

Kate Louise Couzens

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ELDERLY NEWPORT WOMAN'S DEATH

FELL ASLEEP SITTING IN FRONT OF GAS FIRE

The tragic circumstances under which an elderly woman died after being burnt on the legs through falling asleep in front of her gas fire were described at an inquest at the County Hall, Newport, on Wednesday. The Coroner (Mr. J. V. Bullin) held the inquest on 83-year-old Miss Kate Louise Couzens of York House, York Road, Newport, who died in St Mary's Hospital, Newport, on March 27th.

Grace Ellen Mackie, district nurse, of 2 White Houses, Fairlee Road, Newport, said she saw Miss Couzens on March 21st when she was having attention to her legs. She had fallen asleep in her chair in front of the gas fire and had scorched her legs. In spite of the burns she was in good spirits. When witness visited her on Monday the burns were improving, but on Wednesday she was not so well. She sent for Dr. Heathcote who thought it better for her to be in hospital. Two days later Miss Couzens died.

Josephine Patricia Strugnell, of York House, York Road, Newport, said that Miss Couzens went to stay at her home in September, 1956, and had a furnished bed-sitting room. Although she was 83 she could look after herself and did all her own shopping. In March when she did not feel well witness called Dr. Heathcote who said that her heart was worn out. He called regularly. Miss Couzens sat up in her room, but on March 20th was not fit enough to go out. Witness left her sitting in her chair in front of a gas fire and went to collect her prescription. When witness returned Miss Couzens said : "I've had a lovely sleep." After tea she undressed herself and went to bed. She made no complaint about her legs. At 11 p.m., however, when witness went in to see her, she said "I am in a dreadful state." Witness then discovered the blisters. Next morning the doctor was summoned and prescribed treatment. Miss Couzens never complained afterwards about her legs, was never distressed and always cheerful.

Nurse Norma Irene Meagar, of 123 Upper Moor Green Road, Cowes said that she was on duty in Brook Ward on the night of March 26th 27th. Miss Couzens' condition deteriorated through the night and she did not regain consciousness.

Doctor Debashis Saha house surgeon at St Mary's Hospital, Newport, said that although the burns were responding to treatment, death was due to bronchial pneumonia.

The Coroner said that it was unfortunate that an inquest had to be held. His verdict was accidental death, due to bronchial pneumonia accelerated by the burns received by sitting too close to the fire. He was sure that Miss Couzens had been looked after with great care and kindness.

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