

Robert Gibson Smith

1891 census, 101, Upper St. James's Street, Newport

Maria Smith	Head	64		Bridgnorth
Robert Smith	Son	33	Chemist	Newport, Isle of Wight
Sarah A Phillips	Servant	22	General Domestic Servant	Chillerton, Isle of Wight

Isle of Wight Observer - 26 August 1899

SUICIDE OF A NEWPORT CHEMIST.

THE VICTIM TAKES PRUSSIC ACID IN HIS STORE.

On Thursday afternoon, at the George Hotel, Newport, Mr E. F. Blake, the coroner for the Island, held an inquiry concerning the death of Mr Robert Gibson Smith, 43 years of age, a chemist carrying on business at 101, Upper St James's Street, who committed suicide that morning by taking a dose of prussic acid. The first witness was

William Woodford, of 5, John Street, Barton's Village, a porter in the employ of deceased, who said he last saw his master alive that morning at quarter-past 8 as he passed the shop. The deceased had the key of the store in his hand. Several people called and witness went to the store for him and found the door unlocked. Witness called out "Shop," and as he got no answer he went in. He heard him gasp, and found him lying in the store. Witness called a young man named Biles, who came in turned him over. Witness immediately went for Dr. Coombs. Thursday he noticed that deceased was depressed, and lying down with his head between his hands.

William Biles, a dealer, said he was called into the store about 8.20 that morning. He saw deceased lying on the straw with his face downwards. He was unconscious, and groaning very much all the while. He got some water and tried to give it to him, thinking he must have fainted. The bottle produced he found about two inches from his hand. It was marked "poison." The glass stopper was in it. When the doctor arrived the deceased had just passed away.

Dr Coombs said that he went to the store at 8.30 that morning and found deceased lying on the straw. He was dead. The bottle now produced had contained prussic acid. It was a one ounce bottle. There were two strengths. This was the weak strength, and it was prescribed in from two to eight drops, never more. Forty drops would be sufficient to kill a man, and the doctor said he did not care to put that amount on his tongue and spit it out again.

Chief Inspector Ayres deposed to searching the victim's body that morning as they found him in the store. The paper produced he found in his waistcoat pocket. On it was written in pencil the following message: "Dear Jimmy, To you I leave all, and my last thoughts are for the children, Robert. My uncle Corbett died in the same." [A juror intimated that deceased was in the habit of calling his wife "Jimmy."] The witness added that he had seen Mrs Smith that morning, and that she told him her husband had been up all night with pains in head, and that he said it was becoming almost unbearable.

Dr Dabbs, of Shanklin, stated that he had attended the deceased for the last six months, and last saw him about a month ago. He knew he was in a depressed state. This was why he attended him. He was very unhappy and miserable. The deceased said his business weighed on his mind on account of his not having passed his examination. The deceased failed some years ago - went half way through, and never finished it. He had never heard him threaten to commit suicide, though for the last six months, he had considered him on the borderline of insanity. He had frequently consulted him about his troubles, but as a matter of fact they were no troubles at all. It was really the want of his mind.

The Coroner having summed up, the jury returned a verdict to the effect that the deceased committed suicide whilst in a state of unsound mind. The jury expressed their sympathy with the widow and relatives.

Transcription by Tony Barton for the Friends of Newport & Carisbrooke Cemeteries © 2019

<https://www.foncc.org.uk>