

John Riggs

**Isle of Wight County Press
3 September 1949**

**NEWPORT OCTOGENARIAN'S
TRAGIC DEATH**

**Former Prison Officer
And Court Bailiff.**

The death took place in tragic circumstances on Saturday of Mr. John Riggs, aged 85, of 108 Hunnyhill, Newport, a well known figure in the district.

At the inquest held by the Coroner (Mr. R. E. A. Webster) at the County Hall on Monday evidence was given by Dr. D. G. McCann that the deceased suffered from depression,, which had recently become worse in spite of appropriate treatment. He examined deceased after being called to his house about 1.15 p.m. on Saturday and found every indication that death was due to coal gas poisoning.

Mrs. Mary Bowles, deceased's daughter, who lived with him, said she left her father to go to work on Saturday morning after giving him his tea in bed and leaving his breakfast ready. When she returned at about 1.10 p.m. she found him lying on the kitchen floor with his head in the oven and gas escaping. She turned off the gas and went for assistance. Her father had been very upset since the death of her mother 13 months ago and had recently been peculiar in his manner towards witness. He did not sleep well and was sometimes walking about at night.

Herbert Raggett, retired prison officer, of 114 Hunnyhill, gave evidence of taking the necessary steps to clear the house of gas fumes and of applying artificial respiration under the doctor's direction, with the assistance of other neighbours.

P.C. King said there were indications that papers had been burnt in the kitchen grate.

The Coroner returned a verdict that deceased took his own life while in a state of progressive depression, and that he was not responsible for his actions at the time. He expressed sympathy with Mrs. Bowles in the tragic circumstances.

Mr. Riggs had had a full and varied life. Both he and his wife were natives of Broadway, near Ilminster, Somerset. In his early life Mr. Riggs was a postman at Ashill, Somerset, but later joined the Somerset County Constabulary and was stationed in the Axbridge, Redhill, and Lovington districts. After some years he transferred to the prison service, in which he served for about 22 years, being stationed at Portland, Camp Hill, Wormwood Scrubs, and Parkhurst. He retired in 1922 and had since for some years acted as a County Court bailiff. Mr. Riggs had seen many years service as a Volunteer and Territorial commencing in the 3rd Somerset Light Infantry, and being later attached to the Ilminster Contingent of the Old Somerset Volunteers. From 1923 to 1932 he was in the band of the Isle of Wight Rifles, and thus continued a connection with music which began in the Town Band at Ilminster and was followed by over 30 years in the former Newport Town Band. He was a Forester; one of the oldest members of the Ilminster Court. Mr. and Mrs. Riggs celebrated their diamond wedding in 1947.

The funeral took place at the Congregational Church, Newport, on Thursday, the service being conducted by the Rev. J. L. Stafford. The mourners were Mrs. M. A. Bowles (daughter), Mr. and Mrs. E. Beverton and Mr. and Mrs. H. Carver (sons-in-law and daughters), Mr. and Mrs. J. Riggs (son and

daughter-in-law), Messrs. James and T. Riggs (sons), and Mrs. C. Riggs (daughter-in-law). The interment followed at Newport Cemetery. The arrangements were made by Messrs. H. and F. Damp.

The family thank all the neighbours and friends for their kindness, especially Mr. and Mrs. Raggett and sons; also all those who sent floral tributes.

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