

## Frederick James Etteridge

Isle of Wight County Press – 2 July 1904

### 1901 census –

John Etteridge	Head	64	Army Pensioner & School Board Officer	Norwich, Norfolk
Ernest Etteridge	Son	12		Newport, I.W.
Arthur Etteridge	Son	10		Newport, I.W.
<b>Frederick Etteridge</b>	<b>Son</b>	<b>4</b>		<b>Newport, I.W.</b>
Jane Whitewood	M-in-law	70	House keeper	Godshill, I.W.

## DISTRESSING DROWNING CASES AT NEWPORT

### SCHOOLBOY IN A WELL – PLAYMATES HEARTLESS ACTION.

The victim was a schoolboy named Fred James Etteridge, aged 7 years and 8 months, son of the school attendance officer for the borough, Mr. John Etteridge, living at 1, Elm-grove, Newport, who on Sunday afternoon fell in a well in the brickyard-field at Shide-cross. Deceased, after returning from St. John's Sunday-school about 4 o'clock, went out for a walk with other boys – Walter Appel and William Niblett, of about the same age as himself, and Albert Victor Sanger and Edward Matthews, who were three or four years older. They visited the field in which the well, some 25ft. deep, with about 20ft. of water, is situated, and getting inside the railings enclosing the well they lifted up the cover of the well and commenced the dangerous pastime of stepping or jumping across its open mouth. They all got across safely on the first occasion, but when the second attempt was made deceased apparently failed to gain a firm foothold when going across, with the result that he slipped and fell back and disappeared down the well. His playmates, realising that they were helpless to render aid to the drowning boy, admit that in their fright they fled without summoning help, agreeing among themselves to say nothing to any one of the sad end of their little comrade. The result of what appears to be heartless conduct on their part in preserving silence as to what had happened and telling untruths to account for deceased's absence was that the dreadful secret as to the fate of the deceased was not disclosed until quite five hours after the accident, when it came to the knowledge of Appel's father, who at once hurried to the well and, with the assistance of Mr. G. Fry, of Mount-pleasant, recovered the body after over an hour's work with ladder and grappling-irons.

The father of deceased gave evidence of identification and said he last saw deceased alive about 4 o'clock on Sunday afternoon, when he came home from Sunday-school and told witness he was going out for a walk. Deceased got his little walking stick, which witness had not seen since, and went out and never returned.

Albert Victor Sanger, the 11-year-old son of Joseph Sanger, of 6 Union-street, said that on Sunday afternoon he went out for a walk with four other boys, Walter Appel, William Niblett, Edward Matthews, and deceased. Appel took them into the field at Shide-cross and said "Shall we go and see the well?" They all agreed to go and see the well, and Appel opened the well by lifting up the cover and said "Shall we step across?" Witness said "Yes" and stepped across the mouth of the well first; and Niblett, Matthews, Appel, and deceased also stepped across in the order named. Deceased stepped across all right the first time and they shut the well up and were just going home, when deceased opened the well again. – Q. Are you sure he opened it ? – Yes, sir. Deceased went to step across again and mis-stepped

and fell in. – Q. Had you ever been there before? – Once before I had been there. – Q. Doing the same thing? – No, Sir. – Q. And what did you boys do when deceased fell in? – We tried to get him out, but we could not reach him. – Q. I should not think you could. You did not think of going or calling for help? – No, sir; we were all too terrified we could not, and we agreed to say nothing about it. – Q. Was the well cover fastened when you went into the field? – It was shut down, sir. Q. And Appel opened it? – Yes, sir. – Q. Was any one standing near deceased when he tried to jump across the well the second time? How far were you off? – We were all inside the railing round the well. – Q. When he jumped over did he strike anything? – We did not see him strike anything. – Q. Was he given a push by another boy? – No, sir; we did not push him at all. We were on a different side of the well to that on which he fell. – Q. Are you sure he was not pushed? – Yes, sir. – Q. When you were first asked by the police about it, you denied all knowledge of it? – I denied I was there.

P.S. Adams; Yes, and said you and another lad went up round the Castle instead of to this field.

The Coroner: Do I understand you boys agreed you would suppress all information about it? – Witness: We all said we were not going to say anything about it; that is all we agreed, sir. – Q. Is it true you threatened to strike Appel if he said anything about it? – No sir; we did not say any such thing.

The Foreman: What school do you attend? – The Board School.

The Coroner: You say the reason you did not go for help was that you were so frightened? – Yes, sir. – Q. Was that the only reason? – Yes, sir. We were frightened and ran out of the field as fast as we could. – Q. And you say your statement is true that he was not pushed or shoved or touched by any other boy? – Yes, sir; he was not touched by another boy.

The Foreman: I suppose he was not compelled to jump across the well? – No, sir: we warned him not to step across. We were just going home.

By a Juror (Mr. Diffey): They left the cover of the well open when they ran away. They did not stop to shut the well down after deceased fell in. They stopped there about three minutes after he fell in, he should think. Deceased did not cry for help after he fell. His foot seemed to slip as he stepped across from the well cover.

The Foreman said he expected that after walking through the grass to the well the bottom of his boot was rather slippery.

Walter Appel, 8 years old, son of Henry Appel, painter, of 19, West-street, gave similar evidence, saying he opened the well first and Sanger led off in jumping across the mouth of the well. He said they told deceased not to jump across again, as they did not know what might happen; but deceased would have his own way and went to jump across. His toe just touched the opposite edge of the well mouth as he was going across, and he fell back, striking his head on the other side and falling down the well. Deceased never said a word. No one pushed deceased, who was not told by any one to jump over the mouth of the well. Deceased said he was going to jump over, and he would have his own way. They then all ran away, being so frightened, and having talked it over they agreed that they would not say anything about it. – Q. Although you were asked by other people where deceased was? – Yes, sir. – Q. Who first told about his being in the well? – I did, I told my brother. – Q. On the following

day? – No, the same evening.- Q. About what time? – Just before I went to bed, getting on for 10 o'clock. – Q. And your brother told your father? – Yes, sir.

By the Jury: He looked into the well after the accident and saw deceased, but he never said a word after he fell in. He told a boy named Dore that deceased had fallen out of his uncle's cart.

The Coroner: That was before you told your brother about deceased falling into the well? – Yes, sir.

Deceased's father said deceased had no uncle with a cart there. The boy also said deceased's head was cut open by falling out of the cart.

The Coroner: I suppose the reason why you told stories was that you were afraid to tell the truth? – Yes, sir. – Q. Who told you not to tell? – The boy Matthews and others. They said "Don't you say a word about it, not to any one." Witness added that he was absolutely sure deceased was not pushed by any other boy.

Henry Appel, father of the last witness, said when he returned home about 10.15 on Sunday night his daughter told him what the boys had said and that deceased's brother had been down to ask as to the whereabouts of deceased. Witness at once went off to the well, and with the assistance of Mr. Fry, of Mount-pleasant, a ladder was lowered into the well and grappling irons were sent for from the Fire-station. They did not succeed with those, and Dr. Lowe let them have his grappling iron, and ultimately Mr. Fry and himself succeeded in getting the body out about 11.30. His son told him that they went into the field and opened the well cover and that one of the boys – he thought he said it was Matthews – said to deceased that he would give him a penny if he could jump or step across well. The boy said deceased did it, and getting his toe on the other side he slipped and fell back into the well. His son never gave an explanation of why he told stories about it; he did not know then that he had told stories about it.

The Coroner: You appear to have done your best in the matter.

Witness: We did our best, sir.

The Coroner: I am sure you did.

Witness added that the deceased's walking stick was found and brought away by another boy. His cap was fished out of the well by Mr. Lower.

The Coroner said that the other two boys were aged respectively 8 and 12. Their evidence would be much the same as they had already heard and he did not think they would add much to their information by calling them. He did not propose to call them unless the jury were anxious to hear them.

The Foreman and the jury agreed that it was not necessary to call the other boys.

Dr. G. M. Lowe, of The Rays, Shide, said that about 11 o'clock on Sunday night deceased's brother came to his house and asked him to go to the well, which he did and found there the last witness attempting, with assistance, to get the body out. They were successful in their efforts about 11.30. Deceased was fully dressed, there were no marks of external injury,

and the appearance of the body was consistent with death from suffocation by drowning. A watch which was on deceased had stopped at 20 minutes to 5.

By the Jury: Deceased might have been rendered senseless by striking his head when he fell across the well, and thus would have sunk at once, but he understood that one of the boys saw him after he fell into the well.

By the Coroner: The statement that deceased did not speak or cry out for help was consistent with the theory that he struck his head and was rendered insensible.

The Coroner, in summing up, said it was unfortunate that all the lads with the deceased lost their heads, and instead of taking the proper course as straight forward boys should have done, they seemed to have agreed to hide the affair as far as they were able, probably thinking that some degree of blame attached to them for that distressing accident. He did not know that he could say more with regard to that than that if he (the Coroner) was the parent of any of those boys he should be disposed to inflict severe chastisement upon them. The boys were not old enough to say very much to. He took it that their verdict would be that the deceased was accidentally drowned.

The jury returned a verdict of “Accidentally drowned,” and the Foreman expressed the sympathy of the jury with the father and relatives in their bereavement – an expression in which the Coroner joined.

The usual expenses of witnesses were disallowed in the case of the boys.

The jury also made an acknowledgment of the service of Messrs. Fry and Appel in recovering the body.

The funeral of deceased took place at Carisbrooke Cemetery on Wednesday afternoon, when some 30 of his fellow scholars of the first standard at the Nodehill Schools attended, in charge of Miss Williams, in addition to many others. A lovely wreath was sent from the Nodehill Schools and also from the St. John’s Sunday-school. – The father of deceased desires to convey his heartfelt thanks to all for the many kind expressions of sympathy with him and his family in their sorrow.

*Transcription by Tony Barton for the Friends of Newport & Carisbrooke Cemeteries © 2025*  
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