

## **Celia Cooper**

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### **SHOCKING BURNING FATALITY AT NEWPORT.**

#### **DANGERS OF FLANNELETTE.**

A distressing burning fatality occurred at Newport on Monday, when an elderly widow, Mrs. Celia Cooper, living with her daughter at 57 New-street, was fatally burned in her bedroom and died during the evening. The deceased, who was in bed when her daughter left the room, must have got up and according to her own statement she became giddy and fell, her nightdress, which was a flannelette one, being ignited by the fire. The daughter, hearing the screams, rushed to the room and found her mother a mass of flames. With admirable presence of mind and pluck she wound a blanket round her and succeeded in smothering the burning clothes, she herself being burnt in the attempt. Her aged mother, however, was most shockingly injured, and although she was attended to within a few minutes by Dr. Hutton Castle, the District Nurse, and Mr. J. Williams, a former member of the St. John Ambulance Brigade, the case was hopeless from the first, and she died within a few hours. Much sympathy is felt for the relatives of the deceased.

The inquest was held at the Gospel hall, Union-street, on Wednesday, by the Deputy Coroner (F. A. Joyce, Esq.). Insp. T. Cass and P.C. Tiley were the police officers present. Mr. N. H. T. Mursell was chosen foreman of the jury.

Miss KATHLEEN COOPER, daughter of the deceased, said deceased had been a widow for 21 years and was 82 years of age. She last saw her mother in bed on Monday afternoon. She had been poorly off and on with a very severe cold but felt better up owing to difficulty of breathing. On the morning of the 30th, however, she felt better and thought she could rest and so stayed in bed and a fire was lighted at the request of the deceased. There was no fire-guard. Deceased was not in the habit of having a fire-guard. This was the first fire witness had had in the bed-room this winter. The deceased was not too feeble to attend to it. About 1.30 witness took her dinner up and after that, at about 2.30, she took her medicine. Witness again made up the fire and deceased said she would have a nap and perhaps get up for tea. Witness then went downstairs and did her work, and at about 3 o'clock she heard terrible screams, but did not think at first that they came from the deceased. She then ran upstairs and saw deceased standing by the bed enveloped in flames. Deceased was wearing a woollen vest, a calico chemise, a nightgown of flannelette - [The Coroner: Ah! flannelette.] and a woollen shawl. Nearly the whole of the clothing was burnt. Witness caught up a blanket from the bed, wrapped it round deceased, and tried to force the flames down. She then got her on the floor and endeavoured to beat out the flames. Witness burnt her hand badly. Witness then laid deceased down and opened the window and called for help. Mrs. Cass and others came and put out the fire, which was spreading in the room. Her mother was then unconscious and Mr. Williams and Mr. Burt came and did what they could and deceased was put back in bed and Dr. Castle was sent for and came immediately. Deceased was made as comfortable as possible, but she died about 7 o'clock the same night. She very soon recovered consciousness after fainting at the time, and she told witness that she got out of bed and felt giddy and she thought she must have fallen and her clothing touched the fire. She said there was a stick against the bed so that she could have knocked to call witness, but she thought she could have managed without her.

By the Foreman: deceased was not near sighted but her hearing was affected.

Mrs. ALICE CASS, living at 62 New-street, wife of Frank Cass, said her milkman called her after he had heard screams proceeding from the last witness's house. She went at once and she confirmed the evidence of the last witness. She asked the milkman to fetch the doctor and Mr. Burt.

Dr. HUTTON CASTLE said he was called and went at once. The deceased was in bed when he arrived in about two minutes. There was a horrible smell of burning in the whole room and several people were removing charred clothing. Mrs. Cooper was horribly burnt all over, and on turning down the bedclothes he found that portions of her clothing were still burning and they had some difficulty in getting it off. That showed the extreme inflammability of the clothing. The condition of the body was such that it was absolutely impossible to apply anything; if they had tried they would have torn the flesh away in the process. The only thing that could be done was to protect the body from the air as much as possible for the time being. The abdomen, chest, back, thighs, face, and top of the head were all badly burned and he recognised at once that the case was absolutely hopeless. The District Nurse came in and she was a great help. He ordered milk and brandy to be given to deceased and saw her again about half an hour later. It was extraordinary that she lived so long and regained complete consciousness. The flannelette nightdress was nearly all gone. He had no hesitation in saying that death was due to shock as a result of the burns.

The Coroner, in summing up, said no doubt the flannelette nightdress was partly the cause of the unfortunate occurrence. People would buy flannelette, although practically every Coroner in England had had occasion to warn the public against it. Miss Cooper seemed to have done everything she could under the circumstances. It was easy to be wise after the event and say it would have been prevented if there had been a fireguard. He did not think blame could be attached to any one, however, as fireguards were only insisted upon where there were children. With regard to the flannelette, he had repeatedly expressed his views on the subject, but there was no law to prevent people purchasing it.

The jury reached a verdict of "Accidental death from shock, as a result of burns."

Transcription by Kate MacDonell for the Friends of Newport and Carisbrooke Cemeteries,  
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