

William Edward Appleton

**Isle of Wight County Press
23 September 1939**

INQUEST ON RETIRED SEAMAN AT NEWPORT.

BROTHER THE CHIEF WITNESS.

The Deputy Coroner (F. A. Joyce, Esq.) held an inquiry at the Guildhall, yesterday (Friday), into the circumstances of the death of Mr. William Edward Appleton, aged 67, of 12 Cross-street, Newport a retired seaman. Mr. Appleton was found dead by his son, Mr. J. W. H. Appleton, on returning home from work on the previous Tuesday. There was a jury of seven, of which Mr. A. O. Purdy was foreman, and at the suggestion of the Coroner the jury viewed the body before the evidence was taken. Mr. G. S. Green represented the deceased's son and Mr. G. Hall appeared for Mr. Charles Appleton.

After an inquiry lasting three hours the jury retired and reached agreement after 15 minutes. Their verdict was "That the deceased man received a blow or blows which caused injuries to the face, but there is insufficient evidence, in our opinion, to state if those injuries were actually the cause of death."

James William Henry Appleton, a lorry driver, deposed that deceased was his father, and resided with witness and Charles Appleton (deceased's brother). - The Coroner: Were the two brothers generally on good terms? - Witness: They were all right until the drink came. Father liked a drink or two, but was always very quiet.-Q. And your uncle, was he addicted to drink? - Yes. -Q. Was he then inclined to be quarrelsome? -He was upset by the least little thing. -Q. Did you ever know them to fight? - Never in my presence. - Witness said that he returned home from work at about 7.40 p.m. on Tuesday and found his uncle lying on the couch apparently asleep. He went upstairs and on entering his father's bedroom saw a dark form, which he found to be his father's body, in a crouching position on the floor behind the door. There was blood on his face. Witness shouted to his uncle, but received no answer and concluded that he was under the influence of drink. His father had a fall previously and injured his eye, but the marks had disappeared.

Dr. A. A. Heathcote said he had attended the deceased man at intervals during the last four years for high blood pressure and failing sight. He agreed with the Coroner that a person who had suffered an apoplectic stroke might feel as if he had received a blow on the head; he would have a stunned feeling. None of the external injuries of deceased was sufficient to cause death. - By the foreman: Almost of the bruises on the deceased might have been caused by a fall.

Dr. C. K. Sylvester said he was called by the police to 12 Cross-street, Newport, about 8.20 p.m. on Tuesday and formed the opinion that death had taken place between one and two hours previously. At the request of the police, he examined Charles Appleton at the Police Station. He was rational in speech and his eyes reacted to light. There was a smear of blood on his forehead, another on his right cheek, and small abrasions on his jaw, right hand, and shin. There was blood in the nails of his right hand. Subsequently he examined the body and

found blood over the face and hands and in both nostrils, swelling and bruising of the left cheek, considerable bruising of the inner surfaces of both lips and a cut half an inch deep on the left side of the upper lip. A post-mortem examination established that death was due to cerebral haemorrhage.

The Coroner: Was there any injury on the skull to indicate that he had received a blow with a stick or any other weapon?

Dr. Sylvester: No, nothing apart from the injuries to the face.

Dr. Sylvester said that any injury, excitement, or even muscular effort would predispose to cerebral haemorrhage in a man liable to have one at any moment. He thought the injury to the lip was caused by crushing between some object and the upper jaw.

The foreman: There was no corresponding cut on the lower lip?

Dr. Sylvester: No.

By Mr. King: Any of the external injuries might have been caused by a fall. There was no doubt that deceased suffered from high blood pressure.

Mr. Green asked if the doctor thought the superficial wounds were consistent with a fall or a fight, and Dr. Sylvester replied that some were consistent with a fall and others with a fight. Deceased had normal strength for a man of his age. If attacked he would not be able to keep up a sustained defence. It would be possible for a man to have a leaking artery which would have caused unconsciousness by degrees.

Mr. Green: Would the external injuries be a contributory cause of death?

Dr. Sylvester: They might hasten the predisposed cause, in the same way as taking off his boots might have done.

Tony Rossi, dealer, of 8 Town-lane, Newport, said he saw deceased at 5 p.m. near the Victoria monument, when he asked witness for a match. He said he was going to die and complained of pains in the head and chest. Witness advised him to go home and see a doctor. Deceased did not look as if he was going to die then.

Donald Macklen, aged 13, of 42 Chapel-street, said that when passing the Appleton's house at 6.30 on the 19th he heard a man banging the inside of the door. He shouted "Help, Murder" twice.

Peggy W. F. Cook, aged 13, of 8 West-street, said that when outside the Appleton's house at 6.40 she saw through the front downstairs window a man in a fawnish coloured cap and white shirt, who appeared to be hitting a man who was lying down. She thought the man lying down was Charles Appleton.

Peter Taplin, aged 8, of 1 Cross-street, said he heard noises in Appleton's house and through the window saw men lying on the floor.- The boy's mother, Ethel Hilda Taplin, said her son drew her attention to the noise and she heard screams twice, probably just before 5

p.m. Just before 7 p.m. Charles Appleton spoke to the lad and gave him something from the front door, which was only partly opened.

Myrtle Strugnell, a young shop assistant, of 3 Cross-street, stated that she saw deceased going towards his house at between 4.15 p.m. and 4.30 p.m. There were no marks of blood on his face.

Ronald Leslie Lockhart, of 14 New-street, stated that Charles Appleton at 6.45 p.m. asked him to go for some matches. He "just poked his head round the door" so that he did not have a good view. He was wearing a light coloured shirt and had his jacket off. Appleton said he could not ask him in because he was cleaning up. He seemed sober.

Two visits to the Appletons' house were described by Joseph Franklin, ice cream salesman, of 77 High-street. After 3.30 p.m. the elder brother was in the front room. He had a drink with Charles, and later Charles had the remaining drink from a small bottle. The elder Appleton was quite normal then. At 4.50 p.m. witness again called. The elder brother unlocked the door and said Charles had just gone out. Deceased looked normal and there was no sign of fighting.

Charles Appleton, brother of deceased, said he left the house at 9 a.m. and after finishing his rounds, went to the Crispin, where he had three pints of ale and bought a 2s. bottle of sherry. He reached home at 2.40 p.m., gave his brother a glass of sherry, and then went upstairs. After he had come down again, witness heard a fall, and found his brother lying on the floor between the kitchen and the scullery, bleeding from the face. Witness picked him up and told him he had better stop in, but he would not do so. Witness rested on the couch and went to sleep. He had not seen his brother since that time. The next thing he remembered was being awakened by the police sergeant. He was sober and had not quarrelled with his brother. - The Coroner: You had some injuries on your face. Did you not? - No, sir. There were no injuries on my face or other parts of my body.

Inspector Willmott read from the doctor's statement of evidence as to small abrasions on the angle of the right jaw, the left elbow, the upper part of the left shin bone, and on two fingers of the right hand. - Appleton said they were nothing at all. They were little spots caused by the nails of fruit boxes.

The Coroner: You think the injuries you saw on your brother were the result of a fall? - Yes. What happened after he left I cannot tell.- In reply to Mr. Green witness said that his brother seemed to be bleeding a lot when he fell. He pressed him to stay in, but he would not. Witness got blood on himself when he helped his brother up. - Questioned again as to why he let his brother go out, in view of his condition, witness said his brother had "these brain fits" and was all over the place, up and down stairs and up and down the garden, and one could not do anything with him. His brother did not fall until after Franklin's visit at about 3.30 p.m. He was sleeping until awakened by the police and he did not know where his brother was.

The Coroner: Who called for help inside the house? - I don't know about that sir. -Q. Were you asleep? - I don't know. My brother was always having these brain fits. The neighbours knew and took no notice.

In further cross-examination witness admitted sending out for matches. - Mr. Green: Then it is not true that you slept from the time your brother went out until the police asked for you? - I laid down again and went to sleep. - Q You did not think your brother's injuries from the fall serious? - He was bleeding. That is all I can say. He must have had another fall.

The Coroner: You say then that the evidence of the children is all wrong? - Yes. My brother was always shouting, even at three or four o'clock in the morning. The neighbours know. - Q. You knew that your brother was in delicate health? - Yes. - Q. Why did you not look after him then? - I did look after him sir. - The Coroner described deceased's injuries and remarked "You did not look after him." - Witness: He did not have a cut on the lip when he left. - Q. I suggest that you were in drink and did not know? - No sir.

Questioned by Inspector Willmott about his remark to Lockhart that he could not ask him in because he was cleaning up, witness said he made the remark because he did not want Lockhart in his house. He refused to answer when it was pointed out that he had said he slept until the time he was awakened by the police, but later admitted sending Lockhart for matches during that time.

P.S. Thatcher said he was called to the house at 7.50 p.m. Charles Appleton was lying on the couch in the front room. His brother was dead in a back bedroom. On a coat which Charles Appleton was wearing and which he said his brother sometimes wore, he found bloodstains. There were spots of blood on a mat inside the front door, on the front room couch, on magazines near the couch, and on the curtain. Charles Appleton had been drinking, but was fit to have washed himself.

By Mr. Green: There were no marks of blood near the step where deceased was supposed to have fallen, or on the stairs.

The Coroner told the jury that he thought they would have difficulty in reaching a conclusion. The first point they had to examine was whether death was due to violence, and there was no doubt in his mind whether violence did contribute to it. There was no proof before them that any blow caused death and he did not think the evidence justified them in coming to any such conclusion, although they might suspect the evidence of the brother, which was difficult to believe. He repudiated the suggestion of a quarrel, but outside evidence suggested that a quarrel and fight took place between them. He might have been the worse for drink and his mind hazy. The Coroner explained the legal aspects of a verdict of manslaughter and a verdict that there was insufficient evidence to show that the injuries were the actual cause of death and the jury then retired.

Transcription by Kate MacDonell for the Friends of Newport and Carisbrooke Cemeteries,
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