

Walter Birch

1891 census – 3 Elm Grove, Carisbrooke

<i>Walter Birch</i>	<i>Head</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>Gas fitter</i>	<i>Whippingham, Isle of Wight</i>
Ellen Birch	Wife	44		Newport, Isle of Wight
Frederick Birch	Son	12	Scholar	Carisbrooke, Isle of Wight
Walter Birch	Son	9	Scholar	Carisbrooke, Isle of Wight
William G Birch	Son	7	Scholar	Carisbrooke, Isle of Wight
Albert Birch	Son	4		Carisbrooke, Isle of Wight

Isle of Wight County Press – 17 June 1893

SHOCKING SUICIDE AT NEWPORT.

Shortly after 1 o'clock on Saturday last considerable sensation was caused by the news that a whitesmith named Walter Birch, aged 52, and living at Elm-grove, Newport, had committed suicide under the most painfully-shocking circumstances. The worry of a three months' illness had apparently unhinged the poor fellow's mind, and shortly before he brought about his self-destruction he was labouring under a delusion that an accusation of stealing tools from the shop of his employers, Messrs. Wood and Horspool, had been made against him, and that he was being watched. On the day before his death he visited his employers' shop and made reference to this delusion, and appeared in a very depressed state of mind. Having partaken of a good dinner with his wife and family he went upstairs, and getting possession of an old white-handled razor which he had in his tool-box he inflicted an awful gash in his throat, almost severing the head from the body. The assistance of Mr. Salter, a next-door neighbour, and P.C. Ryall was quickly summoned by the horrified wife, who found her husband lying in a pool of blood in the bed-room, and Drs. Castle and Barr were immediately sent for, but all to no avail, as death naturally ensued almost instantly. Deceased had shaved twice that morning with the razor that he generally used, and his wife had put that out of his way. He leaves a wife and eight children, four of whom are still at home. Deceased was a good and trusty workman.

The inquest took place at the Trafalgar Inn on Monday morning, before Edward F. Blake, Esq. – Mr. E. J. Airs was chosen as foreman of the jury.

The first witness was Ellen Birch, deceased's wife, whose statements were alternated with heavy sobbing. She said that her husband was 52 years old and was a whitesmith. For the last 12 weeks he had been at home ill. He was got very low and weak. A short time ago the doctor told him he would be able to go to work on the previous Monday, but he found he was too weak and could not go. On the previous Saturday morning he got up at half-past 8, and went into the garden. He seemed about the same as usual and quite nice. He ate a hearty breakfast. He had a good dinner with her and the family at 12 o'clock. Deceased asked her boy, who worked at the shop, if he had been at the shop of Messrs. Wood and Horspool, where her husband had worked, about some tools. He had an idea last Friday and Saturday that Mr. Wood had accused him of taking away some tools, but he had not been so accused. He imagined somebody was watching him. All the tools he had at home belonged to him. On Friday last he went down to Mr. Wood's shop and told them about the tools. She begged of him not to go, as he could hardly walk then, but he would go. After dinner on Saturday he asked her if she would go down to the shop about the tools, and she said "Yes, I will go." He then said "Oh no, I will go," and he said he was going upstairs first to get his other coat and waistcoat and make himself look respectable before going down street. It was about 1 o'clock when he went upstairs. He was very quiet for some time. She went to the foot of the stairs about 10 minutes or quarter of an hour afterwards and heard a gurgling noise just as if some one was choking. She went upstairs directly and saw him lying on the floor. His legs were moving. She thought he was in a fit at first, but then saw the blood gushing from his neck. She told her daughter to run out into the road and call a man to her assistance. She found the piece of paper produced in deceased's pocket after he was dead. He must have written what it contained on Saturday morning. – The Deputy Coroner read the following written in pencil on a torn half-sheet of note paper: "I am almost distracted. I am tempted and failed, and don't want to

give way to-day. Long suffering and hope for mercy, and believe somebody have been false to me. [Witness: That's about the tools] Good-bye all."

Charles Salter, living next door to deceased, said that he had not seen deceased just lately. He had not seen anything peculiar about him and thought he was one of the last who would commit suicide. He was aware that he had been ill for some three months. About 1.15 on Saturday last Mrs. Birch sent for him, and he went at once. He found deceased lying on the floor with his right arm tucked up, and a razor was lying close by on the floor. There was blood all over the place. He could not see deceased's throat at first. He could hear the gurgling noise in his throat. He did not know what to do, so he sent for a doctor at once. He thought that if they moved him they might make matters worse. The doctor arrived quickly, but he was dead.

Dr. Hutton Castle said he had known the deceased for many years. He had been attending him for some months for inflammation of the veins of his left leg. There was nothing to see in the complaint, and it seemed to prey upon his mind to a very extraordinary extent. Owing to the nature of the complaint it was absolutely necessary that deceased should keep perfectly quiet, and they could readily understand that that was very trying to an energetic man. He was always worrying day and night about it because there was nothing to see, and witness called in Dr. Barr in order to satisfy deceased that it was necessary that he should remain quiet. About a fortnight ago he was practically well as regarded the complaint and witness recommended him to go to work – light work – thinking that that would keep his mind occupied, and he seemed delighted at the idea. He noticed that he was very weak. Deceased did not tell him that he was not fit to go to work, and witness was under the impression that he was going, but he had since understood that he did not go. Deceased was in a depressed state – melancholious – but he did not consider he had any suicidal tendency. The illness and continual worry might have overbalanced his reason and led to self-destruction. He was sure he must have been insane at the time.

By the Foreman: He had not seen deceased for about a fortnight. He fully recognised that he would not be able to go straight off to hard work. Witness wanted him to do something to keep him from worrying. He had his club money coming in and was not in difficult circumstances.

By a juror (Mr. E. Cave): He did not leave any instructions as to knives or anything being kept out of deceased's way. He did not think such precaution necessary.

Another juror, Mr. Scott, deceased's fellow workman, said that he saw deceased last Tuesday week, when he said he could not go back to work. He was all of a shake then.

The Coroner briefly summed up, remarking that the fact of his being prevented from going to work on account of illness appeared to have had such an effect on his mind as to lead him to take his life. There could be no doubt that he was insane at the time.

The jury immediately returned a verdict of "Suicide whilst temporarily insane."

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The funeral of deceased took place on Tuesday afternoon at Carisbrooke Cemetery, the Rev. F. Rogers officiating. The firm of Messrs. Wood and Horspool, deceased's employers, were represented by Messrs. W. Beer (manager) and H. J. Sircombe, and four of deceased's fellow workmen – Messrs. G. Scott, G. Woodford, D. Black, and J. Boxall – acted as bearers. The deceased's three sons were amongst the mourners.

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