

Sidney Walter West

Isle of Wight County Press – 11 August 1934

BATHING FATALITY AT THORNESS BAY.

GALLANT BUT VAIN ATTEMPT AT RESCUE.

A bathing fatality made all the more distressing by the fact that a very plucky attempt at rescue only just failed, occurred in the Solent near Elmsworth Farm, Porchfield, about 4 o'clock on Sunday afternoon, the victim being Sidney West, nearly 16 years of age, a bricklayer, youngest son of Mr. and Mrs. Alfred West, of Gunville West, Carisbrooke.

West and a friend named Edmund Cooper, of Carisbrooke, were bathing near Saltmead Ledge, which is a notoriously dangerous spot except to good swimmers as at certain states of the tide the depth of water increases suddenly by three or four feet outside the ledge. West, who was only a moderate swimmer, unconsciously crossed the ledge and was caught by the tide which runs strongly here and constitutes another danger. He was soon in difficulty, being unable to regain shallow water, and his friend shouted for the help of several other young men on the beach a little distance away. The only good swimmer among them was Mr. Cedric Mew, a young married man living at Sunnyside, Castle-street, Carisbrooke, a member of the Carisbrooke football team, and he made a very gallant attempt at rescue which, though unfortunately unsuccessful, reflects great credit on him. Mew's own story of his rescue effort told to a *County Press* representative, gives the clearest idea of what occurred. He said: "I was sitting on the beach after having had a rather long swim myself when Cooper called for help. I saw West splashing about in the water about 30 yards from the shore, and as I dashed in I saw him throw up his arms and sink. I swam to the spot as quickly as I could and saw him floating face downwards. I shouted to him to turn over on his back, so that it would be easier for me to get him ashore, but he did not reply and I think he must have been almost unconscious. I turned him over and holding his arms began to tow him. When I had pulled him a little way his arms came up and my hands slipped and he sank, but I caught him by the hair and again commenced to drag him towards the shore. He was a big heavy lad and I had the greatest difficulty in keeping my head above water. I went under several times and I could tell my strength was going. A little later after having been dragged under two or three times I was completely exhausted and I had to release my hold. West sank and I saw no more of him. I managed to struggle back until I was in my depth, and then one of the young fellows who had waded out helped me ashore. I am terribly sorry I could not get West in but I did all I could. If I had held on any longer I should have been finished too. Had it happened before I had had my swim I am sure I should have saved him, but I was tired."

West's mother has just recovered from a serious illness and deep sympathy is felt with her and her husband and the other members of the family in their tragic bereavement.

A number of the deceased's friends from the Carisbrooke district searched the shore at low tide on Monday in the hope of recovering the body, but without success. It was, however, found on Tuesday near the scene of the tragedy.

THE INQUEST.

The body was removed to Elmsworth Farm, where the inquest was held yesterday (Friday) afternoon by the Deputy Coroner (Francis A. Joyce, Esq.). Inspector H. Randall was the police officer present.

Ronald John West, a brother, said the deceased's full name was Sidney Walter West. He was nearly 16 years of age and was employed by the Gunville Brick and Tile Company at Rookley. On Sunday afternoon witness had been to the shore at Elmsworth to bathe and the deceased arrived just as witness was coming away. About 4.30 p.m., after he had gone home, he heard that his brother was missing, and returned to the shore, but could find no trace of the deceased. His brother enjoyed good health. He did not think he could swim, but witness and he often bathed at the spot.

THE DANGERS OF THE SHORE.

Edmund Cooper, 17, of No. 2 Gunville West, Carisbrooke, said that the deceased and himself entered the water at about 4 o'clock. Neither of them could swim very well, but they swam out together. When about 30 yards from the shore witness tried to touch the bottom, found he could not do so, and shouted to West, who was only a yard or two away, to swim back. Witness turned and struck out for shore and West followed, but when he (Cooper) touched bottom and turned round he saw that West had been carried out farther by the current and was shouting for help. Witness had previously shouted for help and he then waded ashore and called to Mr. Mew, who was on the beach, that West was in difficulties. Mr. Mew immediately swam out to try to rescue West. There was a strong current running towards Cowes at the time.

The Coroner : Didn't you know there was a strong current there at certain states of the tide?

Witness : No, Sir.

The Coroner : No one has ever told you ?

Witness : No.

Asked his opinion as to the suitability of the shore for bathing, Mr. W. H. Lock, of Elmsworth Farm, said practically the whole coastline from Gurnard to Newtown was dangerous except to good swimmers because of the sudden increase in the depth of the water over the ledges of rocks and the current. He had often warned young people going to bathe of those dangers, but all he had got for his trouble was "cheek."

The Coroner : I know the difficulty, and you are under no obligation to warn them.

NO FALSE ALARMS.

Replying to Inspector Randall, the witness Cooper denied that he and West had been previously calling for help when they were not in difficulty. He did not think they had ever gone out of their depth there before. They must have swam out across the ledge without realising it.

THE RESCUE ATTEMPT.

Cedric George Mew, builder's labourer, of Sunnyside, Castle-street, Carisbrooke, then told the story of his plucky rescue attempt, as given above. He said he heard shouting and splashing from West and Cooper for perhaps a couple of minutes before Cooper's actions led him to realise that West was really in difficulty. Until then he thought the lads were joking.

The Coroner : I don't blame you in the least for hesitating because, unfortunately, bathers nowadays frequently make a noise, screaming and shouting, and even sometimes falsely calling for help. I have known of more than one instance where someone has gone to the assistance of persons in the water whose cries would lead one to believe they were in difficulty, only to find that they were in no danger at all and were merely fooling.

Mew added that when he reached West he was blue in the face and feebly paddling the water with his hands. He made no attempt to clutch at witness and he thought he was then almost unconscious. He was positive that not more than two minutes elapsed between the time of the first shouts and his entering the water. He simply threw off his shirt and went in.

The Coroner : Are you a strong swimmer ?

Witness : A fairly good swimmer, but I had been for a long swim before that and I was tired. He thought he dragged deceased about 15 yards towards the shore before he was forced to release his hold. The current was very strong.

Edwin Lucas, a London postal sorter, of 158 Blagdon-road, New Malden, on a visit to Sticelett, Northwood, described the finding of the body on the shore 200 yards west of Burnt Wood on Tuesday, at 4 p.m.

The Coroner, in his **SUMMING UP**, said there was no doubt whatever that the poor boy lost his life by drowning, because he was not a good swimmer. Had he been able to swim well he could have regained the shore. Cooper, too, was an indifferent swimmer and he could not be blamed for not getting his friend ashore. The sad fatality showed the risk which people ran who swam out beyond their depth before they could swim well. Learners would be well advised to take the wise precaution of wading out until the water was up to the

chest and then swimming towards the shore. If these young fellows had been content to do that the tragedy would have been averted. It was a well known fact that the coast for a considerable distance in that district was distinctly dangerous for anyone except good swimmers owing to the existence of the ledges already described, and the currents when the tide was at about half ebb or flow. The witness Mew entered the water as soon as he realised that West really required help and he (the Coroner) was satisfied that he did his utmost to save West's life. His verdict would be that the deceased was accidentally drowned.

A WARNING.

Mr. Lock said he hoped the publicity given to the inquest proceedings would act as a warning to others. People often came to the shore and went headlong into the water without taking the trouble to find out the nature of the shore.

Mr. Ronald West, on behalf of his parents, thanked all who had tried to save his brother, and those who had recovered his body.

The funeral takes place at Carisbrooke Cemetery to-day (Saturday), at 2.30 p.m.

Isle of Wight County Press – 18 August 1934

CARISBROOKE

FUNERAL OF MR. S. W. WEST. ---- The funeral of Mr. Sidney Walter West, the victim of the sad bathing fatality at Thorness on Sunday week took place on Saturday at Carisbrooke Cemetery. The Rev. Dr. W. H. Mildon, B.A., officiated, and Mr. Arthur James, T.C., read the lesson. The family mourners attending were the deceased's parents (Mr. and Mrs. A. West), the Misses M. and V. West (sisters), Messrs. R. and L. West (brothers), Mr. and Mrs. S. Day (brother-in-law and sister), Mr. Hollis (uncle), Mesdames West and F. Earley (aunts), Mrs. C. Earley (cousin), and Mrs. L. Whittington. Others attending included Mr. B. Sanders, C.C., Mr. and Mrs. H. Biles, Mr. E. James, and a number of friends from Gunville and Carisbrooke. There were over 30 beautiful floral tributes, including those from his former workmates, neighbours, and friends at Gunville; and Mr. and Mrs. W. Biles and the staff at Park-green Farm. Messrs. O. C. Hamilton and Son made the arrangements.

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