

3.3 TELFER MITCHELL'S STORY

Once upon a time there was a boy from Roscroggan and his name was Telfer Mitchell. At 15 years old, Telfer did what any boy from Roscroggan would do; he got himself work at South Crofty Tin Mine. The Captain was called 'Capn Johnny Boo' - big man, big beard, big voice.

"Right, my bewdy boy," says the Capn to Telfer, "first day, first job - End Mucker!"

Deep, deep underground, once the blasting was done, Telfer had to make his way through the fug and the smeech into the end of the drive and shovel out the shattered rock. Hard work and long hours, but Telfer showed the right spirit and Cap'n Jonny Boo was impressed.

"Right my bewdy boy," says the Cap'n to Telfer, "how d'ee like to learn the job of Timberman?"

Telfer was good at that work too.

One day, in a party of 7 men, he was set to timber New Cooks Kitchen Shaft. They were working on a Soler, a wooden platform which was lowered down by four chains. Each chain was engineered to take 17 tons of weight - safe enough? When they were about half way down the shaft, the worst happened. A slab of rock peeled from the shaft wall above and fell, striking the corner of the soler. The chain snapped and all 7 men were tipped headfirst down the shaft.

Telfer woke up in Redruth Miner's Hospital. His leg was in a cast and his head was bandaged. The doctors told him that he was lucky to be alive. They had all fallen several hundred feet, ricocheting off the sides of the shaft. Three of Telfer's workmates had been killed. Telfer was told that his leg was mangled and that he would never walk again. Telfer set his mind to recover as best he could and within a few months he surprised the doctors by taking his first steps. But, Telfer's leg was so badly smashed that he could not bend it.

"Sorry, my bewdy boy," says the Capn to Telfer, "no work underground for a one-legged man!"

Telfer decided that if he couldn't go back to work underground he would find work above ground.

He got a job tin streaming at Tolgus Tin Mill in the valley from Redruth to Portreath. He learned to work with a vanning shovel, a long triangular shovel which, with the right knack, you could separate out tin from the gravel in the streams. He became such a good Tin Streamer that they said he could smell tin.

But, he still needed to find a way to get to work. He couldn't walk far and there was no bus, so Telfer took his bike. How do you ride a bike with only one good leg? Telfer would tie his good foot onto the bike pedal and leave the bad leg hanging out to the other side. He had two ways of stopping: either find a wall to lean against or just fall off!

One day on his way to work, he was flagged down by a policeman.

“I’m arresting you for being drunk-in-charge-of-a-bicycle!” said the constable.

“I reckon you’d be wobbly too with only one leg!” explained Telfer.

But, as he got older, he decided it would be better to get to work with a dunkey and shay. He trained his dunkey very well: Telfer would stop for a drink or two at the pub on the way home, then climb into the back of the shay and fall asleep - the dunkey knew the way to get his master safely home.

As an old man Telfer remembered all the miners he had worked with over the years - nearly all of them had been killed in accidents or died in their forties of ‘phthisis’, lung disease caused by breathing all that fug and smeech. But Telfer was still working above ground at Tolgus Tin until he was 80 years old. Entertaining the visitors and the pub customers with his tall tales and his wisdom from a life of Cornish Mining,

“That fall down South Crofty Shaft - saved my life!” said Telfer Mitchell.

See resource [3.3 B Film: Telfer Mitchell](#).

HWEDHEL TELFER MITCHELL	TELFER MITCHELL’S STORY
Tri a gesobewesyon Telfer a veu ledhyas yn mil, naw kans, peshwar war’n ugens pan gudhas soler, hag i owth oberi warnodho, yn shafta Kroftti Dyghow.	Three of Telfer’s workmates were killed in 1924 when the platform they were working on collapsed in South Crofty shaft.
Telfer o shyndys yn trog, mes y turyas ev ha kavos whel orth Melin Sten Talgos.	Telfer was badly injured, but he survived and found work at Tolgus Tin Mill.
Kynth esa saw unn arr dha dhodho, yth eth Telfer dhe whel der dhiwros pub journa oll dre gelmi y drooz da dhe’n troosla ha gasa y arr gabm dhe gregi rydh.	Although he only had one useful leg, Telfer bicycled to work every day by tying his good foot to the pedal and letting his gammy leg hang free.
Yth esa dhodho diw fordh dhe stoppia; kavos fos dhe boosa er bynn ... po kudha dhe’n leur.	He had two methods of stopping; find a wall to lean against or just fall over.
Telfer a besyas dhe wonez (ha hwedhla) bys dhe’n mil, naw kans, peshwar-ugensow.	Telfer carried on working (and telling tall tales) until the 1980s.