

John Rice

Isle of Wight County Press 6 September 1924

PORCHFIELD DAIRYMAN`S TRAGICALLY SUDDEN DEATH.

ATTRIBUTED TO OVERWORK.

The death occurred with tragic suddenness during Monday night of Mr. John Rice, dairyman, of Allswell Villa, New-road, Porchfield, and formerly of Hillis Farm. The deceased, who was 37, was very well known at Cowes, where he had a milk walk, and also sold garden produce. He was at work on Monday, and appeared to be in good health, but the following morning he was found dead in bed by the side of his nine-year-old son, with whom he was sleeping. The deceased was an exceptionally hard-working man, and his extraordinary energy and long hours of toil doubtless affected his heart, though the Coroner, in his remarkable summing-up at the inquest, said that the evidence as to the actual cause of death was not very conclusive. The deceased leaves a wife and family of four, including an infant child, for whom much sympathy is felt in their grievous and sudden loss.

An inquest was held by the Deputy Coroner for the Island (Francis A. Joyce, Esq.) in the school at the Beulah Chapel, Porchfield, on Thursday. Police-Inspector W. Shotter was present.

Harriet Cass, nurse, of 54 St. Mary`s-road, Cowes, said she had recently attended the deceased`s wife, who was confined on August 29. The deceased had been in good health during the five weeks she had been in their home, going to work every day. On Monday deceased retired to bed at 11.30 p.m. She had never seen him in better spirits. On going to call him as usual at 5.30 the following morning she received no answer, and entered his room. She found him lying in bed in a natural position, slightly on his left side. Life was extinct, and the body was almost cold. Dr. Hay was sent for. Deceased`s nine-year-old son was sleeping by the side of him. She awoke the boy, who was unaware of what had happened to his father. She had never heard deceased make any complaint of his health, and never knew him to have a fainting fit. He had been working very hard. He had a long way to go---as far as Cowes-green---on his milk round. When first she went to the house deceased told her in passing conversation that he thought he had indigestion.

Dr. A. E. Hay, said on Tuesday morning, in response to a telephone communication, he went to the deceased`s home, arriving there about 6 o`clock. Death had taken place probably three or four hours. He had been attending deceased at different times for about 10 years, but never for anything serious or for heart trouble. He had made a post mortem and found the muscles on the left side of the heart rather excessive, which might be expected of one suffering from overwork. He had what might almost be described as an athlete`s heart, probably caused by overwork. There was no valvular disease. All the other organs and brain

were quite healthy, but the lungs were very congested, probably due to the stopping of the heart's action. The lungs otherwise were quite healthy.

The Deputy Coroner said the cause of death was not very clearly defined.

Dr. Hay said death was probably due to an irregular heart, which failed in its action.

The Deputy Coroner said it appeared to be one of those exceptional cases in which a post mortem had failed to show what really happened or to give a very adequate cause of death. He was quite satisfied, however, that death was due to natural causes. The circumstances were very sad, and he sympathised very much with Mrs. Rice in the extraordinary death of her husband, who appeared to have been in perfect health. She had only just had a child, and he was sure every one must feel very much sympathy for her. A person who was in bodily health and able to fulfil various functions might suddenly succumb without reason or warning. The only thing found at the post mortem was that the muscles of the heart had contracted, causing it to stop beating. It was said that life hung upon a thread. Although that thread was sufficient for ordinary support, in that case it snapped. He thought death was due to syncope, probably caused by defective working of the muscles of the heart.

Dr. Hay agreed, and said the deceased had been working almost day and night.

A verdict of "Death from natural causes" was returned.

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