

Albert George Grimes

Isle of Wight County Press – 26 May 1917

STEAM PLOUGH DRIVER KILLED.

SHOCKING ACCIDENT AT WELLOW FARM

A distressing fatality occurred at Wellow Farm on Monday evening, the victim being Mr. Albert George Grimes, aged 32, of 3 Clarice-terrace, Alvington-road, Carisbrooke, the well-known driver of one of the heavy tractor engines belonging to the I.W. Farmers' Agricultural Outfit Company. Deceased was employed on the engine working the Company's steam ploughing tackle, when he had occasion to dismount to attend to the wire hawser used in drawing the plough. Whilst he was on the ground, the engine began to move, partly, it was stated, through the starting lever not being properly closed, and partly through the engine – a 16-ton machine – being on a slight incline. Deceased at once attempted to regain his position on the machine in order to stop it, but he either fell or was swept off by the bushes as the engine forced its way through a thorn hedge, and the wheels went over his shoulder and head, killing him instantly. Deceased had been in charge of the engine ever since its arrival in the Island over two years ago, and was known as a most careful driver. The greatest sympathy is felt for the widow in her heavy loss.

An inquest was held on Tuesday evening at the Willow Institute by the Deputy Coroner (F. A. Joyce, Esq.), those present included Mr. R. P. Mew, C.C., representing the Farmers' Agricultural Outfit Company, Mr. J. A. Kingswell, of Wellow Farm, and P.S. Oliver Sibbick, representing the police.

Mr. Maurice Drake was foreman of the jury.

Frank Chiverton, of Carisbrooke, foreman in the employ of the I.W. Steam Plough Company, gave evidence of identification, and said deceased had been in the employ of the Company for just over 2 ½ years in the same capacity, and had had the same machine and the same job. He had never had an accident before. At about 5 o'clock on the previous evening they had just started work in one of Mr. Kingswell's fields at Wellow Farm, deceased being in charge of the engine at one end of the field, whilst witness at the other end where another engine was working. It was not the rule for the driver to have another man with him at the engine when at work, except on the road, but on that occasion another man named Whitewood, was with deceased. He was only there in case deceased wanted help in shifting the wire when moving the engine; he was not responsible for starting or stopping the engine; that responsibility rested with the driver alone. Whitewood would be under no obligation to touch the engine except under the orders of the driver. Deceased had occasion to get off the engine to see whether there was sufficient length of wire for the work, and, as far as witness knew, he stopped the engine before getting off. The first he knew of anything being wrong was when he heard Whitewood shouting for help and the engine grinding through the hedge into the next field, across which it went before witness reached and could stop it. It was about a quarter of a mile away from where he was. He ran across and saw deceased crushed on the ground. He should say that deceased was caught in the hedge and pulled off the engine, which was standing about two yards from the hedge at work before the accident. Whitewood was the only person near deceased when the accident happened. When he got up to stop the engine he found the starting lever slightly open, showing that it could not have been completely shut off before the deceased got down. That, no doubt, was the cause of the engine restarting whilst deceased was on the ground. – Q. If he got off the engine, his duty would be to be most careful to close the starting lever entirely? – Yes, certainly. – Q. You think that had not been done? – No, he could not have done it properly, as it could not have got open again of its own accord. – Q. Was it in working order? – Yes, in perfect working order. – Q. Had it ever gone wrong before? – No. – Q. Did you form any opinion as to the cause of the accident? – I don't see anything else. – Q. You mean that he got down for the purpose which Whitewood explained to you and failed to shut the lever properly? – Yes. – Q. And that it was not due to any defect of the lever? – No.

By Mr. Mew: The engine was pointing slightly downhill when it restarted.

Mr. Mew said that, in his opinion, the engine could not have started unless it was going slightly downhill.

The Coroner: You don't think the lever was enough to have started it if it had not been pointing downhill?

Witness: No. It would not have moved had not the engine been pointing down a slight slope.

The Foreman asked if the engine was left out of gear, how it got in gear again to go as it did.

Witness said it was already in gear. He had just moved his engine down, and had got off to see whether his rope would reach to the end of the field. He stopped his engine and got down to see how much rope he had, and as he was down, according to what Whitewood told him, the engine started. Deceased went to get up into the engine to stop it, as it was grinding into the hedge. That was all he knew.

Mr. C. W. Cooke (juror): I suppose it was not customary for the driver to get off the engine whilst it is in motion? – No.

Mr. R. M. Sanders (a juror): How far did it go after the accident? – About 130 yards. – Q. With the valve only slightly open? – Yes, because it was going downhill.

The Foreman: After the engine started, was it all downhill afterwards? – Yes, it drew itself round downhill.

Harry Whitewood, 2 Eastern-villas, Alvington-road, Carisbrooke, steersman, in the employ of the I.W. Steam Plough Company, said he had been so employed for five weeks. On the previous evening he was helping to move the wire coil, when deceased moved the engine. He (witness) rode either the plough or the cultivator when they were at work. At about 5 p.m. they had just started work in the field in question, and deceased stopped the engine and got down to see whether the wire, which was from the coil on the drum of the engine, would reach the end of the field, when the engine started moving. – Q. How long after he got down was it before it started? – I should say it was two or three minutes after he got off. – Q. What did he do? – He went to jump up to stop it from moving, and he must have slipped, or something. All I know is he slipped off; but how it happened I cannot say, unless the hedge pulled him off. He got on the engine, but could not get right over before he was pulled off, as the engine went right through the hedge. I could not say whether the bushes pulled him off or whether he slipped. He was standing at the end of the engine when the accident happened. – Q. How far was the engine from the hedge when it was first stopped? – About two paces. – Q. It was not part of your work to have anything to do with the engine? – No. – Q. Do you ever have anything to do with the engine except under orders? – No, I don't understand it. – Q. Did you see the engine pass over him? – No; I could not see that because of the hedge, but I saw him after it had gone over him. – Q. Had you been working with him for five weeks? – Yes. – Q. Did you ever know of an accident happening before? – No; he had been most careful. I don't understand sufficient about the engine to say what made it go on.

The first witness, Chiverton, in reply to the Coroner, said the engine lever worked easily. He had been working the engine that day, and it worked splendidly.

Replying to Mr. Mew, Chiverton said the gradient was not sufficient for the engine to have started by its own impetus.

Whitewood said that when the accident happened he called for help. Deceased was killed instantly.

Mr. A. Grimes (deceased's brother): Why should the engine have started as it did?

The Coroner said the evidence was that the starting lever had not been shut off sufficiently.

Chiverton said as it was not properly shut off, although the engine stopped for a bit, the rise of steam would be sufficient to start it off. As the steam was rising there was more power.

The Foreman asked Chiverton if he had ever known an engine, which had been stopped, start three minutes afterwards of its own accord?

Witness: No, not properly on its own, unless there was steam in it.

Q. You don't think that the steam was entirely shut off? – I know it was not, because I went and turned it off.

Mr. Sanders: What took it through the hedge? – The weight of the machine – the little steam and the weight. When it went through the hedge there was about an 18-inch slope down the bank. Of course that gave it a start to go on.

Dr. S. L. G. Young, practising at Freshwater, said that on being sent for, he went to the field and found deceased lying on his back. There was the track of the engine wheel showing where it had passed over his head, which was, of course, fatally crushed.

The Coroner said they had ample evidence to show that deceased's death resulted from an accident due to the fact that deceased failed completely to shut the valve off before dismounting from the engine, and they would doubtless return a verdict to that effect.

The Foreman, after conferring with his fellow jurors, said one of the jury did not agree that such a verdict should be returned.

The Coroner said he did not know what blame could be attached to any one, as no-one but deceased was responsible for the engine, and it was very clear from the evidence what happened. Perhaps the jury would like to confer in private.

The Court was then cleared, and after Mr. Mew had been called in by the jury it was reopened, and it was announced that the jury had returned a verdict that the deceased "was accidentally killed by a steam-engine passing over him."

Mr. Mew, on behalf of deceased's employers as well as of his fellow employees, said he should like to express the deepest and profoundest regret at that deplorable accident. Deceased was held in very high esteem by all with whom he had come into contact; he was the most careful of drivers, and he did not think that there had ever been a word out of square between him and his employers and fellow workmen, who worked on forms of family affection. He should like to express his deepest sympathy with the widow and other relations for their sorrow.

The Coroner said he was sure the relatives would very much appreciate that king expression of sympathy, and on their behalf he thanked Mr. Mew.

The Foreman also added an expression of the jury's sincere sympathy with the widow and other relatives, and said they wished to hand their fees to the widow.

The Coroner: I thank you, gentleman, for your generosity.