

## **Thomas Pratt Wills**

**Hampshire Telegraph - 6 June 1896**

### **DEATH OF PRATT WILLS**

#### **IN PRISON AT PARKHURST.**

By a strange coincidence the announcement was made on Saturday of the death of Thomas Pratt Wills, the late Secretary of the Portsea Island Building Society, and of the formation of a new Society in its place. In the presence of death it would not be seemly to recount again the story of his gross mismanagement and woeful mistakes, or to attempt to picture the terrible evils which the failure of the Society brought upon thousands of honest, hard-working, thrifty people. It is enough that he was punished for his wrong-doing, and that death has now anticipated the conclusion of his sentence by a few short weeks.

Wills died in Parkhurst Prison at eleven p.m. yesterday week. Deceased, who is described by the prison doctor as a feeble old man, had been in the hospital for the last twelve months, suffering from senile debility. He contracted a cold recently, and gradually became worse, succumbing eventually to an attack of bronchial pneumonia.

Deceased was received at the prison on the 15th of August, 1893. His occupation in prison was the patching of clothes. He was serving a sentence of five years' penal servitude, and probably would have been liberated this month on ticket-of-leave.

Deceased, at one time, was a wine and spirit merchant, in Queen-street, Portsea. Subsequently he was appointed a relieving officer under the Portsea Guardians, and afterwards a Poor-rate collector. While holding the latter position he founded the Portsea Island Building Society in 1846, taking the position of secretary. In 1857 he was appointed Clerk to the Portsea Guardians, succeeding the late Mr. Devereux. Ten years later he succeeded the same gentleman as Superintendent Registrar of Births and Deaths for Portsmouth. Deceased held the position of Clerk to the Guardians up to 1877, when he resigned, and was succeeded by Mr. S. R. Ellis. The office of Superintendent Registrar, however; he retained up to the time of the Building Society's failure.

As a young man the deceased took a very active interest in the Volunteer movement and held a major's commission in the 1st Hants Artillery Volunteers, receiving a handsome presentation on his retirement from that corps.

He was once an active supporter of St. John's Church, Portsea, where he held the position of Churchwarden. However, on the refusal of the Vicar to allow the choir to appear in surplices, he left the church and joined the ranks of the Salvation Army.

#### **THE INQUEST. - A FATAL JOURNEY.**

The Island Coroner held an inquest at Parkhurst Prison, on Saturday, on the body of the late T. P. Wills, aged 78. - The Principal Warder called the Coroner's attention to the presence of reporters without the knowledge of the Governor. The Coroner said that the Court was under his jurisdiction, and he had no objection to the presence of reporters. If the Governor had, he must let him know. - Subsequently the Principal Warder said the Governor stated the reporters might remain, but they must not go into the Prison proper. - Coroner: I was not going to allow them to the Infirmary.

Warder Borroughs said that deceased, who was undergoing a term of five years' penal servitude. was received from Wormwood Scrubbs on the 15th August, 1893, and had been in hospital since the 11th May last year, with the exception of nine or ten days, when he went to the London Law Courts to give evidence. He was reported dangerously ill on the previous day.

Dr. Smalley, the prison surgeon, said that the deceased was in indifferent health when received, and had been in hospital for the last year, suffering from senile debility. He improved a great deal under treatment. He was seriously ill at one time.

By the Coroner: Deceased was ordered to attend the Law Courts on the 12th May, and witness considered he was in a fit state to go. Deceased did not complain of having to go. He returned into prison on the afternoon, of the 22nd, and next day complained of being unwell. He said he had not been well, and that he had had diarrhoea whilst away, and caught cold coming across on the boat to the Island. He got worse, developing signs of bronchial pneumonia, from which he died at eleven p.m. on Friday. Witness did not consider he was in an unfit state to go to London, or he would have stopped him. He had prevented him from going once in 1893.

The Foreman said that May was a treacherous month for an old feeble man to take a journey.

The doctor said that though deceased was a five years' man, he was due under his licence to leave the prison in a few weeks' time.

A verdict of death from natural causes was recorded.

The Coroner remarked that no blame was attributable to anyone. The fact that the surgeon once refused to allow deceased to go to London showed that he exercised the discretion which he alone possessed.

#### **THE FUNERAL.**

The remains were buried at Carisbrooke Cemetery on Wednesday afternoon. The costs of the funeral were borne by the relatives of deceased.

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