

Thomas Henry Abbott



Possibly the type of car involved.

Isle of Wight County Press – 28 November 1908

SHOCKING MOTOR FATALITY.

NEWPORT MAN'S TRAGIC DEATH AT COVENTRY.

[By *County Press* Special Correspondents.]

A shocking motor-car accident occurred at Coventry on Tuesday morning, resulting in the death of Thomas Henry Abbott, 39, of Melbourne-street, Newport, I.W. Deceased was employed by Dr. Underhill, of Newport, and was sent to Coventry to learn motor driving, his employer having decided to purchase a Humber car. Abbott arrived at Coventry on Monday night and left the Humber works with an expert local driver named Pegg, on Tuesday morning, in a 15-horse-power test car. The accident happened at Binley, a hamlet three miles from Coventry, at 12.30. The car, fitted with a lorry body, was soon to pass the Craven Arms Hotel, Binley, and proceed in the direction of Brandon, another hamlet a few miles further on. The car had only gone another 150 yards when it swerved on to the footpath and ran up a 5ft. bank, which rises at an angle of about 60 degrees. The vehicle reached the top of the bank, the four wheels being on the inclined surface, and the car then overturned. Abbott was pinned beneath the car and fatally crushed, the car being found resting on his head, and Pegg was thrown clear of the car and was picked up in an unconscious condition. Abbott was killed instantly. There is as yet no definite evidence as to who was driving the car at the time of the accident, but the probabilities are that deceased was at the wheel.

The news of deceased's tragic death, first published in Newport in a *County Press* special telegram, created a very painful impression among the late Mr. Abbott's many friends and acquaintances, some of whom bade him farewell on the previous day, when he started for Coventry in order to undergo a month's training to qualify as a motor driver for his employer, Dr. Underhill, medical officer of the Island Workhouse. Others saw him for the last time in Newport Market on Saturday, at the auction sale of Dr. Underhill's carriages and harness, which took place in consequence of the owner's decision to abandon horsed vehicles for a motor. The deceased had been coachman for the Doctor ever since the latter came to Newport, and he was also in the employ of his predecessor, and a very reliable driver and faithful servant he was, devotedly fond of horses. He was the son of the late Mr. Tom Abbott, well known throughout the Island as the occupier of the Green Dragon hostelry and stables, which in former days was an important posting centre. When his father held the contract for the conveyance by special mail-cart of the weekly consignments of the County

Press to Ryde and Cowes the deceased sometimes acted as driver, and in this and other connections he was most reliable. The deceased had served for 12 years in the 3rd King's Royal Rifles, and he passed through the Chitral campaign and the South African War. In the latter he took part in the arduous fighting under the late Gen. Buller, from the memorable repulse at the Tugela to the relief of Ladysmith, and after. He passed unscathed through the terrible ordeals of the Tugela (where he saw Lord Robert's only son fall), Vaal Krants, and Spion Kop, and it is specially pathetic that he should now have lost his life in a peaceful avocation. He leaves a widow, for whom much sympathy is felt. He was a member of the Newport Court of Foresters, officers and members of which will attend his funeral this (Saturday) afternoon, at Carisbrooke Cemetery.

Dr. Underhill, who broke the news to the distressed wife, left Newport on Wednesday morning for Coventry to give evidence of identification at the inquest and to make arrangements for the home-bringing of the body, which arrived last evening.

The inquest was opened at Foleshill Board-room, near Coventry, on Thursday afternoon, before Dr. C.W. Iliffe, Coroner for North Warwickshire. Mr. W. Maddocks appeared on behalf of Messrs, Humber, Ltd.

The CORONER said they would not be able that day to go beyond the taking of evidence to establish the identity of deceased. The gentleman who owned the car, or who would have owned the car, was present not only for the purpose of speaking as to deceased's character, but also to give sufficient evidence to enable them to arrange for the removal of the body back to the Isle of Wight for interment,

Dr. SYDNEY VALENTINE HERCULES UNDERHILL, said he was a medical practitioner residing at Newport, I.W. Deceased was 39 years of age, married, with no family. He was a sober man and in every way very careful. He was sent by witness to the Humber works at Coventry to receive instruction in driving a motor-car. Deceased had been in his employment as coachman for six years, and was an excellent servant. He was sent to gain sufficient knowledge for him to become a competent motor driver. He had not previously driven a motor-car.

P.S. FIELDING proved seeing deceased lying dead by the side of the road, under a motor-car, which was turned upside down. The car had been turned over by running into the bank.

In reply to Mr. Maddocks, WITNESS said the car was well round a somewhat dangerous corner, and he thought the road at the spot where the accident occurred was a reasonable place for deceased, as a learner, to be driving.

A JURYMAN: I should say it is not.

The CORONER thought they had better go no further at present, but wait for the evidence of the man who was on the car with deceased. This man was in the Hospital, and would probably be there for another ten days.

The inquest was then adjourned for a fortnight.

Isle of Wight Observer – 5 December 1908

Island Paragraphs.

FUNERAL. – At Newport, on Saturday, the funeral took place of the late Mr. Thomas H. Abbott, aged 39, coachman in the employ of Dr. Underhill, of Newport, who was killed on Tuesday in a motor accident at Coventry, whilst undergoing training there in motor-driving. The coffin was covered with floral tributes. The first part of the service was at St. Thomas's Church. The Vicar (the Rev. H.E. Sharpe) officiated. There was a very large attendance including a number of Foresters of which Order deceased was a member of long standing.

The Isle of Wight Times – 17 December 1908

THE FATAL MOTOR ACCIDENT TO A NEWPORT MAN

The adjourned inquest on the body of Thomas Henry Abbott, 36, of Melborne-street, Newport, who was killed at Binley on Tuesday November 24th, through the upsetting of a motor-car, was held by Dr C. Ilifle (Coroner for North Warwickshire) at the Workhouse, Foleshill, near Coventry, on Thursday.

Mr. W. Maddocks represented Humber, Ltd., and also the Ocean Accident Company.

The details have already been published in these columns.

The Coroner, in summing up, commented on the excessive speed at which motor-cars were driven along the roads and also referred to the great increase in the number of local accidents due to this cause. In this particular case, however, there was no excessive speed, but the accident was a complete illustration of some defect in the Act granting licenses. So far as he knew, under the Act, it was not necessary that an applicant should produce a certificate of competency or that he should be processed of good sight and hearing and not be an irresponsible person. The only qualification was that he should be 17 years of age. There was not even the necessity for the person to be present at the application. The licence would be granted to a ***** if the 5s were sent with the application. He strongly urged that it was necessary that a motor-car driver requiring a licence, like the driver of a hackney carriage, should be compelled to produce a certificate of competency before being allowed to drive on the public highway, and that the earliest instruction in driving should take place in some isolated locality where traffic was never seen. The public was being killed and something must be done. He emphasised the fact that in this instance neither the Humber Company nor the driver Pegg were to blame. Pegg bore a most excellent character as a driver, but he advised him in instructing people how to drive not to let them take the wheel until he had satisfied himself that they were capable of driving. The only person so far as he could see blameable in the matter was the poor man who had paid the penalty with his life.

Mr Maddocks said he had been asked by Dr Underhill, of Newport, in whose employ deceased was, to express his and his family's great regret at the sad occurrence. Abbott was a faithful servant. The Humber Company also expressed their great regret that such a thing should have happened while a man was being taught to drive in one of their cars. Every precaution was taken on this, as on all occasions by the Company, to protect not only lives but to protect generally men sent to them to receive instruction in driving. Pegg was a thoroughly reliable man and nothing more could have been done.

The jury returned a verdict of “Accidental death” and added that they thought the Humber Company were to blame in allowing cars to be placed in the hands of novices too early and before giving them some knowledge of the mechanism.

The Coroner said he was afraid that was a reflection on the Company and was hardly warranted, because it was not on the evidence, and they had to find their verdict in accordance with the facts placed before them. He suggested that they might make it a recommendation.

After again consulting the jury withdrew the rider and suggested that before a license to drive a motor-car was granted an applicant should possess a certificate of competency.

Transcription by Tony Barton for the Friends of Newport & Carisbrooke Cemeteries © 2018

<https://www.foncc.org.uk>