

**David Coward**

**Isle of Wight County Press – 15 June 1957**

**GUNVILLE DROWNING TRAGEDY**

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**BOY DISREGARDED WARNING**

At an inquest at the County Hall yesterday the story of events leading to the death on Wednesday of David Coward, aged 14, a pupil at the Priory Boys` Secondary School, in Gunville Brickworks pond, was told before the Coroner (Mr. J. V. Bullin). Mr. W. J. Eldridge represented Mr. A. W. Bull, of Rookley Manor, owner of the land, and the boy`s father, Mr. G. Coward, of 13 Castle Road, Newport, was accompanied by Lieut. R. Islett, of the Salvation Army.

Tony Godfrey Roger Farrington, 14, of 128 Whitepit Lane, Newport, said that on Wednesday with David Coward he went to the house of the Scoutmaster (Mr. Snow) at Gunville. They went into the fields and finding that it was later than they thought, instead of going to the swimming pool at Seaclose as they intended, David said they would go to the brickworks pond and "just jump in and out again." They jumped in together and David was swimming across the pond as witness came out. Witness turned to put on his shirt and when he looked again he could not see David. After shouting and looking round the adjoining field he told Mr. Yelland. They entered the brickyard by stepping over a chain. He had been there fishing lots of times and he thought David had also been there before, but not to swim. --- Replying to Mr. Eldridge, witness said he knew there was a notice "swimming prohibited" on the other side of the pond.

**IGNORED SCOUTMASTER`S WARNING**

Frederick Charles Snow, of 105 Gunville Road, Carisbrooke, Scoutmaster of the troop to which David and Tony belonged, said that they were at his home at lunch time on Wednesday. He had a premonition that they intended to go to the pond and gave them strict instructions not to do so. Later he felt so uneasy that he left his lunch and again told the boys to go to the swimming pool. He gave David 2s. 5d. to make up enough for them to go to the pool and have an ice cream afterwards. After lunch he looked for the boys, to see them through the town on their way to the pool, but could not find them. He saw that their bicycles were in the shed and that their bathing things were in their packs. At about 4.30 p.m. Mr. Yelland came to him at his work and he immediately cycled back to Gunville. He sent Mr. Yelland to ring the police and dived into the pond, swimming up and down as deep as he could go at the spot Tony indicated, and he also searched the reeds.----- Asked about the use made by local children of the pond, witness said that parents in the locality

seemed to allow their children from the age of six upwards to go there. To his knowledge children had used it for 18 to 20 years, but this was the first tragedy.

### **BODY IN 18 FEET OF WATER**

P.C. Simpson described how he and other police officers and members of the Fire Brigade dragged the pond from a boat. The body was recovered from a spot where the water was about 18ft. deep, about 9ft. from the bank.

The Island Pathologist (Dr. P. D. Swinstead) said the lungs gave evidence of death from drowning. The stomach was very full of partly digested food, and it was always sound advice not to bathe on a full stomach.

### **OWNER`S DIFFICULTIES**

In a statement on behalf of the owner, Mr. Eldridge said that the pond was being slowly filled in by the Newport Council. Up to March of this year the Agricultural Executive Committee had part of the brickworks site and, unknown to the owner, had blocked up the normal right-of-way round the northern side, and substituted another right-of-way to the south. Mr. Bull had blocked up this right-of-way and had been requested to re-open the one through the brickworks, but had refused as he considered it dangerous. Negotiations were in progress to re-open the southern footpath, which would be fenced on both sides and was much safer. At the request of the Education Committee he had placed "Danger --- bathing prohibited" notices there in letters a foot high.

### **"MISADVENTURE" VERDICT**

Expressing sympathy with the boy`s father, the Coroner said that as well as inquiring into the cause of death it was part of his duty to consider what could be done to obviate a recurrence. Parents and everyone should make it known how extremely dangerous this pond was and take every possible step to keep children and others away. He recorded a verdict of death by misadventure, and commended Mr. Snow and the police and other helpers for the prompt way in which they had acted.

Lieut. Islett expressed thanks to all concerned on behalf of Mr. Coward.

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**Isle of Wight County Press --- 22 June 1957**

### **NEWPORT**

**Scouts` Tribute at Funeral.**----Members of the 1st Carisbrooke Scouts and Cubs (Princess Beatrice`s Own) formed a guard of honour at St. John`s Church on Monday at the funeral service for David Coward, aged 14, of 13 Castle Road, a member of the troop, whose death in a drowning tragedy at Gunville was recorded last week. They were accompanied by

Group Scoutmaster F. C. Snow, Scoutmaster F. Bailey, A.S.M. R. Maxfield, Akela Miss R. Brading, and A.C.M. I. Linington. Among the large congregation were a party of David's classmates and friends from the Priory Secondary School, accompanied by the head master (Mr. H. W. Flux) and the deputy head master (Mr. T. G. Boyland), members of the 1st Carisbrooke Guides (Princess Beatrice's Own) with their captain, Miss F. Arnold, representatives of the Towers Holiday Camp, Thorness, where the 1<sup>st</sup> Carisbrooke Troop hold their annual camp, and of the Brighstone Sea Scouts and the St. John Ambulance Brigade, of which he was a junior member, and of the St. John's Children's Church and Scripture Union. The service was conducted by the Vicar (the Rev. S. F. Cooper), who referred to David's close connection with the church as one who had been through the Sunday-school, one of the first choirboys when a robed choir was started some five years previously, and as a regular member of the children's church and a junior sidesman. Lieut. R. Islett (Salvation Army) also took part in the service. Miss D. Welby-Pryer (organist) accompanied David's favourite hymns "Onward, Christian Soldiers" and "Abide with me," and the service concluded with the scout taps. The mourners were Mr. and Mrs. G. F. Coward (father and mother), Mr. L. Sivier (grandfather), Miss R. and Mrs. N. Sivier (aunts), Mr. C., Mr. and Mrs. F., Mr. and Mrs. A., Mr. and Mrs. R. Sivier, Mr. G. Sivier, and Mr. and Mrs. P. McManus (uncles and aunts), Mrs. Foster, Miss P. Foster, Martin Harding, Geoffrey Cox, and Mr. R. L. Hibberd. Mr. and Mrs. F. G. Coward (grandparents) and Mrs. C. Sivier (aunt) were unable to attend. The interment was at Carisbrooke and the floral tributes included those from Tony Farrington (his companion on the occasion when he met his death); friends and neighbours of Castle Road; friends and neighbours of the C.C.M. Social Club; the 1<sup>st</sup> Carisbrooke Scouts; the Cubs; the Guides; the Towers Holiday Camp; the head master, staff, and scholars of the Priory Secondary Boys' School; St. John's Sunday – school and children's church; St. John's Scripture Union; St. John's Choir; the office staff, St. Mary's Hospital; the directors of Messrs. J. W. C. Gill; and Lieut. Islett and the insurance staff of the Salvation Army. Messrs. H. and F. Damp made the arrangements. -----Mr. and Mrs. Coward wish to thank their many kind friends for expressions of sympathy and floral tributes in the tragic death of their son, David, particularly Mr. T. Snow and Lieut. and Mrs. Islett.

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