

Harry Miller

1911 census – 2 Albany Terrace, Hunny Hill, Newport, I of W

Harry Miller	Head	48	Convict Prison Warder	Coventry
Esther Kezia Miller	Wife	48		South Hayling, Hamp
Frederick Edwin Miller	Son	15	Warehouse Porter	Parkhurst, IW
Esther Elizabeth Miller	Daughter	13	Apprentice Dressmaker	Portland, Dorset
Robert Baden Powell Miller	Son	11		Carisbrooke, IW
Beatrice Margaret Miller	Daughter	8		Carisbrooke, IW
Adelaide Louisa Miller	Daughter	3		Carisbrooke, IW

Isle of Wight County Press – 31 January 1914

PRISON WARDER'S SENSATIONAL DEATH.

DISTRESSING ACCIDENT AT NEWPORT.

The distressing death of a Parkhurst Prison warder, Mr. Harry Miller, aged 50, living at 2 Albany-terrace, Newport, caused a sensation in Newport and the district at the beginning of the week. It appears that late on Saturday night deceased, who had spent the evening in the town, was noticed by several persons to be leaning against the wall of the Shoulder of Mutton public-house at the bottom of South-street. It is stated that when apparently about to leave he was seen suddenly to overbalance and fell backwards into the roadway striking his head heavily. The landlord and several of his customers, who were outside, went to deceased's assistance, and P.C. Russell, who was sent for, was quickly on the scene and assisted deceased along the street for a short distance. The poor fellow, however, collapsed in consequence of a serious wound at the back of his head, and he was conveyed on the police ambulance to the Police-station. Dr. Underhill was sent for by Insp. Sibbeck, and deceased's wound was dressed by the doctor, who, owing to the serious condition of the patient, ordered his removal home in a cab and communicated with Dr. Slaney, one of the medical staff at the Prison, who remained with deceased until his death at 2.15 on Sunday morning. A report in some of the London papers on Monday morning, stating that deceased was "found" lying in the street, and that "it is not known how the wound was caused," investing the case with an air of mystery which the circumstances did not justify and gave colour to the rumours of foul play which were falsified by the evidence. To account for the fall it was suggested that deceased might have slipped on a banana skin on the pavement, or that he might have fainted or had a fit.

Deceased was regarded by those who knew him as a quiet and sober man of good character. As a prison officer he had 26 years' to his credit, with a clean record throughout, which was testified to by those in high position in the Service. For several years he served in connection with the criminal asylum at Parkhurst, and he was regarded by his superiors as very reliable and efficient. He leaves a widow and family of nine, for whom, as well as for the other relatives, the deepest sympathy is felt. Four of his sons are in the Army and Marines, and one of these was in the military hospital at Parkhurst awaiting a serious

operation, which had caused deceased and his wife considerable worry. Deceased's father was also in the Prison Service.

On Tuesday afternoon the Deputy Coroner (F. A. Joyce, Esq.) held an inquest on the body at the Wesleyan Schoolroom, Hunnyhill. Mr. Hugh Gramshaw (Messrs. Lambert, Bassitt, and Hiscock) appeared for the relatives of the deceased. Lieut. R. M. Tabuteau, R.N. (Deputy Governor in charge of Parkhurst Prison), was present, as also were Principal Warder Miller (brother of the deceased) and several of deceased's sons, Dr. O. F. N. Treadwell (medical officer of the Prison) and Dr. Slaney (deputy medical officer), Dr. S. V. H. Underhill, and Insp. H. Sibbeck (representing the I.W. Constabulary). Mr. W. Godwin, T.C., was foreman of the jury.

Mr. GEORGE HERBERT MILLER, principal warder, of Parkhurst Prison, living at 5 Southcottages, Parkhurst, identified the body as that of his brother, who was a hospital warder at Parkhurst Prison. He last saw deceased alive on duty on Saturday morning, when he was in his usual health. Deceased left the Prison at about 11.45 a.m.

The CORONER said that Mrs. Miller, wife of the deceased, saw her husband in the evening, but he proposed to excuse her from giving evidence if they could do without her.

The jury agreed.

Dr. S. V. H. UNDERHILL, of Newport, said that at about 11.30 on Saturday night he was called to the Newport Police-station, where he saw deceased, who had a contused and lacerated wound on the back of his head. Witness could rouse him by shouting, but he did not answer clearly. They could not make out from what deceased said what his name was. They thought he said his name was Harry Brewer. Deceased had part of the Prison uniform on. Witness sent for Dr. Slaney, and deceased was conveyed to his home in a cab and handed over to the care of Dr. Slaney. On Monday witness made a post-mortem examination in the presence of Drs. Treadwell and Slaney, and found that there was a large extravasation of blood corresponding with the exterior situation of the wound, which was not down to the bone. On further examination they found a fracture starting from the point which would correspond to the external wound and running along the base of the skull. There had been considerable hemorrhage and laceration of the brain owing to the fracture. – Q. Would that condition be sufficient to cause death? – Yes, quite. It was a star-shaped wound radiating in three directions, and it was situated an inch to the right of the prominent bony point at the back of the skull. Such a wound could have been produced by a severe blow at the back of the head, which could have been received in different ways – by a blow with a heavy instrument, by a brick-bat or anything else heavy, or by a fall. The nature of the injuries was quite consistent with a fall. Fracture of the base of the skull would be a characteristic of injuries resulting from a fall. – Q. What other mark was there upon him? – There was a slight mark over the left eyebrow. – Q. An abrasion? – Yes, a very slight one. His other organs were in a very healthy condition for a man of his age. Deceased did not sufficiently recover to explain what had happened whilst witness was there.

By Mr. J. Williams (a juror): An ordinary fall would cause that injury if he hit his head a sufficiently hard blow.

Dr. SLANEY (deputy medical officer of Parkhurst Prison) said he saw deceased being brought home in a cab at Hunnyhill about 1.45 a.m. on Sunday. Immediately afterwards he saw deceased at his home, and he confirmed the evidence of the last witness. He examined the wound, and he was there when the deceased died, about 2.15 a.m., without having recovered consciousness. Witness was at the post-mortem examination with Dr. Treadwell, and he confirmed Dr. Underhill's evidence. He had no doubt that death was due to the injury described.

By the Foreman: The laceration of the brain was due to concussion. Deceased was a very healthy man indeed. He had been many years in the Service.

The room was cleared of witnesses while the landlady of the Shoulder of Mutton was giving her evidence, the CORONER saying that they could be called in as required, so that they should not hear others' statements before making their own. Five witnesses adjourned to an adjoining room.

ELIZABETH HARRIS, wife of Frederick Edwin Harris, licensee of the Shoulder of Mutton, South-street, said that she was in the bar parlour on Saturday night, when deceased, whom she had never seen before, came in just before closing time, between 10 and 15 minutes to 11 o'clock. He had on a soft hat and overcoat. He fell forward a bit as he came in the door and then pulled himself together and called for a glass of beer. She did not answer him, but called her husband, who was in the tap-room, and told him she thought the man was the worse for drink and asked him to come and speak to him. Her husband told deceased that he would not serve him, as he thought he had had enough. Deceased demanded a drink, and said he wanted them to fetch a policeman. Her husband said he did not wish to do that. Her husband then called time and the customers left. Witness went to lock the bar-parlour door and saw deceased standing outside, leaning against the wall. He was quite upright then. Her husband was outside talking with the customers who had gone out from the tap-room. She walked through the house from the bar-parlour door to the tap-room door, and on getting there she saw deceased lying on his back in the roadway and her husband and another man, Jack Richards, were raising his head and unfastening his collar. She thought deceased was hurt and fetched a policeman. Several of the customers were there, but some had gone. Those with her husband were Joe Read, Jack Richards, and Sidney Lockyer.

Q. There had been no quarrel previously? – No, none whatsoever. There was no occasion for it. We had not got enough in the house to quarrel. Deceased was not quarrelsome at all. – Q. Did you see the deceased go out of the doorway? – I saw my husband walk out behind him. – Q. Was he the last to leave? – He was the last to go off the doorstep. – Q. Did he object to go? – No, I don't think so. I did not hear him. – Q. Your husband was close behind him? – Yes. There were two more passed out just in front of him. – Q. There was no occasion for your husband to turn him out by force? – None whatever. – Q. And he did not lay hands upon him? – No, sir. – Q. Are you quite sure of that? – I am quite sure. – Q. You don't know anything regarding the fall itself. You don't know what happened? – No, I don't.

By the Foreman: She heard no quarrelling and no high words at all passing between any of them. Her husband was in conversation with other customers several yards away from the spot where she saw deceased standing leaning against the wall. Only a few seconds elapsed, she thought, from the time she locked the bar-parlour door till she got round to the tap-room door. Deceased was not quarrelsome. He did not say anything because they did not serve him, except that he wanted the drink. Deceased was standing off the step, so the door could not touch him.

By Mr. Gramshaw: She did not know that deceased was short-sighted and that that might be the reason for him entering as he did and leading her to think he might be the worse for drink. – Q. It would be quite natural for him if he was short-sighted to have tripped over something and to have the peculiar shuffle he had? – That might be so. I don't know.

The CORONER: It is best for licence-holders to err on the right side.

By Mr. Gramshaw: She did not know that at 10.40 that night deceased was seen in the street and was quite sober and rational in his speech. She did not have any conversation with deceased at all; she did not answer him when he asked for the beer; she simply got up and walked away.

By Mr. J. Williams: Deceased was lying in the middle of the road as near as possible, his head being towards the mill stream.

By the CORONER: You are quite certain that deceased was not pushed out by any one or struck during the time he was there? – No, I am quite positive he was not. It was not many seconds from the time she locked the bar-parlour door till she got out at the tap-room door. She went straight round.

FREDERICK EDWIN HARRIS, licence holder of the Shoulder of Mutton, said that on the night in question, just before closing time, his wife came and asked him to go into the bar-parlour and see a man whom she thought was the worse for drink. He went there and saw deceased, who asked for a glass of beer. Witness replied "You have had enough and I shall not serve you." Deceased said "You fetch a policeman to know the reason why." Witness replied "I shall not serve you if you stop here till 11 o'clock. There are not many more minutes to go." In about two minutes he called "Time," which meant that it was closing time. Deceased went to the door, hesitated, and then went just outside and leaned against the wall outside the bar-parlour door. Witness said to his wife "Lock the door and I will go round to the other door," and she did so, and witness went outside to two or three customers from the tap-room – Joe Read, Jack Richards, and Sid Lockyer. There was no soldier there, the soldier had gone. He was wishing the rest "Good night" as they were going away up the street. They were about three yards from deceased, who was standing with his back to the wall. Just as the other chaps were about to go up South-street deceased reeled round and fell backwards into the road. They ran to his assistance and saw that he had fallen with both hands in his overcoat pockets. Deceased fell away from the kerb, which was only about 2in. above the roadway. He apparently had no time to pull his hands out of his pockets. They helped him up. No one was within two or three yards of deceased when he

fell, and he was not touched by any one. – Q. You did not push him out at all? – No, sir. He went out and I expect he was out there a minute before the door was shut.

The FOREMAN: You did not put your hands upon him at all? – No, sir. When we picked him up he was foaming at the mouth. Next day when he was clearing up, he picked up two banana skins about where deceased was standing and a piece of clinker (produced) and stones in the road about where deceased fell. It was a frosty night. Before he washed down the banana skins were there. He could not see next morning where deceased fell, but the clinker was not many feet away from the spot where he was. They always swilled the foot-path down in the morning. There was no blood on the foot-path and he did not see any blood in the road.

By Mr. G. Reynolds (a juror): Deceased was apparently turning to go when he fell.

By the jury: They had a job to get the collar of the deceased's tunic unfastened. They sat him up and got him on his legs.

By the Coroner: Deceased had one foot on the doorstep when he fell.

The CORONER: That would aggravate his fall, and with his hands in his pockets he would fall very heavily.

Witness, in reply to the Coroner, said the road sloped out at that point from the house towards the stream. The foot-path was narrow, not more than between 2ft. and 3ft. wide.

Mr. GRAMSHAW: When you spoke to the deceased in your house he spoke quite reasonably, didn't he? – I thought after what my wife told me that he had had enough to drink. – Q. Would you say he was really the worse for drink? – I do not say he was drunk. He was the worse for drink. – Q. Did he walk out of the house himself? – Yes, he had his hands on the table which was near the door, and he staggered as he went out and steadied himself on the table. He went down the steps by himself. – Q. How do you say he fell down? – He was leaning against the wall, when all at once he reeled round like this (imitating the movement), and then fell into the road. It is a wide road and he was picked up about 6ft. or 7ft. from the kerb – I cannot say exactly, as it was dark. He found some banana skins on the pavement, right opposite the doorway. – Q. Do you know that the deceased was talking to people about 10.10 p.m. and at 10.40 p.m. that night in the street, and that he was quite sober then? – I could not say anything about that, I did not see him till eight minutes to 11. I did not know deceased and had never seen him before. I do not know that he had a peculiar shuffle in his walk.

By the Coroner: Deceased was a perfect stranger to me.

JOHN RICHARDS, carter, of 6 Town-lane, Newport, said he was in the tap-room on the night in question, just before 11 o'clock, and he saw deceased walk out of the bar-parlour door at closing time. He did not know deceased was there till then. He had seen him at the Prison when he had been carting up there. – Q. Was he pushed out or helped out? – No, sir, he walked out himself. – Q. Who was outside at the time? – The Landlord, J. Read, and Lockyer. I saw the deceased leaning against the wall with one foot on the doorstep and his

hands in his pockets. I had just said "Good night" to the landlord when I looked round and saw deceased lying out in the road. He was by himself. – Q. If any blow had been struck you would have heard it? – Yes, I was only four or five yards away from him. – Q. Was he struck by anyone? – No, sir. – Q. Or pushed? – No, sir. – Q. You are positive about that? – Yes, sir. – Q. If any blow had been struck by any person you must have seen or heard it? – Yes. – Q. Was there any quarrelling inside or outside the house? – No, sir.

The CORONER: I am calling these witnesses in, but it is a very straight story. There is practically no difference in their evidence.

The FOREMAN: Yes, it is very straightforward.

JOSEPH READ, labourer, of 39 South-street, said he was in the Shoulder of Mutton all the evening on Saturday till closing time. He was in the tap-room. He did not see the deceased come in, but the landlady came into the tap-room to her husband and said that a man who she thought was the worse for drink had come into the parlour. He heard Mr. Harris refuse to serve the man, who said he would demand beer if he had to go and fetch a policeman. The landlord said it was his own beer and he should do what he liked with it. Witness went into the passage adjoining the bar behind the landlord, who shouted "Time," and witness went out into the street. He saw deceased standing with one foot on the step, leaning against the door-jamb. The door was then ajar. It was not gone 11 o'clock, as the landlord called time about three minutes to 11. Deceased was standing against the wall when the landlady closed the door. They were saying "Good night" to the landlord and had got two or three yards away from the door when they heard the deceased fall and saw him right out flat on his back. – Q. Who was close to him? – No one. – Q. If any one had struck him, would you have heard it? – Yes. – Q. You must have heard it? – Yes. – Q. You are positive he was not struck? – Yes. There was no quarrel whatever. – Q. You are quite positive he fell of his own accord? – Yes, I should think so. – Q. You were there and could see? – There was no one close enough to hit him or push him. – Q. If there had been any quarrel, you must have heard it? – Yes, sir. There was no quarrel whatever. – Q. You are certain the landlord did not push him out? – Yes, I am quite sure. He went out by himself.

By the Foreman: He was two or three yards away when deceased fell, and he never saw or heard any one strike or push deceased. As they heard him fall they ran to him.

Mr. Gramshaw had no question to ask the witness.

The CORONER said he did not think it necessary to carry that evidence any further, as all the witnesses agreed after close examination, which he thought necessary having regard to the reports which had been flying about, but which the evidence showed were unjustifiable. The jury had not to inquire into any question of the sobriety of deceased; all they had to do was to determine the cause of death. The facts as related by the witnesses were extremely simple; all told a very coherent story, and he was not able to detect anything in their respective statements to suggest that what they had stated was not exactly what happened. Deceased was thought by the landlord and landlady to be the worse for drink, but he might or might not have been ill at the time he called there, and he was refused drink. In these strenuous days for licence-holders, if a licensee erred at all in such

cases, it was best to err on the side of cautiousness. In that case the landlord refused to serve deceased, and the evidence showed that the latter went out of the door alone and after leaning against the wall he was seen to turn to walk away, when he fell backwards. The medical evidence was quite clear that the injuries were consistent with a fall of that character, and inasmuch as deceased was standing with his hands in his pockets it was obvious that the fall would be a very heavy one, and a very bad fracture might easily result from it. He was quite satisfied with the evidence and saw no reason to throw any doubt upon it whatever. He took it that the verdict would be that death was due to an accidental fall.

After the jury had deliberated.

The FOREMAN said their verdict was that death was due to a fractured skull, caused by an accidental fall. They were of opinion that there was no evidence that the deceased was intoxicated.

The CORONER said that fortunately they were not called upon to try the question of sobriety of the deceased. The family naturally had a very strong feeling on that matter and declared that deceased was a most sober man, and that it was probable that on that particular occasion, he might not have been in his usual state of health, as they were prepared to give evidence that shortly before the time named by the witnesses he was seen in the street by people who said he spoke in his usual rational way, and they believed him then to be perfectly sober. That was at 10.40 the same night.

The FOREMAN said that the jury wished him to express the deepest sympathy with the family and other relatives of the deceased in their great sorrow. Some of the jury had known deceased for some time.

Mr. GRAMSHAW said that the family desired him to thank the foreman and the jury for their expression of sympathy.

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The funeral of deceased took place on Thursday afternoon at Carisbrooke Cemetery. In addition to members of the bereaved family and the deceased's brothers, 36 Prison officers followed, including Principal Warders Burgess, Keeping, and Shrimpton, the last-named representing the Camp Hill Prison staff. Deceased's colleagues of the Prison Hospital staff acted as bearers, these including Warders Taylor, Hunt, Wheeler, Hayles, Manning, and King. Insp. H. Sibbeck, of the County Constabulary, and Mr. Alfred Peck were among others present. The Rev. A. W. Officer officiated. There were a number of beautiful floral tributes...Messrs. H. and F. Damp carried out the funeral arrangements.

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