

newborn female child Jacobs

Hampshire Advertiser – 15 May 1886

A PAINFUL CASE.

On Tuesday afternoon an inquiry was opened at the Guildhall before the Coroner for the Isle of Wight (Mr. F. Blake) concerning the death of the female child of Annie Jacobs, a young domestic in the service of Mr. Johnson, residing at 80, Alexandra-terrace, Newport. – Mr. G. P. Joyce appeared on behalf of the young woman, the mother of the child.

The first witness called was Sarah Dillon, 4 South Mall-terrace, who deposed that on Sunday morning, the 9th inst., she was in attendance on Mrs. Johnson, living at 80, Alexandra-terrace. She had been in the house three weeks and had frequently seen the girl, whom she knew as Ann. She was the only servant. During that time she suspected her condition, and in reply to witness she denied the accusation altogether. At a quarter to 8 on Sunday morning she came to ask her if she would answer the front door. This was as she (witness) was dressing. She stated she was unable to go herself. Witness noticed she was partially dressed, though she did not come inside the room. Witness answered the door, and afterwards came upstairs. Looking into the girl's room she found her sitting on a chair. Witness told her to get into bed, and she would send for someone to do her work. She then left the house to see Mrs. Adams about doing the work. Before she returned to the house she called upon the girl's cousin, whom she desired to tell her mother. Did not see the girl again until the afternoon.

By Mr. Joyce. – She spoke to her about her condition the first day she went into Mr. Johnson's service. When she went into her room on the Sunday afternoon she saw the dead body of a child.

Mary Adams, a married woman, living at 32, Clifford-street, sister of the last witness, said she went to the servant's room in Mr. Johnson's house on Sunday morning last, at 9 o'clock. The girl was then sitting on a box close to the bedside, and was partially dressed. She appeared to be ill at the time. Witness helped her to undress and she got into bed. At this time she had no suspicion as to what had happened. However, she immediately went to Mrs. Gustar, the midwife, as she thought she would know better what was the matter with her. As soon as Mrs. Gustar came it was ascertained that a child had been born. Mrs. Gustar asked where the child was, and the young woman answered that it was in the box she had been sitting on. She then gave witness a key, which was under her pillow. She (witness) unlocked the box and found some soiled clothes. Mrs. Gustar took the child out. She knew it was living because it made a little noise. Mrs. Gustar put it in a warm bath. It continued to make a noise afterwards. Dr. Wilkins was sent for.

Mr. Joyce. – What length of time elapsed after Mrs. Gustar took the child out of the box and the arrival of Dr. Wilkins?

Witness could not say. It might have been half an hour or an hour. She said she placed the child in the box that it might not make a noise, and also because she wished to take it to her mother.

Mrs. Jane Gustar, midwife, living at No 2, Field-place, stated that when she arrived at Mr. Johnson's the servant said she must go home. Witness told her she could not do so. She

subsequently told her that she had had a child, but this she denied. Witness said "It's no use you telling me that : I know you have, and I want to know where it is." It was some little time before she said it was in the box and gave the key to Mrs. Adams. Could not see any part of the child's body until the soiled clothes were removed, and she then found it lying at the bottom of the box. The clothes were not weighty. Witness could say positively that the box was not full so as to cause the lid to press upon the child. It made a little noise. The child died a few minutes after the doctor left. There was a good deal of blood both on the bed and inside the box. She observed a bruise on the forehead of the child. The mother said she did not know how it came there.

By Mr. Joyce. – It might have been an hour before the child died after being taken from the box. The mother said she tried to dress herself three times to take the child home to her mother, but became so faint that she could not see. I have no doubt but that she intended to take the child home alive.

Mr. Robert Bird Wilkins, surgeon, said he arrived at Mr. Johnson's house a few minutes before 10 o'clock on Sunday morning. He there saw a newly-born female child lying on a blanket at the bottom of the bed. It was dying at the time. Was not able to do anything. He observed a bruise on the forehead, over the right eye, and other smaller bruises on the left side of the head above the ear. Was unable to form any opinion as to how they had been caused. His first impression was that the child had died from haemorrhage of the umbilical cord, but that impression had been somewhat altered since making a *post-mortem* examination that morning. The result of this was that he found the bruises already referred to. Witness removed the scalp, and found the whole of the surface bones or tissues infiltrated with blood. On examining the bones of the skull he found the right part of the frontal bone corresponding to an external bruise, fractured right across. The left parietal bone had a horizontal fracture running to about the centre, and from that a vertical fracture up to the top of the skull. The right parietal bone was also vertically fractured right through, and the surface of the brain was covered with effused blood. These injuries would of themselves have been sufficient to cause death, though he would have expected it to have occurred more rapidly from this cause. He had also examined the state of the heart and blood vessels. They contained only a very little blood. This would point to extensive haemorrhage. There was no external wound whatever. Could not suggest how the injuries were caused. If they had been caused by a blow should have expected to find the tissues lacerated.

In answer to the Coroner, Dr. Wilkins said. – "Well sir, I think the condition of the skull was sufficient to cause death, but I cannot positively say that was the cause of death, nor can I say how or in what way the injuries referred to were caused."

By a juror. - Did not think that a fall would account for the fractures, though it might account for the bruises.

By Mr. Joyce. – They might have been caused partly by pressure and partly by a fall.

The Coroner, in summing up, alluded to the natural desire on the part of the mother to keep the matter a secret. If medical assistance had been provided the fatality in all probability would not have occurred. The question for the jury to decide was the cause of death, and whether the mother was responsible, criminally or otherwise, for the death of the child. It had been pointed out that death might be due to haemorrhage, or to the injuries described in the doctor's evidence. If they were inclined to think it was due to the

latter cause it would then be for them to decide whether they were inflicted intentionally or accidentally. He did not think there was anything in the evidence to show that this young woman meditated taking the life of the child. They might say, if they thought proper, that the child died from injuries to the head, but there was not sufficient evidence to show how they were inflicted, though he certainly thought it would be difficult to bring home a criminal intention on the part of the mother to destroy the life of the child.

After a short consultation the jury came to the decision as follows:- "That the child was born alive, but as to the manner in which it came by its death it is impossible to say."

It was stated that the mother of the child is only 17 years of age.

Transcription by Tony Barton for the Friends of Newport and Carisbrooke Cemeteries,
© 2023 <https://www.foncc.org.uk>