

---

## Harry WILSON, GC

*Mine rescue, 10th March 1924, Harriseahead Colliery, Staffordshire*

**Status:** Miner, Harriseahead Colliery, Staffordshire

**Life dates:** 13th January 1903, Stoke-on-Trent – 26th March 1986, Kidsgrove, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire. Harry was cremated at Brad Well Crematorium **Obit:** *The Times*, 4th April 1986

**Biography:** Harry was the son of Samuel and Dorothy Wilson who lived in a house called The Views in Mow Cop.

He attended local schools and then in 1924 went down the Harriseahead Mine and later the pit at Dinnington in Yorkshire. He married Mary Jeffries in 1925 and they had two daughters Betty and Mollie.

Harry was known to be a very jolly man who played the violin in the North Staffordshire Orchestra and also possessed a fine voice in the chapel choir. He was particularly known for his role as the laughing policeman in the annual pantomime. His granddaughter Joy is a well-known opera singer.



Harry Wilson and his wife.

© Syd Cauveren

Harry did not remain in the mines and for 30 years, starting in 1938, took a job with Kidsgrove Council driving the dustcarts. Everyone knew him for he had also been a volunteer in the St John's Ambulance for most of that time.

**Citation:** *22nd August*

*Whitehall, August 15, 1924.*

His Majesty the KING has been graciously pleased to award the Edward Medal to Mr. Pailing Baker, Colliery Manager, and Mr. Harry Wilson, road corporal, in the following circumstances:—

On 10th March, 1924, an inrush of water took place at the Harriseahead Colliery in Staffordshire. The majority of the workmen had already left the mine, but it was found that one man named Booth was missing. He had been working alone about 130 yards from the bottom of the shaft, and representations were made to Baker, the Manager, that it was impossible to rescue him. The bottom of the pit was three parts full of water and the water was still rising.

Baker, however, was resolute: he called for volunteers and Wilson was one of five men who responded and descended into the mine by a footrail. The rescue party reached a ventilation door which they dared not open owing to the pressure of water behind it and they therefore prepared to retire. Baker, who had followed, insisted that Booth could not be left, but Wilson was the only man who volunteered to continue the work of rescue.

Baker and Wilson managed to force the ventilation door and allow the water to escape gradually. They then waded to the place where Booth was working, reaching him after great difficulty, and all three men were eventually drawn to the surface. Both Baker and Wilson ran a very great risk of being trapped under the low roof in the mine. They could not tell to what height the water would rise and if it had reached the roof both the rescued and rescuers would have lost their lives. Both Baker and Wilson displayed exceptional courage and resolution.



The George Cross gifted to the IWM by Harry's daughter and her husband.

*2nd September 1924*

*Whitehall, 1st September, 1924.*

EDWARD MEDAL.

In the notice dated the 15th August, 1924, which appeared in the Gazette No. 32967 of the 22nd August, notifying the award of the Edward Medal to Pailing Baker and Harry Wilson, for "Pailing" Baker " read "Paling Baker."

**Other awards:** EM (Bronze Mine) – GC exchange, Certificate of the Order of Industrial Heroism, Certificate of the Carnegie Hero Fund Trust, 1977 Queen's Silver Jubilee Medal. Harry's GC is on display in the Imperial War Museum. The certificates for the Order of Industrial Heroism was worded thus "presented as a mark of respect and admiration to a brave man who, in a moment of peril, thought more of others than of himself." That for the Carnegie Hero Fund Trust reads "He serves God best who most nobly serves humanity."

### The story

Harriseahead Colliery was situated between Packmoor and Mow Cop.

At great personal risk, the two men rescued Edwin Booth of Mow Cop who was working in a distant part of the mine when the inrush of water occurred. It was necessary to wade breast deep through the rising water to effect a rescue.

Mr. Sam Finney, (Secretary of the North Stafford Miners Federation) presided over the presentation of the awards. He spoke on behalf of everyone that they were very thankful that the lives of the men at Harriseahead Colliery were not lost in the flood which took place, and their hearts were overwhelmed with gratitude and thankfulness to the two men whom they had met to honour that evening. 72 miners, who were at work below ground at the time, had an extraordinarily lucky escape. There was an exciting scene as the men struggled through the breast-high water towards the shaft bottom and drawn to the surface. Another 17 or 18 made their way out by a footway or drift.

But for the remarkable courage and coolness displayed by the whole of the men in the face of a dangerous situation it was probable that the accident would have been attended by loss of life. As it was, all the men were got safely out of the pit, without any panic and within an hour of the inundation.



**Harriseahead headgear.**  
*Courtesy Fionn Taylor*

It was about the middle of the morning shift that the inrush of water occurred. There were about 150 miners employed at the Harriseahead colliery, and three shifts were worked, the morning shift being the largest. From some cause, which has not yet been determined, there was a sudden inrush of water and owing to the steep gradients of the workings, it poured with great force to the pit bottom, and quickly rose to a height of four feet.

An alarm was immediately raised, and as word of the flooding was quickly passed from mouth to mouth, the men were advised to remain calm and to make their way with all practicable speed to the cage. They had to struggle through the still-rising flood to the cage where they were drawn up without mishap.

The men presented a bedraggled and pitiable sight as they emerged from the cage at the top, but they were all cheerful and glad to have come out without being cut off by the water. They were given a change of clothing or hurried off to their homes.

The depth of the pit was about 260 yards. It was evident that close to one of the working places, there had accumulated a considerable "pocket" of water, the presence of which had not been suspected. Water was still running into the pit bottom and although pumping had been proceeding since Tuesday morning, there was still no appreciable reduction in the depth of the water. Probably at least a week would elapse before the water could be removed, meanwhile, the pit was completely stopped.

One man gave a graphic account to the local newspaper, he said:

"I was in my working place, when suddenly I heard a strange rumbling sound. I concluded it was a rush of water somewhere. Directly afterwards all the men were warned to leave the pit immediately and to do so as calmly as possible. We all realised then that the pit was becoming flooded, and in order to save ourselves from being cut off, as we did not know the depth of the flood at the time, we hurried as quickly as possible towards the cage. It was a difficult job to get there, as we had to fight our way through the water, which in my case was up to my armpits. I am glad to say that there was no loss of life, but it was one of the luckiest escapes I have ever known in the pit, and I have been a miner for a good many years."