

Annie Matilda Read

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Sad Suicide at Newport.

The sad circumstances attending the death on Thursday of Mrs. Annie Matilda Read, aged 64, the wife of Mr. Henry Frederick Read, of 43 Quay-street, Newport, were investigated by the Deputy Coroner (F. A. Joyce, Esq.), sitting without a jury at the Town-hall, Newport, yesterday (Friday).

Mr. Read, who is employed by Messrs. Shepard Bros., deposed that the deceased had enjoyed fairly good health, and during the last few years had been a lot better, having had nothing the matter with her. On Thursday morning she had a bilious attack. She had a little toast for breakfast, and said that as she was not feeling well she did not want any dinner. He left her at 2.30 p.m., and on his return at about 4.45 p.m. he found the front door locked and the key left in the window, as was their usual custom. Thinking she had gone out he opened the door and found that the back door was open, but still thought his wife had gone out. He shouted up the stairs but received no reply. He noticed a smell of gas and found that the bath-room door was locked. He immediately obtained assistance and the door was broken open. His wife was sitting almost upright in the bath with her head resting on the edge of it. The gas ring of the geyser was turned on full, a blanket having been placed over it covering her head. It was a powerful geyser, and most of the gas would be inhaled. He pulled off the blanket, turned off the gas, opened the window, and sent for the police. The deceased had been worried lately by drumming noises in her head, and these were stated to be due to catarrh; she was slightly deaf in one ear.

The Coroner handed the witness a memorandum which he said had been found in the bedroom adjoining the bath-room, and Mr. Read identified the handwriting as being that of his wife.

Inspector H. Randall read the memorandum as follows: "Am afraid I've got the same complaint as poor Kate, and then the noises in my head, life's not worth living. You will find everything here. Wishing you all the best of health and luck. Mum."

Mr. Read, continuing, said his wife had not been medically attended lately, and had enjoyed good health for several years, except for the noises in her head.

The Coroner : Has she ever given any indication of suicidal tendencies ?----I was never more surprised in my life. When we left she said "I will lie down for a few minutes and will have tea ready for you when you come back." She was the last woman I thought would have done such a thing; something must have gone wrong in the brain. She was expecting her grand-children at the end of the week for holidays and was looking forward to their visit.

The Coroner said the deceased appeared to have thought about getting entirely deaf.

Mr. Read said the deceased had had a tremendous lot of worry about her sister-in-law, who was very ill at the Nursing Home, and that was what she meant by her reference to Kate.

The Coroner: She says the same complaint ?----I can't tell what it is; some internal complaint.----Q. Has your wife given any indication of suffering from some internal complaint ?----No.----Q. You don't know any cause for it ?----No, I don't, none whatever. She had everything, she was worshipped by her children, and was one of the best women who ever lived.----Q. And you are not able to offer any explanation ?----I cannot say. Something must have snapped in the brain.----Q. She has not had any misunderstanding or quarrel with any member of the family ?----No, we have never had a quarrel for years. I don't suppose you would find a happier or more united family anywhere. She was worshipped by her children and by myself.----Inspector Randall : She had never made a suggestion that she was suffering from any complaint ?----Nothing at all, only this catarrh.---The Coroner : She has often been left in the house alone ?----Often, I am out every day. My daughter goes out every afternoon, and my wife was then left there. I thought she had been called either to her sister-in-law or step-sister, who were both very ill.

Miss Ethel May Read, who resides with her parents, said her mother had been in her ordinary health until the last two or three days. She confirmed her father's evidence. Her mother had complained at times of noises in the head, and had for a long time experienced a difficulty in hearing with one ear. She had not been to a medical man as she thought there was no cure for it. She often talked about the illness of her sister-in-law and had been to see her. Referring to the memorandum left by the deceased, witness said her mother had not talked about the relative's illness to her or seemed afraid that the same complaint was coming on; she did not think it had preyed on her mind.

P.C. T. Hartnell said he went to the house at 5 p.m. and on entering the bath-room saw the deceased lying on her side almost in a sitting position. She was on her right side and there was a cushion under her head, which was towards the gas ring of the geyser, her mouth being within an inch of the ring. The blanket had been wrapped tightly round the geyser.

Mr. Read (interposing) said the young fellow who burst open the door opened the window, and he (Mr. Read) turned off the gas.

P.C. Hartnell said the note produced was found on the deceased's bed, the bed-room immediately adjoining the bath-room.

Dr. W. W. Jeudwine said he was called to the house at 5 p.m. by Mr. Read and found Mrs. Read dead, lying in the bath in the manner already described. The blanket had been fixed up on the geyser on her face. She was clothed and lying on a pillow in the bath. She had been dead for about two hours. He had no doubt that death was due to gas poisoning. There was a very large supply of gas, and death would swiftly ensue under the conditions he found. He had not attended the deceased.

The Coroner said the evidence in this unfortunate case was very clear. There was not the slightest doubt that this poor woman, probably in an impulsive moment, decided to destroy herself. The means of doing so were very ready to hand, and she availed herself of them. There was not the slightest doubt that she committed suicide by gas poisoning. The reason given in the memorandum seemed a very small one, but it was impossible for any of them to fathom the workings of the human mind. He could not find in the evidence of either the husband or of the daughter anything which would suggest a reasonable ground for deceased's act. On the other hand the motive seemed so little that she must have had a brain wave or brain storm unpremeditated and so decided to destroy herself. He sympathised with the husband and daughter. He thought that she was of unbalanced mind at the time, probably from the fear of impending illness. His verdict would be that the deceased committed suicide by gas poisoning, by placing her head in or near a gas ring under a geyser, and that she was of unbalanced mind at the time, through fear of impending illness, and acted under a sudden impulse.

Mrs. Read was formerly Miss Norris, and her parents kept the George Inn, Newport. She was a native of Southampton.

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