang?

Mr Dowd: Yes, so there was a noise, it was a noise like, say like a truck hitting the rib.

ROWAN SWEENEY (34 cut-through)

Post-incident statement to Grosvenor

Couple pressure bumps. Blew stopping bag at 34ct.

Interview with the Coal Mines Inspectorate

Mr Smith: Okay. So tell us about what happened, what you felt, saw, heard, smelled, when the incident occurred.

Mr Sweeney: Yeah, so we'd finished installing our last can for the day. We got them done pretty quickly. We were just, yeah sort of standing there having a chat for a bit. My ears are very sensitive to pressure. I felt the first bump. I was the only one out of all of us to feel it. My ears pressurise, depressurise, whatever they do.

Mr Dobson: What's that, like a popping when you're on an aeroplane?

Mr Sweeney: Yeah exactly, exactly that, I'm very sensitive to that. So I sort of flinched a little bit, went you know what was that and it was disregarded by the other boys because they obviously didn't feel it. And then there was the second larger one which was quite painful, followed by a big push of air against the ventilation which actually pushed a, a brattice wing over, that pushed pogoos off the roof.

Mr Dobson: In the 34 cut-through?

Mr Sweeney: In 34 cut-through, correct, yeah and yeah followed by a plume of dust obviously to which we all, yep, we sort of knew something not right was happening by that point. We decided to stay put, sort of wait and see what was going on. Anthony Allan, I didn't know he was going, walking back down to the face, I thought he was re-erecting the brattice wing, as I continued to talk to Jamie and Aaron. And then we then, I then noticed the boy's lights flashing moments later which was your emergency PED to evacuate the pit. I did not receive the emergency PED to leave the pit, my light didn't do that, that's for your information. We then walked into C heading, into the belt road and sort of could see down to the maingate. I was looking for Anthony, I couldn't see him.

...

Mr Dobson: Just with regards then for clarity for myself, you said you felt that pop, then you felt a pressure wave, then an intense pressure wave that blew the props and brattice over.

Mr Sweeney: Yeah, yes.

Mr Dobson: What, have you any timing between those, what that, when, from the first pop that you had, to the second, to the third?

Mr Sweeney: They, they were close together and I only felt two. Yep.

...

Mr Smith: Have you ever previously felt anything like that before underground?

Mr Sweeney: A goaf fall.

Ms Smith: And tell us about that.

Mr Sweeney: The goaf fall?

Mr Smith: Yeah.

Mr Sweeney: I was, that was actually the first one I was involved in was 104, the start of this block. I was just, yeah walking along the longwall face and yeah felt a very very similar feeling in my ears before obviously hearing and visibility going to nothing because of dust obviously.

AARON CHARCHALIS (34 cut-through)

Post-incident statement to Grosvenor

3 x pressure bumps.

Interview with the Coal Mines Inspectorate

Mr Smith: Ok. Well just tell me about those three pressure events. Where were you when it occurred, if anyone else was with you when they occurred...

Mr Charchalis: Yep.

Mr Smith: ...and what did you feel, see, hear, anything like that?

Mr Charchalis: So I was on the outbye side of the brattice stopping that was in 34, or on the maingate roadway side and I was with Anthony Ellen, Jamie Dowd and Rowan Sweeny. Felt a very small pressure event in my ears, then followed by two big ones which really hurt our ears and then we had the brattice, wouldn't have, I didn't hear anything and I wouldn't even have felt, but apart from my ears, I wouldn't have even noticed what was going on if that brattice wing wasn't there, but it just went bang, bang and then I'm pretty sure it went bang again. My initial thoughts were that the tailgate had completely come in and blocked it off and that was what the change of pressure was, but now thinking after that obviously if it had of it just would have reversed the ventilation and then that would have been it (?), it wouldn't have boom, boom, boom.

Didn't know what had happened. We knew something bad had happened. Anthony was like, no that's not right, so he went down the face. We stayed there, still sort of discussing what was going on. We noticed, timeframes I don't know exactly, but we noticed two drifties come flying past, we didn't know that there was injured people in that one at the time and then very shortly after that we got the emergency ped (?) to get out. We went into the belt road to go to the crib room to see if we could see if Anthony was there, but there was no lights, so we kept going to the crib room. Rowan Sweeny, he's only, he's a junior miner, he wanted to go down the face and see what was going on, but I said no because we didn't know if that roadway had completely cut off and it was just building up gas, so you don't know what you're walking into. We went up to the crib room, went there and as soon as we got to the crib room we went to the edge of it and that's when the vehicle was coming past, so we just managed to get on the vehicle and then get out.

SAM PRIEST (33 cut-through)

Post-incident statement to Grosvenor

2 pressure waves close together. Significant.

Interview with the Coal Mines Inspectorate

So I felt what was very similar to me as a roof fall, a significant goaf fall or what I'd imagine a significant roof fall would feel like. Didn't hear anything, didn't, there was no was or shockwave that would move us, there was no stone dust dislodged from the roof, just that feeling of that pressure in your ears. That was at 2:55, I wrote that on there.

From my recollection approximately 10 or 15 seconds later there was another one which was very similar but slightly more intense I would say. I immed-, like the first one raised alarm bells, the second one made me pick the phone up and ring the control room...

Statement to the Board of Inquiry

At approximately 2:55pm, I was in the crib room when I felt pressure in my ears, similar to the feeling I have experienced when there has been a roof fall or significant goaf fall. I didn't hear anything or feel a shockwave and no dust dislodged from the roof.

About 10 to 15 seconds later, I experienced the pressure feeling again. This time it was more intense.

ANDREW RYAN (33 cut-through)

Post-incident statement to Grosvenor

In Crib room, felt 1 x big bump/pressure wave that shook brattice wing in crib room.

Interview with the Coal Mines Inspectorate

Mr Tolhurst: Can you step me through what occurred that day up until the time of the incident?

Mr Ryan: Then I went to crib and yeah I was having something to eat. One of the other boys told a bit of a pop which I didn't, one of the boys said his ear popped and mine, they don't generally pop anyway, I was eating at the time. And then pretty shortly after the whole brattice wing through the crib room shook. Sam, the deputy, was sitting next to me, he jumped straight on the phone to control who was checking cold (?) pressures and shit like that.

...

Mr Tolhurst: You mentioned that you were in, in crib when you've experienced the incident and obviously...

Mr Ryan: Yep.

Mr Tolhurst: ...you mentioned that you didn't feel the first pressure event, but you felt the second pressure event.

Mr Ryan: Definitely felt the second one, yeah.

Mr Tolhurst: You mentioned, I think, was it, did you say there was a pump(y?) next to you or...

Mr Ryan: No, the deputy, that was Sam.

Mr Tolhurst: Sam, sorry.

Mr Ryan: Sam Priest, yep.

Mr Tolhurst: Deputy. And when the second pressure event occurred you talked about the brattice swinging, so.

Mr Ryan: Yeah, just felt it shake, the whole length of the cut-through, yeah it was just like a big over pressure event, it was extremely noticeable.

Mr Tolhurst: Okay. Nothing, your ears didn't pop on the second event or...

Mr Ryan: Mine very rarely pop, but yeah I think the other boys did definitely.

GRANT FRENCH (33 cut-through)

Post-incident statement to Grosvenor

Felt two pressure bumps. Power dropped.

Interview with the Coal Mines Inspectorate

Mr Tolhurst: Can you step us through what you did that morning up until the time of the incident?

Mr French: So I went up to the crib, I had to find out from the deputy and that what was going on with that and they said no, we're cutting through. So okay, no worries, so, and then while we're talking there we, I just felt a big, big pop through me ears and went oh, what was that, you know and then about, I don't know, probably would have been ten, 15 seconds later a real big pop after that and you just felt oh, what was that, that wasn't good. And then we lost power, lost power straight away. Well I, actually I did know that we'd lost power, but after the pop the deputy rang control asking a few collar pressures and stuff like that and he stated to me that he was going inbye to do an inspection, to have a look at it. Inbye, he said we've lost power as well, so I said okay, he said well I'll go back to the transformer and wait for the, wait for a call to repower once the deputy had checked it out and all that sort of stuff.

...

Mr Tolhurst: So when your ears popped did you feel anything else, did you hear anything, see anything?

Mr French: Not a real lot, just it was just more of a pressure, pressure like bump that you felt. That's all it felt like, you know it felt like when a goaf, when a goaf fall comes in, when you first, when you first taken off on your longwall block and you get those initial first pressure bumps. It felt, the first one felt like that, but the second one felt like probably five times worse than any, any pressure bump I've had before.

JASON DITCHBURN (6 cut-through)

Post-incident statement to Grosvenor

2 x pressure waves. Ears popped. Power went out after 2nd pressure wave.