

Richard Livingstone

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MAN'S TRAGIC END AT THE POOR LAW INSTITUTION.

The death took place under tragic conditions at the Poor Law Institution, Parkhurst, on Sunday, of Richard Livingstone, 66, who had been an inmate since March, 1928, and formerly belonged to Cowes. Deceased apparently left his bed-room early on that morning clad only in his underclothing, made his way out of the building, walked some distance along the garden path skirting the wall of the imbeciles' yard, entered the yard by its one door, and went back in the direction in which he had come on the other side of the wall. He had apparently stopped in the angle of the wall over which he could see the door of the building he had left close at hand, and made ineffectual attempts to climb the wall, and it was here that his nude body was found later.

An investigation into the circumstances surrounding his death was held at the Institution on Tuesday by the Deputy Coroner (F. A. Joyce, Esq.). Inspector Sibbick and P. C. Batley represented the police and Mr. H. Walker (assistant county clerk) was also present.

John McKeown, master of the Institution, deposed that he was informed on Sunday morning at 8 o'clock that a body of a man had been found in the imbeciles' yard. He sent for Miss Bryce (superintendent nurse), the doctor, and the police, and went to see the body, which he found lying in a corner of the yard. It was quite nude, and underneath it were the man's shirt, vest, pants, and socks, a pair of mittens, and two bandages. There were marks as though the deceased had tried to scale the wall. He had been out all the previous day (Saturday) and returned at 7.15 p.m. He was sleeping in an upstairs room in the main building containing nine men in all, and would have to pass through another room containing 18 men before making his way downstairs. Apparently no one had heard him go out. It was not an unusual thing for a man to go down in the night, and the outside door downstairs leading into the garden was never locked, though all the doors leading out of the garden were locked at night. There would be no one in charge of the ward at night as the men were ordinary inmates who would not require such attention. Deceased was a very quiet and reserved man, and had given no indications of being mentally unsound. - replying to Inspector Sibbick the Master said that there was no necessity for the men to go downstairs for a lavatory.- Mr. McKeown's evidence as to the position of the body and the clothing found near it was corroborated by Miss Bryce.

Evidence was given by Alfred Boxall, the gatekeeper, that Livingstone appeared to be normal when he returned from his outing at 7.20 p.m. on Saturday.

Charles Excell Butcher, an inmate occupying a ward next to deceased's, said that Livingstone appeared tired and worn out when he returned to his room at 7.40 on Saturday. At 11 o'clock that same night he opened the door, looked at witness twice, and then shut the door again. Witness was a light sleeper and rarely went to sleep until three or four in the morning on account of suffering from asthma, but he heard nothing further during the night and on inquiry found that no one else in his ward had heard anything.

William George Kimber, who occupied the bed next to deceased, said Livingstone combed his hair for about a quarter of an hour at about 9 o'clock, then got into bed with his jersey and trousers on. Later as witness was dropping off to sleep he heard the handle of the door squeak, but could not say at what time it was.- In reply to Inspector Sibbick witness said it was unusual for deceased to comb his hair as he did that night. He had noticed that he looked queer a few days previously.

Dr. George Raymond, medical officer of the Institution, said he knew deceased to have been in frail health. When he examined the body on Sunday morning the deceased had apparently been dead for some time. There were bruises on the shoulders, shoulder-blades, and forehead, and from various indications witness came to the conclusion that he had been trying to climb the wall. Possibly he had taken off his clothes with the idea that they encumbered him. Death was due to exposure and cold.- Asked by Inspector Sibbick if he thought the cold caused the deceased to lose his reason, Dr. Raymond replied that he thought the man had lost his reason before he started.- Miss Bryce stated that deceased could not have been out very long as when she was called both the body and the clothing were dry, and she had ascertained from the night nurse that on Sunday morning it rained heavily between 5 and 6 o'clock.- the witness Boxall, recalled, said that although very reserved the deceased was on good terms with everybody.

The Coroner said he had come to the conclusion that the man died from exposure and cold. With regard to his mental attitude at the time he must conclude that he was of unsound mind because he went out so scantily clothed on such a cold night. The verdict would be that he died from exposure while wandering out from the Institution at night, that he sustained minor injuries while attempting to scale a wall, and that he was of unsound mind at the time.

Transcription by Kate MacDonell for the Friends of Newport and Carisbrooke Cemeteries,
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