

Frank Ernest Walton

Isle of Wight County Press - 26 June 1909

DISTRESSING SUICIDE AT NEWPORT.

Last (Friday) night the Deputy Coroner of the Island (Francis A. Joyce, Esq.) held an inquest at the Gospel-hall, Union-street, Newport, on the body of Frank Ernest Walton, aged 23, grocers' clerk, in the employ of Messrs. Jordan and Stanley, grocers and provision merchants, lodging at 2 Clarence-terrace, Clarence-road, Mount Pleasant, Newport, who committed suicide on the previous Wednesday evening by shooting himself. Mr. W. D. Hutton was foreman of the jury and Inspector T. Cass and P.S. Hutchin were present on behalf of the police.

The CORONER said owing to the shocking injuries to deceased it would be very difficult and painful for a relative to identify the body by viewing it. He therefore proposed to call Inspector Cass to give evidence of identification.

Inspector CASS said he had known deceased between one and two years and from the clothing and other appearances he identified the body as that of Mr. F. E. Walton. He said that about 7 o'clock on Wednesday evening he received a report that the deceased had shot himself at his lodgings in Clarence-road. He proceeded there with P.S. Hutchin and found deceased in the bed-room in a sitting position with his back against a piece of furniture. He saw that deceased's face and head above the mouth were blown away and the remains were scattered about the room. There was a double-barrelled gun close by deceased, standing against the bed, only one barrel of which had been discharged. The other had not been loaded. Deceased's legs were crossed and he was holding an ash walking stick by the lower end, the crook of the stick being held towards deceased's feet. – [The stick, it was supposed, had been used by deceased to pull the trigger of the gun.] – Witness and Sergt. Hutchin went through the deceased's correspondence, but found nothing there of a recent date or anything that might be deemed sufficient to cause deceased trouble, excepting one or two letters and a telegram relating to the death of his mother, which took place about a fortnight or three weeks ago. They found nothing of which deceased had any reason to be ashamed. In the fire grate they found a number of letters which had been torn up into such small pieces that they were unable to piece them together again or to tell the dates or anything as to their contents. Placed prominently on the chest of drawers in deceased's bed-room witness found a card, in which was written in pencil "God forgive me; I could not stand the shame. Too late to alter things now. Dying love to Daisy and all.- Frank."

Mr. LEONARD JORDAN said that the writing on the card was in the handwriting of deceased.

WITNESS said that in an envelope was a premium book referring to a policy of insurance on deceased's own life. On the envelope deceased had written "This belongs to W.E. Walton, 9 Torrington-place, Plymouth." Deceased had taken off his collar and necktie, coat, vest and boots. He had also taken down his braces and tied them round his waist. Witness found nothing else to throw any light on the affair.

ELIZABETH KNELL, of 2 Clarence-terrace, Clarence-road, said deceased had been lodging at her house for over three years. About 4.30 on the previous Wednesday he returned home to tea, with which witness served him in the front room. She did not speak to deceased and he did not speak when she took in his tea. Deceased had a good tea and then went upstairs, and he left his lodgings at about 5.20 to return to business. After he had been gone a short time he returned and went to his bed-room. Before 6 o'clock Messrs. Jordan and Stanley's boy came and inquired if deceased was ill, because he

had left the office in such a hurry. Mr. Walton came to the door of witness's room and said "It is only Mr. Stanley's boy. Tell him I am not in." Witness delivered that message and the boy went away. Deceased was waiting on the top of the stairs for her return, and said "What did the boy say." She told deceased what he came for, and added "I won't tell lies for you." She then asked "What's the matter, Mr. Walton." and he replied "Nothing." She said "There must be something," and deceased said "Not much." He then went into his bed-room. A few minutes later the postman came – about 6.15 or a little earlier. Witness opened her bed-room door and saw deceased run down the stairs. Witness said to him "Is that letter for you, Mr. Walton?" and deceased, who picked up the letter from the mat, said "Yes," and he returned to his bed-room. Witness finished dressing, and was just going out when she heard a shot. She did not wait a second, but knocked at deceased's door and called "Mr. Walton" four times. Deceased did not reply, and she then opened the door and saw enough to convince her of what had happened. Witness did not know the contents of the letter deceased had just received, and she did not hear him make any exclamation on receiving it. Deceased hurried to the door for the letter, and he then had his coat, vest and boots off and appeared to have already prepared for what he did immediately after; it was so quick after his return that she heard the report of the gun. Asked if she knew from whom the last letter came, witness said, "I should think it was from his brother at Plymouth." Deceased received a black-edged letter at dinner time that day, marked "Urgent." She could not say that that was the letter deceased destroyed, but he burnt some letter soon after dinner in the kitchen grate. Deceased kept the gun in his sitting-room. She did not see him carry it upstairs. He seemed rather depressed at times, but he had given no indication whatever of a suicidal tendency. She always knew when he did not want to enter into conversation, as he took up a paper to read. She did not know anything about deceased's personal affairs, and could give the jury no information to explain his written statement on the card or his suicide.

Mr. LEONARD JORDAN, of the firm Messrs. Jordan and Stanley, of West End House, Newport, said deceased had been retail ledger clerk in the employ of his firm for rather over three years. Witness last saw deceased alive at 5.20 p.m. on Wednesday, after his return from tea. Deceased went to tea at about 4.20 or 4.22 – he should have gone at 4.15 – and he returned about 5.12. When he returned the other clerks went to tea, leaving deceased there with witness. Witness had observed nothing whatever peculiar in deceased's demeanour up to that time. On returning from tea witness sat at his desk for four or five minutes, apparently thinking about what he should do first, and then he got up and went out without speaking to witness. That was the last witness saw of deceased. Witness thought deceased had gone to the shop, as it was nothing unusual for him to leave the office temporarily. Deceased had done his work satisfactorily, though witness had had to tell deceased that day that he should have liked one thing done differently. – Q. You did not rebuke him sharply? – No, not in the least. – Q. You have had no cause to complain of the way in which he has done his work? – None whatever. – Q. As far as you know, are his books in order? – They are. – Q. There was no suggestion from you or your firm that he would be going from your employ shortly? – None whatever. – Q. Are you able to give us any reason for the written statement which deceased left? – No. – Q. You did not know of any cause of shame on his part? – No. Deceased had told him of his recent bereavement, and he had leave of absence on two occasions for four or five days on each occasion to visit his mother and to attend the funeral, the latter being between June 9th and 14th. Deceased had seemed in his usual health lately, but he thought he very much felt the illness and death of his mother. Finding deceased did not return on Wednesday evening he sent a boy to his home thinking he might have been taken ill. Deceased had been away ill before, once or twice.

By the Foreman: Deceased's account at the office had been audited by a London firm of accountants up to Christmas last; they had not been thoroughly examined since, but as far as he knew the books were quite well in order.

WALTER EDWARD WALTON, of Torrington-place, Plymouth, chief of the electric staff of the Telephones Company, brother of deceased, said he last saw deceased alive a fortnight ago that day at Cheltenham. Witness had a good deal of conversation with deceased, who seemed very much cut up and was too prostrated to attend the funeral of his mother. Deceased returned to the Island two days later. He had since received two letters from deceased, but had destroyed them, he was sorry to say, in accordance with his rule not to keep letters after he had answered them. – Q. Beyond the death of his mother do you know of any cause of trouble or anxiety which your brother had? Witness said one of his (witness's) brothers had gone wrong, and deceased had been worrying his life out about it. Deceased wrote a letter to witness showing that he was super-sensitive about it, and witness sent a telegram to him and told him it was no affair of his, as his brother was old enough to take care of himself. Deceased was very reticent and nursed troubles, and did not let anything out about it. His brother's affair happened in December last.

By the Foreman: As far as he was aware, there was absolutely no reason whatever why deceased should have written the note about the "shame." In addition to being super-sensitive, deceased had an idea that he had a very weak chest, and that used to worry him very much, so much, in fact, that he said he should have to leave the Island. He (witness) told deceased to do so, and said he would look out a place down in Devonshire, where he could recruit his health. Deceased was below zero in health, and he (witness) made him promise to write to him twice a week in reply to his own letters, which he wrote to keep up his spirits. He thought the death of his mother temporarily unhinged deceased's mind. The letters which he received from deceased and had destroyed threw absolutely no light on that affair. They related chiefly to witness's proposal to spend a week-end with deceased in the Island, and to deceased's intention, if he could get the time off, to spend a week-end at Plymouth. The last letter he wrote to deceased would have arrived on Wednesday; it was written "to try and buck him up," and perhaps it was too much for deceased, who might have given away at the moment and lost his balance. Deceased worried a great deal about the brother who had gone wrong, but witness told him not to do so, as everything had been done that could be done, and he (witness) had set his brother on his legs again. In Cheltenham they were very well known, and when that blow came, which caused his mother's death, deceased was awfully upset when he heard people passing remarks about his brother's affair, but he (witness) told deceased he must play the man.

Dr. THOMPSON gave evidence confirming that of Insp. Cass as to the position of the body, and said he found the gun, the muzzle of which was just below the chin, lying across deceased's body.

The jury, after a brief conference, returned a verdict that deceased committed suicide by shooting himself, but there was not sufficient evidence to show the state of his mind at the time.

The FOREMAN said the jury wished to express their sincere sympathy with the relatives of deceased in such very sad circumstances.

DECEASED'S BROTHER thanked the jury.

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