

Lance Sprake

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WELL-KNOWN HUNT RUNNER'S SAD END.

MR. LANCE SPRAKE, OF NEWPORT.

A well-known figure in hunting circles and a familiar character to people in all parts of the Island has been removed by the death, under tragic circumstances, of Mr. Lancelot Henry Sprake, of Newport, whose dead body was found floating on the sea at Thorness Bay on Monday. Lance Sprake, who was nearing his 70th birthday, had for over 45 years regularly followed the Island Fox-hounds as a runner. His tall, upright figure clad in hunting costume could be seen at every meet of the pack, and his courteous assistance to hunting folk in opening gates, holding horses, and in other ways, helped him to gain a living and won the respect of the field, and all associated with the sport were amazed at the energy and stamina displayed by a man of his years. He knew by name practically every wood, copse, and footpath in the Island. In his earlier days Sprake drove fours-in-hand and cabs, and latterly he had acted as car park attendant at Carisbrooke Castle during the summer months. He was a man of quiet, inoffensive ways, and there are many who regret his sad end.

THE INQUEST.

was conducted by the Deputy Coroner (Francis A. Joyce, Esq.) at Great Thorness Farm on Tuesday. Inspector W. Shotter and P.C. Chandler were the police officers present.

FARMER'S PLUCKY SWIM.

Frank Downer, farmer, of Great Thorness, said that at about 11.30 a.m. on Monday a lad staying with him went to the cliff edge and saw a man's clothing on the beach and a body floating face downwards about 50 yards from the shore. He called witness, who immediately swam out and brought the body ashore, but the man was evidently dead. His clothing was neatly folded in a heap on the beach. He sent a message to the police at Cowes.

The Coroner : You acted very courageously and properly.

Witness : I would do the same for you, sir, if you were in the water.

The Coroner : I believe it, but I hope you won't have the chance (laughter).

Witness (continuing) said he knew the deceased by sight, but had never seen him in the neighbourhood before except occasionally when he was out with the foxhounds.

AN INCOHERENT LETTER.

P.C. Chandler said when he arrived he saw the body on the beach and the clothing as described by the last witness. Deceased had evidently been in the water only a short time. In the clothing he found a watch and chain, spectacles in case, 5 1/4d. in coppers, and the letter (produced) addressed to the Coroner.

The Coroner said the letter was incoherent and unintelligible. On the outside of the envelope in addition to the words "To the Coroner," was written : "It is lies said about me. I suffer with cramp. Good-bye Angel Sparks, I hope to meet you in heaven. We won't have another walk together. Brown Jug Inn, Newport." On a sheet of note-paper enclosed in the envelope was the brief message : "All I have said about Angel Sparks is quite true----L. Sprake."

The Coroner asked who the lady mentioned was and if she was present.

Inspector Shotter said she was the daughter of the licensee of the Brown Jug Inn, Newport. She had been interviewed by the police, but said she only knew the deceased as a customer at her father's house, and could give no reason for her name being mentioned. Under those circumstances he did not think it necessary to call her as a witness.

The Coroner said he could not imagine why the deceased thought he would be interested in what he had written. It pointed to his mind being affected.

Alice Martha Beavis, wife of George William Beavis, Downside-cottages, Ventnor, a daughter of the deceased, gave evidence of identification. She said she had not seen her father since March, when he came to see her after a meet of the foxhounds at Whiteley Bank. He was then in fairly good health, but he was badly ruptured and complained of the pain of that injury. He was not in receipt of an Old-Age Pension, but as far as she knew he was not in necessitous circumstances. She knew of no reason why he should take his life.

Edith Rose Brobson, wife of Albert George Brobson, residing at 37 Caesars-road, Newport, said deceased had lodged at her house for three years. He had his meals out except on Sundays, when she cooked him a dinner. She did not think he had gone short of food, as there was some in his room, and he always paid her regularly for the room. He had been somewhat strange in his manner lately and complained of the heat. She had heard him talking to himself in his room and once or twice he exclaimed "Oh, dear !" On Friday morning when he came downstairs he said someone had climbed up and looked in his bedroom window during the night. He said it had been going on for some time and he could not understand who it could be.

The Coroner : That was pure imagination, I suppose ?

Witness : Yes. No one could get to his window except with a ladder. After making the complaint he went out, but he returned about half an hour afterwards and told her that he

was sorry he had mentioned it and asked her to say no more about it. On Sunday evening he asked her for an envelope and she gave him one. It was the one which was addressed to the Coroner. She heard him leave the house about 5.30 on Monday morning and thought he had got a job at haymaking. She knew of nothing bearing on his mind. He had only complained of the heat, apart from the incident she had mentioned.

The Coroner : You know nothing of any lies told about him ?

Witness : Nothing whatever.

The Coroner said the nature of the communication addressed to him and the leaving of the clothes on the beach clearly indicated that deceased intended to destroy himself. The letter and the evidence of Mrs. Brobson left no doubt that deceased's mind had become deranged, and he had no hesitation in returning a verdict that deceased drowned himself whilst of unsound mind.

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