

# 3 FURTHER HISTORICAL MINING CHARACTERS

## 3.1 WILLIAM CRAGO'S STORY

Once upon a time there was a boy of 9 years old called William Crago, Billy to his mates. Billy lived at Tremar Coombe near Liskeard and his Dad was a miner.

One Monday at half past four in the morning, Billy's Dad shook him awake. Today was to be Billy's first day working at South Caradon Mine. Billy's Mum helped him pull on a flannel shirt, the canvas trousers and jacket she had made, a hard hat (or tull), and a pair of heavy boots (but no socks).

For two miles Billy and his Dad walked through the cold and dark until they got to the mine. Then they picked up all their gear from the store house; gunpowder and fuse wire for blasting, paper, candles and clay, a small wooden cask of drinking water and various metal tools such as drills, picks, gads and moils. Billy was loaded up with a canvas sling carrying all this heavy gear to keep his hands free for the climb down.

The first ladder went straight down for about 10m, then there was a landing and Billy's dad showed him how to fix his candle to his hat with a wad of clay. From there they climbed another 150m straight down. His dad kept saying "hold tight your hands, son". After this, the shaft continued but angled at a slope. Whilst this made it easier to hold on tight, there was now a constant stream of freezing water dripping from the roof and running down their backs. They climbed another 300m down with their

boots (no socks, remember) filling up with water. It took Billy and his father two full hours to climb down and they hadn't even started work yet!

When they got to their level they had to walk across a narrow plank of wood with a drop down the mineshaft either side. The level was a tunnel about 6 feet high, 3 feet at the top and a little wider at the bottom. They walked on for half a mile and eventually arrived at a spot where coats and gear was piled up on the floor. Billy's dad put down the water barrel and the gear and showed Billy a plank for sitting on. It was only a bare plank but to poor exhausted Billy it was the most comfortable seat he had ever sat on.

Billy could hear the 'tick tick tick' of the picks all around. Suddenly, a voice shouted 'FIRE' and a huge explosion ripped through the tunnel. The noise was so loud, it seemed to Billy that the rocks were smashed apart and that they would all surely die.

From out of the smoke and the noise came two figures, dressed, like him, in miner's gear, their faces pitch black with soot and dirt. One was called Carlyon, and from the way he spoke, Billy could tell he was from down in the west of Cornwall. He looked at Billy and said, *'what's the matter sunny, art ee scared?'*

Billy says. *"Iss you?"*

*"What are ee scared at 'un?"*

Billy said, *“at that hole that went off, I thought the whole place was scat in pieces”*

They all laughed and a bunch more charges went off. Billy felt like he’d had enough of mining for one day.

During his many years as a miner, Billy saw lots of changes. The best of which, he said, was the invention of the Man Engine. This was a series of lifts which miners could stand on to get down to or up from the lower levels. It saved the miners from the exhausting and dangerous climbs on those long wooden ladders, but it wasn’t without its risks. One time as Billy was riding the Man Engine, the engine jolted and Billy was thrown off, falling head first down the shaft. Lucky for Billy he crashed onto one of the support beams that ran across the shaft some 10 feet below. He was knocked out and his dad had to climb down to rescue him. Billy was badly cut and bruised, with a few broken ribs, but lucky to be alive.

We know a lot about Billy’s life because many years later he wrote everything down in his journal. At the end of this journal Billy asks the reader to think of all the things that we couldn’t have without the treasures that miners bring up to the surface.

“So,“ said Billy Crago, “every time you open a tin can, or boil a kettle, remember the miners who risk their lives to make your lives easier.”

See resource [3.1 B Film: William Crago](#).

<b>HWEDHEL WELLA KRUGOW</b>	<b>WILLIAM CRAGO’S STORY</b>
Yn mil, eth kans, naw ha tri-ugens Wella o saw naw bloodh yn y gynsa dydh yn whel gans y das yn Bal Karadon Soth.	In 1869 William was just nine years old on his first day at work with his father in South Caradon Mine.
Euthik glyb y’n tewlder dien, y hwrussons i klambra dre skeulyow prenn rag dew our kyns hogen dalleth whel.	Streaming wet in the pitch darkness, they climbed down wooden ladders for two hours before they could even begin work.
Gorownys gans tardhow bodhara ha spenys dre lavuryans heb let, yth o Wella pur lowen pan dheuth prys krib.	Terrified by the deafening explosions and exhausted by the relentless labouring, William was very pleased when it was time to stop for crib.
Yn uskis, y tyskas Wella fatel aswon gwri gwyrdd rych yn kober o aga fewas.	William quickly learned how to recognise the rich green copper lode that was their prize.
Diwetha, y skrifas dydhlyver yn unn dheskrifa yn manylyon meur bewnans rag Den Bal Kernow yn nownsegves kansbledhen	Later he wrote a journal describing a nineteenth century Cornish Miners’ life in great detail.