

Discussion: Origins of British reservoir safety legislation 1850–1930

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This is a discussion piece on Charles JA and Tedd P (2024) Origins of British reservoir safety legislation 1850–1930. *Dams and Reservoirs* 34(4): 142–152, <https://doi.org/10.1680/jdare.24.00101>.

Introduction

I enjoyed the above paper (Charles and Tedd, 2024). It sets the development of the legal framework into its historical context. I would like to take the opportunity to set the record straight on two incidents listed in Table 3, namely those at Rishton and Clydach Vale reservoirs.

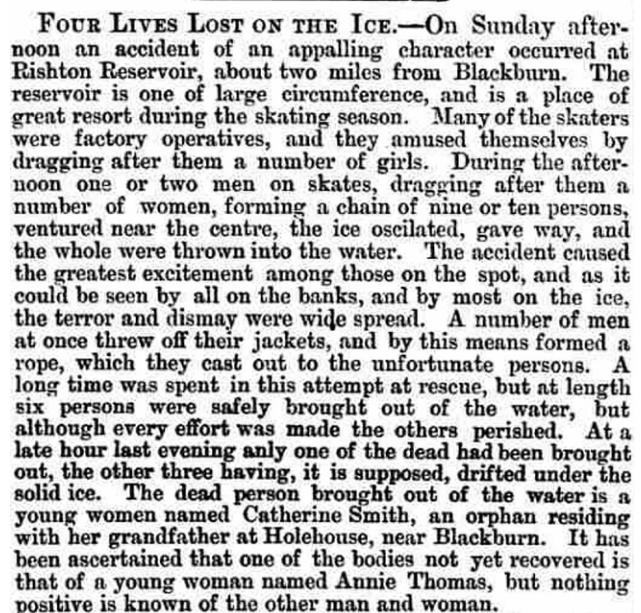
Rishton Reservoir

Rishton Reservoir was built in 1829 to augment the water supplies to the Leeds and Liverpool Canal. It is near Blackburn in Lancashire and continues to serve the function for which it was built. It holds 580,000 m³ of water behind a 10.4 m high embankment dam. There were indeed fatalities at the reservoir in 1870, but they resulted not from a failure of the dam but ice on the surface of the reservoir breaking, precipitating numerous skaters into the water. Six people were rescued, but four young people, Catherine Bleasdale, Hannah Towers, Sarah Ann Townley and James Smith died. The incident occurred on 30th January, and was recorded in the newspaper cutting (Figure 1) and in the diary of Charles Tiplady (Tiplady, 1870).

Clydach Vale

The 1910 incident at Clydach Vale was caused by the escape of water trapped in disused mine workings, which destroyed houses and inundated a school resulting in a total of six deaths.

Details of this incident are recorded on the website of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Library Service (2018).



FOUR LIVES LOST ON THE ICE.—On Sunday afternoon an accident of an appalling character occurred at Rishton Reservoir, about two miles from Blackburn. The reservoir is one of large circumference, and is a place of great resort during the skating season. Many of the skaters were factory operatives, and they amused themselves by dragging after them a number of girls. During the afternoon one or two men on skates, dragging after them a number of women, forming a chain of nine or ten persons, ventured near the centre, the ice oscilated, gave way, and the whole were thrown into the water. The accident caused the greatest excitement among those on the spot, and as it could be seen by all on the banks, and by most on the ice, the terror and dismay were wide spread. A number of men at once threw off their jackets, and by this means formed a rope, which they cast out to the unfortunate persons. A long time was spent in this attempt at rescue, but at length six persons were safely brought out of the water, but although every effort was made the others perished. At a late hour last evening only one of the dead had been brought out, the other three having, it is supposed, drifted under the solid ice. The dead person brought out of the water is a young women named Catherine Smith, an orphan residing with her grandfather at Holehouse, near Blackburn. It has been ascertained that one of the bodies not yet recovered is that of a young woman named Annie Thomas, but nothing positive is known of the other man and woman.

Figure 1. Cutting from Salisbury and Winchester Journal dated 5 February 1870

A response to this discussion can be found at Charles JA and Tedd P (2025) Response to discussion: Origins of British reservoir safety legislation 1850–1930. *Dams and Reservoirs*, <https://doi.org/10.1680/jdare.25.00998>.

REFERENCES

- Charles JA and Tedd P (2024) Origins of British reservoir safety legislation 1850–1930. *Dams and Reservoirs* 34(4): 142–152, <https://doi.org/10.1680/jdare.24.00101>.
- Charles JA and Tedd P (2025) Response to discussion: Origins of British reservoir safety legislation 1850–1930. *Dams and Reservoirs*, <https://doi.org/10.1680/jdare.25.00998>.