

Frederick James Drudge

Isle of Wight County Press 20th October 1928

GUNVILLE LABOURERS DEATH

KNOCKED DOWN BY MOTOR CAR ON PATHLESS ROAD

POLICE VIEW OF DIMMING HEADLIGHTS

A strong plea to motorists to refrain from dimming their headlights was made by the Deputy Chief Constable (Supt. Salter) at an inquest on the body of Frederick James Drudge, aged 69, a labourer, of Primrose Cottage, Gunville West, who died at the County Hospital on Monday from injuries received through being knocked down by a motor-car on the main road near his home on the previous Saturday evening. The inquiry was held at the London Hotel, Ryde, on Wednesday, and the acting deputy coroner (W. H. P. F. Thirkell, Esq.) had the assistance of a jury, of whom Mr F. C. Watts was the foreman.

William Henry Drudge, of 1, Eva-terrace Shide, a brick moulder, son of the deceased, said he last saw his father about a fortnight before the accident.—In answer to Supt, Salter, witness said his father was not deaf and his eyesight was good. He walked in a badly bent position, owing to an accident which he met with in a sand pit about 30 years ago.

Percy George William Oxley, a lorry driver, employed by the B.P. Petrol Company, of Newport, living at 5 Mildred-terrace, Alvington-road, Carisbrooke, said that about 6.45 p.m. on October 13th he was driving one of Colson's motor-buses along Gunville-road, Carisbrooke. He was going towards the Forest, and was well on his near side. The night was very dark, and he had both his electric sidelights and headlights on. He stopped just a little below Gunville Chapel to put down passengers. While stationary he noticed a motor-car in front coming towards him. He then dimmed his headlights, and the driver of the motor-car did the same. After restarting he passed the motor-car about 10 yards further on. He saw no foot passengers on the road, which was about 21 feet wide and had no footpath on either side. After going to Ash-lane and turning round he returned to near the spot where he had put down passengers, and found that there had been an accident. From the position in which the other car was witness formed the opinion that it must have stopped immediately after it passed him. He could give no estimate of the speed of the other, but it could not have been going very fast. He saw a man under the car, and helped push the vehicle back to get him out.

Deceased's legs were pointing in the same direction as that in which the car was going.—By Supt, Salter: His headlights were not very brilliant, neither were those of the motor-car.

The Coroner said that it was a debatable point among motorists as to whether it was best to dim their headlights. Some thought it a matter of courtesy, but it was a good plan when they met a vehicle with brilliant headlights to keep an eye on the left side of the road and be guided by their own light on the hedge.

Emily Holbrook, of 2 Brooklyn-cottages, Gunville, wife of Fredrick Holbrook, a maltster, said she alighted from Colston's bus at The Willows. As she crossed the road to her house on the opposite side she noticed deceased walking down on the right hand side of the road in the direction of the Forest. He was walking with a stick and carrying a bag on his back. After entering her gate she heard a very loud grating noise, but did not see what happened.

Albert Edward Summers, bus-driver employed by Mr A. E. King, of Carisbrooke, residing at 16 Clarendon-street, Newport, said that on the evening in question he was driving a Ford sedan from the direction of the Forest along Gunville-road to Carisbrooke. He was on left centre of the road, a practice of his where possible on that road, so as to leave room for foot passengers. He had two sidelights and one headlight on the off side. He saw Colson's motor-bus at a standstill near The Willows with both sidelights and headlights on. They were bright but not brilliant. When he first saw the bus his speed would be about 15 miles an hour, but on seeing it he slackened his pace to about 10 miles an hour. When witness got within a few yards of the bus the driver, who had dimmed his headlights, started again, and witness switched off his lights. Immediately after passing the bus he switched them on again. He saw no one in the road, and only had his near sidelight shining on the hedge to guide him. Immediately after he switch on his lights he saw deceased, who was about five or six feet away from the near side of his radiator. His speed at that moment would be about eight miles an hour, but, though he put on his brakes, deceased was too close to him for witness to avoid knocking him down. Witness jumped out of his car and found deceased in a doubled-up position under the front of the car, his head pointing in the direction in which witness was travelling. He released the brake and pulled the car back two or three feet, sufficient to get hold of deceased's head and shoulders. The other witness then arrived and helped get deceased out from under the car. He was unconscious, and they carried him into a house nearby. Afterwards witness saw some blood on the road about 8ft. 6in. from the hedge. It was at the spot where deceased was found under the car.—Supt. Salter: Why did you dip your lights?—Because the other bus driver dimmed his.—Q. But he was stationary and you were moving?—I imagined he would move before I got to him.—Q. But when you switched off your lights you could hardly see anything?—I could see my near side hedge and I reduced my speed accordingly.—Q. But wouldn't it have been better for you to have stopped and let him go on.—I could see far enough for the speed I was going.—In reply to the Coroner, witness said it was a practise for one driver to dim his lights when he saw another had done so.

Supt. Salter said they had had three accidents in the Island through the dimming of lights on the road, and two of them had proved fatal.

The Coroner said that seemed to prove that dimming of lights was a bad thing.

Supt. Salter said he knew Summers to be a very careful driver.

Isabella Forshall, house surgeon at the County Hospital, said deceased was admitted to the hospital at 8 p.m. on October 13th in an unconscious condition. His injuries comprised fractures of the lower jaws, fracture of the bridge of the nose, and a suspected fracture of the

skull. He did not recover consciousness, and died on Monday morning. The case was hopeless from the beginning, and death resulted from cerebral haemorrhage.

The coroner said it would appear the deceased was walking in the path of the oncoming motor-car. The question of dimming headlights had been discussed in all the technical papers. From his personal experience he found that sitting in the front of their car when he met those powerful headlights he could not see for a minute if they were not dimmed.

The jury, without hesitation, returned a verdict of accidental death, and attached no blame to the driver.

The Coroner said he certainly agreed with them.

Supt. Salter said, the verdict having been given, he wanted to say that he hoped motorist would not dim their lights. If they could not see he suggested that they should stop until the other car had passed. Where they had narrow and winding roads it would be much better to keep the lights on. It was better to stop than to kill people.

Mr. A. E. King, owner of the motor-car, expressed deep regret at the occurrence and his sympathy with the family. He felt it very deeply himself, for deceased was thought most highly of at Gunville.

The Coroner, jury, and Summers, the driver of the car, also associated themselves with the expression of sympathy. The Coroner said he hoped that Supt. Salter's suggestions would go forth and be acted upon.

Deceased's son, Mr. W. H. Drudge. In acknowledging the expressions of sympathy, also thanked the nurses and doctors at the hospital and any one else who had rendered assistance to his late father.

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