

Thomas Millbrook Harris

ISLE OF WIGHT COUNTY PRESS

27 October 1951

FATAL ACCIDENT ON POLLING DAY

WOOTTON RESIDENT KILLED

Polling day was marred by an accident at Wootton, resulting in the death of a well-known resident, and serious injuries to an East Cowes man. Mr. Thomas Millbrook Harris, aged 59, was returning from voting, when he and a pedal cyclist, Mr. Paul Pleiffer, of 2 St. David's Road, East Cowes, were in collision opposite Mr. Harris's home Just Fancy, Lushington Hill. Both fell heavily, and Mr. Harris received a fractured skull, and died almost immediately. The cyclist received head and other injuries, and after attention by Dr. F. R. B. H. Kennedy and Dr. A. C. Porteous was taken to the Royal I.W. County Hospital, in the Newport ambulance. Yesterday he was still unconscious.

The Coroner (Mr. R.E.A. Webster) will open an inquest at Ryde Town Hall to-day, at 12.15 p.m.

The death of Mr. Harris will be keenly regretted, particularly in Newport, where he had many friends. He served in the I.W. Rifles in the 1914-18 war, and lost his left arm at Gallipoli. He had for many years been employed by Messrs. Frank Cheverton, Ltd., as a Storeman, and only last winter he fell heavily on a patch of ice in the yard while at work and received a fractured skull. A well-known member of the Newport Conservative Club he played a good game of billiards in spite of his handicap, using the table brush as a rest.

ISLE OF WIGHT COUNTY PRESS

3 November 1951

POLLING DAY FATALITY AT WOOTTON

INQUEST ADJOURNED SINE DIE

AMBULANCE SERVICE CRITICISED

After hearing medical evidence, the Coroner (Mr. R. E. A. Webster) adjourned sine die the inquest opened at the Town Hall, Ryde, on Saturday, on Thomas Millbrook Harris, aged 59, of Just Fancy, Lushington Hill, Wootton. Mr. Harris was returning from voting in the General Election, and, when opposite his home, was involved in a collision with a pedal cyclist, Mr. Paul Pleiffer, of 2 St. David's Road, East Cowes. Mr. Harris died almost immediately and Mr. Pleiffer was gravely injured.

Dr. A.C. Porteous said that at about 8 p.m. on Thursday week he was called to the scene of the accident, and found Mr. Harris lying in the road. He had been bleeding from both ears and nose, a sign of a fractured skull. Witness was of the opinion that he had died within the preceding 10 minutes. He ordered his removal to the ambulance, and there made a more

detailed examination. There was no sign of injury apart from that to the head. There was very little laceration of the skull, most of the haemorrhage coming from the left ear and nose. Death was due to coma and intra-cranial haemorrhage, arising from a fractured skull. Dr. F. R. B. H. Kennedy, J.P., arrived shortly after witness and attended to the cyclist, who was already in the ambulance.

Chief Police Inspector A. R. Bird said the cyclist was still gravely ill and was suffering from a fractured skull.

A Relative's Protest

Oscar Edwin Day White, of 101 Trafalgar Road, Newport, a foreman motor engineer, said Mr. Harris, his brother-in-law, was a Ford Service Storeman employed by Messrs. Frank Cheverton, Ltd., Newport. He had seen the body at Ryde mortuary and would like to know why his brother-in-law was left in such a disgraceful condition.

The Coroner: I have no knowledge of that. I will write to the ambulance people and call their attention to what you have told me.

Mr. White said he used to drive in the ambulance service and had taken a good many cases in and had always undressed the dead persons and put them in a proper condition. His brother-in-law was left in a filthy condition. His legs were crooked and his clothes covered in blood. Why was he taken in the ambulance, as the doctor said he was dead? Why was he not taken home, where witness would have helped to take care of him?

The Coroner said he did not hear about the accident until the next morning.

Mr. White: I would like to know who is responsible.

The Coroner: All I can do is to write to the ambulance service and find out all about it.

Mr. White: I think it was disgraceful; I was disgusted. We did not leave people like that during the war.

The Coroner: I am very sorry this has happened. There has definitely been a break-down in the service in some way, and I shall find out how it happened.

The Funeral

There was a large congregation at the funeral service in St. Edmund's Church, Wootton, on Tuesday. The Rector (the Rev. A.H. Gender) officiated. The hymns "Eternal Father, strong to save" and "Abide with me" were sung.

The mourners were Mrs. Harris (widow), Mr. H. Railey (step-father), Mr. and Mrs. O. E. White (brother-in-law and sister), Mrs. P. Painter (sister), Mr. and Mrs. A. Matthews (brother-in-law and sister-in-law), Messrs. C. Reid and C. Harris (brothers-in-law), Mesdames E. Tulk, E. Dove, and M. Harris (sisters-in-law), and Mr. and Mrs. B. Peddar and Miss S. Reid (nephews and nieces). Messrs. F. Cheverton, Ltd., were represented by Messrs. F. A. and R. B. Cheverton (directors), L. G. Pearson, S. A. Barlow, C. Jolliffe, A. W. Lockhart, C. G. Carson, W. G. Batchelor, G. Bishop, J. Holden, J. Carter, R. Cousins,

J. Dyer, A. T. Gunning, S. H. Orchard, R. Kemp, S. Sage, A. Attrill, D. Simmonds, H. B. Minns, B. Stuart, W. Perry, and T. Thomas. Mrs. Pitman and the Misses C. M. Smith, M. B. Cheverton, and J. Downer (staff); the I.W. Rifles by Messrs. H. G. Peachey, H. Green, W. Buckett, and J. Clarke; Newport branch of the British Legion by Messrs. A. T. Smith (president) and G. W. Blee; Wootton Conservative Association by Lt.-Col. D. G. Brodie; St. Edmund's Parochial Church Council by Mesdames E. and E. C. Hendy and Glassey; Fowler's Garage, Newport, by Mr. J. Moorman; the Orchard Engineering Co. by Mr. G. H. Morrall; Lushington Garage by Mr. P. S. Harwood; and Ryde Anglesea Hall whist drives by Mr. C. G. Newman. The wreaths included those from the directors and staff of Messrs. Frank Cheverton; Newport branch of the British Legion; Newport Conservative Club; Wootton Conservative Association; and Wootton Church Council.

The Union Jack was flying at half-mast outside the Newport Conservative Club.

Mrs. Harris expresses her gratitude to all those who assisted at the time of the accident, and for many expressions of sympathy and beautiful floral tributes.

ISLE OF WIGHT COUNTY PRESS
22 December 1951

LUSHINGTON HILL FATALITY

THE ADJOURNED INQUEST
"ACCIDENTAL DEATH" VERDICT

At an inquest at the County Hall, Newport, on Wednesday, when the Coroner (Mr. R. E. A. Webster) sat with a jury, a verdict of accidental death was returned on Thomas Millbrook Harris, 59, of Just Fancy, Lushington Hill, Wootton, who died almost instantly after a collision with a cyclist near his home on October 25th. The inquiry was opened at the Royal I.W. County Hospital on October 27th, and adjourned for the attendance of the cyclist, Paul Pfeiffer, of 2 St David's Road, East Cowes, who was also seriously injured.

Mr. A. H. Dallimore was elected foreman, Chief Inspector A. R. Bird represented the police, and the town clerk of Newport (Mr. F. H. W. Buxton) and the borough engineer (Mr. F. Rath) were present. Pfeiffer gave his evidence in German through an interpreter, Mr. A. Pemberton.

The Coroner recapitulated medical evidence given when the inquest was opened, and said he had not thought it necessary to recall Dr. A. C. Porteous, who had stated that death was due to a fracture of the skull, and that Mr. Harris was dead on his arrival a few minutes after the accident.

CYCLIST'S EVIDENCE

Pfeiffer said he was a farm worker at Brading, and on October 25th was riding his bicycle down Lushington Shute at about 7.30 p.m. There were two or three fowls in a box on the back of the bicycle, but this did not interfere with his handling of the machine. He was on the

left-hand side of the road, but was not travelling very fast. As he descended the hill he heard a car coming from behind. The driver hooted about three times and witness wondered what was the matter. He was knocked off his bicycle and he remembered no more until he woke up in hospital. He saw no one crossing the road. His machine was carrying ordinary battery lights. He had nothing on the handlebars. - The Coroner: The policeman who saw the bicycle afterwards states that a satchel of pears was fastened to the crossbar? - Witness agreed that he had a despatch case fastened to the crossbar, but said it did not get in his way; he had cycled like that for two years. He had a rear light.

Clement Ashton, gardener, of Hambledon Cottage, Lushington Hill, said that he and his wife met Harris at the polling station at Wootton Bridge, and after recording their votes they walked back together. Mr. Harris appeared to be in his normal health and was quite talkative. He left them for a few minutes to go into Harwood's garage, but caught them up again a few hundred yards down the hill. There was no pavement and they were walking on the right-hand side of the road facing the oncoming traffic. Witness and his wife crossed the road to their house, which was about two-thirds of the way down the hill, leaving Mr. Harris to go to his home, which was about 90ft. below on the same side as that of witness. As witness crossed the road he saw a light coming down the hill, and as he shut the gate with his back to the road he heard a cyclist go by, but did not look round. He formed no estimate of the speed of the cyclist.

BADLY LIGHTED ROAD

In reply to the Coroner witness said the road was very badly lighted. Harris intended to come back to see him about five minutes later. He heard a crash and found the cyclist was lying across his machine in the middle of the road, and Harris was 8ft. or 9ft. in front of him, more to the left-hand side. It appeared that he had been crossing the road when the impact happened. Witness did what he could and the motorist called the police and ambulance. - The Coroner: Was it a bright light that you saw? - Just an ordinary cycle light. - In reply to a juryman, witness said that he saw no car at the time, otherwise he and his wife would not have been crossing the road.

P.C. Fisher said the accident happened outside Sherwood, Lushington Hill, midway between two gas lamps. The road was 21½ft. wide at the spot. The front wheel and handlebars of the bicycle were badly damaged. The lamps were in working order, the rear brake had been repaired with strongwire but was in order, and the front brake had been broken, apparently by the accident. A box measuring about 12in. by 19in., which had been firmly fixed to the rear carrier of the bicycle was shown to him. It was of very light construction, but there was no damage to it, or to the rear of the bicycle to indicate that it might have been run into from behind. The road was very dark at the point.

In reply to the Coroner the Borough Engineer said there were six lamps on the hill. - The Town Clerk said that the Newport Corporation would be affecting an improvement to the lighting in that area.

The Coroner said there could be no doubt as to the cause of death. The fractured skull suffered by Harris was due to being run into by the bicycle ridden by the first witness, who had suffered severe concussion and had been in hospital until recently. He could not remember what had happened, and as he was not English he might not quite understand the way in which English courts were run and he might be nervous and apprehensive. Perhaps

Pfeiffer had rather over-stressed things in his reference to the motor car, of which he (the Coroner) thought the jury ought not to take very much notice. The witness had taken a terrific toss and there could be little question of negligence. It was a dark night and not a well lighted road. It would appear that the cyclist had descended on the left-hand side and from the positions after the accident it seemed that he might have seen Harris and swerved at the last moment to avoid him. He thought they would have to come to the conclusion that it was an accident. Without retiring the jury returned a verdict of accidental death.

Transcription by Rosemary Stewart for the Friends of Newport & Carisbrooke Cemeteries

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