

Ellen Dove

Isle of Wight County Press - 8 January 1921

DROWNING TRAGEDY AT ALUM BAY

NEWPORT WOMAN'S SAD SUICIDE

Early on Saturday morning the police in the West Wight were notified that Miss Ellen Dove, a middle-aged domestic servant, employed by Mrs. Patterson, of the Seven Gables, Totland Bay, was missing from the house, and later in the day her body was recovered from the sea at Alum Bay. Deceased was a member of a well-known Newport family, and was held in much esteem by many friends in the town, and the news of her sad end occasioned much regret. She was for many years housekeeper to the late Mr. Wilson Clark, and was understood to have benefitted by his will.

The Deputy-Coroner (Francis A. Joyce, Esq.) held an inquest on the body at the Alum Bay Hotel Tap on Monday.

Harry Margham, Hearn-street, Newport, carriage builder, identified the deceased as his wife's sister. He last saw her alive on the Saturday before Christmas at his home. She then seemed quite rational, and made no complaint. She was out of service, but, until just previously, had been with the late Mr. Wilson Clark, of Newport. He had since heard that she had accepted a position as cook at The Seven Gables, Totland Bay. She was 51 years of age. She spent some six or eight months at the County Asylum, Whitecroft, some 10 years ago, but had never shown any suicidal tendency. – By P.S. Sibbick: Deceased was quite bright and in her usual spirits when staying with her sister at Northwood immediately before coming to Totland.

Jacob Cotton, residing at the old Coastguard-station, Alum Bay, fisherman, said that on Saturday he was looking over the cliffs at Alum Bay at about 1.30 p.m., when he saw a body floating in the water east of the pier, close to the shore. He secured help and recovered it, and reported the matter to the police. The body was fully clothed, except for a hat. It was quite possible for anyone to go on the Pier, as the gates were kept unlocked.

Julia Emily Downer, lady's maid to Mrs. Patterson, at the Seven Gables, Totland, said Mrs. Patterson came to reside at the Gables on December 28th, and witness arrived with her. The deceased came as a cook on the afternoon of the next day. She seemed quite cheerful when she arrived, and fairly bright on the Thursday, but on Friday she seemed to get very worried about the cooking. She had very little to do, and everyone was kind to her, but she seemed to have lost confidence in herself. She remarked to witness during the day that no one knew how much she missed her home and the old gentleman (meaning the late Mr. Clark). At about bed-time witness noticed that she looked depressed, and asked if she had a bad head. She replied that she felt very depressed, and later in the evening she complained of her head, and said everything seemed a blank to her. She said "I feel as if I am going out of my mind," and also passed some remark about doing something to herself.

Witness was worried about her, and told her mistress of her condition. Mrs. Patterson asked witness to tell her to go to bed. Deceased said she did not want to go, as on the previous night she could not sleep. She told witness that she had been "like this before," and added "it was through religion." She seemed worried with the thought that she was going to be ill, and become a burden and a nuisance to her friends, she said that she had been praying to God to take a great burden from her mind, but what the burden was she did not explain. Witness and deceased went to bed about 9.30, witness going with her to her room, and advising her to go to bed at once. She noticed that deceased looked very strange as she said "good night," and told her that if she felt unwell during the night, or wanted anything, to knock at her door. She heard no more of her until about 4 a.m. on the Saturday morning, when she heard a bang as of a door, but thought that deceased had had a sleep and was going to the kitchen to see the time. Witness got up at about 7 o'clock and called to the deceased. She noticed that the deceased's bed-room door was wide open, and after looking for her downstairs without finding her saw that the back door was open, and also the door leading to the roadway. Mrs. Patterson then communicated with the police.

P.C. Rogers said that on hearing of deceased's disappearance he searched the cliffs and shore at Totland without result. Later he heard that a body had been found at Alum Bay, and went and saw it. It was very scantily dressed, and there was no hat and coat on the body, although it was believed that deceased wore those articles when she left the house. He had made an extensive search for the missing clothing, but had not found it. A purse on the body contained two £1 Treasury notes and 6¾d. in coppers. Deceased left no message at her mistress's house.

Dr. Hands said the appearance of the body was consistent with death from drowning at about the time when it was believed the deceased left the house.

The Deputy Coroner said the facts were extremely clear. He did not attach the slightest blame to the ladies in the household, as the deceased was a stranger to them, and they very naturally assumed that she might improve after a night's rest. He was afraid he must exclude any possibility of accident, having regard to the evidence, and his verdict would be that the deceased committed suicide by drowning, and that she was of unsound mind at the time.

Transcription by Shani Watts for the Friends of Newport and Carisbrooke Cemeteries.

©2020

<https://www.foncc.org.uk>