Sophia Braik

1911 England, Wales & Scotland Census
22 Drill Hall Road, Newport, Isle of Wight, Hampshire, England

Name	Relationship	Status	Age	Occupation	Birthplace
Sophia Braik	Head	***Widow***	76		***Shalfleet, Hampshire***

Isle of Wight County Press
8 January 1921

AGED WIDOW'S LONELY

DEATH AT NEWPORT.

Plenty of Money, But Little Food.

On Saturday, the Deputy-Coroner (Francis A. Joyce, Esq.) held an inquest at the Territorial Recreation Club, Newport, on the body of Sophia Braik, aged 85, who was found dead at her home at 22 Drill-hall-road, Newport, on the previous Thursday.

Mr. Richard Young Morgan, of Rams-down Farm, identified the body of deceased as that of his aunt, who was the widow of James C. Braik, a Scottish evangelist, who died at Wallington, Surrey, nearly 30 years ago. It was a long time since he had seen the deceased, who had resided at Drill-hall-road for more than 20 years, living alone, to the best of his knowledge. She had a sufficient income to keep herself. Her habits were those of a recluse, and it was known to him that she would not admit any one to the house.

Harry Cole King, caretaker of the I.W. Rifles Drill-hall, which is opposite deceased's house, said he had frequently seen deceased. He last saw her at 7.15 on the morning of Christmas-eve, when she was sweeping off her doorstep. She went out shopping pretty regularly, and was often afterwards seen sitting in the front-room near the window. He had never seen any one admitted to the house. The baker and the landlord were about the only people to whom deceased would answer the door. His store-room window was opposite deceased's house, so he could see very well. He thought she had gone away for Christmas, as he did not see her afterwards.

Alice Ann West, wife of James West, living next door to deceased, said she had known the deceased between 14 and 15 years, and saw her most days when she was sweeping her steps or going out. She had had no conversations with deceased, who talked to nobody. She would not even pass the time of day with a neighbour. Deceased did her own shopping, and the baker called. No one saw her at her home except by appointment. She saw deceased during the Christmas week, but not after Christmas. Latterly deceased had got very shaky and tottery. She had no one to stay or sleep in the house with her during the time witness knew her, and she always kept her front door locked.

P.S. Merritt said that at about 1 p.m. on the 30th ult. he went to the deceased's house with Inspector Sibbeck, and, not getting a reply to their knocking, they forced an entrance through the kitchen window. They found deceased on the landing passage upstairs, lying on her back, practically nude, except that she was wearing a pair of stockings and a petticoat. Other portions of her clothing were on the landing where

she was lying, and on the table downstairs. She appeared to have been dead some time. The body was very emaciated, and there was superficial bruising on both knees and on the side of the head.. She was not near the stairs where she could have fallen, but between the top of the stairs and her bed-room, which was in the front. The bed had been slept in. The only food he could find was half a loaf and four small buns, very mouldy, and a quantity of sugar. There was no meat, butter, or tea, and no evidence of any meal having been partaken of recently. There was no milk in the house.

Mr. Morgan said that he happened to know that many years ago deceased did not take milk in her tea.

Witness added that 16s. 6d. in cash was found in the house. He was told that no one was admitted by the deceased, and that the landlord, when calling for the rent, wrote a post-card to say he was calling at a certain time, and he was not admitted but was paid at the door.

The Coroner said that was the second case in which an elderly person lived and died alone in a house which he had dealt with within three weeks.

Dr. Underhill, police surgeon, said that at about 1.30 p.m. on the 30th ult. he was called to the house and found deceased as described. He had made a post mortem examination. Externally and internally there were marks of senile decay. The stomach was practically empty, except for fluid, as were the intestines. There were superficial bruises on the temple and legs. Deceased had been dead for possibly three or four days.—Q. Did you find anything to account for death other than senile decay?—Only the fact that the stomach and intestines were practically empty.—Q. Was the body much emaciated?—Yes, beyond the natural thinness of old age.—Q. Do you think death might have been accelerated by exposure and insufficient food?—Yes.

The Coroner: I do not want to say that she died from privation, but I cannot dismiss from my mind the strong possibility that privation formed an important part of the accelerating cause. In other words it is a case in which, had there been proper care and attention available, she might be alive now.

Dr. Underhill: She was very senile. There is no doubt that death was accelerated by the want of food and exposure. There was very little disease except the ordinary senile change.

The Coroner said that he must return a verdict in accordance with the medical evidence, that deceased died on or about December 28th from senile decay accelerated by exposure and insufficient food. He was not disposed to blame any relative, as the evidence clearly justified the conclusion that deceased was a woman of marked eccentricity of character, who very unwisely refused to allow the intervention of any one to assist her in time of need, and that quite exonerated any relative from liability. Whether the local authority should be armed with more power to intervene in such cases was a question for consideration. One very often came across cases in which persons were living alone from their own choice,, without any one to care for or help them in times of emergency, and the consequence was that they died a lonely death. In those days, when one heard of schemes for building houses to meet the shortage, it was a matter which the local authority should look into. He asked Mr. Morgan if he happened to know whether deceased had money at her bank.

Mr. Morgan: Yes, she had plenty of money on current account.

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