

Michael John Moffat

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ELECTROCUTED IN FIELD SURVEY, INQUEST TOLD

A 26-YEAR-OLD estate agent's planning assistant – one of a three-man team surveying a field at Freshwater – was electrocuted when a 14ft. metal staff he was carrying, in connection with the work, touched an 11,000-volt overhead power line.

This occurred where the power line was at its lowest point over the field, but the cable was still more than a foot above the minimum required height from the ground, an inquest jury at County Hall, Newport, were told on Wednesday.

The jury returned a verdict of accidental death on Michael John Moffat, unmarried, of High Street, Carisbrooke.

The inquest was before Mr. J. V. Bullin, Island coroner.

Mr. Gordon Foster, surveyor's technician, of Castle Street, Carisbrooke, said that he, Mr. Moffat and Mr. David Holbrook were employed by Sir Francis Pittis and Son, the Island estate agents, and on Friday week they had been surveying a field off Easton Lane, Freshwater, where housing was being planned.

BOTH HANDS

He and Mr. Moffat were holding a surveyor's 14ft metal staff and Mr. Holbrook was taking readings. They were aware of the power line running across the field and at one point he had commented "We have got to watch those things."

Some 30 readings had been taken and this brought them close to the power line near the corner of the field. The wind was gusting and he remembered helping Mr. Moffat to steady the staff to keep it vertical while a reading was being taken. Mr. Moffat was holding the staff with both hands close to his chest.

"Then there was a complete blackout and I felt something hit me," he said. He remembered feeling an electric shock passing through the right hand side of his body, and hearing Mr. Moffat cry out.

The next thing he was aware of was seeing Mr. Moffat lying on the ground. He was also apparently thrown to the ground, although he did not remember it happening.

Mr. Holbrook, surveyor, of Oakhill Road, Seaview, said he was 150ft away from where the accident occurred, but was not looking at the other two men at the time it happened. He had just taken one reading and had signalled them to move to the next position, so he assumed that Mr. Moffat had "walked into the cable."

He added that, at the time, he thought the power cable was extremely low, but he had since noticed that other cables elsewhere were possibly as low.

Dr. P. H. W. Sheard, of Stroud Road, Freshwater, said he was called to the scene by the ambulance emergency service, and arrived at the field within minutes. He found a man lying on his back, lifeless, underneath the electricity line.

Two of the man's colleagues were giving artificial respiration and attempting cardiac massage. He took over external cardiac massage for ten minutes and also administered heart stimulants, but the man could not be revived.

FOUND NAIL

Dr. P. D. Swinstead, consultant pathologist, said that during a post mortem examination, he found a blackened mark, consistent with that caused by an electrical burn, on the sole of the man's left foot. The sock had also been burnt in the same position and at that point, in one of rubber boots that the man was wearing, he found a nail protruding from the sole.

The cause of death was electrocution. "The discharge must have been through the sole of the foot," he said.

Asked about the significance of the nail in the boot, Mr. Leonard Jones, electrical inspector of factories, told the hearing, "The discharge to earth makes use of anything that is there."

Mr. Eric Livesey, district engineer of the Southern Electricity Board, said the power line had been measured at 18ft. 1in. at its lowest point. The minimum height for such a cable across a field of that nature was 17ft.

Formal evidence of identification was given by the man's father, Mr. William Moffat, who was represented by Mr. J. Suggett.

Mr. M. H. Tennant appeared for Mr. Holbrook and Mr. Foster, and the company were represented by Mr. P. H. Rolf. Mr. D. G. T. Millington represented the SEB.

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