



MYSTERY OF MISSING DEAN BOYS.

SEARCH OF OLD MINE WORKINGS ABANDONED.

BLOODHOUND TAKES PART IN HUNT.

After a search of old mine workings at Dean pit extending over two nights and two days the fate of two 13 year old Dean (Water) boys remains a mystery. They are Jack Hitchen, of 1, Spring Garden Cottages and Fred Williams, of St Back Carr Road. Yesterday (Friday) the entrance to the pit towards which they were seen walking, on Tuesday night was sealed. When they set off they said that they were going to look for a air raid shelter, Williams telling his blind mother that they would " try to find one for you and auntie". When they failed to appear on Tuesday the alarm was raised and Wednesday became a day of continuous activity in the whole of the underground workings of the old pit, which links up with Nabb and Grime Bridge pits and extends as far as Bacup and Stacksteads.

WORKINGS COMBED.

The day staff at both the pits scoured the roads to ensure against the possibility of the boys having entered those pits instead of the Dean Pit. Others worked their way through the passages of the disused pit. The tunnels in some places are no more than 28ins high, and men had to work their way along with water up to their knees in some places. It is not thought that there are any deep pools in which the boys may have stumbled.

After finishing their usual shifts at the pits on Wednesday, the men of the two collieries, numbering over 100, volunteered to go back and comb the whole district, but a two hours search brought no trace of the missing boys. The boys had a candle each and some matches, but the searchers were unable to discover any spent matches anywhere. So systematic were the searchers that groups set out in several directions. From the old pit in several directions and travelled as far as they could while one candle burned out, in the hope of striking a point where the boys might have reached before their own candle gave out. Many of them were engaged on that task for a few hours Wednesday night, and others later took up the search, the last not coming away until 2,oclock on Thursday morning.

POLICE AND VILLAGERS SCOUR HILLSIDE.

In the meantime the villagers, augmented by people from the surrounding district, scoured the hillside along with police to look for any possible holes into which the boys might have fallen and be lying injured. The Manager of the pit Mr T Ashworth, said it did not seem possible they

could have missed the boys if they were inside. Tragic figures at the entrance to the Dean Pit on Thursday waiting for the result of the searches were Mr Hitchen and Mr W Bradley (stepfather of Fred Williams). Mr Bradley again stayed up on Wednesday night to await more news, and Mr Hitchen, who was worn out with fatigue, told a reporter that he had not had his clothes off since Tuesday night. His wife who is not in good health, has broken down under the strain. Mr F Evans headmaster of the Whitwell Bottom Council School, which the boys attended, called at their homes on Thursday to express the sympathy of the whole school.

FALL OF ROOF EXAMINED.

In the middle of Thursday afternoon a police bloodhound was brought from Horwich to take part in the search, and was given clothing belonging to Fred Williams to smell. In the charge of P.C.Robinson the dog followed a trail to the entrance of the pit, and went inside for some distance until water was reached and circumstances were unfavourable. Twice the dog entered the workings and P.C Robinson, attended by P.S.Parry, followed it to the end of the main shaft. For a hour and a half they ranged the workings but without success.

After their days work had finished another party of over 30 miners went into the workings, and falls of roof that might have been recent were examined. By seven o'clock on Thursday night all the searchers had come out, every accessible part of the workings having been explored, and mine experts who are familiar with the whole network of passages feel that the boys are not inside. Men in the adjoining pit are still keeping a look out.

Small parties of volunteers again went out over the hillside, and every nook and cranny known to the people in the district has been inspected. The mystery remains unsolved, Yesterday Mrs Bradley, mother of Williams, said that ,like her husband she was convinced that the boys were there. Mrs Hitchen, however, told a reporter that her husband was now convinced that the boys were not in Dean Pit.