

William Henry Lawes

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DROWING FATALITY AT NEWPORT,
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Unemployed Carter's Sad End
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The tragic circumstances surrounding the death of Mr. William Henry Lawes (68), a carter formerly employed by Mr. D. Biles at Rowborough Farm, and living alone at 31 Prospect-road, Newport (his wife having been a patient at St. Mary's Hospital, Parkhurst, for a long time), whose body was recovered from the River Medina near Hurstake on Saturday afternoon, were investigated by the Deputy-Coroner (F. A. Joyce, Esq.), at an inquest in the Town-hall, Newport, on Tuesday. Police Inspector T. Willmott was present.

P.C. Gray stated that in consequence of a report received he went with Dr. A. Heathcote to Broken Bridge, Dodnor, on the west side of the river, on Saturday, where he saw the body of a man on a mud bank 13ft. from the edge of the water. It was lying on its back, the coat having been removed and the belt slackened. Three lads there had brought the body in and taken off the coat. No handwriting was found on the deceased. A 8ft. fence crossed the path, which was about 6ft. wide, and there was a bridge over the sluice, leading to the Cement Mills. If persons had kept to the path they would have to climb over the fence near the sluice, which was under water at high tide. It was about half-tide at the time, with about 6ft. of water near the sluice. The fence was put there to keep cattle in a certain area. It was quite possible for anyone to fall into the water when climbing over the fence.

Percy W. Woodford, haulage contractor of 10 Drake-road, Newport, a nephew of deceased, said he saw his uncle about twice a week. The last time he saw him was on May 23rd in St. James's-square. Deceased then complained of pains in the head. He seemed rather low, but there was no indication that he was contemplating suicide. Mrs. Lawes had been a patient at St. Mary's Hospital for nearly two years, and his uncle had been living in the house by himself. He thought he had been unemployed since April. He was in receipt of an old age pension. Deceased had an accident about four years ago,, when a large piece of chalk fell on his head in a chalk pit. He thought the pains in the head of which he complained were the effects of the accident.

Mrs. Elizabeth Woodford, of Whitwell, a sister of deceased, said she last saw her brother alive on May 18th when he came to Whitwell for the day. He was depressed, and complained of pains in the head and being very badly off. She gave him 5s. and a quantity of food. He said he could not go to work. On previous occasions he had been in good spirits,, but she saw a great change in him on that occasion. He should have visited her again on Sunday.

Mrs. Annie Mackett, of 38 Prospect-road, Newport, stated that she had known Mr. Lawes for a long time, and had visited his wife at the hospital every week. She did not think he had worked for Mr. Biles for about four or five weeks. She last saw him on the previous Friday, when he told her that he was going to see the doctor. He had recently complained of pains in the head.—By the Coroner: He had complained of giddiness when bending down.

Mrs. Teresa Harley, of 7 East-street, Newport, stated that at about 3 p.m. on Saturday she passed Mr. Lawes, who was standing on the bridge, on the Newport side of the boathouse. She passed the time

of day with him, and he acknowledged it. She did not see him alive after that. Shortly afterwards some children told her there was a man in the water. She saw the body floating face downwards in a deep gully by the side of the path. She thought she would have been able to hear a strong cry for help from where she had been sitting. She attracted the attention of some young men in a boat. They rowed around and pulled the body in, and commenced artificial respiration until the policeman and doctor arrived.

Ronald Edwards, on 29a High-street, Newport, deposed that at about 5.15 p.m. on Saturday with two friends he was working on a boat moored near Hurstake. They heard a shout and got into a small boat, rowed about 400 yards north of the boat-house, and pulled the body in. It was floating some 3ft. from the parapet in about 6ft. of water. He helped to pull it out of the water and place it on a mud bank. After loosening deceased's neckerchief, and taking off his coat and waistcoat they commenced artificial respiration, which was kept up with the help of his friends. Mr. Frank Sheath also assisted.

Dr. Aubrey A. Heathcote, of 137 Carisbrooke-road, Newport, stated that on his arrival the man was dead. He conducted a post mortem on Monday, and found several superficial injuries, all caused after death. The condition of the organs was consistent with drowning. Referring to the injury to the head sustained by Mr. Lawes in the chalk pit, Dr. Heathcote said it was quite possible for him to have become dizzy and fallen into the water.

In reply to the Coroner the relatives said they did not know if deceased could swim.

The Coroner said he accepted Dr. Heathcote's evidence that death had been caused by immersion in the water. There were indications that it was a case of suicide, yet the death might have been an accident. Deceased could have become dizzy and fallen into the water. He thought it safer to return a verdict of "Found drowned".

The late Mr. Lawes was very well known in the town, having been formerly employed as a carman for Messrs. Shepard Bros. and Messrs. Westmore.

The funeral took place at Newport Cemetery on Wednesday.—Mr. W. Woodford wishes to thank the police and jury for kindness shown in his sad bereavement.

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