

Charles Breaker

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THE FATALITY AT A COWES SHIPBUILDING YARD

INQUEST

The distressing death of Mr. Charles Breaker, a well-known Newport man, of Melbourne-street, New-village, who succumbed to fearful injuries received by being struck by a “monkey” (an iron weight of about a ton) attached to a pile-driving engine used in connection with works being carried out by Mr. Frank Bevis, a Portsmouth contractor, at Messrs. John Samuel White and Co.’s shipbuilding yard and engineering works, Cowes, on the previous Thursday, was the subject of an inquest opened by the Deputy Coroner for the Island (Francis A. Joyce, Esq.) at the Frank James Memorial Cottage Hospital, East Cowes, on Saturday afternoon. Insp. Bignell was the chief police officer present. Capt. C Fryer was foreman of the jury.

The CORONER stated that it was necessary to open the inquest before the Easter holidays for purposes of burial. He should adjourn the inquiry in order to give the family an opportunity of being represented, so that they could ask the witnesses any questions, and also to communicate with the inspector under the Workshops and Factories Act. In such a case they must give four days’ notice of the inquest, which he proposed to adjourn until Friday.

WILLIAM BENJAMIN BREAKER, stoker in the Royal Navy, identified the body as that of his father, who was 56 years of age. He was a labourer, formerly in the employ of Mr. Jenkins, of Newport, and he had been employed by Mr. Frank Bevis, of Portsmouth, for about six weeks.

HAROLD HILDER, carpenter, of Furzyhurst, Northwood, in the employ of Mr. Bevis, said they were working at Messrs. John Samuel White and Co’s yard, Cowes, where Mr. Bevis had a contract to construct a sea wall and foundations for a new crane. The deceased was entirely in the employ of Mr. Bevis. Witness was working in the same gang as the deceased on the previous Thursday afternoon, at about 2 o’clock. He was about nine yards away from him and saw the “monkey,” which was an iron weight used for driving the piles. The top of it came away from the face of the pile-driving engine, and when it had got a little way over it slipped off the pile on which it was resting, fell down to the ground, and struck deceased a very heavy glancing blow on the back. He was about three feet away, and in front of the engine working on his hands and knees in a stooping position. They were about to take the engine away from that pile to one about 6ft. further along. When they saw the “monkey” beginning to slip the foreman of the job (Walter Houston) shouted “Look out, Charlie.” He thought deceased attempted to get out of the way, but there not sufficient time to get clear. Two other labourers, George Day and Frank Fuller, were working on the engine.

Replying to the CORONER, WITNESS said there was a wire attached to the “monkey” and the engine, but it was slack, because the engine was not working and they were going to shift it.

The CORONER said he supposed there were guides and slides for the “monkey,” and he asked if they were taken off first.

WITNESS said yes: they were bound to be taken off.

The foreman and other jurors expressed a desire to see the pile-driving engine, and it was arranged that they should inspect it before the resumed inquest.

WITNESS added that he rendered first-aid, a doctor was sent for, and the deceased was taken on a stretcher to the Frank James Memorial Cottage Hospital.

DR. G.R. DENTON stated that immediately on being called he went to Messrs. J.S. White and Co.'s yard, where he saw deceased and ordered his removal to the Hospital. There he made a more careful examination and found the injuries to be so severe that there was no hope of the deceased's recovery, and he died about 5-o'clock the same afternoon. The pelvis and the lower part of the spine were fractured, the lower portion of the body being very severely injured. There were also, no doubt, very bad internal injuries, which were more than sufficient to cause death.

In reply to a juror, the DOCTOR said as far as he could tell the deceased was a strong man and fit to do the work for which he was engaged.

The inquest was adjourned until yesterday (Friday).

THE ADJOURNED INQUEST

Yesterday (Friday) afternoon the adjourned inquest was held, Mr. Arthur Wolfe, H.M. Inspector of Factories, attended.

WALTER HOUGHTON, foreman employed by Mr. Frank Bevis, said it was a mystery how the "monkey" fell over. He had been engaged in that kind of work for 30 years and had never known as accident like that occur before. Unless Fuller, a labourer, touched the "monkey" as he got off the platform, witness could not account for the accident.

The INSPECTOR said there was an inch bevel against the "monkey," which indicated that it must have been touched to cause it to fall over.

GEORGE HENRY DAY, of 1 Castle-road, Cowes, another workman, said Fuller was still on the raised platform when the "monkey" fell. He thought it was a miracle how it fell over.

The CORONER: Miracles don't happen nowadays (laughter).

WITNESS said he should not have expected the "monkey" to fall unless it was shoved, though the pins had been removed.

The CORONER thought the "dolly" was canted, which caused the "monkey" to topple over on the release of the pins.

FRANK FULLER, 3 Sun-hill, Cowes, labourer, said when the pile had been driven by the foreman's orders he removed the chair from the "dolly," which held it in position. He then undressed the "monkey," taking the pins out. He should not have touched the pins if he had not received definite orders to do so. After doing that he jumped on the platform, and the "monkey" then fell. It came down when he landed on his feet. He did not touch or push the "monkey." The foreman did not tell him to get off the stage. He did not think the "monkey" was square on the "dolly." Three of them were strangers to the work.

By the INSPECTOR: It was the first time he ever undressed the "dolly." The men below were hidden from his view by the "monkey."

The CORONER said the evidence of witness and the foreman did not agree.

The jury returned a verdict of “Accidental death” and added a rider that they were of opinion that greater precaution should have been taken. Sympathy was expressed with the bereaved family, and acknowledged by the deceased’s son.

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